

SOKO NI DRUA

Pacific Workforce
Development Plan
for the Food and
Fibre Sector

July 2025



Information on our workforce data

The data used on this report is sourced from Stats NZ's Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI). The IDI is a large research database containing microdata about people and households. Data is from a range of government agencies, Stats NZ surveys including the Census, and non-government organisations.

Stats NZ Disclaimer

The statistics mentioned in this report are not official. They have been created for research purposes from the [Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) and/or Longitudinal Business Database (LBD)] which are carefully managed by Stats NZ. For more information about the [IDI and/or LBD] please visit <https://www.stats.govt.nz/integrated-data/>.

Inland Revenue Department disclaimer

The results are based in part on tax data supplied by Inland Revenue to Stats NZ under the Tax Administration Act 1994 for statistical purposes. Any discussion of data limitations or weaknesses is in the context of using the IDI for statistical purposes and is not related to the data's ability to support Inland Revenue's core operational requirements.

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Mr Apple, Hortus, Moana New Zealand, Palmerston North Pacific Network,
and the Ohu Ahumahi Pacific Fono



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WELCOME

MAURI,
NOA'IA,
TALOFA,
MĀLO NI,
KIA ORĀNA,
TĀLOFA LAVA,
MĀLŌ E LELEI,
HALO OLGETA,
HALO OLOKETA,
NI SA BULA VINAKA,
FAKAALOFA LAHI ATU,
TĒNĀ KOUTOU KĀTOA,
AND WARM PACIFIC GREETINGS.

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

As Aotearoa New Zealand's food and fibre sector grows, so too does its reliance on the people who drive it forward. Among these are Pacific peoples, whose skills and labour sustain some of our country's key industries.

The Pacific workforce also continues to grow – representing a significant opportunity for the whole of the food and fibre sector.

Soko ni Drua is a tool to help enable the best outcomes for the Pacific workforce in our sector.

The Recognised Seasonal Employers (RSE) scheme plays a very significant part in supporting both the food and fibre sector and providing job opportunities for thousands of workers from across the Pacific in Aotearoa New Zealand. Key aspects of Soko ni Drua seek to improve the skill development and recognition opportunities from the RSE scheme.

Soko ni Drua will continue to evolve and develop as the needs of the food and fibre sector and the sector's Pacific workforce evolve. We look forward to seeing better outcomes for all involved.



A stylized white signature of Jeremy Baker on a dark background.

Jeremy Baker
Chief Executive

SOKO NI DRUA

In the spirit of our Pacific ancestors, we present Soko ni Drua, our Workforce Development Plan for Pacific peoples in the food and fibre sector of Aotearoa New Zealand - a journey toward a vibrant, inclusive future for our Pacific communities.

Just as the tides shape our shores, this plan seeks to shape the landscape of opportunity in the people, food and fibre industries, where the heritage and aspirations of Pacific peoples intertwine.

Soko ni Drua is a collective journey toward a brighter future – one that honours the many cultures of Pacific peoples and empowers those communities to thrive in our sector. Our approach encourages unity among diverse partners - community organisations, educational institutions, and industry leaders - working together toward common goals. This collaborative spirit is essential for ensuring the long-term success of our workforce initiatives.

This journey is rooted in the history of Pacific ancestors, the first navigators who bravely ventured into uncharted waters to discover new lands. Their courage and determination serve as our guide as we chart pathways into work and learning opportunities.

Together, we will navigate these waves of change, building a workforce that is bold, adaptable, and ready to lead in a dynamic world.

WHAKAPAPA OF THE NAME

Gifted from our Fijian Ohu Ahumahi¹ Rangatira, ‘**Soko ni Drua**’ pays tribute to the many indigenous Pacific peoples who, for thousands of years, have used voyaging and navigation knowledge paired with the most innovative canoe and sail technology to traverse the Pacific Ocean purposefully and accurately.

‘**Soko ni Drua**’ pays respect to Pacific peoples as traditional knowledge holders and the belief that we are all in this waka (canoe) and moana (ocean) together and need to work together for a thriving Pacific workforce.

The Fijian word ‘**Soko**’ speaks to the domain of Tangaroa, the extraordinary skill of open ocean traditional wayfinding without instruments; the skill that sits within a wider body of indigenous knowledge that intersects the relationship between Pacific peoples and their spiritual, ecological, and cultural environments.

‘**Drua**’ are the double-hulled Fijian canoes, identical to the Tongan Kalia and Samoan ‘Alia. Drua are among the most finely crafted vessels in Fiji, made from carefully fitted planks built up upon a keel and stitched together with coconut fibre cord.

