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Federal Migration Strategy a ‘Positive Step Forward’

The nation’s peak hospitality associations have welcomed the Federal Government’s new Migration Strategy as a “positive step forward”, but look forward to further consultation on issues such as the chronic labour shortage in regional areas and changes to student visas.

Both the Australian Hotels Association and Accommodation Australia said the industry would now work closely with the Government on the implementation of the strategy announced by Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil today.

AHA CEO Stephen Ferguson said access to an effective migration program is critically important to the hotel industry nation-wide.

“Of course, we want to hire Australian workers first, but the fact is the size of our industry is such that there are huge gaps in skilled roles such as chefs we are unable to fill without overseas workers – especially in the bush,” he said.

“Ensuring we have a sufficient supply of skills in the regions is absolutely critical for the hotel sector, so we are pleased to see skilled visa processing for the regions has been given the highest priority by the Government today.

“That said, the current requirement for backpackers to spend 88 days in regional areas when applying for a second-year visa is absolutely critical for the hospitality and accommodation industries and we look forward to participating in the government’s review of this requirement.

“The migration strategy released today is a positive step forward in building a better system that works for business and the community and we look forward to taking part in reviews to make the system even fairer for all.”

Accommodation Australia CEO Michael Johnson said the migration strategy “implements a number of reforms which will improve the system, while recognising more work needs to be done.”

“The new three-tiered ‘Skills in Demand’ visa to be developed will bring with it the benefit of a more streamlined approach including to the current ineffective labour market testing requirement,” Mr Johnson said.

“Also, the new seven-day turn-around for top tier workers above a new salary threshold of \$135,000 is particularly welcome - as it will give better access to highly skilled migrants, including much needed hotel and accommodation managers.

“The recognition of the importance of the Working Holiday Maker visa, particularly to regional Australia, is also evident in the strategy and we look forward to working closely with Government on its on-going reviews.”

Mr Johnson said potential areas of concern included the emphasis on the mobility of employer-sponsored temporary visas - as government fees are often only a minor part of the total cost that an employer has outlaid to sponsor a migrant.

“Changes to the international student visa will also be closely watched by the hotel industry as students are an important part of our hotel workforce,” he said.

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