

**Development Policy Centre submission to the  
“A Migration System for Australia’s Future” Review**

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## Summary of recommendations

### **Recommendation 1: Permanent migration and the Pacific Engagement Visa**

- (a) The Review should endorse the Pacific Engagement Visa, and recommend its expansion over time.
- (b) The Review should rebut the myth that the Australian permanent migration program is or should be non-discriminatory.

### **Recommendation 2: The growing use of onshore asylum claims as work visas**

- (a) Given that the main solution to the serious and growing problem of the use of asylum applications as a work visa is to reduce the processing time for asylum applications, a time limit on protection visa decisions should be reintroduced and more resourcing should be temporarily provided to the Department of Home Affairs and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, noting that in the long run a reduced volume of applications will lead to budget savings.
- (b) An amnesty for those denied asylum and staying on illegally should not be considered until determination processes have been accelerated, and the attractiveness of the work rights attached to the protection visa accordingly reduced. Otherwise, the introduction of asylum would benefit a relatively small group, while potentially attracting many more to take advantage of what is now a well-trod path of putting in a claim for a protection visa in order to enlarge and extend their work rights in Australia.
- (c) The Review should greatly increase the data available on this issue, releasing data on, for example, departmental processing times; number of overstayers; applicants who appeal to the court.

### **Recommendations 3 to 8: Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM)**

**Recommendation 3: Reducing exploitation for all migrant workers.** Fully implement the recommendations of the 2019 Report of Migrant Workers' Taskforce, and expand elements of PALM regulation to similar temporary migration programs, such as mandatory employer vetting, worker education and induction, and sanctions on non-compliant operators.

**Recommendation 4: PALM-specific measures to improve worker welfare.** Promote PALM worker welfare by: (i) making all contract information available in the worker's language; (ii) setting a floor on workers' take-home pay; (iii) requiring employers to publicly and in writing reassure workers that complaints are welcome and will not be used against them or impact their employment; (iv) obtaining worker feedback through regular, confidential surveys, both scheme-wide and employer-specific; (v) encouraging employers to build suitable accommodation for their workers; and (vi) mandating sending countries to place at least one liaison officer in Australia once their number of workers reaches a certain minimum.

**Recommendation 5: To reduce absconding:** (i) implement the recommendations to improve worker welfare (Recommendation 4); (ii) speed up processing times for onshore protection claims (Recommendation 2); and (ii) crackdown on employers who hire migrant workers

illegally, with increased funding for compliance activities by the Australian Border Force and the Fair Work Ombudsman.

**Recommendation 6: Single administration.** Pacific labour mobility should be administered by a single government department or agency.

**Recommendation 7: Agricultural visa.** As per the Select Committee on Temporary migration, the Australian Government should position the PALM scheme as the ‘predominant source of low and semi-skilled labour’ in Australia's agricultural sector, and the Review should recommend against the introduction of any new Agricultural visa in the future.

**Recommendation 8: Pathways to permanent residency** should be built into the PALM scheme to avoid permanently temporary migrant families, especially in sectors where continuity of care is paramount. The Meat Industry Labour Agreement provides a good model that should be piloted for PALM, and a similar model should be introduced for PALM aged-care workers. Exemptions for or concessions to PALM workers to TSMIT requirements should be considered to ensure such pathways are viable for PALM low and semi-skilled workers.

**Recommendation 9: Regional integration.**

In order to foster enhanced integration with the Pacific, Australia should pursue a range of migration initiatives to increase the freedom of movement between Australia and Pacific island countries, as well as Timor Leste.

## 1. Introduction

The Development Policy Centre is a think tank for aid and development serving Australia, the region, and the global development community, based at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University. We have been working on Pacific labour mobility since our establishment, including, in part, with support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Pacific Research Program.

The submission focuses on Pacific migration, as well as the growing use of protection visas as work visas.

