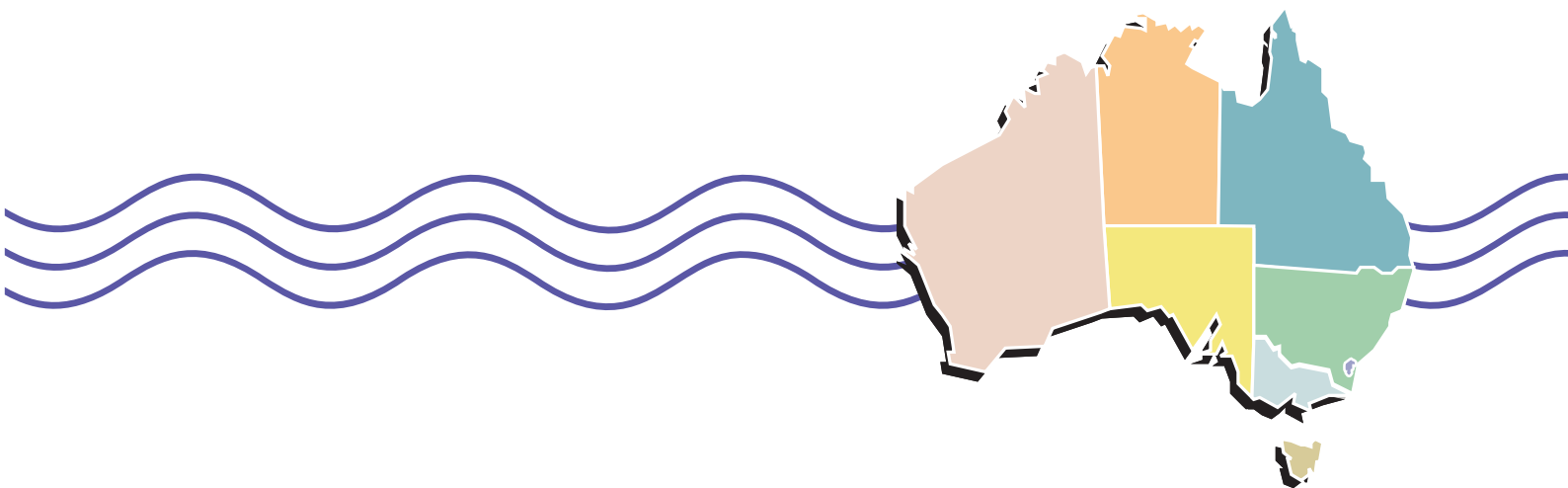


Chapter 3

State-Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM)

- A total of over 56,300 visas have been granted since the introduction of SSRM initiatives.
- In 2004-05 there were 18,697 visas granted under SSRM initiatives, an increase of 47 per cent on 2003-04.
- This outcome represents 24 per cent of the total Skill Stream in 2004-05.
- Victoria was the most popular State in 2004-05, (7,100 visas), followed by South Australia (4,951 visas), and Queensland (2,412 visas).



State-Specific and Regional Migration

All spheres of government are focused on the development, acquisition and retention of skills. The Australian Government recognises that a balanced migration program plays an important role in contributing to the economic, demographic and social development of regional Australia and low population growth areas. Since 1996–97 the Australian Government, in consultation with State and Territory Governments, has introduced a number of initiatives designed to assist State and Territory Governments and regional authorities to:

- encourage a more balanced dispersal of Australia's skilled migrant intake;
- address skill shortages that may exist in specific regions of Australia; and
- attract overseas business people to establish new or joint ventures.

Research into patterns of population distribution and the reasons why migrants decide to settle in certain areas of Australia shows that there are four factors which are of primary importance in determining where migrants settle: location of family members; the availability of employment; business opportunities; and prior experience of an area, for example, as an overseas student. The State-Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM) initiatives are based on these factors.

SSRM initiatives enable State/Territory governments, regional employers and development bodies to pursue regional development objectives and employment and business outcomes through the use of more flexible program provisions and threshold criteria for skilled migrants. They also provide an incentive for skilled migrants to locate to areas of Australia that are seeking more migrants through recognition of family linkages. These concessions have been carefully designed so that they do not undermine the overall integrity of the migration program objectives. Applicants must be skilled and meet mandatory health and character requirements.

For the 2004–05 program year 18,697 visas were granted under these initiatives. This is an increase of 47 per cent on the 2003–04 outcome of 12,725 visas and is the highest since the introduction of the initiatives in 1996–97. This outcome represents 24 per cent of the total Skill Stream in 2004–05.

