



Delivering benefits for Australian employers and Pacific partners

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is built on strong partnerships between Australia, Pacific island nations and Timor-Leste and is the primary temporary migration program to address unskilled, low-skilled, and semi-skilled workforce shortages in rural and regional Australia.

Our farmers need workers, Australian families need produce, and Pacific island nations need income. The PALM scheme delivers on all of these.

The Australian Government's Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) are being replaced by a more flexible and efficient single Pacific labour mobility scheme with both seasonal and long-term options – the PALM scheme.

Key changes under the single program from April 2022

Single visa stream

Option to recruit workers for short-term, seasonal positions or longer-term roles.

Extended visas for up to 4 years

Option for multiple entry to Australia, providing employers with more workforce stability and allowing workers more time to develop skills, complete qualifications and send money home.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) works in partnership with the Pacific Labour Facility to connect Australian employers with workers through the PALM scheme.

It is an uncapped, demand-driven program – the numbers of participating workers are limited only if Australians are available to fill workforce shortages.

THE PALM SCHEME AT A GLANCE



**CURRENT
PALM
EMPLOYERS
373**

(at 25 March 2022)



**52,000
PRE-SCREENED
WORKERS**

(at 31 January 2022)

There are large numbers of prescreened workers awaiting job offers from approved PALM scheme employers in [10 participating countries](#): Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

SINGLE PROGRAM

Single Australian Government department responsible

Delivery of both the SWP and the PLS – to be combined into the PALM scheme – is now managed by DFAT.

**MORE THAN
19,000
WORKERS**



More than 19,000 workers have arrived since labour mobility restarted (as at 14 April 2022)

Seasonal and longer-term workers have been arriving in large numbers since the Pacific labour mobility restart in August 2020.

**23,427
WORKERS**

(at 14 April 2022)



There are more Pacific and Timor-Leste workers in Australia now than ever before.



NEW PROCESSES

Preventing the mistreatment of workers and simplifying processes for industry are important drivers behind combining the SWP and PLS into the PALM scheme.

WORKPLACE RIGHTS



Workers have the same rights and conditions as Australian workers

Workers are employed under the same legislation and are entitled to the same minimum rates of pay and conditions as Australian workers.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS



Prompt management of worker's concerns

If workers raise issues, DFAT and the PLF investigate promptly and refer them to the appropriate authorities, e.g., Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO). Workers can also be moved to a new employer.

WORK EXPERIENCE



Helping future employment

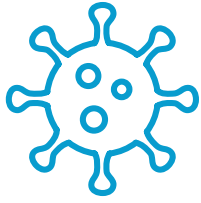
According to a 2017 World Bank Report, 95% of SWP workers wanted to return the next season, and employers (98%) were just as eager to have them back.



\$64.15 M¹

AUD sent to the Pacific in savings and remittances from the PLS

PLS workers have sent an estimated total of \$64.15m in savings and remittances to the Pacific, and paid \$22m in income tax since July 2018 to December 2021. SWP workers remit on average \$1,061 a month to their families, which has proved critical in supporting the livelihoods of worker households during the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, PLS workers save and remit \$1,310 per month, equating to 39% of their monthly Australian income.



Supporting workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring all workers in the PALM scheme are supported. This was critically important during the COVID-related labour mobility pause between March and August 2020 due to lockdowns and border closures.

We are supporting workers with access to welfare and community services and information on health and safety. Where workers have been unable to return home due to border closures, we have supported their redeployment and where possible we have helped workers to return home.

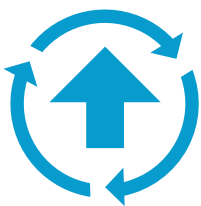
**More than 17,300
redeployments of
workers between March
2020-January 2022**
(at 25 March 2022)

All redeployments have occurred with the consent of workers. This has enabled workers to continue sending money home to their families at a time of economic hardship, while helping industry meet critical workforce shortages.



"Households with seasonal workers overseas (and thus, those who could receive remittances) reported lower levels of financial anxiety and spent about 17% more on consumption than those with workers whose trips were cancelled due to the pandemic. They were also significantly less likely to resort to coping strategies that would adversely affect them in the longer term, such as reducing consumption, depleting savings, selling assets and livestock, taking a loan, or pulling children out of school."