## 2. Permanent migration and the Pacific Engagement Visa

*“This is a real ground-breaking initiative, the Pacific Engagement Visa. It’s the first time that ... the Australian Government will allocate a specific number of permanent migration visas for a region, and it’s a sign of our support and enthusiastic membership of the Pacific family, that we want to make it easier for Pacific Islanders to live in Australia, to be permanent migrants, and eventually become citizens. Because that diaspora is so important. And I, quite frankly, I think it’s a disgrace that in 2019 for example, there’s only 621 Pacific Islanders that became permanent migrants to Australia, which represented only half of one percent of the total permanent migration to Australia.”* – Minister for International Development and the Pacific, Pat Conroy MP

The Pacific Engagement Visa is a welcome change to Australia’s permanent migration system to encourage settlement from the Pacific and Timor-Leste. It is justified for several reasons: the strategic importance of the Pacific; the underrepresentation of our near neighbours in our

migration program; the undesirability of allowing New Zealand migration policy to determine Australian migration outcomes; climate justice; and, perhaps most importantly, the legacy of the Pacific Island Labourers Act and the White Australia policy more broadly.

The influence of New Zealand on Pacific migration outcomes in Australia is covered by [these two blogs](#), and is illustrated by the fact that there are [more Cook Islanders in Australia than those with a PNG heritage](#). Those Pacific nations with good access to New Zealand (mainly the Polynesian ones) are greatly advantaged relative to those that lack it (mainly the Melanesian ones).

The Review should endorse the Pacific Engagement Visa, recommend its expansion over time, and, importantly, rebut the myth that the Australian permanent migration program is non-discriminatory.

While the claim is often made that Australia's permanent migration program is non-discriminatory (for example, p.3 of [this official document](#)), it clearly is not. New Zealanders can come to Australia whenever they want for as long as they want, as a formal arrangement since 1973. While they are subject to distinct benefit eligibility criteria, New Zealand clearly has preferential access to Australia's permanent migration regime. A more recent example of preferential treatment is that provided for Hong Kong citizens who have been residents of Australia for at least four years.

These are examples of *de jure* discrimination between countries in Australia's permanent migration regime. There are also examples of *de facto* discrimination. A [significant proportion of backpackers \(one in five\)](#) become permanent residents. Therefore, the greater a country's access to Australia's working holiday visa the greater the discrimination in favour of that country with regards to Australia's permanent migration program.

Having a discriminatory permanent migration program is probably the norm rather than the exception among countries. Australia's trade policy is also discriminatory with special treatment given to those we have a free trade agreement with. Of course, preferential treatment should not be arbitrary or racist. But migration policy should give special treatment to particular countries when there is a solid justification.

It is time to bury the myth that Australia's permanent migration regime is or should be non-discriminatory.

### ***Recommendation 1***

*(a) The Review should endorse the Pacific Engagement Visa, and recommend its expansion over time.*

*(b) The Review should rebut the myth that the Australian permanent migration program is or should be non-discriminatory.*

### **3. The growing use of onshore asylum claims as work visas**

Over the last decade, there has been growing use in Australia of asylum claims as *de facto* work visas. Those making these claims arrive in Australia on a valid visa, typically by plane. They are *not* irregular migrants. This topic is thus very much in scope for the Review. It is a problem

for the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme, the focus of Sections 4 and 5, but it is also a much bigger problem that threatens the integrity of the Australian migration regime as a whole.

This section of the submission is based on a variety of official sources, brought together in a draft report by one of the authors (Stephen Howes), who can be contacted for further details and references.

### 3A. Changes over the last decade

To understand what has been happening, it is useful to compare key parameters at the turn of the decade (2008-09 to 2012-13, or 2008-12 for short) with those from 2019-20. 2019-20 is a better year for comparisons than 2020-21 or 2021-22 since borders were closed throughout the latter two years.

As summarised in the table below, and explained in the text following, there have been very large, interdependent changes in four key parameters.

**Table 1. Changes in key parameters regarding on-shore protection visas between 2008-12 and 2019-20**

	(1) Claims	(2) Ave. months to rejection	(3) Grant rate	(4) Est. stock of protection bridging visa holders
(a) 2008-12 ave.	6,113	5	46%	6,582
(b) 2019-20	23,266	28	10%	89,111
Ratio (b)/(a)	3.8	5.1	0.21	13.5

*(i) Explosion in the number of claims*

From 2008-09 to 2012-13 on average 6,113 people who had arrived in Australia with a valid visa applied for asylum. By 2019-20 this had increased almost four-fold to 23,266. Before international borders were closed in March 2020, the number of asylum seekers arriving in Australia by plane had, for several years, matched or exceeded the numbers arriving either by boat or plane in the crisis boat-arrival Rudd-Gillard years. When borders closed, applications fell, but the number of applicants was still higher than in the 2000s. With borders now reopening, applications have risen again. For example, on an annualised basis, applications in October 2022 were 17,400.

