

Information for Queensland communities hosting Pacific nations workers employed under the Australian Government's Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Workers Programme

Pandemic-related workforce issues have challenged food and fibre supply chains across Australia. As one of the initiatives to assist the state's agricultural sector with labour supply, the Queensland Government is participating in the recommencement of the Australian Government's Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Workers Programme (PLS/SWP). These programmes source workers from Pacific nations with no or low Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) risk.

When workers spend time in Australia through the PLS/SWP, they gain valuable income and skills to take home. This is making a positive difference to the livelihoods of thousands of families in Pacific island countries and in Timor-Leste, and helping to build prosperity and security across the region.

The PLS/SWP for Queensland offers three options for quarantine: on-farm, industry-led regional facilities and hotel. Queensland was the first state to introduce on-farm quarantine.

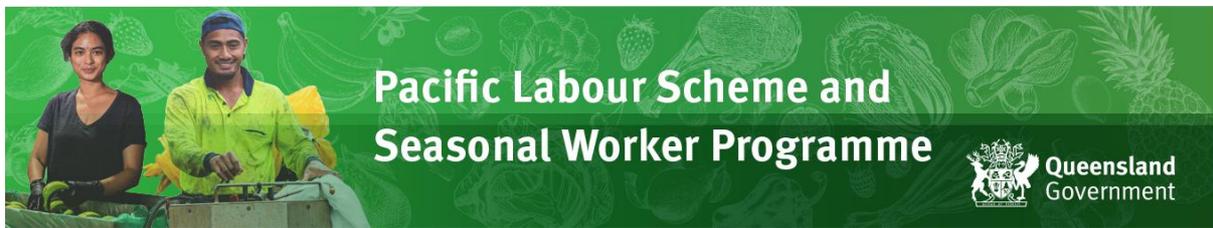
The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' (DAF) PLS/SWP team works very closely with Queensland Health and Queensland Police Service in accordance with national and state specific COVID-19 requirements, as well as recognising the National Cabinet decision to prioritise repatriation of Australian workers.

Q: When did Queensland start bringing in people from Pacific nations to supplement its workforce?

Workers in participating Pacific nations and East Timor only come to Australia under the Pacific Labour Scheme or the Seasonal Worker Programme to work in certain sectors. These are both Australian Government initiatives. The SWP commenced in 2012, and the PLS began in July 2018.

For further information please visit the following Australian Government websites for PLS <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/pacific-labour-mobility/Pages/default> and for SWP <https://www.employment.gov.au/seasonal-worker-programme>.

Generally, the Queensland Government would have almost no direct involvement in recruitments under the PLS and SWP. It is only because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to ensure adequate quarantine and health capacity for workers that the Queensland Government is required to be involved.



Q: Why is Queensland bringing overseas workers into the country when there are unemployed Queenslanders?

Attracting and training Queenslanders to work in the agribusiness and food sector continues to be the Queensland Government's key focus for meeting forecasted labour shortages. We are delivering several initiatives to encourage Queenslanders into casual agricultural employment, particularly leading up to the spring/summer harvest.

- **#pickqld campaign**
A targeted campaign to connect seasonal workers, displaced Queensland workers and working holiday makers to employment opportunities in key agriculture regions where demand for workers is high. The campaign also includes the #pickqld bonus \$1500 payment for new harvest workers.
- **Queensland Agriculture Workforce Network (QAWN) support**
Building on the established network to deliver local solutions to workforce issues, in collaboration with industry groups and local governments, to encourage, place and keep Queenslanders in agricultural work.
- Putting in place practical international border arrangements to allow seasonal workers for agriculture access into Queensland, facilitating continuity of workforce, trade and the supply chain.

Traditionally there has not been enough local workers to fill all of the casual labour jobs needed in the agriculture sector, especially during peak seasons such as harvest and planting.

