

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

SUBMISSION INTO THE REVIEW OF REGIONAL MIGRATION SETTINGS.

JULY 2024

Contents

Executive summary3

Submission4

Introduction.....4

VISA Settings4

Regional Definitions.....4

Skilled Occupation List5

Migrant Wellbeing6

Supporting Retention6

Summary7

References8

Executive summary

The City of Greater Geelong welcomes the **Review of Regional Migration Settings**, and the Department of Home Affairs commitment to the evaluation of regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program. As outlined in the *Australian Government Migration Strategy Action Plan* this review will ensure migration supports regional development objectives and does not contribute to the exploitation of migrant workers.

In our submission we have focused on the importance of a regional context in defining the Skills Occupation List to support migration eligibility and the regional planning needed for success.

Reinforcing the importance of having the regional infrastructure and wrap around services needed to support a migrant workforce that has been identified through the application of regional context to a Regional Occupation List.

We see regional context as an important conversation that should continue and one that needs the voice of local government central to decision making and make the following four recommendations to the Review.

1. Regional definitions need to take into consideration the economic environment of the region, systemic impacts affecting the region, and the ability of the region to attract and retain the required workforce, as opposed to being defined by location alone.
2. A Regional Advisory Group should be created which would inform Jobs and Skills Australia in the development of a Regional Occupation List, informed by Local Government with regional industry knowledge, ensuring that the nuances of regional context are not lost in labour market indicators and datasets.
3. Regional Migration Workforce Strategies should be developed to deliver on the identified skills needs listed in the Regional Occupation Lists. Developed with an intersectional gender equity lens, which provides a blueprint for attracting, supporting, and meeting the needs of migrant workers in regional locations.
4. Planning for regional migration should include planning to support cultural and community engagement alongside the fundamental rights of housing, education, food, and healthcare.

Submission

The City of Greater Geelong (the City) welcomes the **Review of Regional Migration Settings**, and the Department of Home Affairs commitment to the evaluation of regional migration settings and the Working Holiday Maker program. As outlined in the *Australian Government Migration Strategy Action Plan* this review will ensure migration supports regional development objectives and does not contribute to the exploitation of migrant workers.

INTRODUCTION

The City is a growing, diverse regional city, our community is enriched by the presence of people from all over the world. We are a multicultural city with just under 18% of our total population born overseas. We recognise and value our cultural diversity, which allows us to be a more inclusive and welcoming community that values and respects everyone, regardless of their cultural background.

Migration and migrants have been important in the development of the Geelong region. In the mid-1800s, the first European migrants were drawn by the bustling port and the desperate need for workers in the surrounding area. After World War II, people displaced in Europe were looking for a place to start a new life. At the same time, Geelong's manufacturing sector needed their skills and labour to thrive. Following the Vietnam War and changing government policy, refugees from South-East Asia were welcomed to the city. Today, skilled migrants are still essential for the local economy.

Inclusive and welcoming communities are created on a basis of trust, trust that those within the community will have access to the services and supports they need, and trust that they will not be disadvantaged based on the different aspects of any one individual's identity. We recognise that the diversity in our community can expose individuals to overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation, and we focus on ways to remove any intersectional disadvantage and marginalisation through our community plans and strategies.

We know that community trust also relies on governments working together to create the best outcome for all members of our community. The City sees this review, which considers a regional context, as an important step forward in ensuring the needs of the region and the communities are considered when implementing the *Australian Government Migration Strategy*.

VISA SETTINGS

The City agrees with the *Review Discussion Paper* that visa settings contribute to the vulnerability of migrant workers to exploitation, particularly those on temporary visas, and that visa settings that contribute to worker exploitation, should be reformed to design out these exploitation risks.

The visa settings are numerous (work, study, family reunification, humanitarian) and can be daunting for anyone trying to navigate the system. Simplification of VISA settings would be welcomed.

REGIONAL DEFINITIONS

In considering the question, **could regional definitions be simpler**, we acknowledge the *Review Document* message that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to regional policy development cannot address the diversity of regional Australia.

The City is the second-largest city in Victoria. Located 75 kilometres south-west of Melbourne, the municipality covers an area of 1,252 square kilometres, including suburban, coastal, and country areas, we know that across our region alone the definition of regionality varies greatly.

Outside of metropolitan Melbourne, the greater Geelong municipality (the municipality) is the most populated region in Victoria, with an estimated resident population of 282,809 (ABS ERP 2023). Over the past decade, the population of the municipality has experienced significant growth in the western and eastern corridors. Population is forecast to grow to 396,388 by 2041. The size and demographic profile of the municipality continues to shift and change.

Each local government area has unique infrastructure needs. Local governments must tailor their investments to address specific challenges, such as transportation, utilities, and public facilities. Alongside the demands that arise based on natural endowments, such as beaches, rivers and lakes, national parks, and forests. This diversity will influence economic opportunities and regional development strategies.

