

Skilled Migration and DAMA Overview

This document is the first of four documents provided as pre-reading material to stakeholders prior to Phase 2 consultation.

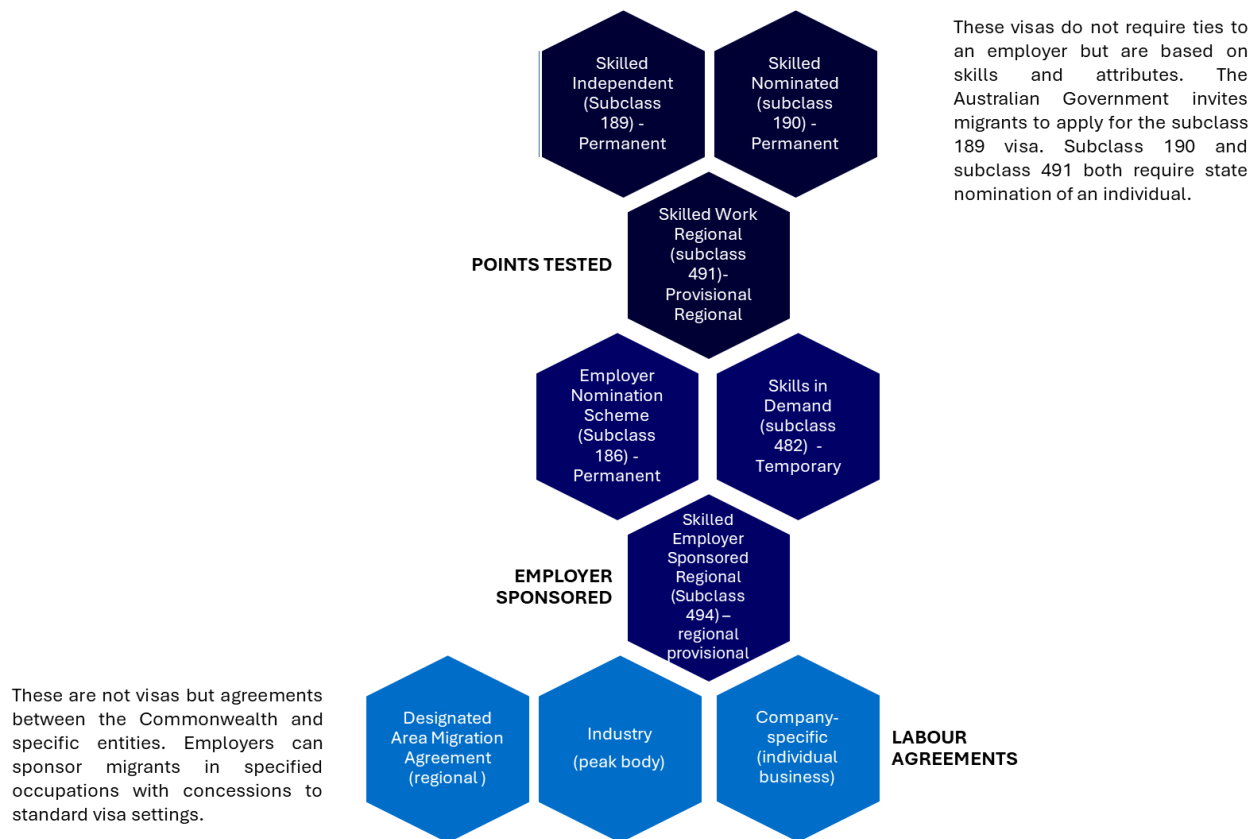
The skilled visa system in Australia – an overview

When a job vacancy cannot be filled by an Australian citizen or permanent resident, eligible overseas workers can be employed. There are a range of temporary, provisional and permanent visas that allow skilled migrants to live and work in Australia (see Figure 1). A summary of key visa features and requirements of employer sponsored visas is at Appendix A.

The Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs (DHA) is responsible for the policy and management of immigration and citizenship. It drafts legislation, sets visa fees and conditions, assesses applications and grants visas.

From lists administered by DHA, the Queensland Government develops a Queensland Skilled Occupation List annually, which it uses to nominate skilled migrants to apply for a permanent or provisional visa from the Australian Government to meet the state’s economic and workforce needs.

