



MALANDA NORTH

CALL TO ACTION ON BUSINESS MIGRATION FOR REGIONAL/RURAL AREAS:

a few simple, low cost changes could make a significant difference to overseas investment in economically disadvantaged areas of Australia.

Suggested Changes

1. Raise Business Migrant numbers – existing levels are too restrictive.
 - a. The Migration Program Report 2011-2012 indicates an allocation for 2013 of 7400; as at date of publication of the report there were 11,273 clients already in the queue.
2. Queues are too long. Reduce length of processing time. Based on details under 1) above, it will take almost two years to process an application.
3. Consider a weighting (or separate quota) to give advantage to regional/rural areas in order to counterbalance the natural advantages of metropolitan areas.
 - a. The DIAC already recognises “regional, remote or low population growth areas” areas by postcode for Employer Sponsored Visas, which have the highest priority processing of any skilled visas. The postcodes of the regional areas specified in the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme would not need new research but could be immediately applied to business migrants as well.
4. Stay open to further opportunities to cut red tape or devolve aspects of ranking suitable candidates. This would be largely with a view to raising caps and cutting queues, but also in selecting applicants who will most easily integrate into small communities. This could be achieved by incorporating local knowledge in the “matchmaking” process.
5. Identify a small number of prime rural/regional areas to serve as pilots for preferred investment precincts to test whether higher local and private enterprise involvement could raise the effectiveness of SME business investment migration for non-metro areas.

Potential Benefits

Business migrants are amongst our most desirable migrants. This is not presently reflected in overall quotas. There are no geographical weightings for business migrants, unlike sponsored migrants. Metropolitan areas will attract the lion’s share of business migrants. A small change in geographical distribution patterns of settlement of business migrants could make a big difference to rural/regional economies at low cost and without disadvantage to cities.

In this historical moment of domestic budget cuts (difficult to find investment/subsidies from within Australia) and considering Australia’s top ranking in economic performance amongst OECD countries (making Australia a prime target for business migrants), rural and regional Australia can and must look to foreign investment to fill some of the present imbalances which will take years to rectify through structural change. The benefits could include:

1. Reduction of delays in investment moneys flowing in to rural areas for SME’s.
2. A potential to tip the economic balance positively in many of these marginal areas. Many rural areas with strong medium to long term potential could now fall irretrievably into welfare dependency without at least a minor influx of investment; this suggested low cost alternative for a quick boost via better business migration investor policy is an option worth exploring.
3. Reduction in government expenditure on marginal infrastructure such as schools and services, especially in areas of small population and low socio-economic status where a small inflow could produce a disproportionate benefit in government expense in areas which are not now carrying their weight (eg. through better student numbers in marginal state schools, reduction in unemployment, increased local business confidence, etc.