



# Expanding and improving labour mobility

**The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is one of Australia's temporary migration programs 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 together to connect Australian employers with Pacific and Timor-Leste workers through the PALM scheme.

PALM scheme approved employers can apply to recruit workers in any sector in all regional and rural postcodes, in agriculture nationally and in select agriculture-related food product manufacturing sectors.

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 1,500 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.

# THE PALM SCHEME AT A GLANCE



**CURRENT EMPLOYERS**  
**470**

(at 29 February 2024)

## 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.



**38,149**  
**WORKERS**

(at 29 February 2024)



Approximately 21% of these workers are women.<sup>1</sup>



**53,788**

## PRE-SCREENED WORKERS

(at 31 July 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

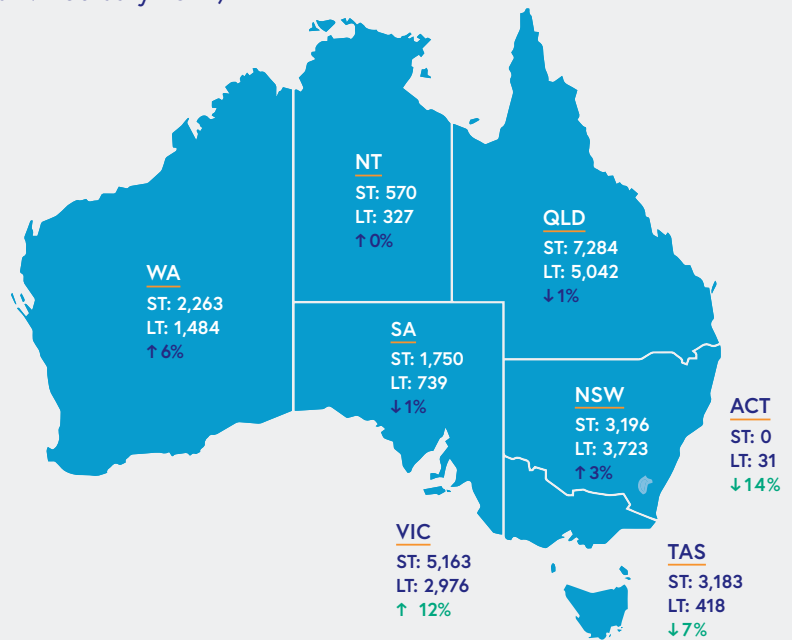


The productivity of overseas seasonal workers was 20% higher on average compared to working holiday makers, based on fruit picking tasks.

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

## DISTRIBUTION OF WORKERS

(at 29 February 2024)



ST: short-term workers

LT: long-term workers

↑↓: % increase/decrease between 31 January 2024 – 29 February 2024



**\$212M<sup>3</sup>** AUD received in the Pacific in remittances and superannuation from long-term workers

Long-term PALM scheme workers sent an estimated \$168m in remittances to the Pacific and Timor-Leste and paid \$81.8m in income tax from July 2018 to May 2023. 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.





## CASE STUDY

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

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

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

Queensland Berries is one of Australia's largest privately owned commercial berry enterprise, and employs Tongan, Solomon Islander and Timorese workers through the 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 recruits both long-term and short-term 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

