



## COVERSHEET

<b>Minister</b>	Hon Erica Stanford	<b>Portfolio</b>	Immigration
<b>Title of Cabinet paper</b>	Green List Amendments: progressing previously deferred additions	<b>Date to be published</b>	9 July 2025

### List of documents that have been proactively released

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>
May 2025	Green List Amendments: progressing previously deferred additions	Office of the Minister of Immigration
21 May 2025	Green List Amendments: progressing previously deferred additions ECO-25-MIN-0071 Minute	Cabinet Office

### Information redacted

**YES**

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with MBIE's policy on Proactive Release and is labelled with the reason for redaction. This may include information that would be redacted if this information was requested under Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Some information has been withheld for the reason of Confidential advice to Government.

## **In Confidence**

Office of the Minister of Immigration

Cabinet Economic Development Committee

## **Green List Amendments: progressing previously deferred additions**

### **Proposal**

- 1 This paper seeks agreement to add 10 occupations to the Green List Work to Residence pathway, which were deferred in March 2024. A review of skilled residence settings is currently underway to address broader issues with residence for skilled migrants.

### **Relation to government priorities**

- 2 This change supports the Government's Going for Growth agenda and priority to focus the immigration system on attracting and retaining the skills and talent that New Zealand needs.
- 3 Progressing these Green List Amendments also supports the Government's 2025 economic growth plan by providing a residence pathway for skilled migrants in key trades occupations who would be beneficial to retain in the longer term but who are unlikely to gain residence under current immigration settings.
- 4 These 10 Green List Work to Residence occupations have identified shortages that are not being met by the domestic workforce.

### **Executive Summary**

- 5 In March 2024, Cabinet agreed to postpone the addition of 11 occupations to the Green List Work to Residence pathway in the context of record high net migration and a softening labour market [ECO-24-MIN-0024]. These occupations span the transport, manufacturing, construction and infrastructure sectors. Most of them are mid-skilled trades occupations and were previously considered as meeting the requirements for addition to the Green List in the review in 2023, including having national significance and identified shortages that are not being met by the domestic labour market.
- 6 Since the decision to postpone, New Zealand's net migration, economic and labour market context have shifted. Since last year, net migration has been steadily declining and has nearly returned to long-term average levels. New Zealand's economy has recently displayed signs of rebounding and demand for skilled tradespeople is expected to increase over the next year.
- 7 Skilled migrants in these trade occupations are unlikely to qualify for residence under current immigration settings. This is because they would be unable to meet the

requirements (qualification, income, or registration) under the Skilled Migrant Category (SMC).

- 8 Work is also progressing to ensure that the SMC is fit-for-purpose Confidential advice to Government
- 9 While this broader work is progressing, I am seeking agreement to add 10 of the 11 previously deferred occupations to the Green List Work to Residence pathway, to address the residence gap for key skilled tradespeople whilst supporting retention. These are:
- 9.1 Fitter (General);
  - 9.2 Fitter and Turner;
  - 9.3 Fitter-Welder;
  - 9.4 Metal Fabricator;
  - 9.5 Metal Machinist (First Class);
  - 9.6 Panelbeater;
  - 9.7 Paving Plant Operator;
  - 9.8 Pressure Welder;
  - 9.9 Vehicle Painter; and
  - 9.10 Welder
- 10 I am not proposing to add one of the occupations previously deferred – Road Roller Operator. This is because there has not been any demonstrated demand for migrants to fill this role in the last two years.
- 11 Adding these 10 occupations to the Green List Work to Residence pathway will support workforce retention by requiring migrants to accumulate two years of work experience in these occupations in New Zealand first (on a work visa), then providing a pathway to residency for the most skilled and experienced people in these roles. The Green List targets the most skilled migrants in these occupations through the use of wage thresholds. In general, only around the top 20% of those migrants working in these occupations are likely to be able to meet the required wage thresholds to gain residence. Immigration New Zealand (INZ) will implement these changes in August 2025.
- 12 To date, the Green List Work to Residence pathway has not resulted in large numbers of approvals, with 224 residence visas approved between October 2023 and February 2025.
- 13 Occupations are only added to the Green List where there are long-term labour market needs for occupations that are not being filled by New Zealanders. The Green List is

regularly reviewed and, if there are no longer shortages, occupations can be removed. A more substantive review of the Green List will occur in the second half of 2025 with implementation in 2026.

