

PALM (Pacific Australia Labour Mobility) Scheme Position Paper

29 January, 2024

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. Purpose | 2 |
| 3. Background | 2 |
| 4. Situation Analysis | 3 |
| 5. PALM Future – Reimagining the Scheme..... | 7 |
| 5.1. Structured Supports | 7 |
| 5.2. Stakeholder Responsibilities..... | 8 |
| 5.3. Role Clarity | 8 |
| 5.4. Visa Conditions..... | 8 |
| 5.5. Employer Readiness | 8 |
| 5.6. Community Engagement and Regional Approaches | 9 |
| 5.7. Accommodation | 9 |
| 5.8. Working Hours..... | 9 |
| 6. Summary of Recommended Actions | 10 |

1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is threefold:

1. To provide an overview of the PALM Scheme.

Including the history, changes over time, what is working well, and the issues/concerns that have come up in the research.

2. To explain and advocate for the PALM Scheme.

Including a clear articulation of the intentions of the PALM Scheme (and to examine if Australia is meeting these intentions), the intended benefits for the Pacific Nations (and Timor Leste) who engage with the scheme (beyond financial/GDP benefits, and 'Brain Gain' opportunities for PALM workers); and what are the intended benefits for Australia from involvement with this scheme?

3. A 'reimagining' of the PALM Scheme.

Exploring how the program can meet the intentions of Pacific Nations, Timor Leste, and Australia; responses or proposed responses to the significant issues and concerns identified; and what would a reimagined program (embedded within the community) look like?

2. About Welcoming Australia

Welcoming Australia is a non-partisan organisation that works towards an Australia where everyone can belong, contribute, and thrive. This position paper has been developed to highlight the experiences of PALM workers in Australia, recognising that PALM workers are part of a temporary migration scheme in Australia with a distinct visa category. Still, PALM workers are entitled to the same work rights (pay, conditions, etc.) as Australian workers.

Through Welcoming Australia's work in Welcoming Cities, Welcoming Clubs and Welcoming Workplaces, there has been extensive discussion about PALM, with confusion among communities and reports of complex issues within this program. This position paper has been developed in response to this. As a non-partisan organisation, Welcoming Australia has no direct link and nothing to gain or lose from confronting this topic.

This position paper is an outline of the current state of the program and an exploration of opportunities to change this initiative.

3. Background

There are longstanding deep connections between Australia and the Pacific region. Australia emphasises a united Pacific family and the valuable role of Pacific-led regional organisations. In addition, Australia acknowledges that the Pacific is facing a climate emergency and is spearheading efforts to build climate and disaster resilience.

Australia looks to support the region's sustained growth and development as the Pacific continues its post-Covid recovery. Connections between Pacific and Australian communities are also strong through partnerships in sports, education, media, and church communities.

Australia contributes to gender equality efforts in the Pacific with investments totalling \$170 million committed between 2021 and 2026 for women's leadership and rights programs. Increased trade, infrastructure development and labour mobility are also areas of interest for Australia and the Pacific.

Australia and the Pacific region are also partnering around the management and conservation of the Pacific Ocean, fisheries development, security cooperation, and the role of the Office of the Pacific.¹

In 2012, the short-term Seasonal Worker Programme (short-term) commenced in Australia, delivered by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). In 2018, the longer-term Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) was introduced. Both programs were demand-driven temporary migration employment initiatives that focused on providing short and long-term workers from the Pacific and Timor-Leste for key industries across regional and rural/regional Australia.

Delivered through DEWR, a single Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme was introduced in 2022. The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme is built on solid partnerships between Australia, Pacific Island nations and Timor-Leste. It is the primary temporary migration program to address unskilled, low-skilled, and semi-skilled workforce shortages in rural and regional Australia,² deploying them to eligible businesses.

The Approved Employer deed aids PALM's delivery. The objectives in this document detail the intentions of the PALM scheme to support economic growth for Australia's Pacific neighbours and address workforce shortages. It also outlines the requirement that employers ensure worker well-being and uphold workplace rights and protections.³

It is estimated that the PALM Scheme has contributed AU1.3 billion in economic value since 2019⁴, and the introduction of the Single Visa stream in 2022 has enabled a more straightforward approach to lodging workforce applications. The Single Visa stream still includes short- and long-term Visa options, allowing Australian businesses to match their labour shortage projections.

