

Information for industry: Recruiting and hosting seasonal 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.

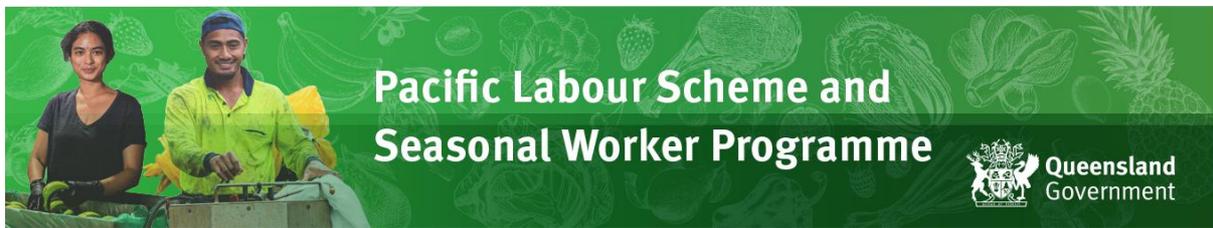
Q: I'm an agribusiness needing additional labour. How can I access overseas workers?

The PLS/SWP Programmes are managed by the Australian Government and all recruitment proposals must be approved by either the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (for the PLS) or the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) (for the SWP).

To participate in either programme, the agribusiness must be an Approved Employer (AE). Typically, small and medium agribusinesses would access workers through a labour hire company who is an Australian Government authorised Approved Employer.

More information about the programmes can be found on the DFAT website:

<https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/pacific/engagement/pacific-labour-mobility/Pages/default>
<https://www.employment.gov.au/seasonal-worker-programme>.



Q: How are Approved Employers expected to use the Requirements for workers in agribusiness and commercial fisheries Guidelines?

Approved Employers must submit their recruitment proposals to the Australian Government for assessment, who will request the necessary Queensland Government approvals.

The guidelines demonstrate the minimum type of quarantine and other arrangements that will be supported by the Queensland Government. Recruitment plan templates have also been developed to help Approved Employers provide all of the information required. Information is available at: <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/agriculture/coronavirus-support/requirements-workers>

Q: How can I check on the progress of my recruitment proposal and how long will it take to get workers in my enterprise?

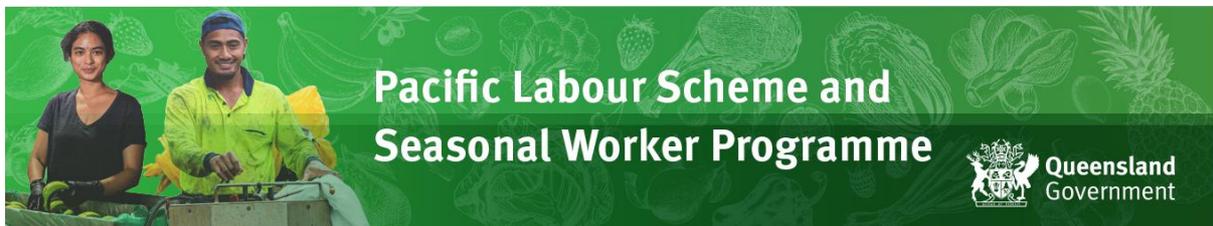
The PLS/SWP application process is managed by the Australian Government, and all recruitment proposals must be lodged with either the DFAT (for PLS) or DESE (for SWP).

The Pacific Labour Facility (PLF) (for PLS) or DESE (for SWP) will advise you when your recruitment proposal has been approved. The Queensland Government assessment of your recruitment proposal will be coordinated by DAF. You will be contacted by an assessment officer if further information is required to enable a decision on your recruitment proposal.

You can expect the process to take 10-12 weeks and we encourage you to contact our team as soon as possible if you are considering recruiting PLS/SWP workers for your enterprise. You can reach DAF by calling 13 25 23.

Q: What if I need to change my recruitment proposal?

As the PLS/SWP application process is managed by the Australian Government, you should contact the PLF (for PLS) or the DESE (for SWP) as soon as possible. Contact details are at the end of this information sheet.



Q: Can I streamline my recruitment proposal?

The Queensland Government is committed to assessing recruitment proposals as quickly as possible.

Once a recruitment proposal is received, consultation will be initiated with the relevant Local Disaster Management Group on the International Quarantine Plan (IQP) and advice will be sought from other agencies before approval is given. It is important to note that this may take some time. Assessment is likely to be faster if the recruitment proposal, including the IQP, is complete and demonstrates risks will be managed to a high standard.

Q: Can I talk with someone about what I propose to put in my International Quarantine Plan?

The guidelines and recruitment proposal template provide extensive guidance on what should be included in a comprehensive IQP.

Further advice is available through the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries' Customer Service Centre (13 25 23). However, the final decision on whether an IQP is adequate will be made by public health experts nominated by the Chief Health Officer.

