



## Peter Dutton contradicts Morrison and says migrant cut positive for the economy

**Treasurer had said cutting permanent immigration would increase the deficit**

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Peter Dutton says a recent drop in the number of migrants settling permanently in Australia will be positive for the economy, contradicting Scott Morrison's arguments that lower immigration levels cost the budget.

It was revealed last week that 162,417 people permanently migrated to Australia in 2017-18 - well under the 190,000 cap and down from 183,608 the year before.

The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has expressed concern about the development, arguing the Turnbull government is "effectively throttling back the rate of migration by stealth".

The ACCI's chief executive, James Pearson, said last week there were "plenty of studies ... which demonstrate that strong, well-planned and controlled migration drives economic growth".

A report last December from the London-based Centre for Economics and Business Research found population growth would help propel Australia to become the world's 11th biggest economy - jumping two places - within a decade.

Earlier this year, the treasurer warned that a proposal by the former prime minister Tony Abbott to slash migration by 80,000 people would cost the budget \$4bn to \$5bn over four years.

But asked on Sunday about the economic impact of a drop of about 20,000 migrants on his watch, the home affairs minister told Sky News "it is a positive one because if we're bringing more productive people in, then there's more economic benefit for our country and there's also greater societal benefit as well".

Dutton said tightening up the program meant “we’re actually bringing more productive people in because we’re not bringing people in who have made false claims”.

“We’re an ageing population,” he said. “I want people to come in with the requisite skills if we can’t find an Australian to fill those jobs. And I want those people to be paying tax as long as they can if they’re of working age and have a capacity to work, because that’s where the economic productivity and benefit is for our country.”

Migration is always a politically sensitive subject but the issue has returned as a front-and-centre political debate around the world in the aftermath of the global financial crisis.

While Australia largely avoided the sustained economic downturn that has helped make migration a political flashpoint in Europe, the United States and the United Kingdom, Abbott has been campaigning for the past couple of years to cut Australia’s migration levels.

Dutton also suggested in February that Australia should reduce its intake of migrants “where we believe it’s in our national interest”.

Abbott in February advocated a target of 110,000 migrants a year, down from 190,000, prompting Morrison to say at the time: “If you cut the level of permanent immigration to Australia by 80,000, that would cost the budget, that would hit the bottom line, the deficit, by \$4bn to \$5bn over the next four years.

“If you did what Tony Abbott suggests, then you would only reduce the proportion that was skilled migration and you’d have a bigger proportion which was family migration - which ultimately gets more dependent on welfare.”

Dutton said he was focussed on applying extra scrutiny to the migration program, which also involved “cancelling visas at a record rate of non-citizens who have committed criminal offences against Australians” in an effort to restore public faith in the system.

The home affairs minister was also asked whether the Turnbull government would ever take up an offer from New Zealand to take asylum seekers currently detained on Nauru and Manus Island.

Dutton said 314 of the detainees had been taken to the US under an agreement struck between the government and the former Obama administration. He said it was possible the New Zealand offer could be considered “if we’re down to a trickle of people within Manus or within Nauru”.

He said that, at some stage in the future, if the law was changed “so that those people couldn’t come to Australia, you might consider it - but it’s a dangerous contemplation at the moment”.

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