

**Submission regarding the proposed visa simplification and important considerations in building a modern visa system**

The Migration Council Australia supports the simplification of Australia's visa system. The current visa system is complex, cumbersome, archaic and often difficult to navigate. However the MCA also notes that there are many elements of our current system that are valuable, either because they enable migration pathways critical to our national interests or because they are underpinned by principles informed by our national values.

Our current visa system has been developed over decades both in ways that are planned and also in an ad-hoc manner that seeks to respond to an immediate or pressing issue. Visa policy is complex precisely because it is a system for the regulation of human movement. Human motivations, aspirations and needs are in a constant state of flux and subject to rapid change. Further, the basic motivations that often underlie migration can be powerful and overwhelming, presenting challenges for regulators.

We also note that the Australian migration framework is complicated by the fact that migration is an intrinsic component of our economy. For Australia, migration is a tool to overcome our geographical isolation and to embed our place and fit within the Asia-Pacific region. In this sense, the Australian economy is unique in its reliance on migration and its need for an open outlook on the movement of people. Further, as a small to medium nation competing for knowledge and services, migration and the draw of skills has been a crucial element of our industry policy and key to our national workforce planning strategies.

Our purpose in providing this short comment is not to pre-empt reforms that might be forthcoming, but rather to outline key values and principles that underlie a successful migration framework. In doing so it is necessary to make broader comments on elements that have underpinned our success as a migration nation. We note in particular, that a sound and effective visa system is not only governed by the mechanisms to select new migrants, but by the social and settlement framework that supports migrants to fully participate in Australian society and the Australian economy once they arrive. In this view, we note that the simplification process must be a collaborative effort with other government departments, most particularly with the Department of Social Services.

**VALUES**

Key values underpinning Australia's migration and humanitarian programs that are important to maintain include the following:

- Australia's migration program promotes diversity and is non-discriminatory, including in relation to race, religion, or ethnicity;

- Australia's migration program aligns with core Australian values, such as equality, including gender equality, freedom, fairness, compassion and the rule of law;
- Australia's migration program acknowledges and responds to social needs, such as family unity and humanitarian commitments, as well as the national economic interest.
- The Australian Government ensures the rights of migrants, including the rights of migrant workers to fair opportunities and conditions;
- The Australian Government ensures that all migrants are supported to integrate and participate fully in Australian society.

## **PRINCIPLES**

Key principles that underpin Australia's successful migration framework and should be retained include:

1. **Open and enabling:** Our overall migration framework should maintain an open outlook that seeks to draw in talent and skills, connecting us with the world. Increasingly Australia will be competing for skills and expertise and our migration program must be competitive with attractive options for migration. Further an open outlook speaks to our trade and investment relationships and our level of economic integration.
2. **Non-discrimination:** Our migration framework should work to actively encourage diversity. Diversity has social and economic benefits and makes us more dynamic and innovative and more competitive in the global economy. Policies that overtly or inadvertently seek to screen out cultural and linguistic diversity go against our national interest and our values.
3. **Evidence based and forward planning:** Our migration framework should be underpinned by an understanding of our labour market needs and our skills gaps. Visa pathways need to ensure the selection of skills that meet both immediate needs and an assessment of future needs. As a critical component of workforce planning, our migration program needs to be guided by industry expertise and evidence of need.
4. **Accessibility and ease of navigation:** Our migration program should be simple and easy to navigate. A system that requires a high degree of specialist knowledge and expertise undermines the confidence of those for whom the system is intended to serve. All stakeholders including business users, family sponsors and all types of visa applicants should be able to self-navigate their pathway.
5. **Structural flexibility:** Any future visa framework should enable innovation and should be able to respond to our changing and dynamic economy. It

should also entail the capacity to respond to individual need and circumstances beyond the ability of current policy makers to predict.

6. International and social responsibility: Benefit to the Australian economy must not be the only indication for whether a person should be granted a visa, but also important are social and humanitarian grounds. It is important that Australia maintains its position as a global citizen and leader in offering support in response to humanitarian need.
7. A focus on integration: A successful migration program looks beyond the visa system and focuses on integration and the opportunity for migrants to fully participate in Australian life. Visa settings determine access to services and pathways to permanency. Visas that seek to create instability or limit participation in Australian life run the risk of undermining our long-term social cohesion.
8. Integrity, trust and fairness: Our migration program must balance integrity considerations with humanity and opportunity. An invitation to contribute to Australia's economy and society entails responsibilities for migrants, for businesses relying on migration and for the Australian Government. These responsibilities must be proportionate, balanced and fully enforced.

## **FINAL COMMENTS**

Our migration program is only successful to the extent that it maintains the confidence of the Australian people. Our migration framework should further our national interests while aligning to our national values. The visa system must have integrity and must be balanced by an open outlook, which acknowledges and celebrates the benefits of migration and its pivotal place in our national history.

## **About Migration Council Australia**

Migration Council Australia (MCA) is an independent not-for-profit organisation established to enhance the productive benefits of Australia's migration and humanitarian programs. MCA brings together corporate Australia and the community sector to provide a national voice to advocate for effective settlement and migration programs.

Our aim is promote greater understanding of migration and settlement and to foster the development of partnerships between corporate Australia, the community sector and Government. More information about MCA is available on its website – [www.migrationcouncil.org.au](http://www.migrationcouncil.org.au).