

Media Release

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Industry welcomes improved Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme

Industry has welcomed Ministers Payne and Seselja's announcement of further reforms to the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. Reforms include the consolidation of the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) into a single program, to be administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

"The fresh produce sector has been committed to developing a productive and returning workforce. This commitment has seen workers from the Pacific become more important than ever to Australia's fresh produce industry. The improvements to the PALM scheme announced today will see the program continue to grow and benefit employers and Pacific workers" said AFPA CEO, Michael Rogers.

The streamlined PALM scheme will include new visa settings and program features while still providing strong worker protections and support via the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF). The PLF will deliver welfare and cultural expertise as well as a 24/7 helpline for workers.

"Combining the SWP and PLS under a single program has great benefits to employers and Pacific workers. A single PALM scheme has enabled the pooling of both programs resources to deliver enhanced worker protection and support, something that is critical to the ongoing success of the PALM scheme" said Mr Rogers.

Under the new PALM scheme, seasonal workers will be able to move between employers more easily and apply onshore for a longer-term visa where an employer has identified them for ongoing or year-round work.

"These reforms are very welcomed by employers because what we've seen during COVID is that the fresh produce industry is moving towards a smaller, more productive workforce. Enabling workers to more efficiently move between Approved Employers will help drive workforce productivity and maximise worker earnings" said Mr Rogers.

The Australian Fresh Produce Alliance welcomed earlier reforms to the PALM scheme which saw the increase of many employers' recruitment caps, making it possible to increase the number of Pacific workers employed in the sector. There are currently almost 19,000 workers from the Pacific in Australia, with more of these workers than ever employed in fresh produce.

"Members of the AFPA remain committed to the PALM scheme including the ongoing recruitment and skill development of Pacific workers as well as the management of worker welfare, protection and support" 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.*