

Australian Pork Limited

AUSTRALIAN
Pork™

Australia's 2022-23 Migration Program

December 2021

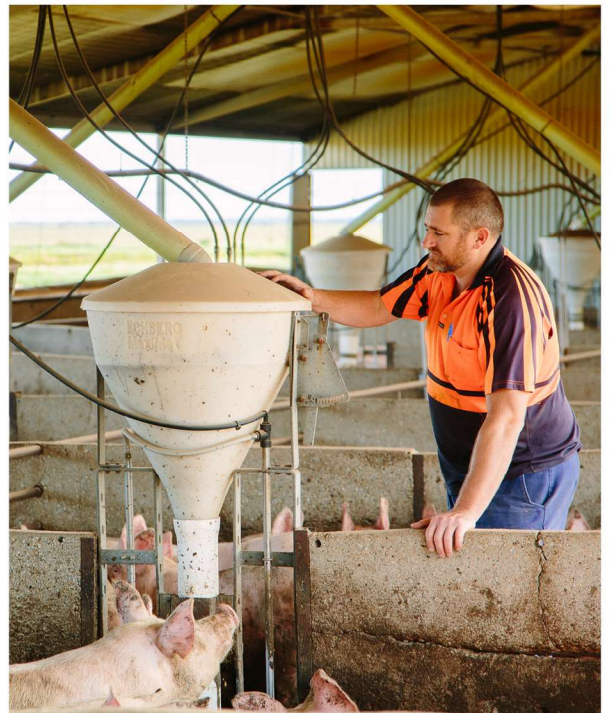


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I. Executive Summary

A key business constraint faced by Australian pork producers is the ongoing challenge of attracting and retaining labour. Our producers are reporting shortages across all occupation and skill levels within their piggeries, a trend that is seen throughout the supply chain. Over the past two years COVID-19, strong competition in agricultural and regional labour markets, and industry growth has exacerbated this longstanding problem.

While our industry seeks to fill these workforce shortages with Australians, poor social perceptions of the industry combined with a lack of support services in rural and regional Australia hamper these efforts. The Migration Program, which consists of Skilled, Family and Special Eligibility streams, supported by other temporary work visas, addresses these critical shortages in the pork industry.

Use of skilled migration, supported by the Pork Industry Labour Agreement (PILA), has been increasing since its development in 2011 and this is likely to continue. The PILA remains a critical, fit-for-purpose tool for our industry, however to ensure industry derives the intended benefits, it must be supported by efficient processing and effective customer service provided by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). In addition, the delivery of these improvements must be supported by DHA employees that have an understanding of rural and regional workforce labour market constraints so as to appropriately apply options within the Migration Program to agricultural businesses.

Ultimately, at the heart of the Migration Program are the migrants and the Australian businesses and communities that they will support and form part of. Both need to be supported and incentivised to foster cohesion facilitated by investment into rural and regional Australia. This investment, along with decisions about the size and composition of the Migration Program must be implemented through nationally coordinated cross agency strategies at all levels of government that are underpinned by accurate labour market data and input by industry and community groups.

2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Government and the industries commit to implement and review the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy, underpinned by an annual national labour and skills survey to support decision making, including for regional migration.

Recommendation 2 – Ensure existing migration tools (including Labour Agreements) function effectively and are more responsive to labour market needs through:

- a) Implementation of recommendations from the Final Report of the Inquiry into Australia's Skilled Migration Program, particularly updating of visa processing systems to ensure they are streamlined and support contemporary customer service.
- b) Improved transparency and clear communication to applicants around decisions and status.
- c) Staff responsible for PILA and visa processing and decision making are adequately informed about rural and regional labour markets and the industries that operate in them.
- d) Provide a right of reply opportunity to applicants following a PILA decision (e.g. around accessing an exemption e.g. the 30% migrant workforce in the *Labour Agreements Procedural Instruction*)

Recommendation 3 - Deliver the Australian Agriculture Visa, ensuring its design is fit-for-purpose and complements existing migration pathways used by industry:

- a) Include a longer stay option, with pathway to permanent residency
- b) Both large and smaller businesses can easily and cost-effectively use the visa (not just via labour hire)
- c) Ensuring mobility arrangements balance the needs of the worker and employers
- d) Complement existing migration options including the PILA and where relevant, match or enhances PILA criteria.

