

Latrobe mayor demands PALM fruit pickers be provided better accom



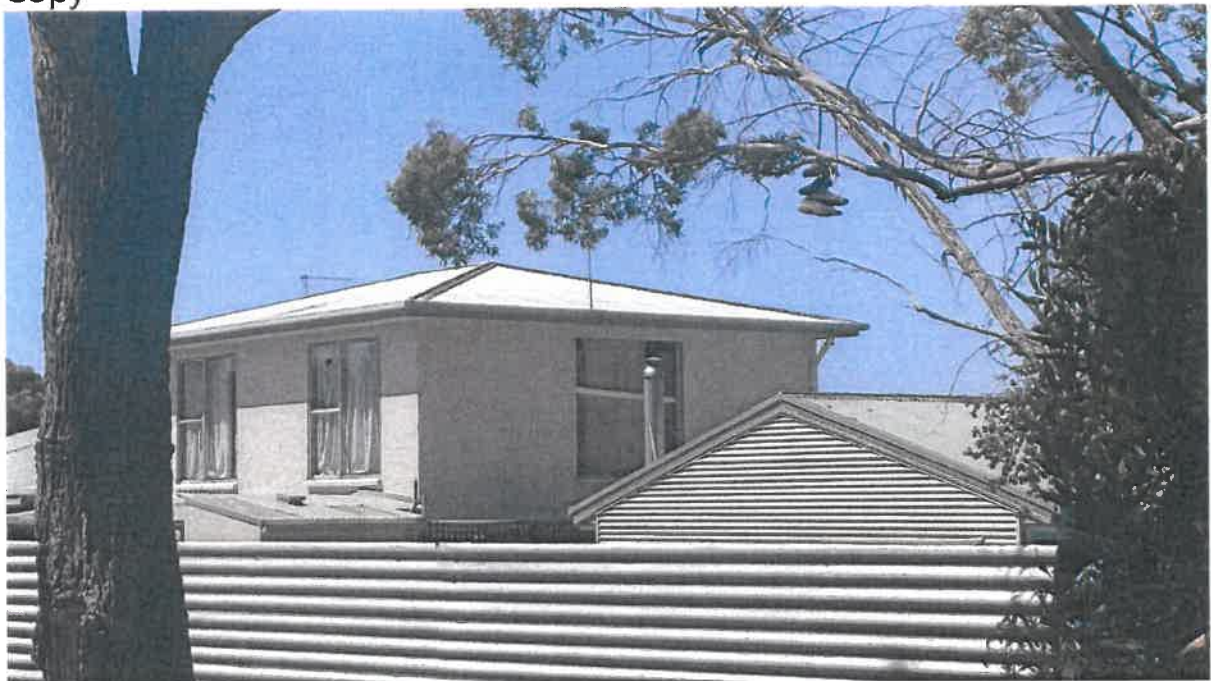
By [Sandy Powell](#)

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A window in the house at 30 Arthur Street, Shearwater, appeared to have been boarded up with plywood. Picture by Sandy Powell

A federal government department has distanced itself from responsibility over the "disgusting" accommodation seasonal workers were living in at a Shearwater house.

On Wednesday, Latrobe mayor Peter Freshney urged the federal government to step up the Pacific Australian Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme to ensure workers brought to Australia to work in the agriculture industry are appropriately housed.

The mayor's comments came in the wake of the council forcibly removing 40 workers from a house at Shearwater because they believed lives were at risk due to a number of fire safety and planning issues.