The newly structured PALM program has also facilitated the centrality of coordination under one umbrella rather than the previous SWP and PLS dichotomy. This has reduced confusion around program distinction. Also, with extended visas (up to 4 years), businesses can adequately focus on developing workforce skills and supporting the completion of occupation qualifications.

4. Situation Analysis

Oversight of PALM is provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)⁵. Policy matters connected with the program are within the remit of DFAT, including the most recent reforms to expand and improve the scheme. The administrative and operational responsibility sits with DEWR.

A Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) is currently contracted as the administrative service provider for the PALM Scheme (this will conclude on 30 December 2023, when the administration will be managed through

¹ "Pacific Labour Mobility", <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/pacific-labour-mobility> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 10 December, 2023.

² "Delivering benefits for Australian employers and Pacific partners", <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-04/PALM%20Delivering%20Benefits%20Factsheet%20220422.pdf> 18 April, 2022. Palm Scheme Website, 9 October 2023.

³ "Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme", <https://www.dewr.gov.au/pacific-australia-labour-mobility-scheme> Department of Employment and Workforce Relations, 6 November, 2023.

⁴ "Review of Pacific Labour Facility and Management Response", April 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/countries-and-regions/review-pacific-labour-facility-and-management-response>, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 6 November, 2023.

⁵ Charlie Stevens, "Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Reaches Worker Milestone Ahead of Expectations". March 16, 2023. <https://thepalladiumgroup.com/news/Pacific-Australia-Labour-Mobility-Reaches-Worker-Milestone-Ahead-of-Expectations>. Palladium Group, 9 October 2023.

DEWR). The central role of the PLF, currently managed by the Palladium Group, is to facilitate the supply of suitable workers to meet Australian industries' demands while ensuring the workers' welfare.⁶

According to the Palladium Group, PALM has (as of December 2022) generated AU\$526 million in wages. During the same period, remittances stood at AU\$188.5 million sent to PALM worker families and communities in the Pacific and Timor Leste.

On 31 May 2022, PALM workforce arrivals were 24,469 workers (as of 31 May 2022). This number has increased by 56% in just over a year to 38,259 (as of 31 July 2023)⁷. According to the Federal Government, the support of this worker increase was an effort to address long-standing workforce shortages immediately. Queensland has the largest share of PALM workers (37%). This is almost double the number in Victoria and New South Wales, which have 19% and 17% respectively. Only 2% of PALM workers are located in the Northern Territory. The total distribution of workers (on 31 July 2023) is outlined in the table below:

| QLD | VIC | NSW | WA | SA | TAS | NT |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| 9,234 | 4,328 | 3,126 | 2,395 | 2,329 | 2,398 | 622 |
| 4,813 | 2,776 | 3,487 | 1,429 | 710 | 258 | 328 |
| 14,047 | 7,104 | 6,613 | 3,824 | 3,039 | 2,656 | 950 |
| 37% | 19% | 17% | 10% | 8% | 7% | 2% |

Employee wellness is identified as being of central importance within the PALM scheme. The Approved Employer Deed specifies that PALM worker accommodation, welfare, and general wellbeing are the responsibilities of approved employers. Approved Employers are also expected to be culturally competent; they must understand PALM workers' home countries and cultures, liaise in a culturally appropriate way, and provide interpreters as needed⁸.

From January 2023, the Approved Employer Guidelines stated that approved employers should demonstrate knowledge or undertake cultural training relevant to their PALM employee cohort. However, there is no support process to link employers to cultural competency training, nor are recommended courses or training services outlined in the deed.

It should also be noted that PALM workers must undertake cultural competency training in their home countries before they come to Australia. However, approved employers do not have a similar requirement.

The Community Connections program (currently coordinated by The Salvation Army) and Country Liaison Officers (CLOs) provide some worker support. The former facilitates participation in local communities through social, sporting, and cultural events and religious services. It identifies connections with additional stakeholders to support workers' welfare and well-being. Its other function is to produce resources for enhanced cultural understanding between workers and their host

⁶ "Review of Pacific Labour Facility and Management Response", April 2020, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/countries-and-regions/review-pacific-labour-facility-and-management-response>, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 6 November, 2023.

