

BUSINESS MIGRATION PROGRAM

Statement by Minister for Small Business

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine - Minister for Small Business) [9.09 am]: The Western Australian Government is committed to supporting diverse business development and economic growth throughout the State. One way in which it fulfils this commitment is through the Small Business Development Corporation's business migration program. The program is a Gallop Government initiative, which was launched last year by my predecessor, the previous Minister for Small Business.

The key services provided by the centre include information on all SBDC services for business migrants as well as critical information on visa criteria. The program encourages qualifying business migrants to undertake business or investment activities in Western Australia. In turn, this is having a major impact on the State's economic wellbeing, as business migrants are a prime source of new capital, business establishment, export income and employment generation.

The business migration program also assists and supports qualifying business migrants to be relocated to Western Australia. As such, the business migration program has become a vital tool in attracting investment to the State. The State Government's involvement in Emigrate 2003, a United Kingdom business migration expo earlier this year, has been successful in attracting a wealth of new business migrants to Western Australia.

The Small Business Development Corporation led delegation, which included nine WA migration agents, visited a UK business migration expo earlier this year. I am delighted to inform the House that as a direct result of this investment, the migration agents have already signed up 38 business migrants and 46 skilled migrants from the considerable interest their presence generated. These skilled and business migrants will add considerably to the Western Australian economy - generating jobs for other Western Australians. The UK expo, which is held annually, attracted 20 000 visitors this year and included exhibitors from Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. The UK has become one of the State's key markets for business migration and it is pleasing to note that our involvement in the Emigrate expo has had such a successful result.

From 1 March, the criteria for entry into Australia as a business migrant changed significantly, giving state and territory governments a much bigger role in attracting business migrants through sponsorship. The new business visa regulations involve applying for a provisional visa to come to Australia and establish a business or investment activity before applying for permanent residency status. While WA had less than 10 per cent of the nation's population, it continued to be one of the most popular States for business migration from all countries. WA is the country's second ranked destination for business migrants, attracting around 25 per cent of the total business migrant population behind New South Wales with only 27 per cent. It is clear from the results of this most recent delegation to the UK expo that people want to come to Western Australia to share our strong economy, quality lifestyle, excellent health services, outstanding education services, affordable housing and cultural diversity, making it in their view a better place to live.

I am proud to say the Gallop Government is having considerable success in assisting people to come to Western Australia and invest in our way of life. I will keep the House informed of the progress of this program.