

MEDIA RELEASE

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Skilled migration comment: unions rehash misinformed scare campaign

Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA)

AUSTRALIA'S resource industry employer group, AMMA, is deeply disappointed in today's rehashing of cynical trade union scare campaigns about 457 Visas and skilled migration – complete with the same old misinformation and political point scoring.

"Claims that the government has deliberately reopened a 'loophole' in the skilled migration system are completely untrue and reflect nothing more than union scare campaigning," says AMMA executive director, policy, Scott Barklamb.

"For almost four years under the previous Labor government (14 September 2009 until July 1, 2013), approved business sponsors were not required to nominate a cap on the number of skilled migrants they would need on 457 Visas.

"This was a positive change under Labor to ensure skilled migration could help kickstart our economy.

"During this period, as has always been the case, the 457 Visa program proved to be highly responsive to domestic employment demand. Put simply, when domestic job vacancies go down, so too do the number of 457 Visa applications.

"It was only during the previous government's cynical and highly regrettable political campaign against skilled migration last year that a numerical cap was reintroduced to the 457 Visa business sponsorship scheme.

"Given the 457 Visa program is driven solely by supply and demand, putting a numerical cap on business sponsorship had little practical effect aside from appeasing the trade union bosses behind Labor's failed attempt to turn skilled migration into an election issue."

Mr Barklamb reiterates that the 457 Visa program has never been a 'free-for-all', with myriad conditions, regulation, costs and commercial factors ensuring responsible use of the system.

"The mining industry's use of 457 Visas has been in steep decline since June 2012 and in the past 12 months has decreased by 48.8%," he says.

"In the resource industry, sponsoring a 457 Visa holder incurs an average up-front cost of \$14,000, with some employers reporting total recruitment costs of up to \$60,000. Clearly, this is a last resort to offset skills shortages and not the low-cost option unions would have us believe.

"Market rates must be paid, labour market testing must be adhered to and restrictions apply to approved occupations. In short, if an Australian was available to do the job, they would always be the first employed under such a highly regulated and costly system.

"We discovered last year how calculated misinformation can drag our nation away from sensible discussion about skilled migration. We also saw the risks to our national reputation in sailing a little too close to vilifying those who come to work in this country in a global market for critical skills.

"When discussing any future migration policy changes, AMMA urges an appropriate consideration of the facts before allowing trade unions to regurgitate their myths and mistruths."

Media Contact: AMMA media manager, Tom Reid on 0419 153 407