The distribution of these visas across States and Territories for the last three years is provided in Figure 3-2. Over 56,400 visas have been granted since the introduction of SSRM initiatives.

The SSRM initiatives are designed to deliver a dispersal of skilled and business migrants in line with the needs of each jurisdiction. The Government continues to refine and introduce new initiatives to encourage skilled and business migrants to settle in regional Australia, with efforts continuing into 2005-06. The Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) visa provides a pathway to permanent residence for skilled people who wish to live and work in regional Australia or a low population growth metropolitan centre.

Fig. 3-1: State-Specific and Regional Migration Visa Grants, 1999–00 to 2004–05

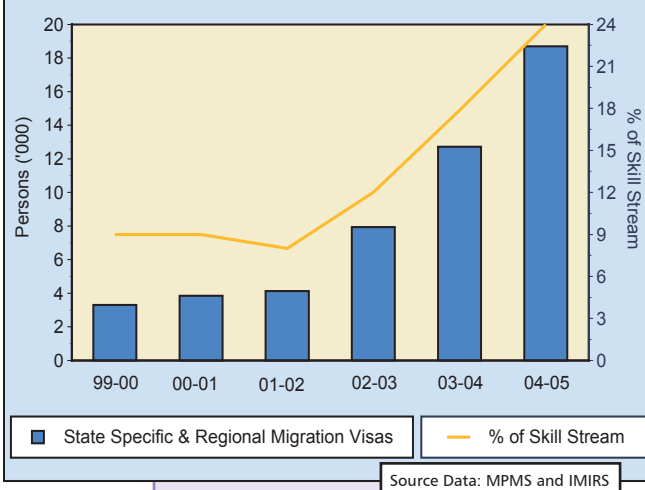


Fig. 3-2: Distribution of State-Specific and Regional Migration Visa Grants

State/Territory	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05
New South Wales	617	857	1,303
Victoria	4,146	6,459	7,100
Queensland	649	1,483	2,412
South Australia	1,324	2,071	4,951
Western Australia	584	968	1,786
Tasmania	197	291	459
Northern Territory	132	154	158
Australian Capital Territory	292	442	528
Total	7,941	12,725	18,697

Source Data: MPMS and IMIRS

Fig. 3-3: Settler Arrivals by State of Stay

State/Territory	2002–03	2003–04	2004–05
New South Wales	38.8%	36.3%	36.3%
Victoria	24.6%	25.1%	24.8%
Queensland	17.2%	18.2%	18.4%
South Australia	3.9%	4.3%	5.2%
Western Australia	13.1%	13.8%	13.2%
Tasmania	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Northern Territory	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
Australian Capital Territory	1.0%	0.9%	1.0%

Source Data: OAD Statistics DIMIA

Key Milestones in State-Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives

October 1995	–	Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS)
November 1996	–	Skilled – Regional Linked category
November 1996	–	Skill Matching Database (SMD)
July 1997	–	State/Territory Sponsored Regional Established Business in Australia (REBA) category
November 1997	–	State/Territory Nominated Independent (STNI) category
July 1998	–	Enhancement to Regional Linked category
July 1999	–	Skill Matching Visa (SMV) class
July 1999	–	Skilled - State/Territory Nominated Independent (STNI) class
July 1999	–	Skilled – Regional Sponsored (SRS) category
July 1999	–	English Language Concession for SRS category
July 2001	–	Skilled – Regional Sponsored (SRS) became the Skilled Designated Area Sponsored category (SDAS)
May to July 2002	–	Enhancements to the Skill Matching Database/Skill Matching Visa implemented (early registration and trial removal of initial fee)
November 2002	–	English Language Concession for Skill Matching Visa
November 2002	–	Applicants on Skill Matching Database eligible for nomination under Labour Agreements without lodging a new application
November 2002	–	Concessions for regional sponsorship of temporary business entrants
March 2003	–	Business Skills two- stage process
July 2003	–	Changes to the points test for General Skilled Migration allows for the award of 5 additional points for overseas students who study and reside in regional Australia or a low population growth metropolitan area for at least 2 years
July 2004	–	Two-stage Skilled-Independent Regional (Provisional) visa
July 2004	–	Creation of network of Regional Outreach Officers (ROOs)
April 2005	–	Skill Matching Database upgrade from Access to Oracle web-based product.
May 2005	–	Expansion of the Migration Occupations in Demand (MODL) list with additional trade, engineering and other occupations
July 2005	–	Changes to the points test for General Skilled Migration allows (SIR) (Provisional) visa applicants to be awarded 10 additional points when sponsored by an authorised State or Territory agency.

