



Inquiry into the value of skilled migration

**AMIC Submission to the Standing Committee on Migration
5 January 2026**

About AMIC

The Australian Meat Industry Council (**AMIC**) is the peak industry body representing the post-farm gate meat supply chain. AMIC members include independent retail butchers, wholesalers, smallgoods manufacturers, meat processors and exporters.

AMIC is registered with the Fair Work Commission under the *Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Act 2009* (Cth), is a member of the Red Meat Advisory Council, and is a signatory to the Australian Red Meat Industry Memorandum of Understanding, which sets roles and responsibilities between industry and government.

The meat industry directly and indirectly employs approximately 190,000 people and is often the single largest employer in rural and regional areas, underpinning the vitality and sustainability of Australia's agricultural sector and rural communities.

The meat industry makes a significant contribution to the Australian economy and is now the largest manufacturing employer in Australia, employing 67,000 people¹ and supporting a further 25,000 people in meat wholesaling and retailing². Meat processing establishments are often the single largest employer in rural communities, underpinning economic vitality and sustainability of Australia's agricultural sector and the regions.

In 2024-25, Australian red meat, pork and smallgoods consumption equated to 52kg per person, and meat and offal exports were valued at \$21 billion. In 2023-24, household income from people employed by the red meat processing sector was \$17.8 billion³.

Summary

AMIC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the value of skilled migration (**Inquiry**) being undertaken by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration (**Committee**).

AMIC continues to advocate for the need to ensure that migration settings remain flexible, responsive, and aligned with industry needs to strengthen and ensure the sustainability of Australia's meat industry. These settings bear an intimate relationship to, and are constitutive of, food security and export competitiveness. These are outcomes with significant and material impact upon the Australian economy.

It is AMIC's position that skilled migrants play a vital role in the sustainability and productivity of the red meat industry, which is impacted in both urban and regional areas of Australia by labour market volatility and shortfalls in available and appropriately skilled labour.

This submission responds to the Committee's Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, with a focus on the unique workforce needs and economic contribution of the meat sector. Our responses to each of the Terms of Reference is informed by consultation undertaken with AMIC members in December 2025.

In addition, this submission makes some broad recommendations for consideration by the Committee.

Response to Terms of Reference

AMIC offers the following responses to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference for the Committee's consideration.

(a) The ongoing economic, social and cultural value of skilled migration to Australia

Skilled migration delivers substantial and measurable value to the meat industry.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2024, Table 1 Manufacturing industry by ANZSIC class

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census 2021

³ Evaluating the socio-economic benefit of the red meat processing industry in regional Australia 2024

Skilled migrants fill critical processing, and technical roles that cannot be met through the domestic labour market alone. Access to skilled labour ensures plants can maintain throughput, meet export accreditation requirements, and avoid production bottlenecks.

At a social and cultural level, the value of skilled migrants extends to cultural diversity, community participation, and social cohesion. In many regional towns, skilled migrant cohorts stabilise local economies and communities which are otherwise experiencing a downturn in population and/or population growth.

AMIC members are strong advocates for the ongoing value of skilled migration to Australia, including in circumstances where domestic labour shortages continue to have a material impact on the meat industry.

AMIC members have highlighted the ways in which skilled migration makes a positive, and critical, economic contribution to the meat industry. These includes -

- A critical contribution to workforce stability needed to run multi-shift processing plants that service domestic and export markets. Chronic shortages of skilled boners, slicers and slaughterers have been well documented in the meat sector, particularly following COVID-19 disruption. Skilled migration through vehicles such as MILA, DAMA and standard migration skills pathways allows plants to maintain throughput, meet domestic and export contracts, support value-added processing, play a critical function within the broader supply chain (producers, transport, cold storage, maintenance contractors, etc).
- Skilled migration fills critical skill gaps which enables the meat industry to contribute to Australia's economic sustainability and growth. On one AMIC member's account, this translates into higher plant utilisation, better use of capital, and the confidence to invest in the future of their business and workforce.

