



# Corporate executives set to escape 457 visa changes

Patrick Durkin

Business groups are confident chief executives will be quarantined from the crackdown on 457 temporary visas and universities expect concessions in a revised list of affected occupations to be revealed by the end of the month.

The retail, hospitality and tourism industries have also made a "really strong case" to protect their top international jobs such as retail buyers, merchandise planners, digital operators, hotel managers and chefs, according to private submissions made to the Turnbull government on Friday.

Hot air balloon pilots and medical glass blowers are among niche positions that industry groups argue Immigration Minister Peter Dutton should also urgently remove from the list of more than 400 occupations excluded from the 457 visas.

"We have every reason to believe that CEOs will be an occupation that will be addressed," said Jenny Lambert, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's director of employment, education and training, who has been meeting with Department of Immigration officials over the past week.

The *Australian Financial Review* has revealed a host of chief executives working on 457 visas have been affected by the changes to limit chief executives, chief information officers and managing directors to shorter two-year stints with no path to permanent residency, including US-born Graincorp chief executive Mark Palmquist, Colombian-born Orica chief executive Alberto Calderon, as well as in the government's own agencies, such as NBNCo chief executive Bill Morrow.

"The government has created uncertainty and nervousness among candidates for senior roles here," executive chairwoman of recruiter Korn Ferry, Katie Lahey, wrote in its submission lodged on Friday. "We need to recognise that business is global."

Ms Lahey revealed one chief executive candidate for an ASX company with global operations had been blocked by

the changes.

"He has deep global industry knowledge, part of it gained while working for a competitor," Ms Lahey said.

"There is no one close to this candidate in terms of the expertise he would bring to the role and skills transfer to the team."

Ms Lambert had been overseeing dozens of submissions from industry groups lodged on Friday and said "there are some really strong business cases for some of the occupations" and they were working with the department to try to find solutions.

"The hot air balloon industry, which is a very important tourist attraction for many regional areas, they are relying on an occupation called pilots not otherwise classified," Ms Lambert said. "A hot air balloon pilot has to be registered with CASA and, because the numbers are small, there is no strongly established training program in Australia, so that industry relies on overseas pilots."

She also pointed to a local medical glass blowing company that made test tubes and laboratory flasks and that relied on glass blowers from Germany who used a 457 visa for tradesperson not otherwise classified.

"We understand there is a lot of politics around this scheme but we are trying to find solutions for businesses that will really find it hard to stay open without accessing these skills," Ms Lambert said.

Australia's single largest employer, the retail sector, said its survey revealed retail buyers, merchandise planners, merchandise designers and digital commerce were four critical roles

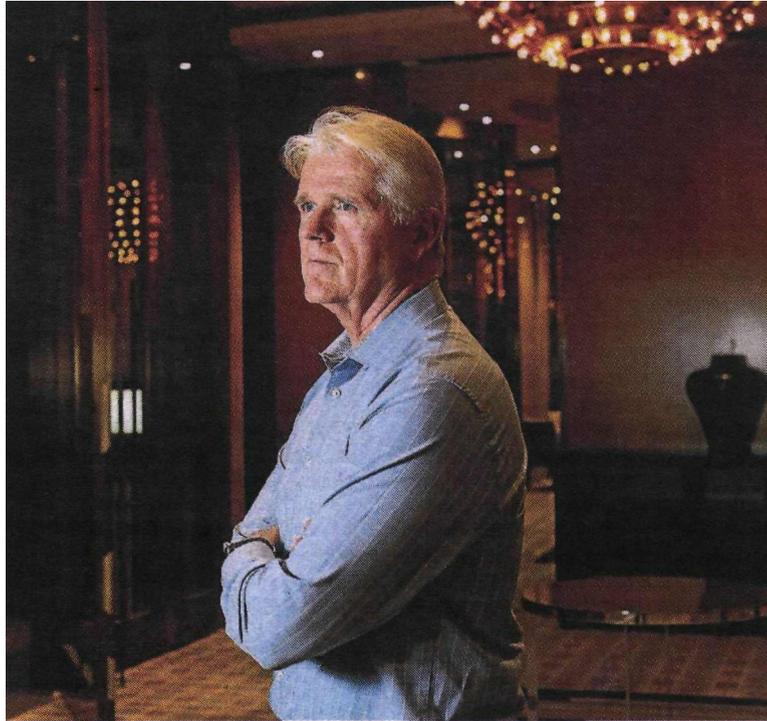
required and it had asked the department to reinstate retail buyers to the short-term skilled occupation list.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association warned the implications for the maritime support sector, which serviced Australia's offshore oil and gas projects run by major companies such as Woodside Energy and BHP, were particularly serious. Several members

had advised their operations would no longer be viable without gas operators, drillers and petroleum engineers working on their vessels and rigs.

Department figures showed the changes would hit Indian and British immigrants hardest. The American Chamber of Commerce in Australia and the French Chamber of Commerce & Industry, which represented major multinationals in Australia, including Mercer, Wells Fargo Bank, GM Holden, 3M and Europcar, had also made submissions, warning that more than 80 per cent of their members believed the changes would have an extreme impact on their ability to attract overseas talent.

The university sector had also been lobbying hard, arguing it was "very negatively affected". The University of Sydney said it had more than 300 members of staff on 457 visas.



NBNCo chief executive Bill Morrow's 457 visa expires next year. PHOTO: PAT SCALA