

Pacific Engagement Visa in PNG: progress and challenges

by Natasha Turia

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Papua New Guinean passports on map of Australia and PNG

Photo Credit: Natasha Turia

At the start of December last year, I released the results of [my first survey](#) of Papua New Guinean experiences with the Pacific Engagement Visa (PEV). 33 of those who were successful in last year's PEV lottery participated in the survey. At the time, only three people had secured a job offer, and only one had an actual PEV visa.

In January, I ran a second survey. The sample size has grown to 84 participants as I connected with more lottery winners. Here are the results.

One piece of good news is that no one's application has been rejected by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA). Everyone submitted the primary requirement which was just the passport details for the primary applicant. Despite some confusion around [whether supporting documents would be required](#) before the closing dates, initially advertised as 12 December, applications have remained active after that date, giving lottery winners the chance to upload additional documents like passports for dependants, police clearances, health assessments and, most importantly and elusively of all, a 12-month job offer.

Another positive development is that more people have secured job offers: up from three people in November to 30 people now. Most of them have found jobs based on their own efforts, and not through the PEV Support Service's employer networks. PEV applicants have found jobs through external employment support agencies and through family and friends living and working in Australia. A handful of applicants who could afford to travel to Australia on their current tourist visas did so. However, only one person so far has been successful in gaining employment using this approach.

The jobs gained have been in a range of occupations: there are accountants, health workers, retail assistants, poultry farmhands, meat workers, tractor drivers, project management administrators and engineers.

On the negative side, only two primary applicants out of the 30 who have job offers

and submitted their complete application between September and December 2024 have received a visa.

Without any official advice on expected visa turn-around times, some applicants have had to request their prospective employers for postponed start dates. Some had their job offer retracted because they were unable to meet the start date. One person has lost three job offers because of visa delays.

No expected processing timeline for the PEV has been listed by DHA, but it takes **ten months to process** a Permanent Residence (Skilled Regional) (subclass 191) visa. It is unclear if this will be the timeline for the PEV. Clear and consistent communication to PEV winners and employers is needed to manage expectations. Ideally, PEV applications who have met all visa requirements should be processed quickly, in a matter of weeks rather than months.

DHA may not require a still-valid employment offer at the time of making a visa decision, but if it is not required, this also needs to be communicated to applicants who otherwise will continue to look for new offers or, at a minimum, ask employers for extensions to existing offers.

One thing that has not changed since the first survey is the negative commentary around the PEV Support Service, with consistent and widespread verdicts of “unsatisfactory”. The Support Service should set up physical offices in key participating countries. Its over-reliance on virtual sessions is unhelpful in a region with **variable internet connectivity**. PNG, with the lion’s share of the PEV quotas, should certainly have an in-country office.

Comments have also persisted about employers not being familiar with the PEV. As I suggested in **my earlier blog**, a jobs portal should be developed to directly connect employers and PEV winners.

A more radical reform would be to grant a 6-month conditional visa to those who have met all other visa requirements, less the job offer, so they can move to Australia and start looking for a job, at their own expense. This would significantly increase their chances of securing a job over applying offshore.

While the reward of permanent residency is a huge one, the price applicants are paying is high. Many respondents are experiencing mental exhaustion and emotional fatigue caused by visa delays and countless unsuccessful job applications. Applicants who are still job hunting said they can spend seven to 10 hours a week looking for a job.

While it is encouraging that more PEV applicants are securing job offers, there are

still some major problems that need to be ironed out if this new visa is to fulfil its potential to supercharge people-to-people connections between Australia and the Pacific.

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