

Evaluation of skilled migration to the Riverina

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Executive summary

Origin

This evaluation was recommended by the *Report of the Commonwealth/NSW Working Party on Migration to Sydney and Regional NSW* which was presented to the NSW Premier and the then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs in 2003.

Key objectives

- Determine how well regional migration schemes are working in the Riverina region of New South Wales.
- Determine the effectiveness of the measures put in place by three levels of government to increase and enhance skilled migration to the Riverina and regional NSW generally. These measures include using department regional outreach officers, the Skilled Matching Database, the Skilled Independent Regional visa; the Skilled Migration Project Officer within the Riverina Regional Development Board, promotional activities including websites and Australia Needs Skills expos in Australia and overseas.

Key elements of evaluation

- Paper based survey of skilled migrants and employers in the Riverina;
- Focus groups of skilled migrants and community members;
- One to one interviews with employers and community representatives;
- One to one discussions with providers of services to skilled migrants, including staff of the Riverina Regional Development Board, the NSW Department of State and Regional Development and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). The Executive Officer of the Murray Regional Development Board was also interviewed.

Key findings

- The Riverina possesses all the conditions essential for successful skilled migration: skilled labour shortages, a viable and mixed economy, a welcoming community and urban centres large enough to meet the needs of a sophisticated and affluent population.

- The Riverina's population is ageing as young people leave and older workers retire. This is contributing to labour shortages and increased demand for a range of services including health and age care.
- Many employers report that they have difficulty in finding skilled workers. While most would prefer to engage a local skilled worker, these are in short supply.
- Skilled migrants are highly valued by employers who sponsor or recruit skilled migrants and the community and many migrants express satisfaction with their life in the region. They have a low (four per cent) unemployment rate and earn an average of \$66 000, which is considerably higher than the Australian average.
- Skilled migrants have expressed a need for more post-arrival assistance and advice, especially in terms of welcome, orientation, introduction into the community and advice on how to access services including schools, banking and healthcare. These settlement services are generally not provided under existing arrangements, although some regional development boards, for example the Murray Regional Development Board, are moving to this model with great success.
- Conditions exist for significant expansion of skilled migration to the region. Many employers who cannot find skilled workers have not tried to recruit skilled migrants. Their main reasons are lack of information, lack of assistance, the process takes too much time and too many resources, and there is too much uncertainty involved in recruiting people they have not met. Some employers noted the need for 'hand holding' from the Riverina Regional Development Board through the department's application process. Some skilled migrants also noted concerns about the time the visa application process takes and lack of information about the process from the department.
- Raising awareness of employment opportunities in the Riverina and the benefits of living there is critical to attracting more skilled migrants to the region. Like most regions of Australia, knowledge of the Riverina is low amongst prospective skilled migrants. This highlights the importance of outreach towards prospective migrants, including attendance at Australia Needs Skills expos.
- The skill shortages faced in the Riverina are in many cases similar to those faced nationally for example nurses, chefs, welders, fitters and accountants.
- The Skill Matching Database is not widely known or used. Although improvements to the database are acknowledged, most employers still require assistance and encouragement to use it. Very few employers in the Riverina have actually recruited skilled migrants through it.

- The regional outreach officer covering the Riverina supports the Riverina Regional Development Board and disseminates some information and publicity directly to local employers. The Riverina Regional Development Board is the main DIAC contact on the ground. Much scope remains for deeper penetration of the skilled migration message.
- The skilled migration project officer position within the Riverina Regional Development Board is crucial to increasing skilled migration to the region. In addition to providing information to prospective skilled migrants and local employers, this position has the potential to fulfil two vital functions:
 - act as an intermediary between skilled migration applicants and local employers, for example by matching the CVs of applicants obtained at expos with the requirements of particular employers
 - provide post-arrival help to skilled migrants and their families, including advice on schools, accommodation, banking and health services as well as introductions to social groups within the local community.
- There is potential for an increase in Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa applicants to the Riverina. This would be helped by increasing outreach towards prospective skilled migrants through Riverina Regional Development Board participation at DIAC expos and other promotional vehicles.
- The SIR visa was introduced explicitly to help regions recruit the skilled migrants they need and it helps employers' to immediately recruit skilled workers who are committed to remaining in regional Australia.

1. The Riverina

Regional definition

For the purposes of this evaluation, the Riverina is taken to be the area for which the Riverina Regional Development Board (RRDB) is responsible. This region encompasses the middle and lower reaches of the Murrumbidgee River Valley of South-Eastern Australia. It stretches 500 kilometres, from Kosciuzsko National Park in Tumut Shire and west across the sheep-wheat belt of the South West Slopes and the riverine plains, and includes the vast horticultural districts of the Murrumbidgee and Colleambally Irrigation Areas (MIA) to the semi-arid plains of Hay.

The RRDB's jurisdiction incorporates 16 local communities (population approximately 163 000), however the Greater Riverina includes portions of surrounding communities such as Urana, Tumbarumba and Jerilderie Shires-home to approximately 175 000 people.

The region has a strong and diverse industry base including:

- agriculture
- manufacturing and food processing
- defence
- softwood forestry/logging and wood/paper product processing
- engineering
- transport and distribution
- viticulture and winemaking
- services – research and development, government agencies
- tourism
- education
- health services.

There are approximately 8900 businesses with employees in the Riverina, many of which are small businesses.

The Riverina's main economic centre is Wagga Wagga - the largest inland city in NSW and an important employment, educational, cultural, social and entertainment centre for surrounding towns throughout the Riverina. The three largest centres in population after Wagga Wagga are Griffith, Leeton and Deniliquin. These towns in turn provide services to the outlying farming regions.

The Riverina region is one of the most productive farming regions in Australia with rice, wheat, citrus and wine grapes being grown in the area.

Rice is an important crop grown in the Riverina, more specifically in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (MIA). The headquarters of Ricegrowers Co-operative Limited, who trade under the SunRice name, are located in Leeton.

There are also numerous wineries in the Riverina especially in Griffith. Notable Griffith wineries include Casella Wines (yellow tail), De Bortoli Wines (Noble One) and Miranda Wines.

Labour market

Clear labour force data on the Riverina region is difficult to obtain, primarily because of differences in the regional definitions data used by the ABS, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and the Riverina Regional Development Board itself. Nevertheless, the following data from the DEWR *Small Area Labour Markets* publication for the September 2006 quarter for the Murray-Murrumbidgee region is at least indicative of current conditions in the Riverina - the largest component of the Murray-Murrumbidgee region.

In the September 2006 quarter the Murray-Murrumbidgee region recorded a 10.6 per cent increase in employment while unemployment fell by 2.4 percentage points to 3.5 per cent compared with the national unemployment rate of 4.6 per cent.

The employment rate in the Murray-Murrumbidgee region was 76.5 per cent and the participation rate was 68.9 per cent compared with the national rates of 72.5 per cent and 64.8 per cent respectively.

In August 2006, retail trade was the largest employer in the region, followed by agricultural and forestry, manufacturing, health and community services and education. It should be noted that around half the employment in retail trade and health and community services was part time, with full time employment predominating in agricultural and forestry and manufacturing.

Figure 1.1 :Employment by industry, ranked, August 2006 ('000)



Data presented are four quarter averages
 Source: ABS Labour Force Survey.

Composition of the Riverina’s population

The most comprehensive information on the population of the Riverina is from the 2001 census. This indicates that diversity (in terms of birthplace) varies widely between major centres. For example, 6.1 per cent of the population of the Wagga Wagga local government area was born overseas compared with the national figure of 23.1 per cent. Half of those born overseas in Wagga Wagga were from English speaking countries.

Griffith had a much higher proportion of overseas born in its population (16.8 per cent) and a higher component of people born in non-English speaking countries (13.6 per cent).

7.8 per cent of Leeton's population were born overseas, most of whom (five per cent) were born in non-English speaking countries. The overseas born in Deniliquin were 5.5 per cent of the population, with two per cent born in non-English speaking countries.

The Riverina's population aged 20-24 in 2001 was 19 per cent lower than the same group who were aged 15-19 in 1996. The region's population aged 25-29 in 2001 was 7.8 per cent lower than the same group who were aged 20-24 in 1996. These figures imply an outflow of younger people from the region. The proportion of the region's total population in the prime working age of 25-54 fell from 40.8 per cent to 40.5 per cent between 1996 and 2001.

The 2006 census has now been taken, with results expected in mid-2007. An increase in immigration to the Riverina may well see an increase in both the proportion of people born overseas and the proportion born in non-English speaking countries, particularly India and China.

2. Measures to increase and enhance skilled migration to the Riverina.

The Commonwealth/NSW working party report recommended that all levels of government should collaborate and also use their respective regional structures to disseminate information and promote skilled migration among regional employers.

This evaluation has examined a number of measures that have been taken subsequent to the recommendations of the report, especially as they pertain to the Riverina. This chapter describes the measures taken and the following two chapters discuss the findings of the evaluation in terms of how successful the measures have been.

DIAC regional outreach officer

The regional outreach officer (ROO) network was established in 2004-05 to promote and support the Australian Government's state-specific and regional migration initiatives. This initiative helps employers, state and territory governments and regional authorities to meet their skilled employment needs and regional development objectives.

