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MEDIA RELEASE

Tight Labour Market Boosts Overseas Skills Need

HIA supports efforts announced today by the Minister for Immigration Chris Bowen to reform the skilled migration program, but questioned whether the amended points test provides a net tightening of requirements which may preclude valuable skilled construction workers from being accepted.

HIA Executive Director – Industry Workforce Development, Nick Proud said that “as the unemployment rate shifts to lower levels into 2011, HIA urges the government to consider options for encouraging skilled migration and be careful not to potentially limit the numbers where skills are in critical short supply.

“Despite the need for skills in the residential sector, suffering labour shortages, the reformed points test appears to make the assessment process marginally tighter for skilled independent migrants in construction trades.

“A 34 year old bricklayer or carpenter joiner, with proficient english, the relevant qualification, with 3-8 years recent and work history would not be accepted under these changes.

“The latest HIA-Austral Bricks Trades Report indicated that nine out of twelve occupational areas including carpentry and bricklaying are in short supply and limiting the pool of skilled migration applications will not help reduce these shortages.

“Shifting away from independent skilled migration to employer demand driven migration has some merit. However smaller employers unfortunately find the other overseas skills options such as employer sponsored migration or temporary options such as 457 visa program complicated and costly.

“Small businesses in the residential sector could be assisted to source offshore skills and the Federal Government should consider options to meet employer demand for skills by encouraging new ideas such as Industry Sponsored Migration and support options which takes away complexity for small employers and applicants alike,” he said.

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