There are challenges in attracting migrants to regional Australia, particularly as there is a well established migration path to Sydney. The Australian Government has worked with the NSW Government to identify measures to contain migration numbers to Sydney. Agreed measures include the development of a Sydney and Selected Areas Skills Shortage List (SSASSL), and a higher salary threshold requirement for skilled persons sponsored to Sydney.

The proportion of skilled migrants opting to settle in regional Australia is expected to continue to grow strongly and greatly assist economic development in regional areas. State and Territory governments and regional authorities determine the extent of their involvement in SSRM initiatives depending on their own individual development priorities. The enhancements provide State and Territory governments with greater influence over the number and skill level of migrants settling in their jurisdictions, that is in line with their economic and regional development objectives. This partnership approach is essential to the long-term success of these policies.

These initiatives include permanent skilled migration categories as well as specific temporary residence programs that can be used to fill skill shortages. These regional initiatives can be used to the advantage of regions experiencing skill shortages. The main SSRM initiatives are:

- Employment based migration initiatives
 - State/Territory Nominated Independent Scheme (STNI)
 - Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS)

- Skill Matching Database (SMD)
- Skill Matching Visa (SMV)
- Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) (Provisional)
- Additional General Skilled Migration (GSM) points for study undertaken in a regional or low population growth area of Australia;
- Employment based temporary entry schemes
 - Sponsored Business Long Stay Visa;
- Family based initiatives
 - Skilled Designated Area Sponsored Category
 - Skilled Designated Area Sponsored Overseas Student;
- Business based initiatives
 - State/Territory Sponsored Business Visas (two stage process).

Details of these initiatives follow in this chapter and further information is on the department's website at www.immi.gov.au/migration/regional.

In addition to the State-Specific and Regional Migration initiatives there are a range of other migration categories (both permanent and temporary) that impact on regional Australia. Examples include:

- skilled migrants who do not migrate under regional initiatives, but who may still elect to reside in regional centres or low population growth metropolitan cities;
- Temporary Resident Doctors; and
- the Working Holiday Maker program, which allows young people to tour Australia and engage in short-term work during their stay which can be in regional areas.

Particular State-Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives

Skill Matching

The Skill Matching scheme, introduced on 1 November 1996, is designed to support State/Territory governments and employers in meeting their skill needs.

Skill matching is made possible by the Skill Matching Database (SMD). The database is a web-based tool, upgraded in April 2005. The SMD helps match potential skilled migrants with skilled vacancies or skill shortages in Australia. It contains the occupational, educational and work experience details of skilled applicants from overseas. Many of these applicants are interested in settling in regional Australia and have occupations that are in demand or in short supply in these areas. These potential migrants have lodged an application:

- in the Skilled Independent category and opted for skill matching by completing the relevant form; or
- for a Skill Matching Visa (see below).

Operated by the Commonwealth, the database is updated daily and is available to members of the skill matching network (comprising State and Territory governments and a network of regional development authorities).

State and Territory governments can nominate applicants from the database for the Skill Matching Visa or STNI scheme and employers can nominate applicants from the database for RSMS, Labour Agreements or the Employer Nomination Scheme.

The database is available on the Internet through DIMIA's website www.immi.gov.au/skills.

State/Territory Nominated Independent (STNI) Scheme

The STNI Scheme enables States and Territories to sponsor Skilled Independent category and Skill Matching Visa applicants, who are interested in settling in States and Territories where their skills are in demand. They can be identified through the Skill Matching Database or directly by State and Territory governments.

State and Territory governments participating in the scheme aim to select applicants who have a sound chance of gaining employment in that State or Territory soon after their arrival.

The Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian governments actively nominated skilled migrants in 2004–05. The 2004–05 Migration Program outcome included nearly 2,700 visas granted under the STNI and Skill Matching schemes. Of these, 1,412 persons were nominated by the Victorian Government, 1,154 persons by the South Australian Government and 76 persons by the Tasmanian Government.

Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme

The Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme was initiated in 1995–96 to assist employees in regional Australia fill skilled vacancies where they have been unable to do so through the local labour market. The scheme is available to employers in all areas of Australia except Perth, Melbourne, Wollongong, Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

The RSMS process involves an employer nomination (through a State or Territory Regional Certifying Body (RCB) to confirm that there is a genuine need for the position to be filled) and a visa application by the prospective employee.

