**Canadian Immigration News:**

Swimming Upstream: Caution Against Nova Scotia’s New Regional Labour Market Demand Stream

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When a current exists there is often great risk involved in swimming against it, and most usually it is desperation that inspires such an attempt. The “current” trend in Canadian foreign worker immigration policy (for both temporary and permanent residency) emphasizes the need for workers to find arranged employment first before seeking entry into Canada. This past March the provincial government of Nova Scotia made noise by announcing their intention to swim against the current and offer placements to workers without arranged employment, something in direct contrast to the norm. It turns out however that this counterforce is not meant as an attempt to reverse the current, rather it is being used as a marketing ploy by Nova Scotia, a small fish in Canada’s immigration system, as it struggles to compete against other big fish to gain the attention of skilled workers abroad.

The direction of Canada’s new wave immigration policy results from the breaking of a dam created by the systematic failure of the previous Liberal government’s attempts to keep immigration channels open. The former government’s way of doing things allowed workers to apply (without limit) based primarily on work experience in their own country. As we found out, overseas work experience and qualifications do not necessarily equate to standards in Canada. The result was a bottleneck resulting from a huge influx of applications, a six year wait list and massive unemployment numbers for arriving immigrants themselves. Immigration consultants were the big winners as they gladly collected the processing fees for hundreds of thousands of Filipinos who technically “qualified” for entry most of whom remained unqualified to gain employment once they arrived.

The enormous pressure of the stagnant flow had to be addressed by Canada’s new Conservative government. A set of Ministerial instructions broke open the dam and chose a more responsible path of flow for new applications. In June of 2010 changes were introduced to the Federal Skilled Worker stream put in place a first ever quota system limiting the number of applicants to be accepted without arranged employment to 20,000 per annum. Applicants who did have a legitimate job offer were separated and exempted from this new quota system. In 2011 the limit was further reduced to 10,000 applicants, and reduced again in 2013 to 5,000. What did not change is that there was NO LIMIT imposed on those with valid job offers. Expect further reductions to be imposed (or elimination altogether) on those who seek to apply without arranged employment to continue at the federal level. Adding to the strength of this current is the fact that the Canadian Temporary Foreign Worker program (TFW) shares the basic requirement of arranged employment before arrival (you cannot apply for a TFW visa while in Canada as a tourist, this disallows people from coming to Canada to look for a job). Further, all provincial nominee programs (with the exception of Quebec) require arranged employment before selection occurs.

When Nova Scotia announced its intention to swim against this current and revert to the old ways of offering entry before gaining employment it caused some excitement in the waters. Immigration agents were ready to sell “easy entry” and many hopeful Pinoys thought that this may allow them to skip the hiring process and sail their application through the newly built canal. The bad news is the canal is far too small, this boat won’t beat the current and in fact it hasn’t even been built to do so.

Nova Scotia’s new Regional Labour Market Demand stream accepts only 150 applications per year. That is 150 total applications for the combined 49 eligible occupations it lists. Accepting 150 people on the basis of their foreign work experience rather than employability poses a very limited risk to the province. Further, obviously such a limited number of sponsorships isn’t meant to fix the provinces severe skilled labour shortage estimated at several thousand workers. What it does accomplish however is put Nova Scotia in the much needed spotlight.

 In the English language immigration pool Nova Scotia a small fish in a pool of large fish (Ontario, Alberta, British Colombia) and is suffering from lack of attention. Swimming against the current is the only way not to get lost in the flow of bigger fish. In support of my theory, it is further conspicuous that the list of eligible occupations is so broad (49 in total) when trying to recruit only 150 total nominations. Eligible occupations include such highly skilled occupations such as nurses, dentists, pharmacists as well as lower skilled jobs such as retail managers and restaurant managers. This is intentionally meant to attract the widest group of applicants possible to the notion of Nova Scotia. An obvious caution is that due to the massive influx of applications, it is predictable that the list will be revised in the future to restrict the current offer to the most highly skilled jobs on the list.

According to the province’s website the province warns it has already received “a large amount of applications” since the program opened about a month ago. What this means is that people have noticed Nova Scotia but it also means applicants who proceed under this program will be subject to the same backlogs they faced under the old system. Waiting times will be unbearable, and occupations currently qualifying risk losing their status. The effect is that Nova Scotia gains prominence, immigration agents make money selling the mantra “Nova Scotia is open” but would be immigrants’ lose out. My advice: save time and swim with the current.

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