⁷ "Expanding and improving the PALM Scheme", November 2022, <https://www.palmScheme.gov.au/about>, Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, 14 July, 2023.

⁸ "Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme: Approved Employer Deed". 26 June 2023, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/PALM%20Approved%20Employer%20Deed%20-%2026%20June%202023.pdf>, Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, 14 July, 2023.

communities⁹. Country Liaison Officers are staff from Pacific nations or Timor Leste but based in Australia. The Pacific nations and Timor Leste appoint them to provide culturally specific support to workers in Australia¹⁰.

This outlined welfare and wellness setup is highly commendable. Unfortunately, research shows that the experience ‘on the ground’ differs significantly.¹¹ Notably lacking are culturally safe and responsive support and services and cultural competency training for Approved Employers. DEWR has stated that Community Liaisons are rolling out cultural awareness programs. However, the framework for this requirement is not yet in the public domain. There is also anecdotal evidence that these cultural programs are particularly required in regional and remote locations, where support is sparse and needed.

The PALM Scheme is being remodelled in 2024 to incorporate an advisory group¹² whose mandate entails contributing strategic, policy, and program aspects that influence Pacific labour issues, identifying and assisting with issue resolution, and sharing best practices, including the program’s long-term future.

Increased partnerships between Pacific nations and Australia are becoming more critical over time. A regional response is needed to the emerging threats of natural disasters, climate change, and outbreaks of infectious diseases, as well as threats of transnational crime. Economic integration fuelled by commerce and workforce mobility is vital for further regional collaboration and connection¹³.

Absconding and disengagement are two critical issues for the PALM Scheme. For example, in the previous Seasonal Worker Program (SWP), a dispute arose at a farm in Bundaberg with 30 ni-Vanuatu workers leaving the program without a trace in early 2021 after numerous complaints about poor pay and work conditions¹⁴. Statistics continue to make troubled reading. According to the Department of Home Affairs, 147 seasonal workers absconded in the 2018-19 fiscal year. This increased to 2,148 workers in 2021-22, and absconding numbers were already 1,438 by the end of March 2023^{15*}.

It should be noted that PALM workers who abscond will have their visa voided and will be highly unlikely ever to be selected for the PALM program again. Despite this firm response, absconding numbers have increased over the last three years, and there are indications that low working hours throughout COVID-19 may be a contributing factor. Reports of reduced hours combined with low wages prompt people to seek alternative employment in contravention of visa stipulations. There is also widespread discussion about poor working conditions, including inadequate accommodation driving absconding levels.

⁹ “PALM Scheme organisational chart and responsibilities” May 2023, <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au>, Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, 6 November 2023.

¹⁰ “Country Liaison Officer” October 2023. <https://acfid.asn.au/job/country-liaison-officer/>, Australian Council for International Development, 5 October 2023.

¹¹ Audrey Courty, “Calls for more Pacific led support services for Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme seasonal workers. 4 March, 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-03-04/calls-for-more-pacific-led-support-services-for-seasonal-workers/102043994>, ABC News, 14 July, 2023.

¹² “Advisory Group” <https://www.palmScheme.gov.au/advisory-group>, Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, 6 November 2023.

¹³ “2017 Foreign Policy White Paper” <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper.pdf>, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 5 October 2023.

¹⁴ Johanna Marie, “Workers from Vanuatu back on Bundaberg farms, but others risk deportation for absconding”. 30 March, 2021. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-30/vanuatu-nationals-back-working-legally-on-bundaberg-farms/100036232>, ABC News, 14 July 2023.

¹⁵ Angus Thompson, “Broke and hungry, Pacific Islanders are abandoning Aussie farms in droves”, 27 June, 2023. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/broke-and-hungry-pacific-islanders-are-abandoning-aussie-farms-in-droves-20230621-p5diah.html>, Sydney Morning Herald, 5 October, 2023.

On 16 September 2023, Catholic Archbishop of Fiji Peter Loy Chong penned a scathing attack¹⁶ on the PALM Scheme in which he accused the program of human trafficking and forced labour and failure to protect the welfare and dignity of seasonal workers. In October 2023, Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka also encouraged PALM workers to know their rights as workers in Australia, citing cases of PALM worker exploitation¹⁷.

