

8 January 2020

Mr Ben Biddington  
Assistant Secretary  
Immigration Policy Framework Branch | Immigration and Community Protection Policy Division  
Visa and Citizenship Services Group  
Department of Home Affairs

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Dear Mr Biddington,

**Subject: Input into Australia's 2020-21 Migration Program**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment and input to the 2020-21 Migration Program.

I also acknowledge the opportunity for the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) to participate in a roundtable discussion with industry and community representatives in Melbourne on the 7 January 2020. The comments below further support our contribution at this meeting.

ALGA is the voice of Local Government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the nation. In structure, ALGA is a federation of State and Territory Local Government Associations. These comments should be read in conjunction with any separate comments received from State and Territory Associations as well as individual councils.

In general, ALGA is supportive of the overall migration program levels and more recently supported the new category of regional visas. These regional visas will potentially take the pressure off some of the infrastructure in metropolitan communities and provide economic stimulus to regional areas. Jobs are available in regional Australia. The Regional Australia Institute's January 2019 analysis indicated there were 42,000 job vacancies outside the major metropolitan centres across a range of occupations and skill levels. However, there is a wide diversity of economic and social conditions in regional communities across Australia so more fine-grained regional analysis will support attracting the right skilled workers with the right communities.

We would also like to make the following comments:

- We support an evaluation of the new regional visa category being undertaken after 12 months (November 2020) to understand the take up, the locations for settlement and barriers and opportunities to regional settlement. The program's operations should then be revised accordingly;
- We also recommend this evaluation consider the definition of regions to ensure that the current Category 3 regions are attracting sufficient skill workers given they are competing with much larger centres in the Category 2 definitions;
- Our feedback has indicated that skilled workers look beyond their job prospects for deciding on a place to work and live. Factors such as liveability, housing affordability and accessibility, education opportunities, community cohesion, health facilities, cultural vibrancy and opportunities for their children are all taken into consideration. In our 2020-21 pre-budget submission (attached), ALGA called for additional federal funding to local government to invest in much needed local and regional social, transport and economic infrastructure; and
- Finally, we know that some local governments, their communities and local businesses will not have a priority on new skilled workers in the short term as their attention will be focussed on responding and recovering from natural disasters (drought and bushfires in particular). In this regard, it will also be important for the promotion of regional visas to counter some of the recent national and international coverage of regional Australia.

ALGA has outlined these issues in more detail in our submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration's "*Inquiry on Migration in Regional Australia*" which is attached for your information.

We look forward to continuing to work with you in the future. Please contact Liz de Chastel, Senior Policy Officer on telephone 02 6122 9443 if you would like to discuss further.

Kind Regards



**Roz Chivers**

Executive Director Policy and Research