

THE CITY OF  
GREATER GEELONG

# SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE VALUE OF SKILLED MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

—

DECEMBER 2025

---

# Contents

---

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Submission</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Geelong: A diverse cultural profile .....	4
Response to Inquiry Terms of Reference .....	4
a) Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Skilled Migration .....	4
b) Effectiveness of Current Skilled Migration Settings .....	6
c) Targeting Skills Gaps and Shortages in Critical Sectors .....	6
d) Supporting Businesses, Productivity and Innovation.....	7
e) Enhancing Public Awareness and Understanding .....	8
f) International Approaches.....	8
Summary and Recommendations .....	9
References .....	9

# Executive Summary

The City of Greater Geelong recognises the significant contribution that skilled migration makes to the economic, social, and cultural vitality of our region. As Victoria's second-largest city and a designated regional centre, Geelong has a proud history of welcoming skilled migrants who drive innovation, address critical workforce shortages, and enrich our community fabric.

Our submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry draws on local insights, recent policy experiences, and best practice approaches to regional migration.

We highlight Geelong's growing diversity, with 18% of residents born overseas and a broad mix of ancestries and languages represented in our community.

Skilled migrants are pivotal to the city's ongoing economic resilience, supporting key industries and fostering social cohesion.

However, we note the need for migration policy settings to be responsive to regional realities, ensuring the long-term settlement, wellbeing, and retention of migrants.

## Key Recommendations:

1. **Provide adequate infrastructure, services, and community engagement approaches** to support skilled migration, especially in regional locations where resources are scarce.
2. **Adopt regional definitions** based on workforce realities, not geography.
3. **Establish a Regional Occupation List** informed by local government and industry, including Regional Certifying Bodies (RCBs).
4. **Reform visa settings** to reduce exploitation and promote permanency.
5. **Plan for migrant wellbeing and retention**, not just recruitment.
6. **Enhance public awareness** through national campaigns and local storytelling highlighting migration's value as a community-building force.
7. **Learn from international best practice** to simplify and strengthen the system.

By adopting these recommendations, the City of Greater Geelong believes Australia can maximise the value of skilled migration, drive sustainable regional growth, and build inclusive, resilient communities for the future.



International Communities at Pako Festa, Geelong

# Submission

The City of Greater Geelong welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia. As Victoria's second-largest city and a designated regional centre, Geelong has a long history of benefiting from skilled migration, which continues to shape our economic, social, and cultural landscape.

Our submission draws on insights from our July 2024 contribution to the *Review of Regional Migration Settings* alongside current best practices and reflects our commitment to ensuring migration policy is responsive to regional needs, supports migrant wellbeing, and enables sustainable growth.

This submission is further strengthened by the City of Greater Geelong's active role in supporting skilled migration. The City acts as the Regional Certifying Body (RCB) for the Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 494). This role is pivotal in ensuring that local businesses can address critical skill shortages by sponsoring skilled workers where local recruitment has not succeeded. The RCB leverages its local knowledge to provide advice to the Department of Home Affairs on whether nominated positions are genuine, necessary, and appropriately remunerated, and whether they cannot be filled by local residents.

## GEELONG: A DIVERSE CULTURAL PROFILE

As of the 2021 Census, the Greater Geelong region had a population of 271,057 people, current population estimate sits at 289,565 (ABS ERP 2024). The community is notably diverse, with over 18% of residents born overseas, up from 16% at the 2016 Census, this diversity contributing to a rich cultural tapestry. The most common countries of birth outside Australia include the United Kingdom, India, New Zealand, the Philippines and China reflecting both historical migration patterns and more recent global mobility trends.

Recent migration trends since the 2021 Census show notable shifts in Geelong's population dynamics. Analysis of ABS Estimated Resident Population (ERP) data reveals that, following a significant rebound in overseas migration numbers immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, the year to June 2024 experienced continued sturdy growth in overseas migration. This ongoing influx has played a substantial role in driving the region's population increase and reflects both national and global trends in mobility.

These patterns highlight the sustained importance of skilled migration to Geelong's growth and community diversity.

Geelong's residents trace their ancestry to a diverse mix of backgrounds, with the top ten most commonly reported being: English, Australian, Irish, Scottish, Italian, German, Dutch, Indian, Croatian, and Chinese. This diversity highlights both the city's strong Anglo-Celtic roots and the influence of more recent Asian migration. Language diversity is likewise prominent, with Mandarin, Punjabi, Italian, Croatian, Filipino/Tagalog, and Macedonian frequently spoken at home in addition to English.