[World Bank blog post about November 2021 report on labour mobility and remittances in the Pacific during COVID-19](#)



Continuous improvement since labour mobility restart

Since the restart of the recruitment of workers in August 2020, DFAT has:

- increased the number of approved employers under the PALM scheme
- introduced solutions to meet employer needs and enhance outreach through the placement of additional support staff across Australia
- recruited additional personnel and provided logistical support and equipment to our Pacific and Timor-Leste partners to mobilise more workers through COVID lockdowns
- streamlined program arrangements through a new employer deed and guidelines and a new IT platform to manage recruitments, mobilisations and reporting (launching mid-2022)
- established stronger labour mobility partnerships with the Pacific and Timor-Leste by negotiating new bilateral agreements with our PALM scheme partner countries.



Maria and Jacinta (workers from Timor-Leste) with Lee and Karen at Bulmer Farms.



[Meet the team from Bulmer Farms in this short video](#)

CASE STUDY

Helping a family farm stay afloat in difficult times


Bulmer Farms in East Gippsland, Victoria, is one of Australia's largest fresh salad vegetable producers. Like many growers, it relies on overseas workers at harvest time, but COVID-related travel restrictions impacted their usual labour supply.

Thanks to the PALM scheme, the farm was able to stay afloat during the pandemic with workers from Kiribati, Timor-Leste and Vanuatu.

"We would normally have a number of travellers and backpackers, but since COVID, that is no longer a labour option," said Bulmer HR manager Karen Grant.

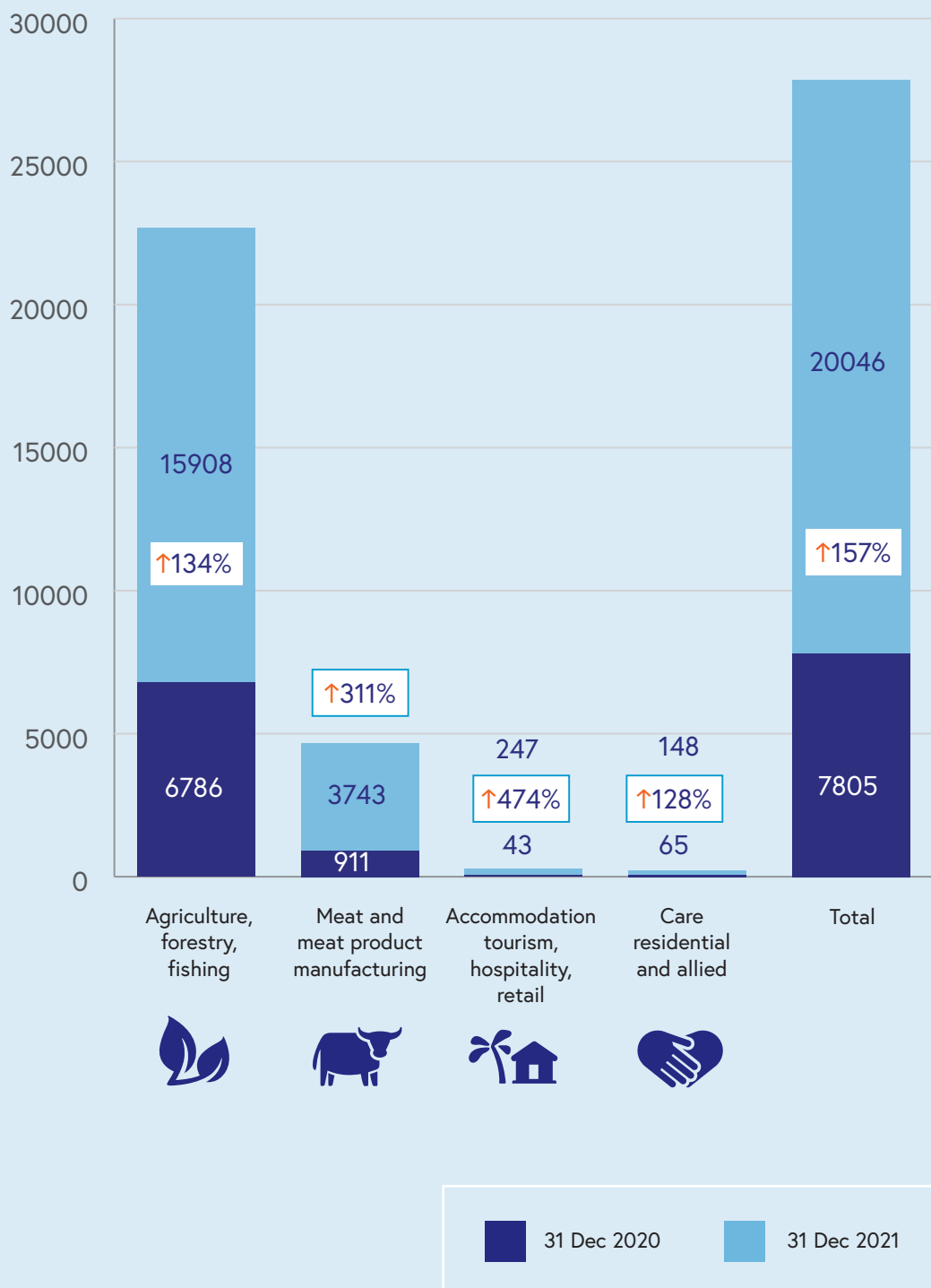
"While we're always looking for local labour solutions, we need a combination of locals and overseas workers for a successful harvest season. I think without the PALM scheme, we would really struggle."

