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**THE HON ALEX HAWKE MP
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP, MIGRANT SERVICES
AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS**

**THE HON DAMIAN DRUM MP
Member for Nicholls**

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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Government supports the Goulburn Valley to fill critical skill shortages

The Goulburn Valley in Victoria is the latest region to take advantage of a Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA).

Modelling undertaken by the region anticipates the Goulburn Valley DAMA will contribute to a further \$144m in economic output, as well as drive population growth and create additional job opportunities for Australians.

Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs Alex Hawke said the signing of the Goulburn Valley DAMA further demonstrates the Government's commitment to supporting regional Australia through the economic recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"With over 74,000 vacancies in regional Australia, regional migration initiatives, such as DAMA arrangements, are particularly timely as we look forward to the return of skilled migrants to Australia," Minister Hawke said.

"Although the preference is always to employ Australian workers where possible, skill shortages remain and this agreement will help to provide the staff employers have been struggling to find."

"The Greater Shepparton, Moira and Campaspe local governments have shown tremendous effort in consulting with local businesses to inform the strong DAMA submission."

Federal Member for Nicholls, Damian Drum, said business owners and managers, health services and local governments had been involved in the planning of this DAMA.

“I’d like to personally thank all of them for their work in making this important agreement a reality,” Mr Drum said.

“We have seen in other parts of Australia that the implementation of a DAMA has a significant positive impact on a region’s productivity, and I have no doubt this will be the case for the Goulburn Valley.”

“As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is particularly important to have the workers we need and while this Government’s preference is to always employ locals, in many cases there is a scarcity of Australians to undertake certain skilled work.

“This DAMA will allow local businesses to recruit suitably qualified overseas workers across a variety of occupations to build their workforce to where it needs to be to maximise production.”

The Goulburn Valley DAMA provides businesses access to a number of occupations not available under mainstream visa programs, giving employers increased flexibility to ensure job ready workers can fill skill shortages.

The availability of a permanent residency pathway through a DAMA means overseas workers will be able to contribute positively to the region over the longer-term, further adding to the diversity of the community and enabling the transfer of critical skills to Australian workers.

The Goulburn Valley region, bordered on the south by the Great Dividing Range and to the north by the Murray River, is a significant agricultural region but also includes important retail, manufacturing and tourism industries.

The Greater Shepparton City Council will administer the process for accessing the Goulburn Valley DAMA which will be open to businesses operating in any of the Greater Shepparton, Moira and Campaspe local government areas. Local businesses can apply individually to access the DAMA from 2022.

Greater Shepparton City Council Chief Executive Officer Peter Harriott said the DAMA will mean that businesses in the region can remain productive, competitive and sustainable into the future.

“Over recent years, we have been told by many employers they are struggling to attract and retain skilled workers across a variety of industries” said Mr Harriott.

“The DAMA is a targeted program allowing endorsed employers to access migrant workers. Workers appointed under the DAMA are not replacing local workers – they are filling gaps in the labour market which have been holding businesses in our region back”.

For more information on the DAMA see <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/regional-migration/dama>

For further information: Minister's Office – 02 6277 7770

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