



Australian Government



Australian  
**Small Business and  
Family Enterprise**  
Ombudsman

23 March 2021

Mr Julian Leeser MP  
Chair  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

*via email: migration@aph.gov.au*

Dear Mr Leeser

### Joint Standing Committee on Migration

One of the ongoing factors constraining SME output is the availability of suitable labour,<sup>1</sup> which prevents small businesses from growing and participating in the economic recovery. To improve the skilled migration program for small businesses to access a skilled workforce we suggest the following:

**1. Improve the visa processing time for small businesses.**

Extended processing times negatively impact businesses utilising workers on visas. Delays inhibit small businesses and result in missed opportunities, such as tendering for contracts that need skilled migrants and restricting growth during pivotal periods. Previous visa processing times indicated 75% of Subclass 482 visas were processed in 32 days.<sup>2</sup> This could be improved by reducing processing time targets to less than thirty days for all new applications and renewals reduced to two weeks.

**2. Increase the available pathways to permanent residency.**

Increasing the range of visa pathways to permanent residency would help attract talented migrant workers for small businesses. This should be targeted to sectors exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic such as hospitality, travel and the agriculture industry. This will ensure small businesses in these sectors are able to contribute to Australia's economic recovery and meet future long-term labour needs of these industries.

**3. Reduce the cost of the Skilling Australians Fund levy.**

The current Skilling Australians Fund levy acts as a deterrent for many small businesses due to its high cost and payment timing. This levy could be reduced by half for small businesses with payment linked to visa grant rather than the current upfront approach to sponsor an overseas worker.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Miss Kit O'George on 02 6243 7244 or at [kit.o'george@asbfeo.gov.au](mailto:kit.o'george@asbfeo.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**The Hon. Bruce Billson**  
Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman

<sup>1</sup> <https://business.nab.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/NAB-SME-Business-Survey-Q4-2020.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Tourism Accommodation Australia, Submission 04 to Senate legal and constitutional affairs committee, Impact of changes to service delivery models on the administration and running of government programs, 1st November 2019