*(ii) Much longer processing times*

With more applicants, the system is becoming clogged, and processing times have greatly slowed. The average time to an unsuccessful asylum claim decision (taking into account that most unsuccessful applicants appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal or AAT) is estimated to have increased from 5 months in 2008-12 to 28 months in 2019-20.

Once a claim is rejected after an AAT appeal (and nearly all claims are now – see the next point), applicants usually lose their work rights. On average applicants nevertheless stay on for another estimated 1.7 years after rejection. One reason is that about half those who are unsuccessful at the AAT appeal to the courts, a process that itself takes longer than year. Work is allowed while a court appeal is underway; in addition, some stay on illegally, though the number of failed asylum seekers who then become illegal overstayers is only estimated to be about 8,000, less than 9% of the stock of asylum seekers in Australia.

In all, the estimated time a protection bridging visa holder whose application will eventually be rejected can expect to have to work in Australia, legally or illegally, is four years.

*(iii) Plummeting grant rates*

With longer processing times, the bridging visa an onshore asylum applicant can readily obtain is becoming increasingly attractive as a work visa. Typically, a protection bridging visa applied for onshore will come with unrestricted work rights, as well as Medicare access. The increasing use of bridging visas as work visas is evidenced by the plummeting success rate that asylum applicants face.

The chances of applicants being granted asylum (the “grant rate”) used to be almost one-in-two (46% for 2008-12), but as of 2019-20 had fallen to an all-time low of just 10%. The share of applicants from “unsafe” countries (with grant rates of at least 50%) has collapsed from one-third to 2%. Three of the top five source countries (that is, the countries with the largest number of applications) in 2008-09 had grant rates of 90% or more (Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Iraq). In 2019-20, the top five source countries (Malaysia, China, India, Vietnam and Fiji) had grant rates of 4.2% or less. Three of the top five (Malaysia, Vietnam and Fiji) had a grant rate of 0.5% or less.

In summary, greater numbers are applying for protection visas not to obtain asylum but to gain work rights.

*(iv) Rapidly growing stock*

Thanks to a Senate Order, recent data on the stock of onshore protection bridging visa holders (as against the flow of new applicants) is available. As of June 2020, there were 89,111 such visa holders, including those whose visa had been cancelled but who had not yet left. 37,497 applicants were waiting for a “primary” determination by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), and an estimated 32,510 for the outcome of their appeal to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). The remaining 19,112 had had their appeal rejected, and were either appealing to the courts or the Minister, or were just staying on. Earlier data are not available, but the stock at the end of the earlier comparison period (June 2013) is estimated to have been only 6,582 applicants, one-fourteenth of the June 2020 level.

The growth in the stock of asylum seekers is driven by each of the first three factors: more applicants, longer processing times, and a lower grant rate (since some of those rejected stay on illegally). Even when borders were closed, the stock of asylum seekers still increased – from 84,210 at the end of March 2020 to 90,787 at the end of December 2020, 92,971 at the end of June 2021, 94,909 at the end of December 2021, and 94,912 at the end of June 2022.

### **3B. Causes**

These trends are self-reinforcing. One can describe what has been happening as a vicious circle or a shift in equilibrium: from one self-reinforcing state that existed a decade ago – low number of new applicants; quick processing time; high probability of asylum claim acceptance; low stock of applicants – to another that has emerged in recent years – high number of new applicants; long processing times; low probability of acceptance; high stock of applicants. As processing times have gotten longer, the value of work rights conferred by a bridging visa has increased, more people have applied to get work rights, and so on.

