



# Expanding and improving labour mobility

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

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) work in partnership with the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) to connect Australian employers with Pacific workers through the PALM scheme.

PALM scheme approved employers can apply to recruit workers in any sector in all regional and rural postcodes, or in agriculture nationally.

To participate in the scheme, employers must demonstrate that there are not enough Australians available to meet their workforce needs.

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

**The Australian Government is committed to improving and expanding the PALM scheme, including:**

- making the scheme more attractive to employers of short-term workers by reducing the burden of upfront travel costs
- reducing red tape for all PALM employers
- relocating the Australian Agriculture Visa program within the PALM scheme
- providing opportunities for longer-term workers to bring their partners and children to Australia, subject to Australian employer sponsorship
- improving workplace standards for PALM scheme workers and implementing the recommendations of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce
- ensuring PALM scheme employers have the flexibility they need.

# THE PALM SCHEME AT A GLANCE



**CURRENT PALM EMPLOYERS**  
**404**

(at 30 November 2022)

## WORKPLACE RIGHTS



PALM scheme 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. Complaints are taken seriously and investigated promptly.

The Government is committed to improving conditions for PALM scheme workers and will implement the recommendations of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce.

**33,713**  
**WORKERS**

(at 30 November 2022)



Approximately 21 per cent of these workers are women.<sup>2</sup>

There are currently more Pacific and Timor-Leste PALM scheme workers in Australia than there have ever been before.



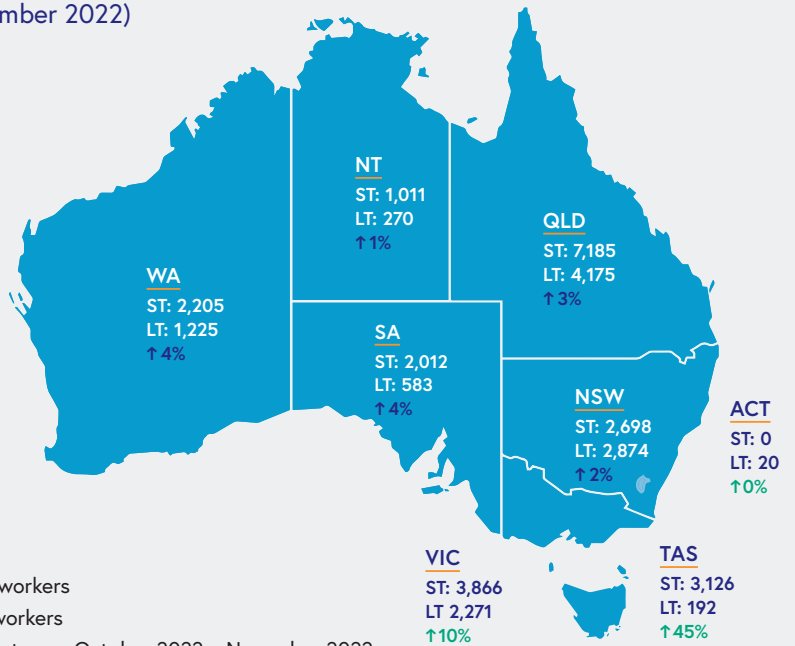
**40,108**  
**PRE-SCREENED WORKERS**

(at 30 June 2022, based on a half-yearly survey)

There are large numbers of pre-screened 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.

## DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS

(at 30 November 2022)



**\$64.15 M**<sup>1</sup> AUD sent to the Pacific and Timor-Leste in savings and remittances from long-term workers

Long-term PALM scheme workers have sent an estimated \$64.15m in savings and remittances to the Pacific and Timor-Leste and paid \$22m in income tax from July 2018 to December 2021. Short-term 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, long-term workers save and remit \$1,310 per month, equating to 39% of their monthly Australian income.

1. PLF mid-year briefing January 2022.

2. Based on applying gender breakdown of the number of PALM visas granted to workers in country.





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

## CASE STUDY

### Helping a family farm 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 workforce.

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.](#)



## Benefits for Pacific and Timor-Leste workers

High numbers of returning workers

Each year around 74% of short-term PALM scheme workers are returnees who often work for the same employer. According to a 2021 World Bank Report, 95% of short-term workers wanted to return the next season, and employers (98%) were just as eager to have them back.

