MEDIA RELEASE

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Urban Taskforce supports most of the Immigration changes announced by Minister Burke

CEO of Urban Taskforce Australia, Tom Forrest, today congratulated Minister for Home Affairs, Immigration and Citizenship, Hon Tony Burke, for taking a sensible and measured approach to migration.

Importantly, today's speech at the National Press Club explicitly recognised the desperate need Australia has for both skilled and unskilled construction workers.

We simply don't have enough trades and skilled workers to deliver the enormous pipeline of housing and infrastructure we need to meet our housing needs now and into the future.

Urban Taskforce is pleased to see that Ministerial Direction 119 which lists the priority skilled migrant needs of Australia, will be updated to prioritise migrants that have skills Australia needs in construction, education and agriculture.

Urban Taskforce is pleased that the Federal Government is not looking to smash our migration program which would have an economy destroying impact.

Migrants generate economic growth, pay taxes to support our health and education systems and support an aging population. Along with their critical role in construction, they often do jobs that are unpopular, but are necessary to support critical and growing sectors of our economy including health, aged care, child-care, tourism and agriculture.

The Federal Government's focus on ensuring our migration program is robust and fit for purpose and targeted at the skills we need is welcomed by the Urban Taskforce.

Urban Taskforce supports Minister Burke's assessment on housing shortages and migrants.

He said:

"… the housing shortage we have, is not caused by immigration, but immigration needs to be part of the solution for the housing crisis."

There clearly needed to be a recalibration of the immigration program. Those who are staying beyond their visa's should be required to return home.

The new "no further stay" provisions are a good step. Similarly, visas for students should be for students – not their families. We support Minister Burke's changes to the student visa program. Tightening up in these areas is a good thing.

However, the changes made to the backpacker program risk simply shifting the problem of an under supply of workers from the regions to the cities – to the detriment of housing supply (which is in crisis) in the cities!

We have a massive undersupply of unskilled construction labour in the property construction sector.

The requirement for backpackers to spend extra time in the regions in order to extend their visas should be extended to cover areas of critical unskilled worker shortages in all areas, like construction. That way we would be using the immigration system to support the areas where workers are most needed.

The plan to cut the number of backpackers extending their stay to two and particularly three years while they are working in jobs that cannot be filled from the home-grown workforce is myopic and is not supported.

*The comments and analysis above can be attributed to **Tom Forrest**, CEO, Urban Taskforce.*

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*The **Urban Taskforce Australia** is a property development industry group, representing Australia's most prominent property developers and equity financiers.*