

Foreigners fill skilled positions, but unions fear riots

# Visas lure hundreds of staff

David Nankervis

INDIANS, Filipinos, Chinese and Vietnamese are leading the surge in foreign workers moving to South Australia.

Latest Immigration Department figures show 1470 foreigners now temporarily call this state home – an increase of 610, or 70 per cent, in the past two years.

The majority of these skilled migrants can be found working in hospitals, abattoirs, restaurants, manufacturing firms and universities.

Visa 457 allows companies to sponsor skilled workers to meet staff shortfalls for up to four years.

Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone hailed the scheme as an overwhelming success and expected the number of foreigners moving to this state to grow.

“We have an unemployment rate of under 2 per cent for skilled workers, which demonstrates there is a shortage,” she said.

“Imagine if a company gets an export order and needs more skilled staff but there are none available locally – it either brings in skilled workers from overseas or misses out on the business.”

Senator Vanstone said Visa 457 gave companies flexibility to grow and provided foreign workers who could train young Australians.

However, SA Unions secretary Janet Giles said workers brought in on these visas could deny job opportunities to South Australians.

“And we have many examples of 457 Visas being used in shonky arrangements where local employment is overlooked and overseas workers are exploited and treated unfairly,” she said.

The Federal Government should be investing in greater training opportunities and employment assistance for locals, instead of allowing foreign workers to be exploited at locals’ expense, Ms Giles said.

“Employers and the Federal Government have dropped the ball on skills and training and we now have a crisis.”

Electricity supply monopoly ETSA Utilities had been a big sponsor of foreign workers, recruiting 90 skilled staff from overseas, mostly powerline workers, during the past 16 months.

The workers have come from Britain, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya and the Philippines.

“ETSA Utilities, like many other Australian electricity companies, has had difficulty finding skilled powerline workers during the national labour shortage,” ETSA spokesman Craig Clarke said.

“Despite training our own ap-

prentice powerline workers, a process that takes four years, ETSA Utilities has needed extra staff more quickly to fulfil our commitment to South Australia.”

According to the Immigration Department, about 20 per cent of Visa 457 employees applied for permanent residency.

These applicants would join an increasing number of permanent skilled migrants living in SA.

The number of skilled workers coming to SA had risen almost 700 per cent in the past decade, from 1700 in 1996-97 to 11,500 in 2005-06.

Joseph Villanueva said the decision to leave his wife and three children in the Philippines and move to Adelaide to work was about opportunity.

In February, ETSA sponsored the 31-year-old powerline worker’s four year temporary migration.

“I miss my family and call them every night but I intend to apply to stay in Australia permanently and bring them out here,” Mr Villanueva said.

“Here I can earn three times as much as back home and there are much greater opportunities for my children in Adelaide.”



**HIGH POWERED:** Filipino linesmen Edwin Ramos (left) and Joseph Villanueva with supervisor Ashley Tomkin.  
Picture: Dylan Coker

## TOP 9 OCCUPATIONS FOR VISA WORKERS

Industry Classification	2004-05	2005-06
Slaughterperson	20	210
Registered nurse	180	210
Powerline tradesperson	10	60
Cook	50	40
General practitioner	<5	40
Welder (First Class)	<5	30
Driller	10	30
Metal fabricator	20	30
University lecturer	10	30

## TOP 6 COUNTRIES OF VISA WORKERS

Country of Citizenship	2004-05	2005-06
United Kingdom	240	250
China	90	240
Philippines	30	140
South Africa	60	90
India	40	90
United States	40	50

## AVERAGE SALARY OF VISA WORKERS

Industry Classification	2005-06
Cultural and recreational services	\$64,600
Electricity, gas and water supply	\$65,600
Finance and insurance	\$65,100
Manufacturing	\$67,700
Mining	\$86,300