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New migration arrangements issued for offshore resources activities

Information posted on the Department of Immigration & Border Protection's website has signalled the Federal Government's intention to exclude certain offshore resources activities from Australia's migration zone, while a Regulation has been issued confirming the skilled visa types required for installations inside the migration zone.

Minister for Immigration & Border Protection, Peter Dutton, has published a new [Regulation](#) specifying the visa types required for foreign nationals working on "resources installations". The Department at the same time has published updated [material](#) on its website reflecting the new offshore migration requirements that will take effect from 14 December 2015.

While further instruments are expected to be issued to give effect to the indicated changes, the published information confirms that for foreign nationals (ie. skilled non-citizens) undertaking activities on offshore "resources installations" (eg. installations attached to the Australian seabed), the current migration / visa requirements will not change.

However, for foreign nationals undertaking activities on non-resources installations offshore, it will have important implications.

The introduction of the new arrangements will take effect on 14 December 2015.

How will things change from 14 December 2015?

From 14 December 2015, foreign nationals undertaking activities on "resources installations" (see later in this paper for definitions) will continue to require either a 400, a 457 or a permanent residence visa in order to perform work within Australia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Nothing will change for those skilled foreign workers. Their current migration / visa requirements will continue from 14 December 2015.

However, non-resources installations operating offshore (eg. some manoeuvring vessels, etc) will be deemed to no longer be within Australia's migration zone. This means foreign nationals undertaking activities on exempt non-resources installations will no longer need to notify the Department of Immigration & Border Protection to enable a special purpose visa (SPV) to be conferred on a foreign national to enter a project's licenced area (ie. the permit zone). This means those particular foreign nationals would not require any other visa that provides work rights if the vessel / structure falls within the prescribed exclusion.

In short, from 14 December 2015, foreign nationals on non-resources installations will be deemed to be exempt from Australia's migration zone and therefore will not need a visa that provides work rights in order to undertake their intended activities.

Those foreign nationals will only require the appropriate visa that would have been necessary for them to enter or exit Australia, eg. a transit visa, an e-visitor visa, a business travel authority or a maritime crew visa (MCV), depending on what passport they hold and how they enter and leave Australia.

Key takeout: From 14 December 2015, foreign nationals working on "resources installations" within Australia's EEZ will continue to require a 400, 457 or permanent residence visa to perform work. Foreign nationals undertaking activities on non-resources installations will be deemed to be outside Australia's migration zone and will not require a visa such as an SPV, 457, 400, or a permanent residence visa.

What is a "resources installation"?

A "resources installation" within Australia's EEZ, which will continue to be deemed to be inside Australia's migration zone from 14 December 2015, means one of the following:

- **A resources industry fixed structure** – a structure that is not able to move or be moved as an entity from one place to another and is for offshore use in exploring for or exploiting natural resources.
- **A resources industry mobile unit** – a vessel equipped to (or a moveable floating structure for use offshore in order to):
 - Explore or exploit natural resources by drilling the seabed or its subsoil; or
 - Obtain substantial quantities of material from the seabed or its subsoil.

Note: Vessels used in manoeuvring a resources installation, or in operations relating to the attachment of a resources installation to the Australian seabed, are excluded from the definition of "resources industry mobile unit" above. They are therefore not a resources installation and, as such, would be deemed to be outside Australia's migration zone from 14 December 2015.

Unless a vessel or structure fits into one of the two categories above, it is not a resources installation and, from 14 December 2015, would be deemed not to be in Australia's migration zone. Consequently, foreign nationals undertaking activities on those non-resources installations would not require a visa that provides work rights in order to undertake activities on those vessels provided they fall within the exemption.

New Regulation issued

The Migration Amendment (Offshore Resources Activity) [Regulation](#) 2015 will take effect on 14 December 2015.

The new Regulation simply specifies the visa types that can provide work rights for foreign nationals working in offshore resources activities within the migration zone. For activities that fall within the migration zone, the Regulation specifies that a Temporary Work (Skilled) Visa (Subclass 457), a Temporary Work (Short Stay Activity) Visa (Subclass 400) or a permanent residence visa is required for foreign nationals performing work.

A separate instrument is also expected to be published to give effect to the specified exclusion from the migration zone for vessels and structures that are not resources installations, as per the information published on the Department's website.

