Migration and Population Study
Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins Street East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Submitted by via email to: migrationandpopulation@pc.gov.au

FECCA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the study on the impact of migration and population growth on productivity growth in the Australian economy. Please find a copy of our submission attached. Our submission addresses a number of key questions raised in the issues paper *Economic Impacts of Migration and Population Growth.*

FECCA is the national peak body representing Australians from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Our role is to advocate, lobby and promote issues on behalf of our constituency to government, business and the broader community. Our charter includes promoting full access and equity, advocating community harmony and the celebration of diversity, championing human rights and arguing that Multiculturalism is central to the social, economic and cultural health of Australia.

FECCA believes that immigration makes a substantial positive contribution to the productivity and economic growth of Australia. However, as our submission documents, there are structural barriers to immigrants and humanitarian entrants integrating quickly into the workforce, and being able to effectively use qualifications and skills that they bring to Australia.

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Our submission quotes examples of these barriers from two different people working in Migrant Resource Centres, who see the struggles that new entrants face everyday in their search for meaningful employment. It also highlights personal stories of two migrants to Australia who have struggled to be able to find recognition of their skills and qualifications.

We would be very happy to discuss any of the issues raised in this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact me on 0417 489 066 or Conrad Gershevitch, the FECCA Director on (02)6282 5755, should you wish to do so.

Yours sincerely

Abd-Elmasih Malak
FECCA Chairperson

23rd September 2005

FECCA submission to Productivity Commission study into the impact of migration and population growth on productivity growth in the Australian economy

International migration trends

The world is 'on the move' - the skilled labour market is internationally mobile, shifting between countries, economies and cultures. More Australians live overseas as emigrants than live in Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory combined. In this environment, concepts of citizenship, of a sense of commitment to a 'home' and core culture, is increasingly confused. Just as Australians are now mobile in this globalised employment market place, so too is skilled labour from numerous other countries. Skills and qualification recognition are, in these circumstances, issues of great importance and, while some universities are exploring trans-national degrees and degree portability, professional bodies in Australia are exclusionary. They have largely managed to excuse themselves from participating in the competition reform agenda of the last ten or more years; this has significant impact on the Australian economy, which no government has yet adequately addressed. Furthermore, many employers are discriminatory in their employment practices. If these matters are not tackled, and urgently, Australia will suffer the consequences of economic decline and skills deficits as an international workforce chooses to live and work in more flexible, congenial and financially profitable destinations.

Linkages between migration, population growth, productivity and economic growth

FECCA believes that increasing immigration rates should be one part of a holistic response to addressing Australia's ageing population and recognised workforce and skill shortages. We support increases in the current levels of immigration. However, this must all be understood within the context of a physically sustainable environment (ie. population policy and economic growth must be managed in such a way that we reduce our human 'footprint' on the total ecology) and within the context of a properly managed human infrastructure both in our over-crowded cities and under-populated, under-resourced rural centres.

There are sensible and practical economic reasons for increasing skilled migration to Australia by 20,000 for 2005-06 and in subsequent years. There are increasing skill shortages in the Australian workforce, partly due to an ageing population and increasing levels of female infertility, so it makes good planning sense to fill the gaps that are resulting from these changing demographics. Furthermore, the education and training of skilled immigrants has occurred overseas and, therefore, at no cost to our economy – another significant saving for Australia. Any investments, to support skilled migrants to find fulfilling employment in Australia, such as professional bridging courses and supervised placements, are sound propositions if they assist new arrivals to more fully contribute to the total economy in the long run. As well as these economic arguments, there is another good reason for an increase in skilled migration - skilled migrants increase the size of the economy by injecting large amounts of taxation revenue into forward estimates. Skilled migrants also contribute to the overall economy by satisfying their demand for housing and other goods and services. It is accepted generally by economists that migrants have a higher propensity to consume rather than save early in their settlement period.

This has been well documented by Access Economics (*Migration: Benefiting Australia p.113*) estimates that, after 10 years, the average skilled migrant has a net benefit to the federal budget of $14,000. This actually starts at $5,000 per annum in the first year and gradually rises as time goes by (p.120). Extrapolating these figures to calculate the taxation benefit to the Australian economy of an additional 20,000 skilled migrants illustrates that within one year $100,000,000 in taxation will be raised, minus outlays. By 2010, this will have increased to approximately $200,000,000 and, by 2016 to $280,000,000.

