



# AUSTRALIAN PORK LIMITED

Submission into the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy

August 2020



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# Executive Summary

The Australian pork industry faces significant difficulties attracting and retaining labour due to the need for an increasingly skilled workforce. Labour supply deficits have primarily been caused by poor social perceptions of the industry, dominated by ill-conceived notions that a career in the industry is unrewarding, non-technical, and one with limited pathways for career development. However, given the increasingly technical and integrated nature of the pork supply chain, this view simply does not reflect the reality of the modern Australian pork industry. Concerningly, this lack of awareness and understanding is particularly prevalent within primary, secondary, and tertiary students who will underpin the future pork industry workforce. Australian piggeries are also hampered by a skills shortage, a side effect of the market failure within the vocational education and training (VET) sector which has resulted in a reduction of fit-for-purpose training courses that drive the upskilling of piggery employees.

Whilst this submission considers workforce barriers and impediments experienced by the pork industry, APL recognises they are common to many industries within the agriculture sector. To address these concerns, APL propose the following 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.

**Recommendation 2** – Ensure that agricultural students can access affordable online training regardless of their geographical location through continued investment in regional communications infrastructure and implementation of consistent training and skilling subsidies at a state and territory level.

**Recommendation 3** - Government commit to working with the industries to update the national primary and secondary curriculums to adequately reflect the essential nature of Australian agriculture and build greater awareness amongst school students to assist in the development of a workforce pipeline.

**Recommendation 4** – State and territory governments support ongoing investment in Agricultural Labour Hubs in rural and regional Australia to connect employees with agricultural employers.

**Recommendation 5** – Government create a nationally recognised agricultural ‘trade-equivalent’ job brand to recognise the skill set of agricultural workers, professionalise a career in agriculture and assist skills transfers across agricultural industries.

**Recommendation 6** – Replace the ANZSCO occupations list with an accurate and flexible occupations framework which can adequately reflect the skillsets of agricultural workers.

**Recommendation 7** – The English language requirement for the ENS 186 visa applicants under the PILA should be reduced to an overall band score of at least 5, with a score of at least 4.5 in each of the test components of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

**Recommendation 8** – To further improve the usefulness of the PILA, expand the list of occupations under the PILA to incorporate the ANZSCO occupations; ‘Pig Farmer’ and ‘Piggery Worker’.

# 1. Australian Pork Limited

Australian Pork Limited (APL) commends the establishment of the National Agricultural Labour Advisory Committee and welcomes the opportunity to make a submission into the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy.

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.

## 2. 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 2019, the Australian pork industry produced almost 400,000 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.

## 3. Current Agricultural Workforce and Industry Outlook

According to the National Farmers Federations' (NFF) Food, Fibre & Forestry Facts, as of August 2019, 318,600 people were directly employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries which accounted for 2.5% of the national workforce. The gross value of Australian agriculture in 2018-19 was \$62.208 billion<sup>1</sup>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data from 2016 confirms agriculture continues to face challenges posed by an ageing workforce, with the average age of a livestock farmer now 57 years old.<sup>2</sup> 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 traditional retirement age have fuelled these statistics, raising significant concerns about workforce succession in the coming decades if this trend continues.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nff.org.au/media-centre/farm-facts/?download=DOWNLOAD>

<sup>2</sup> <https://joboutlook.gov.au/Occupation?search=alpha&code=1213>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.

Geographically, as of November 2018, 82% of agricultural employees lived in regional Australia.<sup>4</sup> 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 communities. 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.

The NFF, and its members including APL, believe that Australian agriculture can exceed \$100 billion in farmgate output value by 2030, a vision endorsed by the Australian Government<sup>5</sup>. However, despite this optimistic outlook, should the agricultural workforce continue to experience chronic skills and labour shortages this ambitious target will be placed at significant risk. For Australian agribusiness to realise its full growth potential it must be supported by an adequately trained and well supported workforce. Overcoming current constraints requires ongoing partnership between government and industry to deliver the National Agriculture Workforce Strategy, supported by an annual national labour and skills survey that supports ongoing policy and investment decision making.