Soko ni Drua is a plan for the Aotearoa vocational education and training (VET) system, to foster the courage of Pacific peoples to continue to use their languages, cultures, and knowledge systems to chart their own destinies, to support them in creating new knowledge, and more importantly, to enable Pacific peoples to thrive, now and into the future.

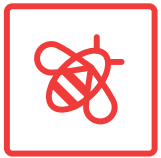




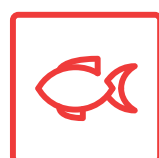
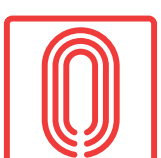







¹ - Ohu Ahumahi is the collective of the six Workforce Development Councils.

MUKA TANGATA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

We are one of six Workforce Development Councils. We work on ways to enhance VET to meet the needs of industry, Māori agribusiness, employers, employees and learners.

- ▶ We analyse industry workforce and skill needs, through both data analysis and discussions with industry and employers, and provide that analysis to industry, government, and training providers.
- ▶ We use that analysis to develop qualifications, standards, and micro-credentials to make sure people in our sector have the skills needed to enhance productivity and growth.
- ▶ We advise the government on how much to spend on these qualifications, standards, and programmes across vocational education and training, to maximise the impact for industry and the nation.
- ▶ We moderate and otherwise provide quality assurance of the delivery of these qualifications, standards, micro-credentials and programmes, to ensure that industry needs are being met in practice.
- ▶ We do all of this in ways which honour te Tiriti o Waitangi and advance Māori Crown relations, so Māori agribusiness can flourish.

We work with 14 industry groups in the food and fibre sector on ways the vocational education system can support their diverse needs .

	Apiculture		Nursery, Turf, and Gardening
	Arable		Poultry, Pigs, and Other Livestock farming
	Dairy Farming		Seafood
	Equine, Greyhounds, and Racing		Sheep, Beef, Deer, and Wool farming
	Forestry		Support Services
	Fruit		Vegetables
	Grapes and Wine		Veterinary Services and Animal Care

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENTS =

MANA MOANA AND TE HAUMAKO

By embracing the unique contributions of Māori and Pacific peoples, we can cultivate an ecosystem where everyone thrives, enhancing workforce capabilities that reflect the cultural richness of Aotearoa and driving economic prosperity for our communities.

- ▶ The Ohu Ahumahi **Mana Moana Pacific Outcomes Framework** provides Pacific-focused guidance for skills leadership, qualifications and quality assurance to amplify Pacific voices and strengthen industry leadership within workforce development. It is guided by a vision of equity, innovation, and transformation, ensuring that Pacific peoples have meaningful opportunities within the food and fibre sector.
- ▶ **Te Haumako is our Māori Workforce Development Plan for the food and fibre sector.** The name symbolises the most fertile soil - a strong foundation that nurtures and sustains growth, much like pā harakeke (flax plantations) thriving in well-prepared land.

Developed in collaboration with Māori, Te Haumako embeds tirohanga Māori (Māori perspectives) into workforce development. It focuses on Māori success, ensuring that iwi, hapū, whānau, ākonga (learners), kaimahi (workers), and businesses can flourish at all levels of the sector.

The plan sets out key areas of work, incorporating 19 actions designed to support Māori growth and wellbeing. By bringing together efforts across all our operational teams, Te Haumako fosters a collective and coordinated approach to Māori workforce development.

CULTURAL VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Both Mana Moana and Te Haumako are anchored in cultural values that guide our approach:

- ▶ **Whanaungatanga** (relationship, kinship) and **manaakitanga** (hospitality, support) strengthen relationships among community members, industry stakeholders, and educational institutions, fostering a supportive environment for all.
- ▶ **Kaitiakitanga** (guardianship) reflects our commitment to sustainable practices that honour our lands and oceans, ensuring that our cultural heritage is preserved for future generations.
- ▶ **Fakateagaaga** (spirituality) a cornerstone of Pacific principles and mental wellness is the belief in Atua (God) - spirituality, religious practices, dignity and collective prosperity.
- ▶ **Aro'a** (love) a sense of responsibility, kindness, and compassion to others, loving one's family, community, environment, Atua, cultural practices, others and love of self.
- ▶ **Faka'apa'apa** (respect) appreciation, honour and how we see and treat others. Respectful relationships keep every Pacific person safe and protected.
- ▶ **Vuvale** (family) Pacific people are never alone, they have a strong sense of identity and belonging to their family, kin and wider community.
- ▶ **Ola Fetufa'aki** (reciprocity) maintaining balance between the environment and people, acts must be reciprocated, consideration is given to time, what to give and how the response or giving is performed.
- ▶ **Soalaupule** (consensus and collectivism) an inclusive decision-making process, where everyone whose voices should be heard have their interests, strengths and goals represented and decisions are made collectively and based on the consensus of all.