The regional outreach officer with responsibility for the ACT and Southern NSW including the Riverina region is based in the DIAC ACT Regional Office. The key role of the ROO is to:

- provide a local contact point for information and advice to Regional Certifying Bodies and employers on state-specific and regional skilled migration visa options and processes;
- raise awareness and understanding of regional migration programmes by working in partnership with all levels of government and relevant networks and
- Visit regional areas to develop and strengthen partnerships with regional communities and assist them to make the most of skilled migration.

In the two and a half years since the ROO position was established, there have been at least 25 visits to the region. The ROO has visited Wagga Wagga, Griffith, Albury, Gundagai, Leeton, Junee, Deniliquin, and Narrandera. During this period the ROO responsible for the Riverina has been required to act in another position for around 14 weeks. This has caused some disruption to the effective discharge of the ROO function in the Riverina. However, the ROO position is now occupied on an ongoing basis and a second officer has been appointed to provide administrative back-up to the position. This will

ensure continuity in the position and demonstrates the commitment of DIAC to the ROO function in the Riverina.

A review of the ROO network is currently being conducted by DIAC. The review is examining a range of indicators of ROO performance including:

- the level of awareness of regional migration initiatives among key stakeholders, particularly regional employers
- the activities employed by the ROO network to achieve its objective; and
- factors influencing the operation of the ROO programme.

During the course of the Riverina evaluation, key stakeholders in the Riverina and in the neighbouring Murray Regional Development Board were asked for their assessment of the ROO position. In general, the consensus is that the ROO provides an indispensable contact point with DIAC for regional certifying bodies and regional employers for advice and information on regional skilled migration options. It is also widely acknowledged that the ROO position plays a valuable role in disseminating information and promotional material to prospective employers. Regular regional roadshows involving RCBs and ROOs may assist in promoting regional migration.

The recent survey conducted in the Riverina shows however, that there remains a large number of Riverina employers who have not yet received information on their skilled migration options (see next chapter). The recent strengthening of support for the ROO whose responsibilities include the Riverina should go some way to helping meet this outstanding need for information and for faster processing of RCB certifications.

The Skill Matching Database

The Skill Matching Database (SMD) is a web-based tool that helps match potential skilled migrants with skilled vacancies in Australia. It contains the educational, employment and work details of skilled migrants and includes many who are interested in living and working in regional Australia.

The database is intended for use by employers for employer sponsored migration categories as well as by state and territory governments. Applicants who have their details on the database are not guaranteed a job in Australia or migration application approval.

Employers are not under any obligation to employ an applicant from the database until they are satisfied the applicant is suitable for their business.

Applications for all state specific and employer sponsored initiatives, including the Employer Nomination Scheme, Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme, State and Territory Nominated Independents and skill matching visa categories, receive priority processing. Where the nomination is made by a State or Territory government, the migrant is selected on the basis that the specific skills and experience they possess are in demand in that State or Territory. As a result, their employment prospects once they arrive in Australia are good.

The SMD has been underutilised in the Riverina. Between April 2005 and October 2006, a total of 11 Riverina employers have requested 78 resumes of people on the database. DIAC records indicate that three skilled migrants have actually been recruited via the skill matching database by Riverina employers over the same period. One employer has recruited a motor mechanic and an electrician and has reported no difficulties in doing so. Others who have used the database report that they are deterred from recruiting via this method because of the uncertainties, delays and potential commitments involved.

DIAC has undertaken a series of measures to help increase awareness and useage of the SMD in the Riverina including useability testing in Wagga Wagga and Griffith, in-depth training for the RRDB and delivering information brochures through the region.

More encouraging news from the Murray RDB suggests that once more ground work has been undertaken, in terms of informing employers of the database and actively helping them to use it, there can be an increase in positive results. There remains a low level of awareness of the database among the potential market of Riverina employers who need skilled workers but who have not yet recruited skilled migrants.

The Skilled Independent Regional visa.

The Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa was introduced on 1 July 2004 to enable state and territory governments to nominate skilled people who wish to live and work in regional Australia but are unable to meet the criteria to be granted a permanent visa.

Successful applicants are granted a three year temporary visa. After living for two years and working full time for a total of 12 months in a regional or low population growth metropolitan area, they can apply for a range of permanent visas.

The results of the survey and focus groups of employers in the Riverina strongly suggest that while so far take-up has been limited, the SIR visa has strong potential for the region. In NSW the sponsorship role for SIR visas has been delegated to Regional Certifying Bodies (RCBs) which for the Riverina region is the Riverina Regional Development Board. Between March 2005

and March 2006 the Riverina RDB had sponsored some 25 SIR principal applicants and their families.

Concurrent with the Riverina evaluation, DIAC is conducting a survey of SIR visa holders. Within this survey responses from eight SIR visa holders living in the Riverina were received. Within this sample, three respondents had a job using their skills, another three had unskilled jobs and two were unemployed.

On the other hand, Riverina employers have expressed a desire for skilled workers who are already in the region and can therefore be employed without delay or inconvenience to the employer. This suggests that there is potential for the SIR visa to be used more strategically in the Riverina. For example, while the RCB already only sponsors SIR applicants with occupations on the Riverina occupations in demand list (as a general rule) there is further potential for matching applications with vacancies and active recruitment of SIR applicants at DIAC expos. This approach has been adapted to good effect by the Murray RDB.

The Skilled migration project officer within the Riverina Regional Development Board

This position has proved crucial to the attraction and settlement of skilled migrants to the Riverina. A dedicated position was funded by the NSW Department of State and Regional Development until 23 September 2006. The officer occupying the position constructed a skills shortage list for the Riverina, assisted by information from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. The officer also attended several overseas DIAC Australia Needs Skills Expos and had begun to match the CVs of attendees with the needs of Riverina employers. The officer was also beginning to take on a post arrival role, helping new skilled migrants and their families to become familiar with the region and to establish contact with housing, health and education services.

While there has been a break in the activities of this position because of funding issues, the basic role of the Board as an RCB has continued with the assistance of an existing casual employee of the Board who has moved into a fulltime position, committing approximately 10 hours per week to the role. It is expected that a casual employee will be obtained to extend the level of service to a total of 30 hours per week early in 2007.

A very good example of what a dedicated position/s at this level can achieve is provided by the Murray RDB which is having strong success in recruiting, matching and helping orient and settle skilled migrants and their families. The Murray experience also generally underscores the critical role of local organisations including RCBs in the skilled migration process.

Promotional activities including web sites

The Riverina Regional Development Board has developed a very good skilled migration component of its web site, which contains information for prospective skilled migrants and regional employers. The web site includes the Riverina skilled occupations in demand list, indicating which occupations the RCB is willing to sponsor. The list is consistent with the occupations in demand reported by local employers in the survey (see Chapter 3). The RRDB web site also includes links to the skill matching database and to further information on particular visas on the DIAC website.

The NSW Department of State and Regional Development also have a very useful web site with good information and links for people considering migrating to regional NSW.

DIAC regional promotion activities have concentrated on awareness raising activities, stakeholder management and developing plain English information products, including successful case study profiles about regional migration schemes for regional employers and potential skilled migrants. DIAC recently held an expo in the Riverina showing how departmental activities benefit business and people in the region. This included presentations on skilled migration to local employers.

Expos

The Australia Needs Skills expos are being held in select locations and are designed to be one tool to help Australian employers find workers in areas of skills shortage. Australian employers and their representatives can meet people with the skills and experience needed to fill job vacancies in Australia. Overseas workers are invited to attend to learn about visas and employment in Australia. Skilled workers attending an expo can: meet Australian employers who have skill shortages; talk to state and territory governments who want to recruit overseas skilled workers; find out more about migrating independently to Australia; and listen to presentations on topics, such as the Employer Sponsored Schemes, the Skill Matching Database, General Skilled Migration and Overseas Skills Recognition.

Feedback from key stakeholders strongly suggests that the expos are playing a major role in informing and recruiting skilled migrants to regional Australia. For example, the recent expo in Sydney attracted 5000 skilled workers and 52 exhibitors. Of those who attended the expo, 22 per cent were aged between 20 and 24, 33 per cent were between 25 and 29 and 19 per cent were between 30 and 34. The qualification levels of those at the expo were high, with 42 per cent stating they had a Bachelor Degree, 29 per cent with a Masters or Doctorate, eight per cent with a Diploma and six per cent with trade or technical qualifications.

3. Qualitative research – focus groups and one to one interviews

DIAC commissioned Colmar Brunton Social Research (CBSR) to undertake qualitative research as part of the evaluation of skilled migration to the Riverina. The qualitative research consisted of 32 in-depth interviews and six focus groups. The overall purpose of the in-depth interviews and focus groups was to gain knowledge and insight into perceptions of skilled migration to the Riverina and how skilled migrants might benefit the local communities.

Two of the focus groups were carried out with community members (general public) in Wagga Wagga. The remaining four focus groups were carried out with skilled migrants living in the Riverina area (two in Wagga Wagga and two in Griffith). Seven in-depth interviews were carried out with sponsoring employers of skilled migrants, twelve interviews were carried out with non-sponsoring employers and 13 interviews were conducted with community representatives. The focus groups lasted approximately two hours and the in-depth interviews took around 45 minutes to one hour to complete. The field work was conducted from 6 -14 November 2006.