**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.**

## 4. Innovation and Technology in the Australian Pork Industry

### 4.1 Innovation and Technological Advancements in the Industry

Advancements in innovation and technology on Australian farms have played a major role in maintaining Australia's competitiveness in global markets and continue to shape the agriculture industry domestically. Particularly, technology has had a profound impact on the depth of skills and abilities that are required of the agricultural workforce. Changes in the type of workforce required because of these advancements have become particularly evident in the Australian pork industry.

Compared to the volume of production from nations such as Denmark, Germany, the United States, and China, the Australian pork industry is relatively small. However, it is leading in science,

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<sup>3</sup> 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

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

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.awe.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/dawe-purpose-objective-priorities-statement.pdf>

sustainability, and social responsibility. The modern Australian pork industry is a highly technical, specialised, and dynamic industry which relies on a skilled workforce. Australian pig production now requires a workforce of suitably skilled people who are responsible for technical animal husbandry procedures including artificial insemination, management of herd health and biosecurity, nutrition, and growth and productivity. Innovation in automation and robotics, sustainable energy and feed waste utilisation on pig farms also calls for a workforce with skills in, for example, engineering and energy science.



## 4.2 The Impact of Innovation and Technology on the Workforce

For the pork industry, addressing the need for increasingly skilled workers is becoming progressively more difficult. CSIRO's Data61 (2019) report identified that between 2011 and 2016, 45% of high-skilled agricultural employees left the sector.<sup>6</sup> The same report identified that job vacancies in regional Australia grew by 14% compared to a growth of only 8% in vacancies in capital cities.

The 2019-20 Annual Industry Survey conducted by APL revealed that almost a third of respondents reported having a staffing shortage in their business. When asked "What levels of staff would benefit from better training opportunities?", 82% of respondents reported that stockpersons would benefit most from better training. This is an indication that a person undertaking the duties of a 'stockperson' in the pork industry is no longer simply handling and feeding stock. Rather, a stockperson is now responsible for a much wider range of technical duties such as those mentioned above. The same survey found that when respondents were asked whether they thought there were enough training opportunities available within the industry, almost two thirds of respondents reported that they thought there were not. The CSIRO Data61 report identified that only 15 out of 43 Australian universities offered degrees in agriculture contributing to difficulty gaining suitably skilled labour.

As found in the 2019-20 APL Annual Industry Survey mentioned above, many producers have difficulty accessing training courses made available through local Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) as a result of market failure in the vocational education and training (VET) system. Increasingly, vital training packages are not being offered or delivered to the agricultural workforce in regional areas due to the centralisation of training facilities in major cities, in part due to many training colleges being absorbed into the university system from the late 1980s onwards. RTOs continuing to operate in the sector

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<sup>6</sup> <https://data61.csiro.au/en/Our-Research/Our-Work/Future-Cities/Planning-sustainable-infrastructure/Future-of-Australias-agricultural-workforce>

must do so on a commercial basis, however diminishing regional populations make it increasingly unfeasible for RTOs to offer a wide range of courses as they simply are not profitable.

This issue is compounded by the lack of consistent application of government training subsidies at both a federal and state level. Federally, agricultural employers are unable to access training assistance through the Additional Identified Skills Shortage payment as agricultural traineeships are not recognised by the program. This lack of recognition is also mirrored in the National Skills Needs List. At a state and territory level, despite similar qualifications and training packages being made available, subsidised support payments are applied inconsistently and may require varying levels of fees to be paid depending on where the student undertakes a course.

**Recommendation 2 – Ensure that agricultural students can access affordable online training regardless of their geographical location through continued investment in regional communications infrastructure and implementation of consistent training and skilling subsidies at a state and territory level.**

## 5. The Impact of Changing Social Perceptions on the Agriculture Workforce

While availability and accessibility of training opportunities is crucial in equipping the current and future workforce with the skillsets that are required by the pork industry, the social issues facing the industry must be addressed. The agriculture industries, and particularly the pork industry, have endured longstanding difficulties attracting and retaining a stable workforce due to poor social perceptions.

