MEDIA RELEASE
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Migration Cuts Could Cripple International Education
Leaders Risk Economic Destruction in Short-sighted Migration Debate

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) today slammed the Federal Opposition's proposed changes to Australia's immigration policy, saying wholesale cuts to migration could cripple the international education sector - Australia's largest services export industry - and lead to mass job losses across its 120,000-strong workforce.

And the peak body has warned both major political parties that short-sighted, reckless campaigns to cut migration would have wide-reaching economic implications for all Australians.

"A race to the bottom where the winner is the party with the smallest migration program does not serve the country well in the eyes of our regional neighbours and trading partners nor will it provide for the continued economic growth that our political leaders crave," said ACPET CEO, Andrew Smith.

"Every international student in Australia adds about $30,000 a year to the economy. A 33,000, or 7 per cent, drop in the number of international students would bring a $1bn hit to the economy."

"Poorly-planned migration and education policy changes are already on track to wipe more than $3.6 billion off the value of this industry in the next 18 months. Mr Abbott's proposal would see that figure skyrocket, making a difficult time for this industry truly devastating."

Speaking about the impact on the broader business community, Mr Smith said the tourism, hospitality and business sectors were united in their condemnation of the destructive and dangerous debate surrounding cuts to migration, and he pointed to recent research by the Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC), which showed that the ramifications of cutting student visas were not fully understood by either side of politics.

"Promises of a small Australia and drastically reduced immigration programs are a poor substitute for addressing border protection, housing affordability, under-investment in transport infrastructure and adequate regulation of international education." Mr Smith said.

"Attempts to neutralise these domestic challenges by mixing debates about asylum-seekers, immigration and population targets will not serve Australia well."

"A sustainable Australia will require continued investment in skills and knowledge, an investment that must be underpinned by skilled migration to ensure that the economic and social development of our communities continues. A robust General Skilled Migration program with links to our education and training system and robust labour market forecasts will ensure that Australia's future skills needs will be met.

"Whichever party wins Government, if they continue to undermine the international education sector through ill-conceived migration policy developed without consultation, tens of thousands of Australians will lose their jobs and billions of export dollars will be lost."

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