

Media Release

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Streamlined Pacific Australia Labour Mobility to address industry needs

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) welcomes the Morrison Government's announcement of the first stage of reforms to Australia's labour mobility programs – the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP).

Reforms announced today support greater alignment between the PLS and SWP under the newly branded Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, making these programs better able to respond to the needs of employers and workers.

"Members of the AFPA have been strong supporters of both the PLS and SWP and have been participating in these programs for several years. The Government's commitment to streamlining these programs and reducing red tape for employers will help industry build on the success of these programs to date" said AFPA CEO, Michael Rogers.

The announcement today will support the Government's commitment to bring an additional 12,500 workers to Australia by March 2022 and builds on the successful restart of the SWP and PLS that has seen over 10,000 workers travel to Australia in the last 12 months.

"The restart of the PLS and SWP has been critical to the horticulture industry. These workers fill critical harvest roles in our sector; roles that not only enable the harvest of fresh fruit and vegetables but also support thousands of full-time and ongoing jobs in regional communities" said Mr Rogers.

A key policy priority for the AFPA in 2021 has been to increase the number of Pacific worker visas for the horticulture sector to 20,000 annually, a priority that will be addressed in part through the doubling of recruitment caps for Approved Employers announced as part of today's reforms.

"The horticulture sector is reducing our reliance on working holiday makers and is in the midst of a workforce restructure as a result. The PLS and SWP form a key part of this restructure and offer Approved Employers a more productive workforce that returns year on year, but most importantly have strong protections embedded in the programs to ensure worker welfare" said Mr Rogers.

The PALM scheme will also further safeguard worker welfare through extended funding for increased regional presence of Pacific Labour Facility staff and the Fair Work Ombudsman to continue compliance activities in line with the expanded program.

"The reforms announced today under the refreshed PALM scheme will continue to support the welfare of all workers under the program, will deliver immediate improvements in the programs, and help industry to better develop a productive and returning workforce" said Mr Rogers.

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***About the AFPA** - The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance (AFPA) is made up of Australia's key fresh produce growers and suppliers. The AFPA represents half the industry turnover of the Australian fresh produce sector - \$4.5 billion of the \$9.1 billion total; 1,000 plus growers through commercial arrangements and more than 15,000 direct employees through peak harvest, and up to 25,000 in the grower network.*