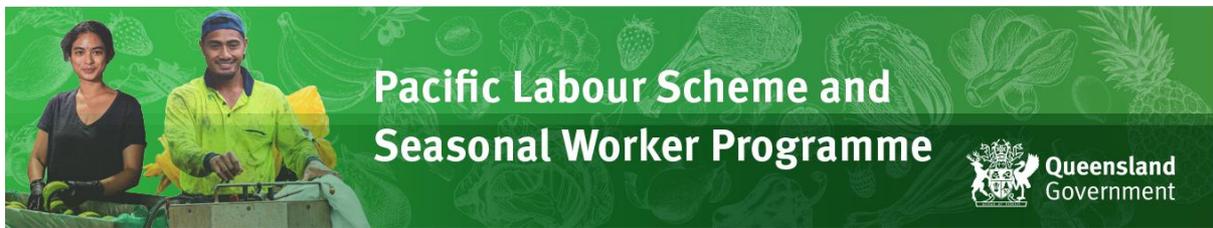
For this reason, the Queensland Government has agreed to participate in the recommencement of the Australian Government's PLS/SWP.

These schemes require employers to demonstrate to the Australian Government, through labour market testing, that they cannot find suitable labour locally before overseas recruitment is approved.

Q: What steps are in place to protect the health of the regional communities where the Pacific nations workers will be working?

Queensland is focused on keeping Queenslanders safe from COVID-19 while ensuring our agricultural sector continues to support our economic recovery and put food on our tables.

All overseas workers entering Queensland for agricultural work are required to complete 14-days quarantine, which is coordinated by the enterprise hosting the workers, known as the Approved Employer (AE). Workers will generally be quarantined on or near the farm where they will be working, through on-farm or regional quarantine, or in hotel quarantine where available.



Only workers from low COVID-risk countries will be able to quarantine on-farm. During on-farm quarantine, workers are permitted to work but are not permitted to have direct contact with other farm workers or the wider community.

Comprehensive International Quarantine Plans (IQPs) for the workers must be developed to meet the Queensland Chief Health Officer's requirements before the workers are approved to enter Queensland and complete quarantine on-farm. The Local Disaster Management Group is also invited to comment on the IQP. Pastoral care and community services are also arranged for the workers to access.

Under a comprehensive IQP that is approved by Queensland's Chief Health Officer various conditions under an IQP to be met include requirements such as:

- 24-hour private security
- appropriate fenced quarantine zones
- four (4) supervisors quarantining with the workers
- daily worker activities to prevent boredom and ensure worker welfare is adequately met
- regular Queensland Police Service checks as required
- daily checks by Queensland Government compliance officers.

DAF and Workplace Health and Safety Queensland will monitor compliance against the IQP. Following quarantine, the workers should not pose a greater COVID-19 risk than any other seasonal worker.

In addition to the approved IQP, the agribusiness must also have a Workplace Health Management Plan (WHMP) to manage the risk of COVID-19 amongst their entire workforce (both local and overseas workers). This is consistent with requirements for agribusinesses employing seasonal workers already in Australia.

Q: What health requirements has the Queensland Government introduced to bring overseas workers into Queensland under the PLS/SWP?

On 21 August 2020, the National Cabinet agreed that states and territories are responsible for ensuring appropriate quarantine and other health and workplace health and safety arrangements are in place for workers entering Australia under the PLS/SWP.

In consultation with the agriculture sector, DAF has developed guidelines to assist Approved Employers to develop IQPs and other arrangements for quarantine that are likely to be supported by the Queensland Government. The guidelines have been approved by Queensland's Chief Health Officer.



The guidelines for hotel, on-farm and regional quarantine require the Approved Employers to develop and enforce an IQP. The IQP will need to address issues such as the transport of workers to the quarantine facility and workplace, separation from other workers on site, strategies for health and welfare checks, dealing with workers displaying symptoms of COVID-19, and risk-based site security measures.

A copy of the on-farm guidelines can be found here:

<https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/seasonal-work-covid19/resource/a811ca6b-2636-4c65-a7e1-cf5795c4965d>

Q: If one of the workers tests positive for COVID-19, will they be sent straight home or be treated here in Queensland?