Reports of exploitation, inadequate housing, and arbitrary movement of workers across locations without attendant logistical support fuel the program's negative perception (it should be noted here that for many businesses, the capacity to move workers across locations is critical to their involvement in the program; it would be positive though if movements were communicated clearly to workers, and support was provided to make transitions smoother). 1,654 Fijians applied for asylum between January 2020 and June 2023¹⁸.

Initially, it was intended that the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme would be aimed at unemployed people seeking employment. Through the scheme¹⁹, they would develop skills and experience to advance their careers. However, many highly skilled manufacturing, hospitality, tourism, and healthcare workers have joined the PALM scheme. This has drained the Pacific and Timor Leste regions of critical workforces seeking higher wages offered through PALM²⁰.

This growing trend of skilled Pacific workers joining the PALM Scheme poses a considerable challenge for Pacific Island and Timor Leste economies.

“Vanuatu as a case in point has had skilled Ni Vanuatu workers...leaving their jobs to join the Pacific labour mobility program...worsening the existing labour shortages of Ni Vanuatu workers with skills and work experience required to replace those who have left their jobs to go to Australia...”

— Astrid Boulekone, General Manager of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry²¹

Similar sentiments have been voiced by Fuimaono Rosalia Me, a cultural adviser for the Women in Business Development non-profit in Samoa, who stated that critical workers in the country's agricultural sector have left for the Scheme²².

¹⁶ “Opinion: The Dark Side of Seasonal Work”. 18 December 2023. <https://www.fijitimes.com.fj/opinion-the-dark-side-of-seasonal-work/>, Fiji Times, 18 December 2023.

¹⁷ Apenisa Waqairadovu. “Legal Measures to combat exploitations in PALM”. 27 October, 2023, <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/legal-measures-to-combat-exploitations-in-palm/>, Fiji Times, 6 November, 2023. *PLEASE NOTE: DEWR has advised that new data on these numbers and other key updates on the scheme will be provided in early 2024, this section of the paper will be updated accordingly.

¹⁸ Richard Curtain, “Why the Catholic Archbishop of Fiji is wrong to condemn seasonal work”. 12 October, 2023, <https://devpolicy.org/why-the-catholic-archbishop-of-fiji-is-wrong-20231012/>, Development Policy Blog, 18 December 2023.

¹⁹ Richard Curtain, “Brain drain 1: a growing concern” 13 October, 2022. <https://devpolicy.org/brain-drain-1-a-growing-concern-20221013/>, Development Policy Blog, 27 October 2023.

²⁰ Apisalome Movono, Leilani Faaiuas, Regina Scheyvens, “Underpaid at home, vulnerable abroad: how seasonal job schemes are draining Pacific nations of vital workers”. 29 November, 2022. <https://theconversation.com/underpaid-at-home-vulnerable-abroad-how-seasonal-job-schemes-are-draining-pacific-nations-of-vital-workers-194810>, The Conversation, 6 October, 2023.

²¹ Catherine Wilson, “Pacific Islands fear brain drain as Australia lures workers”. 17 January, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2023/1/17/pacific-islands-fear-brain-drain-as-australia-lures-workers>, Al Jazeera, 27 July, 2023.

²² Richard Butler, “For Pacific Islands, Australia's job schemes a double-edged sword | Labour Rights” 6 February, 2023 <https://allaboutvanuatu.com/for-pacific-islands-australias-job-schemes-a-double-edged-sword-labour-rights/>, All About Vanuatu “Good News”, 6 November, 2023.

In preparing this position paper, anecdotal interviews with PALM workers provided more context to the complexity of ‘brain drain’²³.

Benjamin* is from the Solomon Islands and works in the PALM Scheme in NSW, but he is an experienced policeman in his home country. Stephen* is a qualified teacher from the Solomon Islands and working for PALM. He hastily joined the program for its promised wages are higher than those in the teaching profession at home.

It should be noted that only allowing low-skilled, unemployed persons to join the PALM scheme creates a complex problem. The payment for PALM scheme workers is much higher than skilled workers receive working in their field in their home countries. Therefore, skilled workers also seek to join the scheme for financial benefit. Allowing skilled workers to join the scheme appears more equitable for workers but drains significant human resources from the Pacific region and Timor Leste.