A DIMIA spokesperson recently stated "Conservative modelling by Access Economics suggests that additional taxation revenue from an additional 20,000 skilled migrants each year will exceed $1.5 billion over the same period." This figure probably refers to the tax effects only, however, whatever figure you choose to take, new skilled migrants do bring enormous economic benefit to the Australian economy.

FECCA argues that a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce enhances Australia's economic growth. Indeed, a central plank of the Government's policy *A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia* is that of 'productive diversity'. This acknowledges, promotes and seeks to foster the vast economic benefit to Australia that is derived from cultural and linguistic pluralism in contemporary Australia and which provides us with a competitive edge to our engagement with the globalised marketplace. Indeed, productive diversity recognises the importance of capitalising on and enhancing Australia's wealth of both cultural and linguistic skills.

However, we believe that Australia's immigration policy must be balanced – with a focus on both skilled migration and family reunion and humanitarian programmes. All Australians should have the right to have their families join

them in Australia under the family reunion program. The Government must recognise that family reunion programs hasten the settlement period experienced by immigrants and contribute to Australia's economic wealth.

Indeed, it could be argued that Australia is able to attract skilled immigrants in the numbers that we do because we have a multicultural policy that makes Australia a welcoming destination and their migration investment therefore pays off. Australia needs to harness better the 'diversity dividend' so the qualities immigrants bring are utilised by all of Australian society. But these dividends do not only accrue from skilled immigrants and overseas students but also from humanitarian entrants; 'capital' should not be only measured economically. Intellectual, cultural and moral capital can also reap enormous dividends in the medium term.

FECCA asserts that exogenously increasing population, whether this be achieved through skilled migration or an expanded Humanitarian Entrant program, would be a positive way forward, as Australia does have a greater population carrying capacity. However this must be balanced with carefully planned environmental, industrial and immigration policies, all co-ordinated under a long-term, strategic, scientifically researched, economically modelled, social policy framework that identifies realistic population targets.

The impacts of population size on productivity and economic growth

Is there evidence that a larger population promotes productivity and economic growth?

A larger population can promote productivity and economic growth. It is however important that structures be developed to facilitate people's capacity to add to economic growth. Prof Glenn Withers, Professor of Public Policy at the Australian National University, recently argued in an article written for FECCA's *Australian mosaic* magazine (*Australian mosaic* issue 7) that a key factor is whether an expanded population can be equipped proportionately to contribute, for example through education and training, plant and equipment and infrastructure.

FECCA believes that in order to build a more productive workforce, there must be investment in our higher education system. There must be significant increases in the operating grants of universities and institutes of advanced learning and provision of programs and facilities to enhance educational opportunities including, campus childcare, bridging and remedial courses, development of an inclusive curriculum, special English tuition, counselling, and appropriate student financing. These measures will help to ensure that our expanded population has the capacity to make a positive contribution and add to economic growth. It will be also be a key issue in attracting families of skilled migrants, seeking a better life for their children.

Do they vary for different types of immigrant (skilled and unskilled, humanitarian etc) and between industries and geographic regions? Are these effects significant? Are these effects dependent upon the regions in which migrants settle?

Government policy currently provides incentives to immigrants wishing to settle in regional and rural areas of Australia, to foster growth in rural Australia and take pressure off infrastructure in cities. However, Prof Glenn Withers argues that:

> *"….migration adds to the per capita growth because it helps overcome Australia's tyranny of distance. With the growth of the internet, it might be thought that distance does not matter. But as the world moves into a knowledge economy phase it is increasingly understood that concentration of educated people in lively metropolitan centres interacting and exchanging ideas informally and formally are the key sources of modern growth."*
>
> (Prof Glenn Withers, *Australian mosaic* issue *7*)

In order to ensure that the same potential for growth can be extended to regional and rural areas, it is important that government immigration policy is mindful of the need to build vibrant, welcoming rural communities. Currently many rural communities are experiencing high levels of unemployment. Employment that is available is often low paid and menial. Many smaller rural communities are also in decline and their populations are ageing. Increasing numbers of people receiving welfare support have relocated to rural areas because the cost of living is cheap. However, in some areas, this has created 'welfare ghettos' which is leading to isolated, alienated and excluded communities. The isolation experienced by people living in some rural areas is exacerbated by government and private sector infrastructure closures and poor, remote or unavailable telecommunications, education and other vital forms of human service infrastructure.

