

PLMAM Employer Forum Outcome Statement 2024

1. The second PLMAM Employer Forum took place on day one of the 2024 PLMAM meeting, 11-14 November, with the theme “Collectively building resilience”. The employer-only forum included 100 PALM and RSE employers and industry representatives who attended in person, and a small number of employers who attended online.
2. The forum began with a brief background to the origins of the one-day event and its purpose. Acknowledging employers’ central role in the success of the PALM and RSE schemes, the Pacer Plus Implementation Unit (PPIU) seeks to continually enhance employer engagement in the annual PLMAM meetings and provide employers with the opportunity to participate more fully in the strategic discussions and decision-making that occur during the four-day meeting.
3. The objectives of the workshop, as set out by the PPIU for PALM and RSE employers, were to:
 - i. Provide a status update on the 2023 Employer Forum outcomes.
 - ii. Respond to the PPIU draft paper *Guiding Principles on Pacific Labour Mobility Worker Wellbeing* and identify any potential commitments.
 - iii. Respond to the PPIU draft concept note *Pacific Skills Mobility Partnership* and identify any potential commitments.
 - iv. Discuss key issues with the Australian superannuation system and the challenges faced by PALM workers seeking access to their contributions.
 - v. Identify employers’ priority actions for 2025.
 - vi. Develop a unified employer position on strategic issues included in the PLMAM agenda.
4. While acknowledging the PALM and RSE schemes present different opportunities and challenges for all participating parties, employers recognised that both schemes aim to achieve the same high-level outcomes for sending and receiving countries. Employers reiterated their willingness to work together to identify areas of alignment and cooperation for the benefit of all labour mobility stakeholders, both now and in the future.

Status update on progress towards 2023 employer commitments

5. Employers reiterated their commitments to the PALM and RSE schemes and their strong desire to continue working in partnership with the governments of sending countries, Australia and New Zealand, to further enhance the benefits of labour mobility for all parties.
6. As primary stakeholders in the PALM and RSE schemes, employers noted the following:
 - i. The Pacific labour mobility space is “crowded” with a wide range of stakeholder groups with differing priorities.
 - ii. Expressed their desire to be seen as, and be part of, “the solution” to addressing identified issues within the PALM and RSE schemes.
 - iii. Reiterated their desire to better understand and be responsive to the priorities of sending countries and work with them to resolve issues of concern.
7. Australia and New Zealand representatives presented on their respective progress towards the 2023 employer commitments. Statements are attached in Appendices 1 and 2.

Employer responses to PPIU Worker Wellbeing Guiding Principles and Guidelines

8. RSE employers:

- i. Noted that the intent of the principles is already being implemented through *Ola Manuia* and other employer-led initiatives.
- ii. Sought clarification on the intended audience(s) for the principles and guidelines.
- iii. Requested that the word “mandated” is replaced with “primary” responsibilities.
- iv. *LM3 Worker Agency* (specifically “workers have a sense of purpose for their labour mobility journey”): Noted that this guideline requires a greater level of cooperation between sending countries and employers to ensure information on worker/family goals is communicated to employers so that they can support workers in the achievement of their goals.
- v. *LM10 Reintegration*: Highlighted the need for greater discussion and clarification from individual sending countries on their priorities and opportunities for reintegration.

9. PALM Approved Employers:

- i. Expressed broad support for the principles and guidelines but identified the need for further review and consultation (in particular, review of responsibilities – mandatory and other - to ensure they are fair and reasonable).
- ii. Noted there is tension between the existing PALM AE Deed and Guidelines and Worker Wellbeing guidelines. The two guidelines need to be compared to identify areas of overlap, gaps, and new responsibilities not specified in the Deed and to support further consultation.
- iii. Requested clarification about the intended audience(s) for the principles and guidelines.
- iv. *LM3 Worker Agency*: Stated that this principle is not well articulated in the guidelines. Approved Employers requested further discussions around the relationship between worker agency and regulations/employer requirements.
- v. Raised specific issues that need further consideration with respect to worker wellbeing, such as: serious incidents, inadequacies in current pre-departure briefings, family engagement in labour mobility and workers’/families’ goals for labour mobility.