But it is not only brain drain concerns that bedevil the program. Separation from family and loneliness exacerbate already poor mental health outcomes²⁴. A public health crisis is also developing, with an increasing number of women falling pregnant, which reveals a void in welfare safety nets, mainly because PALM workers are not eligible for Medicare²⁵.

5. PALM Future – Reimagining the Scheme

As more PALM workers move and temporarily settle in regional and rural communities, it seems ‘on paper’ that more people-to-people links are being established for an aspirational united, connected and stronger Pacific ‘family’. However, this qualitative goal will remain illusory if program gaps are unresolved. A holistic view of implementation is urgently needed. The recommendations below mirror the recently released White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities²⁶.

5.1. Structured Supports

Quantitative financial outcomes (for workers and nations) must be balanced with qualitative results that emphasise well-being, mental health, and social support. Welcoming Australia works with new arrivals and receiving communities to create communities where everyone can belong, contribute, and thrive. In the Approved Employer Deed and through the Community Connections program, there are intentions for this program to support employee wellness and wellbeing. Still, reports reveal that this is different from the reality.

Therefore, the PALM scheme must have structured social, cultural and health supports that wrap around the PALM worker community to welcome and support all workers. Cultural competency training for all approved employers and anyone associated with the scheme should be mandatory.

²³ Anecdotal reports in Leeton and Griffith, NSW, conversation with Ken Dachi, November 2023.

²⁴ Matt Withers, “Rapid analysis of family separation issues and responses in the PALM scheme – final report”, 12 August 2022. <https://devpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Rapid-analysis-of-family-separation-issues-and-responses-in-PALM.pdf>, Development Policy Blog, September 2023.

²⁵ Jordyn Beazley, “No support’: Pacific Island labour-hire workers fear \$6,000 cost of giving birth in Australia” 23 July, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/jul/23/no-support-pacific-island-labour-hire-workers-fear-6000-cost-of-giving-birth-in-australia>, The Guardian Australia, 6 October, 2023

²⁶ “Working Future: The Australian Government’s White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities

“25 September, 2023. <https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/final-report> Department of Treasury, 6 November 2023.

ACTION: Require approved employer cultural competency training and clearly define support roles within the PALM program delivery.

5.2. Stakeholder Responsibilities

PALM administration must seek increased involvement by diplomatic representatives from the Pacific and Timor Leste regions, particularly trade attaches. The connection with Country Liaison Officers (CLOs) must be seamless and directly connected to approved employers and labour-hire agencies that deploy workers from the participating countries on the program, seamlessly connecting them with the Community Connections program alongside local governments and communities, including diaspora communities.

PALM workers are temporary migrants to Australia and should have the same support as any other migrant, including social and cultural support, health advice and services, language support and education. A coordinated effort with local councils, community groups and businesses is required to ensure that every worker receives settlement support.

ACTION: Outline clear deliverables for Country Liaison Officers in governing the PALM deed.

5.3. Role Clarity

Clarity of roles, functions, and requirements of operational components of the program, PLF, Community Connections, and Country Liaison Officers, would require that the model be overhauled to make it fit for purpose and have breadth at the grassroots level. There needs to be accountability in all tiers of the PALM program to ensure the role requirements are understood and delivered. This includes coordinating efforts with local councils, community groups and employers.

ACTION: Simplify the administrative structure of the PALM Scheme and roll out a communication campaign to educate stakeholders.

5.4. Visa Conditions

Rates of absconding are too high, and the current visa conditions are a contributing factor. It is encouraging to note that a [family accompaniment](#) program will be piloted in late 2023. Additionally, the new [Pacific Engagement Visa](#) offers a permanent pathway. However, pathways continue to be limited, and PALM workers returning each season struggle to build a life in Australia. One of the perceived pathways to abscond and seek asylum in Australia.

The current Scheme also ties workers to one employer only. If workers feel unsafe or unhappy with their employer, they cannot change, and many abscond. There also needs to be support or an amnesty for workers who have absconded to return to their correct employer or return home without issue. This will reduce the risk of PALM workers staying in Australia without a visa.

ACTION: The Department of Home Affairs needs to review and revise the visa conditions to reduce the risk of workers absconding or seeking asylum and to provide amnesty or support to those who have.