“

IT'S STRAIGHTFORWARD WORK, I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING, AND I JUST GET ON WITH IT.”

For over two decades, Alo has served the food and fibre sector with commitment and pride.

Alo first arrived in New Zealand in the 1960s, eventually making Palmerston North home. Since then, he has clocked up an impressive 20+ years working at Press Natural Growers, as well as part-time mahi at a farm in Ōpiki.

“It's straightforward work,” he says. “I know what I'm doing, and I just get on with it.”

He also shares his work opportunities with others, often helping bring “the boys” into roles on the farm. It's this quiet leadership and looking out for others that speaks volumes about Alo's character and community spirit.

While he hasn't taken part in recent formal training, Alo's experience and calm confidence show a different kind of knowledge, one built through hands-on work, trust, and time.

His story reflects the heart of the Pacific workforce - resilient, grounded, and guided by values of service and humility.

THE PACIFIC WORKFORCE

The Pacific workforce is growing fast and represents a significant opportunity for the food and fibre sector.

- ▶ **The Pacific population is growing fast.** Pacific peoples make up 9% of New Zealand's population, growing 16% from 2018 to 2023. New Zealand's overall population grew by ~6% over this period.²
- ▶ **The Pacific population is young** – the median age of Pacific peoples is 25 years, significantly younger than the New Zealand median age of 38.1.³

Our food and fibre sector is forecast to grow – being able to attract, retain and grow our Pacific workforce represents a significant opportunity.

- ▶ **GDP contribution:** In 2023, Pacific peoples contributed 6% to the overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP),⁴ and 5% to the Muka Tangata industries.⁵ Contribution varies across industry groups, with higher contributions for industries where Pacific peoples make up a greater share of the workforce, such as fruit and vegetable production.
- ▶ **Asset base:** Pacific peoples' businesses and organisations held \$8.3 billion in assets in 2017. The Primary sector accounted for \$963 million (11.5%), while the Business Services sector held the largest share at \$2.5 billion.⁶
- ▶ **Regional distribution:** Auckland dominance - 62% of Pacific peoples live in Auckland, with 11% in Wellington and 6% in Waikato.⁷

2, 3 - 2023 Census

4 - The income approach to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measures the income earned from the production of goods and services by adding business profits, salaries and wages, and taxes less subsidies.

5 - GDP Occupation Forecasts, Sweet Analytics

6 - New Zealand Pacific Peoples Economy - November 2018 (treasury.govt.nz)

7 - 2018 Census population and dwelling counts, Stats NZ

BEYOND GDP AND LABOUR SUPPLY

Pacific peoples contribute to cultural and spiritual wellbeing, and extensive unpaid community work, including church governance, childcare, and event organisation.

- ▶ **Volunteers in Pacific not-for-profit organisations provide the equivalent of 670 full-time jobs weekly.**⁸

People working in the food and fibre sector need a focus on pastoral care, especially for those facing challenges from working in remote and isolated communities.

Through building pathways for the Pacific workforce to grow and thrive in food and fibre, there are also opportunities for the sector to benefit from Pacific peoples' expertise in building the social and cultural support systems.

8 - New Zealand Pacific Peoples Economy - November 2018 (treasury.govt.nz)

The Pacific workforce plays an outsized role in growth industries such as Horticulture and Seafood

- ▶ In 2022, 20,057 Pacific individuals were employed in Muka Tangata industries⁹ which is around 8% of the 228,700 Pacific peoples working across all industries nationwide.
- ▶ Within the food and fibre sector, Pacific peoples are concentrated in a few key industries – predominantly Horticulture and associated services, and Seafood.
- ▶ In 2022, 33% of Pacific peoples working in Muka Tangata industries were employed in Support Services,¹⁰ followed by 31% in Fruit, and 7% each in Seafood and Vegetables.¹¹
- ▶ Many seasonal horticulture contractors are not directly employed by horticulture businesses, which results in their data being captured under Support Services rather than the Horticulture industry group.



The Pacific workforce plays a crucial role in our Horticulture and Seafood industries. These industries are forecast to grow their exports and workforces over the next decade and will rely on an increasingly higher-skilled workforce to remain competitive.

Attraction of new entrants is often shaped by connections and relationships to those already in the sector and whether they have positive experience there.

By building on these areas of strength and supporting those in the sector to have transferrable skills recognised elsewhere in the food and fibre sector, there are opportunities to build both the current capability and future labour pipeline into the sector.