### **Background on the Green List**

- 14 The Green List was introduced in 2022 to offer a prioritised residence pathway for high-skilled migrants in specified skilled occupations where it is particularly important to attract and retain people in the current labour market context [CAB-22-MIN-0145]. Occupations are only added to the Green List where there is an identified shortage of domestic workers so there is a low risk of displacement of New Zealanders.
- 15 The Green List offers two streamlined residence pathways for specified occupations:
  - 15.1 The ‘Straight to Residence’ pathway that can be accessed from offshore after receiving a relevant job offer; and
  - 15.2 The ‘Work to Residence’ pathway that requires the migrant to work in a job for two years in New Zealand before being eligible for residence.
- 16 In March 2024, Cabinet agreed to postpone the addition of 11 occupations to the Green List considering record high net migration and the higher risk of displacement at the time [ECO-24-MIN-0024]. These occupations are mostly mid-skilled trades occupations (ANZSCO skill level 3)<sup>1</sup> from the transport, manufacturing, construction and infrastructure sectors:
  - Fitter (General);
  - Fitter and Turner;
  - Fitter-Welder;
  - Metal Fabricator;
  - Metal Machinist (First Class);
  - Panelbeater;
  - Paving Plant Operator;
  - Pressure Welder;
  - Road Roller Operator;
  - Vehicle Painter; and
  - Welder.
- 17 I am not recommending that the previously deferred Road Roller Operator occupation be added to the Green List as it is ANZSCO Level 4 (lower skilled) and there have been no applications for this occupation through the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) in the last two years.

### **Only the most skilled migrants in these occupations will be eligible**

- 18 The addition of these 10 Green List occupations will target the most skilled migrants in those occupations using wage thresholds. The previous Government agreed to wage thresholds of median wage plus 15 percent for four of the occupations and median wage plus 30 percent for seven of the occupations. This broadly targets the top 20%

---

<sup>1</sup> Road Roller Operator is ANZSCO skill level 4 (lower-skill level).

of highly skilled people in these occupations. Migrants who do not meet the skill threshold will not be eligible.

- 19 To date, the Green List Work to Residence pathway has not resulted in large numbers of approvals, with 224 residence visas approved between October 2023 and February 2025.

**Current immigration settings are unlikely to provide residence pathways for skilled tradespeople without professional registration**

- 20 Under the current Skilled Migrant Category (SMC) settings, skilled migrants must demonstrate their human capital through pay, qualifications, or professional registration to be eligible for residence. However, many trade occupations have no professional registration body nor require having a degree-level qualification to enter the workforce. This means that they must meet the pay threshold to be eligible for residence, which is currently set at 1.5x the median wage. Given that most migrants in trades are paid around the median wage, it is unlikely skilled tradespeople could gain residence under the SMC.
- 21 Under the temporary pathway, skilled migrants in trades can work in New Zealand for up to five years if they have a job or job offer from an Accredited Employer under the AEWV settings. Current volumes of migrants in these roles are provided in the Appendix to this paper.

**Lower migration and improving economic conditions provide an opportunity to progress these additions**

*Net migration has declined and started to stabilise*

- 22 Cabinet's decision to postpone the addition of 11 occupations to the Green List last year was in the context of record high net migration and a soft labour market. Statistics New Zealand data shows that New Zealand's net migration for the year ended February 2025 was provisionally 32,900. This is a significant decline from its peak of 136,700 in the year ended October 2023. In comparison, the long-term average of net migration for year ended February pre-COVID (from 2002 to 2019) is 27,300.