At Bulmer, workers are engaged in processing on wash lines, crate washing, harvesting, picking and planting. According to Karen one worker, Jacinta, is a standout. "She has worked with us for 18 months now, has successfully completed a first aid certificate, and is a valued member of our OH&S committee."

[Read more stories from the PALM scheme.](#) 

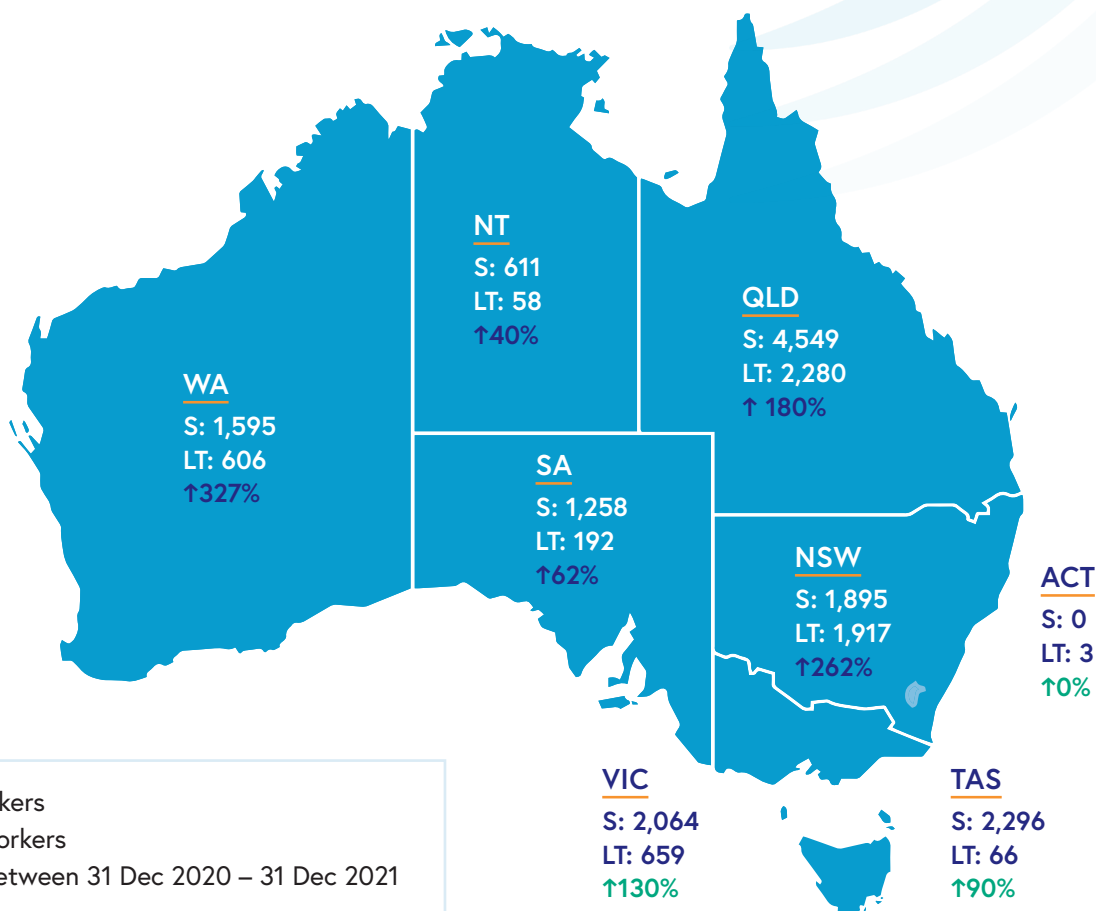
Focus on agriculture, meat processing and care sector

As of March 2022, the majority of employers participating in the PALM scheme are in the agriculture/fishing and meat processing sectors. DFAT is committed to growing the PALM scheme presence in the care sector.



