



14 November 2024

MPOL 337

Daran Ponter
Chair
Greater Wellington
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Dear Daran,

Thank you for your letter of 5 September regarding your concern at the decision announced in April to discontinue the residence pathway for bus drivers under the Transport Work to Residence Visa pathway. I can appreciate your interest in ensuring public transport operations remain fully staffed, given the reliance many in the Wellington region have on the system.

Sector agreements are not intended to fully resolve labour shortages, rather they are to provide sufficient support to sector while maintaining some tension to encourage reduced reliance on migrant labour. I am advised when the previous Government agreed to establish the Transport Sector Agreement residence pathway, the parameters were clearly communicated to the sector, including that the agreement was a one-off, time-limited measure to bolster critical shortages while the sector worked towards increased recruitment and retention of New Zealand workers.

Employers are still able to recruit migrant bus drivers on a temporary basis under the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) to fill shortages. There has been strong demand for AEWVs in other occupations without residence pathways, and there were solid volumes of AEWV applications for bus and truck driving roles before the residence pathway was announced. I am advised that since the AEWV was open in July 2022, over 1,000 visas have been granted for people to work in New Zealand specifically as a bus driver, and we will continue to monitor the situation. Under the new residence settings, 14 AEWVs have been granted to migrants to work as bus drivers.

We are currently undertaking a wider review of the AEWV to ensure that temporary work visa settings are as optimally balanced and as fit-for-purpose as possible. Following this, my attention will turn to the skilled residence settings (including the Green List and the Skilled Migrant Category (SMC)), as many employers have raised concerns that there are critical gaps in the Green List and the current eligibility criteria for the SMC is too narrow. However, the reality is that New Zealand does not have the absorptive capacity to offer residence to everyone who comes here on a work visa, and a line does need to be drawn somewhere, with higher-skilled roles generally being the priority.

Thank you for writing and take care.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erica Stanford'.

Hon Erica Stanford
Minister of Immigration