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**BOOSTING OUR POPULATION: NEW FIVE YEAR NT MIGRATION AGREEMENT BEGINS**

An additional 36 occupations are now available to overseas nationals in the Northern Territory, after a new bilateral migration agreement took effect yesterday.

The second Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA II) between the NT Government and the Federal Government identifies 117 shortage occupations where employers can recruit skilled migrants if they are unable to fill positions locally.

Unlike the first groundbreaking agreement between the two jurisdictions, DAMA II visa holders can now apply for permanent residency after working in the Territory for at least three years.

NT Chief Minister Michael Gunner said the addition of the pathway to permanent residency in DAMA II gave skilled migrants a big incentive to move to the NT and stay long-term.

“The Territory Labor Government’s number one priority is jobs for Territorians but we know access to, and retention of, a suitably skilled workforce is a key issue for many employers and there is a need for additional workers, Mr Gunner said.

“We also know that more people moving to the Territory equals more jobs.

“The Territory Labor Government fought hard for the inclusion of the pathway to permanent residency in this new five year agreement, which we expect to significantly increase the number of skilled migrants moving to the Territory.

“The NT has a long and proud history of migration of overseas nationals and they have been a key contributor to economic growth, population growth and social diversity. This new agreement will help that continue.”

Federal Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs David Coleman said DAMA II is an example of the Government using Australia’s migration program to benefit specific locations.

“The Government is working to improve our immigration program to better match the needs of our states, territories and regional areas,” Mr Coleman said.

“Our first priority is always to fill jobs with Australians, but the immigration system can play an important role in helping to address regional skills gaps.

“The NT has seen first-hand the benefits of using a DAMA to respond to their unique workforce shortages.

“I am pleased that we can continue to partner with the NT Government to support the skills needs of local businesses where Australian workers are not available to fill those jobs.”

Under DAMA II, employers must seek to hire Australian workers through conducting labour market testing before any overseas workers can be recruited.

Mr Gunner said the new agreement complements the Territory Labor Government’s recently released population strategy, a comprehensive plan to attract people to live and work in the NT.

“Every Territorian benefits when we attract more people to the Territory,” Mr Gunner said.

“More people means more jobs and a stronger economy, which means better schools, better hospitals and more police.”

The first DAMA between the Federal and NT Governments was the first in Australia where a broader range of shortage occupations was available than those identified in standard skilled migration programs.

**Media Contacts**:              *Mr Gunner* Kim Stephens 0417 683 144

*Mr Coleman*                       Whitney Harris 0466 462 511