*The shift in New Zealand's economy and the Government's priorities for economic growth are likely to increase demand for skilled tradespeople*

- 23 New Zealand's economy is beginning to improve after two consecutive quarters of contraction last year. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was up 0.7 percent in the December 2024 quarter, following a 1.1 percent decline in the September 2024 quarter<sup>2</sup>. GDP per capita also rose 0.4 percent in the December 2024 quarter, which was the first quarter in two years with a rise in per capita GDP.
- 24 The Government's focus on economic growth will also likely have an impact on workforce demand. Although there was a declining trend in the volume of building activity since 2022<sup>3</sup>, it is expected that demand for skilled tradespeople will increase

<sup>2</sup> New Zealand's gross domestic product (GDP) fell 0.2 percent in the June 2024 quarter.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics New Zealand reported a downward trend in building activity volume since its peak in the September 2022 quarter, largely due to a decline in new building consents.

over the next year as major infrastructure projects begin and changes to planning regulations are underway. For example, the first stage of the Roads of National Significance (RoNS) is moving at pace. The Going for Housing Growth programme, which will be implemented through amendments to planning regulations, will enable more homes to be built. These projects will increase demand for tradespeople in the sector while industries continue to report shortages of skilled workers<sup>4</sup>.

**A work to residence pathway will address the residence gap for key tradespeople whilst supporting retention of trades workers needed to support economic growth**

- 25 The 10 occupations deferred from the Green List additions last year that I am proposing to add are previously identified as occupations in shortage and having national significance (high strategic government priority, pivotal to value chain, and/or important to the health and safety of New Zealanders). This proposal is being progressed ahead of the wider changes to skilled residence settings, given the lack of residence pathways for skilled tradespeople under current immigration settings and the likely increase in demand for skilled tradespeople over the next year.
- 26 The case for providing a residence offering for these occupations is based on the importance of these occupations in supporting Government's priorities to grow the economy, the existing gap in residence settings for key trades, and evidence of ongoing demand. The further review of the SMC and the Green List will ensure that the skilled residence settings attract and retain other valuable skilled migrants.
- 27 Adding these 10 occupations to the Work to Residence pathway under the Green List is likely to offer the following key benefits:
- 27.1 supports improved retention rates as migrants are required to accumulate two years of work experience in their occupations in New Zealand before gaining residence under the Work to Residence pathway; and
- 27.2 provides increased certainty for migrants working in trade occupations as current settings are less likely to provide them with access to residence.
- 28 The Green List is regularly reviewed and occupations can be removed if there is no longer a domestic skills shortage. A review of the Green List is on the immigration work plan for the second half of 2025 with implementation in 2026. There is precedence for removing occupations from residence pathways. For example, the work to residence pathways for truck drivers and bus drivers were shut down under the Transport Sector Agreement [CAB-24-MIN-0096], as data suggested that shortages had been resolved.

**Implementation**

- 29 Subject to Cabinet agreement, INZ will implement these changes in August 2025.

---

<sup>4</sup> The 2024 New Zealand Manufacturing Talent Survey identified that shortage of skilled workers in specific technical fields, including welding and metal fabrication, remains to be a major problem.

### **Cost-of-living Implications**

- 30 As immigration fees apply for these residence applications, there is a cost to applicants of up to \$6,450 per application, in line with other skilled residence application fees.
- 31 This proposal has no cost-of-living implications for other New Zealanders.

### **Financial Implications**

- 32 There are no direct financial implications from this proposal.

### **Legislative Implications**

- 33 There are no legislative implications from this proposal.
- 34 Immigration instructions are the rules and criteria for the grant of visas and entry permission to New Zealand and are set out in the Immigration New Zealand Operational Manual. Section 22 of the Immigration Act 2009 authorises the Minister of Immigration to certify immigration instructions. Subject to Cabinet's agreement, I will certify new immigration instructions in line with the decisions taken.