Recommendation 4 – To further address uneven population growth and economic development between urban and regional Australia:

- a) Ensure alignment of relevant rural and regional strategies and migration planning across agencies and at all levels of government, underpinned by accurate labour market data.
- b) Prioritise agricultural workforce needs in national migration planning through partnership with industry and organisations and institutions within local communities
- c) Implement programs to support migrants and local communities which foster community cohesion and long-term settlement within rural and regional Australia
- d) Maintain priority status for agricultural visas/occupations as essential to post COVID-19 recovery.

Recommendation 5 – Support a regionalisation agenda and regional development policies that deliver economic and social infrastructure to ensure equitable access to opportunities. This includes:

- a) Adequate and affordable accommodation and housing
- b) Improved infrastructure including telecommunications
- c) Services that underpin quality of life and 'liveability' including healthcare, childcare and education.

Recommendation 6 - Ensure expenditure of the Skilling Australians Fund (SAF) levies directly benefits the agricultural workforce via genuine and effective upskilling and training initiatives, supported by transparent investment and outcomes reporting. In addition, the SAF recommendations

(16, 18) of The Joint Standing Committee on Migration should be implemented to further improve fairness of the levy.

3. Australian Pork Limited

APL is the national representative body for Australian pork producers. APL is a producer-owned not-for-profit company combining marketing and export growth, research and innovation, and policy development to assist in securing a profitable and sustainable future for the Australian pork industry.

Our industry is proud of its achievements to date, positioning it as a leader in sustainable agriculture, animal welfare and innovation. Our Strategic Plan 2020-2025 and new APL Sustainability Framework 2021-2030 set ambitious goals for more positive impact, including for regional communities and people.

APL has long invested in education, training and workforce attraction initiatives and pork businesses have been genuine and responsible users of the migration system to help fill skills shortages. We share government's vision that developing human capital is key to delivering on industry growth and sustainability goals including the Government's Ag2030 plan and \$100 billion target by 2030.

Australian Pork Limited (APL) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the planning of Australia's 2022-23 Migration Program.

4. Contribution of the Pork Industry in Australia

As the most consumed meat globally and the second most consumed meat in Australia, pork is an important part of our diets. Australia's domestic sow herd numbers approximately 270,000, housed in approximately 4,400 registered sites nationwide. In 2021, the Australian pork industry produced almost 437,000 metric tonnes of pork and of which 9% was exported.

The domestic pork industry plays a vital role in contributing to Australia's food security owing to the restrictions that Australia's biosecurity laws place on the importation and sale of fresh pork from overseas. All fresh pork consumed in Australia is domestically sourced.

In a typical year, the pork industry, including pig production, primary and secondary processing, and wholesale, contributes \$5.3 billion in gross domestic product to the Australian economy and supports about 36,000 jobs nationally. The industry is largely based in regional Australia, with the largest volume of production sourced from Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia, respectively.

5. The Current Agricultural Workforce

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from 2016 confirms Australian agriculture continues to face challenges posed by an ageing workforce, with the average age of a livestock farmer now 57 years old.¹ This represents an average age increase of 13 years over the past three decades, with the average age of a farmer in 1981 being 44 years old. The same report identified that over a 40-year period, 31% of the total agricultural workforce was 65+ years of age compared to just 4.2% of the total workforce in all other industries. A combination of fewer young people entering farming and lower exit rates at

¹ <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Occupation?search=alpha&code=1213>

traditional retirement age have fuelled these statistics, raising significant concerns about workforce succession in the coming decades if this trend continues.

There have also been consistently more jobs available in agriculture than there have been suitable candidates for the past fifteen years. Research has shown that farms across the agriculture industry experience difficulties recruiting skilled (non-labourer) positions due to applicants lacking the required capabilities and experience.² This is of particular relevance to the pork industry which requires a skilled workforce to undertake much of the day-to-day running of a piggery.

As a further example, the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy 2020³ explains how the supply of agricultural university graduates in Australia has not kept up with increasing demand. Specifically animal science graduate numbers, whilst steady, are very small (less than 200 per year).