Pig farming is not regarded amongst Australians as a prestigious career choice. The poor social perceptions of the industry are arguably the biggest threat to the current and future agricultural workforce. In a labour-related industry survey carried out by APL in 2017, 94% of respondents said the perceived unattractiveness of the pig industry was the main impediment to recruiting Australian workers.

As outlined in publications by the Regional Australia Institute, a widely held dogma within the Australian workforce is that an agricultural career is unrewarding, requires only a low level of skill and has very little, if any, opportunity for career development.<sup>7</sup> This drives people like university graduates with desirable skillsets, away from the industry. However, given the size and technical nature of the pork industry, this is not true.

### 5.1 Promotion of Agriculture in Australian Curriculums

A key causation of low uptake of agricultural careers and an ageing agricultural workforce has been the failure to disseminate agricultural careers information in primary and secondary schooling, particularly in metropolitan schools. The Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA) released a student survey data report in August 2020 which looked at student awareness of the primary industries and their knowledge on where their food comes from. When asked about industries and their involvement in food and fibre production, only 45% of metropolitan students reported that 'Pig farming' was involved in producing Food and Fibre products in Australia compared to 62% of regional and

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/RAI-Regional-Jobs-for-the-Future-Submission.pdf>

remote students. The following quotes from students captured by the PIEFA study exemplify the disinterest and lack of awareness of the industry:

*“They [jobs] seem boring and I don't know anything about it...and I don't really want to know about it”*

*“It doesn't make you a lot of money.”*

*“Sounds boring and I don't want to work in a factory or on a farm”*

*“Not interested. Don't really know much about it.”*

*“I live in the city and don't know much about jobs in that industry”*

*“I am not as interested in this [Food & Fibre] as other areas of science”*

The report discovered that sentiment ranked lower for animal-based industries overall compared with plant-based industries. Of the animal-based industries, sentiment was the lowest for ‘Pig farming’ with nearly a third of students reporting they felt either ‘Not really positive’ or ‘Not positive at all’ about pig farming. 59% of student respondents reported that they had learned what they knew about food and fibre from their schoolteachers. It is also clear that students are not aware of where their food originates with 17% of students reported thinking that bacon was made from something other than animal products. Only 21% of students knew either ‘a little bit’ or ‘a lot’ about piggery workers and, disappointingly, only 11% of students responded that they would like to know more about ‘Pig farming’.

To improve students understanding of agriculture and the pork industry, Australian curriculums require information that educates students about primary industries and the origins of their food. Given their important role in disseminating this information, teachers and careers advisors must be adequately supported and resourced to deliver accurate information about agriculture and the careers the industry offers.

**Recommendation 3 – Government commit to working with the industries to update the national primary and secondary curriculums to adequately reflect the essential nature of Australian agriculture and build greater awareness amongst school students to assist in the development of a workforce pipeline.**

The Victorian and Queensland Governments have developed initiatives to strengthen the link between RTOs, local schools, and producers to improve the introduction of students to work opportunities and to allow businesses to identify potential candidates more easily.

The Victorian Skills Commissioner’s (VSC) have developed The Great South Coast Regional Skills Taskforce which provides targeted advice on the skilling needs of the region and informed the development of a regional skills demand profile. The Regional Skills Taskforce model has supported Victoria’s regions by working locally to identify job opportunities, create pathways and gear the VET system to support and promote future local careers. The Victorian Government also has a Regional Skills Fund which supports regional industry capability to ensure long-term employment by aligning local industry priorities for skills through collaborative and innovative partnerships between regional industry, businesses and the tertiary sector including TAFEs, Learn Locals, LLENs and universities.

The ‘Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network’ (QAWN) is part of a range of efforts by the Queensland Government aimed at improving the uptake of agriculture careers including; the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (RJSA), Agforce School to Industry Partnership Program (SIPP) and Gateway Schools to Agribusiness.

