



# Expanding and improving labour mobility

**The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is one of Australia's 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 further improving and expanding the PALM scheme, including:**

- strengthening oversight of domestic operations as part of improved support for PALM scheme workers
- responsibly growing the PALM scheme and better supporting employers and participating countries
- supporting more than 1,000 PALM scheme workers to attain formal qualifications over 4 years
- increasing support to make it easier for PALM scheme workers to access their superannuation savings when they return home
- providing access to Medicare for an initial 200 families who will participate in the Government's family accompaniment pilot.

31 MARCH 2023

# THE PALM SCHEME AT A GLANCE



**CURRENT EMPLOYERS**  
**431**

(at 31 March 2023)

## 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.



**37,790**  
**WORKERS**

(at 31 March 2023)



Approximately 20 per cent of these workers are women.<sup>1</sup>

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



**37,013**

## PRE-SCREENED WORKERS

(at January 2023, 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.

## WORKER PRODUCTIVITY

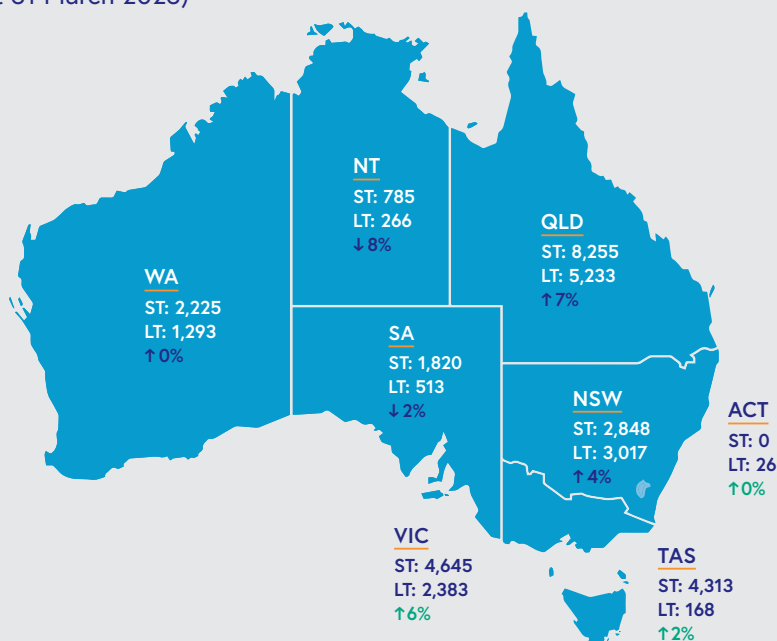


The productivity of overseas seasonal workers was 20% higher on average compared to working holiday makers, based on fruit picking tasks.

The productivity of returning seasonal workers was 15% higher on average compared to first-time workers.<sup>2</sup>

## DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS

(at 31 March 2023)



ST: Short-term workers

LT: Long-term workers

↑: % increase between February 2023 – March 2023



**\$64.15 M<sup>3</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.





[Meet the team from Queensland Berries in this short video.](#)

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

## CASE STUDY

### PALM scheme workers are "vital" for this family business

Queensland Berries is Australia's largest privately owned commercial berry enterprise, and employs Tongan, Solomon Islander and Timorese workers through the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme.

Recruiting from the Pacific islands and Timor-Leste has enabled the business to build a consistent team to grow, pick and pack berries across its 5 sites in South East Queensland.

"Three years ago, we made the best decision of our company to become involved with the scheme. It is vital for the stability of our business," said Queensland Berries Director Melissa McGruddy.

For Queensland Berries, it's not just about business, but also building a team that has access to support and pastoral care.

"The mental and physical health of our staff is paramount. We promote diversity and pride ourselves on a happy and harmonious workplace.

"A major part of our induction program is ensuring the staff feel comfortable and know that our team is there to support them. Adjusting to new foods, homesickness, climate, shared accommodation and work can be overwhelming," said Melissa.

Queensland Berries recruit both long-term and seasonal workers, many of whom return each year for the new harvest.

