

## FACTSHEET

### Key reforms under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme will commence from 4 April

The Australian Government is implementing decisive reforms to address immediate and long-term workforce shortages; ensure worker protections; and reform and improve delivery for workers and employers alike.

Between 10 June to 18 July 2021, the Australian Government undertook a comprehensive review of the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP). Following this, and in response to stakeholder feedback, the Australian Government took action to consolidate the two programs into a single, streamlined scheme - the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme to be managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The scheme continues to provide both seasonal and long-term worker streams.

A single PALM scheme improves conditions for workers, streamlines administration for employers, workers and labour sending countries, and provides greater flexibility. The suite of reforms announced here marks the commencement of the PALM visa, and the first round of substantive changes. A new PALM Deed and Guidelines are under negotiation and expected to be finalised mid-2022 - reflecting the Australian Government's commitment to working with stakeholders to get the settings right.

Stakeholders will have the opportunity to contribute to continuous improvement of the scheme through consultation structures being established to guide the reform effort.

### Single, more flexible PALM scheme visa

- a) A single PALM scheme visa will be available for all PALM scheme workers with extended validity of up to four years and provision for multiple entries to Australia.
- b) This visa provides:
  - a. employers with the option to recruit workers to fill either short term or longer-term placements
  - b. seasonal workers the ability to apply *onshore* for a longer-term visa (where nominated by their employer).
  - c. employers with greater workforce stability and workers more time to develop their skills, complete their qualifications and earn income to send home
  - d. A mandatory offshore period of three months after each nine-month seasonal placement and six months for long-term workers after completing a four-year placement. This ensures workers return home and reconnect with their family and community.

### Removal of recruitment caps

- a) Recruitment caps will be removed for existing employers with a good track record working with Pacific workers.

- b) Caps may be utilised where performance concerns persist.

### **Expanding our presence in regional Australia**

- a) The PALM scheme will deliver a stronger presence in regional Australia.
- b) 24 PALM scheme personnel are being rolled out to cover every Australian state and territory, ensuring an on-the-ground presence to better support employers and workers to deliver the scheme.

### **Improving worker welfare**

- a) Reviewing worker welfare and assurance measures in May 2022 to identify best practice approaches to be launched mid-year.

### **Expansion of eligible sectors**

- a) Restrictions on sectors for the seasonal stream will be removed, meaning that all employers with a need for seasonal workers in regional and rural Australia can apply to recruit PALM scheme workers (except for agriculture which applies to all of Australia).
- b) Piloting a new pathway to increase the volume of qualified Pacific aged care workers under the PALM scheme, through a partnership between DFAT, Australian Pacific Training Coalition and aged care employers.
- c) DFAT will explore the feasibility of expanding the scheme into new sectors, such as aquaculture, disability care and construction.

### **Streamlining processes for employers**

- b) Commitment to ongoing consultation and the establishment of a red tape reduction working group to meet quarterly to reduce bureaucracy for employers while maintaining strong worker protections. Over time this will include web-based options to enable employers to suggest improvements to administration of the PALM scheme.

### **Reforms to be introduced in mid-2022**

- a) Finalised PALM scheme Deed and Guidelines with streamlined processes for Approved Employers and stronger protections for workers.
- b) Delivering an improved IT Platform alongside the new PALM Deed and Guidelines which will deliver efficiencies for employers and Pacific governments, with all recruitment and mobilisation activities to be managed through a single portal. This will include better information flows between participating countries and the new employer portal. Employers will have access to new planning tools to manage recruitments, and new portability arrangements will be managed more systematically, creating efficiencies for employers and program managers.

For more information, please visit [www.palmscheme.gov.au/faq](http://www.palmscheme.gov.au/faq).