Government policy is committed to increasing migrant intake over the next decade and offering incentives to new migrants wishing to settle in rural areas. However, planning and action are required to ensure that we are able to effectively utilise the skills and energy of new migrants and humanitarian entrants wishing to settle in rural and regional areas. Some of the issues facing individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLDB) and families living in rural Australia include:

- limited knowledge of services available,
- limited information on how to access services,
- poor communication strategies for migrants,
- poorly planned settlement services for new and old migrants,

- limited education opportunities for diverse communities,
- inadequate funding for some regional initiatives,
- unemployment of young adults,
- problems with housing and cultural awareness,
- jobs for 'partners' (eg. husbands of medical practitioners),
- discrimination and stereotyping from some members within the host community and
- accessing services that are provided in a culturally appropriate manner. Settlement service provision has largely been predicated on a "White Anglo-Celtic" paradigm. In an assimilationist model for Australia this may be appropriate. However, in a multicultural Australia this does not recognise the changed migration patterns to this country.

Rural areas must be able to welcome new migrants and humanitarian entrants, to offer employment choices that utilise existing skills and create opportunities for people to become valued community members. In order to support sustainable immigration into regional and rural areas, communities must advocate and promote tolerance, acceptance and celebration of cultural diversity. Without this, the skills and potential economic growth that migrants and humanitarian entrants can bring to rural and regional Australia will be lost.

The impacts of migration on the composition and supply of skills in Australia

Is there evidence that immigrants improve the quality of technical knowledge and entrepreneurial skills in Australia? If so, what industries and occupations have benefited from migrants entrepreneurial skills?

The Federal Government's *Diversity Works!* program highlights the skills that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can bring to Australian workplaces. FECCA believes that immigrants do improve the quality of entrepreneurial skills in Australia. The literature in relationship to Entrepreneurship and Innovation suggests that those predisposed to these attributes have had a "dislocation factor" of some kind in their lives. Migration is considered to be a very important "dislocation factor".

The *Racism No Way* website states that:

> *Surveys show that within 12 months of arrival:*
>
> *• 56% of migrants were engaged in business employing an average of 5 staff*
> *• 52% had generated export earnings*
> *• 31% of those in business had turnover of over $1 million*

> • *those migrants in business had transferred capital to Australia on average worth just under $1 million each*.
>
> (Source: http://www.racismnoway.com.au)

A recent article in FECCA's *Australian mosaic* magazine article profiling Russian born businesswoman Larissa Vakulina illustrates the skills that immigrants bring (see scan at attachment 1). Ms Vakulina was unable to find employment in Australia despite holding a degree in Urban Planning, Design and Engineering from the University of St Petersburg in Russia. She enrolled in, and achieved a Masters of Business Administration, but was still unable to find meaningful employment. In 1999, Ms Vakulina formed her own business called *Expo Trade* – exporting meat, wine, and lamb skins to Russia, and importing fertiliser. The company has grown steadily and in 2003 was awarded third place in the BRW 100 fastest growing companies in Australia. The company was established by Ms Vakulina with a determination to capitalise on her experience of being a migrant and utilising personal contacts and knowledge of the Russian market.

Australia must ensure that the skilled workforce we are attracting is retained here. This is more likely to occur where immigrant skills and qualifications are recognised and when the culturally and linguistically diverse workforce finds the kind of employment and wealth-creation opportunities it expects.

Is there widespread evidence that migrants' skills are not being fully utilised in the Australian labour market? If so, what are the reasons for under utilisation of migrants' skills?

FECCA argues that there is widespread evidence that migrant's skills are not being fully utilised in the Australian labour market. This was highlighted recently by the FECCA Chairperson, Mr Abd-Elmasih Malak when he stated:

> *" Skilled migration seems a reasonable solution to our economic and social challenges. Indeed, it would be if it were not for the exclusionary conduct of professional bodies, entrenched and passive racism amongst many employers, and still, many gaps in government programs to assist skilled migrants to participate in Australia's social and economic life in a manner commensurate with the abilities, educational qualifications and experience they bring with the best of good will to Australia. Too often, skilled migrants arrive in Australia only to discover than nobody will employ them in their skill area. People with higher, professional degrees and with years of senior experience end up impoverished, marginalised, working in low-skill, low-paid industries without hope of changing their life or properly supporting their dependants. It is unreasonable to entice to Australia a person with a masters degree in economics and ten years work*

experience with the World Bank, for example, and then expect them to drive a taxi cab for the remainder of their working life."
(Message from FECCA Chair, *Australian mosaic*, issue 10)

