

**INQUIRY INTO MODERN SLAVERY RISKS FACED BY
TEMPORARY MIGRANT WORKERS IN RURAL AND
REGIONAL NEW SOUTH WALES**

Organisation: Multicultural Council of Griffith Inc
Date Received: 24 March 2025

SUBMISSION

RE: Submission to the Modern Slavery Committee inquiry into modern slavery risks faced by temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales.

Dear Modern Slavery Committee,

Please accept this letter as my submission on behalf of Multicultural Council of Griffith Inc. into your current *Inquiry into modern slavery risks faced by temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales*.

I note your terms of reference which I have responded to below:

Incidence, causes and extent of forced labour, deceptive recruiting, gender-based violence, sexual servitude and labour trafficking

Concerns Under the PALM Scheme

The PALM scheme, while commendable in theory and beneficial to many participants, harbors significant concerns that require urgent attention in the antislavery inquiry.

The concerns apply to the high number of people, including women and children. Incidents of forced labour, deceptive recruiting practices, gender-based violence, sexual servitude, and labour trafficking underscore a distressing reality for those have been affected under the scheme.

They have been neglected by the system, found themselves vulnerable to an extreme reality and have become severely vulnerable to exploitation and modern-day slavery.

The situation they find themselves in are further exacerbated by serious health issues, which often go untreated or not treated at all and are left with lifelong impacts on their wellbeing and opportunity to provide for their families, when once they were, fit, healthy and full of vitality on arrival under the PALM scheme.

Despite the scheme's positive intentions, a worrying number of individuals, including vulnerable women and children, have been severely neglected. These people often fall outside the formal worker arrangements outlined under PALM, rendering them extremely susceptible to modern slavery.

The PALM scheme has some major problems, impacting many vulnerable individuals, including women and children. Despite its good intentions, a high number of participants face exploitation and neglect, which can and has led to modern slavery.

Key Issues:

- **Forced Labor:** Workers are often forced to work under unacceptable conditions.
- **Deceptive Recruiting:** Misleading recruitment practices convince and trick people into exploitative work environments.
- **Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Servitude:** Women and children are disproportionately affected, silence is a problem.
- **Labor Trafficking:** Exploitative networks who look for weakness in the program to further compromise the dignity and safety of these workers.

Health and Wellbeing Impact:

- On arrival, the many PALM workers were healthy and full of potential, however, over a period of time, a large number were left with untreated health issues and lifelong burden of diminished wellbeing and lost opportunity to support their families back in their countries.
- The intended benefits of the scheme have been overshadowed by systemic neglect.

The statistics and findings from the many studies carried out since these issues have been highlighted, underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to protect the rights and wellbeing of PALM scheme workers. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensuring that the scheme truly benefits all participants and prevents modern slavery

Suggestion: It's crucial to address these problems to safeguard all participants in the PALM scheme. The inquiry must investigate the causes and extent of these issues to create effective solutions to combat modern slavery and alleviate the burden on local communities and health systems.

Violations relating to wages, allowances, superannuation, leave entitlements, workers compensation, piecework payments, such as underpayment, excessive deductions and debt bondage arrangements

The Multicultural Council of Griffith, constantly have people on the PALM scheme coming to us with these concerns.

Support Challenges:

- *Despite that we currently not having no funding to support them, we do our best to link workers to legal, accommodation, food, health, counselling, wellbeing and other diverse required support. services through local servicers and community-based assistance services.*
- *Funding for a paid worker, instead of volunteers, is essential to ensure these matters are adequately addressed.*
- *Seed funding for a paid worker to assist volunteers is central to ensuring these people's matters are addressed adequately.*

Structural factors that make temporary migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation – when people are injured, they become extremely vulnerable

Temporary visas are the primary factor making PALM scheme workers vulnerable to exploitation. Workers are tied to their employers, which means any minor issue can be used as leverage by unscrupulous employers, leading to exploitation. Workers fear deportation, making them hesitant to report abuses.

Example:

- A young mother on the PALM scheme came to us without work rights, while her two-year-old baby, born here, had work rights. The incompetence and stupidity of this visa system leaves both at the mercy of exploitation and modern-day slavery in Australia.
- This highlights the impracticality of some immigration department decisions, strange and do not make any practical sense.

Addressing these structural factors is crucial to protect temporary migrant workers from exploitation.

Worker conditions and labour practices of direct employers and labour hire companies, including the adequacy of regulations governing both Labour hire companies are a mixed bag

- Workers from the Pacific have no, or no practical, recourse to raise their grievances.
- The current grievance process put in place by the Government is not attainable by them, or when it may be, they are too fearful to take formal grievances forward for fear of being deported and bringing shame upon themselves and their families.

Urgent Need for Reform in Worker Conditions and Labour Practices

Worker conditions and labour practices of direct employers and labour hire companies urgently need reform. Labour hire companies are highly variable in their practices, leaving many workers, particularly those from the Pacific, without practical recourse to address their grievances.