9 - Soko Ni Dura page 11 - Muka Tangata
10 - Since RSE workers are in New Zealand temporarily, they typically do not report their ethnicity to government agencies. However, because the RSE scheme only brings workers from Pacific countries, they are considered Pacific peoples. While they often appear in the data under Support Services (due to labour hire company ANZSIC coding), they primarily work in the Horticulture and Viticulture industries.
11 - Integrated Data Infrastructure, StatsNZ

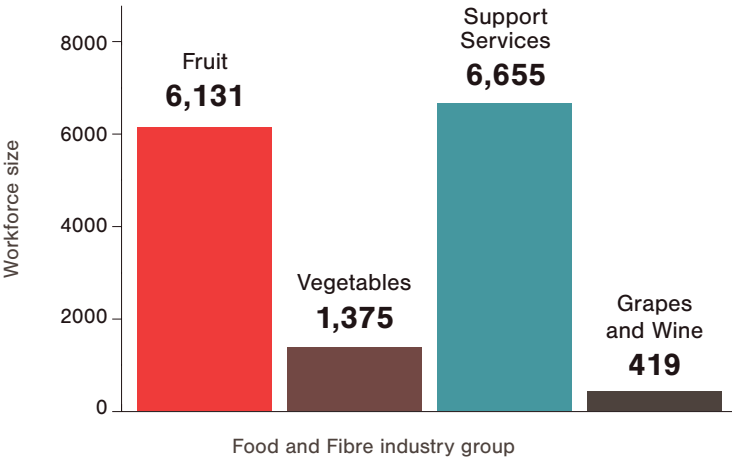
PACIFIC WORKFORCE INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT:

HORTICULTURE AND
SUPPORT SERVICES



The Horticulture industry is one of the substantial growth areas in the Government’s push to double exports.

▶ 14,580 Pacific peoples were employed across Horticulture and Support Services in 2022.



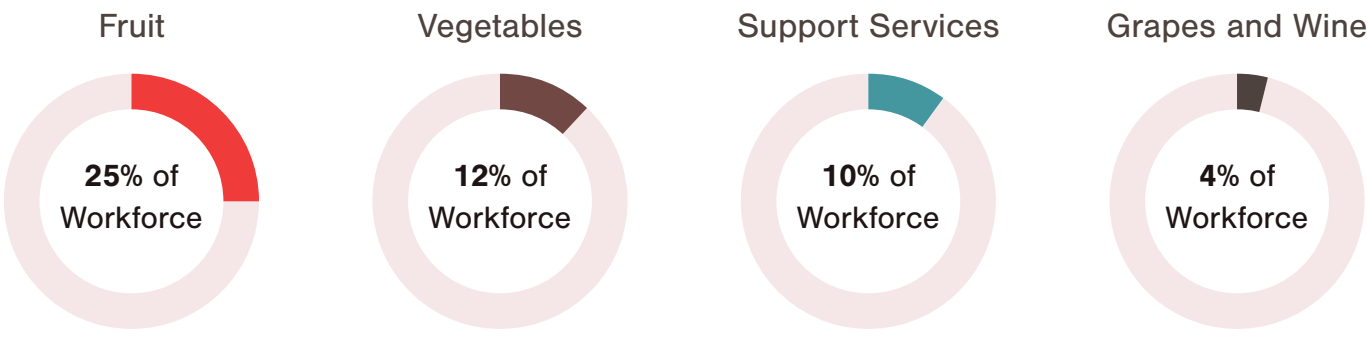
▶ Pacific peoples are typically employed in labour roles and have earnings of between \$20,000 to \$40,000.¹²



▶ Horticulture export revenue is expected to grow by 19%, reaching \$8.5 billion in the year to 30 June 2025.¹³



▶ Pacific peoples make up a significant portion of the workforce in these industries (2022):



Our Skills Forecasting modelling shows that under a ‘business as usual’ scenario the food and fibre workforce is expected to grow, with horticulture (especially Fruit) being a key driver. However, as this growth is primarily driven by higher skilled roles, it will be increasingly important to build pathways to develop these skills within the workforce.