Employer responses to the Pacific Skills Mobility Partnership

10. Employer Forum participants expressed support in principle for the *Pacific Skills Mobility Partnership* concept.

11. RSE employers:

- i. Recognise that worker skill development is a critical way in which employers can “give back” to sending countries.
- ii. Would like to better understand the skill needs of individual sending countries in order to support their priorities.
- iii. Noted that alongside understanding country-level skills priorities, employers also want to ensure workers’ voices are heard and that they provide training that meets workers’ needs.
- iv. Noted challenges associated with Government policy settings, such as restrictions around the types and level of skills that can be attained under current RSE visa settings.

- v. Noted that while onshore training opportunities for RSE workers in New Zealand are well-developed and proactively supported by RSE employers, further work can be done on creating skills development opportunities for workers when they return home (e.g. between RSE employment contracts).
- vi. Acknowledged the benefits of providing onshore training to RSE workers but noted the challenges with engaging workers for out-of-hours training during busy peak season periods.
- vii. Noted the importance of continued efforts towards NZQA recognition of Pacific qualifications and identified initiatives already in place to support formal and informal skills recognition in New Zealand (e.g. Muka Tangata RSE Skills Recognition project).
- viii. Recognised the wide range of informal skills obtained by RSE workers while in New Zealand (e.g. occupational health and safety, food safety) that could be recorded and shared as an informal skill profile. This could also be recognised as prior learning in a formal qualification.
- ix. Noted that with increased adoption of technology and automation, low-skilled labour roles will diminish over time and different skills will be needed in future.

12. PALM Approved Employers:

- i. Acknowledged and supported the need for a “skills dividend” for sending countries within the PALM scheme.
- ii. Remain committed to offering upskilling opportunities for PALM workers.
- iii. Emphasised the need to be better informed of sending countries’ priorities and expectations around skills development.
- iv. Emphasised the importance of life/soft/leadership skills that PALM workers may attain while in Australia and which are not well-recognised.
- v. Highlighted limitations for employers, especially those in the short-term stream, to provide leave and/or paid time off for worker training, particularly during peak seasonal periods.
- vi. Noted tensions between PALM policy and visa settings (i.e. low skilled occupations) and sending countries’ desire to upskill.
- vii. Highlighted potential opportunities for existing Approved Employers to expand into new employment sectors and leverage their PALM scheme experience to facilitate this expansion.
- viii. Highlighted opportunities for PALM expansion into sectors not currently participating in the scheme and that have been identified as growth priority areas by sending countries (e.g. tourism and hospitality, agriculture, trades, fisheries and e-commerce).
- ix. Suggested DFAT could play a greater role in funding a wider range of skills development opportunities.

PALM Approved Employers responses to superannuation

13. PALM Approved Employers acknowledged the complexity associated with the Australian superannuation system and the challenges it poses for PALM workers seeking to access their contributions. Specifically, superannuation that is yet to be claimed, and superannuation that has been paid to the worker as a cheque, but the cheque has not been cashed.

14. The Approved Employers of Australia Association has submitted a report to Government identifying the issues associated with the current superannuation arrangements.
15. In summary, the report notes that resolving current constraints with the superannuation arrangements requires legislative changes in Australia and government-to-government actions.

Strategic issues and priority actions for 2025

16. RSE employers:

- i. Acknowledged that domestic policy settings for labour mobility sit with the respective receiving country governments.
- ii. Reiterated that the employer-worker relationship is at the heart of the success of the RSE scheme.
- iii. Commit to further strengthening relationships with individual sending countries in order to create a sustainable future for labour mobility.

17. RSE employers' priorities for 2025 are to:

- i. Work collaboratively with labour mobility stakeholders and agencies to facilitate positive worker and employer wellbeing outcomes and skills development opportunities.
- ii. Support the collection of robust data to enable informed decisions to be made by employers as well as sending and receiving countries. This recognises the need for timely data to enable relevant parties to manage internal and external risks to the scheme.
- iii. Actively engage in forums for sending and receiving countries to share challenges and priorities to enable solution-based reciprocal outcomes. For example, working with MFAT and MBIE to organise regular sending country-specific forums with RSE employers.
- iv. Encourage Government to continue to support an employer-led scheme.

