

Submission
No 15

**INQUIRY INTO MODERN SLAVERY RISKS FACED BY
TEMPORARY MIGRANT WORKERS IN RURAL AND
REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Welcoming Australia

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The Mayoral Alliance for the Pacific (MAP), co-founded by Welcoming Australia and Leeton Shire Council, aims to equip local councils to engage more effectively in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme and deliver better outcomes for communities, employers, and workers.

The Alliance discusses, develops and promotes a cohesive local government voice centred on the benefits and challenges of the PALM Scheme to ensure better economic, social, and cultural outcomes for all community members. While collaboratively advocating for constructive solutions to “disengaged” workers, our collective voice seeks to amplify and enhance the likelihood of attaining win-win-win outcomes for workers, local communities, employers and diplomatic relations.

To combat modern slavery risks relating to PALM Scheme workforce disengagement, MAP proposes the following:

1. Inter-governmental liaison

Action: Develop and implement a consultative framework that ensures local governments and state and federal agencies are actively and routinely involved in program planning and delivery. This framework should incorporate regular feedback mechanisms, open communication channels for addressing concerns, and a structured process for co-designing policy and budget recommendations.

Action: The Australian Government should foster collaborative engagement with Welcoming Cities and the Mayoral Alliance for the Pacific through a cross-departmental approach to improve the support network for the PALM scheme and enhance community outcomes.

2. Employer Readiness

Action: Mandate approved and enhanced culturally responsive training for employers to foster positive workplace relationships and enhance employer-employee interactions.

Action: Encourage participation in the *Welcoming Workplaces* initiative to create inclusive work environments. Equally, require PALM-approved employers to be certified as “Employers of Choice” through the initiative.

Action: The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) should require PALM scheme employers to undergo mandatory training on Australian labour laws to ensure compliance and protect worker rights.

Action: Resource local partners in regional communities to support employers and engage them on an ongoing basis to ensure they meet their commitments.

3. Proactive Visa Conditions

Action: Reapprove the current cohort of “disengaged” PALM workers for return into the scheme and support employers who extend them job offers. Additionally, this category should encompass disengaged workers who were misinformed and applied for protection or asylum.

Action: Revise visa conditions to support worker retention and integration.

Action: Create flexible mechanisms and supportive policies that allow employees to change employers or employment locations as needed, ensuring PALM workers are not tied to a single employer.

Action: Ensure Departmental officers are regularly present on the ground and address regional issues with local partners.

4. Coordinated Community Engagement

Action: Provide funding and resources to local organisations to establish regional migrant centre hubs to enhance support networks and monitoring conditions for PALM workers.

Action: Connecting Approved Employers with community services and facilities (churches, sports clubs, community groups) to support opportunities for PALM workers to engage with and participate in their local community using a place-based approach that is appropriately resourced.

5. **Quality Accommodation Assurance**

Action: Empower and financially resource Host Councils (Local Governments) to assess and periodically monitor the quality of accommodation for PALM workers, promoting safe living conditions.

6. **Prepared and Supported Workers**

Action: Strengthen Australia's commitment to workers' countries of origin by facilitating pre-departure briefings, including training, providing information resources for families, and addressing challenges such as loneliness and community integration.

Action: Ensure and guarantee PALM workers have seamless access to Medicare and necessary healthcare supports, prioritising their health and well-being.

Action: Provide in-place resourcing to address the broad range of daily matters facing workers, employers, and the community. Current arrangements are not fit for purpose.