12 - Census information sources from Stats NZ Integrated Data Infrastructure, please refer to Appendix for Stats NZ IDI disclaimer. This data reflects self-reported annual income, not actual earnings.
13 - [Situation and Outlook for Primary Industries \(SOPI\)](#) June 2025

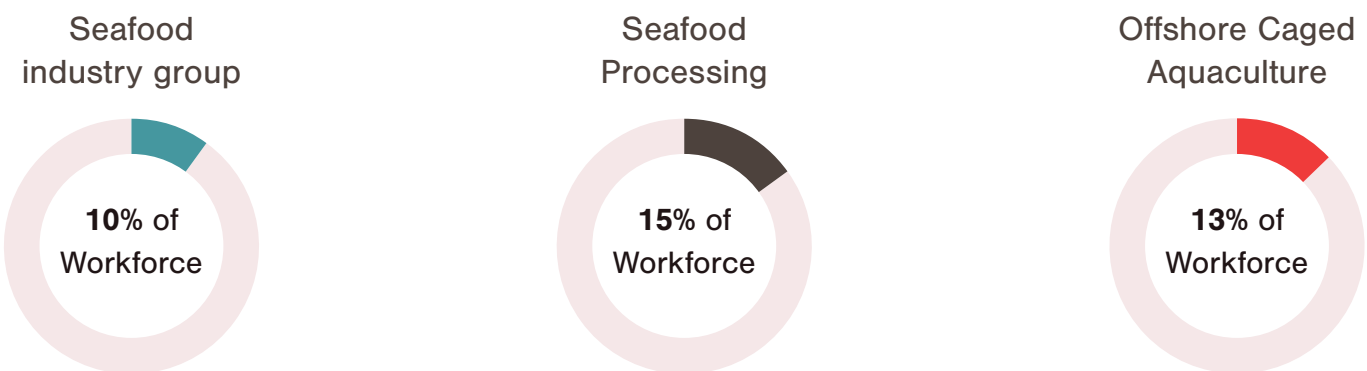
PACIFIC WORKFORCE INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT:

SEAFOOD



The Seafood industry is one of the key focus areas in the Government’s initiative to double exports.

► 1,383 Pacific peoples were employed in the Seafood industry group in 2022. They make up a significant portion of the workforce across these industries.



► Pacific peoples are typically employed in labourer roles.



► Seafood export revenue is expected to rise by 2% to \$2.2 billion in the year to 30 June 2025, with Aquaculture export revenue expected to grow 13%.¹⁵



¹⁴ - These figures refer to Seafood Processing. Census information sources from Stats NZ Integrated Data Infrastructure, please refer to Appendix for Stats NZ IDI disclaimer. This data reflects self-reported annual income, not actual earnings.
¹⁵ - [Situation and Outlook for Primary Industries \(SOPI\)](#) June 2025

VEILOMANII

TONGA



“

BEING ABLE TO SAY, “I’M HERE TO HELP YOU,” THAT’S WHAT I LOVE ABOUT THIS JOB.”

For 11 years, Veilomani has been a key member of the team at Moana New Zealand, managing relationships with over 250 domestic customers - a role that relies heavily on her people skills.

Fortunately for Veilomani, connecting with people and finding solutions comes naturally. **“Being able to say, ‘I’m here to help you,’”** she says, **“that’s what I love about this job.”**

Over the years, Veilomani has continued to grow her skills in a variety of areas. She’s now sharing those skills with her team, working as a mentor and passing on her knowledge.

In the future, Veilomani is keen to formalise her experience with a qualification - whether that be something related to growing her leadership skills or simply gaining recognition for the skills she’s built throughout her career.

“I’m now at the point where I’m involved in the interview process,” she says. “The first thing we usually look at is what qualifications someone has, so I know how important it is.”

At the heart of everything Veilomani does is a desire to help people.

Whether it’s supporting her family, teaching seminary before work, or building customer relationships with empathy and care, Veilomani brings a spirit of service to every part of her life.

RECOGNISED SEASONAL EMPLOYER WORKERS IN THE FOOD AND FIBRE SECTOR

The Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme (RSE scheme) has become a vital part of filling workforce shortages in viticulture and horticulture industries since the early 2000s.

What started as an industry initiative to fill a labour gap, was later adopted by the New Zealand government and went on to become the biggest formal overseas worker scheme in the country.

This works both to support industries to fill a labour gap during busy seasons, and to boost Pacific economies.¹⁶ Nine different Pacific countries are eligible to participate in the scheme.¹⁷



- ▶ The number of Pacific RSE workers in Muka Tangata industries has increased from 5,100 workers in 2015 to 8,500 workers in 2022. The majority of these workers came from Vanuatu (42%) and Samoa (26%) in 2022.
- ▶ Since its launch in 2007, the RSE scheme has operated under an annual cap on workers. The initial cap was set at 5,000, and has steadily increased over time to meet employer demand. The cap in 2025 was set at 20,750.
- ▶ Of the total RSE workers in 2022 (12,700), 67% worked in Muka Tangata industries. Their contributions drive the success of sectors such as Horticulture and Viticulture.
- ▶ Of the total 8,500 Pacific RSE workers in Muka Tangata industries in 2022, 92% identified as male. Enhancing gender balance and supporting women's participation can diversify and strengthen the workforce.
- ▶ 72% of these total workers fall within the 25-44 age bracket. This working-age demographic highlights the potential for sustained and long-term contributions to the food and fibre sector.
- ▶ Between 2007 and 2022, 56% of RSE workers returned for multiple seasons, with most completing two or three seasons, providing employers with a skilled and experienced workforce familiar with industry requirements.¹⁸