Key findings of the focus groups and in-depth interviews

Skilled migrants

- Skilled migrants were attracted to the Riverina region because of the fresh air, relaxed lifestyle and the large country town feeling.
- They were very satisfied with the welcoming nature of the local people and the support networks they had established.
- Most were pleased that the towns within the region, like Wagga Wagga and Griffith, had most of the facilities and amenities found in the cities while many felt that living in the area gave them a better life for themselves and their families. This last point is also a major reason why skilled migrants often choose to stay in the Riverina area.
- In terms of what they didn't like, some skilled migrants mentioned a lack of public transport, isolation from the rest of Australia, lack of support networks and loneliness, a lack of promotion opportunities and a feeling that their skills and talents were not always used to their fullest potential.
- There were varying perceptions amongst skilled migrants regarding the visa application process. Those who found it easier had typically used a migration agent or a lawyer to assist them in their applications. Those who found the application process more troubling mentioned the large amount

of paperwork, not being informed adequately by DIAC, medical examination processes and the time and money involved.

- Skilled migrants would like to have better communication with the responsible parties, particularly DIAC. Most felt that having a contact person to speak to would have made the entire process easier and less time consuming. Many also mentioned that they would like the process for relocating their dependents to Australia to be much quicker.
- Overall skilled migrants reported being satisfied with their current situation including their present employment. Most felt they were not being exploited and that they felt appreciated by the other employees, which led most to say that they are likely to stay in the Riverina area in the foreseeable future.

Sponsoring employers

- Sponsoring employers in the Riverina take on skilled migrants because they need to fill a labour gap. Most mentioned having extreme difficulty doing this in Australia. Almost all essential trades were listed as being in high demand from electricians and welders to doctors and nurses. Most employers mentioned that they initially try to source workers in the local region but often find a void of the types of workers they were looking for.
- Most sponsoring employers reported that skilled migrants not only fill positions and plug the skill shortage gap, they also bring experience and different skills, are often productive from day one, allow employers to take on more business, relate with other migrants and bring a fresh mindset towards the job.
- Sponsoring employers also felt that skilled migrants often see the job provided to them as being a “*real opportunity*” and they tend to be very appreciative and committed to their work and display a good work ethic.
- Sponsoring employers are concerned about the time it takes between identifying an appropriate skilled migrant and getting the skilled migrant working in Australia. They also reported that there is uncertainty about the process in terms of whether the migrant has the right skills including language, the visa process itself and migrants fitting into the community and the workplace.
- Many of the sponsoring employers mentioned that they received helpful assistance from Kelly Painting (Riverina Regional Development Board) in that she “*held their hand*” throughout the process.

Non-sponsoring employers

- Employers who are not currently sponsoring a skilled migrant felt that the costs involved were too high and that the process was difficult and

complex. Others mentioned that they simply haven't needed to employ skilled migrants as they were able to source people in the local area.

- Non-sponsoring employers felt that if they took on a skilled migrant the benefits would be no different to those they would gain from having an Australian employee. That is, it would simply fill a position that was available.
- Language and communication was seen an issue along with not being able to fit into the Australian work culture. Also, not being able to meet and evaluate the person on a one-on-one basis was concerning for non-sponsoring employers. Notably the Central West Regional Development Board is funding access to videoconferencing facilities to allow employers to interview prospective employees offshore. The success of this initiative should be monitored by the DSRD.
- Other concerns for non-sponsoring employers included costs, extra supervision and also the paperwork to be done. In order for this group of employers to consider sponsoring skilled migrants they mentioned having more assistance from DIAC and other agencies.
- Some were not aware of the skilled migration programme and that there is assistance to help them sponsor a skilled migrant. Most non-sponsoring employers hadn't heard of the DIAC Regional Outreach Officer, the Riverina Regional Development Board or the skills matching database.
- They felt better communication could be achieved through email, information seminars, face-to-face discussions and newsletters. They would like to know what parties are involved in the process that could potentially help them.
- Non-sponsoring employers mentioned a number of areas that could be worked on that would encourage them to consider taking on a skilled migrant such as: easing the employment settlement process, getting the message out that they help employers meet skills gaps, having face-to-face information sessions and raising awareness on a general level.

Community representatives

- Community representatives found the addition of skilled migrants to the Riverina to be positive, both for the workplace and the community. Most agreed that skilled migrants are needed in the Riverina and they help fill the labour shortage, whilst none had received any bad reports from employers of skilled migrants.
- Most felt that skilled migration to the Riverina produces cultural diversity and creates a more socially cohesive community. As well as plugging skill gaps the migrants are seen to provide more economic strength to businesses by maximising capacity and also because they work and then invest that money back into the local economy.

- The representatives expressed concern over whether the government and community help enough with assimilation and offering social and economic support.
- Concerns were also raised over the exploitation of skilled migrants by employers, the integration and easing of the settlement process, potential mismatches with skills requirements and assimilation issues.
- A few community representatives were concerned over skilled migration replacing the re-training of people in the local community and substituting for it. Some felt that upskilling local people should be the first step in combating the skills shortage in the Riverina region.
- Some community representatives suggested that the community needs a local mentoring or buddy system so that migrants can learn about the area and make important contacts.

Local community/general public

- Some members of the public believe that skilled migrants are filling the jobs that Australians won't do. It was mentioned that skilled migrants keep essential services, like medical, running efficiently.
- Most community members suggested people living in the Riverina areas are growing in their acceptance of migration and that the community was very welcoming.
- They perceive skilled migrants to be happy and honest people who work hard and make their opportunities. In addition, the public see the community as being very welcoming and supportive. They believe skilled migrants help by spending money in local shops, increasing the school population and bringing in new customs.
- Only a small percentage of local community members were concerned about language and the migrants not understanding the Australian way of life. Whilst some mentioned they were concerned over whether the migrants in the programme had the right skills for the job and whether they would assimilate into the lifestyle.
- Overall, local community members held a very positive view towards the skilled migration programme as did community representatives.

4. Employers survey and in-depth interviews with employers

Purpose of the employer survey

To find out:

- The extent of skill shortages in the Riverina
- The number of employers who use skilled migration to address skill shortages
- The methods used by employers to recruit skilled migrants
- The experiences and difficulties faced by employers when sponsoring and recruiting skilled migrants
- Employers' reasons for **not** using skilled migrants.

Findings from the employer survey are substantiated by comments made in the employer in-depth interviews.

Setting the scene

Businesses surveyed/interviewed

Businesses listed in the current edition of the Riverina Yellow Pages as well as businesses identified by the Riverina Regional Development Board (RRDB) were approached to participate in the survey. A total of 643 completed survey forms were received. This equates to an overall response rate of 34 per cent.

The first question on the survey form asked employers to identify the size of their business. The purpose of this particular question was to distinguish between employers and people who are self-employed. Table 4.1 – summarises the response to this question.

There are 119 businesses without employees and therefore out of the scope of the survey. Thus the final sample size for the employer survey is 524 employers.

Table 4.1: Size of businesses responding to the survey

Business size	Number of Businesses
Just Myself/self employed	119
1 to 5 employees	267
6 to 19 employees	157
20 or more employees	100
<i>Number of businesses in-scope</i>	<i>524</i>

In setting up the survey, there was also some selectivity in deciding what businesses would be included. Businesses that were unlikely to employ skilled migrants, such as supermarkets, video libraries, take-away food stores and retail chains were deliberately excluded. Table 4.2 show the industries of businesses that were in-scope.

Table 4.2: Industries of businesses surveyed in the Riverina

Industry	Number of Businesses
Trade Services eg carpenters, electricians and other tradespersons	106
Health and Aged Care	96
Agriculture	83
Personal Services, eg butchers, bakers, hairdressers	38
Motor	34
Financial services	29
Restaurants	27
Construction	24
Accounting	18
Education	17
Local Government	13
Legal	8
Engineering	6
OTHER	25
Total	524

Skill shortages

A high proportion – almost two-thirds of employers said that they had difficulties recruiting skilled workers. When interviewed one employer stated *“There’s a skills shortage nationally in the electrical industry. We advertised extensively around Australia and had been unable to attract suitable applicants so we went overseas....Some people say the migrants are taking jobs off of Australians but the truth is employers are happy to put locals on but you can’t always find sufficient workers.”* Another employer said *‘we would love to recruit some more nurses for our rural and remote hospital’*.

In terms of sheer numbers, table 4.3 shows that managers, welders, accountants, motor mechanics, nurses and chefs were the occupations that were in most demand among employers having trouble filling skilled vacancies.

Table 4.3: Occupations that are in the greatest demand

Occupation	Number of businesses
Managers and Administrators	49
Structural Steel and Welding Tradespersons	37
Accountants, Auditors and Corporate Treasurers	29
Motor Mechanics	29
Registered Nurses	25
Chefs	19
Secretaries and Personal Assistants	15
Medical Practitioners	14
Metal Fitters and Machinists	10
Building, Architectural and Surveying Associate Professionals	8
General Clerks	8
Legal Professionals	8
Plumbers	8

Table 4.4 shows that there are also “niche occupations” where the supply is falling far short of demand. That is, where the majority of prospective employers find it difficult to get the skilled workers they need. Such occupations include legal professionals, metal fitters and machinists and medical practitioners. By comparison, it appears that there are some skilled occupations which prospective employers are finding it relatively easy to fill positions, for example shearers and carpenters.