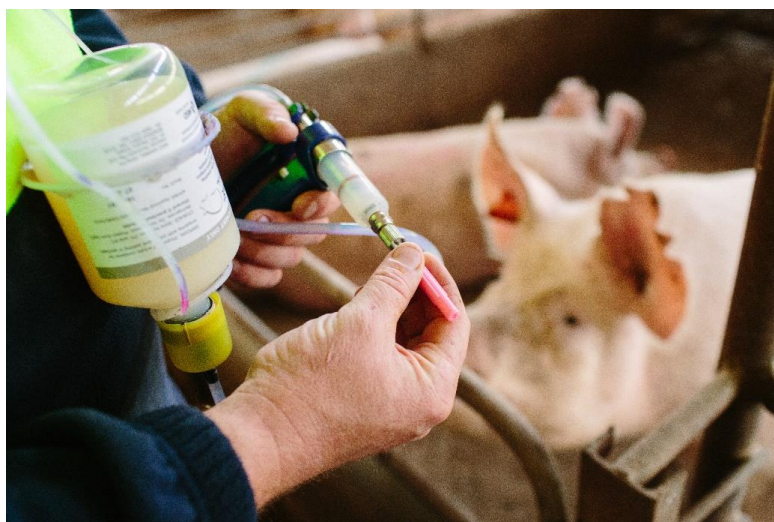


APL strongly supports these programs and believes efforts like these mentioned are vital in addressing the skills shortages in the industry. APL believe the development of regional Agricultural Labour Hubs will provide an effective national solution to connecting people seeking work with employers in the agricultural industry.

**Recommendation 4 – State and territory governments support ongoing investment in Agricultural Labour Hubs in rural and regional Australia to connect employees with agricultural employers.**

## **5.2 Animal Welfare and Environmental Sustainability in the Australian Pork Industry**

Despite its relatively small size, the Australian pork industry prides itself on its world leading animal welfare standards and environmental sustainability. Pork producers realise the significance of the relationship between evolving social opinions and social licence and as such, producers in the industry maintain some of the most sustainable, low emission and environmentally viable production systems. In doing this, industry has been receptive to new technologies aimed at reducing environmental impacts and improving animal welfare outcomes such as the adoption of sustainable energy alternatives like biogas and the voluntary phase out of sow stalls.



As a result of Australia's leading animal welfare standards, all stockpersons working with pigs must, at the very least, have an appropriate level of training to ensure compliance with state animal welfare legislation. A stockperson is only considered suitably qualified if they:

- are a veterinary practitioner,
- hold a Certificate III in Pork Production or equivalent,
- have been assessed by a training organisation registered under the *Vocational Education and Training Act 2005* (or under an equivalent Act in another State or Territory) to have successfully completed units of competence within the Agriculture, Horticulture and Conservation and Land Management Training Package in relation to working in pork production, which include units of competence in at least the following areas:
  - moving and handling pigs;
  - caring for health and welfare of pigs;
  - complying with industry animal welfare requirements;

- administering medication to livestock;
- euthanising livestock; or
- have, for a period of at least twelve months, cared for pigs in a commercial pig establishment and had training and experience in at least the following areas:
  - moving and handling pigs;
  - inspecting and assessing the health and well-being of pigs;
  - carrying out vaccinations, health treatments (as described in clause 7 of this Code) and the elective husbandry procedures (described in clause 8 of this Code);
  - humane destruction of pigs suffering an incurable disease, untreatable injury or painful deformity;
  - maintaining records of inspections and assessments of pigs.

The pork industry is becoming increasingly technical, and while access to education and training opportunities from RTOs is crucial to the industry's success, university education also plays an important role in fulfilling technical demand.

### 5.3 Skill level of Careers in the Pork Industry

In classifying the skill level of farming occupations, the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO) is used to classify all occupations in the following skill-level hierarchy:

- Skill level 1: Managers – holds a bachelor's degree or at least five years' experience. Occupations include “farmers”, “farm manager”, “specialist manger”, and “CEOs”.
- Skill level 2: Professionals – holds a bachelor's degree. Occupations include “agronomist”, “veterinarians” and “plant scientist”.
- Skill level 3: Technicians and tradespeople – holds a cert II and 2-3 years on-the-job training. Occupations include “shearer” and “skilled horticultural worker”.
- Skill Level 4: Clerical and administrative workers – Occupations include “bookkeepers”, “project administrator”, and “office support”.
- Skill level 5: Machinery operators and drivers – holds a cert II or cert III or formal experience related training. The sole agricultural occupation is “harvester operator”.
- Skill Level 6: Labourers – does not need any formal training. Occupations include “dairy farm worker”, “wool handler”, “stable hand”, and “fruit picker and packers”.

