



Pacific Labour Mobility Consultation  
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### **TFGA Submission: Pacific Labour Mobility Consultation**

The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector.

Agriculture is one of the key pillars of the economy and, with the current level of support from the government, are well positioned to further capitalise on the stature of Tasmanian agriculture.

The TFGA appreciates the opportunity to make comment on the Pacific Labour Mobility Consultation. The TFGA views labour shortages, which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as being one of the major issues currently faced by the agricultural industry. The issue is widespread, predominantly affecting the horticultural, dairy and meat processing sectors across the country and causing major disruption to supply chains. Tasmanian producers understand the important part that migrant and overseas workers play in filling gaps in the workforce and this has only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

The TFGA have developed the following responses to the questions posed in the discussion paper.

#### **How can we maximise the efficiency of Pacific labour mobility programs, and deliver good outcomes for employers and workers?**

The TFGA acknowledges that while labour facilitation and service organisations who facilitate the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and the Season Worker Programme (SWP) provide various levels of support to both the workers and employers, there is room for an increase in assistance provided to both parties. With regard to the employers, more guidance is required to help them understand how to become an Approved Employer, particularly for small producers who may have only previously employed casual workers such as backpackers. Many small producers do not have the capacity, for various reasons, to comply with the necessary requirements to become an Approved Employer and

labour shortages restrict the opportunity for further business growth, a problem which could be alleviated by these programmes.

In terms of the workers, while labour facilitation and service organisations who deliver the schemes provide an excellent service to help secure positions on farms, there appears to be less emphasis on the longer-term strategy regarding their ongoing employment. Working with both employers and employees to get a better understanding of what roles need filling and what the critical time periods are throughout the year could help maximise the efficiency of the programs (specifically within the SWP). By enabling workers to move around different sectors within the agricultural industry throughout the year, the initiatives could be better utilised, provide more consistent employment and improve outcomes for all involved.

**TFGA Recommendations:**

- Improved flexibility for workers to move between Approved Employers.
- Increased assistance for small producer to become Approved Employers.
- Increased education for producers about the initiatives.

**What additional flexibility might be added to the programs? What are the potential risks associated with greater program flexibility?**

As mentioned above, additional flexibility for workers to move between farms/employers would be highly beneficial to Tasmanian producers. Many potential employers may only be able to provide a few weeks or months of work at a time, however different sectors require labour at different times throughout the year and if coordinated correctly, could provide overseas workers with significant periods of employment. For example, once the majority of fruit picking is completed over the Summer months, workers could move on to potato harvest throughout Autumn and early Winter before then going into Spring calving in the dairy sector, or simply move between different similar business types who have different requirements at different times.

The main risks associated with this is the difficulty with accurately monitoring worker movements and welfare once they leave their initial place of employment and begin travelling between farms. A potential method to limit these risks is to increase the support provided to producers to assist and encourage them to become Approved Employers and decrease application waiting periods so that a comprehensive network of Approved Employers can be created and managed by program facilitators throughout the year.

Some Tasmanian growers have also expressed an interest in having the ability to extend the SWP for workers who show potential and are eager to continue their employment beyond the initial 9 months.

**TFGA Recommendations:**

- Facilitation of an Approved Employers network for improved efficiency and utilisation of the initiatives.
- Reduction of red tape.

**Is there any specific streamlining of current arrangements you would like to suggest? Are there any associated risks to manage?**

One of the biggest obstacles for employers is finding and/or managing accommodation for employees, especially if employees do not have a valid driver's licence. This is an issue particularly within the SWP and the TFGA believe that there is room for labour facilitation and service organisations who manage the program to provide further assistance with accommodation and travel for seasonal workers.

Several Tasmanian growers have suggested that on-farm quarantine for seasonal workers be considered by the Government as well as an increase in hotel quarantine capacity. Approval of flights into Australia from the Pacific Islands has been another major barrier nation wide throughout the pandemic and this is something that needs to be streamlined and improved prior to the 2021/2022 harvest season.

**TFGA Recommendations:**

- Increased planning and assistance with accommodation and travel arrangements.
- That on-farm quarantine have further consideration.
- That the process for approving flights from the Pacific Islands into Australia be streamlined.

**What stakeholders have an important role to play in delivering good outcomes, in particular in relation to worker welfare?**

Maintaining an appropriate standard of worker welfare is ultimately the responsibility of the employer and all stakeholders need to work cohesively to ensure that this remains a priority. The TFGA believes that there is considerable scope for relevant Federal Government departments and program facilitators to provide support and education for employers relating to pastoral care and more specifically around cultural sensitivities. Creating a positive environment for workers where they feel safe and respected will result in better engagement and increased productivity.

**TFGA Recommendation:**

- Increased importance placed on pastoral care.

**How can mutual benefits and people-to-people links between Australia and the Pacific island countries and Timor-Leste be further promoted?**

It is well documented that many workers who have participated in the SWP or PLS initiatives have taken the skills and knowledge gained while working in Australia back home and applied them in their own businesses. A lot of these skills are relating to practical on-farm tasks however the TFGA believe that there is significant opportunity to also emphasise providing them with training around business management and in particular, safety.

The ability for these workers to have equal access to training courses while in Australia would help to significantly broaden their knowledge in these areas and would be of great benefit to them, their businesses and those working within the businesses once they have returned to their country of origin.

**TFGA Recommendation:**

- That training provision and education for employees working under the SWP and PLS have further consideration.

Again, the TFGA appreciates the opportunity to be involved in the consultation process and recommends the continuation of both the Seasonal Worker Programme and Pacific Labour Schemes. Seasonal worker shortages will be an ongoing issue for the agricultural industry for a significant length of time following on from the pandemic and it is encouraging to see that the Government is committed to monitoring and improving the current system.

If you have any questions regarding this submission, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John McKew', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**John McKew**  
Chief Executive Officer  
16 July 2021