Key Issues:

- **Inaccessibility:** The current government grievance process is unattainable for many workers.
- **Fear of Reprisal:** Workers are often too fearful to file formal grievances due to the threat of deportation and the potential shame it could bring upon themselves and their families.
- **Lack of pastoral care/wellbeing support:** Workers are left on their own, when they are faced with severe /other health issues to handle the system with not advocacy.

Suggestion: Reforms are needed to ensure that all workers have access to fair and effective grievance processes without fear of reprisal. This includes revising regulations governing labour hire companies to provide adequate protection and support for workers. The workers need to fully understand their Australian rights, isolation, lack of communication networks, distances

between towns, transport, the importance of converting their licences to Australian licences once they arrive (review the process through Services NSW), culture and normal day to day living norms BEFORE migrating to Australia to undertake the PALM scheme employment.

Adequacy of monitoring, compliance and enforcement of workplace laws, including health and safety laws – the monitoring is virtually non-existent on the ground.

Monitoring, Compliance, and Enforcement of Workplace Laws

The monitoring, compliance, and enforcement of workplace laws, including health and safety laws, are severely lacking under the PALM scheme.

Key Issues:

- **Inadequate Monitoring:** On-the-ground monitoring is virtually non-existent.
- **Australian Border Force (ABF) Actions:** ABF occasionally detains individuals without appropriate visas, often for valid reasons, highlighting gaps in visa regulation.
- **Poor Healthcare:** The healthcare provided under the PALM scheme is inadequate. Workers with long-term or complex health issues often do not receive necessary treatment, even when these issues arise from their employment.

Suggestion: Effective monitoring, compliance, and enforcement of workplace laws are essential to protect workers. Improvements in healthcare provisions and visa regulations are also crucial to ensure workers' safety and wellbeing.

ABF come through the area occasionally and 'round' a few people up that do not, for often valid reasons, have what is deemed an appropriate visa. Also, the healthcare provided under the PALM scheme is a shambles and when workers have any sort of longer term of complicated health issues, they end up not getting the treatment they need – even though it is often a result of their employment.

Support and Resources for Vulnerable Temporary Migrant Workers

Local Support Needs:

There is a real need for funding on the ground for local community organization the Multicultural Council of Griffith Inc.

Currently, the volunteer/s are not present daily, and often do not understand the real problems. As a result, resources are not reaching those who need them most, such as disengaged PALM workers. Specific funding is necessary to provide the very important community work and direct assistance at the local level.

Impact of Visa Settings and Employment Conditions: The visa settings and conditions of employment for temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales contribute to their vulnerability. (Refer to previous section for detailed discussion).

Interjurisdictional Cooperation and Data Sharing:

Up-to-date information about who is coming to the community for work on PALM, including details such as country of origin, gender, age, and likely support needs.

Currently, no such information is available, hindering appropriate planning and support, which could prevent many current problems.

State-Based Protections:

State governments/federal government are not providing visible support on the ground for those in the most acute need, particularly disengaged PALM workers. Local communities and individuals are forced to fill this gap.

Suggestion: Increased funding and resources are essential to support vulnerable temporary migrant workers. Effective interjurisdictional cooperation, comprehensive data sharing, and visible state-based interventions are crucial for providing adequate support and protection.

Support and Resources for Vulnerable Temporary Migrant Workers

Local Support Needs: There is a critical need for on-the-ground funding for local community organization The Multicultural Council of Griffith, who have been fielding thousands of community members and PALM workers on a volunteer basis.

Currently, those who receive funding available are not present daily and often do not understand the real problems. As a result, resources are not reaching those who need them most, such as disengaged PALM workers. Specific funding is necessary for organizations to provide direct assistance at the local level.

Impact of Visa Settings and Employment Conditions: The visa settings and conditions of employment for temporary migrant workers in rural and regional New South Wales contribute to their vulnerability. (Refer to previous section for detailed discussion).

Interjurisdictional Cooperation and Data Sharing: Local governments and community organizations need up-to-date information about who is coming to their community for work on PALM, including details such as origin, gender, age, and likely support needs. Currently, no such information is available, hindering appropriate planning and support, which could prevent many current problems.

State-Based Protections: State governments are not providing visible support on the ground for those in the most acute need, particularly disengaged PALM workers. Local communities and individuals are forced to fill this gap.

Suggestion: The Modern Slavery Committee should come out to Griffith and meet with local workers and those disengaged from PALM. This is the only way to understand the real situation for them. We are ready to assist in bringing forth these concerns if the committee can arrange such a visit.

We would be interested in assisting people to bring forth these concerns should the committee be able to make such a visit occur.

These statistics and findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to protect the rights and wellbeing of PALM scheme workers. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensuring that the scheme truly benefits all participants and prevents modern slavery.

Sincerely

Carmel La Rocca

President

Multicultural Council of Griffith Inc.