18. RSE employers concluded with the following statement:

The success of the RSE scheme depends on continually fostering existing relationships with workers and their families and communities, developing new relationships and understanding the aspirations and the challenges faced by sending country partners. RSE employers commit to ongoing collaboration with sending governments, and the New Zealand government, to support economic growth, contribute to bilateral commitments, and harness opportunities that improve the lives of workers, their families and communities.

19. PALM Approved Employers:

To support future labour mobility arrangements with the Pacific and Timor Leste, Approved Employers emphasised that the PALM scheme needs to respond to workers' and employers' needs and concerns, to ensure a scheme of mutual benefit, and balanced and sustainable growth.

To this end, two key priorities are identified:

- i. Scheme operations and improving Pacific Labour Mobility
 - (a) *Engagement with Pacific and Timor Leste*
 - Improve engagement with the Pacific and Timor Leste, in particular LSUs to better support worker wellbeing and employer participation.

- Focus on engagement during worker mobilisation and pre-departure to ensure that workers, families and communities are well informed and prepared, and to enhance in-country worker welfare outcomes.
- Actively engage in forums for sending and receiving countries to share challenges and priorities to enable solution-based reciprocal outcomes.

(b) Community of Care Model

- Strengthen stakeholders' abilities to support and deliver a Community of Care model that enhances worker agency and supports greater program participation.
- Address social license issues to foster a supportive environment for workers in Australian communities.

(c) Growth and sustainability strategies

- Support program growth and sustainability through strategies to better support workers and employers as stakeholders in the scheme's success, e.g. expansion into other sectors, addressing social license issues, etc.

ii. Future of the Scheme and Pacific Labour Mobility

(a) Engagement with Pacific and Timor Leste

- Grow the scheme through engaging with Pacific and Timor Leste partners, which includes better understanding of the strategic significance of Pacific labour mobility for different sending country partners, both now and into the future.
- Foster collaboration among stakeholders (employers and workers) to work towards a sustainable future for labour mobility.
- Ensure employers are kept informed of any changes to domestic, or sending countries', labour mobility policy settings, country expectations, natural disasters and so forth.

(b) Enhance PALM Scheme's Image and Reputation

- Ensure Approved Employers, workers, Australian government and sending country governments continue to work collaboratively on enhancing the image and reputation of the PALM scheme, to safeguard its longevity.

(c) Data Collection for Informed Decision-Making

- Work with sending countries, the Australian Government and Approved Employers to capture accurate data to enable informed decision-making and improve program outcomes and sustainability.

20. PALM Approved Employers concluded with the following statement:

Approved Employers remain committed to ongoing collaboration with sending governments and the Australian government to support the development and sustainability of the PALM Scheme. While there are a range of short- to medium-term operational challenges facing the scheme, Approved Employers welcome the opportunity to work with sending country partners to understand how the Scheme can better meet their labour mobility goals and aspirations. The success of the PALM Scheme

will continue to rely on open, transparent and positive relationships between all stakeholders to support the continued evolution of Pacific labour mobility.

Appendix One

2024 PLMAM Employer Forum Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme Update on 2023 PLMAM Employer Commitments

The 2023 Pacific Labour Mobility Annual Meeting (PLMAM) was the first year employers were formally part of labour mobility dialogue in the Pacific. An inaugural PLMAM Employer Forum brought together employer representatives from the PALM and RSE schemes to enhance engagement and provide employers the opportunity to participate in high level discussions and decision making that take place at the PLMAM.

The Forum instigated joint discussions between Australia and New Zealand employer representatives around the theme of 'Harnessing the developments benefits of labour mobility'. The session enabled discussions on how PALM and RSEs employers can enhance partnerships with labour sending countries and agree on ways to work together to address concerns of the Pacific. It was also an opportunity for PALM and RSE employers to exchange experiences and identify opportunities to work together to support the Pacific to harness development benefits for labour mobility.

