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Albanese Government Criticized for Lowering English Requirements as Migration Surges

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The Albanese administration is under renewed pressure following a quiet decision to reduce the minimum English language proficiency scores required for several visa categories. The policy change comes amid record-high migration levels, prompting concern from the Opposition about mounting strains on Australia's infrastructure, housing, and essential services.

Assistant Minister for Immigration Matt Thistlethwaite recently signed off on the revised standards, which lower the benchmark for "functional" English, a requirement for applicants seeking training visas and work and holiday visas. The adjustment marks the

first change in over a decade and affects several major English-language testing systems used internationally by prospective migrants.

Under the new rules, the passing score for the Pearson Test of English (PTE) has been reduced from 30 out of 90 to 24. For the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the minimum score has dropped from 32 out of 120 to 26. According to Pearson's scale, the revised score indicates a downgrade in comprehension from someone who can understand everyday sentences to someone limited to basic and familiar expressions. The benchmark for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) remains unchanged at 4.5 out of 9.

Opposition Home Affairs spokesperson Andrew Hastie condemned the move, calling it "reckless" in light of ongoing pressures facing the country. "The Albanese Labor government brought in a million migrants in its first two years, 70 percent higher than any previous two-year period," Hastie stated. "Net overseas migration reached high levels, per ABS data. This is unsustainable."

Hastie criticized the government's response to growing concerns, arguing that rather than managing intake numbers or addressing housing and infrastructure strains, the administration has instead chosen to lower entry standards. "Our infrastructure is under pressure, essential services are stretched thin, and young Australians are locked out of the housing market. Social cohesion is fraying," he said. "Australians are worse off under Labor's immigration policy."

In response, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations Tony Burke dismissed the criticism, accusing the Opposition of politicizing immigration and targeting multicultural communities. While he noted that net overseas migration had decreased as expected, Burke did not provide a specific explanation for the change in language requirements. "It appears with Mr. Hastie, nothing has changed," Burke said. "No message has been received."

The Coalition, which campaigned on a pledge to cap annual migration at 160,000 during the last federal election, has remained relatively quiet on immigration policy since its electoral loss. However, the recent changes to visa language standards have reignited public and political debate around the broader implications of high migration, particularly in relation to economic sustainability and national cohesion.

As Australia's population continues to grow rapidly, the conversation over who gets to come in and under what terms is becoming more critical. The lowering of English

requirements may have wide-ranging consequences not only for labor markets and integration but also for long-term social and cultural dynamics across the country.