As of November 2018, 82% of agricultural employees lived in regional Australia.⁴ The agriculture sector not only provides an important source of economic and employment opportunity for regional Australia but enables a strong social fabric within these communities⁵. However, a career in agriculture, and specifically the pork industry, often requires employees and their families to relocate and live remotely away from services that are often taken for granted in urban settings. Access to schooling facilities for children, centres of employment for partners, health facilities, and shopping centres can become difficult. While the remuneration rates in the pork industry are competitive and often subject to considerable increases over short periods of time, the current workforce demands more than just competitive pay to live and work remotely.

Currently regional and agricultural labour markets are extremely tight, mainly due to the impacts of COVID-19. Regional job vacancies at record highs, topping levels not seen since the peak of the mining boom. Labour shortages in regions are now further constraining the prospects of regional businesses and communities⁶. Other factors are also exacerbating shortages such as strong competition within agriculture for labour due to peak seasons and record production as well as from other sectors such as services and mining sector, the latter particularly in Western Australia and Central Queensland.

6. The Current Pork Industry Workforce

6.1.1 Workforce characteristics and skills

The Australian pork industry is diverse in terms of location, scale, ownership, and method of production. Combined with gradual consolidation of the industry over the past two decades, many piggeries now demand specialist skills within their workforce.

Corporate owned and large-scale privately owned (“family corporate”) piggeries represent a large proportion of the production and employee numbers in the industry. The needs of these larger piggeries are quite different to those of smaller privately owned piggeries (“family farms”). In particular, larger piggeries may need to manage a larger workforce, often across multiple sites. Similarly, there

² Dufty, N, Martin, P and Zhao, S (2019) *Demand for Farm Workers: ABARES farm survey results 2018*, Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics and Sciences, Canberra

³ <https://www.awe.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-agricultural-workforce-strategy.pdf>

⁴ <https://australianjobs.employment.gov.au/jobs-industry/agriculture-forestry-and-fishing>

⁵ ABS data typically shows that people in farming occupations have higher volunteering rates than others <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/4102.0main+features10dec+2012>

⁶ Regional job vacancies hit a record high in the month of October 2021 <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/regional-job-ads-continue-rising/>

are differences in the technical and production skills required of the workforce depending on the type of production system (e.g. indoor, outdoor, and free-range piggeries).

Globally, the Australian pork industry is small. But we are leaders in science, sustainability, and social responsibility. As pig production systems become more sophisticated, driven by technological advancement, the roles of the workers in the industry evolve. The modern Australian pork industry is a highly technical, specialised, and dynamic industry which relies on a highly skilled workforce. Particularly, Australian pig production now requires suitably skilled people who must be responsible for managing nutritionally balanced feed operations, monitoring growth, performing artificial insemination operations, and monitoring animal health and behaviour.

Thus, the industry has a high demand for skilled, experienced labour to fill permanent positions. At the very least, all stockpersons working with pigs must have appropriate training to ensure compliance with state animal welfare legislation. A stockperson is considered suitably qualified if they are a veterinarian, hold a Certificate III in Agriculture (Pork Production) or equivalent, or have completed assessment by a Registered Training Organisation in:

- the movement and handling of pigs;
- care for the health and welfare of pigs;
- compliance with industry animal welfare requirements;
- administration of medication to livestock.

6.1.2 Industry attraction and retention initiatives

As the industry's peak organisation, APL has long invested in initiatives that positively promote our industry and attract a capable workforce, including:

- Engagement with schools, education institutes and the community to promote pork careers, including through continued support for the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia
- Communications and outreach activities to improve awareness of the positive impact of the pork industry, including via our new virtual tour, presence at events and careers days
- Providing scholarships for higher education, undergraduate and postgraduate students
- Building industry capability and leadership through support for accredited training, our online learning platform, the Australian Pork Emerging Leaders and Australian Rural Leadership Program opportunities
- Collaboration with other Research and Development Corporations to support businesses implement good employment practice via the:
 - People in Agriculture project and the
 - Rural Safety and Health Alliance.

This is in addition to the many initiatives individual employers undertaken to attract and retain staff including via graduate programs, supporting traineeships, formal training and leadership programs. Pork producers with labour shortages are also aware of and connected with the various employment services and programs in their regions, supported by state and federal governments. These include opportunities via CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse), disadvantaged or priority groups and other job seekers including ex-defence/veterans and also ex-offender programs.

6.1.3 Lack of local labour and skills

Unfortunately, appropriately skilled workers who are available for employment in the Australian pig industry are difficult or impossible to source locally. The pork industry has suffered ongoing difficulties in sourcing skilled piggery workers for some time.