Victorian local government's emphasise place-based initiatives that address local needs. These initiatives focus on collaboration, tailoring solutions to specific socioeconomic conditions within each locality. Place-based

approaches are important at the local government level as it enables sharing of decision-making control with communities seeing themselves as equal partners in the success of their community.

Local socioeconomic conditions vary due to factors such as industry and jobs, industry closures, remoteness, the impacts of natural disasters, access to services including health and social services and diverse challenges facing community members including youth, family, refugee, migrant and aged care support challenges. Economic specialisation, infrastructure, and administrative capacity also shape local government's role.

Local government has a critical role to play in supporting all people living and working in, and visiting its municipality. Local Government is responsible for the economic, social, and cultural development of the municipal area it represents.

Victoria's local governments are good at adapting to their unique socioeconomic contexts, emphasising collaboration and tailored solution. The twelve-month average unemployment rate to March 2024 for Geelong was 3.2%, and while 0.8% higher than the same quarter in 2023, it sits .8% lower than the current national rate of 4%.

We know that regional migrants are more likely to settle in regions with strong employment this makes the greater Geelong region a prime migrant workforce location. The greater Geelong region is classified as Category 2 – 'Cities and Major Regional Centres' alongside Perth, Adelaide, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Canberra, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie, Wollongong/Illawarra, and Hobart.

Yet, we would argue that we face many similar workforce challenges as do regional centres classified as Category 3 – 'Regional Centres and Other Regional Areas', such as limited market, competing demand and the financial constraints faced by regional locations which affect the ability to attract and retain specialist and generalist staff.

From a skilled workforce perspective, the skills, vocational and adult education system continues to have levels of uncertainty (as it was at the time of the review of the Migration Strategy), with aspects of the VET and Tertiary systems still under review, and Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) in the process of embedding itself into practice.

From a regional perspective any systemic issue affecting workforce development has greater impact, by virtue of supply and demand, in a regional setting.

Regional definitions need to take into consideration the economic environment of the region, systemic impacts affecting the region, and the ability of the region to attract and retain the required workforce, as opposed to being defined by location alone.

SKILLED OCCUPATION LIST

In considering the **Skilled Occupation List (SOL)**, while we recognise that the SOL serves as a guide for the Australian government when determining the eligibility of skilled migrants for different visa categories, we highlight that by comparison a *Regional Occupation List (ROL)* allows for context at the local level, identifying the specific needs of the region and connecting with local strategies and plans for regional economic growth linked to the changes seen at the local level.

The *Migration Strategy* recognises the importance of a longer-term evidence-based approach to planning migration, an approach that closely collaborates with the states and territories and is driven by the advice of JSA. The transparency highlighted in the *Migration Strategy*, relating to the work of JSA and the transparency of the *JSA Labour Market Indicator Model*, is good to see.

However, the City would argue that a model designed for national consideration does not have the subtlety needed to identify regional nuances and **plan for regional migration**. We would want to see JSA work with local governments and regional industry bodies to define the specific considerations needed to support a viable ROL.

For example, the current future workforce estimates for Early Years Educators and Teachers in greater Geelong has highlighted a workforce gap of 1960 unmet places. This has come about because of government reforms which have doubled funded kindergarten hours in 2029 for 4-year-olds, accompanied by ongoing population growth, which has resulted in greater Geelong requiring a significantly larger workforce and supporting infrastructure.

The current natural workforce growth rates in greater Geelong will not be sufficient to meet the projected demand for educators and teachers in 2029. Several communities within the region are already experiencing persistent and ongoing vacancies across different service types, long wait lists, and a significant proportion of services are capping places.

This type of regional workforce challenge needs to be considered when identifying a ROL.

A Regional Advisory Group should be created which would inform Jobs and Skills Australia in the development of a Regional Occupation List, informed by Local Government with regional industry knowledge, ensuring that the nuances of regional context are not lost in labour market indicators and datasets.

This approach would consider not only the regional data, strategies, and growth plans but also the nuances of the regional industry market and issues and the infrastructure needs, wrap around services and educational settings required to support the development of Regional Migration Workforce Strategies. A blueprint for supporting migrant worker success in regional Australia and delivery of the identified skills listed in the ROL.

MIGRANT WELLBEING

We believe that key to any migration strategy and workforce approach is the infrastructure and services available to support and enable a migrant workforce to engage and connect with their regional setting.

The challenges that migrant workers face is well researched and documented, especially relating to the challenges that arise when migrant workers do not connect with their community, this presents as poor mental health and well-being and violation of workers' rights.

To create an ROL solely on workforce datasets, without consideration of a regional strategy to support the delivery of the workforce identified in the list, would be setting it up to fail and not in the best interest of the migrant workers.

A 2022 submission to the **Australian Review of the Migration System** by Women in Adult & Vocational

Education, highlighted, among other recommendations, a need for any future migration program to consider the intersectional gender equity needs of migrants, calling out that:

“... a construction of skill based on labour market experience (which) reinforce(s) gendered roles between male and female skilled migration applicants.” Pg.3

While also highlighting that for “immigration policy the value of one’s labour is equated with the price of it” and that not all skills are valued the same, asking for an intersectional gender lens to be applied to the list structure.

