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Australia's failing to reach its migration quota, but Wagga and the Riverina are setting yearly records

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Wagga bucks the national migration trends



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 Mayor Greg Conkey with new citizens Marcus Daniel, 7, and Derrick Daniel, 4, at this year's Australia Day citizenship ceremony at the Victory Memorial Gardens. Picture: Les Smith

The nation is facing a 10-year low when it comes to migration.

But the [Riverina is well and truly bucking](#) the trend.

In the year to July 1, there was a 12,468 drop in the amount of skilled migrants coming to Australia.

Whereas the [Riverina office of Regional Development Australia](#) has seen a record two years, processing 240 skilled migration visas in the past 12 months alone.

That was 90 more than the previous financial year, and an enormous 151 more than the 2015/16 financial year.

“Over the past two years, our figures indicate we’ve seen a significant increase in the number of skilled migrants coming to the Riverina,” said CEO Rachel Whiting.

The region has consistently seen above average migration levels since 2010, when 202 skilled migrants arrived.

Wagga’s [high migration rate is an area of pride](#) for Mayor Greg Conkey.

“We’re punching above our weight for migration, which is excellent,” he said.

“Our city is refugee friendly and proudly multicultural.”

Wagga comfortably boasts representation from [112 nations, and 107 language groups](#).

With a growth rate of one per cent each year, Mayor Conkey said Wagga is fast approaching a population of 100,000.

“We’re on track to becoming the southern capital of NSW,” Mayor Conkey said.

“I think it’s around 60 per cent of our industrial growth over the past five years has come directly from workers who were not born in Australia.”

Ms Whiting is concerned the upward trend is nearing its end now that the Home Affairs Office has brought in tougher regulations.

“It will be interesting to see how the government’s restrictions on skilled migrants will effect the numbers going forward,” Ms Whiting said.

“The point system has been tightened, meaning migrants will be preferred if they are younger and have a better grasp of English, which we think is unnecessary in a lot of situations in rural or regional areas.”

Ms Whiting and Mayor Conkey agree, should Wagga follow similar patterns to the rest of the nation, and experience a reduction in migrants, much of its business capital would be lost.

“Industries in our region cannot expand if they cannot find workers,” Ms Whiting said. “We need to focus our attention on bringing people from the big cities, and bringing in skilled hands from overseas.”