Labour and skills shortages remains a major business constraint, with skills gaps and vacancies currently existing across all occupation levels.

APL undertook a poll on 30 September 2021 with 12 industry producer representatives (representing producers from WA, QLD, VIC, SA and NSW), asking what skills are currently missing in their piggeries and what migration programs they are currently using to help fill gaps. It is important to note that whilst this might not seem a large sample size, it represents over 50% of industry production. Respondents reported gaps at all levels, with piggery worker and then senior stockperson most common:

- 33% reported gaps at Farm Manager level (ie ANZSCO level 1)
- 75% reported gaps at Senior piggery stockperson level (ie ANZSCO level 3)
- 92% reported gaps at Piggery worker level (ie ANZSCO level 4)

This same group reported that they were using the following migration programs to access labour:

- 82% Skilled visas under the Pork Industry Labour Agreement (PILA)
- 58% Skilled visas under standard migration programs (i.e. TSS/482)
- 33% are using Working Holiday Maker (backpackers)
- 50% are using Pacific Australia Labour Scheme, mainly the longer term stream (ie up to 3 year instead of Seasonal program)

Feedback from some members indicates that unskilled labour sources such as the Pacific Labour Scheme is still not filling gaps on farm as workers don't have the skilled required.

A separate poll undertaken with 12 producers across different states in Australia in August 2021 indicated a number were looking to recruit in the coming 6 months to five year horizon, upwards of around 50 skilled piggery stockpersons.

In some cases producers with persistent vacancies have given up advertising, due to the lack of local suitable job applicants. This is typically following significant time and money spent on multiple efforts to use local job services, recruitment, undertake placement and induction, managing employees failing to turn up subsequently resigning.

Consultation to support the development of the *2020-21 APL Workforce Strategy* resulted in 74% of respondents indicating that labour and skill gaps were their main workforce issues. Engagement also highlighted that despite significant efforts, they struggle to find enough local people to employ, particularly with the appropriate interest, attitude and skills. Having the right attitude and interest was considered of great importance, and most producers would readily employ local people and support them with training, if these criteria were met.

Producers confirmed the main factors impacting on attraction of new candidates (in order) were:

1. Image or perception of the industry
2. Lack of understanding and promotion of agriculture in the education sector
3. Strong competition from other industry sectors
4. Perception of low pay rates
5. Lack of awareness of career opportunities
6. Unfavourable working hours

Some of the current key drivers of the workforce shortages explored above include:

COVID-19 impacts

The existing hardships the pork industry has faced in attracting and retaining suitable stock persons has been drastically exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and border closures. This has restricted access and movement of skilled migrant workers to Australia to take up work on Australian piggeries.

COVID-19 impacts and border closures have slowed movement and access of visa holders in the last two years and lack of available flights have further added to delays, uncertainty and cost. Businesses managing to obtain visa holders have also been required to manage significant added administration (eg travel exemptions and cross border movement) and pay substantial quarantine costs in the last year, in some cases (eg WA) twice, on top of existing sponsorship costs.

APL supports all levels of government developing and implementing 'COVID-19 Recovery Plans', aligned to the COVID-19 National Plan and prioritisation of essential workers to enter Australia.

Current growth

The Australian pork industry has seen a 35% increase in domestic pork consumption over time and has grown to \$5.3 billion in value through increased productivity, from \$3b in 2012. Pork is the most consumed meat globally and the second most consumed meat in Australia. APL's vision for the industry is to be Australia's preferred protein choice; sustainably adding \$1b to farm gate value by 2025 (APL 2020-2025 Strategic Plan).

The industry is currently experiencing some growth and market signals are positive, adding to the existing workforce strain given skilled staff are required to support the operation of new sites and teams. We are aware of a number of businesses in expansion, requiring new staff across management, senior stockperson and lower skilled farm hand roles as well as supporting agricultural service roles.

APL is aware of a number new requests for Labour Agreements in the past 6 months which will require advertising of a number of senior stockperson positions over the coming years. Typically this middle management role, is critical for enabling business growth, productivity and also for ensuring retention, quality supervision and upskilling for the rest of the team.

Meat processing shortages

Further to the key drivers above, it is important to note that chronic workforce shortages are seen across the entire supply chain particularly meat processing. APL is a member of the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) and we refer to their advice regarding processing workforce constraints and needs.

