

MEDIA RELEASE

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Free trade achievement must not be hijacked by xenophobic scare campaign

Australia's resource industry employer group – AMMA (Australian Mines and Metals Association)

THE AUSTRALIAN community must not allow an overwhelmingly positive free trade deal with China to be hijacked by those in the Labor Party and trade union movement who continue to push predictable and irresponsible falsehoods about skilled migration in this country in pursuit of their own vested interests.

"It is disappointing, but not at all surprising to see the usual Labor and union suspects peddling misinformation about skilled migration in the resource sector and other industries in a transparent attempt to discredit the China-Australia FTA," says AMMA chief executive Steve Knott.

"The fact is that most skilled migrants working in Australia do not have an affiliation with a trade union, and thus do not pay union fees, part of which is often donated to the ALP.

"Skilled migrants on 457 Visas are specifically sourced on a needs-basis. They have a job lined up, they pay taxes and they are employed on Australian rates and conditions.

"This free trade agreement should not be a vehicle for Labor and union representatives to re-hash their tired scare campaigns to push their vested interests at the expense of the national interest."

Mr Knott notes skilled migrants are a very small component of Australia's labour force, and that Chinese nationals comprised just 6.3%, or 2,610 individuals, of primary 457 Visa applications in the year to March 2014.

In the resource industry, skilled migrants comprise less than 3% of the total workforce, with employers paying between \$14,000 and \$70,000 per employee just to source and recruit those with highly specialised global skills critical to building projects of national significance.

Such high costs, coupled with strong regulation and existing protections and benchmarks, ensure temporary migration schemes are used only to supplement Australian jobs in areas of skills shortages.

"ACTU president Ged Kearney said today that 'it's very difficult not to sound xenophobic'. Well the best way to stop sounding xenophobic is to stop with their overblown rhetoric and focus on the actual facts," Mr Knott says.

"Various Labor and union figures consistently overstate the misuse of skilled migration, including former immigration minister Brendan O'Connor's concocted claims of '10,000 rorts'. None of these claims hold up to scrutiny.

"In 2013 to 2014, 79 mining employers had their 457 Visa programs monitored by the Department of Immigration and only three of them had minor sanctions applied. Before scaring the public using a fabricated threat, the ACTU and Labor would do well to reflect on bipartisan achievements in making Australia a global champion of free trade.

"It reflects very ill on the lasting achievements of the Whitlam and Hawke governments in reforming tariffs for the ACTU and Labor to revert to reactionary industrial xenophobia when Australia achieves another great milestone in bringing jobs and economic opportunities into our growing country."

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