Rohan Weeraratne has first hand awareness of the many barriers that skilled migrants face in securing meaningful employment in Australia, through his role as Manager – Employment and Training with the South Eastern Migrant Resource Centre in Melbourne. He argues that:

"The vast majority of skilled migrants from CLDB face systemic discrimination in the Australian labour market. For instance, DIMIA statistics reveal that 45 per cent of skilled Australian-sponsored migrants were unable to find employment for the first three months after arrival. The same statistics reveal 21 per cent of skilled migrants are still unemployed six months after arrival."

*(*Rohan Weeraratne*, Australian mosaic* issue 10*)*

He goes on to state that:

"(the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity) HREOC 2001 report – Face the Facts, highlights 50 percent of recent migrants with jobs rarely used their highest qualification, and 24 per cent had work that required a lower level of skills or experiences than had their overseas job. This is not a picture that we can be proud of; rather, it reveals a picture of an Australian workplace that lacks strategic and effective use of the skills of skilled migrants.
…….Many skilled migrants say they were advised by employers that they were not suitable for particular positions because they did not have an 'Australian' accent. ……It seems that cultural diversity is accepted in the Australian labour market, as long as one can speak with an 'Australian' accent."

(Rohan Weeraratne, *Australian mosaic* issue 10)

The barriers experienced by humanitarian entrants can be even greater than for skilled migrants. According to the HREOC report, *New Country, New Stories discrimination and disadvantage experienced by people in small and emerging communities*, humanitarian entrants from small and emerging communities have reported the additional difficulty of being unable to demonstrate the qualifications they had completed due to their inability to bring relevant documents from their country of origin. Individuals also stated that they had difficulty obtaining permanent employment. (*New Country, New Stories – discrimination and disadvantage experienced by people in small and emerging communities, HREOC, 1999).*

Does the degree of utilisation of skills differ across industries and occupations or between highly skilled and less skilled immigrants?

FECCA notes the 'closed shop' practices of certain professional bodies that are deliberately intended to restrict overseas-qualified job seekers from their ranks, ostensibly on the basis of quality control. This state-of-affairs has resulted in an alarming shortage of workers in key professions (such as the medical profession) especially in rural and regional Australia. We argue that the medical profession is a glaring example of a 'closed shop' regarding the non-recognition of overseas qualifications.

FECCA argues that conditional registration should be available for appropriately supervised overseas-trained medical professionals who are willing to work in an 'area of need'. This is essential if they are to maintain their clinical skills while they are being assessed.

The 'closed shop' practices of professional bodies includes both medicine and pharmacy. A case study of the barriers to recognition of overseas qualifications is documented by Michael Kimber in a recent article in *Australian mosaic* (attachment 2). Mr Kimber qualified as a pharmacist in South Africa and has maintained his registration in South Africa. He worked as a community pharmacist in Swaziland, then joined the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry. He migrated to Australia and joined the pharmaceutical industry as a Manufacturing Director for 17 years. Mr Kimber is a member of the Pharmaceutical Science Committee of the Australian Drug Evaluation Committee and has provided advice to the Therapeutic Goods Administration on the standards for therapeutic goods manufacturing. He can teach pharmacy students, do research, give clinical demonstrations, but **cannot** work as a pharmacist unless he takes a multi-part examination based on the Bachelor of Pharmacy course. No bridging course is available. If he were to pass the examination, he would still be required to work in a local pharmacy, under supervision for up to a year. Mr Kimber would then have to attend an interview and pass a second examination. This is despite the current and forecasted shortages of pharmacists, highlighted in a number of studies over the past ten years. This is just one individual example of the excessively restrictive nature of many professional bodies in Australia today.

Is there evidence of regulatory barriers arising from, for example, the failure to recognise international qualifications and skills, or lack of appropriate professional or occupational bridging programs?

