

## **New restrictions on 457 Visas shows government beholden to union mates**

CONSIDERING more baseless restrictions for the 457 Visa scheme shows the Gillard Government's commitment to its union supporters during the dying days of this parliament outweighs its regard for Australia's economic interests and international reputation.

National resource industry employer group AMMA (Australian Mines and Metals Association) says that while mining has reduced its use of 457 Visa workers by 20% in the past 12 months, the resource industry is very concerned about the damage to Australia's labour market and global reputation from the government's short-sighted skilled migration rhetoric.

"Immigration Minister Brendan O'Connor may be determined to deliver for his trade union mates in the face of all facts and reason, but the wider community is simply not buying into the government's borderline xenophobic political campaign," says chief executive Steve Knott.

"The government may have dog whistled, but using skilled migration as a political football will not deflect public attention from its performance on employment, border protection and economic policies.

"The Gillard Government needs to begin to accord the Australian community more respect, stop insulting the public's intelligence, and stop demonising 457 workers and their employers."

AMMA calls for the government to rule out the reintroduction of unworkable labour market testing policies which were universally rejected by industry, the Migration Council and the Law Council.

"Not only would there be serious bureaucratic and administrative problems, the Department of Immigration has flagged their own concerns that labour market testing could bring Australia in breach of its international trade obligations," Mr Knott says.

"Our industry is a small user of skilled migrants, but when we do need them, they are almost always vital to safety, maintenance and project delivery. Some firms require helicopter maintenance workers who require up to 6 tickets of competency only taught in the UK and France."

Mr Knott also notes that insisting employers provide evidence of local recruitment efforts, such as transcripts of interviews and details on why certain applicants were unsuitable for a particular role, could breach privacy laws and jeopardise commercial-in-confidence arrangements.

"The restrictions reportedly under consideration today would render the 457 Visa program unusable. Some might conclude that the government and union intention all along was to discourage essential labour migration through prohibitive red tape and additional costs," he says.

"The government already sets the occupational classifications and requirements for the 457 Visa program. If the Minister believes rorting is occurring, he should provide greater resources and training to DIAC case officers before the regulatory bar is unnecessarily raised for everyone.

"Employers have repeatedly offered to have a sensible discussion about nailing down any loose planks in the application of the system. The Gillard Government however, at the behest of their union mates, seems hell bent on ripping up the floorboards.

"Along with ALP stalwart Simon Crean, the resource industry calls for proper, considered dialogue on this issue of national importance prior to any further changes to the system."

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