



12 June 2015

Migrant Intake into Australia  
Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra ACT 2601

Ask for: Natalie Walker

Our Ref: A2146502

Dear Commissioner,

**Productivity Commission inquiry into migrant intake into Australia**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback for consideration as part of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the greater use of charges to determine migrant intake into Australia. Please see Council's submission enclosed.

Hobsons Bay City Council values the cultural diversity in our community and the opportunities that this brings. We look forward to the Commission's recommendations and working with the government in the future.

If you would like to discuss this submission further please contact Natalie Walker,  
Director Strategic Development

Yours sincerely,

Chris Eddy  
Chief Executive Officer



## **Hobsons Bay City Council's submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into migrant intake into Australia**

Hobsons Bay City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission for consideration as part of the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the greater use of charges to determine migrant intake into Australia.

Hobsons Bay has a proud history of cultural diversity which has its origins in 1950s and '60s migration, and has grown steadily into the twenty-first century. Our residents have arrived from over 130 countries, and speak more than 100 languages. Over 30 per cent of the community was born overseas, with three-quarters of this group from a non-English speaking background.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds make significant economic, social and civic contributions, and continue to shape the character of the municipality through food, music and other intercultural exchanges. The Hobsons Bay *Multicultural Policy 2012-15* guides Council's work to further support and enhance service provision, planning, advocacy and community development for our local culturally diverse community.

In response to the Productivity Commission's Issue Paper, Council does not support the use of charges to determine migration intake. Global migration patterns are driven by complex political, social, economic, cultural and personal forces. A market-driven mechanism (such as capacity to pay an immigration fee) does not account for these complexities and is not an appropriate or equitable way to determine who is able to enter, live, work and remain in Australia.

Specific concerns with determining migration intake in this way include:

- **loss of control** - it could reduce the influence of government policy and community expectations in determining migrant intake. It may also lead to unintended consequences such as increased numbers of wealthy older people that will have a higher reliance on community services, at the expense of younger skilled migrants which are able to bring additional skills and opportunities to our communities
- **pay for entry** - it reinforces the 'pay for entry' philosophy exploited by people smugglers. While the proposal has some potential to reduce this practice (by offering a legitimate alternative for people to gain entry via payment), it will further marginalise the poorest and most vulnerable people
- **dependent relationships** - this change could create dependent relationships between employers and prospective migrants with little or no capacity to meet large immigration fees. Employers who pay these fees on behalf of employees would invariably impose strict conditions (including lower wages) and could

strongly impact on employees' capacity to exercise employment rights. This situation would be particularly troubling if large employers were able to buy multiple visas and 'import' large numbers of migrant workers

Council has further concerns regarding the impact of this proposal on the health and wellbeing of Hobsons Bay residents and local services. The removal of requirements relating to family connections would effectively make it much more costly (impossible in some cases) for established migrants to be reunited with family members. This would have clear negative implications for individual health and wellbeing and increase the risk of mental health issues (such as depression) and risk taking behaviour (such as drug and alcohol abuse). In many cases, older family members also provide support by looking after children while parents work or study. Limitations to family migration will therefore increase demand for local childcare services and place additional financial demands on already-stretched family budgets.

Council has similar concerns with respect to the removal of requirements relating to skills. Hobsons Bay has seen a significant (and welcomed) influx of skilled migrants over the past ten years. For instance, the Indian-born population trebled between 2006 and 2011, largely as the result of skilled migration. Skilled migrant communities have become an important and vibrant part of the municipality and are providing much needed population growth in a largely ageing community. The introduction of barriers to further growth would be harmful to these communities and the municipality as a whole.

While the Inquiry's terms of reference state that any charges 'could be waived for genuine confirmed refugees', Council is unequivocally opposed to any system that introduces significant financial requirements for refugees and asylum seekers. Hobsons Bay has a strong history of welcoming refugees and recently signed an agreement with the Refugee Council of Australia to become a 'Refugee Welcome Zone'. Any changes introduced to migrant intake should not limit the capacity of vulnerable people to seek asylum in Australia and gain access to a fair and equitable process to state their claims as refugees.

Ultimately, all of these measures have the potential to reduce Hobsons Bay's cultural diversity. This outcome would directly undermine Council's Multicultural Policy, which is founded on the principle that 'cultural diversity is a great social, cultural and economic asset that benefits the municipality'. Consequently, Council is opposed to the use of charges to determine migration intake into Australia.

Council looks forward to the outcomes of the inquiry and further communication with the Commonwealth Government to support migration.