

# SEASONAL WORKERS ACCOMMODATION IN THE SWAN HILL REGION - What you need to know

## Seasonal workers and local residents

The influx of seasonal workers results in a high demand for temporary accommodation within the municipality.

The length of stay in temporary accommodation varies and is often required by overseas visitors with temporary working visas or interstate or itinerant workers following growing seasons.

## Are you living in temporary accommodation or aware of any in your area?

Most seasonal workers seek temporary accommodation for the duration of their employment for sowing/maintenance periods or harvest season.

Temporary accommodation can take a number of forms, this information sheet will explain each type, in greater detail.



## Camping/caravan park

Camping/Caravan Park accommodation typically involves living in a caravan or cabin or in some cases a tent, with shared use of shower and toilet facilities.

Camping and caravan parks are generally licensed accommodation providers and must operate in accordance with their registration and code of conduct.

## Motel/hotels

Motels will generally comprise of a private room with bathroom or in some cases communal use of bathroom facilities.

Some hotels and motels will often include the use of shared cooking facilities or "camp-kitchen" for the use of guests and generally includes a cleaning service for rooms that is carried out on a weekly basis.

Motel or hotels are generally established local businesses and registered and operate in accordance with legislation.

## On-farm accommodation

On-Farm accommodation is generally provided by employers or labour-hire contractors and typically comprises transportable buildings with shared bathroom, cooking and living facilities or in many cases private dwellings.

On-farm accommodation is usually located on the property where a crop is to be harvested and maintained and operated by farmers or labour-hire contractors.

Legitimate on-farm accommodation operators are required to follow relevant building and planning regulations based on their size and capacity.

## Private rentals/sub leasing

A private rental will generally comprise of a room in a private dwelling. A typical private rental will generally comprise of 2-4 occupants with 1-2 people per bedroom and communal use of living and cooking facilities.

Private rentals can also include the use of a caravan or transportable dwelling located on the same property as a private dwelling.

Most private rentals will feature 1-2 permanent residents who have been living at the dwelling for a period of 6-12 months and private rooms can be sublet for shorter periods of time such as a harvest season.

## Rooming house/shared accommodation

A rooming house is a building, usually a house in a residential area or in some cases rural areas or on farms, where one or more rooms is available for rent and where the number of people occupying the property is four or more.

Shared accommodation buildings can often include up to 11 or more habitable rooms. Residents will have exclusive possession of their own room and the right to share common areas like kitchens, bathrooms, and lounge rooms with other residents.

It is often difficult to distinguish the difference between a private rental and a rooming house, generally a rooming house is characterised by upwards of 5 residents living in the same house for a short period of time.

In the Swan Hill region, it is most often seasonal workers from overseas and from Australia who live in this type of accommodation, due to their short-term needs and the affordability and availability of rooming houses.



## Help us provide safe and healthy accommodation for seasonal workers.

Strict codes of practice apply to all accommodation providers to ensure the health and safety of guests, and all legitimate providers must adhere to health and safety, hygiene, building and planning regulations under Victorian and local laws.

Most temporary accommodation operations will require approval from council and there are limits on the number of people allowed.

## Changes to the Swan Hill Planning Scheme

Amendment VC202 to the Victorian Planning Provisions has removed the need for a planning permit for worker accommodation for up to ten (10) people in the Farming Zone. This change will make it easier for farmers to attract and retain workers, especially during peak harvest / picking times.

**PLEASE NOTE** -The planning permit exemption is only available to exclusively accommodate workers engaged in agriculture and must be on at least 40 hectares of land in a Farming Zone. A building permit is still required.

Meanwhile, to make sure all accommodation is up to standard, any proposal will still need to meet requirements regarding lot size, waste water treatment as well as having to be associated with the ongoing agricultural use of the land.

## Do you have a concern?

Local residents and seasonal workers can help to ensure safe, hygienic and comfortable seasonal accommodation is available.

Local residents or workers who have concerns about existing accommodation can contact:

**Dennis Hovenden, Project Manager** - phone 50362340 or email:

[dennis.hovenden@swanhill.vic.gov.au](mailto:dennis.hovenden@swanhill.vic.gov.au)

All information remains confidential.

## Additional Information for accommodation providers – Rooming Houses



### Are you providing accommodation to seasonal workers?

If you are considering renting out rooms in your home or establishing a shared accommodation business such as those described above, special building regulations will apply and a planning permit and/or building permit may be required prior to accepting guests.

If you are renting or sub-letting your property to more than four people, you may be running a rooming house and must comply with all applicable laws.

### Requirements for registration as an accommodation provider

If you qualify as an accommodation provider or think that you may be, you must be licensed with Consumer Affairs Victoria and comply with all planning, building and local laws.

Some examples of your responsibilities are listed below, but you should contact Council to discuss your individual property and regulations that apply.

### Example rules and requirements that apply to rooming houses/shared accommodation:

Rooming houses/shared accommodation  
MUST:

- ✓ Be registered with Council's Public Health Services Department.
- ✓ Provide a clean-living environment, including adequate ventilation, continuous and adequate hot and cold-water supply, clean drinking water, regular rubbish collection, adequate sewerage and water discharge, and vermin-proof bins that are emptied regularly.
- ✓ Provide at least one toilet, one bath/shower and one wash basin for every 10 people
- ✓ Comply with regulated room sizes, based on number of occupants and length of stay
- ✓ Comply with Local Laws around use of caravans in residential areas
- ✓ Have appropriate Building and planning Permits if required.
- ✓ Have the regulated number of stand-alone, hard-wired smoke alarms, and other fire safety measures



## Working towards safe and healthy accommodation options for Seasonal Workers in our region

Council is committed to working with existing owners and proprietors that may not meet regulations or are not operating in accordance with legislation and local laws to achieve compliance.

There is an understanding that issues of non-compliance may not be intentional in many cases, and council can assist these operators by providing the resources and advice to assist in running a safe and healthy business for residents and staff. However, in some instances it may be necessary to impose enforcement measures to ensure compliance.

Measures can include issuing of orders/notices to upgrade safety measures of the building, prohibit occupation and remedy and breaches of standards under the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations, the Swan Hill Planning Scheme, and the Building Act 1993.

Council may also serve an infringement notice or offences, including operating an unregistered business if required.

## Contact us

If you think you might be running a rooming house or shared accommodation or seeking to establish one and have any questions about the rules that might apply to you - please contact:

### **Public Health Department**

Phone: 5036 2591

Or visit [www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/rooming-house](http://www.swanhill.vic.gov.au/rooming-house), to review more details on building regulations for accommodation.