5.5. Employer Readiness

To reduce absconding rates and improve PALM worker experiences, the Scheme must prioritise workplace engagement, ensuring the employers are suitably trained and prepared to employ PALM workers. Over and above pre-departure and arrival briefings, cultural inclusion programs and culturally

responsive training must be part of the employer readiness requirement. This should be embedded for approved employers, staff, accommodation providers and other stakeholders. Cultural safety is critical for workers to feel included and valued, and will also reduce the risk of absconding.

The next step from this work is for approved employers to benchmark their approaches against the Welcoming Workplaces standard to measure welcoming and inclusion.

ACTION: Embed culturally responsive training for all PALM employers and encourage employers to engage with initiatives such as Welcoming Workplaces.

5.6. Community Engagement and Regional Approaches

Numerous regional and rural towns host PALM workers. Consequently, community engagement, including an expanded local government role, sports initiatives, religious participation and other programs and networks, is integral to advancing social cohesion and successful temporary settlement. A whole-of-community approach can also aid a better understanding of prevailing workforce issues by CLOs, providing safe spaces and culturally appropriate support and connections for workers.

Local Government can play a vital role as a facilitator and broker in communities where PALM workers are hosted. Additionally, when neighbouring councils work together, coordinated supports and approaches can deliver more significant outcomes for the receiving communities, employers and workers.

ACTION: Support a coordinated regional approach and encourage neighbouring LGAs to engage with the Welcoming Cities initiative to create a holistic welcoming and inclusion experience for PALM workers.

5.7. Accommodation

According to the Approved Employer (AE) Deed governing the PALM Scheme, an AE must provide suitable accommodation and transportation or arrange reasonable accommodation and transportation with an Accommodation Provider or Transport Provider. Additionally, the AE must refrain from coercing a worker to arrange their accommodation. Notably, there has been improvement in accommodation assessment, with more clarity around what is substandard and what is approved accommodation. Despite this, there are inconsistencies in accommodation experiences, and there should be greater scrutiny of accommodation and accountability for substandard accommodation.

ACTION: Host Councils (Local Governments) should be involved in assessing the quality of identified accommodation.

5.8. Working Hours

The new PALM minimum working hours requirement will apply from January 2024, with the removal of averaging from July 2024, and will significantly impact the PALM Scheme. Anecdotal conversations with Approved Employers (AE) indicate that they will reduce their numbers of PALM workers, as they cannot meet the minimum 30 hours per week work requirement and cannot afford to pay staff for hours not worked. More desperate employers are also likely to require PALM workers to work in unsafe conditions (extreme heat, rain, snow) to ensure that staff work 30 hours per week²⁷.

²⁷ Kaya Barry. *Submission to State Development and Regional Industries Commission* (copy attached). 23 August, 2023.

A more collaborative approach to worker hours should be considered, such as allowing the averaging of hours over a month or a season. Another option is to build connections and collaborations between different farms. If there are not enough hours on one farm, the workers can assist at another farm or approved employer as part of an agreement. PLF must address reduced work hours and unregulated movement of workers to alternative locations due to crop seasonality, especially in agriculture.

Action: Review and revise the minimum working hours requirement to account for seasonal variations and consider the option for workers to be employed across different farms and locations in a coordinated way.

6. Summary of Recommended Actions

The recommended actions are as follows:

- Welfare coordinators must have detailed performance indicators for monthly welfare monitoring and reporting.
- Outline clear deliverables for Country Liaison Officers in governing the PALM deed.
- Simplify the administrative structure of the PALM Scheme and roll out a communication campaign to educate stakeholders.
- Remove or fine labour hire agencies that aren't actively screening out skilled workers qualified in other industries.
- The Department of Home Affairs needs to review and revise the PALM Visa conditions to reduce the risk of workers absconding or seeking asylum.
- Embed culturally responsive training for all PALM employers and encourage employers to engage with initiatives such as Welcoming Workplaces.
- Support a coordinated regional approach and encourage neighbouring LGAs to engage with the Welcoming Cities initiative.
- Host Councils (Local Governments) should be involved in assessing the quality of identified accommodation.
- Review and revise the minimum working hours requirement to account for seasonal variations and consider the option for workers to be employed across different farms.