What triggered the shift? A superficial explanation is that there was a surge in applications, and the processing of those applications did not keep up with their growing number. There are also three deeper explanations. The first is that information spread among various nationalities – starting with Malaysians, then Chinese, then others – that applying for asylum was indeed a good way to gain temporary work rights in Australia. The second is that policy makers were focused on something else – arrivals by boat – and neglected to pay sufficient attention to the growing number of air arrivals. The third is the removal starting in 2013-14 of the Howard-era requirement that asylum applications be decided within 90 days, adherence to which would have meant that the blow out in decision-making times (which have made protection bridging visa so much more attractive as a temporary work visa) would simply not have been possible. A measure taken in order to be “tough” on asylum seekers has backfired spectacularly.

### **3C. A serious and growing problem**

This is not an issue that should divide those who otherwise have different views on migration levels or the treatment of asylum seekers. The trends summarised above are clearly problematic. Those on bridging visas may be dependent on the intermediary who arranged their visa and thus vulnerable to exploitation. The integrity of our migration system has been undermined with the key migration integrity benchmark defined when John Howard was prime minister (the percentage of visa holders who apply for asylum) now being breached. Other visa classes have been compromised with workers in other categories (e.g. PALM workers) now applying for asylum to allow them to seek work elsewhere in Australia. The problem is particularly serious among some nationalities: in 2019-20, almost one in ten Fijians visiting Australia applied for asylum.

### **3D. Solutions**

Closed international borders and a subsequent reduction in number of asylum seeker applications were a missed opportunity to solve this problem before borders fully re-opened and application numbers rocketed skywards again. Urgent action is now needed.

The main solution to this problem is simple: reduce the processing time for asylum applications. The Howard-era 90-day rule for protection visa decisions should be reintroduced. This would require a short-term increase in resources for processing applications at the DHA and AAT, and perhaps the courts. However, it would save money over time, since once we have reverted to the old equilibrium there would be fewer applications to process. Other strategies could also be deployed, for example, giving priority to processing claims from nationals whose applications are the most likely to be rejected, those in visa categories other than tourists, and the most recent arrivals.

It is estimated that less than 9% of the stock of onshore asylum seekers in Australia is here illegally, staying on after their claim has been rejected and all legal avenues have been exhausted. Some have argued that this group should be granted asylum. However, the small size of illegal overstayers (that is, holders of cancelled protection bridging visas) relative to legal asylum seekers is an argument against this. In any case, asylum for this group of illegal overstayers this should not be considered until determination processes have been accelerated, and the attractiveness of the work rights attached to the protection visa accordingly reduced. Otherwise, the introduction of asylum would benefit a relatively small group, while potentially attracting many more to take advantage of what is now a well-trod path of putting in a claim for a protection visa in order to extend and enlarge their work rights in Australia.

## ***Recommendation 2***

*(a) Given that the main solution to the growing problem of the use of asylum applications as a work visa is to reduce the processing time for asylum applications, a time limit on protection visa decisions should be reintroduced and more resourcing should be temporarily provided to the Department of Home Affairs and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, noting that in the long run a reduced volume of applications will lead to budget savings.*

*(b) An amnesty for those denied asylum and staying on illegally should not be considered until determination processes have been accelerated, and the attractiveness of the work rights attached to the protection visa accordingly reduced. Otherwise, such an amnesty would benefit a relatively small group, while potentially attracting many more to take advantage of what is now a well-trod path of putting in a claim for a protection visa in order to extend and enlarge their work rights in Australia.*

*(c) The Review should increase the data available on this issue in this public domain, releasing data on, for example, departmental processing times; number of overstayers; applicants who appeal to the court.*