Employers may nominate employees directly from overseas, or from within Australia. Those nominated from within Australia are often already in regional employment on a temporary basis.

For the position to be approved under this program there must be a genuine vacancy for a position in a business in regional Australia and, unless the appointment is exceptional, requires a person with an Australian diploma equivalent qualification, full time employment and for at least two years. The position can be approved as an exceptional appointment if the position is so highly specialised or unusual that a person with a diploma could not be found for the position. The nominee is generally expected to have the skills for the position at diploma level or higher (unless it is an exceptional appointment), be under the age of 45 and to have functional English. Any employer with their business based in regional Australia may participate in the scheme.

DIMIA actively promotes the RSMS and officers from DIMIA's Business Centres maintain close contact with interested bodies to increase awareness of the program. There is a special focus on developing closer links with Chambers of Commerce in regional areas and other government agencies such as the State and Regional Development authorities to overcome skill shortages.

Since its introduction in 1996 more than 11,300 visas have been granted under the RSMS. In 2004–05, a total of 3,166 visas were granted under the RSMS (onshore and offshore) which represents an increase of more than 45% in visa grants from last financial year.

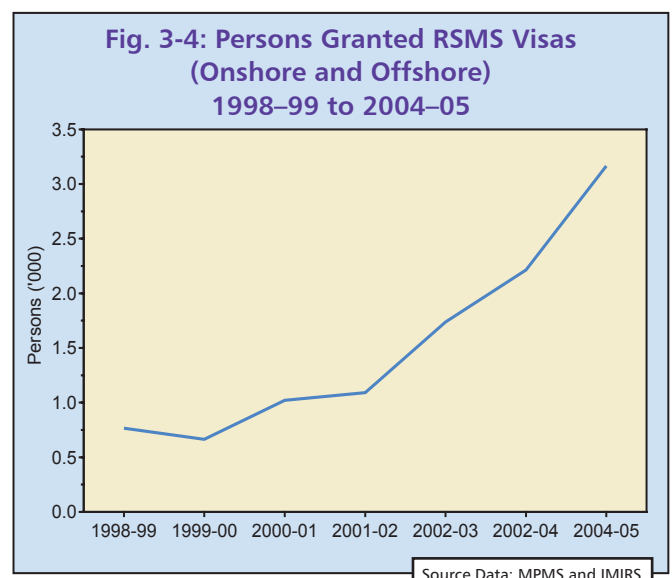
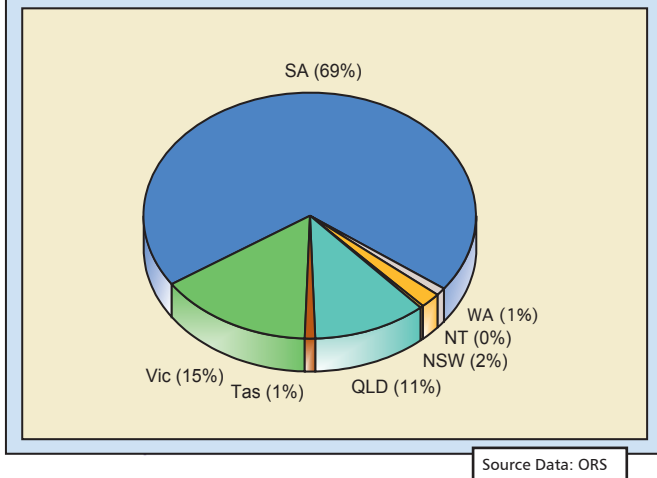


Fig. 3-5: SIR (Provisional) Visa Grants (persons) by Sponsoring State



More information on the RSMS can be found on DIMIA's website at www.immi.gov.au/migration/employers/rsms.htm.

A current list of Regional Certifying Bodies can be found at www.immi.gov.au/migration/employers/certifying_bodies.htm.

Skill Matching Visa

The Skill Matching visa provides the opportunity for skilled people who do not meet the current pass mark under the Skilled Independent category to be included on the Skill Matching Database for possible nominations by an employer or a State or Territory government.

The Skill Matching visa is not points tested and there is no initial cost to lodge an application. The applicant only pays the visa application charge upon successful nomination by either a State or Territory government or an employer. Applicants must meet key threshold criteria relating to skill, age and work experience. Compared to the General Skilled Migration (GSM) points tested categories, there is a lower recent work experience requirement and more options available for applicants to meet the English language requirement.