AMIC regularly raises the issue of meat processing workforce and skills shortages: *'while we need more engineers, technologists and food scientists in a changing industry, the fact is the numbers we need in boning room and killfloor personnel are far greater. The thickest end of the jobs shortage crisis is in semi-skilled and unskilled floor workers'*⁷

The meat industry training organisation (MINTRAC) also advises moderate – strong future demand for meat inspector and meat processing roles as well as shortages of butcher and smallgoods makers.

⁷ <https://www.beefcentral.com/news/beef-2021/processing-labour-challenge-an-issue-for-all-of-industry-amic-urges/>

7. The Importance of Skilled Migration

First and foremost, the Australian pork industry wants to provide jobs for Australians and businesses and industry have long invested in education, training and workforce attraction initiatives. Filling gaps via migration remains important to pork businesses who have been genuine, responsible users of migration for some time.

Skilled overseas workers have played a significant role in addressing the skill and labour gaps experienced by industry over the past 10-15 years. The industry uses Skilled migration to fill skilled roles both manager and senior stockperson roles in piggeries.

Some 60% of respondents surveyed to support the development of the Workforce Strategy indicated that they had staff that were on some form of visa (reinforced by poll results above).

While corporate and larger family-owned piggeries have relied extensively on skilled migrant workers for some time, primarily through the Pork Industry Labour Agreement (PILA), smaller producers are increasingly utilising the skilled migration pathway.

Sourcing migrant labour is resource-intensive for businesses however these roles remain extremely difficult to fill through the Australian job market, so it is a necessary option. Staff sourced through these migration pathways are highly valued for the skill level and sought-after experience they bring, as well as the overall positive benefit they have on businesses and local communities. They are critical to a business' future success and ability to expand, improve efficiencies and innovate.

Pork businesses started using Labour Agreements in 2011 and in 2014 the PILA industry template was established. It provides a vital tool, enabling businesses to sponsor skilled overseas workers in the occupation of 'senior stockperson (piggery)', a key role in pork production businesses.

The majority of skilled migrants employed in the industry are from the Philippines. Overwhelmingly, producers acknowledge the importance of their Filipino employees to their operations because of their relevant skills, with most having tertiary agricultural, animal science or veterinary qualifications and piggery experience from their own country. Other positive attributes that producers highlight of the Filipino staff include their strong work ethic, interest in the industry and commitment to community.

Producers report significant decrease in turnover of their Australian-born staff since the arrival of the skilled migrants. Improved staff retention and lower turnover in the workforce is observed, with more people with the right skills and aptitude for the job. This creates a more stable and fulfilling workplace.

Without access to the skilled migration program, the supply of highly skilled, reliable and committed workers from overseas would be removed from the Australian labour market. This would result in a very restricted skilled labour market for pig producers, compounding with the existing struggles of acquiring suitably qualified labour locally.

8. Migration and Economic Recovery

The 2021 Intergenerational Report shows a clear link between migration and economic growth. Further, a recent report by BDO Econsearch⁸ demonstrated that regional demand driven migrants are job creators, not takers.

⁸ <https://www.migrationsolutions.com.au/news/bdo-econsearch-migration-report/>

As explained in the Planning Australia's 2022-2023 Migration Program Discussion Paper, since the year ending 30 June 2006 net overseas migration has been the key driver of Australia's population growth. However due to COVID, for the first time this has been characterised by net outflow since 1946.

As has been recognised through the allocation of essential industry status at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia, the agricultural industries are going to play a major role in Australia's economic recovery. In order for the industries, including the Australian pork industry, to remain strong and fulfill their duty in the recovery process, they must have access to a suitable and stable workforce. Without a suitable workforce, there are high risks to both farm business continuity and animal welfare outcomes given the technical nature of careers in the pork production industry. With the difficulties our producers face attracting and retaining Australians in their businesses, migration therefore plays a crucial role in keeping Australian piggeries in operation and moreover, contributing to the country's economic recovery post-COVID-19.

To ensure government implements effective and useful migration policy settings for agricultural it must be supported by a strong collaboration and partnership with industry on migration matters.

