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### **Berries Australia welcomes Pacific Worker scheme reforms**

Berries Australia welcomes today's announcement by the Australian government that the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is now a single, streamlined program that will benefit employers and employees.

The two existing PALM initiatives - the Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP) and Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) - will be consolidated and operated under a single, improved PALM scheme. It will commence in April 2022 and be managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The streamlined PALM scheme will include new visa settings and program features while still providing strong worker protections and support via the Pacific Labour Facility (PLF). The PLF will deliver welfare and cultural expertise as well as a 24/7 helpline for workers

Berries Australia Executive Director Rachel Mackenzie said that the industry particularly welcomes the streamlining of processes and improved capacity for workers to move more easily between farms to enable an efficient and effective workforce for the sector and maximise worker earnings.

"The industry continues to support strong worker protections underpinned by an active compliance and assurance program," she said.

"The Pacific Worker scheme has really shown its value to the sector during the pandemic and the funds workers have been able to send home have supported Pacific Nations devastated by a lack of tourists.

"The berry industry has relied heavily on these workers during the Pandemic and those growers who had already set themselves up to participate in the scheme were at a definite advantage," Ms Mackenzie said.

Berries Australia commends the government for listening to industry and worker representatives to implement reforms that benefit both parties.

*For more information or to arrange an interview contact Berries Australia Executive Director Rachel Mackenzie on 0408 796 199.*

Berries Australia is the peak industry body the Australian berry industry and is a joint venture between the **Australian Blueberry Growers' Association (ABGA)**, **Raspberries and Blackberries Australia (RABA)** and **Strawberries Australia Inc. (SAI)**. Berries Australia represents more than 1000 growers nationally with members ranging from small family farms to large corporate enterprises.