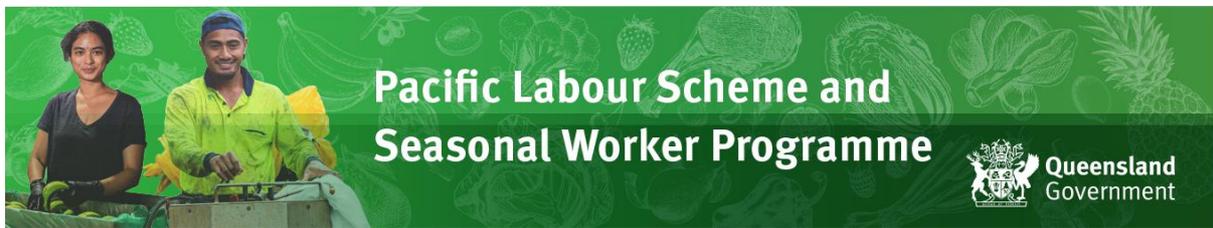
There are a measures in place to protect the health of the overseas workers as well as Queensland communities. These include the requirement to complete 14-days in quarantine in accordance with an IQP that has been assessed as meeting the Queensland Chief Health Officer's requirements. The agribusinesses where the workers will be working are also required to have a WHMP to further protect the rest of their workforce from the risks of COVID-19.

If, despite these extensive risk management measures, an individual tests positive for COVID-19 during or after the quarantine period, the health management of the other workers will be informed by advice from Queensland Health and the individual will be removed to complete their quarantine in hospital.

Q: What happens if one of the Pacific nation workers breaches the rules that apply to them while quarantining on-farm?

Compliance officers from the Queensland Government will attend on-farm quarantine locations daily to ensure the employer and workers are complying with the approved IQP and any other applicable rules. Any alleged breach will be investigated by the compliance officers. The Queensland Police Service may also investigate complaints.

Consequences of a breach of the IQP could include penalties for non-compliance with a health direction under the Public Health Act 2005, possible transfer of all workers to hotel quarantine for the remainder of the quarantine period at full cost to the Approved Employer, and suspension of Queensland's approval to recruit further workers under the PLS/SWP. Where appropriate, enforcement action may also be taken against individual workers.



Q: If there is a group of Pacific nation workers quarantining in my region, how will the needs of my community be managed?

An Approved Employer who wishes to quarantine workers on-farm must submit an IQP as part of their application package. The IQP will need to address issues such as the transport of workers to the quarantine facility, separation from other workers on site, strategies for health checks and dealing with workers displaying symptoms of COVID-19, and risk-based site security measures.

During the assessment of the IQP, the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) and Public Health Unit in the relevant area will be given the opportunity to review and provide comments on the proposed arrangements. Key state and local government agencies are represented in the LDMG and therefore, as a group, have a good understanding of how arrangements could be managed in their local government area, including the region's ability to respond to a COVID-19 outbreak.

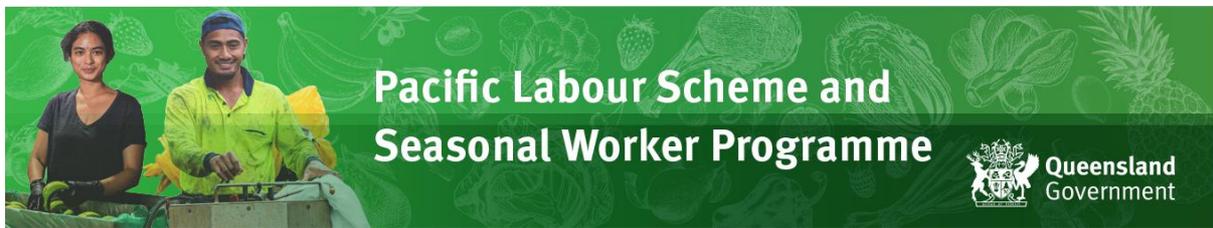
All comments and requests made by the LDMG will be given due consideration before a quarantine plan is approved.

