

0.0 Commonwealth Migration Measures: Potential Impacts on Shire of Kondinin Employers

FILE NUMBER:**DATE:** 19 September 2026**AUTHOR:** Bruce Wright, Chief Executive Officer**AUTHORISED OFFICER:** Bruce Wright, Chief Executive Officer**DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST:** Author - Nil

Authoriser - Nil

ATTACHMENTS: Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

1. Notes the Commonwealth migration measures announced on 17 September 2026 and their potential implications for employers within the Shire of Kondinin.
2. Notes that commencement dates, transitional arrangements and detailed operating rules for several of the announced measures, including the proposed ballot for second and third-year Working Holiday Maker visas, had not been published as at 19 September 2026.
3. Writes to the Federal Member for O'Connor and the Commonwealth Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Immigration and Citizenship:
 - a) seeking confirmation of the proposed commencement date and transitional arrangements for the Working Holiday Maker ballot;
 - b) requesting appropriate transitional protection for people who have already completed or commenced the specified regional work; and
 - c) requesting that the seasonal workforce requirements of agricultural, hospitality, accommodation and tourism employers in the eastern Wheatbelt be considered before the measures are implemented.
4. Requests that the Western Australian Local Government Association consider the workforce implications of the announced measures for small regional local governments and communities through its advocacy program.

SUMMARY**VOTING REQUIREMENT**

Simple Majority

COUNCIL'S ROLE**Advocacy**

When Council advocates on its own behalf or on behalf of its community to another level of government/body/agency.

BACKGROUND

The Shire of Kondinin comprises the communities of Kondinin, Karlgarin and Hyden and covers approximately 7,340 square kilometres in the central-eastern Wheatbelt.

The local economy is based principally on broadacre agriculture, livestock, tourism and emerging mining activity. Grain production is the dominant land use, while Hyden supports an internationally recognised visitor economy associated with Wave Rock and surrounding attractions.

The Shire's relatively small resident population can make recruitment difficult where employment is seasonal, required at short notice, located away from larger regional centres or connected with fluctuations in agricultural and visitor activity.

Working Holiday Makers and other temporary migrant workers may form part of the available workforce for:

- farms and agricultural contractors;
- transport, mechanical and grain-handling businesses;
- accommodation providers;
- hospitality venues;
- tourism and visitor-service businesses; and
- other local employers.

The Shire does not currently hold reliable information about how many local employers use temporary migrant labour, the visa pathways involved or the number of workers potentially affected by the announced measures.

Confirmed Local Data

The 2021 Census recorded 847 usual residents in the Shire of Kondinin local government area. Of these, 629 people reported Australia as their country of birth. The Census also provides information about citizenship, employment and place of work.

These figures cannot be used to determine the number of migrant workers employed locally.

Conversely, seasonal workers employed within the Shire may not regard Kondinin, Karlgarin or Hyden as their usual place of residence and may therefore not be represented in the usual-resident figures.

The 2021 Census was also conducted during COVID-19 border restrictions. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has cautioned that those restrictions affected the number and composition of temporary visa holders present in Australia at that time.

The Department of Home Affairs publishes national and state-level data on temporary visa holders and employer-sponsored visas, but the publicly available information does not provide a complete and dependable count for the Shire of Kondinin. Working Holiday Makers are also mobile and are generally not tied to one nominated employer or workplace.

The appropriate conclusion is that temporary migrant workers may be employed within the Shire, but their number and importance to local employers have not been confirmed.

Working Holiday Makers

The Minister announced that second and third-year Working Holiday Maker visas would move to a ballot. Existing specified-work requirements would remain:

- 88 days of specified work to qualify for entry into the second-year ballot; and
- six months of specified work during the second visa period to qualify for entry into the third-year ballot.

A person could therefore complete the required work but not obtain a place through the ballot.

This may:

- reduce certainty for workers and employers;
- reduce the incentive for some Working Holiday Makers to undertake regional work;
- reduce the number of experienced workers available for subsequent seasons;
- make seasonal workforce planning more difficult; and
- create particular difficulties if the ballot or visa-processing timetable does not align with harvest or peak visitor periods.