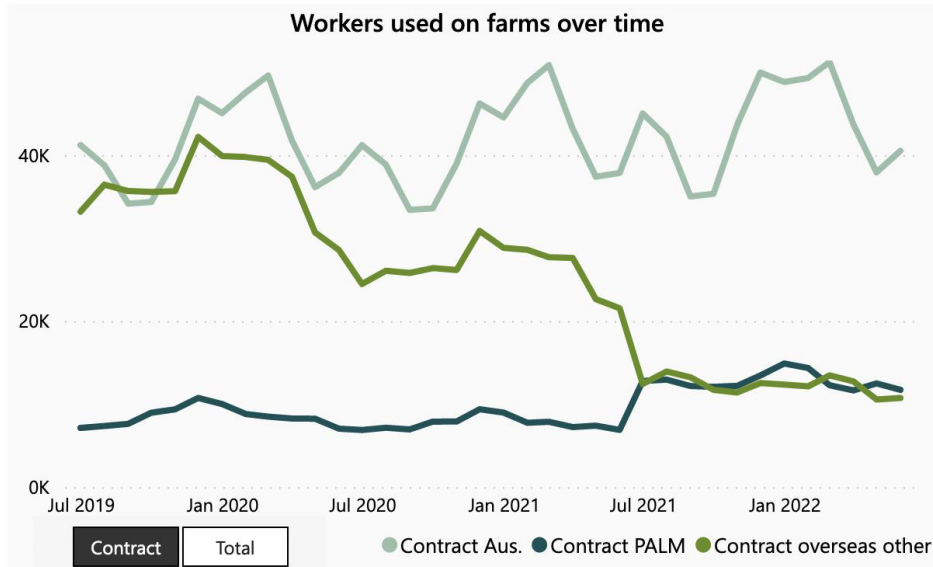
## **4. The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme**

### **4A. Worker exploitation**

Since their first introduction in 2007, the tightly regulated Pacific temporary migration programs (previously the multi-month Seasonal Worker Programme and the multi-year Pacific Labour Scheme, now combined into PALM) have struggled to compete with other unregulated sources of migrant labour, especially with backpackers and undocumented workers. Growth of the PALM scheme in horticulture reflects the pressure on farmers to lift their treatment of workers (pre-COVID) as well as, during COVID, actual worker shortages.

The composition of Australia's horticulture workforce has shifted during the pandemic – PALM scheme workers now (just) outnumber backpackers on farms. These gains are fragile - the return of post-pandemic backpackers may see this trend reversed, and undocumented workers are still a significant source of harvest labour.





Data source: [ABARES](#)

PALM workers are tied, via the conditions of their visas, to one employer, making them intrinsically vulnerable to exploitation. Employer sponsorship is a fundamental principle of Australia’s temporary migration regime, and one which we do not address in this submission. Given employer sponsorship, while there is room for legitimate debate over the appropriate degree of regulation, the scheme will always need to be closely regulated as a counterbalance. The regulations in place to provide that counterbalance include the following:

- 1) mandated employer-vetting (to become an approved employer)
- 2) welfare officers to support migrant workers, who regularly meet face to face with workers
- 3) the provision of minimum work hours over set periods of time
- 4) employer obligations to provide approved standards of accommodation and transport
- 5) regular reporting to and inspections by the Australian government, including escalation procedures if any welfare issues involving migrant workers occur
- 6) a 24/7 contact number in-language that all workers can access
- 7) complaint mechanisms via labour sending country governments
- 8) the engagement and involvement of community and diaspora groups
- 9) sanctions including the ability to bar employers from hiring PALM migrants (by suspending or removing approval employer status) if breaches occur
- 10) mandatory worker education requirements on arrival.

Because the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) schemes are highly regulated, they in fact report [fewer incidents of exploitation](#) than other, less regulated, temporary pathways (e.g., backpackers, students, and partners).

A [survey of short-term PALM \(SWP\) workers](#) indicates that the great majority are highly satisfied with their experience, and would recommend it to their friends. The majority vote with their feet and return, with the average number of SWP visits (prior to COVID) being around five.

However, that is not to say that there are no problems of poor treatment/exploitation of PALM workers. The most persistent problems reported by workers have included general employment issues, poor quality accommodation and living conditions, and inflated costs for wrap around services (e.g., transportation and accommodation), resulting in high deductions. During border closures, a lack of work hours and subsequent inability to make money have become significant concerns. Some of the [barriers to speaking up](#) for Pacific workers include fear of losing their job/visa, embarrassment or shyness, and lack of confidence speaking English. Beyond just regulation, empowering workers to speak about their experiences will involve directly addressing these barriers and perceptions with workers.