CSIRO's Data61 (2019) report, and several Government studies of farm labour, outlined that the vast majority of occupations in the industry were identified as either 'Livestock Farmer' (skill level 1) (usually the farm owner) or 'Livestock Farm Worker' (skill level 6) with almost no representation of occupations with skills levels in between. This binary characteristic of a career in the industry is a result of the ANZSCO system and its inability to properly capture the skill levels that are truly present within the pork industry. The table below shows the number of enrolments in pork production courses. The Diploma, which is intended for the occupation 'Pig Farmer' (ANZSCO: 121318, skill level 1), has extremely few enrolments. Whereas, the Certificate III in Pork Production, intended for the occupation 'Livestock Farm Workers' (ANZSCO: 841599, skill level 5) has relatively steady and healthy enrolments.

Table I Qualification enrolments in pork production courses by year

Qualification	Qualification Enrolments by Year				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Certificate III in Pork Production	287	213	191	164	215
Diploma of Pork Production	2	5	13	6	1

Source: NCVET VOCSTATS, TVA Program Enrolments, 2015-2019

Workers in the pork industry often enter the industry without recognised qualifications and develop a range of skills ‘on-the-job’, which are not recognised through the ANZSCO system. So, they fall into lower skill levels under the ANZSCO system (mostly skill level 6). This is not only irreflexive of the actual skills people in the industry have, but is also damaging because of its impact on how the Australian workforce views the industry. In the 2019-20 Annual Industry Survey, one South Australian producer reported:

*“There is no substitute to what I learned on the farm, in the sheds and in the sale yards and as a consequence I became far better prepared for managing a business”*

It is important that Australia’s workforce understand that highly skilled occupations are not only available in the agricultural industry but are in high demand. In promoting this, we must add value to experience in agriculture by developing a nationally consistent ‘trade-equivalent’ job brand for skilled farm workers. This is crucial in attracting school leavers, as currently working on a farm does not provide the worker with a qualification over a period of time. This is the opposite for apprenticeships in trades, who can obtain nationally recognised qualifications despite needing similar technical ability. The ability to become recognisably qualified in trades makes those careers much more attractive compared to agriculture.

The corporatisation of farming businesses in the modern agricultural industry has introduced places of employment that need people with official qualifications. Official qualifications provide the employer with more certainty that a person has a skillset that is of use to their business. Larger businesses can not only support people with nationally recognised qualifications but need them. The development of an agricultural ‘trade-equivalent’ qualification would equip the worker with skillsets that could be carried across industries.

**Recommendation 5 – Government create a nationally recognised agricultural ‘trade-equivalent’ job brand to recognise the skill set of agricultural workers, professionalise a career in agriculture and assist skills transfers across agricultural industries.**

**Recommendation 6 – Replace the ANZSCO occupations list with an accurate and flexible occupations framework which can adequately reflect the skillsets of agricultural workers.**

## 6. Migration

The Temporary Skilled Migration Program (TSMP) has played a crucial role in the industry’s response to the challenge of varying labour availability. Reflecting this, in the 2018-19 APL Industry Survey, 34% of respondents had at least one Temporary Skill Shortage (TSS) (subclass 482) visa holder on their staff. The benefit of the temporary skilled migration system is outlined through quotes from pig producers below:

*“Our region is a thriving agricultural area, and it’s very hard to get skilled workers locally. Many school leavers can’t read or write properly, unable to pass basic aptitude tests, and those that can want to go to university”.*

*“If we advertise for piggery workers, we are never successful within Australia. In general Aussies will not work with pigs ... or relocate [to regional areas] to work with pigs!”.*

## **6.1 The Pork Industry Labour Agreement**

The Pork Industry Template Labour Agreement (PILA) was established through recognition by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) of the positive role the Australian pork industry plays as a genuine and responsible user of the temporary skilled migration pathway.<sup>8</sup> This agreement was negotiated between APL and DHA and was approved by the Minister in 2014. The foundation of this agreement lies within the many benefits associated with temporary and permanent skilled migration to regional Australia.

