1. Queensland’s agribusiness and commercial fisheries are heavily reliant on seasonal workers. The Queensland horticulture sector alone needs, on average, between 15,000 and 17,000 casual and contract full time equivalent (FTE) workers each month during a good season. In a typical year, visa holders may provide up to 40% of farm labour.
2. A shortage of seasonal farm workers has been developing since international borders closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives are underway to attract more Queenslanders to take up the available jobs but will only partly address the urgent labour shortfall.
3. In September 2020, Queensland agreed to trial participation in the resumption of the Federal Government’s Pacific Labour Scheme and Seasonal Worker Programme. The trial focussed on allowing workers from low risk Pacific nations to quarantine ‘on-farm’ under guidelines endorsed by the Queensland Chief Health Officer (CHO).
4. Queensland is the first state or territory to trial on-farm quarantine. Allowing work on-farm during quarantine benefits both the workers and farmers. There have been no significant issues with the quarantine of over 600 workers who have arrived over the trial period.
5. Regional industry-led quarantine facilities, located outside of towns and with appropriate security, have been proposed to increase the capacity to safely quarantine workers.
6. Cabinet endorsed the following arrangements for Queensland’s ongoing participation in the Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) and Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) for agricultural seasonal workers from low COVID-19 risk countries:
	1. continued use of on-farm quarantine while quarantine is required for coming Pacific nation workers, subject to the approval of the CHO;
	2. continued use of hotel quarantine for small numbers of workers, subject to Queensland Police Service and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet advice that there is available accommodation and capacity without displacing returning Australian nationals or permanent residents;
	3. the use of regional facilities, including as part of a wider use of these facilities for quarantine purposes (if approved), subject to CHO approval and the capacity for appropriate Queensland Government compliance oversight;
7. Cabinet noted that hotel quarantine may be required for larger groups of workers in exceptional circumstances where there is an urgent and unavoidable need (such as change in the originating Pacific nation’s COVID-19 risk after Queensland Chief Health Officer approval has been granted and the flight is in transit), subject to Queensland Police Service advice that there is capacity within the hotel quarantine system.
8. Cabinet approved that arrangements for quarantine will include industry meeting the costs of, and being responsible for, quarantine of workers, including costs of a security overlay if appropriate, and medevac to an approved health facility if required.
9. Cabinet approved the establishment of a cross-agency committee that will oversee and support the delivery of the quarantine arrangements for the PLS and SWP.
10. Cabinet noted the PLS and SWP implementation in Queensland will be underpinned by the overarching principles of: Public safety is the basis of economic recovery; Use of low risk PLS and SWP countries; Industry funded solutions; No displacement of repatriating Australians; Compliance monitoring proportionate to COVID-19 risks; and consistency with nationally agreed decisions.
11. *Attachments*
* Nil.