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## Albanese Criticized for Easing English Tests Amid Migration Surge

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Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is receiving criticism following the government's revision of English language requirements for some visa categories. This policy shift, part of the government's Migration Strategy announced on December 11, 2023, modifies language proficiency standards for Student and Temporary Graduate visas. The changes came into effect on March 23, 2024 and represent an adjustment, not a relaxation, of standards. For student visas, the minimum IELTS score rose from 5.5 to 6.0, and for pre-study ELICOS courses, it increased from IELTS 4.5 to 5.0.

Meanwhile, Australia experienced elevated migration levels in recent years. Net overseas migration reached approximately 518,000 in the year ending June 30, 2023. In the 2023-

24 financial year, this figure declined to around 446,000, down from 536,000 a year earlier. Over the year to March 2024, net overseas migration was around 510,000.

The 2024 Budget projected a reduction in net migration to 260,000 for 2024-25. However, Treasury data released later forecasted net migration closer to 340,000 in December 2024, with further adjustments in early 2025.

Critics, including Shadow Home Affairs Minister Dan Tehan, argue that elevated migration places strain on infrastructure such as housing, transport, and healthcare. He cited projections predicting migration levels remaining above 260,000 annually through 2025. Former immigration official Abul Rizvi expressed concerns about potential mismatches between migrant skills and labour market needs, which could impact employment outcomes for certain workers.

As Prime Minister Albanese prepares for the annual leaders' summit in Queenstown with New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, migration remains a prominent domestic issue. The talks will address key topics including international affairs and regional cooperation. Discussions will also cover the Single Economic Market framework, which seeks to reduce regulatory barriers to business between the two nations. The issue of Australia's policy of deporting New Zealand-born individuals convicted of crimes is also expected to be discussed.

The government maintains that updated language requirements support educational and economic integrity by promoting better learning and employment outcomes for visa holders. Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil has stated that the migration reforms are part of a broader strategy to attract high-quality migrants while ensuring the system's sustainability and alignment with national needs.