One of the great features of the TSMP is that sponsors can nominate a skilled overseas worker for permanent residency under the PILA through the Employer Nominated Scheme (ENS) (Subclass 186) visa. For a sponsor to nominate a TSS visa holder for permanent residency, the employee must be either employed directly for them as a Subclass 457 or TSS visa holder in the nominated occupation, for at least three years before the nomination is made or, if they held a Subclass 457 visa before 18 March 2018, as a Subclass 457 or TSS visa holder in the nominated occupation, for at least three years before the nomination is made.

The TSS visa (subclass 482) and Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) (Subclass 494) visa can partially satisfy ongoing fluctuations in labour demand in the Australian pork industry. However, permanent residency solutions for addressing the long-standing labour shortage issues in the Australia pork industry are key. The only way in which permanent residency can be achieved under the PILA is through the ENS (subclass 186) visa.

Permanent residency is critical to facilitating the entry of new skills into the domestic workforce. An important aspect of the TSS visa in the pork industry is that many skilled migrants who come to Australia on TSS visas have higher qualifications and greater skill sets than locally sourced employees on pig farms. In the 2017 APL labour survey, 90% of respondents noted the positive impact on business productivity as a result of accessing the 457 visa program.<sup>9</sup> Also noted by 82% of respondents were improvements in staff retention overall from accessing the program. In the pork industry, the transferring of important skills and knowledge from skilled migrants to the local workforce has been immensely positive. It has contributed to the improvement of the Australian labour market. Some examples of this are captured in the quotes below:

*“Having these 457 workers in our business has done many things for us; helped us have a stable workforce, turnover of staff is minimal even with the Australians, improved work culture, allowed us to grow our business, work cover claims are down. Living in Australia we have many challenges; feed prices, drought, pig prices.*

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<sup>8</sup> <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/employer-subsite/files/labour-agreement-template-pork-industry.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> On 18 April 2017, Malcolm Turnbull announced his intention to replace the 457 visas with 2 new categories (short term and medium term) of visas. One of the replacements was the Temporary Skill Shortage visa, known as a 482 Visa.

*Having these 457 workers on board just gives us some surety with our work force. It would be better if the process of sponsorship for these people was made simpler”.*

- The above quote was taken from a Queensland producer with 16 full time staff, including five former 457 visa holders that had transitioned to permanent residency, and two current 457 visa holders.

Our producers also noted a positive impact on overall team dynamics when employing skilled workers from overseas:

*“Their presence has helped the Australian guys to show leadership, openness to another culture for a better, diverse workplace”.*

- The above quote was taken from a Victorian producer with 38 fulltime staff, including one 482 visa holder who has transitioned to permanent residency and one current 482 visa holder.

*“457 workers have all had specialised training in my industry and are highly motivated to prove themselves. This has motivated local employees and demonstrated to them a more professional approach to their work which has had a very positive effect on my business”.*

- The above quote was taken from a Queensland producer with 80 fulltime staff, including 15 that had transitioned from 457 visas to permanent residency.

Without access to the TSMP, the supply of highly skilled, reliable and committed workers from overseas would be removed. This would result in a very restricted skilled labour market for pig producers, compounding the existing struggles of acquiring suitably qualified labour locally. APL encourages fit for purpose regulation and the streamlining of the PILA to improve the use of skilled migration in regional Australia.



### 6.1.1 English Language Requirements

Legislative changes implemented in November 2019, removed certain English language concessions available to applicants applying for permanent residency through the visa 186 pathway. The concessions allowed skilled overseas workers to be exempt from sitting the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) when they had completed the required period of temporary residency and if they could prove they had completed a minimum of five years of secondary or higher education delivered in English. The removal of this concession meant that applicants would need to achieve a score of at least 6 in each of the IELTS components. APL appreciates that the intention of these changes by government is to direct incoming overseas workers to rural and regional Australia by making the pathway to permanency through the RSMS 187 visa (which requires the overseas worker to live outside of non-regional areas) substantially less onerous. However, this action has imposed an unintended disadvantage to pig producers looking to source overseas workers using the PILA framework, as the only visa available for permanency under the PILA is the ENS 186 visa. Australian piggeries are vastly regionally or rurally based and therefore, any worker achieving permanent residency through the PILA is destined for regional or rural living.