¹⁶ - RSE scheme 'transformed' the New Zealand fruit growing industry | RNZ

¹⁷ - Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme research | Immigration New Zealand

¹⁸ - How often do Pacific Peoples seasonal workers return to New Zealand? | Devpolicy Blog from the Development Policy Centre

Stories from the sector:

PENI, NIUMAIA, AND RATU FIJI



“

WE HAVEN'T COME FROM KIA TO BUILD OUR OWN HOUSE JUST FOR US, WE ALSO HELP THE COMMUNITY...”

Hailing from the small Fijian island of Kia, RSE workers Peni, Niumaia, and Ratu are working their second season at Mr Apple in the Hawke's Bay.

They're part of a team of 15 men from Kia, and their motivation is simple – to help rebuild after it was devastated by Cyclone Yasa in 2020.

It's not just about rebuilding their own houses, Ratu says, but rebuilding the whole of the island: **“We haven't come from Kia to build our own house just for us, we also help the community - our church and our community hall, to help everyone and our community.”**

The work they're doing now is also laying the foundation for something more, beyond the rebuild. Each man has a goal: whether it's buying a boat to fish, opening a canteen, or simply saving for their families' futures.

RSE SKILLS RECOGNITION PROJECT

The RSE scheme provides a critical pathway for Pacific workers to engage in seasonal work in Aotearoa.

Through the RSE Skills Recognition Project we will establish and implement a robust skills recognition framework for RSE workers, ensuring that the skills they acquire through the scheme are formally acknowledged and transferable across participating Pacific nations.

The overarching vision is to move beyond seasonal employment and create sustainable workforce pathways that contribute to economic resilience and social mobility for Pacific workers and their communities.

DELIVERABLES:

- ▶ Provide skill recognition for the Pacific RSE workers, ensuring their skills are acknowledged in their home countries and valued by New Zealand employers.
- ▶ Support education providers to create targeted training programmes that address specific skill gaps within the RSE scheme.
- ▶ Implement programmes to foster cultural exchange and advocate for inclusive workplace policies.
 - ▶ Establish a framework for potential career advancements within the RSE scheme.
 - ▶ Provide resources and guidance for Pacific workers to navigate their career paths and emphasise the importance of ongoing learning.
 - ▶ Assess skills of RSE workers in their home countries before departure.
 - ▶ Assist RSE workers in defining objectives for their participation in the scheme, including skill-gain goals.
 - ▶ Support the development of mentorship programmes with New Zealand employers to support skill development.
 - ▶ Provide regular check-ins with RSE workers and employers.
 - ▶ Assess and award standards to RSE workers based on evidence gathered.
 - ▶ Facilitate recognition of skills by sending country authorities upon reintegration.

FRANCIS

SOLOMON ISLANDS



“

**THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP NOT ONLY ME,
BUT A LOT OF PEOPLE BACK ON THE ISLAND.”**

Francis began as part of the RSE scheme in 2012 and now holds an Accredited Employer Work Visa. He’s a workforce supervisor at Hortus, and has become a valued member of his workplace community.

With four children back home in the Solomon Islands, being away from family is hard. A positive for Francis, is the connections he’s made while working in New Zealand. “When I come here, I still feel like I’m home,” he says.

During his time in New Zealand, Francis has completed the Vakameasina programme,¹⁹ gained first aid certification, and earned his full New Zealand driver licence. He’s also worked his way up to a senior position, honing his leadership skills.

He’s proud of the skills he’s developed and is keen to take them back to support his community.

“This is an opportunity to help not only me, but a lot of people back on the island.”

¹⁹ - Vakameasina programme: Vakameasina (translating to ‘treasures we carry together’) was an education and development programme for seasonal horticultural workers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

PACIFIC PATHWAYS

Opportunities for career advancement

To attract and retain the Pacific workforce, the food and fibre sector needs to look at how it can build pathways and opportunities for advancement within the industries. Without these pathways, the industries risk becoming increasingly unattractive to both new entrants and those within the workforce.