Figure 1: The skilled visa system



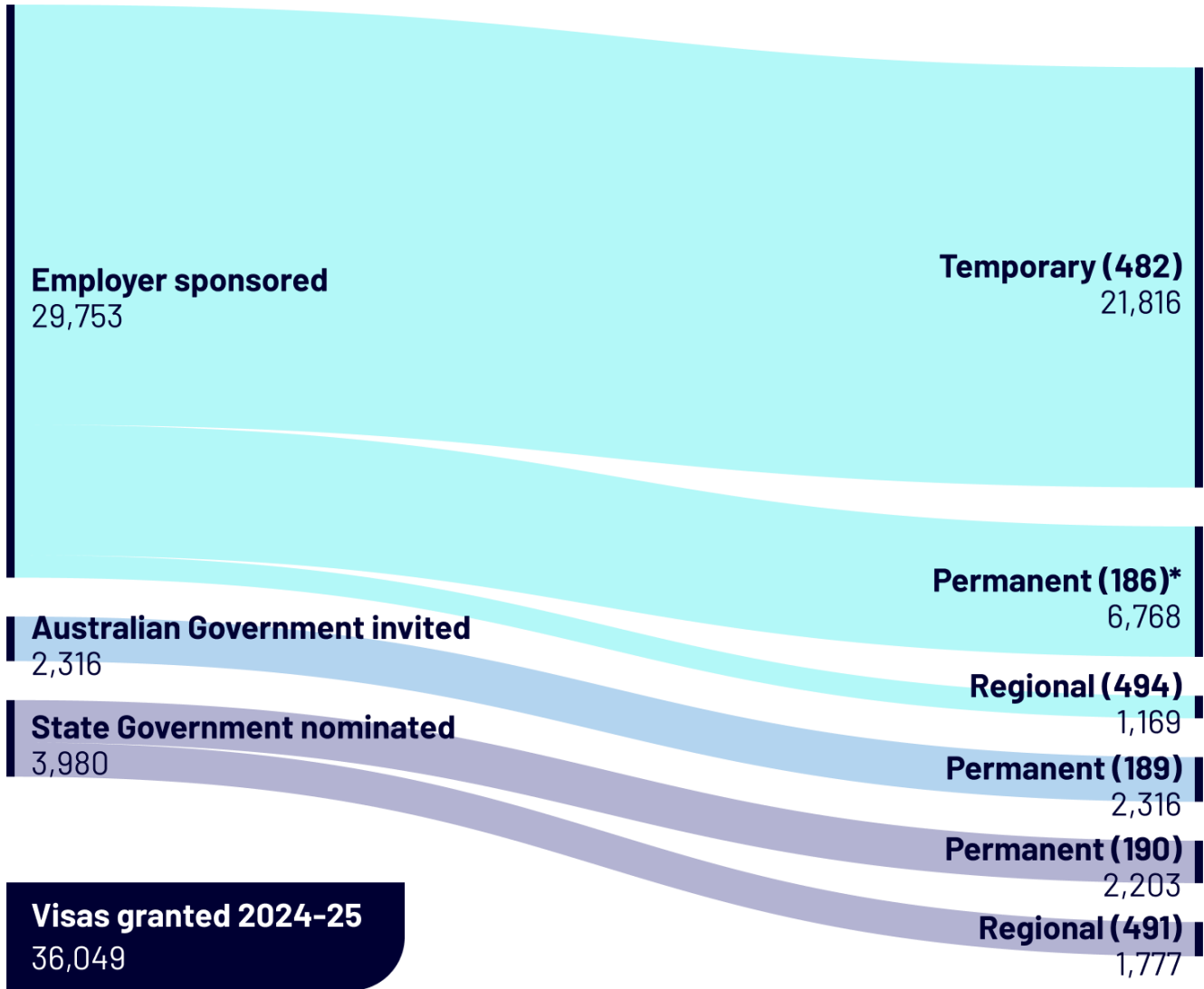
Skilled Migration in Queensland

In 2024-25, around 80% of the 36,049 skilled visas granted to primary applicants and their dependents intending to reside in Queensland were employer-sponsored, of which almost 22,000 were temporary subclass 482 visas (see Figure 2). Collectively, almost 70% of the temporary subclass 482 visas granted in Queensland were for positions in:

- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Accommodation and Food Services
- Manufacturing

- Professional, Scientific and Technical Services
- Other Services.

