

Push to fill region's jobs

Council to run migrant program

EMPLOYMENT

BY RACHAEL HOULIHAN

Region

MANY of the region's employers are crying out for skilled workers, and Warrnambool City Council is working on an innovative long-term solution to fill the jobs gap.

With the support of Wannon MP Dan Tehan, the council is set to launch an application to secure a Federal Government designated area migration agreement (DAMA).

City growth director Andrew Paton said the region's residents weren't filling job vacancies, so DAMA was one solution. Councillors will vote on submitting the application at Monday's council meeting and then if it is accepted by the Federal Government, it will run over three years from 2019-21.

Under the DAMA framework, employers in areas experiencing skills and labour shortages can sponsor skilled and semi-skilled overseas workers.

DAMAs are designed to ensure employers recruit Australians as a first priority and prioritise initiatives and

strategies to facilitate the recruitment and retention of Australian workers. Warrnambool would be the second region to have a DAMA, with the first currently in place to cover the Northern Territory.

As previously reported in *The Standard*, there is a need to fill 1000 specific jobs, which the region's employers are struggling to fill. It comes as the Victorian Skills Commissioner Neil Coulson launched the Great South Coast regional skills demand profile in Portland this week, highlighting the need for more than 3000 more workers in the industries across the region by 2021.

Many employers are now looking to employ migrants, with a number of south-west businesses already engaged with overseas workers, especially in the agricultural and meat industry.

Mr Paton said there was three reasons why the council would run DAMA in the region, as the jobs available were not being filled by local residents.

"We have a flatline in population growth," he said. "In Warrnambool it is one per cent, and across the region

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THE Great South Coast has a growing demand for skilled workers, with jobs in the region expected to at least increase by more than 3000 in the next three years.

Victorian Skills Commissioner Neil Coulson launched the regional skills

demand profile in Portland, which detailed the experiences of south-west employers who are struggling to find skilled workers to fill positions.

Every industry across the region will have an increase in the number of workers it requires by 2021, with agriculture, manufacturing,

healthcare, tourism and transport industries the most in demand.

The profile is a comprehensive overview of the region's employment needs.

Mr Coulson said it honed in on the specific shortages in the south-west and would inform higher educators, schools and young people on

it is three per cent. We have really low unemployment, around 2.9 per cent and we have an aging population. Census data shows between 2006 and 2016 there was

1000 less people of working age in the region. We have individuals screaming out for skilled workers. The government is now giving us an opportunity to address it."

He said attracting growth was complex and DAMA would help to address long-standing skills shortages. "The agreement is specific

to our region," he said. "DAMA will list jobs that are short in our region. The three-year program offers pathways to permanent residency."

GREAT: Warrnambool City Council chief executive officer Bruce Anson, Victorian Skills Commissioner Neil Coulson and mayor Tony Herbert at the launch of the regional skills demand profile. **Picture:** Morgan Hancock



Skills shortage highlighted in south-west

where the jobs were.

"By addressing areas of skills shortages for employers we can raise prosperity and productivity while providing a smoother transition to working life for our young people," he said. "We can help all young people gain careers without having to leave behind family and

friends. This report shows there are good jobs and great careers available in the region. This information can start the conversation and we can get it out to schools through career education with the support of industry to encourage more work experience and more opportunities for young people to

understand what the great job opportunities are with local employers."

City of Warrnambool Council chief executive officer Bruce Anson said all industries needed more skilled workers.

"Skilled population attraction is vital," he said.

— RACHAEL HOULIHAN



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