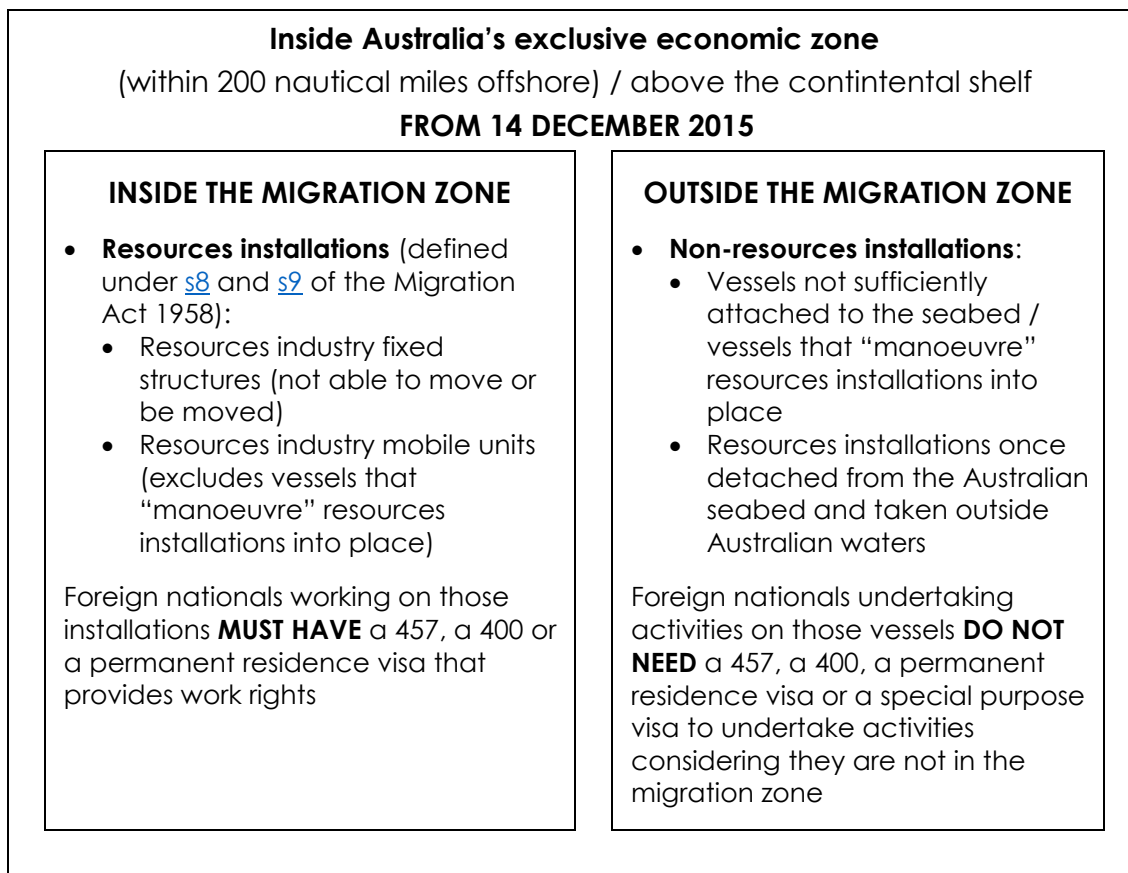
The effect of the new regime will be that a non-citizen who is on a vessel or structure that is used for operations or activities identified in [s9A\(5\)\(a\)](#) and [s9A\(5\)\(b\)](#) of the Migration Act 1958, but that is not an Australian resources installation, is not taken to be in the migration zone.

This is a return to the long-standing delineation of the migration zone that was in place in Australia between 1982 and 2014.

The two instruments being replaced

Two previous instruments, a [determination](#) and a [declaration](#), which will be revoked with effect from 14 December 2015, had the combined effect of enabling foreign nationals on non-resources installations to use an SPV to undertake activities within a project's licensed area in the migration zone. Those vessels / structures were exempt from having to use a 457, 400 or permanent residence visa (the visa types prescribed for resources installations) but still required an SPV at a minimum to undertake activities in the licenced area.

The following diagrams illustrate in very simple terms the key migration requirements for offshore resources activities before and after 14 December 2015.



Inside Australia's exclusive economic zone
(within 200 nautical miles offshore) / above the continental shelf
BEFORE 14 DECEMBER 2015

INSIDE THE MIGRATION ZONE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources installations (defined under s8 and s9 of the Migration Act 1958): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources industry fixed structures (not able to move or be moved) • Resources industry mobile units (excludes vessels that "manoeuvre" resources installations into place) <p>Foreign nationals working on those installations MUST HAVE a 457, a 400 or a permanent residence visa that provides work rights</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-resources installations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vessels not sufficiently attached to the seabed / vessels that "manoeuvre" resources installations into place • Resources installations once detached from the Australian seabed and taken outside Australian waters <p>Foreign nationals on those vessels MUST HAVE a special purpose visa at a minimum to undertake activities in the licenced area</p>
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What could happen next?

AMMA understands the effect of the latest published information, and the impending replacement of the two pre-existing instruments, means the current High Court challenge by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) and the Australian Maritime Officers Union (AMOU) may not go ahead as scheduled.

The High Court case, due to be heard in February 2016, involved a challenge of the two instruments that will have been revoked from 14 December 2015.

If the new Regulation is disallowed, the earliest this could happen is when the Senate resumes on 2 February 2016. However, any motion to disallow would be extremely unlikely to be heard immediately upon parliament resuming.

It is important to note that the new Regulation, whilst disallowable, merely specifies the visa types required for offshore resources activities within the migration zone, ie:

- A Temporary Work (Skilled) [Visa](#) (subclass 457);
- A Temporary Work (Short Stay Activity) [Visa](#) (subclass 400); or
- A permanent visa.

The exclusion of non-resources installations from Australia's migration zone is given effect via separate means to the Regulation.

AMMA will keep members informed of further developments.

For further information

For migration advice in relation to these matters, please contact AMMA's Manager of Migration Services, Jules Pedrosa, on (02) 9231 4043 or at jules.pedrosa@amma.org.au.

For a more detailed policy briefing on these matters, please contact AMMA's Executive Director of Policy And Public Affairs, Scott Barklamb, on (03) 9614 4777 or at scott.barklamb@amma.org.au.

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