Figure 2. Visas granted in 2024-25 to skilled migrant workers and their dependents intending to reside in Queensland



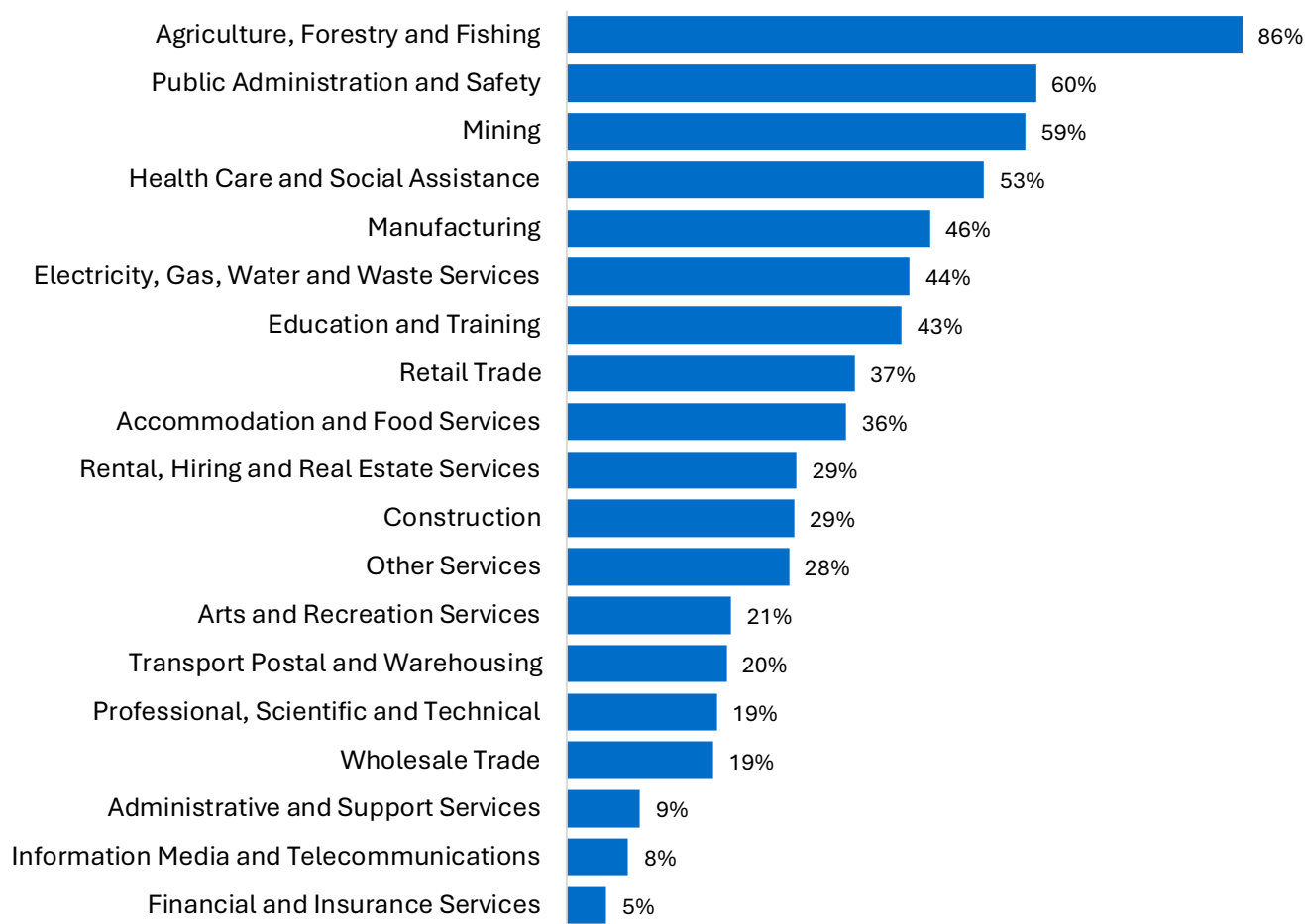
*An unknown proportion of the 6,768 permanent subclass 186 visas granted were to previous subclass 482 visa holders, who applied under the temporary resident transition stream.

Data for temporary subclass 482 visa primary applicants shows that in 2024-25, 40% were granted to workers for positions located outside the major centres of the Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast and Brisbane Greater Capital City Statistical Areas.¹

The majority of temporary subclass 482 visas granted for positions in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Public Administration and Safety, Mining, and Health Care and Social Assistance were in regional Queensland. However, fewer than one in ten temporary subclass 482 visas granted for jobs in Administrative and Support Services, Information Media and Telecommunications, and Financial and Insurance Services were in regional Queensland (see Figure 3).