AMIC members also affirmed the positive and enduring social and cultural impact of skilled migration. This includes -

- Skilled migration has a substantive and positive cultural impact, including the enrichment of both workplace culture and regional communities through linguistic, culinary and cultural diversity, which results in more inclusive, resilient teams and communities.
- Skilled migration lifts productivity and innovation, fills critical skill gaps, and supports essential services and local communities. At the same time, it adds to Australia's cultural diversity and strengthens our connections with the rest of the world.
- Skilled migration contributes to Australia's current needs, and future proofs Australian business and communities. When skilled migration is appropriately targeted to labour market needs and backed by strong settlement and integration support, it continues to play an important role in Australia's future prosperity and social wellbeing.
- Skilled migrants contribute to social cohesion, play a key role in communities, particularly in regional areas of Australia, support the sustainability of regional communities, and together with their families, contribute to volunteering, local clubs and civic life. In regional communities, migrants help stabilise local populations, supporting the viability of schools, health services, childcare, local retail and community sport.
- In smaller towns, the loss of skilled migrants would have an outsized impact on social cohesion and service viability.

(b): The effectiveness of current skilled migration settings in meeting the current and future needs of the states and territories, while recognising the ongoing need for housing and infrastructure

Current migration settings provide important pathways for business to engage skilled workers — particularly through the Meat Industry Labour Agreement — but several constraints limit the effectiveness of these settings. These include the availability of appropriate housing and infrastructure to support skilled migration in remote and regional areas of Australia. Housing shortages in regional areas can limit settlement capacity together with the ability of employers to attract, engage and retain skilled migrants.

AMIC member feedback is that current skilled migration settings are broadly relevant to current and future workforce needs but that the administration of these settings (including and especially visa processing times) remain complex and difficult to navigate. The current settings are not uniformly compatible with the operational settings of the red meat industry which are time sensitive. These operational settings include domestic and export meat supply contracts and forward contracted livestock procurement.

The challenges of navigating these settings are compounded by the absence of required improvements in the availability of housing and infrastructure to support the sustainability of skilled migration. Red meat processors are making investments in non-core business to ensure skilled migration is workable, including building or leasing housing, arranging transport and facilitating community orientation.

AMIC members have provided specific feedback on how improvements might be made, including that coordination between State and Federal governments – across both skilled migration settings and infrastructure planning (social housing, rental supply, transport links, childcare, health services) – is critical to translate skilled migration into sustainable social and economic outcomes, particularly in regional outcomes.

AMIC members have described the current skilled migration settings as rules-based rather than outcomes-based. Our members report that rigid occupation lists, uniform English thresholds (IELTS) and income thresholds do not align with genuine regional labour market conditions and enterprise agreements in the meat sector. These settings, in many instances, are a barrier to the engagement of skilled migrants in the red meat industry and create uncertainty for both employers and employees.

The current migration settings may also impact the attractiveness of Australia for skilled migrants who have multiple markets available to them. For example, pathways to permanent residency are not always clear or accessible for workers who may become long-term contributors to regional communities and to the Australian economy. Additionally, temporary visa holders face limited access to essential services such as healthcare and education, and industry-specific training—such as Certificate II and III in Meat Processing—is not funded for these workers, discouraging employers from investing in upskilling. To improve effectiveness, policies should simplify transition pathways, close integrity gaps, extend access to basic services for temporary migrants, and provide funding support for industry training to ensure workforce capability and retention.

(c): The scope to more effectively target skills gaps and shortages in critical sectors to improve services that benefit Australian communities

The meat industry faces chronic shortages in skilled meat workers, quality assurance and food safety technicians, maintenance and engineering roles in processing facilities.

These shortages are structural, not cyclical. Domestic recruitment and skills training efforts have not met demand despite significant investment and innovation.

There are opportunities to more effectively target skills gaps and shortages in the red meat industry, including the following –

- Enduring, formal recognition of meat processing as a critical sector for skilled migration prioritisation.
- Improvement of the MILA to ensure access to specialised roles.
- Improvement of alignment between occupation lists and actual industry needs.