There is strong evidence of regulatory barriers impeding the ability of immigrants to secure meaningful employment commensurate with their skills and experience. Rohan Weeraratne, Manager – Employment and Training, South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, Melbourne, recently argued that:

"Official recognition of overseas qualifications and skills do not translate into jobs. This difficulty is exacerbated by discrepancies between the pre-migration qualification assessment and the actual qualifications or skills required by professional or trade bodies in Australia. Many skilled migrants ask: what is the point of having official qualification recognition by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) and its state counterparts if employers and professional bodies have no regard for these assessments? Many trade and professional bodies, under the cover of public safety and maintenance of Australian standards, operate against the principles of fair competition…….. We continue to waste the vast reserve of talents, skills and abilities of highly intelligent, educated and experienced migrants of CLDB. As a society, we need to plan for better strategies to support skilled migrants re-establishing their lives in Australia."

(Rohan Weeraratne, *Australian mosaic* issue 10)

FECCA recently recommended an Australian Competition and Consumer Commission investigation into the issues highlighted by Mr Weeraratne.

A consultation process undertaken by HREOC with migrants and humanitarian entrants from small and emerging communities illustrated some of the barriers that people experience:

"Individuals reported that they encountered a professional arrogance among some assessors (assessing professional qualifications for recognition in Australia)……Particular problems with current skills recognition processes included:

- *inconsistent standards and requirements between different states,*
- *competing professional bodies setting different requirements for recognition,*
- *lengthy delays in processing applications for recognition*
- *insufficient information on recognition requirements before assessment; and*
- *insufficient feedback when qualifications fail to be accepted."*

(*New Country, New Stories – discrimination and disadvantage experienced by people in small and emerging communities*, HREOC, 1999).

Do aspects of Australia's migration program (including stream categories, eligibility criteria and entitlements on arrival) impede the realisation of productivity and economic growth gains from migration?

Eligibility to entitlements on arrival in Australia, mean that immigrants must find any form of employment, or are completely dependent of their

sponsors to cover their immediate needs, as they do not have recourse to social security for a two-year period upon entry into Australia. This two year exclusionary period creates many structural barriers to Australia realising the productivity and economic growth gains that skilled migrants can bring.

Skilled migrants are ineligible for government assistance on arriving in Australia. This makes the option of unpaid work experience as a strategy to address lack of local experience financially impossible for many.

Many Australian employers have limited understanding of the Skilled Migration program and remain suspicious of recognised overseas qualifications especially form developing countries. This lack of understanding by employers can make breaking into the job market very difficult for skilled migrants. They are often caught in a 'Catch 22' where they are unable to get a job because don't have local experience, but are unable to get local experience because they don't have a job.

An additional disadvantage is experienced by holders of temporary protection visas (TPVs). TPV holders are not eligible for Government assistance for English language tuition. Therefore barriers are created which makes it difficult for TPV holders to access English language training. Such training would greatly enhance their chances of finding employment, or participating in training to build new skills.

Do Australia's settlement and mainstream services adequately equip new arrivals to participate in the Australian economy as soon as possible?

Australia's mainstream and settlement services do not adequately meet the needs of new arrivals wishing to enter the Australian workforce as soon as possible. Skilled migrants do not receive adequate assistance in securing employment through the Job Network. Current systems are not responsive to individual needs, and often attempt to employ a 'one size fits all' approach that disadvantages new immigrants and humanitarian entrants.

A skilled migration roundtable hosted by Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) argued that selling oneself in interview and via job application letters is culturally alien for many skilled migrants – who are unprepared for the Australian labour market and employment practices. FECCA recommends that the Australian government invest in programs that orient new arrivals to Australian work practices and build job-readiness to equip people to participate in the Australian economy as soon as possible. Extending Centrelink payments to cover the initial transition period of the first 6 months to support short-term update training into skills, trades, or professions would also be a very positive step forward.

Lack of English language proficiency remains a key barrier to being able to find meaningful employment. Colin English from the Migrant Resource Centre of Albury argues that:

> *"The English language skills of refugees entering Australia under the humanitarian stream are often poor. Refugees bring into Australia, a broad spectrum of skills, but because of poor English language skills, often cannot enter the workforce at the same level at which they were employed in their home-country. However, they will often accept unskilled work passed up by the local community."*
>
> (Colin English, quoted in Katrina Dal Molin article, *Australian mosaic,* issue 7.)

Our submission has outlined many barriers to Australia being able to take full advantage of the productivity gains and economic growth that immigration can offer. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the issues raised in this submission. Please do not hesitate to contact either myself on 0417 489 066 or the FECCA Director, Mr Conrad Gershevitch on (02)6282 5755, should you wish to do so.