Key messages from the 2023 forum include:

- Request from both Australia and NZ employers to have greater participation and representation in future PLMAM forums.
- Commitment to addressing short- and long-term initiatives.
- Emphasis on employer-employee relationships being at the heart of labour mobility.
- Employers to foster and strengthen direct relationships with Pacific sending countries.

Short and long term goals were identified and responsibility lies with each country to implement and provide an update at the 2024 PLMAM on progress and / or barriers to achieving the commitments (refer to appendix 1 - employer commitments).

In October 2024, all RSE employers were asked to fill out a survey to ensure those representatives attending PLMAM (as not all can attend) can be taken into consideration to advocate for all RSE employers on agenda items discussed at the Employer Forum.

Results of this survey provide actions RSEs undertake as part of their dedication to meeting the expectations of works and Pacific sending countries which support the short-term commitments made at 2023 PLMAM Employer Forum. Note examples provided in this update will not cover work that NZ Government agencies lead and may touch on initiatives that require collaboration.

1. Recruitment plans that meet the goals of sending countries and communities.

Notwithstanding the RSE review which began in late 2022 to ensure the scheme is sustainable for the long term and the benefits are shared across all participants, since its inception in 2007, employers have fostered strong relations with Labour Sending Units (LSUs) to better understand their expectations, systems, challenges etc.

Examples include:

- Reviewed recruitment strategies and plans to meet goals of LSUs and employers.
- Direct relationships with villages (travel to villages to meet with workers and families and village leaders to understand goals of workers, families and communities).
- Sharing opportunities across different villages and recruit from multiple villages – addressing concerns of recruiting people from one village.
- Working with decision makers in the regions through a centralised recruitment model.
- Working with LSUs to streamline recruitment processes aligned with their systems.
- Developing Country Fact Sheets – to inform employers of recruitment processes and timeframes of each Pacific country as well as cultural facts etc.

2. Supporting the development of appropriate skills for workers that meet the needs of employers while also being of direct benefit to workers, their families and communities, and that are of value to sending countries.

Other than the Vakameasina RSE Worker Training Programme supporting capacity building of workers, employers have taken upon themselves the provision of on-the-job training in maintaining, harvesting, pruning, planting and post-harvest activities in the horticulture and viticulture sectors. Other examples include, forklift / tractor training; machine operating; quality control; irrigation; road safety driver training; first aid; mental, physical and sexual health training (for both men and women), horticultural spray courses (Growsafe), supervisory, leadership, business studies, cooking - nutrition etc.

NZ is unique in that there are Pacific training providers employers engage with to support RSEs such as the Puataunofu Taunofu Worksafe programme trainings.

In a recent development, RSE policy now supports RSE workers to undertake training and skills development not directly related to their role.

3. Addressing the barriers to sending of remittances and access to superannuation to maximise income to workers' families and communities.

There are challenges as employers respect that workers have the right to do what they want with their wages. Many employers support requests of Kiribati, Vanuatu, Samoa and Fiji for workers to implement voluntary National Provident Fund deductions through SWAS.

Employers have provided training for banking apps such as ANZ GoMoney and fostered relations with Pacific finance providers such as Pacific Ezy that support workers to send money home with low fees.

4. Reintegration initiatives – Partnership with Pacific communities

The majority of RSE employers proactively engage with workers and / or village groups to identify and implement projects that impact communities.

Reintegration initiatives that impact bilateral relations at the macro level are enabled between Pacific and New Zealand governments. Whereas community and individual initiatives are industry

led. There are ongoing discussions by employers emphasise they require the Pacific and NZ Governments to provide an enabling environment.