¹ The GCSA comprises the following SA4s: Brisbane-North, Brisbane-South, Brisbane-East, Brisbane-West, Brisbane Inner City, Ipswich, Logan-Beaudesert, Moreton Bay-South, Moreton Bay-North.

Figure 3. Regional Queensland's share of total temporary subclass 482 visa grants per industry, 2024-25



Temporary subclass 482 visas granted in regional locations reflect the industrial variation of Queensland. For example, 43% of these visas granted for Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing positions were in the Darling Downs-Maranoa region. The Mackay-Isaac-Whitsunday region contained significant proportions of temporary subclass 482 visas granted for positions in both Mining (23%) and Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services (21%).

Almost one in four temporary subclass 482 visas granted for jobs in Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services were in the Toowoomba SA4. The importance of Wholesale Trade and Health Care and Social Assistance to Wide Bay is evident with 16% and 14% of all temporary subclass 482 visas granted to positions in these industries.

Designated Area Migration Agreements

A Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA) is a two-tier framework covering a defined regional area that provides flexibility for regions to respond to their unique economic and labour market conditions.

The first tier is the overarching five-year deed of agreement (head agreement) between the Australian Government and a Designated Area Representative (DAR), which may be a state or territory authority, or regional body. The second tier comprises individual labour agreements with employers under the settings of the head agreement for that region.

DAMAs provide greater access to overseas workers than standard skilled migration programs by adjusting occupation and skills lists and allowing negotiated concessions to usual visa requirements (e.g., salary concessions for disability support workers or higher age limits for teachers).

An employer is endorsed by the DAR after the DAR reviews and confirms the business is viable and legally operating, the role is genuine, labour market testing is adequate, and the occupation is part of the DAMA. Once

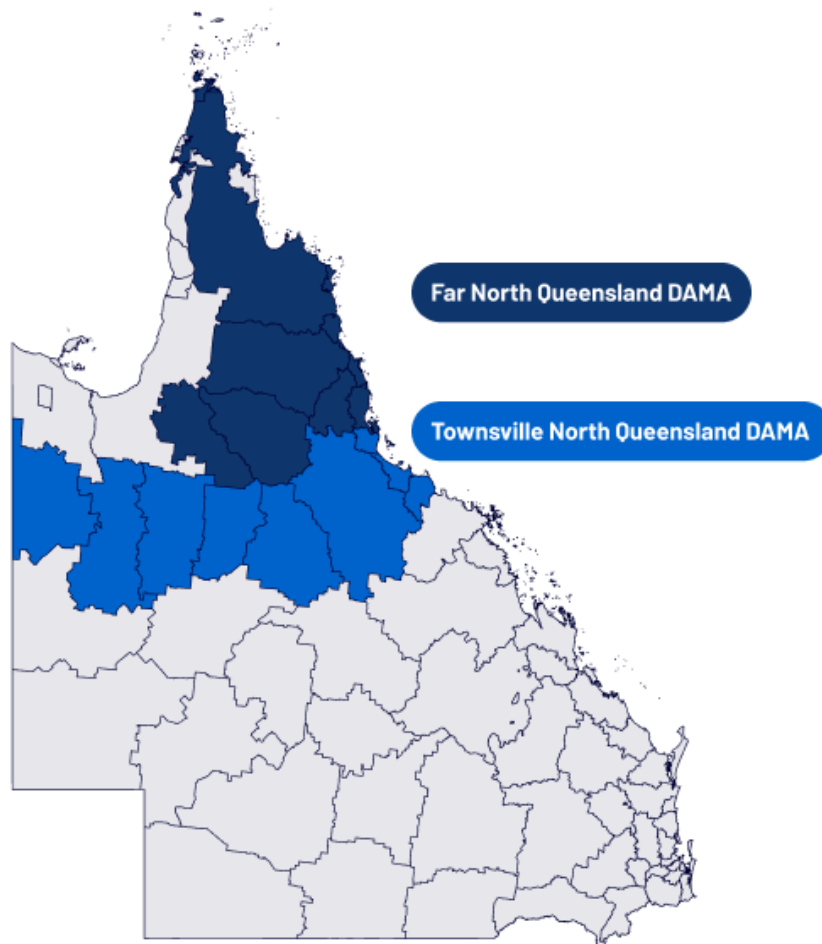
endorsed, an employer applies to the Department of Home Affairs for a DAMA Labour Agreement, which subjects them to DAMA reporting, pay and training conditions for up to five years.