Table 4.4: Relative difficulties in finding particular skilled workers

Type of worker	Proportion of prospective employers having difficulties
Metal Fitters and Machinists	100%
Legal Professionals	89%
Structural Steel and Welding Tradespersons	88%
Medical Practitioners	88%
Registered Nurses	81%
Chefs	79%
Building, Architectural and Surveying Associate Professionals	73%
Motor Mechanics	73%
Managers and Administrators	72%
Accountants, Auditors and Corporate Treasurers	67%
Plumbers	67%
Farm Hands	64%
Secretaries and Personal Assistants	58%
General Clerks	53%
Carpentry and Joinery Tradespersons	45%
Receptionists	45%
Shearers	44%

From the survey evidence however, it is apparent that most employers are not currently viewing skilled migration as an answer to the problem of local skill shortages. Employers interviewed said that they *“Prefer locals...don’t have all the problems and they are more accepted by clients.”*

For instance:

- There are 332 employers in the survey who are finding it hard to fill skilled vacancies.
- Eighty-five of these employers have employed skilled migrants in the past six years,
- Thus there are 247 potential employers of skilled overseas workers who have **not** recruited skilled migrants.
- Around three-quarters of these 247 employers were **unable** to give any specific reason for not employing skilled migrants.

A handful of these employers were able to give specific reasons for not employing skilled migrant, and some common themes did emerge. For example:

- Fourteen employers indicated that they either lacked information about the migration process or thought that the process was too complex. Employer interview comments support this finding - *“We probably haven’t been aware of any opportunities or schemes that are in place now to make that service available to us. We haven’t heard of anything except for when you guys rang us....Lack of Information is a factor...never heard of this.”*
- Twelve employers had concerns about migrant skills and another seven had language concerns.
- Four employers said that they would prefer to employ Australian workers.

A few inferences can be drawn from this information.

- Most employers would be receptive to employing skilled migrants.
- Many employers are not engaged with the process however - even when conventional means of recruitment, such as going through a job agency or advertising in the local newspaper have not produced results. As a result there is an under-utilisation of the skilled migration option.
- The degree of under-utilisation is very pronounced. As a result there would be significant benefits in increased promotion and advocacy of skilled migration to the Riverina and clearing up misconceptions about migrant skills and language ability. The recruitment of a Settlement Officer in the Murray Regional Development Board has helped effectively address an increased workload.

The recruitment and sponsorship process

Numbers involved

Of the 524 employers surveyed:

- Eighty-five had recruited skilled migrants in the past six years. Between them these employers had recruited a total of 286 migrants.
- Forty-nine had also sponsored the skilled migrants they had recruited. These sponsoring employers had provided jobs for 103 skilled migrants.

Figure 4.1 shows that most businesses recruit or sponsor one or two skilled migrants, however there are some exceptions. For instance one firm has recruited 50 skilled migrants in the past six years, another firm had sponsored 10 migrants.

Figure 4.1: Businesses sponsoring or recruiting skilled migrants



From the following table it can be seen that doctors and engineers are the occupations that are being recruited most heavily. However in terms of sponsorship, it is nurses that have the highest sponsorships among employers.

Table 4.5: Occupations most recruited and sponsored

	Number of ...	
	employees recruited	employees sponsored
Doctors	41	12
Engineers	40	5
Nursing Professionals	33	23
Intermediate Stationary Plant Operators	25	0
Chefs	14	13
Horticultural Tradespersons	10	0
Other Specialist Managers	10	0
Accountants, Auditors and Corporate Treasurers	9	1
Air Transport Professionals	7	0

Characteristics

Table 4.6 shows the selected characteristics of these businesses sponsoring and recruiting skilled migrants.

Table 4.6: Industry and size of businesses surveyed

Characteristic	Number of ...	
	recruiting employers	sponsoring employers
Industry of employer		
Health and Aged Care	25	12
Trade Services	14	8
Agriculture	12	9
Restaurants	9	7
Motor	5	3
Local Councils	4	2
Accounting	3	1
Personal Services	3	2
Financial	2	0
Construction	1	1
OTHER	7	4
Size of business		
1 to 5 people	13	7
6 to 19 people	32	19
20 or more people	40	23

Businesses from the health sector are the heaviest recruiters and sponsors of skilled migrants. This is consistent with the findings from table 4.5.

Sponsorship is more likely to be undertaken by larger firms. Almost a quarter - 23 per cent of firms with 20 or more employees had sponsored migrants, compared with only three per cent of firms with one to five employees. This indicates that smaller firms, which usually operate on lower overheads and reduced cash flow, may not have the time, the human resource capacity and the finances to sponsor skilled migrants. There is also the risk that a sponsored migrant might not stay with the firm – this could have a greater impact on the viability of a small business. Therefore many small businesses may prefer to take on a local worker than go through the risk and expense of sponsoring a skilled migrant.

Information about recruitment

Employers that had recruited skilled migrants were asked the following two questions about the recruitment process:

- “Who gave them information about the process for recruiting skilled migrants?”
- “What method did you use to recruit skilled migrants?”

Responses to this question are summarised in table 4.7 and 4.8. From table 4.7 it appears that the more readily accessible sources of information, such as the migration agents and the DIAC website were the ones that were the most utilised. Medical networks such as Coast City Country and the NSW Rural Doctors network were popular with those in the health sector.

Table 4.7: Sources of information used to recruit skilled migrants

Source	% of recruiting employers
Did not use any particular source	25%
Migration Agent	20%
DIMA Website	18%
Recruitment Agency	14%
Riverina Regional Development Board	13%
Medical Network	11%
DIMA Business Centre	11%
Regional Outreach Officer (ROO)	10%
Area Consultative Committee	2%
Other	10%
Not Stated	

Table 4.8 (below) shows that traditional recruitment methods, such as advertising or going through a recruitment agency, were by far the most common recruitment methods. Migrants making direct approaches to employers or vice-versa were also a relatively common approach. DIAC’s skill matching database was not widely used in the Riverina. One employer noted *the RRDB provided exceptional assistance in the process*.

Table 4.8: Methods used to recruit skilled migrants

Method	% of recruiting employers
Advertising	37%
Recruitment Agency	31%
Migrant Approach	13%
Medical Network	7%
Riverina Regional Development Board	6%
DIMA Skill Matching Database	5%
Overseas Expo	3%
None of the above/other	13%

Difficulties with the process

Questions were asked in the survey about difficulties with the recruitment and sponsorship process. Table 4.9 shows that a high proportion had problems with these processes. There were 44 per cent of businesses surveyed had problems with recruitment and 31 per cent had sponsorship difficulties. Interviewees reported *‘We didn’t understand the process....what was required to be submitted.....There wasn’t a transparent process for getting the visa approved.’*

From table 4.9, it appears that the slowness and complexity of the recruitment and sponsorship process are the main concerns of employers.

Table 4.9: Sponsorship and recruitment difficulties

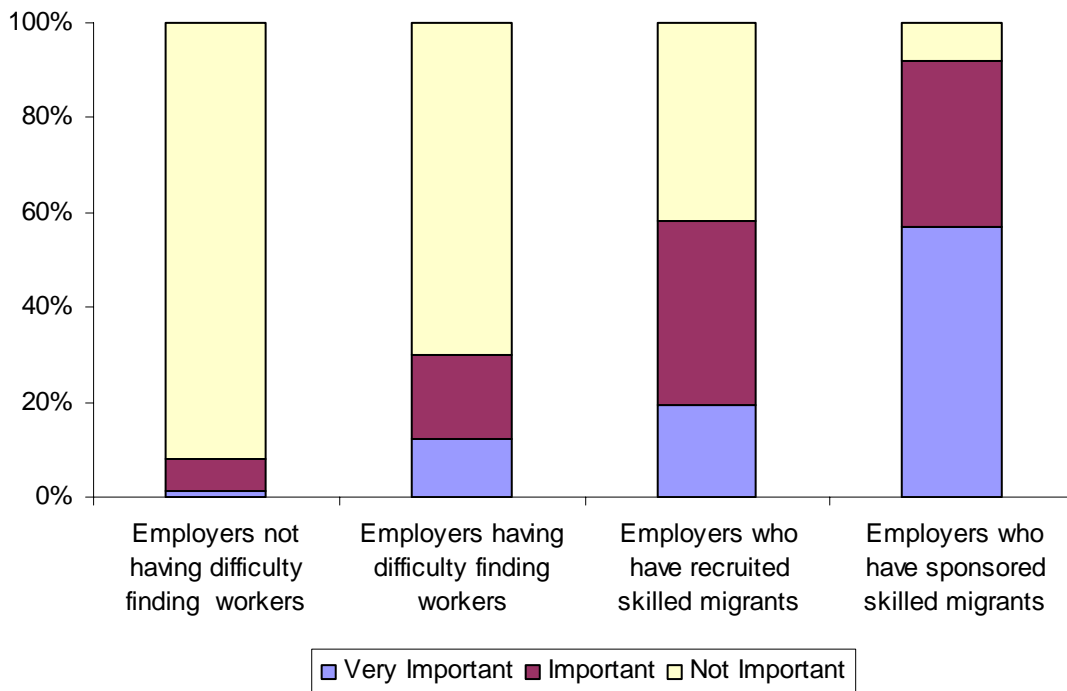
Number of Employers <i>Recruiting</i> Skilled Migrants	85
Number experiencing difficulties	37
Difficulties experienced *	
Difficulties with DIMA/the visa process	11
Difficulties finding suitable applicants	9
Bureaucratic difficulties	7
Language difficulties	4
Difficulties with qualification recognition	4
Other difficulties	2
Number of Employers <i>Sponsoring</i> Skilled Migrants	49
Number experiencing difficulties	15
Difficulties experienced	
Bureaucratic difficulties	7
Other difficulties	3
Slowness of the process	5
<i>* multiple responses allowed</i>	

The importance of skilled migration

All employers surveyed were asked how important the availability of skilled migrants was to their firm’s viability. Overall, only around 13 per cent of those surveyed said it was very important, 17 per cent said it was important and the remaining 70 per cent said it was not important. One employer made the following comment when interviewed - *‘they generate money and help businesses expand’*, another said *‘We had a teacher at the school for 14 years who was educated and trained in Fiji and he was excellent’*.

