

WINE VVS

Government's immigration tweak sees overseas Asians out, integrated Kiwis in

By political reporter Jackson Gothe-Snape

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Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton has slowed Australia's immigration intake — and he didn't need to get a submission through Cabinet.

The country's headline migration figure will be lower in coming years than it would have been otherwise, thanks to New Zealanders already in Australia taking visas that previously went to immigrants overseas.

This new information arrives in the same week Government ministers revealed fewer permanent visas than the stated "ceiling" would be granted for the second year in a row.

Forty four thousand places in Australia's skilled independent visa program have traditionally gone to applicants who are mostly Asian and living overseas.

But now as many as 10,000 Kiwis who are already living and working in Australia will be part of this annual allocation.

The change is a result of a decision by the Government to merge a new Kiwi visa with the existing skilled independent program, without increasing the number of visas in the scheme.

Fewer overseas visa arrivals

The Department of Home Affairs confirmed to the ABC that New Zealanders receiving the new visa are already counted as residents, reducing the number of people coming to Australia as a result of the program.

"The pathway is directly aimed at New Zealand citizens who have been living in Australia for at least five years and have made, and continue to make, a demonstrated economic contribution to Australia," a spokesperson for the department said.

The move will help slow the growth of migration by thousands each year — without changing the Government's formal permanent intake.

Australia's headline migration figure is currently calculated by the ABS as 250,000 and growing at 15 per cent in the year to September.

The new visa was announced in 2016 as an acknowledgment of "the special relationship between the two nations", according to a statement from the Prime Minister.

Mr Dutton told journalists on Wednesday that Cabinet had discussed reducing migration, although the Prime Minister declared there had been no formal submission for a cut to Australia's permanent migration program.

Treasurer Scott Morrison has previously said a cut to migration would hurt the economy.

From Asian migrants to the neighbourhood Kiwi

The tweak has also changed Australia's migration mix.



PHOTO: Peter Dutton has revealed the Government has discussed reducing migration. (AAP: Paul Miller)

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Key points:

- Kiwis in Australia are now getting visas previously granted to mostly overseas-based Asians
- Growth in migration figures is likely to slow by thousands in coming years as a result
- The Government argues it has not formally cut the permanent intake

It has substituted the mostly skilled Asian workers living overseas with Kiwis already working in Australia.

The skilled independent visa — traditionally assessed on points based on a worker's experience — counts for approximately one quarter of Australia's permanent visa program: a ceiling of 44,000 individuals each year.

Alongside the employer-sponsored program, it is Australia's main source of skilled migrant workers.

Last year, three out of five successful applicants in the program were granted visas while living overseas.

Who received skilled visas?

The skilled independent visa program has been dominated by recipients from Asian countries.

India	14,484
China	6,071
UK	3,462
Pakistan	3,050
Philippines	2,697
South Africa	1,938
Malaysia	1,234
Iran	1,089
Nepal	1,043
Other	9,401

Grants are for 2016-17

Source: [DHA](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#)

EMBED: Who gets skilled independent visas?

Nine thousand New Zealanders had applied for the new visa in the first eight months of the scheme's operation, according to the department.

Wayne Parcell, immigration partner at EY, said Australia could expect around 10,000 Kiwi applications this year and noted that these visas were not restricted to specific occupations.

"The criteria for the new visa would seem to have more to do with the context of the Australia-New Zealand relationship than a predetermined impact on the skill segment of the migration program."

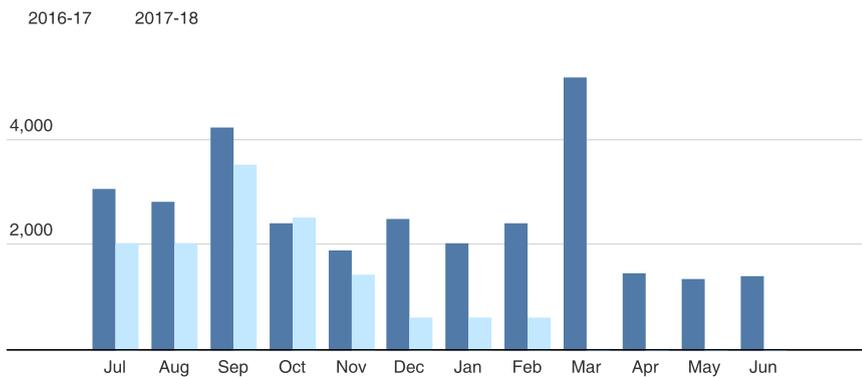
Points-based component shrinks

This influx of New Zealanders has coincided with a shrinking of the old points-based component.

Thirteen thousand, two hundred invitations to apply for one of these visas had been issued in 2017-18 by the end of February, down by almost 10,000 across the same period in the previous year.

Drop in skilled independent visas

The Department invites eligible applicants to apply for these visas. Invitations are down in 2017-18.



Data available to end of February

Source: [DHA](#) • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#)

EMBED: Drop in skilled independent visas

The Department spokesperson said invitation numbers "may vary depending on the number of applications currently being processed by the Department".

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said this week that he had been "very careful in working through the numbers".

"The idea of the migration program in our country, as it was in the Howard government, as it was in the Abbott government, as it now is in the Turnbull government is to make sure we're bringing the right people in," he said.

"People who want to work, not be leading a life on welfare, people who want to integrate into our Australian society, people who want to abide by our values and our laws."

New visa proves popular

Between 60,000 and 80,000 Kiwis are eligible for the new visa, according to different estimates.

The visa requires an applicant to live in Australia for five years and maintain an income over \$53,900.

At the end of February 1,512 of the new visas had already been granted and around 7,500 were still being processed.

Applications only opened in July, and the process typically takes at least three months.

The new permanent visa gives Kiwis access to more welfare services and, unlike the standard visa available to New Zealand visitors, provides a pathway to citizenship.

Topics: government-and-politics, work, immigration, australia

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