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457 Review disappointment for SA

Migration expert Mark Glazbrook has described the outcome of the 457 programme review as “bitterly disappointing” for regional and low-population growth areas, with minimal concessions being offered to employers affected by skill shortages.

The review presented a major opportunity to stimulate economic growth in South Australia; through improved employer access to skilled overseas workers that are in high demand locally.

The Government yesterday highlighted sponsorship approval periods, English-language requirements and streamlined sponsorship processes as areas marked for change following the review process.

But Mr Glazbrook says none of these reforms address the key issues facing employers in areas such as South Australia.

“The biggest barrier restricting employer use of the 457 programme in South Australia is the minimum salary benchmark, which currently sits at \$53,900,” he said.

“This figure is well above the current award and market salary rates for many occupations in dire shortage here in SA, such as cooks, chefs, bakers, butchers and mechanics, as well as agricultural and horticultural workers such as nursery persons and market gardeners, just to name just a few.”

Mr Glazbrook also said the Department’s decision not to increase the number of occupations eligible for a 457 visa was “regrettable.”

Instead, many businesses will continue to be forced to negotiate costly labour agreements with the Government to bring in skilled and semi-skilled workers that are unavailable locally – hurting the prosperity of local industries and businesses that contribute to the local economy.

“It makes no sense to lock South Australian employers and businesses out of the 457 programme. Such limitations affect productivity and the cost of doing business, a fact that is severely restricting growth opportunities,” said Mr Glazbrook.

Migration Solutions are calling for a reinstatement of the Regional 457 visa, a programme introduced by the Howard Government that provided a number of concessions for regional areas to improve employer access to skilled workers.

The programme was then axed under the Rudd Government in 2007, to the detriment of South Australia and other regional areas.

“South Australia’s economy and population growth is fundamentally different to the national economy, which has already been identified by our inclusion in the Regional permanent employer-sponsored program,” said Mr Glazbrook.

A number of industry bodies have also lent their voice to the cause, as seen through Migration Solutions 'Migration Matters' series.

"South Australia is in desperate need of a return to the Regional 457 programme, which fairly afforded businesses and employers with an opportunity to use the 457 program to address skill shortages, facilitate growth and foster greater economic prosperity across the entire State."

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Media Contact

Mark Glazbrook (Managing Director)

T: +61 400 990 772 **W:** (08) 8211 8597 **E:** mark@migrationsolutions.com.au

Lachlan Sellar (Social Media Coordinator)

T: +61 418 434 449 **W:** (08) 8211 8597 **E:** lachlan@migrationsolutions.com.au