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We're in partnership with PT Binamandiri, an East Java manpower agency (www.binamandiri.com) supplying Indonesian dairy farm workers to NZ.

Recent changes in Australian migration law appear to create an opportunity to enter the Australian market while improving ties between Indonesia and Australia, particularly WA, which has a long-standing Sister-State agreement with East Java. This is a matter that also interests me as a member of the AIBC and the Perth-based Indonesia Institute.

The changes announced in the Budget are the Regional Migration Agreement (RMA) and the Enterprise Migration Agreement (EMA). However details are sketchy, perhaps indicating that the door is open for suggestions regarding regulations.

There are many experienced and qualified Indonesians who have worked in the mining, oil and gas industries in Indonesia and overseas on big multinational projects, and who might be suitable candidates for RMA and EMA visas.

However an unnecessarily high level of English competency may be required for these visas. It seems the level could be set at IELTS 5 or 6.

We fully recognise and accept that good English skills are required to ensure temporary migrants work efficiently and safely. We are prepared to run English classes in PT Binamandiri's Malang facilities, which include a language laboratory, to upgrade applicants' skills, as we've done for workers going to NZ.

The reality is that few Indonesian tradespeople are proficient in English. They're unlikely to reach high levels, however intensive the training, because they're coming from a low base.

In competition with workers from the Philippines and India, Indonesian workers are seriously disadvantaged. This is not their fault - the quality of teaching English in government schools has been woeful. (As you'd know teaching of Asian languages in Australia is also flawed - but that's another story.)

It seems that the RMA and EMA categories are basically guest worker schemes allowing short-term quarantined access to the Australian labor market. We feel it would be unreasonable to expect applicants to spend months learning high level English when they will not be remaining in Australia.

Other ways to handle our concerns could be found. For example, forepersons with a high level of English could supervise work groups. This system operates in NZ with fruit pickers and packers.

We'd appreciate any opportunities to discuss these issues further.