It would be a mistake to think that all the solutions to the mistreatment of PALM workers lies with PALM reforms. To the contrary, the most important reform is to ensure all workers are treated well. If some employers are cutting corners, there will be financial pressure on other employers to follow suit, and there will be little moral suasion on them to do otherwise. From this point of view, the new government's commitment to fully implement the 2019 Report of the Migrant Workers' Taskforce is very welcome. In addition, PALM worker protections could be considered for adoption by other temporary migration programs.

*“Competition based on different standards of regulation (and cost) undermines efforts to encourage the uptake of better-regulated visa programs like the SWP, and limits the incentives growers have to make long-term investments in the workforce.” [United Workers Union](#).*

Beyond sector-wide and labour-market-wide reforms, there are some PALM-specific reforms that would also reduce exploitation and improve worker welfare. These include:

- 1) making all essential contract information available in the worker's language (written, visual or oral format);
- 2) setting a floor on workers' take-home pay (to ensure a minimum earning after deductions);
- 3) requiring employers to publicly and in writing reassure workers that complaints are welcome, and will not be used against them or impact their employment (ensuring a right of return, and encouraging workers to raise complaints without consequence);
- 4) obtaining worker feedback through regular, confidential surveys, both scheme-wide and employer-specific;
- 5) ensure 'same job same pay' provisions also apply to temporary migrant workers
- 6) provide greater access to essential services for temporary migrant workers
- 7) encouraging and supporting employers to build suitable, purpose-built accommodation for their seasonal workers; and
- 8) mandating labour sending countries to place at least one liaison officer in Australia once their number of workers reaches a certain minimum.

Long-term separation also affects the welfare and wellbeing of workers and their families. The new government's commitment to end family separation for long-term Pacific workers is welcome.

***Recommendation 3: Reducing exploitation for all migrant workers. Fully implement the recommendations of the 2019 Report of Migrant Workers' Taskforce, and expand elements of***

*PALM regulation to similar temporary migration programs, such as mandatory employer vetting, worker education and induction, and sanctions on non-compliant operators.*

***Recommendation 4: PALM-specific measures to improve worker welfare.*** Promote PALM worker welfare by: (i) making all contract information available in the worker’s language; (ii) setting a floor on workers’ take-home pay; (iii) requiring employers to publicly and in writing reassure workers that complaints are welcome and will not be used against them or impact their employment; (iv) obtaining worker feedback through regular, confidential surveys, both scheme-wide and employer-specific; (v) encouraging employers to build suitable accommodation for their workers; and (vi) mandating sending countries to place at least one liaison officer in Australia once their number of workers reaches a certain minimum.

#### **4B. Absconding**

Absconding (disengagement) has become a serious problem for PALM, one that is undermining worker, employer, sending-country and community confidence in the scheme. Better treatment of workers, including the strategies discussed in the previous sub-section, will reduce absconding. Two other key factors that will reduce absconding are to reduce the value of making a meritless application for an onshore protection visa, discussed in Section 2, and to increase the costs of rogue employers engaging workers illegally. The importance of both factors is evident from the experience of New Zealand, where the Pacific seasonal labour scheme (the RSE) [has not been plagued by absconding](#).

On issue of rogue employers, workers almost always leave the program to work for another employer outside the program. That new employer is acting illegally. Cracking down on employers who hire migrant workers illegally will reduce if not eliminate the problem of absconding.

***Recommendation 5: To reduce absconding:*** (i) implement the recommendations to improve worker welfare (Recommendation 4); (ii) speed up processing times for onshore protection claims (Recommendation 2); and (iii) crackdown on employers who hire migrant workers illegally, with increased funding for compliance activities by the Australian Border Force and the Fair Work Ombudsman.

#### **4C. Single administration**

The Review is meant to recommend reforms that will lead to a simple migration system. Pacific labour mobility should be managed by a single government body or agency. The fragmentation of responsibilities between departments adds unnecessary layers of complexity to what is already a complex program.

***Recommendation 6: Single administration.*** Pacific labour mobility should be administered by a single government department or agency.