Increasing numbers of employers

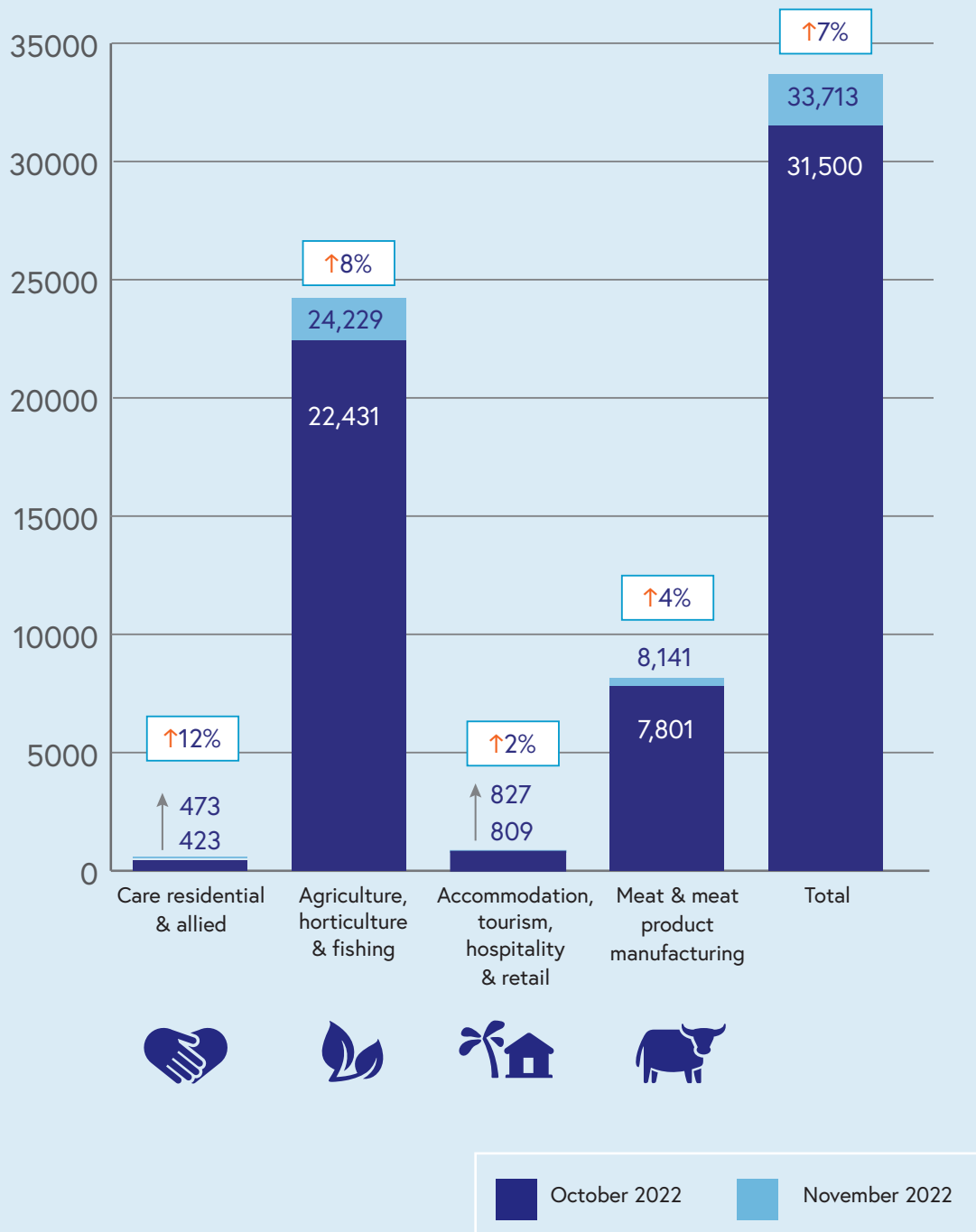
The number of employers participating in the PALM scheme grows every year. Short-term employer numbers have grown by 23% (average year on year growth), while long-term employer numbers have grown by 55% (average year-on-year growth - this increase is largely attributable to mutual recognition).

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 during the pandemic.](#)

## Focus on agriculture, meat processing and care sector

As at 30 November 2022, the majority of employers participating in the PALM scheme are in the agriculture/fishing and meat processing sectors. The Government is committed to growing the PALM scheme's presence in the care sector.





## 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 must be 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.

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

Employers are responsible for ensuring workers' wellbeing, including supporting connections 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.

In the first quarter 2022-23, 64 long-term employer site visits and 41 short-term employer monitoring visits were conducted (1 July - 30 September 2022). These involved assessing the quality of workers' accommodation.



## Assurance activities

The Government undertakes rigorous assurance activities in relation to pay and deductions, work conditions and accommodation, including site visits, reporting requirements, audits and responding to tip-offs.

If workers raise issues, we investigate promptly and refer them to the appropriate authorities, e.g. Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO).

In certain cases, if there are welfare concerns, workers can be moved to a new employer.



## 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.



## Ensuring high quality worker accommodation

All PALM scheme employers must have approved accommodation plans in place for all workers, including details about the costs.

## Contacts

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



### PALM support service line

The contact point for all enquiries is the PLF support service line: (1800 515 131) or the support service email address: ([support@pacificlabourfacility.com.au](mailto:support@pacificlabourfacility.com.au)).



### Welfare and wellbeing officers

Short-term 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 PLF staff in regional locations that AEs can liaise with directly. There are also country liaison officers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste that workers can raise concerns with if needed.



### Immediate investigation

When complaints are raised they are investigated immediately - whether brought directly to the Australian Government, 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).