[READ MORE: Owner of Shearwater fruit pickers' house denies lives were at risk](#)

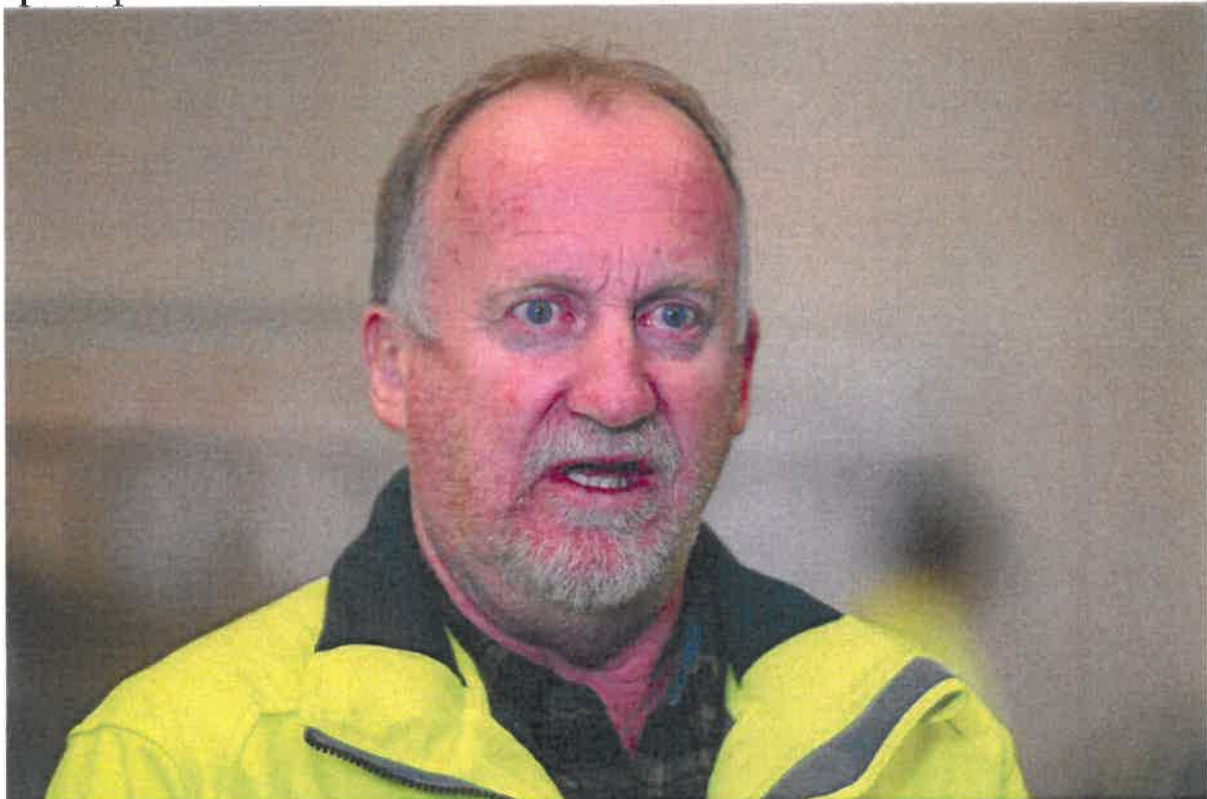
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However, a Department of Employment and Workplace Relations spokesperson said the house on Arthur Street was not approved for PALM workers.

They said PALM workers are able to select their own accommodation and when this occurs approval by the department is not required.

"In these instances the approved employer is required to explain to PALM workers that they will be responsible for all costs and the approved employer is not responsible for the quality of the accommodation," the spokesperson said.



Peter Freshney

It is not known who the approved employer was in this circumstance. Despite saying the department was not responsible, the spokesperson said it acted quickly when alerted to the situation at Shearwater to provide alternate accommodation.

"The department has been in close contact with the affected workers, the employer, as well as the Council and the Vanuatu High Commission."

A similar intervention was conducted by the council at the same property three years ago, when 70 seasonal workers were removed and rehoused.

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Cr Freshney said an investigation was conducted by the council's environmental health officer, the Tasmania Fire Service and Tasmania Police last week after concerns were raised by the community.

"People are absolutely disgusted by what has happened," Cr Freshney said.
"It is unbelievable."

The property's owner, Simon Baldock, denied that conditions at the house risked human lives, and said an appeal of the order was being lodged with the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

Mr Baldock said his property was "no different to a large share house" and that the seasonal workers "had every right to enjoy their home" and "have now been dispossessed".