- ▶ Pacific peoples represent 5% - 7% of the Muka Tangata industries' workforce (2016 - 2022) but are concentrated in lower-level roles, with more than 75% in labouring positions compared to 32% across all ethnicities.²⁰
- ▶ Pacific peoples are underrepresented in managerial roles (9% compared to 41% for all ethnicities in Muka Tangata industries).²¹
- ▶ Across Muka Tangata industries, Pacific peoples tend to have a lower average annual income, with the majority (80%) earning up to \$40,000.²² This may include income from part-time or part-year employment.

20, 21 - IDI, Stats NZ – Census 2018

22 - Census information sources from Stats NZ Integrated Data Infrastructure, please refer to Appendix for Stats NZ IDI disclaimer.

Skills and training to support pathways into and through the sector

Our Skills Forecasting modelling shows that the workforces across Muka Tangata industries are likely to shift over the next couple of decades – with the workforce needing increasingly bigger proportions of higher-skilled roles.

The Pacific workforce tends to hold lower levels of formal qualifications than other ethnicities, with nearly 40% of those working in the food and fibre sector holding no qualification. The concentration of the Pacific workforce within Horticulture, Support Services and Seafood may partially explain this gap as these industries also tend to be those with lower levels of formal training.

Pacific peoples are also underrepresented as learners. The percentage of Pacific peoples enrolled in Muka Tangata qualifications has fluctuated from 3% to 5% between 2017 and 2023. In 2023, 4% of learners identified as Pacific peoples.^{23,24}

It is clear that there is a need to make training relevant and accessible to the Pacific workforce and learners.

This should also act as a call to action, particularly for the industries with strong Pacific participation, to look at how they can support their workforces to take up opportunities to build skills and progress.

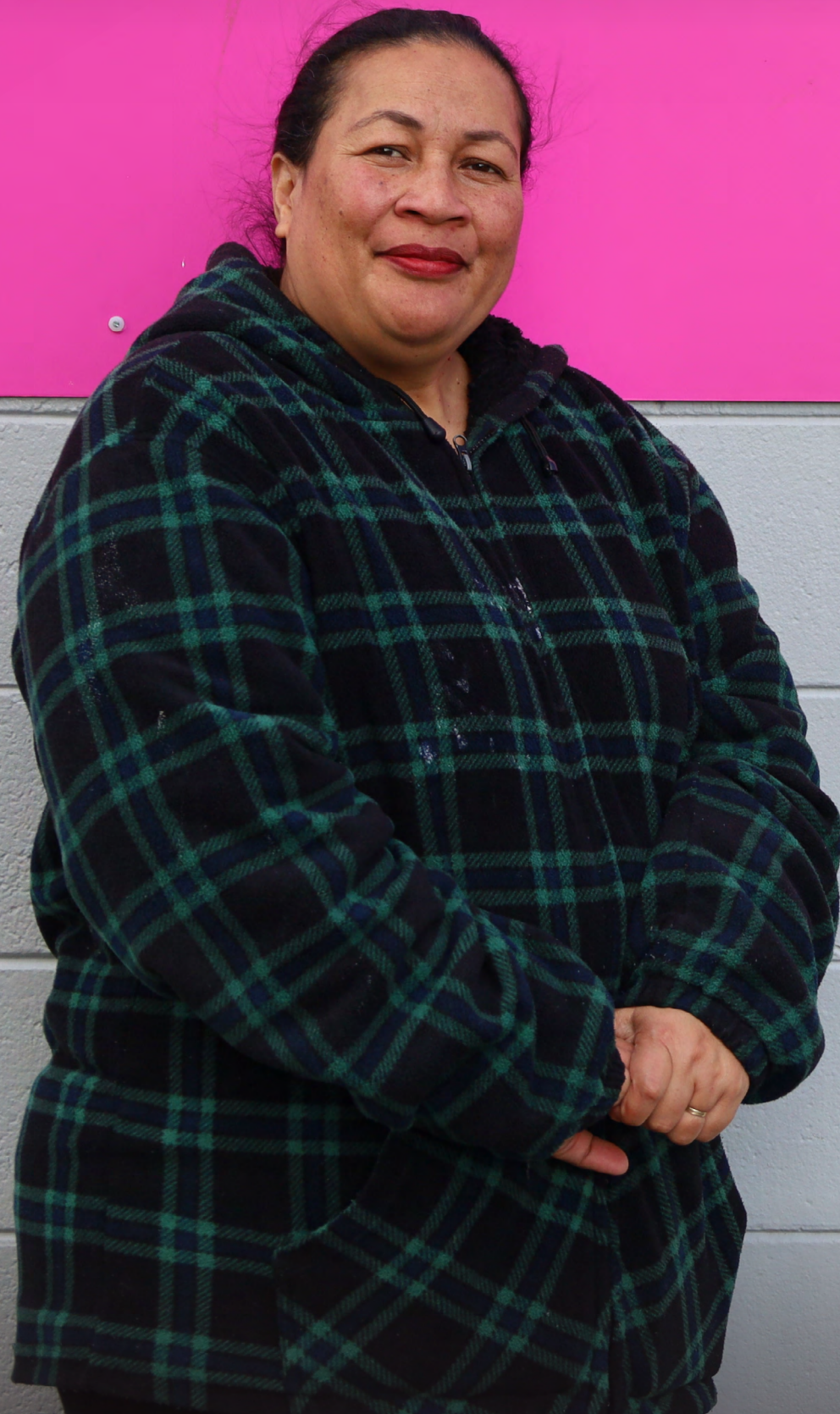
23 - There is no historical mapping of the Muka Tangata qualifications to allow for trend comparisons. Some of these qualifications have replaced others that we do not track historically, so these do not represent a comprehensive set of learner trends.