This low level of interest in skilled migration is consistent with the relatively low percentage of employers who have recruited or sponsored skilled migrants. Employers who are experiencing skill shortages and employers who have taken on skilled migrants are far more likely to say that skilled migration is important to their business. This is shown in figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Importance of skilled migration to business viability, different employer types



As can be seen, the least engaged group, those who do not have difficulties getting skilled workers are 10 times less likely to say that skilled migration is important or very important to their business viability than the most engaged group, that is employers who because of skill shortages have had to sponsor skilled migrants.

5. Skilled migrant survey

The skilled migrant survey collected information on:

- How skilled migrants came to live in the Riverina.
- How they are settling – what they like and dislike about the place, whether they have been made welcome, satisfaction with health, transport and education services and their level of engagement with the local community.
- People's assessment about the quality of service from the Riverina Regional Development Board (RRDB) and DIAC.
- Labour market outcomes – that is employment rates, participation rates, earnings, use of skills, job satisfaction and difficulties finding work.

Comments made by employees at focus groups in both Wagga Wagga and Griffith confirmed the findings of the employee survey.

Migrants surveyed

The names and addresses of 340 skilled migrants who had settled in the Riverina since 2000 were obtained from DIAC's Settlement Database and the Riverina Regional Development Board (RRDB). A small number of skilled migrants also opted into the survey in response to a series of press advertisements.

A total of 129 completed survey forms were received. This included nine participants surveyed in DIAC's Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa survey.

Migrant demographics

Compared with the General Skilled Migration Programme (GSM), skilled migrants to the Riverina differ from the profile of other skilled migrants in a number of ways.

- They are about three years older on average. This is mainly because they have a smaller proportion of former overseas students.
- Compared with the GSM, they are more likely to be from India, South Africa or Zimbabwe, and are less likely to be from the United Kingdom.
- They are slightly less likely to be female.

Table 5.1 : Characteristics of migrants surveyed and general skilled migration programme

	Survey Population	GSM - 2005/06
Birthplace		
Indian Subcontinent	32%	25%
South Africa Zimbabwe	16%	5%
Other countries	11%	9%
China	11%	16%
United Kingdom	10%	22%
Other Asia	13%	23%
North America	7%	1%
Age Profile		
Less than 25	7%	12%
25 - 35	50%	53%
35 - 45	27%	34%
45 and over	16%	2%
Average Age	36	33
Gender		
Females	32%	36%
Males	68%	64%

Migrant origins

It has been established that India and South Africa/Zimbabwe and to a lesser extent China and the United Kingdom were the main sources of skilled migrants to the Riverina. Apart from this, the Riverina has also attracted migrants from a diverse range of 30 different countries spread throughout the world. These included Brazil, USA, Thailand, Egypt, Malaysia, Poland and Taiwan.

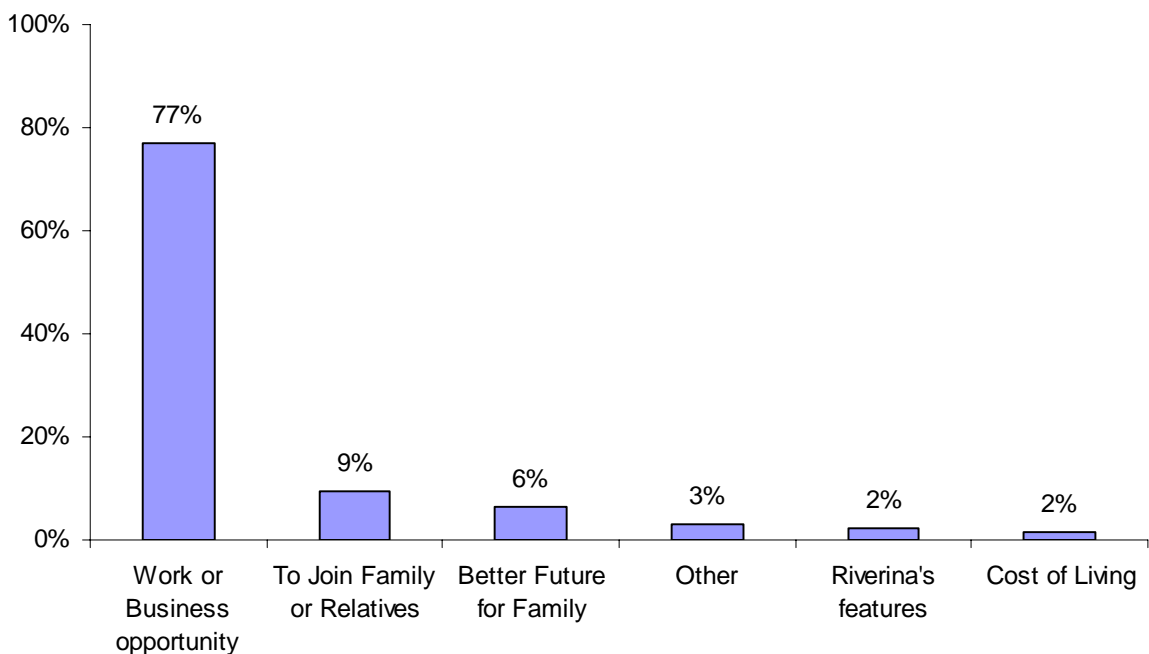
The advantage of regional areas is that they offer a quieter, more relaxed lifestyle, than is normally available in large cities. Because of this, it is possible that many of Riverina's migrants are people from regional areas wanting to continue this type of lifestyle in Australia. The survey shows however, the vast majority of skilled migrants settling in the Riverina are actually from major-metropolitan areas in their previous country. Only around 25 per cent are from regional areas.

Relative to the rest of Australia, this regional-percentage for the Riverina might be quite high. DIAC however has no data against which this figure can be compared.

Discovering the Riverina

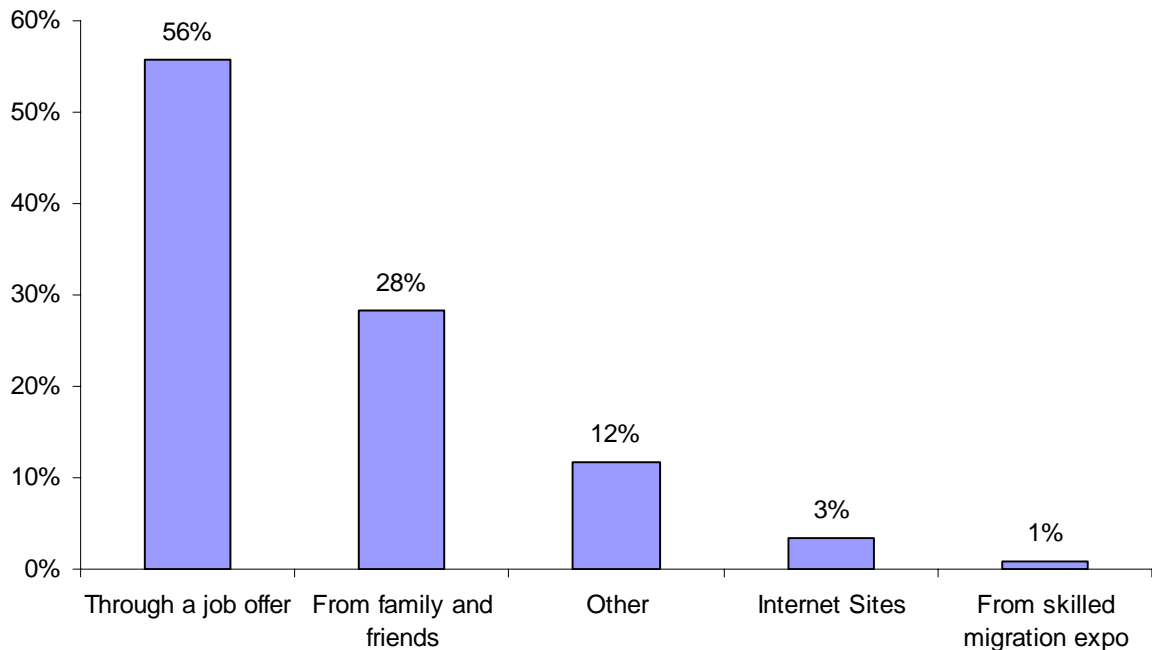
Although the majority of skilled migrants to the Riverina are from major-metropolitan areas, it would be incorrect to assume that they came to the Riverina because they deliberately sought a quieter lifestyle or that they had very much information about the Riverina beforehand. In fact the survey responses show that the overwhelming reason they settled in the Riverina was because they received a job offer. Only two per cent said they came because of Riverina’s features. Skilled migrants attending focus groups in Wagga Wagga and Griffith both reported that the Riverina was the best option as *“The job I was offered was located in the Riverina”*.

Figure 5.1: Main reason for settling in Riverina



Furthermore it appears that most skilled migrants did not know a lot about the Riverina before coming here. More than half of those surveyed said that they found out about the Riverina through a job offer.