APL has received widespread feedback from industry that the changes are prohibitive, hampering efforts to achieve workforce stability and certainty. The changes have put PILA-holders at a disadvantage compared to employers accessing the skilled migration program from outside the PILA framework. The PILA framework has many benefits for producers. Primarily, it provides producers the ability to plan and give foresight to their workforce needs over time. It also allows producers to consult with the Department of Home Affairs to increase or decrease the ceiling of skilled overseas workers they are permitted to employ based on their needs. Thus, having to sponsor skilled overseas workers outside of the PILA framework undermines the very purpose of the agreement and creates inefficiencies in an already fragile labour market. The tables below show Schedule 2 of the PILA and how labour needs can be planned over a five-year period.

Schedule 2 Ceilings and concessions relating to nomination criteria covered by this Agreement							
Item 1 Occupations, Nomination Ceiling and Location							
The table below outlines the occupations that can be utilised under this Agreement for the visa programs specified. It also specifies the nomination ceilings per Year for these Occupations, and where the nominated positions should be based (i.e. location of work).							
<i>SESR nomination ceilings</i>							
Occupation	Code	Nomination Ceilings					Location of work
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Senior Stockperson (Piggery)	070499	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>TSS nomination ceilings</i>							
Occupation	Code	Nomination Ceilings					Location of work
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Senior Stockperson (Piggery)	070499	X	X	X	X	X	
<i>ENS nomination ceilings</i>							
Occupation	Code	Nomination Ceilings					Location of work
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	
Senior Stockperson (Piggery)	070499	X	X	X	X	X	

Figure 1 Schedule 2 of the Pork Industry Labour Agreement

In combating this, the required English language score in the IELTS for permanent residency through the ENS 186 visa should be reduced under the PILA framework. APL understand that the intention of the required score in the IELTS is to ensure that the candidate has a level of English ability that ensures they are capable to carry out the tasks that are required. However, as the TSS 482 visa provides what is effectively a three-year testing period for both the sponsor and employee, it is clear that at the time of applying for permanency, the candidate is more than capable of carrying out the role that is required. It is also clear that the sponsor, being responsible for nominating the candidate for permanency, is satisfied with the ability of the worker to carry out required tasks in their businesses.

**Recommendation 7 – The English language requirement for the ENS 186 visa applicants under the PILA should be reduced to an overall band score of at least 5, with a score of at least 4.5 in each of the test components of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).**

### **6.1.2 The PILA Occupations List**

The occupation by which overseas workers are sponsored through the PILA is ‘Senior Stockperson (Piggery)’. There is currently no ANZSCO code for the occupation of ‘Senior Stockperson (Piggery)’ and as such, the establishment of the PILA provided sponsors in the industry the ability to hire workers from overseas under an occupational description that more accurately reflected the duties that were required. The tasks of a Senior Stockperson (Piggery) (Code: 070499) under this agreement are defined below:

- supervise the site and facilities in terms of the required human resources, physical resources, safety requirements, consumables, documentation and measurement devices;
- provide overall maintenance and compliance of the Company Quality Assurance program for the site ensuring that all relevant documentation is kept current;
- supervise data collection and recording so information is accurate to aid stock and inventory control;
- undertake specific tasks assigned by management to ensure that environmental, quality and safety goals are met;
- implement preventable maintenance programs to reduce planned and unplanned down time;
- supervise trial sheds, collect and record data in accordance with trial protocols;
- selection of breeding stock and/or pigs for sale;
- supervision and participation of daily inspection of livestock, such that the animals are appropriately fed, watered, environmental parameters are fulfilled. The Senior Stockperson (Piggery) in this case would work with and supervise a less experienced Stockperson;
- supervision and participation of daily inspection of livestock, ensuring compromised animals are individually assessed, identified, treated and record in accordance with the Company Herd Health Plan and the industries Model Code of Practice;
- euthanise sick or injured stock in a humane manner and in accordance with the Model Code of Practice for Animal Welfare – Pigs 3rd edition;
- conduct post-mortem examinations of deceased stock and report findings;
- collect boar semen at an artificial insemination laboratory;
- undertake processing duties within the artificial insemination laboratory;
- supervision and participation in the mating of animals via individually supervised mating or through Artificial Insemination;
- supervision of the birthing process, including the ability to physically conduct unsupervised internal assessments of females during parturition to minimise this incidence of still births;