CHOOSING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT...

by Larissa Vakulina

Larissa Vakulina was born in Russia in 1961 and migrated to Australia in 1994. She was a South Australian finalist in the 2002 Telstra Business Woman of the Year Awards. In 2003 her business, Expo Trade, was awarded third place in the BRW 100 Fastest Growing Companies in Australia.

In this heart felt story Larissa tells of the hardships she faced after arriving in Australia and the difficult journey to her success as a migrant woman in business, and as an advocate and leader in her community and workplace.

Having previously holidayed and visited relatives in Australia, in 1993 my husband Andrey and I decided Australia was our preferred environment in which to raise and educate our two sons who were 9 and 11 at the time. In 1994, my family and I arrived in Australia. The education and welfare of our children was the driving force that led us to settle in this country. At the time we thought no further ahead than that.

But we wanted our status to be formalised and legalised so we went through the naturalisation process. This was extremely difficult because at the time I spoke no English. It was, perhaps, the toughest time in my life. Because I couldn't express myself or understand anyone, I was apprehensive about meeting people and tended to keep to myself. But I did not wish to continue living that way and chose to do something about it.

It was the start of a nine-year odyssey of struggle and determination that now sees me as the head of my own company with an annual turnover in excess of $10m. This journey was made more difficult by the fact that since we arrived in Australia my husband has spent most of his time overseas on business.

Much of my struggle mirrors that of other migrants to Australia. For example, despite holding a degree in Urban Planning, Design and Engineering from the University of St Petersburg in Russia, I soon found that this was not enough to get a job in Australia. I decided that I would need an

'Australian' education if I was to be recognised for my achievements in my new country. I looked at various courses on offer at Adelaide University and enrolled in a Masters in Business Administration. I felt the course content would be complimentary to my Urban Development qualifications.

But I discovered that a hard-earned Masters Degree in Business Administration (achieved in two and a half years) was still not enough to gain meaningful employment, despite winning my way through to many final interviews. This was the second time since arriving in Australia that I began to wonder if we had made the right decision by emigrating from Russia. But I was determined not to give up. Instead, I took stock of my assets and advantages to determine whether I could use them to create a business for myself.

I decided to capitalise on something which up till then I had considered as a disadvantage – being a migrant. I had grown up in Russia – perhaps I could use my Russian contacts and create my own export business. After all, I knew what people in Russia would buy. I realised I was very well positioned to start trade in frozen meat and meat products.

Expo Trade began operations in August 1999. From a $600,000 turnover in its first half year of operation, the company has achieved spectacular growth and has taken a major shareholding in a South Australian-based liquid fertiliser company. Expo Trade is on the brink of becoming a significant and influential international trader in agricultural products.

When I first started many people had reservations about doing business with Russia and a Russian, but I said: *"Yes, I'm Russian, but I am also an Australian citizen who has an Australian company operating under Australian law. I have my family here so I will be right here if you need to find me. You can trust me".*

Initially I had to overcome a perception of Russia as an unstable country. In addition I found it difficult being a woman working in my chosen field: meat, wine, lamb skins export and fertiliser import industries. I was often viewed with some scepticism. I have answered this scepticism by doing business to the best of my ability. I am now the Managing Director of Expo Trade Pty Ltd, the most successful and biggest meat, wine and lamb skins exporter into the Russian Federation. I have built the company with values and principles that I would appreciate if I were an employee of the company.

ExpoTrade has recently registered an official branch (office) in St Petersburg, Russia. While business growth and expansion are worthwhile achievements, I believe it is crucial that the company be stable and grow profitably. I envisage ExpoTrade as becoming the best quality exporter to Russia and other markets, not necessarily the biggest.

At the beginning I spent all of my time at work and was involved at all operational levels of trading activities. However, now that my commitments and the business have changed, I try to achieve a balance between business, social and personal life. I have delegated most of my operational and managerial tasks to my team and find myself more involved in the public relations aspect of the business.

Because of my experiences with the immigration process, people from Russian and other communities often ask if I can help people who are experiencing similar difficulties. I am happy to do this as it expands my contact with other people and gives me the opportunity to help newcomers.

To a certain degree, I suppose I am an unofficial ambassador for Russia. When people ask, I am always willing to tell them what I know. I believe this helps people learn more about the Russian culture in order to do business with Russians. I often find myself acting as an adviser and an advocate.