Examples include:

- Hastings District Council / Ngati Kahungunu Iwi Sister Treaty with a district in Samoa (Poutasi) – looking at ways to further enhance reintegration.
- Poutasi Development Trust (PDT) is seeking to develop a training academy based in Falealili that is focused on 3 key areas of identified need:
 - Creating and leveraging economic opportunities for the community.
 - Providing training for RSE workers, both pre departure and return to Falealili, to build skills connected to economic opportunities and to assist with reintegration back into the community.
 - Social wellbeing, including digital technology, numeracy, literacy, and mental and physical health.
- This project will help to ensure the Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme is sustainable over the long term and that the people to people links that underpin the scheme contribute to industry and regional growth and vibrant local communities in both Falealili District in Samoa and Hastings District in New Zealand.
- Trade Aid approach supporting village development.
- Meeting with Ministers and heads of LSUs to dialogue and address concerns of respective governments.
- Goal setting with each RSE when they arrive in New Zealand and again before they return home (e.g. establishing businesses / building houses etc). Many RSE employers visit sending countries to view progress (where possible). Check in with employees about their goals when they return.

5. Employers commit to social and cultural support of workers. This includes pastoral care, worker health and wellbeing.

The RSE policy requires employers to provide pastoral care to workers. There are some great initiatives being done between regional labour governance groups, employers, government agencies, NGOs and the Pacific communities.

Examples include:

- The 11 regional labour governance groups bring together RSE stakeholders to address concerns and find solutions to better support workers, including set up of Pastoral Care Committees.
- Working with church communities to provide spiritual support and counselling.
- Regional sports days in Bay of Plenty, Tasman-Nelson and Hawkes Bay
- Supporting workers to participate in country Independence Day celebrations, language weeks and perform at Waitangi Day celebrations across the regions.
- Working with community Pacific leaders to better understand protocols around funerals, weddings, births etc.
- Supporting and training team leaders.

- The annual RSE Conference includes representatives of LSUs to meet and engage with employers to discuss concerns and address worker issues.
- Introduction of Mihi Whakatau / ava (kava) Ceremony at the RSE Conference for cultural appreciation.
- Unlimited use of vehicle to attend church, recreational activities (rugby/volleyball/soccer, yoga, shopping, fishing and visiting family).
- Working with local health providers for free covid, flu and MMR vaccinations – health education (diet, smoking cessation, sunsmart) and easy access to proactive health tests (breast screening, cervical screening, PSA/prostate tests) etc.
- Hold a Powhiri – formal Māori welcome ceremony for workers to NZ (an employer in Hawkes Bay welcomed 500 RSE workers and one in the Bay of Plenty welcomed over 300 workers).
- Providing a tractor and mower to local village in Tonga for community work - mow village areas and gardening.
- Piloting a satellite health clinic in partnership with Orbit medical insurance and Hastings Health Centre to provide timely and effective medical care for RSE workers.
- Pastoral carers advocating and supporting workers requiring insurance.
- Built relationships with local vegetable growers to provide vegetables and fruit free to RSE team
- Pilot program teaching workers to cook, groceries delivered, budgeting to eat healthy and tasty food
- Inductions regarding reducing family harm / healthy safe relationships from Kainga Pasifika services
- Created memorial area and garden for quiet reflection and time out
- Supporting RSE workers' families and communities following natural disasters, including fundraising and shipping donated items home
- Employer provided wi-fi

Challenges

For RSE employers, it is important to have certainty to be able to invest to meet government requirements and expectations of workers and Labour Sending Units. Employers need transparent and relevant policy and visa setting and communication from its Pacific partners on changes to their policies and procedures.

Barriers RSEs have had to navigate initiatives around include:

- The delayed RSE policy review
- Delayed announcement/implementation of the new RSE worker training provider
- Need for greater direction from Pacific governments about their reintegration priorities

Priorities carried forward

New Zealand has re-established its National Labour Governance Group to support high level engagement on RSE strategic development and address RSE related issues that have huge risk to the horticulture and viticulture sector.