An English language concession applies for this category. This provides for participating States and Territories to make provisions for applicants with functional English to upgrade to vocational English level. The applicant must meet the cost. South Australia and Tasmania are gazetted for this purpose. The Northern Territory is also gazetted for this purpose and is considering becoming involved in the Skill Matching scheme.

Skilled Independent Regional (SIR) (Provisional)

Since 1 July 2004, skilled people who wish to live in regional Australia have been able to apply for a SIR (Provisional) visa. The SIR (Provisional) visa has been developed in consultation with State and Territory governments and is designed to attract skilled migrants who wish to live in a regional or low population growth area in Australia but may not be able to meet the criteria to be granted a permanent visa.

Applicants for the SIR (Provisional) visa are still required to meet the threshold criteria for General Skilled Migration and be assessed against the General Skilled Migration points test. However, the passmark that must be attained for the SIR (Provisional) visa is slightly lower at 110 points than that applied to Skilled Independent visas. In addition, from 1 July 2005, SIR (Provisional) visa applicants are eligible for 10 "sponsorship" points when sponsored by an authorised State or Territory government agency.

If approved, SIR (Provisional) visa applicants are granted a visa valid for three years. After they have resided in a regional or low population growth area for at least two years, and been employed for a total of 12 months, they are then eligible to apply for a permanent visa. A range of concessions are available to SIR (Provisional) visa holders applying for permanent residency under the Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS), State Territory Nominated Independent (STNI) or the State Territory Sponsored Business Owner (STSBO) visa categories.

An integral part of the SIR (Provisional) visa initiative is that an authorised State or Territory government agency or regional certifying body must sponsor a prospective applicant. Sponsorship enables States, Territories and regions to promote themselves to prospective migrants, target particular skills in short supply and give potential migrants information about living in their jurisdiction to help them settle.

In its first year of operation, 1,440 SIR (Provisional) visas were granted.

While the uptake of the visa did not reach initial projections, it is expected that a number of recent factors will contribute to significantly higher outcomes in 2005-06.

These factors include:

- the increase in the Skilled Independent Overseas Student passmark which came into effect on 1 April 2005 making the SIR (Provisional) visa an attractive option for graduates wanting to remain in Australia;
- the introduction of 10 additional "sponsorship" points available to SIR (Provisional) visa applicants who are sponsored by an authorised State or Territory government agency or Regional Certifying Body which will open up this visa option to a much wider range of skilled migrants; and
- increased promotional activities that have improved our clients' understanding of how the visa operates.

Furthermore, from 1 November 2005, Working Holiday and Occupational Trainee visa holders will be eligible to apply for and obtain a SIR (Provisional) visa without leaving Australia. As with other SIR (Provisional) visa applicants, they must be sponsored by an authorised State or Territory government agency or regional authority certifying body and meet the current passmark. This measure will significantly expand the pool of people available for sponsorship by State governments and regional authorities under

the SIR (Provisional) visa and have the additional advantage of attracting people who already have work experience in Australia.

Rewarding Study in Regional Australia

Overseas students who have studied and lived in regional Australia or a low population growth metropolitan area for at least two years can be awarded five points under the General Skilled Migration points test. This is in addition to the five points already available to applicants who have an Australian qualification. These points are designed to encourage overseas students to live and study in regional Australia. It also aims to encourage these overseas students to remain and contribute their skills to the benefit of these areas after they complete their studies.

In addition, any SIR (Provisional) visa applicant who has studied at a regional campus is eligible to apply for, and be granted, their SIR (Provisional) visa while they are in Australia — even if their nominated occupation only attracts 50 points on the General Skilled Migration points test (generally a 60 point occupation must be nominated by students).

Regional Australia, for the purposes of General Skilled Migration categories, is generally defined as any Statistical Division with a population at the 2001 Census of less than 200,000. In addition, metropolitan areas that have experienced low population growth between the 1996 Census and the 2001 Census (less than 50 per cent of national average population growth) are included and are known as ‘low population growth metropolitan areas’.

Temporary Skilled Workers

The temporary business (subclass 457) visa, which is discussed in detail in chapter 5, allows Australian businesses to appoint skilled overseas workers for up to four years. To meet the skilled occupation requirement, the position must meet minimum skill and salary thresholds. In November 2002, concessional arrangements were introduced to reflect the special skill needs of regional Australia. These provisions allow the salary threshold to be waived and the skill levels to be extended for regional Australia. Unskilled occupations are not included. The waiver of the threshold requirements must have the endorsement of the Regional Certifying Body in the area that the position is necessary, the salary levels are consistent with the awards for the occupation or industry and local levels, and the position could not be readily filled locally. More than 978 positions have been filled under these arrangements in the year 2004-05.

