

Frequently asked questions - flooding event in far north Queensland

22 December 2023

An adverse weather event is currently underway in far north Queensland (FNQ) due to the impacts of Tropical Cyclone Jasper. Heavy rainfall in the Barron River catchment area has led to significant flooding that has impacted many residents in the region, including Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme employers.

This list of questions has been developed to support PALM scheme employers and workers to understand the support available and actions required following this weather event.

What emergency support services are available for PALM scheme employers and workers affected by the floods in Queensland?

Anyone whose life is at risk should call triple zero (000) immediately.

People requiring urgent assistance can:

- contact the Queensland Community Recovery Hotline on 1800 173 349
- contact the State Emergency Service (SES) on 132 500 (same number across Australia)
- refer to the [Queensland State Emergency Service](#) website.

You can stay up to date on storm, flood and cyclone warnings through the [Queensland Government's Disaster Management website](#).

Where do I find advice about how to stay safe during a flood?

With impacts of floodwaters continuing in far north Queensland, any affected PALM scheme employers and workers are urged to be aware of ongoing safety and health risks including avoiding walking through floodwater and mud as much as possible.

Floodwaters can contain sewage, debris and animal waste, which can significantly increase the risk of disease and infection.

Anyone who does need to enter shallow floodwater or handle items that have been in contact with floodwater should wear protective footwear and clothing and regularly wash their hands.

If you have any health concerns, you can call 13 HEALTH, or call triple zero (000) in an emergency.

For more information, please visit this Queensland Health media release: [Health risks lurking in far north Queensland floodwaters](#).

For more advice on floodwater safety, including driving during floods and wet weather, please visit this Queensland Government web page: [Floodwater safety](#).

I am a PALM scheme employer impacted by floods in Queensland, what do I need to do next?

PALM scheme employers impacted by flooding as a result of Tropical Cyclone Jasper are required to support the ongoing safety, welfare and wellbeing of workers.

The PALM scheme [Approved Employer Deed](#) and [PALM scheme Approved Employer Guidelines](#) outline your specific obligations in detail.

You must:

- immediately inform the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations if your workers are unable to work and/or require relocation as a result of a weather emergency or natural disaster
 - call the PALM scheme support service line on 1800 515 131 to notify the department of any impacts
- ensure a minimum net pay guarantee for workers after tax and deductions of \$200 a week (refer to guidelines section 5.1.7)
- cover the costs of workers' accommodation and transport for any week in which you offer less than 20 hours (refer to guidelines section 3.7.4)
- review section 13.5 of the guidelines and clause 70 of the deed in relation to force majeure events.

Should I report the impact of flooding - or any other weather emergency - through PALMIS?

In a weather emergency or natural disaster, PALM scheme employers are strongly encouraged to contact the PALM scheme support on 1800 515 131 to notify the department of any impacts.

Please note: the department will close its offices on Friday 22 December 2023 and return to work on Tuesday 2 January 2024. The department is maintaining an emergency on call function during this period.

During this time, employers and workers can call the PALM scheme support service line to report critical incidents - including impacts of the flooding or any weather emergency - and incidents where a PALM scheme worker requires immediate assistance only, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What information do I need to provide to the department when reporting the impacts of flooding or another emergency?

You will need to provide the following information:

- approved employer name
- approved employer contact person and details
- location and address of where incident occurred
- host employer (if known/applicable)
- date and time of incident

- number of PALM scheme workers affected
- names of workers
- country of origin of workers
- outline any emergency services involvement
- details of any workers who required hospitalisation.

Do I need to update accommodation plans if there are changes to my PALM scheme workers' living arrangements due to the flooding?

Employers whose workers require alternative accommodation must inform the department immediately, or as soon as possible. Please contact the PALM scheme support service line on 1800 515 131.

Short-term emergency accommodation arrangements that do not otherwise affect a worker's deductions or employment arrangements do not require a change request.

Where the duration of alternative accommodation arrangements is longer than 14 days, or otherwise affects the worker's deductions or employment conditions, a change request should be submitted through PALMIS as soon as practicable.

I am a PALM scheme employer and have PALM scheme workers affected by the floods. Are they eligible for any disaster relief payments?

Impacted PALM scheme workers may be eligible to receive a Queensland Government [Emergency Hardship Assistance Grant](#) to help with buying food, clothing and medical supplies or accessing temporary accommodation.

To check if your area is eligible, please visit: [Tropical Cyclone Jasper financial assistance](#).

PALM scheme workers can also apply for Queensland Government disaster recovery payments by:

- applying using the form on the [Community Recovery Grants Portal](#)
- calling the Community Recovery hotline on 1800 173 349
- visiting a [Community Recovery Hub](#).

Applying online via the Community Recovery Grants Portal

- If you are a PALM scheme employer, community member and/or other person assisting or applying for the grant on a worker's behalf, please ensure the worker understands the third-party consent disclosure statement. This will be provided prior to starting the application.
 - The worker will need to agree either verbally or in writing that they wish to share their personal information with you so you can submit the application on their behalf.
- Make sure workers have their [required identification documents](#) ready to go.
- Bank account details need to be for the individual applying for the grant.

- If a worker is missing any of the required identification documents, continue with the online application and select ‘no’ to identification questions, then call the Community Recovery Hotline on 1800 173 349 or visit a [Community Recovery Hub](#) to assist with ID verification.

Applying via a call to the Community Recovery Hotline

- When calling the hotline, you need to state you would like to apply for the [Emergency Hardship Assistance Grant](#). If you are a PALM scheme employer calling on a worker’s behalf, please ensure the worker is with you while making the call so they can provide verbal consent.
- You may need to organise an interpreter, so the worker understands the third-party consent disclosure statement.

Applying via a visit to a Community Recovery Hub

- There are 3 Community Recovery Hubs that workers can visit in person. On-site staff can assist with grant applications if needed.
- In-person applications are completed on an individual basis. It is important each person has the required [identification documents](#) with them.
- Find out more about [Community Recovery Hubs](#), including locations and opening hours.

Stay up to date on Queensland Government Tropical Cyclone Jasper community recovery assistance via the [Community Recovery QLD Facebook page](#).

I have PALM scheme workers who were due to return home, but are unable to do so due to the flooding. What do I do?

PALM scheme employers are encouraged to contact the Department of Home Affairs via the online [Status Resolution Service](#) to discuss support options available for PALM scheme workers whose repatriation plans have been impacted by flooding in far north Queensland or any other weather emergency.

Home Affairs advises that where possible, visa holders should depart Australia before their current visa ceases to avoid becoming unlawful in Australia.

In some circumstances, a PALM scheme worker whose visa is expiring and whose repatriation plans have been impacted by a weather emergency or natural disaster may be able to apply for another substantive visa, however, a worker’s individual circumstances will determine their visa options. Please see: [Explore visa options \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](#).

If a worker’s visa has expired then they will need to apply for a Bridging visa E (BVE) in order to become lawful. A BVE is a short-term visa that lets a person remain lawful while they make arrangements to leave Australia.

A worker cannot apply for a BVE until after their visa has expired. More information is on the Home Affairs website [Your visa is expiring or has expired \(homeaffairs.gov.au\)](#).

Employers are required to continue to support the ongoing safety, welfare and wellbeing of workers until such time as they can return home.

What ongoing support is available for PALM scheme employers impacted by the floods?

The department has prepared a document specifically outlining the ongoing support available to PALM scheme employers affected by flooding in the aftermath of the cyclone.

It details a range of federal, state and local government supports available in the coming weeks for impacted employers.

Please visit: [Queensland floods - support for affected PALM scheme employers](#).