- participate in company/industry training sessions and workshops as required;
- perform any other duty as required by the Unit Manager.

Prior to the availability of 'Senior Stockperson (Piggery)' as an occupation, employers in the industry were sponsoring skilled overseas workers under the occupation 'Pig Farmer'. The 'Pig Farmer' description was not reflective of the duties that overseas workers were carrying out on-farm and was preventing employers from allocating their workforce to the needs of their operations effectively.

**Recommendation 8 – To further improve the usefulness of the PILA, expand the list of occupations under the PILA to incorporate the ANZSCO occupations; 'Pig Farmer' and 'Piggery Worker'.**

### 6.1.3 The Benefit of the Pathway to Permanent Residency through the PILA

A major benefit of the pathway to permanent residency through the PILA is that it provides a source of population growth for rural and remote Australia. Population growth in regional Australia is paramount to sustaining country towns. For many of these regional towns in Australia, the overseas-born migrants are the only source of population growth and thus, it is hard to overestimate the long-term benefit of skilled migrants arriving in regional Australia.

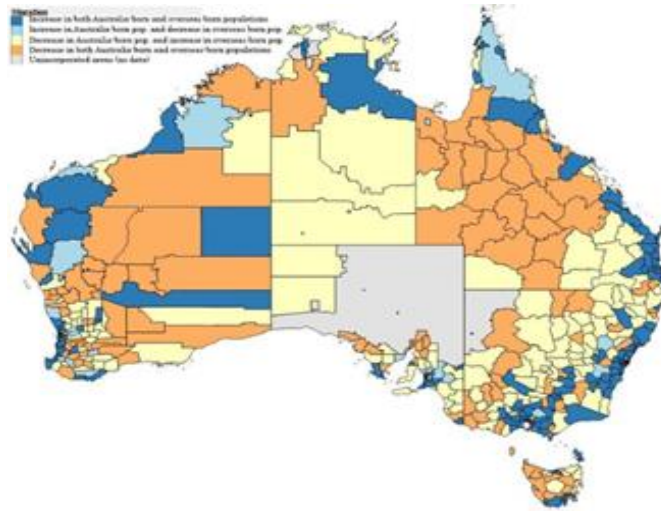


Eight-year-old Toby and his brother, 12-year-old Elijah, at St Patrick's Primary School in Pyramid Hill. Both enjoy playing basketball. (ABC Central Victoria: Larissa Romensky)

Research by the Regional Australia Institute using 2016 Census data investigated population growth and decline of Australia-born and overseas-born people in local government areas. It was found that from 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 would have suffered. It can be seen from the map below, that many rural and regional areas (depicted in yellow) have seen population growth because of skilled migration.





Source: Regional Australia Institute 2017 - Emily

Figure 2 Population growth as a result of skilled

## 7. Conclusion

The Australian pork industry continues to face significant difficulties attracting and retaining labour due to a raft of impediments, including poor social perception and a lack of awareness and understanding of the industry by future workforce participants. Compounding these supply constraints are the increasing shortages in skilled workers available to piggeries which has been caused, in part, by market failure within the vocational and education training (VET) sector. Whilst the Australian pork industry continues to implement initiatives aimed at increasing the Australian workforce pool, it also relies on skilled migration to meet current shortfalls. APL commend the Government for establishing the National Agricultural Labour Advisory Committee to investigate these workforce concerns and look forward to a partnership approach to implementing the National Agricultural Workforce Strategy.



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