- Progress with 'development of a cultural framework'.
- Implement the Ola Manuia which has been rolled out to Regional Governance Groups and they are being introduced to networks.
- The NZ Government is developing practical information guides for employers to recognise signs that something is not right with the worker and questions that can be asked to help the conversation. A health tool kit is also being reviewed by Te Whatu Ora, Health NZ.
- Pacific country fact sheets (one for each Pacific sending country) have been drafted by industry/Liaisons Officers that include country profile, the dos and don'ts of pastoral care from a cultural perspective, protocols around death of a worker, contact points for LSUs, introductory phrases (hello, goodbye, have a good day etc) in each language and more. This all intertwines to provide cultural framework that is still under development in NZ.

Priorities 2024/2025

Based on the two Employer Forum agenda items the following will be prioritised.

Skills Development:

- The NZ RSE employers have a long history in working with the NZ Government to enhance policy and develop support programmes for workers. It was industry that got NZAID to invest in training programmes in NZ. This required a change in policy to allow NZAID money to be spent in NZ. That was Vakameasina.
- We now have Muka Tangata to support training both onshore and offshore (RSE Skills Recognition Project), MFAT have increased the amount available for the new programme which is 4x the old investment. NZQA has been supported by industry to recognise qualifications across the Pacific. All these initiatives are coming together now, and employers will be working with those stakeholders, workers, their communities and Governments to provide training to workers that can support their aspirations.
- This framework could allow onshore and offshore training for many skills such as hospitality, teaching, health, tourism, agriculture, horticulture, and technology. Through programmes such as these and commitments from all stakeholders, labour mobility can move to skill mobility and provide solutions to the skill demands of the Pacific.

Worker Wellbeing:

- Continue to implement Ola Manuia.
- Whanau Moana Nui was launched at the 2024 RSE Conference – a pilot programme that will bring together a cultural awareness framework to increase understanding of cultural differences between employers and workers to enable mutual understanding of culture in its many forms throughout the nine Pacific nations and 200+ NZ employers.

Conclusion

The RSE scheme is an enduring partnership and an important economic enabler, supporting the development, growth and prosperity of Pacific nations as well as NZ. It is vital that it is sustainable and mutually beneficial for all parties.

RSE is unique in that employer's deep value the partnership with our Pacific partners, whether it is engaging and working with workers / community / village leaders, Pacific Liaison Officers, as well as Labour Sending Units.

Success is through fostering existing relationships with workers and their families and communities, developing new ones and understanding aspirations and the challenges of our Pacific countries, and working with both the Pacific and NZ Government officials to provide solutions that support economic growth for the horticulture and viticulture sectors, contribute to government bilateral commitments, and harnessing opportunities that improve the lives of workers, their families and communities.

Appendix Two

Approved Employers of Australia, PLMAM Discussion Document: 11-14 November 2024

The 2023 PLMAM forum was the first event bringing Australian and New Zealand employers together to discuss priority issues and measures to address them which is in itself a very important milestone. Under the theme of “Harnessing the development benefits of labour mobility” a joint Australian and New Zealand employer-only forum was held, with in-person and online participation. This initiative by Pacer Plus acknowledged the central role that employers play in the success of the PALM and RSE schemes, and provide employers with the opportunity to participate more fully in the strategic discussions and decision-making that occurs at the annual meeting. At this forum, PALM and RSE employers committed to the following in 2023:

Reiteration of PALM and RSE employers’ commitments to sending countries

- Employers recognise the commitment and sacrifice that workers, their families and communities make when workers move temporarily to Australia and New Zealand for employment which not only supports the prosperity of individual employers’ enterprises, but also contributes to wider industry, community, and regional growth and to the establishment of vibrant local communities in receiving countries.
- Employers acknowledge that it is a privilege to be involved in the PALM and RSE schemes.
- Employers highlight that employer-employee relationships are at the heart of the PALM and RSE schemes and fostering these relationships is integral to the success of both schemes.
- Employers commit to strengthening direct relationships with sending countries by nurturing greater trust and transparency.
- Employers commit to addressing short-term and longer-term priorities of sending countries as agreed by the parties.
- Employers commit to ensuring that Pacific countries and Timor-Leste remain countries of choice for labour mobility in Australia and New Zealand.