Skilled Designated Area Sponsored (SDAS) Category

This visa allows Australian citizens and permanent residents to sponsor skilled relatives (including first cousins, nieces, nephews and grandchildren) to join them in designated areas identified by State and Territory governments. Currently all of Australia

apart from Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Perth and Brisbane are designated areas. From 1 November 2005, the list of eligible applicants for this visa category will be extended to include the aunt or uncle of an applicant.

Applicants need to meet threshold criteria for skill, age, English language and work experience. There are flexible thresholds for work experience and the English language requirement. Under these concessional arrangements, the English language requirement may be met where:

- the applicant has been assessed as having only functional rather than vocational level English;
- the applicant’s sponsor lives in a State/Territory which has put appropriate upgrading arrangements in place and has been gazetted by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs for this purpose; and
- the applicant has paid the required fee to the designated service provider before the visa is granted.

From 1 July 2006, the SDAS visa will be modified to improve its effectiveness in helping participating areas of Australia to access the skilled migrants they need. From this date, skilled migrants sponsored by relatives living in a designated area of Australia will enter on a three year temporary visa. To be eligible to apply for permanent residence, applicants will need to demonstrate that they have lived in the same designated area as their sponsor for a minimum of two years and have worked in that area for at least one year.

In line with the objectives of the SDAS visa, the two-stage visa arrangement will give States and Territories greater assurance that people sponsored under these arrangements will settle in the same area as their sponsor.

Business Skills Category State-Specific and Regional Migration Initiatives

Since 1 March 2003, the majority of all Business Skills entrants enter Australia initially on a provisional visa for four years and, after satisfactory evidence of a specified level of business or investment activity, may apply for permanent residence. There is also provision for high calibre business migrants under the Business Talent visa to obtain direct permanent residence if they have high level business attributes and are sponsored by a State or Territory government agency.

The interests of State/Territory governments have been given greater priority in the development of the two-stage processing arrangements. Applicants may apply for sponsorship from a State or Territory government and be eligible to meet concessional criteria, enabling sponsors to attract the kinds of business people they are seeking to assist in the economic development of their specific areas. This linkage also encourages applicants who are more committed to succeeding in business in Australia.

In 2004-05, State/Territory agencies approved over 1,850 sponsorship applications and 90 per cent of all business skills provisional (first stage) visa applications were State/Territory sponsored.

In 2003-04 and 2004-05 State and Territory governments continued to sponsor business entrants to establish new or joint ventures or to continue a business they had established in a regional area. In 2004-05 there were 1,065 visas granted under State Sponsored Business Skills (SSBS) and Regional Established Business in Australia (REBA) categories. South Australia sponsored the highest percentage of these entrants (26 per cent), followed by Victoria and Western Australia (22 and 21 per cent respectively). New South Wales sponsored fewer than 10 per cent of these entrants.

Australia continues to actively encourage Business Skills entrants to set up business in regional, rural or low growth areas of Australia. The following are the State/Territory sponsored Business Skills visa categories.

State/Territory Sponsored Business Owner (Provisional)

For people with a successful business career, including senior management or ownership of a business, who have significant assets and a genuine and realistic commitment to participate as a principal in the management of a new or existing business in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Senior Executive (Provisional)

For senior executive employees of major overseas businesses who have been responsible for strategic policy development affecting a major component or a wide range of operations of that business, who have significant assets and a genuine and realistic commitment to participate as a principal in the management of a new or existing business in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Investor (Provisional)

For investors and business people who have an overall successful record of business or investment activities, have significant assets, are willing to invest funds in a designated investment in Australia for four years and have a genuine commitment to maintain business and investment activity in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Business Owner (Residence)

For holders of Business (Long Stay) Independent Executive visas or Business Skills (Provisional) visas who have established a successful business in Australia.

State/Territory Sponsored Investor (Residence)

For holders of the State/Territory Sponsored Investor (Provisional) visa who have maintained a designated investment in Australia for four years and have lived in the sponsoring state or territory for at least two years in the four years prior to application.

Business Talent (Migrant)

For high calibre business people who are owners or part owners of an overseas business and have an overall successful business career, significant business assets and have a genuine and realistic commitment to participate as a principal in the management of a new or existing business in Australia.

Regional Established Business in Australia (Residence)

For holders of Business (Long Stay) Independent Executive visas who have established a successful business in a 'Designated Area' of Australia.