Overall, Geelong's migration profile and cultural diversity are central to its identity and economic resilience. The city continues to attract skilled migrants who enrich the workforce, support local industries, and enhance community life. This underscores the importance of migration policy settings that are responsive to regional realities and supportive of long-term settlement and retention.

## RESPONSE TO INQUIRY TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference for the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's inquiry into Australia's skilled migration program aim to assess and enhance the role of migration in supporting national development.

Presented below is the City of Greater Geelong's formal response to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference.

### a) Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Skilled Migration

Skilled migration is a cornerstone of Australia's prosperity. In 2023–24, the Skill stream accounted for 72.2% of the total Migration Program, with 137,100 places delivered. Migrants contribute significantly to GDP, fill critical workforce gaps, and enrich communities culturally and socially.

According to data released by the Australian Government, Department of Home Affairs, greater Geelong has attracted a substantial number of skilled migrants in recent years.

Between 1 January 2022 and 4 June 2025, it is estimated that an additional 2,305 skilled settlers were recorded as residing in greater Geelong, compared to 465 family settlers and 514 humanitarian settlers. This means that skilled migrants make up the largest group, accounting for

approximately 71% of all new settlers in the region during the reporting period. This strong proportion highlights greater Geelong’s appeal as a destination for skilled professionals, reflecting both the city’s economic opportunities and its capacity to attract talent from a diverse range of countries

Skilled migration has been integral to Geelong’s development, from post-war industrial growth to contemporary service and education sectors. Today, 18% of our population is born overseas, contributing to a vibrant multicultural community, with an increase of almost 10,000 people between 2016 and 2021.

Migrants bring essential skills, cultural diversity, and innovation, enriching our local economy and social fabric.

However, the value of migration must be supported by adequate infrastructure, services, and community engagement. Migrant wellbeing is closely tied to access to housing, education, healthcare, and cultural inclusion. Without these supports, the full potential of skilled migration cannot be realised.

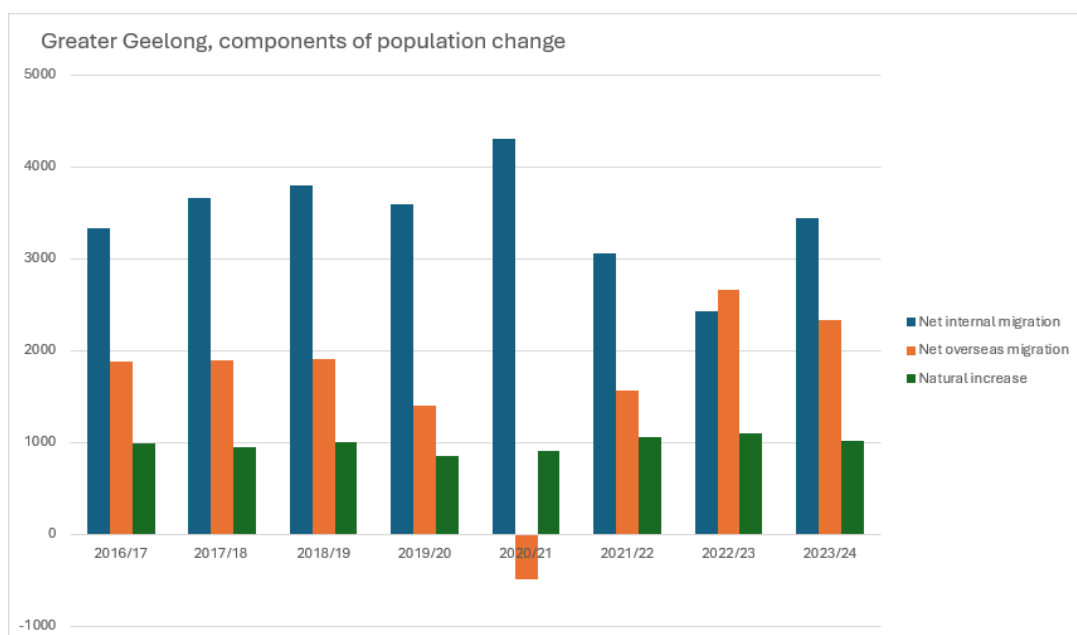
This matters because the benefits of skilled migration, such as economic growth, workforce development, and social enrichment, can only be fully achieved when migrants are well-supported in their new communities. Adequate infrastructure and services, including access to housing, education, healthcare, and opportunities for cultural participation, are essential for ensuring that migrants can settle successfully and contribute to their fullest potential.