## 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

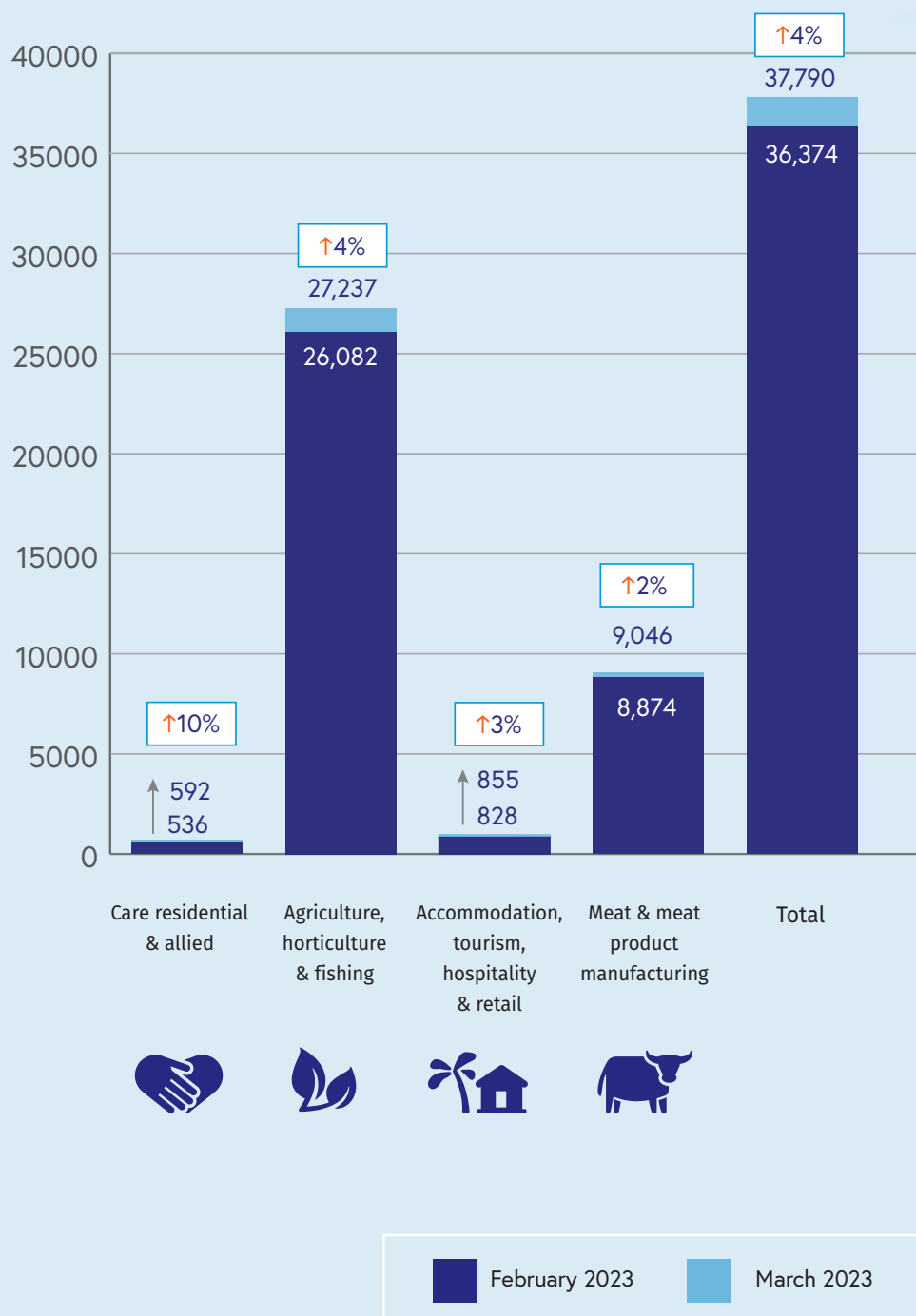
The number of employers participating in the PALM scheme grows every year. Short-term employer numbers have grown by 23% (average year on year growth), while long-term employer numbers have grown by 57% (average year-on-year growth - this increase is largely attributable to mutual recognition).

### 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 31 March 2023, 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.



### REFERENCES

1. Based on applying gender breakdown of the number of PALM visas granted to workers in country.
2. Zhao, S, Binks, B, Kruger, H, Xia, C & Stenekes, N (2018) What difference does labour choice make to farm productivity and profitability in the Australian

- horticulture industry? A comparison between seasonal workers and working holiday makers, ABARES, accessed 24 March 2023. <http://bit.ly/3nEOgYe>. (NB: Sample = 150 seasonal workers and 109 working holiday makers over 3 years.)
3. PLF mid-year briefing January 2022.



## 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.

By the end of the third quarter 2022-23, 202 long-term employer site visits and 102 short-term employer monitoring visits were conducted (1 July 2022 - 31 March 2023). 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).