

MEDIA RELEASE

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Coalition's skilled migration program will restore business confidence: Scott Morrison

SHADOW Minister for Immigration and Citizenship Scott Morrison has declared a Coalition Government will support a skilled migration program that restores investor confidence in the national resource industry, in an address to the AMMA Migration Forum in Brisbane today.

"The Coalition believes in a well run migration program that focuses on skills and creates jobs for Australians," Mr Morrison said.

"The innovation, commitment, skills and application shown in this sector is a leader to the rest of the economy and one we want to encourage and support because we are all the beneficiaries."

The shadow minister told members of resource industry employer group AMMA that the federal government's recent changes to the 457 visa program are damaging business confidence and threatening the viability of projects currently in the pipeline.

"Until this year the skilled migration program enjoyed bipartisan support. Labor's attack on skilled migration through the measures introduced to choke the 457 migration program with union red tape was nothing more than economic vandalism," he said.

"Australia's competitiveness on a global stage is slipping, business is competing for a pool of global capital and currently there is a real risk of being overlooked because of the perception we are high cost and low productivity."

"If this continues, projects worth billions of dollars, not to mention the thousands of jobs that go with them, will only move in one direction – offshore.

"The Coalition has always approached this issue from the perspective that Australia's migration program is intended as a supplement, not a substitute for the Australian workforce.

"Of course we need safeguards, but an employer abusing the 457 program can expect the same tough stance from a Coalition government as anyone seeking to undermine the integrity of our immigration program.

"We need to be tight when it comes to the enforcement of the regulations but fixing those problems doesn't require more regulation."

AMMA chief executive Steve Knott welcomed Mr Morrison's comments and said access to temporary skilled migrants is imperative to providing investor certainty that the labour-intensive construction phases of projects can be delivered on time and on budget.

"Our industry is a small user of skilled migrants. Around 97% of the national industry's workforce is local workers and this has been consistent over the past five years," Mr Knott said.

"The industry goes to extreme lengths to employ locals first, but we still have a small but critical number of skills shortages in key areas and will continue to have these in the next couple of years.

"When we do need skilled migrant labour, it is often vital to safety, maintenance and project delivery.

"And it's important that Australia's resource industry can demonstrate to the international investment community that we can secure the skills to ensure our massive resource projects are built on time and on budget."

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