When these supports are in place, migrants are more likely to thrive, feel included, and actively participate in local life, which in turn strengthens community cohesion and resilience. Conversely, without these supports, especially in regional settings where resources are scarce, migrants may struggle to connect, and the broader community may miss the many advantages that skilled migration brings.

**Top 10 Countries of Overseas Arrivals since 1 January 2022 (currently recorded as residing in greater Geelong)**

Rank	Country	Estimated Total Visas
1	India	858
2	Philippines	273
3	Afghanistan	265
4	Pakistan	212
5	Sri Lanka	129
6	China	101
7	United Kingdom	99
8	Thailand	96
9	Iran	86
10	Syrian Arab Republic	58

Source: Department of Home Affairs.



Source: ABS, Regional Population.

## b) Effectiveness of Current Skilled Migration Settings

While the current system delivers high numbers, its effectiveness is uneven across regions. For example, Geelong is classified as Category 2, yet faces workforce challenges similar to Category 3 regions.

Current visa settings, particularly for temporary migrants, can contribute to exploitation and insecurity. We support reforms that “design out” these risks and promote pathways to permanent residency.

Regional definitions used in migration policy should reflect economic and workforce realities, not just geographic location. A more nuanced approach is needed to ensure migration settings meet actual regional needs.

This matters because the uneven effectiveness of the current skilled migration system can lead to persistent workforce shortages in regions like Geelong, despite high overall migration numbers.

When visa settings do not adequately address local realities, communities may struggle to fill critical roles, hindering economic growth and social wellbeing.

By reforming migration policy to better reflect actual economic and workforce needs, rather than relying solely on geographic definitions, Australia can ensure that skilled migration delivers genuine benefits, supports regional development, and fosters resilient, inclusive communities.

The Skilled Independent and State/Territory nominated categories saw a 49.3% drop in applications in 2023–24, indicating systemic inefficiencies. Through applying a regional context there is a lot to be gained:

- **More equitable distribution of skilled migrants:** By refining migration policy to reflect the specific economic and workforce needs of each region, areas like Geelong can attract and retain the skilled workers they require, reducing persistent shortages and ensuring that regional communities benefit more evenly from migration.
- **Better alignment between visa categories and workforce needs:** Tailoring visa settings to local realities will help fill critical roles and address unique challenges faced by different regions, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach based on broad geographic definitions.
- **Reduced exploitation and improved retention:** Reforms that create clearer pathways to permanent residency for skilled migrants can reduce insecurity and the risk of exploitation often experienced by temporary

visa holders, encouraging longer-term settlement and deeper community connection.

- **Stronger economic growth and community resilience:** With the right migration settings, regional economies can flourish as skilled migrants are empowered to contribute fully, supporting business growth, innovation, and a vibrant social fabric.
- **Enhanced social wellbeing and inclusion:** When migrants are well-supported and able to settle successfully, communities become more cohesive, diverse, and resilient, benefiting from the cultural and social enrichment that skilled migration brings.

## c) Targeting Skills Gaps and Shortages in Critical Sectors

Australia faces acute shortages in healthcare, education, construction, and clean energy. For example, 61% of the construction workforce and 50% of education roles are in shortage.

The **Skilled Occupation List (SOL)** is a useful national tool, but lacks the granularity needed for regional planning. We advocate for a **Regional Occupation List (ROL)** informed by local government and industry, enabling targeted responses to local workforce gaps.

For example, Geelong faces a projected shortfall of nearly 2,000 early childhood educators by 2029 due to policy reforms and population growth. National datasets alone cannot capture such regional nuances.

We recommend establishing a **Regional Advisory Group** to support *Jobs and Skills Australia* in developing ROLs that reflect local conditions and priorities.

Addressing acute shortages in sectors such as healthcare, education, construction, and clean energy through a more regionally focused approach matters because it ensures that the unique workforce needs of communities like Geelong are met, rather than relying on broad national averages that may overlook local realities.

When tools like the SOL lack regional detail, critical gaps persist, such as Geelong’s anticipated need for nearly 2,000 early childhood educators by 2029. National datasets simply cannot capture these local nuances.

By applying a ROL informed by local government and industry input, several gains can be achieved:

- **Improved service delivery:** Targeting regional workforce gaps means essential services, such as

healthcare and education, are better staffed, directly benefiting the community.