Figure 5.2: How migrants found out about the Riverina



The migration process

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the information and help received from DIAC and the Riverina Regional Development Board (RRDB).

In the case of DIAC, 81 per cent of respondents said that they had received assistance from DIAC. Of those who received assistance around two-thirds said that they were satisfied, only 15 per cent said that they were dissatisfied. The remainder had neutral views – that is. they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Around a third of those surveyed had received assistance and advice from the RRDB. Of these, just over two third were satisfied, and only five per cent were dissatisfied. Focus groups members stated *“We initiated communication with the Development Board and they explained it all to us so we could understand the process...they helped with organising the medicals at the hospital....we were happy with the service we got from Kelly”*.

At the focus groups held in both Wagga Wagga and Griffith a number of skilled migrants noted *“You seem to get residency quicker if you go through a lawyer.....onshore applications are a lot easier”*.

Suggested improvements to visa processing

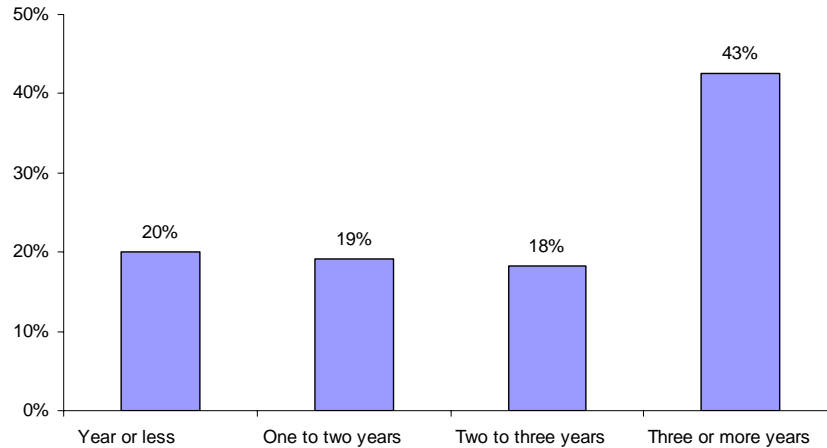
At the focus groups held at both Wagga Wagga and Griffith skilled migrants had a number of suggestions for improving visa processing. In particular, skilled migrants wanted to be kept informed about how their application was progressing. Many spoke of the need for a contact person within DIAC who they could communicate with while their application was being processed. They also suggested that *“Emailing could have been used a lot more, because you have to post everything off and you don’t know if its got there or what the next stage is until something comes back in the post. Why don’t you just send us an email?”* Participants advised that a more empathetic approach to conducting the necessary checks; and an easier way of finding information specific to, and relevant to the skilled migrants’ personal circumstances on the DIAC website (including transferability of qualifications) should be provided.

Time in the area

The survey deliberately included people who were very recent arrivals to the Riverina, as well as established migrants. This was done for two reasons:

- To maximise the sample size. Compared with Australia’s capital cities, the Riverina attracts very few migrants. A wide survey reference period increases the sample size and allows more in-depth analysis of the data.
- Comparison of outcomes – By having separate cohorts of recent and established migrants outcomes that are expected to change over time can be compared.

Of those surveyed, time in the Riverina ranged from two months to over 10 years. The average time lived in the Riverina was 3.4 years.

Figure 5.3: Time spent in the Riverina

Location

The survey population was geographically very concentrated, with almost 70 per cent living in either Wagga Wagga (48 per cent of those surveyed) or Griffith (21 per cent). In comparison, just over 50 per cent of the general population in the region live in Wagga Wagga and Griffith. Other parts of the Riverina accounted for only a quarter of those surveyed. The remaining eight per cent was made up of former residents of the Riverina.

This latter group was an important part of the survey as it provides information on why people left the Riverina. In this regard, the survey data shows that everyone who had left the region did so because of better job opportunities elsewhere. This is good news in a way, as it appears that people are being “pulled” away from the Riverina to advance their careers rather than being pushed “away” by factors such as intolerance, isolation or unemployment.

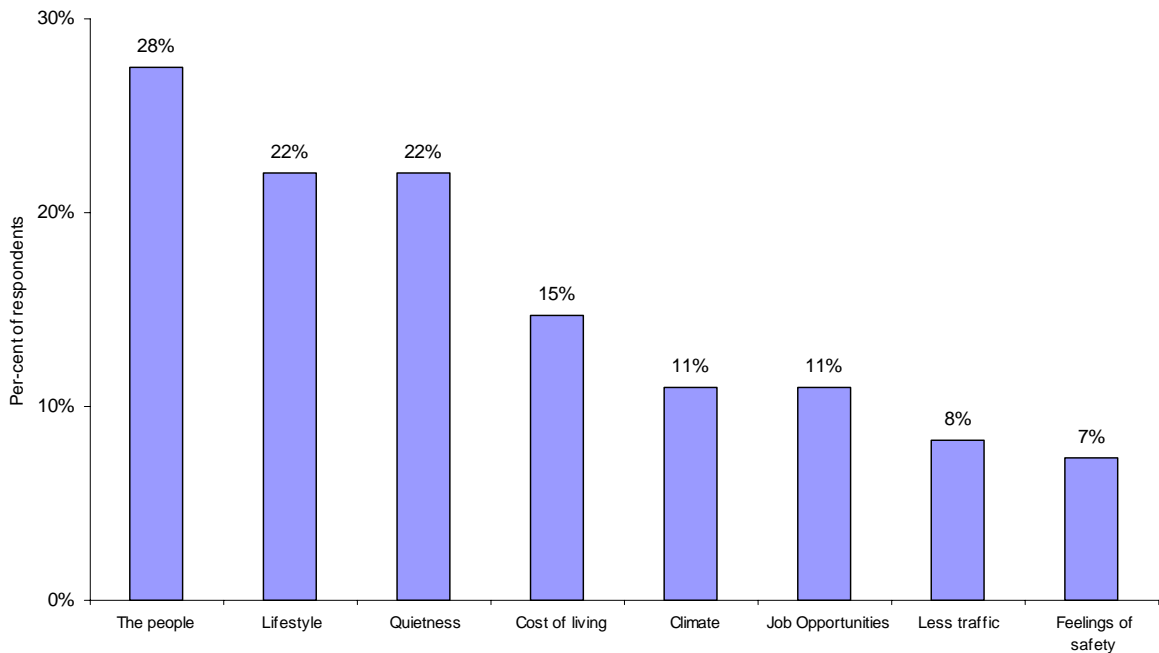
This finding is confirmed when people’s movement intentions are analysed. Of those surveyed - a high proportion - almost one in five said that they intended to leave the Riverina in the next 12 months. Of those contemplating a move from the Riverina, three-quarters stated that they would be leaving for work related reasons.

Examining people’s movement intentions in more detail it is of some concern that most of the people intending to move have lived in the region for more than two years.

Likes and dislikes

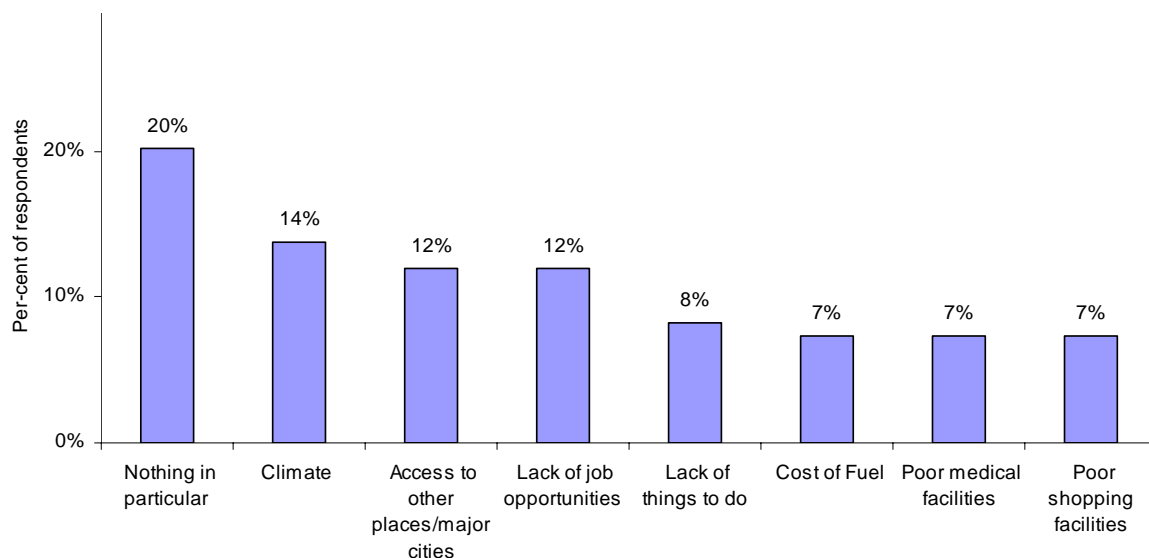
Knowing what people like about a particular region can assist in the promotion of an area to overseas migrants. In the case of the Riverina, the ranges of answers given were a good reflection of the benefits of living a regional area. For example, friendly people, a relaxed lifestyle, quietness, a lower cost of living, feelings of safety and less traffic. Focus group comments support these findings – *“It’s a better lifestyle for my family and less travelling too work for me. It’s like living in the country and the city at the same time. you’ve got all the facilities hospital, sports, leisure and it is all in close proximity for the kids....quite, contact with real aussies, mix of cultures, friendly people’*. Work related aspects such as job opportunities and job satisfaction were much less pronounced.