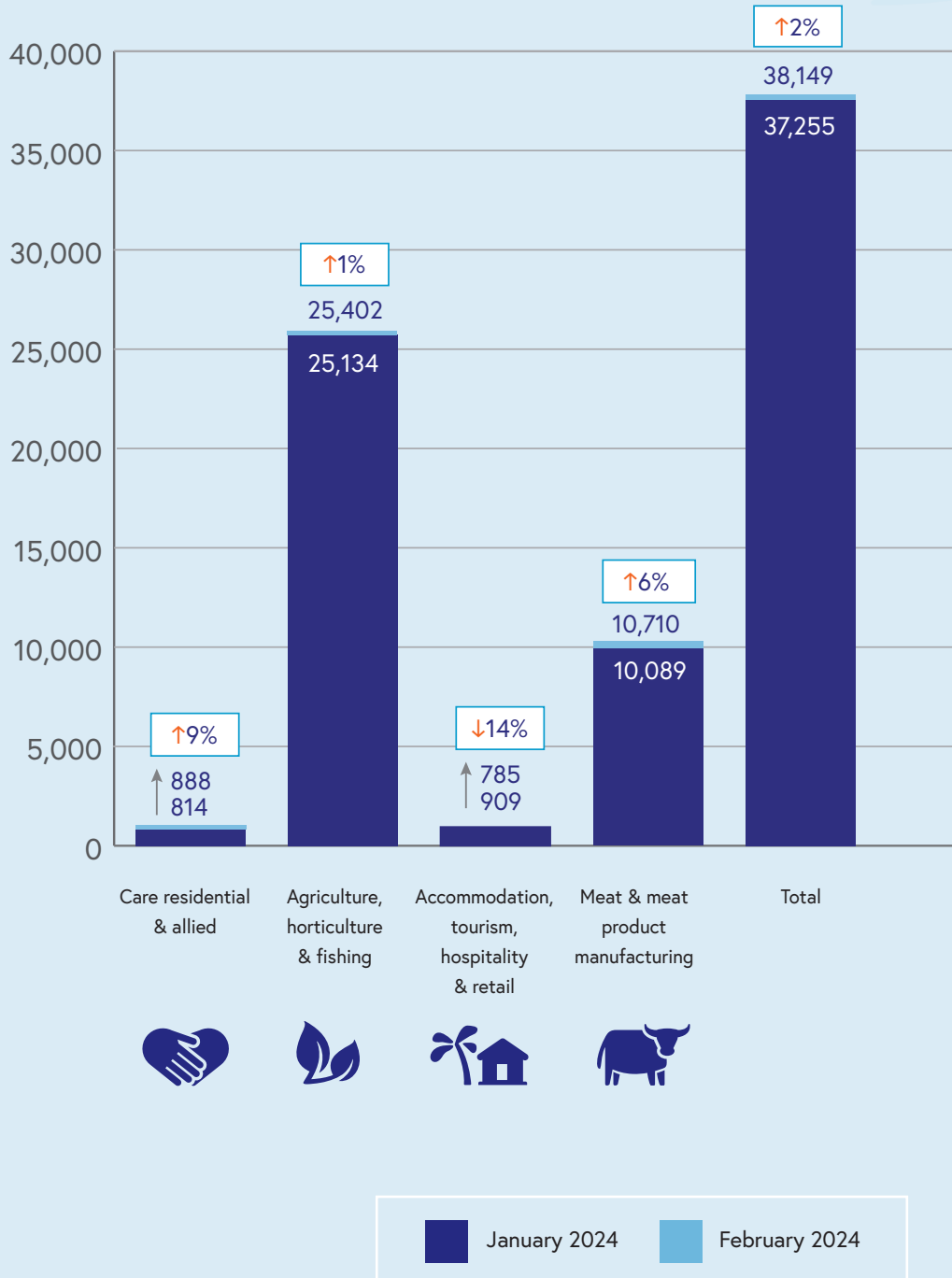
The number of employers participating in the PALM scheme grows every year. As at 29 February 2024, PALM scheme employer numbers have grown by 29% (average year-on-year growth).

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 29 February 2024, the majority of employers participating in the PALM scheme are in the agriculture/fishing and meat processing sectors. The Australian 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 scheme 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. Pacific Labour Facility internal economic modelling, August 2023.



## 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 Australian 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 first third of 2023–24, 126 employer monitoring visits were conducted (31 October 2023–31 December 2023). These involved assessing the quality of workers' accommodation.



## Assurance activities

The Australian 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.



### Support service line

The contact point for all enquiries is the PALM scheme support service line: (1800 51 51 31) or the support service email address: ([palm@dewr.gov.au](mailto:palm@dewr.gov.au)).



### Welfare and wellbeing officers

PALM scheme 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 that PALM scheme employers 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, 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).