AMIC member feedback is that the current skilled migration settings do not have adequate scope to target skills gaps and workforce shortages and do not reflect the modernisation, diversity, professionalisation and complexity of occupations within the meat industry. For example, the MILA limit eligible roles to those of Boner, Slicer and Slaughterer.

Further, our members report that -

- While the current system has mechanisms intended to target skills gaps, it does not provide adequate flexibility or speed to respond to the specific needs of critical sectors such as the meat industry. Greater industry engagement, more regular updates to occupation lists, and tailored visa

pathways would improve the system's ability to address genuine and ongoing workforce shortages effectively.

- Expanding MILA's coverage and maintaining clear pathways would strengthen workforce capability and retention.
- The MILA does not fully capture all critical roles in modern meat plants, such as maintenance fitters and electricians with food-processing experience, refrigeration technicians, quality assurance professionals, engineers and automation specialists.

(d): The scope for skilled migration settings to more effectively support Australian businesses, boost productivity and encourage innovation

There is significant scope for skilled migration settings to more effectively support Australian businesses, boost productivity and encourage innovation.

AMIC member feedback focusses on the following improvements –

- Review and/or change the IELTS requirements, with a focus on workplace measures to facilitate communication and training.
- Remove the application of the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT) relating to workers engaged through the MILA.
- Improved transparency on visa processing timeframes.
- Improve pathways to permanency for skilled migrants.
- Introduce regional measures aligned to regional shortages and industry.
- Review the Core Skills Income Threshold (CSIT).
- Revise and improve occupation lists prescribed by the MILA.
- Establish pathways to and funding for workforce development and training for skilled migrants.

(e): Strategies to enhance public awareness and understanding of the role of skilled migration in Australia

Public understanding of the value of skilled migration to the meat industry is limited. AMIC suggests that strategies could be adopted to enhance public awareness and understanding, including the promotion of case studies, partnerships with industry bodies (including AMIC) to communicate the economic and social benefits of skilled migration, and public awareness campaigns that highlight the role of skilled migrants in sustaining regional communities and essential food supply chains.

AMIC members support government strategies to improve public awareness and understanding of the role of skilled migration in Australia. Our members provided feedback about the need for public awareness regarding the critical contribution of skilled migrants 'from paddock to plate', and about the need to maintain social capital and community support for skilled migration. On one account, this improved understanding would help shift the narrative from a narrow focus on "numbers" to an appreciation of who migrants are, what skills they bring, and how they keep regional Australia working.

Public awareness campaigns in typical channels should be supplemented by support for community integration initiatives (language support, cultural orientation, local events) that help migrants and long-term residents connect, reducing misconceptions and strengthening social cohesion.

(f): Approaches taken in other countries with similar migration objectives

Comparable nations with large agri-food sectors — such as Canada, New Zealand, and the United States — use migration programmes to fill persistent labour shortages in meat processing and agriculture.

Common features of these programmes include dedicated visa pathways for meat processing roles, regional settlement incentives, clearer and faster routes to permanent residency and strong collaboration between government and industry.

Australia's migration settings must be as agile and responsive as those of peer nations.

Some AMIC members have shared concerns that a wholesale import of overseas approaches to skilled migration could risk eliding the specifics of the Australian context.

Recommendations

AMIC puts to the Committee that the following measures be considered to ensure that the value of skilled migration is appropriately leveraged.

These are as follows –

Recommendation 1

Maintain and expand the Meat Industry Labour Agreement to appropriately reflect the occupations required to support the ongoing productivity, efficiency and sustainability of the meat industry.

Recommendation 2

Improve visa processing times for skilled meat workers.

Recommendation 3

Align occupation lists and wage thresholds with regional labour market realities, including a review of the CSIT and the application of the TISMIT.

Recommendation 4

Strengthen pathways to permanent residency for long-term skilled workers in essential industries.

Recommendation 5

Invest in regional settlement infrastructure, including housing and community services.

Recommendation 6

Promote public awareness of skilled migration's role in sustaining food security and regional economies.

Recommendation 7

Benchmark Australia's migration settings against international best practice in agri-food sectors.

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