The local effect will depend on matters that remained unpublished as at 19 September 2026, including:

- a) the commencement date;
- b) the timing and frequency of ballot rounds;
- c) application and selection processes;
- d) processing times after selection;
- e) the treatment of people who have already completed the required work; and
- f) transitional arrangements for people who have commenced specified work.

United Kingdom arrangements

British citizens remain exempt from the specified regional-work requirements for second and third-year Working Holiday Maker visas under arrangements associated with the Australia–United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement.

The Minister stated that UK Working Holiday Maker numbers had increased from approximately 17,000 around the pandemic-affected period in which the agreement was signed to just under 80,000. He also referred to an earlier pre-pandemic peak of approximately 35,000.

The Minister said UK applications would continue to be processed at the slower rate applied in recent years.

The UK exemption is relevant to regional communities because British Working Holiday Makers do not need to undertake specified regional work to access a second or third visa. They therefore do not have the same visa-based incentive to seek employment in locations such as the Shire of Kondinin.

This does not mean British Working Holiday Makers are unavailable for regional employment. It means their decision to work regionally is not driven by the specified-work requirement.

Agriculture and Harvest

Broadacre agriculture is the principal economic activity within the Shire. Local production includes wheat, barley, canola, lupins, peas and hay, with Kondinin, Karlgarin and Hyden serving as grain-receival locations.

Local agricultural businesses may require workers for: seeding; spraying and crop management; machinery operation; harvest; grain handling; mechanical and maintenance work; livestock activities; transport; and agricultural contracting (among others).

Not all of these roles are filled by Working Holiday Makers. The Shire does not currently have evidence establishing the proportion of the local agricultural workforce using that visa pathway, however, anecdotal information tells us that the number is proportionately high in the Shire.

The National Farmers' Federation states that Working Holiday Makers fill approximately one in seven Australian farm jobs. Industry-commissioned research has also identified Working Holiday Maker

participation in grains, red meat, cotton and horticulture during peak periods. These national industry estimates should not be treated as evidence of the precise position within the Shire of Kondinin.

The Minister announced that agriculture, fisheries, construction, resources and teaching would be added to revised skilled-visa processing priorities. This may assist some employers seeking sponsored skilled workers.

Employer-sponsored visas generally involve greater cost, administration and longer-term employment commitments. They are not a direct substitute for every seasonal or short-term worker currently employed through the Working Holiday Maker program.

Tourism, Hospitality and Accommodation

Hyden is an important tourism destination, with visitor activity associated with Wave Rock, Mulka's Cave, Hippo's Yawn, the Humps Nature Reserve and other natural and cultural attractions.

Tourism supports accommodation, hospitality, retail and visitor-service employment within Kondinin, Hyden and the wider Shire.

Working Holiday Makers may be employed in areas including: accommodation servicing and housekeeping; food and beverage service; kitchen assistance; cleaning; retail and visitor servicing; grounds and property maintenance; and general tourism operations (among others).

Hospitality, accommodation and tourism were not identified among the sectors the Minister said would be added to the revised skilled-visa processing priorities.

Some businesses may be able to access employer-sponsored visas or the WA DAMA. These pathways depend on the occupation, proposed employment, employer eligibility and the worker's qualifications and experience. They are unlikely to provide a practical alternative for every casual, seasonal or lower-skilled position.

Possible local effects include reduced opening hours, reduced accommodation capacity, higher recruitment costs and increased workloads for existing employees and business owners. These effects have not been established and require consultation with local businesses.

Alternative Workforce Pathways

Western Australian Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)

The WA DAMA covers metropolitan and regional Western Australia. It allows eligible employers to access specified additional occupations and potential concessions where appropriately qualified Australian workers cannot be recruited.

Available visa pathways include:

- Skills in Demand visa, subclass 482;
- Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional visa, subclass 494; and
- Employer Nomination Scheme visa, subclass 186.

Depending on the occupation and pathway, concessions may relate to age, English-language requirements, work experience, income requirements or access to permanent residence. These concessions are occupation-specific and are not automatically available to every business or applicant.

Employers must first obtain endorsement from the relevant Designated Area Representative. For the statewide WA DAMA, endorsement is administered by Migration Services WA.

The WA DAMA may assist employers with ongoing skilled vacancies, but it is unlikely to replace all short-term or seasonal labour supplied through the Working Holiday Maker program.

Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme (PALM)

The PALM scheme enables eligible businesses to recruit workers from nine Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste where sufficient Australian workers are unavailable.

The scheme provides:

- short-term placements of up to nine months;
- long-term placements of between one and four years; and
- access to workers for unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled positions.

Agriculture and selected agriculture-related food manufacturing activities are not subject to the ordinary regional postcode restrictions.

An employer must either become an approved PALM employer or engage an approved PALM labour-hire company. The scheme includes substantial employment, worker-welfare, accommodation, transport and compliance obligations.

It may be suitable for some larger or coordinated workforce requirements but may not be accessible or cost-effective for every small local employer.

FINANCIAL

There is no identified direct financial impact on the Shire arising from the announced Commonwealth measures. Possible indirect effects include:

- reduced local economic activity;
- lower visitor-service or accommodation capacity;
- reduced spending by temporary residents;
- higher recruitment costs for local businesses; and
- reduced business operating hours or service availability.

These indirect effects cannot presently be quantified.

RISK

Agricultural workforce: Medium

The proposed ballot may reduce the availability or certainty of second and third-year Working Holiday Makers during peak agricultural periods. The degree of local exposure is unknown because the Shire does not hold confirmed data about the number of temporary migrant workers used by local agricultural businesses.

Tourism, hospitality and accommodation workforce: Medium

Kondinin and Hyden businesses may use temporary workers to respond to fluctuations in visitor demand.

Hospitality, accommodation and tourism were not identified among the sectors to be added to the announced skilled-visa processing priorities.

Local business continuity: Medium

Businesses unable to recruit sufficient workers may reduce production, accommodation capacity, operating hours or services.

Worker accommodation: High

The availability, quality and cost of worker accommodation may limit the capacity of local employers to attract Australian or migrant workers.

Migration pathways alone will not resolve workforce shortages if suitable accommodation is unavailable.

Information accuracy: High

Several measures remain policy announcements without published commencement dates, detailed instruments or transitional arrangements.

Shire communications should state that:

- implementation details remain subject to change;
- visa eligibility is determined by the Commonwealth;
- the Shire does not provide migration advice; and
- employers and applicants should use official information or obtain advice from a registered migration agent.

POLICY

There is no Council policy specifically governing migration or visa matters. Council's proposed involvement would be limited to: gathering local workforce information; representing local economic interests; facilitating access to authoritative information; supporting regional economic development; and referring employers to appropriate Commonwealth and State agencies.

The Shire would not:

- provide migration or visa advice;
- determine visa eligibility;
- make representations about individual visa applications; or
- guarantee access to a particular workforce pathway.

Council's advocacy should remain focused on local workforce requirements rather than taking a position on overall national migration levels.

STATUTORY

The proposed actions align with the Shire of Kondinin Strategic Community Plan 2022–2032 and its vision of a “thriving and sustainable future”. They support local economic resilience by identifying workforce needs, assisting employers to access reliable information and advocating for regional workforce requirements.

Any substantial initiative arising from the consultation, such as worker accommodation or a regional workforce program, would require separate assessment and Council approval.

STRATEGIC**Theme****2. ECONOMY****Goal****2.1 Support the diverse industry across the Shire****Strategy****2.1.2 We support and advocate for the agricultural industry in our Shire**

- 2.1.3 Coordinated communication and promotion of business, employment and lifestyle opportunities occurs

COMMENT

The proposed ballot for second and third-year Working Holiday Maker visas may affect agricultural, tourism, hospitality and accommodation employers within the Shire of Kondinin.

The actual local effect is unknown. No current published dataset provides a reliable count of temporary migrant workers employed within the Shire, and the Commonwealth had not published key commencement dates or transitional rules as at 19 September 2026.

It would therefore be premature for Council to assert that local businesses are heavily dependent on migrant workers or that the announced measures will produce a particular workforce outcome.

The recommended approach is to:

1. consult local employers;
2. seek authoritative implementation details;
3. request appropriate transitional arrangements;
4. advocate for eastern Wheatbelt workforce requirements;
5. engage WALGA in regional advocacy; and
6. help employers access official information about alternative workforce pathways.

This approach allows Council to respond to a credible local economic risk while ensuring that its advocacy is based on evidence rather than assumptions.

CONSULTATION

Nil