

Submission in Response to the Consultation on Australia's 2019-20 Migration Program

Introduction

The Chinese Australian Services Society Limited, as a part of the group commonly known as "CASS" in the community, welcomes the opportunity to lodge a submission in response to the inquiry into Australia's 2019-20 Migration Program to the Department of Home Affairs. As a longstanding community organisation, CASS has been dedicated to assisting disadvantaged people from local communities and advocating on their behalf. Our submission is a reflection of the views and concerns that we received from our service users and people in our community, as well as observation and conclusions we made while delivering services to our clients, who are significantly affected by Australia's welfare measures.

About Our CASS Group

The CASS Group provides a comprehensive range of social and welfare services. It is widely known and promoted in the community with our brand name "CASS". It consists of a group of organisations, all of which are charities registered as companies limited by guarantee, including principally its parent entity, the Chinese Australian Services Society Ltd (founded in 1981), and the subsidiary, CASS Care Ltd (established in 2002) which is also an endorsed public benevolent institution (PBI) by the Australian Taxation Office. The services provided by CASS cover a 63-bed Residential Aged Care Facility in Campsie, Home Care Packages for over 220 frail seniors, Commonwealth Home Support Program for over 500 frail seniors, Community Visitors Scheme, Disability Services, Settlement and Health Services, and Children's Services, etc. At present, more than 2,600 families access CASS services and activities weekly.

Our Response to the Annual Consultation on Australia's 2019-20 Migration Program

We are glad that the Department of Home Affairs is seeking consultations on the 2019-20 Migration Program. The Australia's 2019-20 Migration Program Discussion Paper consulted on the appropriateness of the balance between and within skill stream and family stream for meeting the needs of Australians and maximising economic outcome. In contributing to the consultation, we would like to raise the following issues and recommendations:

1. Increase the Proportion of Family Stream and Parent Visa

According to Australia's 2019-20 Migration Program Planning Levels, family stream takes up approximately 30% of the total planned intake of migrants as compared to 70% for skill stream; while parent visa only takes up 15% of the family stream as compared to partner visa which takes up 83%. It should be noted that the significant insufficiency in granting family stream and parent visas would hinder existing Australian citizens, permanent residents and prospective migrants on the core desire and justice of those who wish to reunite with family or partners. Family reunion should not be undermined just for economic interest of Australia. For the skilled migrants that the government desires to retain for economic contribution, increasing quota to the family stream

would enable them to reunite with their family and would greatly increase their likeliness to stay in Australia to contribute their expertise. It would be an economic loss to Australia if the skilled migrants need to return to their origin country to take care of their parents due to inadequate quota for family stream, particularly the parent visa. CASS comes across lots of Chinese migrants over the years, and many of them are the only child due to China's one child policy previously and therefore the sole support of their parents.

It is also important to consider economic outcome to Australia as a whole. The current composition seems to place more emphasis on tangible economic benefits contributed by migrants in the skill stream but has not recognised the contribution of parents and grandparents who also possess various skills and experience. They play an important role in supporting their sons and daughters (the skilled migrants) by taking care of the grandchildren, so that the migrants are able to settle in the workforce, focusing on economic contribution through full-time employment. They also contribute a lot to cultural, religious and community events and affairs by volunteering. Such socio-cultural benefits are not as easily measurable as economic benefits produced by migrants in the skill stream but are equally beneficial and enjoyed by the Australian community. They should be acknowledged by supporting them to obtain permanent residency with greater ease. It is vital for successful settlement through enabling access to benefits and services, fostering social cohesion and empowering migrants to contribute.

For the purpose of maximising economic outcome and humanitarian consideration, CASS proposes giving higher quota to the overall family stream, as well as parent visa to increase its portion in this stream.

2. Increase Employer Sponsored Visa and Review Skilled Independent Visa

The Department of Home Affairs stated in the Discussion Paper that employer sponsored visa holders has the lowest rate of unemployment among all skill categories. However, it is not reflected in the 2018-19 Migration Program Planning Levels, where the planned intake numbers of employer sponsored and skilled independent visa holders have no significant difference. It is proposed that more quota be given to employer sponsored category to reflect the Department's support towards people applicable to this category.

CASS does have some concerns regarding the system of skilled independent visa. According to the Research Report from Australian Population Research Institute in March 2018, only a quarter of the newly arrived skilled migrants who come from non-English speaking countries were able to secure a professional job. There is a lack of prioritisation for occupations that are in greater skill shortage, as well as a lack of support to bridge the gap between newly arrived skilled migrants and employers. CASS proposes that proactive support be provided to help migrants with understanding Australian's work culture, building network with people in the industry, volunteering and accumulating transferable skills to increase their employability.

In addition, it is proposed that the point system for skilled independent visa be modified to recognise skills and experience that are currently not taken into account, for instance, volunteering and student placement experience. Some applicants also need help to have their overseas qualifications assessed and recognised in Australia. CASS believes that migrants can contribute to Australia's needs with timely assistance from the Government.

Conclusion

We welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to the consultation on Australia's 2019-20 Migration Program. We would appreciate if the Department of Home Affairs takes into account the viewpoints and concerns raised in this submission. We are happy to have a further discussion to elaborate these viewpoints and concerns.

We consent to our submission being made public.

Maria Cheng
Chief Operations Manager
CASS Group

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