A gender equity approach is in keeping with the Australian Government’s *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, Priority area 2: *Unpaid and paid care*, which talks to the gendered divisions of paid and unpaid work, and how paid care work is dominated by women and migrant workers – in part due to attitudes about women being ‘natural carers’ – and is also undervalued and often low paid and insecure.

Regional Migration Workforce Strategies should be developed to deliver on the identified skills needs listed in the Regional Occupation Lists. Developed with an intersectional gender equity lens, which provides a blueprint for attracting, supporting, and meeting the needs of migrant workers in regional locations.

SUPPORTING RETENTION

The City has a strong multicultural community and works to ensure people from all cultures and faiths can take part in their community. We want to highlight the following point made in the Review:

“evidence shows that job opportunities and the diversity of jobs available in the local economy are important for skills migrants, as is lifestyle, education opportunities and community safety. Ensuring there is adequate housing, infrastructure and services is also important to improve retention.” Pg.15

Currently, 18% of people living in the greater Geelong municipality were born overseas and 12% of people living in Geelong speak a language other than English at home.

The Social Determinants of Health are a list of factors that influence the health and wellbeing of individuals and the community. These determinants play a role in encouraging migrants to choose to settle and stay in regions. For example, feeling safe in the community, access to culturally appropriate services, access to transport and social support are crucial factors that will encourage migrants to settle and stay in regions.

In early 2023, the greater Geelong community was invited to provide feedback to help us plan and deliver project, services and programs that meet and support the needs of our culturally diverse population.

The responses provided show what is important to the culturally and linguistic diverse community and therefore factors that may be important to migrants in choosing to settle and stay in the regions.

The following key areas were identified as important and valued by the multicultural community:

- Inclusive and affordable community events and activities that celebrate different cultures and faiths.
- Friendly and welcoming community and neighbours.
- Cultural representation and visibility in public spaces.
- Accessibility and language support.
- Community spaces that are affordable for community groups to hold events.

Planning for regional migration should include planning to support cultural and community engagement alongside the fundamental rights of housing, education, food, and healthcare.

SUMMARY

The City has not responded to all raised questions, rather we have focused our submission on the importance of a regional context in defining the SOL to support migration eligibility and the regional planning needed for success.

In closing, we wish to reinforce the importance of having the regional infrastructure and wrap around services to support a migrant workforce that has been identified through the application of regional context to a ROL.

We see this as an important conversation that should continue and one that needs the voice of local government central to decision making.

REFERENCES

- Department of Home Affairs (2024) Review of Regional Migration Settings discussion paper, Australian Government [Review of Regional Migration Settings discussion paper \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/review-of-regional-migration-settings-discussion-paper)
- Department of Home Affairs (2024) Migration Strategy, Australian Government <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/what-we-do/migration-strategy>
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Office for Women (2024) Working for Women: A Strategy for gender Equality, Priority area 2: Unpaid and Paid Care, Australian Government <https://genderequality.gov.au/working-for-women/priority-area-2-unpaid-and-paid-care>
- Department of Home Affairs (2023) A Migration System for Australia's Future, Australian Government <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-publications/reviews-and-inquiries/departamental-reviews/migration-system-for-australias-future>
- Department of Home Affairs (2023) Skilled Occupation List, Australian Government <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/skill-occupation-list>
- Jobs and Skills Australia (2022) Skills Priority List <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/skills-shortages-analysis/skills-priority-list>
- Department of Home Affairs (2022) Designated Regional Areas, Australian Government <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/regional-migration/eligible-regional-areas>
- Women in Adult and Vocational Education (2022) Submission: Intersectional Gender Equity and Australia's Migration System https://wave.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/WAVE_MigrationSystemforAustraliaFuture_15Dec2022.pdf
- Municipal Association of Victoria (n.d.) Local Government in Victoria: An introduction for Members of Parliament https://www.mav.asn.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/31922/MAV-LG-Briefing-Book_Final_201222.pdf
- Victorian Government (2019) Local Government areas report of population Diversity <https://www.vic.gov.au/local-government-areas-report-population-diversity>
- City of Greater Geelong (2018) Multicultural Action Plan 2018-2022 <https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/multicultural/article/item/8cde43b4abe8ed6.aspx>

CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

WADAWURRUNG COUNTRY

PO Box 104, Geelong VIC 3220

P: 5272 5272

E: contactus@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

www.geelongaustralia.com.au

CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTRE

Wurriki Nyal

137-149 Mercer Street, Geelong

8.00am – 5.00pm

LATEST NEWS:

 [@CityofGreaterGeelong](#)

 [@GreaterGeelong](#)

 [@CityofGreaterGeelong](#)

 [CityofGreaterGeelong](#)