Current distribution of workers in each state and territory

Distribution of workers in each state and territory (at 31 Dec 2021).



Benefits for Pacific and Timor-Leste workers

High numbers of returning workers

Each year around 74% of seasonal workers are returnees who often work for the same employer.

Increasing numbers of employers

The number of employers participating in the PALM scheme grows every year. SWP employer numbers have grown by 24% (average year on year growth), while PLS employer numbers have grown by 69% (average year on year growth).

Positive feedback from participating countries

The feedback from Pacific and Timor-Leste Governments is positive. They acknowledge the benefits to their people and economies from their participation in the schemes, particularly as they weather the economic hardships brought on by COVID-19.

Valuable remittances from overseas employment

The money workers send home constitutes a major share of GDP and household income in many participating countries, e.g., in Tonga, remittances equalled nearly 38% of GDP and 30% of household consumption in 2019. [Money sent from overseas was fundamental to financing essential everyday expenses for many Pacific and Timor-Leste households.](#)



Safeguarding workers

Pacific and Timor-Leste workers are employed under the same workplace relations laws as Australian workers, and are entitled to the same conditions and minimum rates of pay.

Employers are strictly vetted by DFAT to ensure they have a history of compliance with workplace relations and immigration laws before they are approved as PALM scheme employers.

A rigorous monitoring and compliance framework includes site visits, reporting requirements (including pay and deductions data and accommodation assessments) and responding to tip-offs.

Workers are connected to community and sporting groups, churches and diaspora groups. The Government also works closely with Pacific island and Timor-Leste governments, supporting their Australia-based country liaison officers to visit workers and monitor employment conditions.

Pacific and Timor-Leste workers, their families and countries benefit greatly from the skills, experience and wages earned while they are in Australia and the PALM scheme is strongly supported by both workers and Australian employers.



"We're so lucky to be in Australia where we can do different jobs and get a range of skills ... we should take these skills back and teach our family and community."

I-Kiribati PLS aged care worker Maatai Tamaiti

Worker pay and deductions

Under the Fair Work Act, employers can only make deductions from workers' pay if they are at cost, are principally for the worker's benefit, and if workers agree to them in writing.

All deductions are included in the workers' offer of employment. Employers must make sure workers have enough money to live on each week after paying tax and deductions and enjoy a reasonable financial benefit from working in Australia.

Average recurring weekly deductions include items such as accommodation, transport, health insurance, meals and utility costs.

Employers also deduct additional costs in the first pay periods. This includes mobilisation costs such as airfares, visa costs and cash advances. These must be spread across the first 12-16 weeks of a workers' employment to ensure workers have enough money to live on during this time.

DFAT undertakes rigorous assurance activities, requires regular reporting from PALM scheme employers on pay and deductions and undertakes regular pay audits.

Ensuring high quality worker accommodation

All PALM scheme employers must have approved accommodation plans in place for all workers, including details about any pay deductions related to accommodation.

The Government ensures accommodation is suitable through virtual, in-person monitoring visits, both announced and unannounced. This may include visiting worksites, places of accommodation, meeting with workers, and responding to tip-offs on any issues.

Under the PLS, 80 site visits were conducted in 2021 and 50 in 2020.

Under the SWP, 142 monitoring visits were conducted in 2020-21.

Since July 2021, 185 monitoring visits for the SWP have been conducted.

How do workers and others make complaints?

Workers and other stakeholders in the scheme can make complaints and raise concerns via a number of channels and do so regularly.



SWP infoline

In 2021, the SWP infoline received just under 400 calls per month on average from workers, employers and community members. Workers can call the SWP infoline on +61 2 6240 5234, during business hours, or 1800 51 51 31 after hours.



The PLF support service line

The PLF support service line is available to provide support for PALM scheme stakeholders 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Workers can call the PLF support service line on 1800 51 51 31 or email welfare@pacificlabourfacility.com.au.



Welfare and wellbeing officers

Seasonal workers are assigned a welfare and wellbeing officer (appointed by their employer) who is required to meet face-to-face with workers every 2 weeks (at a minimum).



Regionally based staff and Pacific government representatives

There are staff in regional locations and country liaison officers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste that workers can address complaints to directly.



Immediate investigation

When complaints are raised they are investigated immediately – whether brought directly to DFAT, the PLF, country liaison officers or other stakeholders.



Fair Work Ombudsman

Workers are encouraged to contact the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) directly if they have questions regarding their pay or working conditions. Workers can call the FWO on 13 13 94 or the interpreter service on 13 14 50.