24 - Tertiary Education Commission, [Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua - Reporting and Data Collection](#).

Stories from the sector:

PELENITINA
TONGA

NITY CENT



“

**THEY SUPPORTED ME WITH MY PRACTICAL WORK
THAT HELPED ME FINISH MY DEGREE... IT'S
INTERESTING LEARNING NEW THINGS.”**

Five years ago, Pelenitina made the move from Tonga to Aotearoa. Today, she's a proud graduate in food technology and an active contributor in the food and fibre sector.

When she first arrived in New Zealand, Pelenitina began studying at Massey University and went on to complete a Bachelor of Food Technology (Honours). But she didn't do it alone.

Her current employer, Growback Ltd, played a key role in her journey offering her a practical placement to complete the degree. What started as an internship turned into something more. They not only supported her studies, but they also kept her on after graduation.

“They supported me with my practical work that helped me finish my degree. They even taught me how to test and do dispatch. It's interesting learning new things.”

Pelenitina is now trained in various parts of the business, from dispatch and product testing to quality assurance processes.

CALL TO ACTION

Recognise the value and opportunity that the Pacific workforce brings to the food and fibre sector

- ▶ The growth of the Pacific workforce represents a real opportunity for the food and fibre sector to grow and revitalise its workforce.
- ▶ The sector should think about how it can tap into and grow the connections to the Pacific workforce.

Our contribution:

- ▶ Provide data and evidence on the Pacific workforce and learners, including handover to a food and fibre Industry Skills Board, to enable the sector to identify key demographic opportunities.

Strengthen and embed cultural connections

- ▶ To attract and retain the Pacific workforce, the sector needs to strengthen how it embeds and supports the values and expertise that the workforce brings.

Our contribution:

- ▶ Support providers to develop programmes to meet the Pacific learning and language considerations.
- ▶ We will explore opportunities through collaboration with Pacific review participants to incorporate traditional knowledge with modern skills in qualifications and standards. Our assessment specifications for skill standards state “All activities should, as relevant to candidates and/or this standard, reflect the peoples of the Pacific and other cultures, and their world views.”

Build pathways and opportunities for the Pacific workforce in the food and fibre sector

- ▶ The food and fibre sector needs to improve pathways and opportunities for progression to retain its existing workforce, build the skills it needs for the future and present itself as an attractive sector to work in.
- ▶ This is particularly needed for the Pacific workforce who are underrepresented in more senior level roles.
- ▶ Training can play a valuable role in building these pathways, but it also requires industry to look at how it can support its workforce to build skills and progress those with potential within their industries.

Our contribution:

- ▶ Muka Tangata leads the consultation and development of educational components (qualifications, standards and micro-credentials) and pathways in the food and fibre sector. Our development projects ensure that the qualifications, standards, and micro-credentials are fit for purpose, meet the needs of industry and enable ākonga to succeed in their training and career goals.

We provide investment advice to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) on what qualifications and modes of delivery it should be purchasing, to meet the needs of both industries and learners. In our advice, we will consider the specific needs of Pacific peoples and convey these to TEC.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

At the conclusion of this chapter, we acknowledge that the journey of Soko ni Drua is one of continuous movement, growth, and transformation.

As we come to the close of this plan, the drua does not anchor - it charts new waters. Soko ni Drua, the path of the canoe, continues its purposeful journey, now looking to align with the evolving direction of our vocational landscape.

With the introduction of Industry Skills Boards (ISBs), there is a vital opportunity to strengthen the partnership between Pacific communities and industry leadership. The ISBs, with their mandate to shape workforce development and influence investment decisions, are natural navigators alongside us.

Soko ni Drua is a commitment. A movement. A collective voyage toward equity, inclusion, and Pacific excellence.

Let us paddle forward - united, purposeful, and unwavering.





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