



Wednesday, April 20, 2016

Response to the request by the SA Department for State Development for industry/professional association input to SA skills in demand for migration

Skills in demand in the livestock industries of South Australia

The livestock industries play an important role in the financial wellbeing of South Australia. In the 2013/2014 year the livestock industries in South Australia had a farm gate value of \$1.298 billion. This was 21.4% of South Australia's total agricultural production.

For the livestock industries to continue to be able to perform at this level and to continue to make valuable contributions to the financial health of the State it is important that it has access to a well trained and experienced work force. This includes the following skills;

- Shearers, shed hands and wool classers
- Musterers and stock handlers
- Farm managers and overseers
- General farm hands
- Maintenance workers

Unfortunately many farmers and pastoralists in South Australia are currently having difficulty finding both skilled and unskilled staff locally. Even though South Australia has the highest unemployment rate in the Commonwealth there seems to be a reluctance of workers to look at a change in career to working in the livestock industries and in rural South Australia.

Changes in South Australian's Rural Population

The South Australian Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure recently published a study on population projections for the State to 2031. This showed that currently 1,715,299 people reside in South Australia; of these 1,265,052 or nearly 73% live in Adelaide.

The statistics for the other statistical divisions are as follows are as follows:

- Outer Adelaide 151,368
- Yorke and Lower North 47,843
- Murray Lands 69,602
- South East 65,362



- Eyre 35,429
- Northern 80,643

The predictions for 2031 are that the population of South Australia will rise to 1,936,812 and Adelaide will have 1,438,477 residents. This will be 74% of the State population in 2031. The predicted populations for the other statistical divisions are as follows:

- Outer Adelaide 189,606 25% increase
- Yorke and Lower North 51,403 7.5% increase
- Murray Lands 71,401 3% increase
- South East 66,472 2% increase
- Eyre 36,771 4% increase
- Northern 82,682 2.5% increase

Though a small increase in rural populations is predicted, much of that increase will occur in large towns/cities in each statistical division. In Yorke and Lower North the most growth will occur in the Copper Coast District Council, in the Murray Lands it will occur in Murray Bridge, in the South East at Mount Gambier, in Eyre it will be at Port Lincoln and Lower Eyre Peninsula, and in the Northern area at Port Augusta and Whyalla (though revised projections may now question any expansion at Whyalla).

Two critical issues facing the supply of skilled farm workers in South Australia

In 1981 the average of farmers and farm workers in South Australia was 44 years of age; in 2011 this had risen to 53 years. The trend is moving upwards with more and more farmers and their employees being actively engaged in farming well past 70 years old of age. Unfortunately as we age we may lose our dynamism and interest in changing farming systems. Over time the younger generation becomes unhappy with the situation and move on.

In the last 40 years the “sponge effect” has been in play in South Australia. The process of large centres sucking the population away from smaller centres has been rife. As smaller centres lose facilities and services the town dies. Firstly goes the bank, then the hotel, then the school and then the general store. Eventually the town exists of a few derelict buildings and a handful of residents.

When the movement of the population from a smaller centre to a larger centre takes place the pool of potential employees reduces substantially. Likely employees are attracted to the better lifestyle offered by the bigger centres and so the spiral gathers momentum.

Over time many farm employees leave their farm employment to follow friends and family whom had earlier moved on. Thus we have a situation that creates a serious vacuum in the supply of likely farm workers.



Our Position

The South Australian Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure report outlines the likely scenario in the rural community. Though regional areas will have an increased population most of this growth will occur in the larger towns. This will continue the gradual drop in potential workers in the livestock industries over the next 15 years.

In order to meet the future needs of farmers and pastoralists there needs to be an active promotion of opportunities for migrants with skills and experiences relative to the livestock industries. Livestock SA strongly supports such an action.

Shortage of shearers and associated wool harvesting skills

Livestock SA is particularly concerned about the shortage of shearers, wool classers and even shed hands. Even though the wool industry is now much smaller than historically, it is difficult to attract people to work in wool harvesting. TAFE SA is the recognised training organisation in this State for shearers and wool classers but unfortunately the increased cost that is charged for their courses is a huge deterrent to anyone considering joining this industry and learning the necessary skills.