As advocated for in the APL submission to the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy (NAWS), government and industry must collaborate to deliver the outcomes of National Agriculture Workforce Strategy, supported by an annual national labour and skills survey that supports ongoing policy and investment decision making. This forum will allow government and industry to share information on a range workforce issues while providing a forum whereby migration policy settings can be discussed.

Recommendation 1 – Government and the industries commit to implement and review the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy, underpinned by an annual national labour and skills survey to support decision making, including for regional migration.

9. Australia's Migration Policy Settings

9.1.1 Skilled visa and Labour Agreement administration and processing

It is important that the regulatory and policy environment surrounding Australia's migration programs aim to enable rather than inhibit access to skilled migrants for Australian agricultural businesses.

Use of skilled migration, supported by the PILA, has been increasing since its development in 2011 and this is likely to continue. The PILA remains an important workforce tool for industry that has operated well. Its design is still fit for purpose. However, in the past two years our members have expressed ongoing frustration and angst resulting from lengthy delays and bureaucratic process in PILA and visa processing and decision making, and unclear communication. This is despite streamlining measures and prioritisation of agricultural occupations for processing. More streamlined, responsive and transparent administration is still required to fill critical workforce and skills gaps.

To ensure industry derives the intended benefits of the PILA and other visas, it must be supported by efficient processing and effective customer service provided by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). In addition, the delivery of these improvements must be supported by DHA employees that have an understanding of rural and regional workforce labour market constraints so as to appropriately apply options within the Migration Program to agricultural businesses.

APL appreciates the work of government and the Department of Home Affairs of late to listen to industry concerns and efforts made to address agricultural workforce shortages including via inclusion of regional concessions. However despite this, there is still lengthy delays in Labour Agreement negotiations, decisions and visa application processing taking in some cases 12 months.

Businesses have raised the process of negotiations for ceiling increases within a 12-month period as overly time-consuming and lengthy (taking two months or more, or almost as long as applying for a completely new labour agreement in some cases). APL also understand that the policy whereby ceilings of 494 and 186 visas cannot be combined at any one time under a PILA is causing significant administrative delays.

Given the critical nature of these staff to pork businesses, the compounding effect of processing delays, border restrictions and lack of available flights due to COVID-19 have been causing significant stress and financial burden over the last two years.

A current policy that exists under the [Labour Agreements Procedural Instruction](#) (the Instructions), is that unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated, overseas workers should not exceed 30% of the total workforce. Notably, the pork industry is specifically identified in the Instructions as an industry that faces exceptional circumstances. Yet, whilst current PILA holders present evidence of exceptional circumstances to support their exemption from this threshold, PILA renewal applications have been declined. Further to this, the process for responding to a declined renewal application does not appear to be transparent or consistent. Given the workforce issues that are being faced, decision makers must apply the policy outlined in the Instructions fairly and provide a right of reply following decision.

Recommendation 2 – Ensure existing migration tools (including Labour Agreements) function effectively and are more responsive to labour market needs through:

- a) **Implementation of recommendations from the Final Report of the Inquiry into Australia's Skilled Migration Program, particularly updating of visa processing systems to ensure they are streamlined and support contemporary customer service.**
- b) **Improved transparency and clear communication to applicants around decisions and status.**
- c) **Staff responsible for PILA and visa processing and decision making are adequately informed about rural and regional labour markets and the industries that operate in them.**
- d) **Provide a right of reply opportunity to applicants following a PILA decision (e.g. around accessing an exemption e.g. the 30% migrant workforce in the *Labour Agreements Procedural Instruction*)**

9.1.2 Australian Agricultural Visa

In addition to the PILA, APL supports the development of the new Australian Agriculture Visa to ensure that workforce constraints across all skill levels are addressed. Whilst the program is yet to be finalised, APL provides the following recommendations:

Recommendation 3 - Deliver the Australian Agriculture Visa, ensuring its design is fit-for-purpose and complements existing migration pathways used by industry:

