

Submission from the AQA

to the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment

on the Accredited Employer Work Visa Review

October 2024

Introduction

The Aggregate and Quarry Association (AQA) is the industry body representing quarrying companies which produce 47 million tonnes of aggregate and quarried materials consumed in New Zealand each year.

Funded by its members, the AQA has a mandate to increase New Zealanders' understanding of the need for aggregates, improve our industry and users' technical knowledge of aggregates and assist in developing a highly skilled workforce within a safe and sustainable work environment.

We would like to thank MBIE for the opportunity to submit on the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) Review.

Please note, we endorse and support Civil Contractors New Zealand's submission on this. In addition, we would like to make some related comments on skilled residence pathways as part of this submission.

The Accredited Employer Work Visa Review

We endorse and support the submission from Civil Contractors New Zealand on the Accredited Employer Work Visa Review Phase Two.

The quarry sector is made up of a lot of small to medium sized businesses, many employing 3-5 people. They are spread across the country and generally on urban fringes or in rural areas.

In general, the sector only employs migrant labour when it can't get local skilled or semi-skilled workers.

In response to the consultation material, we make the following points.

Job checks

We do not support job checks requirements being imposed on proven good employers.

Wage threshold

We support having no wage threshold.

Labour market test

For those employers who have met the criteria to be classified as Tier One or Two, we do not support MSD having a role in the process.

We support increasing the maximum AEWV duration to at least 3 years (instead of 2 + 1) for level 4 and 5 roles.

We do not support removing the ability for employers to support family members for an AEWV. Individuals should not be discriminated against simply because they are family members.

Regional settings

We do not support different settings across different parts of New Zealand.

Settings for migrants whose employment has ended

If an AEWV holder needs to find a new role due to, for example, restructure or redundancy, the current process is too protracted for them to be able to remain in New Zealand without being able to work.

Skilled residence pathways

The pathway to residency is outside the scope of this consultation. However, this is the most urgent problem for those working in our sector.

Quarry businesses tend to prefer permanent employees over temporary ones. They do not want to have to replace workers every 2-3 years. It is difficult for the sector to attract migrant labour if potential employees cannot be offered residency. Migrants, understandably, want a better life for themselves and their families which means being given certainty around settling in their adopted country.

The changes proposed as part of the Accredited Employer Work Visa Review will not remedy this without a pathway to residency for these skilled workers.

Migrants are choosing Australia over New Zealand in considerable numbers because of the pathway to residency that country offers. This is being compounded by New Zealand workers also opting to move to Australia, for various reasons, in increasing numbers.

The quarry sector has lost a lot of workers to Australia in recent years, often to the sizable mining sector. It is likely that when the current slowdown ends in the next 6 -12 months and work picks up, labour shortages will stymie delivery of the Government's ambitions for infrastructure and housing.

This is a serious problem the sector, and the country, needs to address and we ask that the pathway to residency is opened up for review so we can attract the skilled workers the country needs.

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