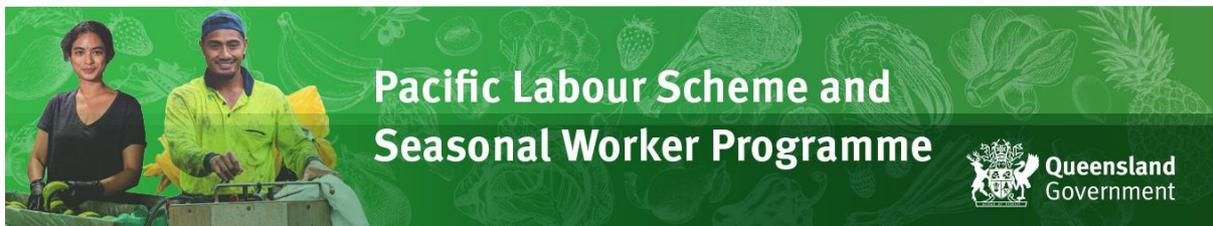
Q: How do I support my workers when they arrive at a new enterprise and in a new community?

DAF is committed to assisting DFAT, Approved Employers and farm operators to ensure the welfare of workers.

Ongoing care is provided by employers and PLF staff for all PLS/SWP workers before, during and after their time in Australia.

Before workers from Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste come to Australia, they participate in pre-departure training that outlines detailed information about how they will be supported in Australia.

When they arrive in Australia, workers are met straight off the plane by their employer. Employers then support the workers as they settle into their new homes and communities and provide them with ongoing advice while they are here.



Workers can call a 24-hour telephone hotline on 1800 515 131 for help and advice whenever they need it. Employers and PLF staff also provide information on a range of topics to help workers, including:

- Finding affordable accommodation and appropriate living arrangements
- Accessing personal finance, superannuation, insurance and banking services
- Completing tax returns
- Sending money home
- What they will need to buy (SIM cards, phones, clothing, etc.)
- Getting an Australian driver's licence
- The Fair Work Ombudsman
- Workplace rights and entitlements
- Health and medical contacts
- Education and training opportunities
- Contacts for any local cultural networks and support in the community where they will live and work.

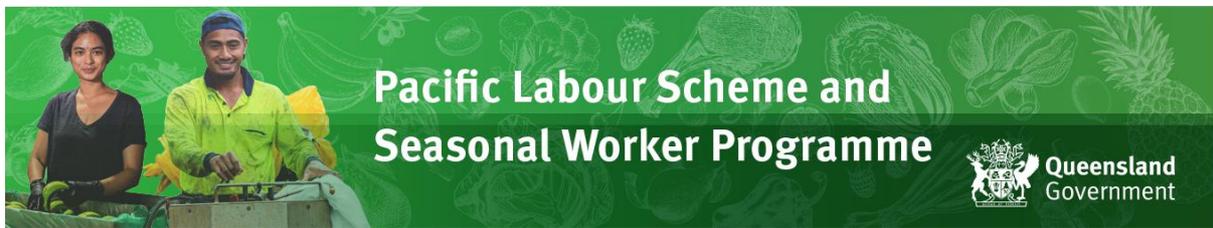
Q: What is being done to protect the rights of PLS/SWP workers?

PLS/SWP workers entering Queensland have the same labour rights as any other Australian worker.

The Fair Work Ombudsman offers guidance regarding sending workers home, leave entitlements and reduction of hours for employers paying under the federal system.

Workers are entitled to be paid under the relevant state or federal award. There is no change in this legislation due to the COVID-19 situation or the restart of the PLS/SWP.

Workers who believe they are not being treated fairly under Queensland and Australia's labour laws are encouraged to [contact the Fair Work Ombudsman](#) on 13 13 94.



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 number of 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 Workplace Health Management Plan (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: What happens to the Pacific nations workers once they have completed their work assignments? Can the workers move to another job? Are they able to stay in Queensland and for how long?

The maximum length of time a Pacific nations worker employed under the PLS/SWP in Queensland can stay in Australia depends on the visa conditions set by the Australian Government.

Workers employed under the PLS programme can work in Australia for one to three years, while workers in the SWP programme can work in Australia for up to nine months. Information on the types of visas that may be issued for these workers can be found on the [Department of Home Affairs website](https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/temporary-work-visas) at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/working-in-australia/temporary-work-visas>



PLS/SWP workers must continue to be employed by their sponsor and within the parameters of their visa. Many sponsors for these workers are labour hire companies that have workforce supply contracts with multiple agribusinesses across Australia and will move the workers to different sites or states as labour needs change and COVID-19 movement restrictions allow.

Alternatively, the workers may be sponsored by a large agribusiness (who is an Approved Employer under the schemes) and spend the entire duration of their stay in Australia at the one facility.

PLS/SWP workers are only permitted to work in the industry covered by their visa and cannot work for themselves or anyone other than their sponsor/employer.

Q: What access does an Approved Employer and Pacific nations worker have to local community services?

Approved Employers and Pacific nation workers have full access to services while working in that particular location information about community services in farming communities can be found on the local government websites or through the pastoral care support services available to workers.

Key contacts for further information:

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (PLS/SWP)

dafcovid19plsswp@daf.qld.gov.au or 13 25 23

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

enquiries@pacificlabourfacility.com.au or (07) 3557 7750

seasonalworker@employment.gov.au or (02) 6240 5234

welfare@pacificlabourfacility.com.au or 1800 515 131

Department of Education, Skills and Employment

seasonalworker@dese.gov.au or (02) 6240 5234

UPDATED: 20 August 2021