#### **4D. Agriculture visa**

The introduction of the Agriculture Visa in 2021 lacked rationale, was recommended against by the March 2021 National Agricultural Workforce Strategy, and added only complexity and confusion to the Australian temporary migration regime. The Review should welcome the new government’s decision to terminate that visa and prioritise the Pacific Australia Labour

Mobility (PALM) Scheme as the predominant source of low and semi-skilled labour in Australia's agricultural sector. For both strategic and developmental reasons this is the correct decision.

***Recommendation 7:*** *As per the Select Committee on Temporary migration, the Australian Government should position the PALM scheme as the 'predominant source of low and semi-skilled labour' in Australia's agricultural sector, and should recommend against the introduction of any new Agricultural Visa in the future.*

## 5. Pacific temporary migration programs and pathways to permanency

The rhetoric from the new government is that Australia should not be a 'guestworker society,' and that no migrant should be 'permanently temporary' is laudable. While it is tempting to think of maximising the skilled intake, the Review should note that many occupations (including meat-workers and carers) are already highly reliant on migrant labour and will continue to be. It is [not just 'high-skill' migration](#) that will be important into the future. Provision must be made to ensure that other workers are *not* permanently temporary by allowing them access to the permanent migration regime.

Under the PALM scheme, some workers only seek to stay in Australia for a short period of time to save money and provide for their families back home. Other workers, however, will wish to stay longer, especially those who choose to bring their families with them, as will now be possible under the new government's possible. It makes no sense to send workers back with their families for a cooling-off period (currently six months after four years), only for them to return again for another multi-year stint.

Providing pathways to permanency is particularly important for [aged care workers](#), a category of workers the government intends to expand. As per the recommendations of the Aged Care Royal Commission, Australia's aged care workforce should not be temporary in nature. Our old people deserve better than that. To avoid PALM from exacerbating what is already a serious problem, a pathway to permanency must be found for PALM aged care workers.

Because PALM is focused on low and semi-skilled occupations, there are few defined pathways to permanency. That said, most PALM long-term (that is, non-seasonal) workers are in the meat processing industry and there is a pre-existing pathway that could be used for these workers via the TSS and the Meat Industry Labour Agreement. (Details in this [blog](#) and [report](#)). Since meat processors are already reliant on the TSS, they should be willing to explore this for interested and skilled workers. That said, the proposed increase to the TSMIT (TSS minimum income threshold) will reduce the incentive to transition workers to the TSS and correspondingly increase the incentive to leave them on PALM.

A similar arrangement to the MILA should be put in place for aged-care workers, with TSMIT concessions as required to make them work.

***Recommendation 8:*** *Pathways to permanent residency should be built into the PALM scheme to avoid permanently temporary migrant families, especially in sectors where continuity of care is paramount. The Meat Industry Labour Agreement provides a possible model that should be piloted for PALM, and a similar model should be introduced for PALM aged-care workers. Exemptions for or concessions to PALM workers to TSMIT requirements should be considered to ensure such pathways are viable for PALM low and semi-skilled workers.*

## 6. Future directions for Pacific migration

One of the objectives of the Review is to identify reforms that will “foster enhanced integration” with partner countries. Nowhere is this more important than in the Pacific, which will never be a major trading region, and where returns to additional aid are greatly diminished. While PALM and PEV are positive initiatives, these should be the start of Australia’s Pacific migration policy and not the finish. Australia’s migration program should be aim to enable greater and more open access for Pacific Islanders to live, work, transit and study in Australia.

Options that should be considered include:

- Expanding the Pacific Engagement Visa over time
- Improving the pathways to permanency for New Zealand citizens
- Relaxing visa requirements for frequent travellers, diplomats, or short stay tourism
- In partnership with New Zealand, supporting skills recognition and qualifications in the Pacific to aid migration
- [Lifting the low numbers of students](#) studying in Australia from our near neighbours
- Special preferential migration agreements (similar to free movement provisions in compact-style arrangements) with interested Pacific Island countries
- Giving Pacific countries access to the Work and Holiday (462) visa, or other more open migration pathways
- Supporting joint training and migration programs to prevent brain drain.

***Recommendation 9:*** *In order to foster enhanced integration with the Pacific, Australia should pursue a range of migration and education initiatives to increase the freedom of movement between Australia and Pacific island countries, as well as Timor Leste.*