My experiences have taught me that academic success is not enough. Overcoming personal crises and facing early failures have contributed to my capacity to cope with difficult situations today. I constantly re-examine the route that has led me to my role as a leader and advocate. My approach has always been a collaborative one, with the aim to keep staff motivated. I know my team well and seek to develop mutual confidence. To this end, as a leader, I am not always required – which proves that my leadership is a bonus rather than an essential element.

I hope that by being recognised as a Russian successfully working in Australia I might inspire and encourage others with similar dreams to persist. I also hope that my contribution can help to build better understanding and relationships between Russia and Australia.

(This article was published in *Australian mosaic* magazine, Issue 6, 2004, number 2. Copyright is retained by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA). The article is reproduced here with the permission of the Editor.)

IMPORTANT SKILLS WASTED

By Michael Kimber

Michael Kimber was born in South Africa where he qualified as a pharmacist in 1969. Initially a community pharmacist in Swaziland, he later entered the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry in Durban. In 1981 he migrated to Australia and joined the pharmaceutical industry in Sydney as a Manufacturing Director for 17 years. Michael is currently a consultant, a PhD student and occasional university lecturer.

Very many overseas trained health professionals cannot get their qualifications recognised in Australia effectively preventing them from practising. Here is just one personal story….

Driving through Outback Queensland five years ago, listening to Radio National, my wife and I heard an interview with a representative of the Pharmaceutical Society bemoaning the shortage of pharmacists in rural areas. As a pharmacist of thirty years standing, my interest was piqued; I thought that I could help, given that I had only recently left the Sydney pharmaceutical company where I worked for seventeen years, managing a large and sophisticated pharmaceutical manufacturing operation. After all, I am still a registered pharmacist in my country of birth (South Africa) and have diligently maintained my registration throughout the 22 years I have lived in Australia.

I did not register as a pharmacist in Australia when I arrived in 1981, simply because I was not required to do so. Unlike many other countries, Australia does not require the supervision of pharmaceutical manufacturing operations to be undertaken by registered pharmacists.

However, I still believed that I would be in a position to help the profession. I have rural pharmacy experience - my first job, after finishing pharmacy school, was as a manager of a rural pharmacy for three years.

On returning to Sydney, full of enthusiasm, I contacted the NSW Pharmacy Board. My enthusiasm soon turned to disbelief. I was told that unless my pharmacy qualification was from the United Kingdom or New Zealand, I

would have to write an examination set by an organisation called APEC (Australian Pharmacy Examining Council). Not to be discouraged, I contacted APEC and was advised that the process was a multi-part examination based on the Bachelor of Pharmacy course; that there were some sample questions available and a reading list of some twenty-odd text books. No bridging course is available and if I were to pass the examination, I would be required to work in a local pharmacy, under supervision, for up to a year. But this was not all. I would then have to attend an interview and pass a second examination.

With my enthusiasm somewhat waned by this stage, I decided that the shortage of pharmacists could not be a priority, since the process is not designed to encourage overseas pharmacists to apply.

A few years later my wife and I moved from Sydney to Far North Queensland. It was then I experienced the reality of the situation. I watched our local pharmacy close down because the owner was ill and could not find a pharmacist to run the pharmacy. I called the Queensland Pharmacy Board and asked what I could do to help. I was met by bored indifference and the same answer given previously by the NSW Pharmacy Board – write the APEC examination, jump through all the hoops and, if you're lucky, you will be allowed to come down to Brisbane, six to twelve months later (after you have worked under the supervision of a local pharmacist) to write the final examination and submit to a verbal grilling.

I pointed out that I have lived in Australia for many years, had been appointed by the Federal Minister for Health as the Expert in Pharmaceutical Manufacturing and that my overseas pharmacy qualifications were considered good enough to provide advice to the Therapeutic Goods Administration on the Standards for therapeutic goods manufacturing in Australia for the ten years that I had served on the Therapeutic Goods Committee. I also advised that I was still a member of the Pharmaceutical Science Committee of the Australian Drug Evaluation Committee and that my expertise in pharmaceutical sciences was considered adequate enough for this role.

This was of little interest to the Queensland Pharmacy Board. My qualifications were not considered part of the skill set required to stand behind a counter in a community pharmacy.

My wife and I continue to travel widely through Outback Australia and have learned and experienced that, in spite of the efforts of some very dedicated people, the standard of pharmaceutical services is very poor, particularly in Indigenous communities.

