

# Minister fires back at Falloon comments

**BEN AULAKH**

Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway has hit back at criticism of Labour's immigration proposals from new Rangitata MP Andrew Falloon.

On Tuesday Falloon said Labour's pre-election promise to cut immigration to between 20,000 and 30,000 people a year would stifle economic development.

Lees-Galloway responded that Labour was trying to fix the "one-size-fits-all" immigration policy it had inherited from National.

Falloon accused the Government of providing "scant detail" on the precise effect the proposed reduction in migrants would have on regional New Zealand, saying the cut could have "a huge impact on South Canterbury".

"So far the [Immigration] Minister is offering our region nothing substantive to ensure we're able to attract the people he does let in," Falloon said.

"South Canterbury has been growing strongly in recent years, unemployment is very low, and employers are struggling to find

the staff they need to fill the jobs that they have.

"Many have had to rely on skilled and semi-skilled workers from abroad."

Falloon said back in November he wrote to newly appointed Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern highlighting his concerns.

"Other than transferring the letter to Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway, the response to those concerns has been complete silence."

It was "well past time" for the Government to "come clean" and provide some "certainty, or risk stalling the growth of our productive region", he said.

Lees-Galloway hit back at Falloon, saying South Canterbury was a "wonderful region that has a lot to offer new migrants".

"It is a shame the local MP thinks his region is not attractive to new migrants but I doubt many people agree with him.

"This Government inherited a one-size-fits-all immigration system from National. I am determined to make our immigration system more agile and better able

to respond to the needs of each and every region."

Formal consultation on Labour's immigration proposal was yet to begin, however "initial responses" from regional employers had been "overwhelmingly positive", Lees-Galloway said.

"Last week I visited Marlborough, a region which, like South Canterbury, has a very low unemployment rate and significant labour shortages.

"One employer there was so excited about our approach, he asked if I could implement the new policy tomorrow.

"I will visit South Canterbury in the next few weeks and look forward to a constructive conversation with people in the region."

South Canterbury Chamber of Commerce chief executive Wendy Smith said even before Labour implemented its planned cuts to immigration, businesses were "already finding it difficult" to recruit the necessary skilled workers.

The proposals would "intensify this issue" and create a potential

"stranglehold on further economic growth".

Smith was therefore advocating a "regional variation" to the proposals, that would "enable areas such as South Canterbury that have high employment and hence very low unemployment to be able to continue with an effective immigration policy".

"This could resemble the earthquake skills shortage programme that was effectively delivered and monitored."

Smith was jointly lobbying with the Auckland Chamber of Commerce "to ensure regional variations are sought to match the needs of the varying regions".

The issue had been raised with Rangitata-based Labour List MP Jo Luxton before Christmas, Smith said.

"We were heartened to receive a prompt and direct response from Minister of Immigration Iain Lees-Galloway.

"We are looking to facilitate a meeting with the minister early this year and will be enabling the business community to hear from him directly."



**Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway.**

PHOTO: STUFF