- **Enhanced productivity and economic resilience:** Filling shortages in key sectors helps drive local economic growth and stability, making regions more self-sufficient and adaptable.
- **More responsive migration planning:** Localised data and stakeholder input allow migration settings to be tailored to real workforce needs, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all national approach.
- **Support for business and innovation:** When skilled roles are filled, businesses can expand, innovate, and remain competitive, especially in regions where local labour supply is limited.
- **Community wellbeing and inclusion:** Effective settlement and retention of migrants, supported by locally relevant policies, foster stronger, more cohesive communities.

Ultimately, establishing structures like a **Regional Advisory Group** to help shape ROLs ensures that migration policy is grounded in local realities, leading to fairer distribution of skilled migrants, reduced shortages, and healthier, more resilient regional economies.

Likewise, positioning **Regional Certifying Bodies (RCBs)** as proactive partners in workforce planning, not just compliance would be beneficial. The City, as an RCB for the Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa (subclass 494), can do more than verify business requests. Leveraging local insights, councils can help identify emerging skill gaps and direct skilled migration to priority sectors, ensuring workforce planning is strategic rather than reactive. We recommend that the Commonwealth embed RCBs in migration policy as regional intelligence hubs, enabling them to influence the development of Regional Occupation Lists (ROLs) and guide skilled workers to areas of greatest need. This approach shifts migration from a demand-driven model to one that anticipates and addresses critical shortages.

While the City recognises that current approaches include a regional approach through **Designated Area Migration Agreements (DAMA)** - a tailored migration pathway that allows regional areas in Australia to address specific labour shortages by sponsoring skilled and semi-skilled overseas workers – this is by exception and not a standard approach for skilled migration.

Unlike the standard skilled migration program, DAMAs offer greater flexibility by enabling access to a broader range of occupations and allowing concessions to visa requirements such as English language proficiency, salary thresholds, and age limits.

These agreements need to be separately negotiated between the federal government and a local Designated Area Representative (DAR), such as a council or regional development authority, and are valid for five years. Only then can employers in the designated area apply for individual labour agreements under the DAMA framework, provided they are endorsed by the DAR and demonstrate genuine efforts to recruit locally first.

For example: **Great South Coast DAMA** – Administered by the Warrnambool City Council, this DAMA covers the Great South Coast region, including towns like Warrnambool, Portland, and Hamilton. It focuses on sectors such as dairy, meat processing, aged care, hospitality, and manufacturing.

A regional approach embedded in the standard skilled migration program is what the City of Greater Geelong is seeking. An approach that recognises regional context in its default design, not one that treats regional Australia as an anomaly and creates additional workload.

#### **d) Supporting Businesses, Productivity and Innovation**

Skilled migration plays a vital role in supporting business growth and innovation, particularly in regional communities where the local workforce may not be sufficient to meet demand. The notable increase of 16.9% in Employer Sponsored visas in 2023–24 demonstrates that businesses are actively seeking skilled migrants to address workforce gaps, drive productivity, and facilitate expansion.

When skilled migrants are retained, thanks to safe, inclusive, and welcoming communities, they are more likely to settle long-term, helping businesses maintain momentum and stability. Retention strategies, such as housing availability and support, diverse cultural representation, language and cultural support, affordable community events, and safe neighbourhoods, are crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and connection for new arrivals.

By prioritising both migrant attraction and retention, the region stands to gain:

- **Boosted business productivity and competitiveness:** Filling critical roles enables businesses to grow, innovate, and compete on a larger scale.

- **Greater innovation:** Diverse perspectives and skills brought by migrants lead to increased creativity and problem-solving within local industries.
- **Stronger local economies and job creation:** Thriving businesses generate more jobs, benefiting the wider community and supporting economic resilience.
- **Improved community wellbeing and inclusion:** Effective migrant engagement in community strengthens social cohesion and ensures migrants feel safe and valued, which in turn supports retention.

Ultimately, focusing on both attracting and retaining skilled migrants ensures that regional areas like Geelong can address workforce shortages, support business growth, achieve greater innovation through diverse perspectives and create vibrant, resilient communities.

#### e) Enhancing Public Awareness and Understanding

Public support for migration is essential. While most Australians recognise its economic benefits, misconceptions persist.

Public understanding of skilled migration's benefits is therefore essential. Local governments play a vital role in fostering inclusive communities and promoting the contributions of migrants. We recommend:

- National campaigns highlighting migrant success stories
- Support for multicultural events and initiatives
- Collaboration with local councils to amplify positive narratives

It is crucial to recognise migration as a vital strategy for fostering strong, vibrant communities, rather than viewing it solely as an economic tool. By embracing positive narratives, such as those outlined in the *Supporting Strong and Sustainable Regions Review of Regional Migration Settings Discussion Paper from June 2024*, unmistakable evidence of the valuable contributions migrants make in enriching regional areas can be evidenced.

