



Response to *Inquiry into the value
of skilled migration to Australia*
Submission by National Farmers Federation

15 December 2025



The National Farmers' Federation

The National Farmers' Federation is the voice of Australian farmers.

We were established in 1979 as the national peak body representing farmers and more broadly, agriculture across Australia. The NFF's membership comprises all of Australia's major agricultural commodities across the breadth and the length of the supply chain.

Operating under a federated structure, individual farmers join their respective state farm organisation and/or national commodity council. These organisations form the NFF.

The NFF represents Australian agriculture on national and foreign policy issues including workplace relations, trade and natural resource management. Our members complement this work through the delivery of direct 'grass roots' member services as well as state-based policy and commodity-specific interests.

NFF Member Organisations



Executive Summary

The National Farmers' Federation (NFF) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's inquiry into the value of skilled migration to Australia.

While our sector relies heavily on unskilled or semi-skilled labour (particularly seasonal and regional work), we recognise that a certain level of skilled labour is also essential for agribusiness, farm management, technology adoption, regulatory compliance and innovation. This submission offers our perspective on the role of skilled migration in supporting those parts of agriculture that do require skills.

Response to Terms of Reference

Below we respond (where relevant) to the Committee's Terms of Reference for the inquiry.

Economic, Social and Cultural Value of Skilled Migration

- Skilled migrants can play a supporting role in agribusiness, particularly in specialised areas such as agronomy, farm management, machinery maintenance and agricultural-technology implementation.
- However, given that a large portion of farm work is seasonal, unskilled or semi-skilled, a sustainable workforce is our primary concern rather than where it is sourced from.
- From a cultural or social perspective, skilled migrants engaged in agriculture or agribusiness often bring valuable international experience or expertise, which can benefit technology transfer, productivity and knowledge sharing. Passing on their culture and values can only be of benefit to communities in regional Australia.

Effectiveness of Current Skilled Migration Settings in Meeting State / Territory Needs, Considering Housing and Infrastructure Constraints

- For those parts of agribusiness that require skilled labour (e.g. farm managers, specialised operators, agronomists), existing skilled migration settings may be useful, only if migration pathways remain sufficiently sustainable and responsive to demand. In that regard NFF is a member of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Skilled Migration and supports the work of the Council and the working groups on the Essential Skills Pathway and Skilled Visa Processing Times.

- We recommend that the Committee considers the disconnect between the general (skilled) migration framework and the actual labour composition of agriculture.

Targeting Skills Gaps and Shortages in Critical Sectors

- In the subset of agriculture requiring skilled workers, especially those adopting modern, technology-driven practices, targeted skilled migration could help address shortages. These may include agronomy, farm management, mechanisation/engineering, biosecurity, and farm compliance roles across all agricultural industries.
- That said, the majority of farm labour shortages are in unskilled / semi-skilled roles. Our primary concern relates to the long-term sustainability of the workforce supplying the agricultural sector.
- In considering the use of skilled migration, there should be recognition that many rural industries remain dependent on flexible, non-skilled labour, and policies should reflect that reality.

Supporting Australian Businesses, Boosting Productivity and Encouraging Innovation

- Skilled migrants with specialised agribusiness or technical agricultural expertise can contribute to innovation, especially as farms modernise (e.g. precision agriculture, sustainable farming practices, machinery maintenance, biosecurity and compliance).
- For productivity and innovation gains, complementary strategies should operate alongside migration policy, such as upskilling the domestic workforce through appropriately targeted training programmes. For example, at both the national and state levels, there are successful programs that warrant continued investment. These include the Ag Trade Apprenticeship Scheme currently under development and ongoing improvements to seasonal and temporary labour programs, alongside a range of effective state-based initiatives.

Conclusion

The NFF appreciates the Committee's examination of the value of skilled migration. While skilled migration plays an important role in supporting specialised agribusiness functions, the overarching issue for agriculture remains the sustainability of its workforce rather than the specific source of labour.

Targeted skilled migration can assist in niche, high-skill areas, but broader labour needs will continue to rely on complementary policy settings, including effective seasonal worker programs and domestic workforce development.

We encourage a balanced approach that recognises the unique labour profile of agriculture while ensuring migration settings remain flexible, responsive and aligned with genuine industry demand.

Positions and Recommendations

- A sustainable workforce is our primary concern, rather than where it is sourced from.
- We support targeted use of skilled migration where it genuinely fills specialised agribusiness or technical roles.
- The skilled migration system should be flexible enough to respond to real demand in rural areas and agriculture.
- Complementary policies remain critical to meet the bulk of labour demand in agriculture.



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