### **Impact Analysis**

#### **Regulatory Impact Statement**

- 35 This proposal does not require a Regulatory Impact Assessment as it has no direct legislative implications.

#### **Climate Implications of Policy Assessment**

- 36 There are no direct climate implications of this proposal.

### **Population Implications**

- 37 This proposal is intended to supplement employers looking to the domestic labour market, and training and development of the existing workforce where possible, to minimise displacement of New Zealand workers.

### **Human Rights**

- 38 The proposal does not have direct implications for the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

### **Use of external Resources**

- 39 There has been no use of external resources in the context of this proposal.

### **Consultation**

- 40 The following agencies and departments have been consulted on and/or informed of the proposal in this paper: the Treasury, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Housing and Development, the Ministry of

Education, Te Waihanga (the New Zealand Infrastructure Commission), Accident Compensation Corporation, NZ Transport Agency, Immigration NZ, Ministry of Disabled People, Prime Minister and Cabinet (Policy Advisory Group), the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Ministry for Women, the Ministry of Ethnic Communities, the Ministry for Pacific Peoples and Te Puni Kōkiri.

- 41 The following areas of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) were also consulted: Sector Workforce Engagement Programme, Labour Market Performance and Policy, Skills and Employment Policy, Small Business and Manufacturing Policy, Economic Development Policy, and Immigration New Zealand.

### Communications

- 42 I intend to communicate this change following Cabinet decisions. The information on occupations added to the Green List will be available on the INZ website, to give migrants and employers certainty about residence pathways and enable them to plan accordingly.

### Proactive Release

- 43 This paper will be proactively released subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982 after announcements are made. This is a longer delay before publication than the usual 30 business days.

### Recommendations

The Minister of Immigration recommends that the Committee:

- 1 **Note** that the previous Government agreed to add a number of occupations to the Green List as a result of a Green List review conducted in 2023;
- 2 **Note** that following high net migration in 2023, Cabinet agreed to postpone the addition of 11 occupations to the Green List in March 2024 [ECO-24-MIN-0024];
- 3 **Note** that since these decisions, New Zealand's net migration and economic context has shifted;
- 4 **Note** that adding the 10 of the 11 deferred occupations will support the Government's Going for Growth agenda, and support retention by using the Work to Residence pathway of the Green List;
- 5 **Note** that further review of the Skill Migrant Category (SMC) and the Green List will address broader residence gaps;
- 6 **Agree** to add the following occupations to the Green List Work to Residence pathway:
  - Fitter (General);
  - Fitter and Turner;
  - Fitter-Welder;
  - Metal Fabricator;



- Metal Machinist (First Class);
  - Panelbeater;
  - Paving Plant Operator;
  - Pressure Welder;
  - Vehicle Painter; and
  - Welder;
- 7     **Note** that the Minister of Immigration will certify new immigration instructions under Section 22 of the Immigration Act 2009 to give effect to the decisions in this paper;
- 8     **Note** that following Cabinet decisions, Immigration New Zealand will implement this change in August 2025.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Erica Stanford

Minister of Immigration

**Appendix: Visa approvals for selected trade occupations****Table 1 – Number of visa approvals in selected trade occupations<sup>5</sup>**

<b>Occupations</b>	<b>Current AEWV</b>	<b>Top 20%<sup>6</sup></b>
Fitter (General)	440	88
Fitter and Turner	104	21
Fitter-Welder	556	111
Metal Fabricator	824	165
Metal Machinist	151	30
Panel beater	386	77
Paving Plant Operator	17	3
Pressure Welder	27	5
Vehicle Painter	303	61
Welder	639	128
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3447</b>	<b>689</b>

<sup>5</sup> Current AEWV data is as of 20 March 2025. Number of approvals are subject to random rounding to base 3.

<sup>6</sup> The “top 20%” refers to a broad estimate of AEWV approvals in these 10 occupations that may make the wage threshold requirements based on current rates of pay.