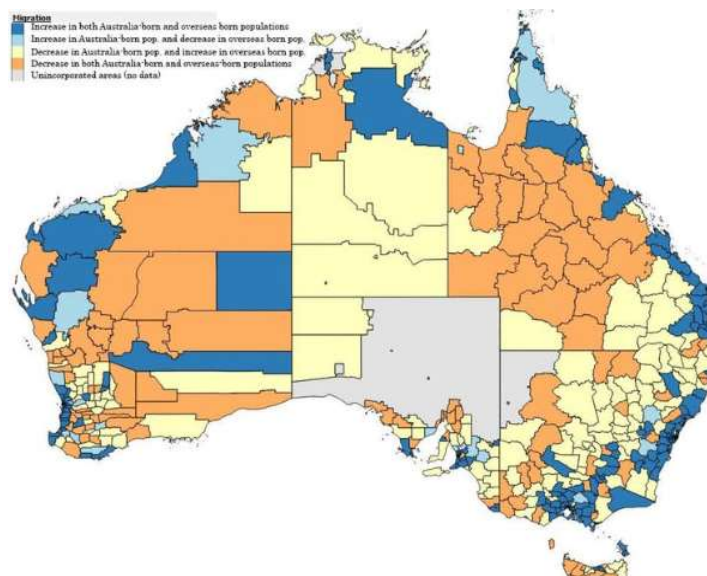
- a) **Include a longer stay option, with pathway to permanent residency**
- b) **Both large and smaller businesses can easily and cost-effectively use the visa (not just via labour hire)**

- c) Ensuring mobility arrangements balance the needs of the worker and employers
- d) Complement existing migration options including the PILA and where relevant, match or enhances PILA criteria.

I0. Supporting Australia's Regions through Regional Migration

Regionalisation and the promotion of migrants to the regions is good for Australia as a whole, taking pressure off our big cities and ensuring a high standard of living for all Australian citizens regardless of their geographical location. Australia is uniquely vulnerable to the disruptions that impact large population centres and stands alone in the developed world in having its people concentrated in cities with populations exceeding one million. Agriculture has a key role to play in the regionalisation agenda and is already a major employer and economic contributor to regional areas. Migration into regional Australia is oftentimes a lifeline for smaller country towns and provides otherwise absent economic and population growth, securing better services for the community.

Research carried out by the Regional Australia Institute using 2016 Census data investigated statistics of local government areas regarding Australia-born and overseas-born population growth and decline. It was found that of the 550 local government areas, 175 regional areas increased their population, while 246 did not. 151 increased their overseas-born and decreased their Australian-born population. Only 20 areas increased in Australian-born population and decreased in overseas-born population. Without the increase in overseas-born residents for the 151 regions, these regions would have experienced population decline and likely, the local economy and services would have declined. It can be seen from the map below, that many Central Australian regions (depicted in yellow) have seen population growth because of skilled migration. It is crucial to the longevity and wellbeing of regional and rural Australia that skilled migrants are able to continue to come into the Australian agricultural industries. It will also ensure agriculture's contribution to Australia's economy as a whole.



Source: Regional Australia Institute 2017 - Growth of Australian-born and overseas-born population 2011-16: 2016 Census data

APL are of the position that policies encouraging migration into the regions are of benefit to agriculture and therefore, regional Australia. APL supports and appreciates policies put in place by

government to attract migration to regional areas such as the Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA), regional visas that provide pathway to permanent residency, incentives to attract skilled migrants to live and work in regional Australia and recently the inclusion of regional concessions into agricultural labour agreements.

Our producers who source overseas skilled workers focus on supporting migrants by providing pastoral care and working to create a sense of community. Businesses are also strong supporters of their local communities through sponsorship, charity and support for disadvantaged groups.

While these initiatives are required to encourage migration into the regions and away from highly populated urban areas, APL believes the additional recommendations made throughout this submission are necessary to ensure the migration system truly works for agriculture and the regions.

Recommendation 4 – To further address uneven population growth and economic development between urban and regional Australia:

- a) **Ensure alignment of relevant rural and regional strategies and migration planning across agencies and at all levels of government, underpinned by accurate labour market data.**
- b) **Prioritise agricultural workforce needs in national migration planning through partnership with industry and organisations and institutions within local communities**
- c) **Implement programs to support migrants and local communities which foster community cohesion and long-term settlement within rural and regional Australia**
- d) **Maintain priority status for agricultural visas/occupations as essential to post COVID-19 recovery.**

Recommendation 5 – Support a regionalisation agenda and regional development policies that deliver economic and social infrastructure to ensure equitable access to opportunities. This includes:

- a) **Adequate and affordable accommodation and housing**
- b) **Improved infrastructure including telecommunications**
- c) **Services that underpin quality of life and ‘liveability’ including healthcare, childcare and education.**



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