Once the Labour Agreement is approved, the employer can nominate and sponsor overseas workers who can lodge a visa application for the most suitable employer sponsored visa (see Figure 1).

There are currently two regionally led DAMAs in Queensland, both in place until April 2027:

1. The Townsville North Queensland DAMA which is administered by Townsville Enterprise Limited and covers 9 LGAs
2. The Far North Queensland DAMA which is administered by the Cairns Chamber of Commerce and covers 11 LGAs.

Figure 4: Coverage of regionally led DAMAs in Queensland, March 2026



The Australian Government, via the Department of Home Affairs, is encouraging a transition to state and territory-led DAMAs to give states and territories a greater role in managing their migration needs. The Australian Government has stated that this will provide better alignment with other state mechanisms that influence the attraction of migrants to regional Australia, including planning and delivering infrastructure, housing and services, local settlement and integration support, and access to education and training.

Phase 1 Consultation

Note: Consultation is for gathering views and information only. It does not reflect Queensland Government policy and does not indicate a Queensland Government position.

Between August and November 2025, Migration Queensland engaged with local government, industry, businesses and community stakeholders outside Southeast Queensland to confirm stakeholders' views on whether a state-led DAMA would benefit them, and identify:

- regional labour and skills shortages

- use of existing skilled migration programs
- support or need for a state-led DAMA
- considerations for an effective and sustainable state-led DAMA for Queensland regions.

During this consultation, stakeholders identified:

- Chronic labour shortages in professional, trades, semi-skilled and service roles within regions.
- Limited local labour supply due to low unemployment rates, jobseekers with significant barriers to work, competition from higher-paying industries, and limited access to suitable training.
- Increased business costs, disrupted services and operations, constrained growth and investment, and weakened regional liveability due to skills and labour shortages.
- Concerns with workforce attraction and retention, with regions reporting strong inter- and intra-regional competition, shortages in essential services weakening local workforce strategies, and limited housing for workers.
- Frustration at the cost, complexity and timeliness of Australia's skilled migration system.
- Broad support for a state-led DAMA that is responsive to regional workforce needs while centralising and standardising administrative processes to reduce duplication for employers and regions.

Phase 2 Consultation

To further inform consideration on whether Queensland should proceed with negotiating a state-led DAMA with the Australian Government, additional targeted consultation is being conducted.

Feedback is sought about the design of the state-led DAMA operational framework to best support industry and employers to attract the workers they need to help fill workforce gaps. Stakeholders will also be asked to provide feedback on the composition of the 2026-27 Queensland Skilled Occupation List.

Appendix A – Summary of key visa requirements of employer sponsored visas

Key requirements	Subclass 482	Subclass 494	Subclass 186	Subclass 186
	Skills in Demand (Temporary) visa – Core and Specialist streams	Skilled Employer Sponsored Regional (Provisional) visa	Employer Nominated Scheme (Permanent) visa – Temporary Residents Transition stream	Employer Nominated Scheme (Permanent) visa (subclass 186) – Direct entry stream
Occupations	456 occupations	650 occupations	456 occupations	456 occupations
Age limit	No age limit	45 years	45 years Exemptions for academics, scientist, researcher or technical (scientific) specialist nominated by govt agency or university. Medical practitioners that have worked in designated regional area for last 3 years	45 years Exemptions for academics, scientist, researcher or technical (scientific) specialist nominated by government agency or university
Work experience	1 year	3 years	2 years	3 years
Minimum salary ²	Higher of \$76,515 or annual market salary rate core skills Higher of \$141,210 or annual market salary rate for specialist skills	Higher of \$76,515 or annual market salary rate	n/a	Higher of \$76,515 or annual market salary rate
English language	Functional English (Generally)	Competent English	Competent English	Competent English
Visa duration	4 years	5 years	n/a	n/a
Pathway to permanent residency	Minimum 2 years sponsored employment in last 3 years to qualify for visa subclass 186 visa – TRT stream	Minimum 3 years employment in a designated regional area to qualify for visa subclass 191 - Regional Provisional stream	n/a	n/a

² Nomination applications lodged between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026