Figure 5.4: Things most liked about the Riverina



Asking skilled migrants what they don’t like about a place is useful as it highlights areas where improvements can possibly be made. In the case of this survey, issues related to remoteness, such as access to other places’ a lack of things to do, poor facilities were the most significant. It is worth noting that the Riverina covers more than 60 000 square kms (an area roughly the size of Tasmania) ranging from isolated farming communities to large regional centres such as Griffith and Wagga Wagga. Thus the importance that migrants attach to some of these issues will vary a lot over the region.

Figure 5.5: Things most disliked about the Riverina



When comparing peoples likes and dislikes, it is clear that people had more good things than bad things to say about the Riverina. This positive result is confirmed by the finding that almost 90 per cent said that they had been made to feel welcome since coming to the Riverina. Lack of job opportunities was discussed by a number of migrants at the focus groups. A skilled migrant noted at a focus group *“the chances for promotion and advancement are limited, especially at the senior level in marketing”*.

Satisfaction with services

Facilities and services such as hospitals and medical centres, good schools and accessible transport are very important contributors to the retention of migrants in the regions. In the survey, respondents were asked to rate the quality of these services on a three-point scale of ‘satisfied’, ‘neither satisfied or dissatisfied’, ‘dissatisfied’.

Table 5.2: Satisfaction with services

	Medical	Transport	Education
Proportion using service	86%	77%	61%
Satisfaction with service			
Satisfied	41%	37%	58%
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	30%	26%	27%
Dissatisfied	23%	37%	15%

As can be seen from the above table, migrants have different views about the quality of services. Although many migrants are happy with the services provided – a significant minority is not. This diversity of opinion could be a reflection of the geographic dispersal of migrants in the Riverina – for example a migrant living in a small town would not have the same access to medical facilities or public transport as someone living in Wagga Wagga.

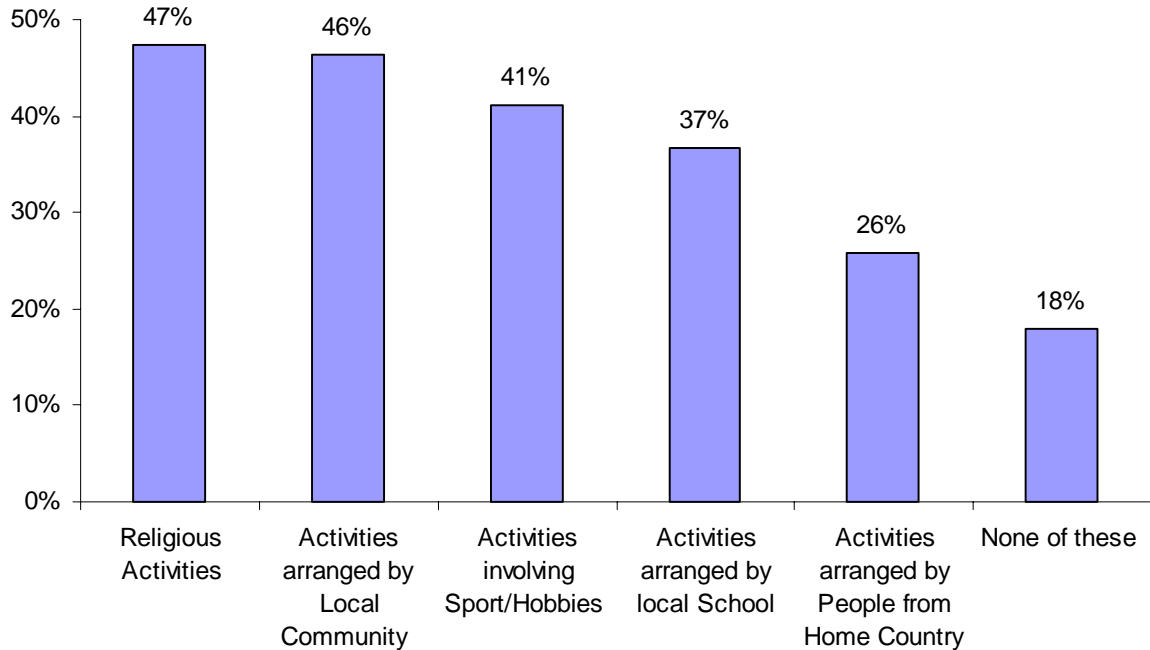
Education services in the Riverina had the highest satisfaction levels – 58 per cent were satisfied with the level of education their children received. This generally positive view is consistent with another survey finding showing that there were very few instances – only three out of 73 parents of school aged children - where children were unhappy at school. At the focus groups one skilled migrant advised *“Need translators in schools to help the kids with English”*.

Community Participation

By getting involved in local activities, a new migrant is demonstrating an increased commitment to their new community. Along with this increased commitment, comes an increased social engagement – that is they get to relate to people from outside their immediate family and workplace environment in a more relaxed and social atmosphere.

Participants in the survey were asked to indicate which community activities they regularly participated in. As can be seen from figure, more than 80 per cent of those surveyed had participated in at least one community activity. More importantly, participation in activities arranged by the local community, local schools, or involving sport/hobbies were very common. These types of activities generally involve dealing with people from the wider community. They are therefore valuable in terms of migrant settlement and acceptance although ethnically based community activities were also relatively common. Migrants noted that *“Easy to meet people through the church...There is a large Phillipine community in Wagga Wagga...they are very friendly and want to help you.”*

Figure 5.6: Participation in community activities



Housing

Another way that migrants can show commitment to stay in an area is by purchasing a home. The survey shows, around a third of those surveyed have made this commitment. As expected, more established migrants had higher rates of home ownership. For example, some 56 per cent of those that had lived in the region for three years or more either owned or were purchasing their home. By comparison, only 15 per cent of those who had lived in the Riverina for less than three years were in this situation. A number of migrants believed that the Riverina housing was ‘affordable’.

To aid the settlement process skilled migrants suggested a number of improvements at the focus groups these included *“The information package they give skilled migrants could be improved...it’s too generic...the information should be very specific to three suburbs (Postcodes) of choice for the migrants.....When you get here DIAC should send a welcoming letter and pack outlining the assistance and benefits you are entitled to.....We need information on schooling, medical benefits...networking in the community...to cope with loneliness...someone from the council could play the role of a central contact person...a mentor for the first few weeks.”*

Working

English ability, experience in skilled occupations and educational attainment are all strongly co-related with their people's labour market outcomes. For example, a well educated migrant who speaks good English should perform better in the Australian labour market than a poorly educated migrant with little English.

As can be seen from table 5.3, most migrants perform well against these criteria:

- Virtually everyone surveyed indicated that they are good English speakers. This included 60 per cent who have English as their best language and 39 per cent whose mother tongue is not English but who speak English "well" or "very well". By way of comparison, 44 per cent of skilled primary applicants surveyed in the first wave of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia 3 spoke English as their best language and 50 per cent spoke English well or very well.
- Almost everyone has post school qualifications. Some 55 per cent have a university qualification - Bachelors degree or higher and further 30 per cent have other formal qualifications, diploma, trade certificate or AQF certificate.
- Nearly three-quarters were working in a professional occupation in their former country. A further 20 per cent were in other skilled occupations.
- Many migrants have worked in occupations which are in demand in regional areas, for example as nurses, doctors, teachers and accountants.

Table 5.3: English ability, education and skill level of primary applicants

English Ability (self assessed)	
English only or best language	58%
Very Well	10%
Well	29%
Not Well	4%
Educational Attainment	
Doctorate	7%
Masters Degree	16%
Bachelor degree/post grad	32%
Diploma	18%
AQF Cert 3-4	3%
Trade Qualification	14%
Other	5%
No Post School Qualifications	4%
Occupation in former country (most common)	
Registered Nurses	14%
Student	6%
University Lecturers and Tutors	5%
Accountants	5%
Secondary School Teachers	4%
Generalist Medical Practitioners	4%
General Managers	4%
Metal Fitters and Machinists	4%
Other	52%
Skill levels of occupation in former country	
Professional or management occupations (ASCO 1..2)	73%
Skilled occupations (ASCO 3..4)	18%
Other occupations (ASCO 5..9)	3%
Former students	6%

Labour market performance

There are three basic measures that can be used to gauge how well people are performing in the labour market. These are:

- Unemployment rates: the proportion of those in the labour market that are looking for work.
- Participation rates: the proportion of those surveyed who are participating in the labour market, that is people who are either working or are looking for work
- Employment to Population ratios: the proportion of those surveyed who are working.

Each of these measures has there advantages. The benefit of unemployment and participation rates for example, is that they have a high recognition factor recognised and can be compared against Australian averages. The advantage of the employment to population ratio is that is a simpler measure that is not affected by people mis-classifying themselves as unemployed when they are actually outside of the labour force and vice-versa.

Table 5.4: Labour market outcomes

	Survey respondents	Australia (Nov 2006)
Employment:Participation ratio	92%	62%
Unemployment Rate	5%	5%
Participation Rate	97%	65%

Against these basic measures, skilled migrants are performing very well. There is a low unemployment rate of five per cent and a very high participation rate of 97 per cent. This compares favourably with the current Australian averages of 4.6 per cent and 65 per cent respectively, it is also somewhat better than the results for skilled Primary Applicants from the LSIA 3 six months after arrival in Australia (nine per cent and 93 per cent).