I again resolved to do something to help and applied and was accepted as a PhD candidate in Pharmacy at a local university (self-funded). My thesis is

to develop a model for communities that do not have a pharmacist, in order to provide such communities with an equivalent standard of quality pharmaceutical services as is expected in towns and cities throughout Australia.

The Queensland Pharmacists Act has a peculiar class of registration; "Special Purpose Registration". Since I am undertaking postgraduate studies, I now have this class of registration, as do some other overseas qualified academics. It allows me to engage in research, teach pharmacy students, give clinical demonstrations and study at postgraduate level. However, I am still not permitted to stand behind the dispensary counter in a pharmacy. I can teach pharmacy students, and I have lectured this year to students in all years of the pharmacy course, but I cannot work as a pharmacist.

The Northern Territory does not have this class of pharmacist registration, and in spite of a critical shortage of pharmacists in the Northern Territory, will not register me as a pharmacist.

The Northern Territory and Queensland claim that the reason for not registering overseas trained pharmacists is one of "quality", yet nurses and health care workers in rural and remote clinics are allowed to "supply" prescription medicines. The categories of medicine "supplied" in this context are far wider than pharmacists can dispense without prescription, yet pharmacy training provided to these workers is either limited or non-existent.

The fact that it is difficult and/or expensive to get pharmacists to live and work in rural and remote areas is not a valid excuse to provide lower quality services. Most people living in these areas are Indigenous Australians who often require more medical services than the general Australian population. Innovative solutions such as allowing Indigenous communities to employ pharmacists in rural and remote areas should be encouraged.

APEC claims it is an assessment organisation and does not recognise any overseas pharmacists as having equivalent qualifications to Australian pharmacists. The responsibility for recognising equivalence of overseas qualifications rests with the States and Territories, who only recognise qualifications gained in the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

No recent formal Australian assessment has been done of UK Pharmacy qualifications. The UK is grappling with its own issues in the registration of pharmacists from other EU countries. The system of supply and range of medicines available in the UK is now very different from the Australian situation. I believe it is only tradition and expedience that encourages the States and Territories to continue this practice.

If an assessment process is required, then it must be consistently applied or it is discriminatory. The Chairman of APEC says that he does not agree that pharmacists from the UK should be exempt from the assessment process.

My opinion is that a fair process for the assessment of overseas qualifications should be as follows.

- A self-assessment questionnaire should be available to overseas qualified pharmacists at a reasonable price. Once this self assessment is completed, the pharmacist can decide if he or she is comfortable with undertaking the APEC examination. The APEC assessment should be re-focused to ensure that overseas pharmacists have the necessary skills required to work in the community. It is unnecessary and a waste of time and resources to require overseas trained pharmacists to answer a series of general questions from the whole of the pharmacy course. The assessment should focus on the area of therapeutics.
- If the pharmacist does not consider him or herself ready to undertake this assessment, then a bridging course should be available at a reasonable cost.
- After the APEC assessment, training should be "work-shopped" with a limited period required in a pharmacy (eg: one month).
- Thereafter, a consistent *competency examination* similar to that presently undertaken by Australian pharmacy graduates should be supervised by a central organisation, possibly a re-focused APEC, thus removing responsibility from the control of the States and Territories Pharmacy Boards. Once the pharmacist has passed this final assessment, then the pharmacist should be eligible for registration in all States and Territories.

This entire process, for an experienced pharmacist with qualifications from a country of equivalent academic standards to Australia, should take no longer than three months. Because Pharmacy is a priority profession for future migrants, the costs associated with the assessment should be met by the Commonwealth. These migrants are highly educated and desirable future citizens already educated at considerable cost in their home countries.

The process of registration is essentially the same as when I arrived in Australia twenty-two years ago. The annual numbers of pharmacists gaining registration is paltry compared with the number of migrant pharmacists working in Australia in areas where registration is not required. This is despite the current and forecasted shortages of pharmacists, highlighted in a number of studies for more than ten years.

Hard earned qualifications gained overseas should not be squandered. My first language is English and I studied in a country with an equivalent educational system to Australia, yet I have found the process difficult and frustrating.

How difficult must it be for my fellow migrants who do not have the advantage of English as their first language, but nevertheless have important skills that should be recognised for the benefit of all Australians?

How about a fair go!