

Govt to slash immigration intake

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The federal government will slash the skilled migration program by 14 per cent, or 18,500 jobs, over the next three years.

The cuts will be coupled with deletions to the critical skills list, which specifies which jobs are open to migrants.

All building and manufacturing trades will be removed, forcing companies to find bricklayers, plumbers, welders and carpenters domestically.

Employers can bring in foreign workers only if they cannot source the labour locally.

Mr Evans says the government wants to ensure migrant workers are not competing with Australians for jobs during the economic downturn.

"That's (building and manufacturing) where we are seeing a drop off in demand, some major redundancies, we don't want people coming in who are going to compete with Australians," Mr Evans told ABC radio.

It is unlikely further cuts will be made to the critical skills shortage list including health, engineering and information technology jobs, he said.

"I doubt they're going to be making any changes in that regard, we are down to a fairly short (critical skills shortage) list now."

The Master Builders Association says the cuts are warranted.

Chief executive Wilhelm Harnisch says unemployment in the building and construction sector is rising.

"We're projecting at least a loss of 50,000 jobs in this industry over the next 12 months," Mr Harnisch told ABC radio.

But the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) says there will be trade skill shortages despite the economic downturn.

"You don't want migration policy to move in high peaks and low troughs, because that does create dislocations through the economy," chief executive Peter Anderson told ABC radio.

"It is far better to allow the labour market to operate in a more natural way."

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