The fact that the RSE Scheme has increased its cap to 20,750, and the PALM Scheme has 30,805 workers in Australia, suggests that both schemes are operating successfully. However, both schemes are experiencing common challenges which need to be addressed in a collaborative, constructive manner to ensure the long-term viability of both schemes are maintained.

Employer focus and actions for the next 12 months (November 2023-November 2024)

Employers committed to demonstrating progress towards the below commitments at PLMAM 2024:

- Working to develop broad-based recruitment strategies that meet the goals of sending countries and communities.
- Supporting the development of appropriate skills for workers that meet the needs of employers while also being of direct benefit to workers, their families, and communities, and that are of value to sending countries.
- Addressing the barriers to sending of remittances and access to superannuation to maximise income to workers’ families and communities.

- Supporting and working in partnership with the PPIU, wider Pacific and Timor-Leste family and international agencies to develop and implement the reintegration framework proposed at PLMAM 2023, with employers playing an active role in this process.
- Employers commit to social and cultural support of workers while in Australia and New Zealand. This includes pastoral care, worker health and wellbeing, while acknowledging any support should meet the needs and expectations of the workers themselves.
- Employers reaffirm recommendation 36(ii) from the 2022 PLMAM Outcome Statement as a priority activity for FY 2023/24: “Development of a cultural framework to assist employers to increase their understanding of cultural differences and support collaborative and respectful relationships and professional behaviours between employers and workers”.

In reflecting on progress of the employer focus and actions over the past 12 months, it is important to acknowledge a range of external (to the Scheme) factors and challenges that impact on employers engaged in Pacific mobility, some of these factors include:

- The geopolitical importance of the Pacific.
- Labour costs to produce manufactured products, particularly within the agriculture sector have risen significantly in Australia. This has placed increasing pressure on employer sustainability.
- Climate change is the biggest priority in the Pacific. Unfortunately, this is not an issue that the RSE or PALM Schemes can fix.
- Employers operate in a very complex regulatory framework making compliance challenging. This exposes employers to financial and operational risk when participating in the PALM Scheme.

Employers remain committed to the Scheme and acknowledge that in order to protect the long-term integrity of PALM (and the RSE scheme), it is important to ensure we have productive, reliable, returning workforces. This should be achieved by strengthening our relationships with the Pacific and Timor Leste by ensuring the Scheme is balanced, mutually beneficial and based on trust.

PLMAM Conference 11-14 November 2024

Theme: ‘Collectively building resilience.’ This is the second year that PALM & RSE AEs can have their say on some of the challenges that employers face, including with policy settings, and that require further consideration.

Key focus areas:

1. Employer focus and actions for the past 12 months:

- (i) **Recruitment Plans:** The PALM Scheme has a lot more detail in the Recruitment Plan and Offer of Employment. The challenge is that workers still lack a good understanding of the requirements prior to arrival in the host country. The Pacific is not transactional but based on relationships and simplified messaging. We need to consider more practical ways to communicate with Pacific families and villages earlier in the recruitment process to ensure better preparedness and understanding of employment arrangements.
- (ii) **Skills development:** Employers acknowledge the importance of developing formal and informal skills among Pacific and Timor Leste workers.

To ensure that employers are supporting targeted skills development, it is important that there is clear communication of skill development priorities from the Pacific; skills must meet the expectations of the Pacific and support worker reintegration in their home countries.

Challenges that will need to be addressed in skills development will likely include tensions around visa requirements (skill levels), availability and ability to access suitable training relevant to reintegration based on current industries within the program and importantly understanding worker voice in terms of what training would be of use to them.

A one-size fits all approach will not be suitable for skills development, and understanding opportunities and challenges from all stakeholders will be key to improving skills development outcomes.

- (iii) Remittance and Superannuation barriers:** The issue of remittances needs to be addressed early in the recruitment process. Expectations from family and friends to send remittances home can be very onerous and stressful for workers. With regards to Superannuation, a lot has been discussed on numerous occasions, but limited changes made as it is a legislative issue with the Australian Government. The AEA has lobbied extensively on this issue and submitted a joint report with the AWU to government outlining changes and reforms required.