

# MODERN SLAVERY RISK FACED BY TEMPORARY MIGRANT WORKERS IN RURAL AND REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES

Hearing: 11 December 2025

## SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

**Dr Ljubov (Luby) Simson, Councillor, Nambucca Valley Council**

Just to reiterate, I am responding from my personal experience and not on behalf of the governing body of the Nambucca Valley Council.

(1) Do you think local Councils where there are large populations of PALM Workers and other temporary migrant workers should have a mandate to undertake inspections of employer's workplaces and accommodation? Without a mandate or similar power, do local Councils have the resources and/or ability to understand the scale of the risk of Modern Slavery and the needs of this population?

### Ljubov Simsons Response:

In the rural landscape, the coalface of Modern Slavery is at the local community level.

Yes, I do think that Council should have the mandate to undertake inspections of employer workplaces and accommodation where PALM and other temporary migrant workers are engaged and employed. This mandate should form part of a broader accountability framework ensuring supply chains from grower to industry are free of modern slavery (NSW Modern Slavery Act 2018) and achieve basic human rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948).

Without a mandate the Council does not have the resources to fully address the scale nor support the risk of Modern Slavery in the Nambucca LGA.

I wish to highlight that this essential for both on-farm and off-farm accommodation of temporary migrant workers.

This legislative change would need to be funded as part of the current PALM and other temporary migrant worker schemes to avoid cost shifting from State and Federal Governments, whilst ensuring viability and capacity building for the implementation of such a mandate via the local Council.

Legislative empowerment of Council would support State and Federal programs designed to improve our rural workforce capacity and capability as part of a broader government accountability framework addressing the Modern Slavery Act (2018).

(2) What is the current process followed by council staff if they are notified of concerns about unsafe or overcrowded living conditions or potentially unauthorised workplace practices occurring on land in the council LGA?

Ljubov Simson's response:

Significantly, in July last year the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner delivered training for frontline Nambucca Valley Council staff to help increase awareness around modern slavery practices.

“As the regulatory authority, any unhealthy or unlawful buildings/uses would be actioned by Council. In relation to whether or not such premises are being used to facilitate modern slavery, we would refer any concerns along with our observations to the Anti-Slavery Commissioner for further investigation”.

From personal discussions with neighbours, farm workers and businesses I know that unsafe or overcrowded living conditions are underreported in the Nambucca LGA.

Our challenge remains capacity coupled with a lack of legislative oversight to address workplace and accommodation issues when identified. This is particularly the case for on-farm accommodation which is often located in isolated areas of the LGA, and at greatest risk of worker exploitation and modern slavery. Legislative oversight by Council will also counter the fear currently driving the underreporting of unsafe or overcrowded living conditions for temporary migrant workers.

I would like to reiterate that a mandate, or the like, to undertake inspections of temporary migrant worker accommodation would provide local legislative empowerment to support State and Federal programs designed to improve our rural workforce capacity and capability.

(3) For local Councils supporting large populations of temporary migrant workers, what additional mandates or resources are necessary, in your opinion, to effectively and holistically respond to the needs of this group?

Ljubov Simsons Response:

Additional mandates and resources should focus on supporting a broader accountability framework inclusive of the farmer/grower who has oversight of workplace practices and often provides on-farm accommodation, labour hire agents and companies, through to the industry bodies who profit from the enterprise, ensuring supply chains are free of modern slavery (NSW Modern Slavery Act 2018) and achieve basic human rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948).

At the public hearing I also spoke about the opportunity of expanding the current Migrant Support Hub to include a local spoke in the Nambucca Valley. This idea could be expanded to include the creation of a more extensive hub-and-spokes model incorporating all high-risk regional areas identified by this NSW parliamentary

inquiry. The Migrant Support Hub and Spokes program could be funded through the existing PALM and other temporary migrant schemes.

The Nambucca Valley Migrant Support Hub would also enable stronger local collaboration with the PALM and other temporary migrant schemes in supporting welcome and cultural inclusion programs, in addition to providing a worker exploitation “safety net” in our joint interest of alleviating Modern Slavery across NSW.