



**THE HON DAVID COLEMAN MP
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP,
MIGRANT SERVICES AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS**

Ref No: MC19-016733

Mayor David O'Loughlin
President
Australian Local Government Association
8 Geils Court
DEAKIN ACT 2600

Dear Mayor

Thank you for your correspondence of 14 August 2019 concerning resolutions arising from the National General Assembly of Local Government. I appreciate the time you have taken to bring these matters to my attention.

I have addressed each of the resolutions outlined in your letter separately below:

Resolution 8

Regarding this resolution, I would firstly like to acknowledge the importance of the role that local government plays in hosting citizenship ceremonies on behalf of the Department of Home Affairs. This longstanding arrangement is highly valued by the Australian Government, as councils continue to be the most appropriate organisations to hold ceremonies and provide a formal, local welcome to their newest citizens.

Whilst I note that local government councils do not receive direct funding from the Department to conduct citizenship ceremonies, the Government (through the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development) provides Financial Assistance Grants to local government under the *Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995*. The grants are untied in the hands of local government, allowing councils to spend the grants in accordance with local priorities. I note that the Government brought forward \$1.3 billion of the Financial Assistance Grant program 2019-20 estimate for payment in 2018-19, which was paid to states and territories on 17 June 2019.

Resolution 64.2

The Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program commenced in 2014 and has provided short-term support to individuals while they engage with the Department to resolve their immigration status, either through the grant of a substantive visa or departure from Australia. The program has been regularly reviewed and updated to ensure it aligns to community standards and continues to support status resolution outcomes.

An individual's access to the SRSS program is assessed regularly on a case by case basis, with appropriate consideration given for individual and familial needs. The program encourages clients with work rights to support themselves and their family throughout the process of their immigration status being resolved. Individuals who have specific barriers to employment or resolving their immigration status, may continue to be supported throughout the SRSS program until these barriers are overcome, or their status is resolved.

Resolution 82

Regarding this resolution proposing government funding and support for migrant workers with Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) backgrounds in rural Australia, the Government uses a points based migration system to select migrants on the basis of their human capital attributes (age, qualifications, English level). Since 10 September 2016, points have been awarded under the skilled migration points test for prospective migrants who have completed an Australian postgraduate research qualification in STEM or information and communication technology (ICT) fields. These points aim to attract top-level migrants with skills in STEM and ICT to contribute to Australia's economy.

From 16 November 2019, the Government is increasing the points awarded for STEM and ICT qualifications from five to 10 points enabling Australia to further prioritise migrants with a qualification in these fields.

With regard to regional migration, this is a key priority of the Government. In November, two new Skilled Regional Provisional visas are being introduced that will encourage skilled migrants and their families to settle and remain in regional Australia for a minimum of three years before they become eligible for permanent residence. For the new Skilled Work Regional (provisional) visa, the points awarded for residing in regional Australia will increase from 10 to 15 points. This change will further support the current policy intent on addressing skills shortage and economic development in regional areas.

Thank you for raising these matters.

Yours sincerely



David Coleman

12 / 9 / 2019