Furthermore, most migrants found work quickly. In fact, 60 per cent of those who were working had obtained their first job in the Riverina prior to arrival. A further 27 per cent had found their first job within a month. For those who were unemployed or had taken more than a month to find work, the most common problem experienced work was a lack of recognition of qualifications.

As has already been shown, skilled migrants bring with them a high stock of skills and experience. It would therefore be expected that they were in jobs that are commensurate with their skills.

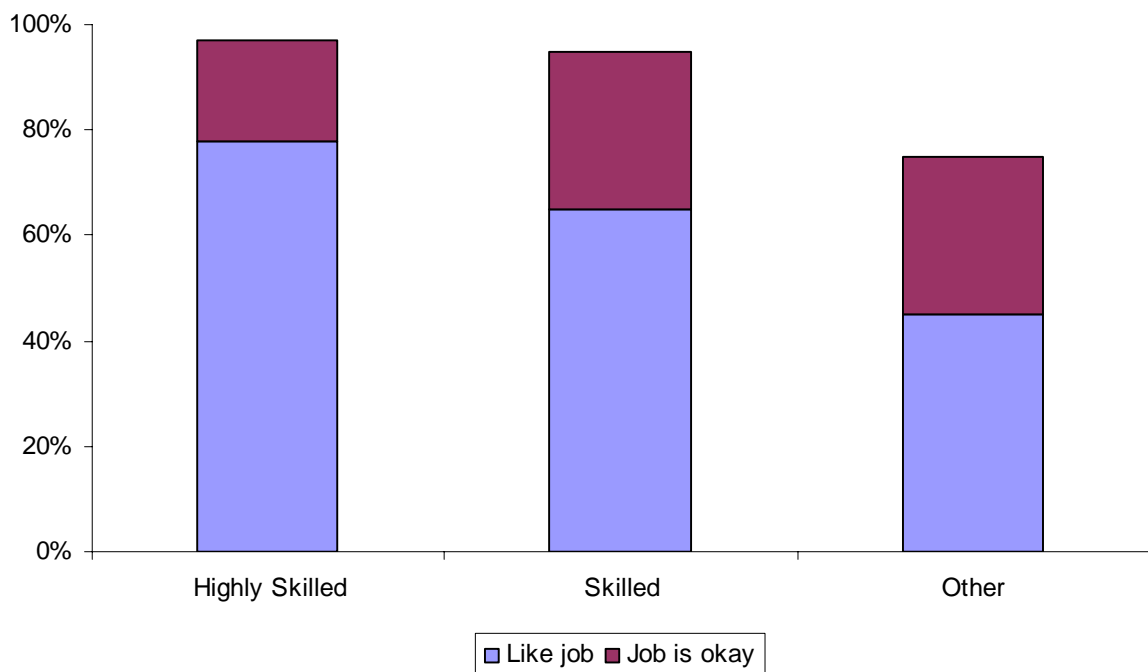
This is largely the case. Almost two thirds of jobs were in professional or management fields and a further 18 per cent were trade or associate professional occupations. Only 18 per cent of jobs were unskilled.

As well as this, almost three-quarters of migrants were working their nominated occupation. This means of course that more than a quarter were not working in their nominated occupation. Most of these were in unskilled occupations.

Further evidence that migrants are well suited to their jobs comes from the attitudinal question – “How do you feel about this job?” Of those surveyed, 70 per cent said that they liked their current job, a further 23 per cent said that their job was “okay”. Only three per cent actually disliked their job. This compares favourably with the first wave of LSIA 3 – where 55 per cent of skilled Primary Applicants liked their jobs and 32 per cent thought their job was okay.

As figure 5.7 shows, the more skilled the job, the better the worker’s perception. For example, almost 80 per cent of those in professional or management occupations liked their job. This is a finding that is also consistent with LSIA 3.

Figure 5.7: Attitude to job



Earnings

Most respondents are working in skilled jobs. Further analysis of the data also shows that the migrants surveyed had been in their job for around four years on average. Based on their level of skill and Australian work experience it would be expected that they would enjoy quite high incomes.

The survey data shows that this is the case. The average annual income of respondents was \$66 000, which is considerably higher than the average full-time adult earnings for Australia as a whole (\$57 000). As expected, the median income of those surveyed was considerably lower at \$50 000 per annum. In terms of hourly rates of pay, respondents earned \$28.50 per hour on average.

Table 5.5: Earnings of survey respondents

Annual Earnings	
\$25,000 pa or less	6%
\$25,001 - \$40,000 pa	30%
\$40,001 - \$60,000 pa	32%
More than \$60,000 pa	31%
<i>Median earnings</i>	\$50,000
<i>Mean earnings</i>	\$66,068
<i>Range</i>	\$6,000 - \$425,000 pa
Rates of Pay	
Less than \$15 per hour	19%
\$15 - \$25 per hour	42%
\$26 - \$35 per hour	26%
\$36 - \$45 per hour	4%
\$46 - \$55 per hour	3%
More than \$55 per hour	7%
<i>Median rate of pay</i>	\$21.60
<i>Mean rate of pay</i>	\$28.50

The survey also asked respondents to provide details of their partner's employment status and earnings. As can be seen from the following table, partners are less likely to be working, with only around 60 per cent employed compared with 92 per cent of Primary Applicants. Partners are only earning about half of what Primary Applicants are earning – a median income of \$25 000 pa compared with \$50 000 pa.

Table 5.6: Earnings and employment status of spouse

Household Structure	
PA and working spouse	45%
PA and non-working spouse	31%
Does not have partner	26%
Earnings of Partner	
\$25,000 pa or less	51%
\$25,001 - \$40,000 pa	27%
\$40,001 - \$60,000 pa	9%
More than \$60,000 pa	11%
<i>Median earnings</i>	\$25,000

This lack of engagement with the labour market is probably not a cause for concern, in fact it reflects the situation in many Australian households. What is worrying however, is the high proportion (around a third) of partners that were dissatisfied with their job. The frustration of being in a job where they couldn't use their skills and qualifications was the most common reason for these people disliking their job.

Appendix 1 – Survey description

As part of the evaluation of skilled migration to the Riverina, two mail-back surveys were conducted:

- A survey of employers in the Riverina
- A survey of skilled migrants to the Riverina

Both surveys were done in-house, using the resources of the Research and Statistics Section of DIAC. A mail-back survey was chosen as the information being asked of respondents is very simple and straightforward. Compared with other methods, a mail-back survey is also relatively cheap and quick.

Purpose of the surveys

The purpose of the employer survey was to find out:

- The extent of skill shortages in the Riverina
- The number of employers who use skilled migration to address skill shortages
- The methods used by employers to recruit skilled migrants
- The experiences and difficulties faced by employers when sponsoring and recruiting skilled migrants
- Employers' reasons for **not** using skilled migrants.

The skilled migrant survey collected information on:

- How skilled migrants came to live in the Riverina
- How they are settling – what they like and dislike about the place, whether they have been made welcome, satisfaction with health, transport and education services and their level of engagement with the local community.
- People's assessment about the quality of service from the Riverina Regional Development Board (RRDB) and DIAC.
- Labour market outcomes – employment rates, participation rates, earnings, use of skills, job satisfaction and difficulties finding work.

Development of the surveys

Representatives from the RRDB, the NSW Department of State and Regional Development and the Australian Bureau of Statistics were consulted in the development of the questionnaires for these surveys.

As the employer survey was going out to more than 50 businesses, approval by the ABS Statistical Clearing House of the survey questionnaire and methodology was also required.

To see how well the surveys worked in the field and to get an estimate of response rates, both employee and employer surveys were pilot-tested in July and August. Responses from these pilot surveys were incorporated into the final survey dataset.

Survey sample

The scope of the employer survey was all businesses needing skilled workers.

Initially, the RRDB was able to provide a list of around 70 businesses-clients that had recruited skilled migrants. The sample size was then increased using the current edition of the Riverina Yellow pages – deliberately excluding businesses that were unlikely to employ skilled workers, such as supermarkets, video libraries, take-away food stores and retail chains.

Sampling about a third of in-scope businesses resulted in a final sample of just over 1900 businesses.

The scope of the employee survey was primary applicants who arrived within the past six years and who had a permanent skilled visa.

Names and addresses of about 340 potential respondents were obtained from the following sources:

- **DIAC's settlement database** – This provided contact details of around 280 Primary Applicants from the Riverina. For migrants who were registered with Medicare, this list also distinguished between migrants who had left the Riverina, migrants who had stayed in the Riverina and migrants who had moved into the Riverina from another part of Australia.
- **The RRDB** – This was a list of around 50 skilled Primary Applicants who had been recruited by business clients of the RRDB.
- **Responses to press ads** – Advertisements were placed in Riverina newspapers, asking for skilled migrants to participate in the survey. Disappointingly, only 10 skilled migrants responded to these advertisements.

In addition the survey included nine participants from DIAC's survey of Skilled Independent Regional visa holders.

Timing of the surveys

Both surveys were conducted through September and October 2006. To improve the overall response rate, there was a reminder mail-out approximately three weeks after the initial dispatch.

Response rates

Response rates for both surveys were similar:

- 129 people responded to the employer survey, a response rate of 37 per cent.
- 643 businesses responded to the employer survey, a 34 per cent response rate.

For a voluntary survey this is very satisfactory rate of response.