Public awareness campaigns play a key role in dispelling misconceptions, building trust, and strengthening the community's support for migration initiatives. By actively promoting these benefits, the government can pave the way for increased social cohesion, reduced discrimination, and more welcoming environments that help retain skilled migrants.

Ultimately, advocating for migration as a community-building force rather than solely as an economic tool, ensures that regional Australia can remain inclusive, resilient, and prepared for future growth.

#### f) International Approaches

Countries like Canada and New Zealand offer regionally tailored migration programs with faster processing and clear pathways to permanency.

Canada's **Global Skills Strategy** processes work permits in as little as two weeks for high-demand roles and includes a targeted approach allowing Canada to respond dynamically to economic needs and regional priorities, ensuring skilled migrants are matched to sectors and communities where they are most needed.

New Zealand's **Green List** identifies high-demand, hard-to-fill roles across sectors such as healthcare, engineering, construction, and education. Migrants with the required qualifications, registration, or experience can access two streamlined residence pathways, making New Zealand more attractive to global talent. It also aligns with national workforce planning and supports regional development.

Both Canada and New Zealand demonstrate how **targeted, transparent, and regionally responsive migration systems** can:

- Address critical skills shortages more effectively.
- Support long-term settlement and retention.
- Reduce administrative burden for employers.
- Align migration with national and regional economic goals.

Australia can learn from these approaches to strengthen its regional migration framework.

Australia's migration system is currently marked by complexity and fragmentation, making it challenging for both migrants and employers to navigate. Adopting similar practices in Australia could foster a more agile and competitive migration framework, delivering improved outcomes for all stakeholders.

Not only would this strengthen the experience for migrants and employers, but it has the potential to enhance Australia's global reputation and foster valuable international partnerships, positioning our regions for greater success in the future.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In closing the City of Greater Geelong urges the Joint Standing Committee on Migration to consider the importance of regional context in skilled migration policy.

We highlight the importance of supporting skilled migration with the necessary infrastructure, services, and community engagement to ensure long-term success and make the following recommendations to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration for consideration.

1. **Provide adequate infrastructure, services, and community engagement approaches** to support skilled migration, especially in regional locations where resources are scarce.
2. **Adopt regional definitions** based on workforce realities, not geography.
3. **Establish a Regional Occupation List** informed by local government and industry, including Regional Certifying Bodies (RCBs).
4. **Reform visa settings** to reduce exploitation and promote permanency.
5. **Plan for migrant wellbeing and retention**, not just recruitment.
6. **Enhance public awareness** through national campaigns and local storytelling highlighting migration's value as a community-building force.
7. **Learn from international best practice** to simplify and strengthen the system.

We thank the Joint Standing Committee on Migration for its consideration and welcome further engagement on this vital issue.

## REFERENCES

- [2021 Greater Geelong, Census All persons QuickStats | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)
- [Estimated Resident Population \(ERP\) | City of Greater Geelong | Community profile](#)
- [Cultural diversity: Census, 2021 | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)
- Department of Home Affairs, Data Access Request – DA25/05/00235  
[www.homeaffairs.gov.au](http://www.homeaffairs.gov.au)
- [Supporting strong and sustainable regions Discussion Paper](#)
- [2025 Occupation Shortage List](#)
- [NZ Long Term Skill Shortage List - VisaEnvoy New Zealand](#)
- [Global Skills Strategy for workers: Get faster processing - Canada.ca](#)
- [Population born overseas | City of Greater Geelong | atlas.id](#)
- [Geelong faces childcare challenge - Geelong Times](#)
- [ABS, Regional Population, 2016/17 to 2023/24.](#)

---

**CITY OF GREATER GEELONG**

WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY

PO Box 104, Geelong VIC 3220

P: 5272 5272

E: [contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au](mailto:contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au)

[www.geelongaustralia.com.au](http://www.geelongaustralia.com.au)

**CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE**

Wurriki Nyal

137-149 Mercer Street, Geelong

8.00am – 5.00pm

**LATEST NEWS:**

 [@CityofGreaterGeelong](#)

 [@GreaterGeelong](#)

 [@CityofGreaterGeelong](#)

 [CityofGreaterGeelong](#)