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Foreign chefs and engineers will have their visa applications fast-tracked under a federal government move that employers said would address severe skill shortages across the hospitality and resources sectors.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke announced chefs, engineers, accountants, auditors and surveyors were among 22 skilled

occupations added to the governments Priority Migration Skilled Occupation List.

Visa applications by workers with an occupation on the list are given priority processing.

Restaurant and Catering Australia said adding chefs to the list “would turbocharge the recovery of tens of thousands of hospitality businesses across the country that were suffering through a crippling skills crisis”.

R&CA national president Con Castrisos said the move would

help restaurants, cafes and caterers “combat the crippling lack of qualified chefs available due to the impact of the Covid pandemic on migration”.

“These skilled migrants are a critical part of thousands of hospitality business across the country, keeping businesses open for longer hours and keeping dozens of Australian workers in jobs. They also play a critical role in training the next generation of Australian chefs in cuisines from all around the world,” Mr Castrisos said.

“Across our country, from Port Douglas to Hobart, from Perth to Sydney and everywhere in between, restaurants, cafes and catering businesses have been crying out for greater access to skilled migrants to help them recover from the Covid pandemic – this change answers that call.”

Visa holders who have been sponsored by an Australian business in a listed occupation will be subject to quarantine arrangements at their own expense.

Other occupations added to the

list include general, taxation and management accountants; external and internal auditors; electrical, civil, structural, geotechnical, transport, mining and petroleum engineers; as well as surveyors and cartographers.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association said chefs and mining, petroleum and geotechnical engineers were in severe shortage across the resources and energy industries, “threatening to put a handbrake on Australia’s recovery from the pandemic”.

AMMA chief executive Steve Knott said the list’s expansion “may well prove to be a turning point in Australia’s skills crisis”.

“Australia’s resources and energy industry has been firing on all cylinders throughout the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of dedicated Australian employees have kept our industry among the most productive and prosperous in the world,” he said.

“However, prolonged closed borders to the small pool of international skilled migrants that sup-

plement our domestic workforces have wreaked havoc on Australia’s resources industry, as they have on most others.”

The interim report of a parliamentary inquiry into Australia’s skilled migration program recommended chefs and engineers be among a number of occupations added to the list.

The government last month removed work-hour caps for student visa holders employed in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry acting chief

executive Jenny Lambert said the government decision was “a huge step to rectify the skills crisis”.

“Covid-19 restrictions have greatly exacerbated existing skills and labour shortages,” she said.

“Many industries bouncing back in our multi-speed economy are facing a severe lack of skills and labour as a result of international borders remaining shut.”

Mr Hawke said the updated list

followed feedback from business stakeholders on critical vacancies.