Q: Why are the quarantine rules for Pacific nation workers employed under the PLS/SWP different to other international arrivals?

International arrivals may come directly from a country with a high COVID-19 risk (or have transited through a country with high COVID-19 risk), and therefore strict hotel quarantine is necessary to protect the Queensland community.

Participation in the on-farm and regional quarantine option is limited to workers originating from those Pacific nations that have the lowest COVID-19 risk profile. This means that their home country has low or no COVID-19 cases and has a reliable testing regime. Also, workers must travel direct from their home nation to Queensland either on dedicated flights (chartered for this purpose) or flights that are only transporting passengers boarding from the recruitment country (not boarding additional passengers in that country on a flight that originated elsewhere).

Workers will quarantine together on-farm or in a regional facility. It would not be appropriate to quarantine international arrivals together as there would be an unacceptable risk of COVID-19 spreading. If a worker in quarantine on-farm or a regional facility tested positive to COVID-19, the quarantine for the entire cohort would be extended.



Q: Why are there limits on how many people can be brought into Queensland under the hotel quarantine guidelines?

The Queensland Police Service has responsibility for managing hotel quarantine and ensuring people in quarantine facilities are complying with all requirements. To date, this system has worked very well. However, Queensland's hotel quarantine system is currently close to capacity, and spaces are being prioritised for returning Australian residents. It is unlikely that large numbers of Pacific nation workers will be accommodated in hotel quarantine.

The National Cabinet has agreed that repatriating Australian nationals and permanent residents must be given priority over incoming overseas workers.

Q: Why are Pacific nations workers allowed to fly into Queensland when there are Australian nationals and permanent residents who can't get back from overseas?

National Cabinet has mandated that the repatriation of Australian citizens must take priority.

There are several factors slowing the repatriation of Australians and permanent residents of Australia. These include the availability and cost of transport options departing from their current overseas location and the capacity to quarantine the arrivals.

Pacific nation workers quarantining on-farm or in a regional facility has not and will continue not impact on the number of Australians able to repatriate.

Q: Why can't Queenslanders quarantine at home when they fly in from overseas if Pacific nation workers can quarantine on-farm?

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Participation in the on-farm and regional quarantine option is limited to workers originating from those Pacific nation countries that have the lowest COVID-19 risk profile. This means that their home country has low or no COVID-19 cases and has a reliable testing regime.

Also, workers must travel direct from the recruitment country to Queensland either on dedicated flights (e.g. chartered for this purpose) or flights that are only transporting passengers boarding from the recruitment country (e.g. not boarding additional passengers in that country on a flight that originated elsewhere).

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Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Worker Programme



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Approved Employers seeking to quarantine workers on-farm or in a regional facility must have a IQP which has been assessed as meeting the Queensland Chief Health Officer's requirements. The IQP will need to address issues such as the transport of workers to the quarantine facility, separation from other workers on site, strategies for health checks and dealing with workers displaying symptoms of COVID-19, and risk-based site security measures. The quarantine of the workers will be enforced by the Approved Employer with oversight from the Queensland Government.

Q: Are other Australian states bringing in overseas workers?

All states and territories have opted in to participate in the restart of the PLS/SWP.

Everyone is working on additional quarantine and alternative arrangements required to bring overseas workers to Australian under the PLS/SWP. The Chief Health Officer in each participating State or Territory needs to approve the quarantine and alternative arrangements for their jurisdiction as is required in Queensland.

Q: Has Queensland's border closures contributed to its agricultural worker shortage?

All Australian states and territories are experiencing an agriculture labour shortage. International border arrangements allow seasonal workers for agriculture to apply for entry into Queensland, facilitating continuity of workforce, trade and the supply chain. For movement from other states into Queensland, check the latest requirements here: <https://www.qld.gov.au/border-pass>

Key contacts for further information:

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