

Reconciling short and long term objectives in migration policy

Speech for Assistant Minister Cash

- Mr Secretary General, Chair, Chris Alexander, Vice Chair, Andrea Nahles and OECD member representatives.
- I am delighted to present this address to the first session of the OECD's second High Level Policy Forum on Migration.
- As we are all very much aware, the international migration landscape is changing fundamentally and this, in turn, is posing a host of policy challenges across the OECD.
- I would like to take this opportunity to address how we, in Australia, are approaching these challenges.
- Over the last year or so, we have taken some very firm steps on this front, and I would like to share our thinking on how we have done this from a long-term perspective.
- Undoubtedly, one of the key developments affecting the migration landscape is globalisation.
- Rapid advances in technology and communications have spurred unprecedented growth in international trade and investment, with new and abundant links being forged between people and places across the globe.
- In effect, globalisation has unleashed a mutually reinforcing nexus between trade and migration.
- Indeed, trade and people movement is set to increase exponentially in coming years.
- Over the next four years, for instance, the volume of air cargo moving in and out of Australia, is set to increase by around 54 per cent, while sea cargo, will increase by a further 20 per cent and the number of international travellers, 25 per cent.
- This mutually reinforcing growth in trade and people movement naturally provides huge growth potential, but it also brings the considerable risk of increased transnational criminal activity.
- To manage this change we must adapt our governance framework so that we can both facilitate the migration-trade nexus, while ensuring a secure, stable border to mitigate the associated risks.
- This is why in Australia, we are breaking with our past, where the immigration and customs functions were, for many decades, separate government agencies, and we are integrating these functions to form a single operational organisation—the Australian Border Force—within a new Department of Immigration and Border Protection.
- We will deliver an efficient border policy and strategy organisation which, as we move away from the traditional silos that have divided immigration and customs functions; will maintain the security of our border and ensure the safe, swift facilitation of legitimate trade and travel.

- This integration is a high priority for the government and is now well underway.
- Through a steady, measured pace of change, we are already delivering huge dividends.
- Through Operation Sovereign Borders, we have stopped the boats and put people smugglers out of business.
- People are no longer dying at sea and we have freed up our offshore humanitarian programme for those who have waited in camps for many years.
- For the first time in years, we are also much better placed to give refuge to those affected by conflict such as those in Syria and Iraq.
- But it's not just governance arrangements that are being challenged by globalisation.
- The overall design of migration policy and the settings that sit within it are also being contested.
- With people more mobile and more connected than ever before, the traditional distinction between permanent and temporary migration is becoming increasingly blurred.
- This, combined with the increased competition for migrants that is associated with population ageing in all OECD countries, poses further challenges.
- Australia must adapt its skilled migration programmes if we are to maintain the competitive advantage of identifying, attracting and retaining the skilled migrants that have been the hallmark of our success as a traditional settlement country.
- Indeed, that is precisely what we are doing with the recent launch, by my department, of a review into the current skilled migration and temporary activity visa programmes.
- This review is based on a number of guiding principles and will involve extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including the OECD as part of its own review of Australia's skilled migration programme.
- The outcomes of this review are likely to be implemented during 2016.
- Importantly, these outcomes will result in the most far-reaching transformation of the skilled migration and temporary activity visa programmes for the last 20 years.
- Through this transformation, we will establish a visa framework that will support Australia's skilled needs for the next 20 years.
- In the meantime, we are doing a great deal of preparatory work, primarily as part of the government's Industry Innovation and Competitiveness Agenda announced in September this year.
- This particularly includes reforms in two of our most significant programmes.
- One is the temporary skilled 457 scheme.
- Following an independent review conducted earlier this year, we are now making it easier for businesses to access skilled workers.
- We are streamlining visa application and renewal processes while providing greater flexibility for English language testing and skill level requirements.

- We are also moving to a more effective, risk-based approach for compliance and monitoring.
- The other main programme involves our Significant Investor visa.
- Here, we are taking steps to encourage more high net worth individuals to make Australia home and to better direct additional foreign investment.
- Austrade will become involved in the process of determining eligible complying investments, while the criteria for complying investments will be aligned to the government's national investment priorities.
- Also, from 1 July 2015, we will introduce a Premium Investor Visa, offering a more expeditious 12 month pathway to permanent residency than the SIV, for those meeting a \$15 million threshold.
- While a large part of our efforts are focused on increased global competition for highly skilled workers and entrepreneurs, we are also very mindful of the growing need for semi and lesser-skilled migrants.
- In many ways, Australia is already ahead of the game on this one.
- With such a large, sparsely populated landmass which has many geographically diverse labour markets, we have, by necessity, developed various migration programmes to help fill less-skilled labour shortages.
- These include our highly successful Seasonal Worker and Labour Agreement programmes.
- There is also the valuable contribution made by temporary entrants such as Working Holiday Makers.
- While our Working Holiday Maker programme is not a labour programme, it does offer short term work rights, which supplement our labour migration programmes, particularly for sectors with highly variable, seasonal demand for labour.
- In all these areas we are making good strides.
- For instance, we are expanding the Working Holiday Maker programme with new partner countries and more liberalised arrangements, and we are also exploring options to support the health and community sector through the labour agreement programme.
- In addition, we are testing new measures to address regional shortages for specialised semi-skilled workers through Designated Area Migration Agreements.
- All in all, there are of course many challenges for the future, given the ever-changing and uncertain environment in which we now live.
- It is clear that we need to adapt and refine our migration policies and programmes to suit this environment and we need to be nimble and adept in doing so.
- Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak to you today.
- I look forward to the outcomes of your discussions at this very important forum.