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MEDIA RELEASE

Proposed changes to Essential Skills visas unjustified

Proposed changes to the Essential Skills visa settings designed to reduce the attractiveness of New Zealand as a destination for temporary workers simply will not work in the current economic and immigration context, believes Ms June Ranson chair of the [New Zealand Association for Migration and Investment \(NZAMI\)](#).

“If we had confidence in the envisaged benefits to New Zealanders being attainable, the resulting disadvantages to temporary migrants might be justified. We do not, however, believe that Kiwi workers or businesses will benefit from the proposed changes, and their likely harshness to temporary immigrants is, in our view, simply not warranted.”

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) has invited submissions on a “suite of proposed changes to the Essential Skills visa settings”¹.

NZAMI is the largest membership organisation representing immigration professionals in New Zealand. Its members have expertise and broad first-hand knowledge of how immigration policies affect migrants and New Zealand businesses. Its full submission to MBIE is attached.

The rationale underlying the presently proposed amendments, it appears, is that reducing the attractiveness of international recruitment of ‘lower skilled’ workers to employers and temporary migrants alike, will enhance the employment prospects of New Zealanders, ensure increased efforts by businesses to train New Zealanders, encourage wage growth, and send a message to lower skilled temporary migrants that they do not have a pathway to residence in New Zealand.

“Our members’ experience is that there simply is an insufficient domestic labour supply for many of the industries most affected by the proposals such as healthcare (and aged care), agriculture, tourism and hospitality, retail, transport, and construction.

“Important, in this context, is that the unemployment rate is low (4.9 percent), and tracking down. Conversely, in the March 2017 quarter, the number of ‘employed people’ was up 5.7

¹ <http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/immigration/consultations/proposed-changes-to-immigration-policy-settings-suite-of-proposed-changes-essential-skills-visa/discussion-document.pdf>

percent from a year ago. Personal factors and limited mobility prevent unemployed New Zealanders from benefiting from existing employment opportunities.”

Ms Ranson says tight labour supply is already a brake on economic growth for a significant number of New Zealand businesses.

“The proposed changes will significantly affect temporary migrants: they will result in disadvantages and possibly harshness to them by limiting the duration of employment, requiring stand down periods, and by preventing them from sponsoring work visas for partners and student visas for dependent children’s elementary education.”

About NZAMI

The NZAMI is made up of lawyers and licensed immigration advisers who must uphold professional standards and comply with the Association’s strict Code of Ethics. This Code requires them to uphold the integrity of the New Zealand immigration system and to respect the vulnerability of migrants at all times. For more information please see: www.nzami.co.nz.

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