

Migration reforms to boost Australian skills 'bigger picture'

THE Federal Government's skilled migration reforms announced in yesterday's Budget will greatly assist the national resource industry's 'bigger picture' on easing its widespread skills and labour shortages, according to national resource employer group AMMA.

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has allowed for an increase of around 5000 skilled migration visas as part of the Federal Budget; a move aimed squarely at filling critical skills needs in those regional areas where mining, oil and gas projects are creating insatiable employment opportunities.

The introduction of Regional Migration Agreements was met with approval from resource employers, which are implementing a range of strategies to ensure Australia's workforce can catch up to unprecedented levels of demand.

"Immigration Minister Chris Bowen's statement that this migration initiative is driven by Australia's skills needs is right on the money with industry's intentions," says Minna Knight, AMMA Executive Director of Industry.

"The wider resource industry is bracing itself for at least 85,000 new jobs to be directly created by new projects by 2016. While just a small part of the overall labour solution, resource employers rely on migrants to fill critical temporary skills gaps that at this stage are unable to be solved by local supply, with just 3,650 temporary visas granted in mining in 2011.

"This focus from the Federal Government to provide more business-sponsored Visas to regional areas will not alter the industry's various strategies to get as many Australians into these new jobs as possible. However it will assist employers to fill some of the highly skilled positions that domestic supply cannot quite match, at least in the short-term."

The government has also committed to fast-tracking permanent residency for business-sponsored visa holders who have working in regional areas for two years, and whose employers want to extend their stay.

Recognising Minister Bowen's stated 'responsible and measured approach', Ms Knight says skilled migrant workers play an important role in realising the benefits of the resources industry's heightened activity for all Australians.

"For a visa application to be granted, resource employers are required to make a strong commitment to providing training for Australian workers," Ms Knight says.

"Any employer who applies for sponsored visa's to bring in overseas workers must have a specific program in place for the up-skilling of Australian workers through apprenticeships, traineeships, graduate programs and other avenues designed to engage as many Australian jobseekers as they can.

"On the ground, this means thousands of extra Australians are being trained or skilled up in the resource industry as a direct result of the existing skilled migration program."

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