

FACT SHEET

Boosting the number of Pacific worker arrivals

1. The Australian Government will work with Pacific Governments and states and territories to rapidly scale up Pacific labour mobility by:

- a) bringing an additional 12,500 workers to Australia by March 2022 to support critical sectors such as agriculture, accommodation, hospitality and aged care
- b) providing additional support to Pacific governments to recruit and deploy workers to Australia, and support them while they are here, and
- c) safeguarding worker welfare by extending funding for:
 - i) an increased regional presence of Department of Education, Skills and Employment and Pacific Labour Facility staff (closer to employers and workers)
 - ii) the Community Connections contract to help build connections between workers and their host communities
 - iii) the Fair Work Ombudsman to continue its education and compliance activities in line with the expanded program size.

New joined-up Pacific labour mobility approach

2. The Australian Government is introducing an integrated approach to labour mobility, announcing:

- a) a streamlined, single application process to become an approved employer with the option to recruit seasonal and/or longer-term workers, and a commitment to respond to applications within 6 to 8 weeks of all required documentation being submitted (unless there are exceptional circumstances)
- b) mutual recognition of existing approved employers for the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS), meaning most employers will be able to recruit under both programs
- c) a new brand for the SWP and PLS – the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme
- d) a new website – www.palmscheme.gov.au – for new and existing employers, community stakeholders and people in the Pacific and Timor-Leste considering work opportunities in Australia
- d) a commitment to announce further specific reforms later in the year, in response to the priorities of stakeholders, following public consultations in June and July 2021.

More aligned and flexible program settings

3. The announcement includes additional flexibilities in program and visa settings including:

- a) expanding eligibility criteria to enable accommodation employers in all parts of rural and regional Australia to recruit seasonal workers, helping the sector to fill workforce shortages
- b) removing postcode restrictions for PLS employers in the agriculture sector to align with SWP eligibility criteria
- c) increasing the validity period for labour market testing to 12 months, reducing red tape for employers
- d) doubling recruitment caps for SWP approved employers with a good record that also have financial capacity to support additional worker arrivals
- e) allowing PLS workers who have spent 3 years in Australia as a holder of one or more PLS visas to apply for a new PLS (subclass 403) visa to remain in Australia for a further 12 months while COVID-19 travel restrictions remain in place
- f) continuing the existing COVID-related flexibilities which allow redeployments of workers to another approved employer, subject to labour market testing and welfare considerations, and the ability to extend their stay onshore
- g) removing the upper age limit of 45 years for PLS workers, aligning with the age criteria for the SWP.

New ways of consulting on Pacific labour mobility

4. The Australian Government will implement new joint consultative arrangements for Pacific labour mobility, including:

- a) a new PALM Advisory Group, bringing together stakeholders to help ensure the scheme is benefiting all stakeholders (Advisory Group membership to be announced soon)
- b) sector sub-committees for agriculture, meat processing and the care sectors, with thematic working groups established as required.

Supporting career development for Pacific workers

5. The announcement includes additional support for workers to facilitate upskilling and career development, including:

- a) a new skills development program to facilitate opportunities for workers to access training up to certificate level while working in Australia, boosting productivity for employers and providing career pathways for workers.