



Australian Government



Australian
**Small Business and
Family Enterprise**
Ombudsman

16 July 2021

Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade
Pacific Labour Mobility
R.G. Casey Building
John McEwen Crescent
Barton ACT 0221

via email: plm.consultation@dfat.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Pacific Labour Mobility Consultation

We welcome the intent to sustain market-driven Pacific labour mobility, but recommend further streamlining of the Pacific Labour Mobility scheme to improve small business access to the Seasonal Worker Program (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS). Lengthy application processes are leading to increased agricultural prices and many small businesses closing due to inability to secure labour¹. We make the following comments for improvement of the scheme:

1. Small business applicants in industry or geographic locations with identified labour shortages should be granted an expedited application process. The current process to become an approved employer takes a minimum of 4 months, and requires interaction with multiple governmental departments. The use of lengthy and complex contractual agreements and guidelines create a large administrative burden on already resource poor small businesses.
2. We support the increased redeployment opportunities and visa changes, as the existing requirement that an employer must offer a minimum of 30 hours' work per week creates an additional barrier to entry for small business operations who require short term labour but fall outside of the weekly work requirement.
3. We recommend DFAT expand its Accommodation Broker scheme to better assist small businesses in finding affordable accommodation. Both the SWP and PLS are aimed at increasing access to labour however, the heavy cost burden limits engagement from the small business sector. Accommodation for workers places a disproportionate cost burden onto small businesses who are often required to outsource this accommodation. This is in addition to the employer covering the full cost of return international airfares and domestic transportation. While the business is able to recoup a portion of the costs, this upfront requirement creates a further access imbalance between small and large business.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you would like to discuss this matter further, please contact Mr Rowen Murphy on 02 6213 7448 or at rowen.murphy@asbfeo.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

The Hon. Bruce Billson
Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman

¹ <https://www.countrynews.com.au/news/2021/03/08/3542228/farm-worker-shortage-woes-to-remain-affecting-production-and-prices>