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FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr PS Russo MP (Chair)
Mr LL Millar MP

Staff present:

Ms A Honeyman (Research Director)

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE PRACTICES OF THE LABOUR HIRE INDUSTRY IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

TUESDAY, 7 JUNE 2016

Emerald

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Committee met at 12.29 pm

CHAIR: Good morning. I declare this public hearing of the Finance and Administration Committee open. I am Peter Russo, the chair of the committee and the member for Sunnybank. My colleague here today is Mr Lachlan Millar MP, the member for Gregory. The other members of the committee who are not present are: Mr Ray Stevens MP, the member for Mermaid Beach; Mr Duncan Pegg MP, the member for Stretton; Mrs Jo-Ann Miller MP, the member for Bundamba; and Mr Pat Weir MP, the member for Condamine.

The purpose of this hearing is to receive evidence from witnesses on the committee's inquiry into the practices of the labour hire industry in Queensland. The inquiry was referred to the committee by the Legislative Assembly on 2 December 2015. The terms of reference for the inquiry require the committee to consider: the extent, nature and consequence of labour hire employment in industries and or regions, including within industry supply chains and the responsibilities of entities involved; phoenixing, undercapitalisation and undercutting of conditions by labour hire companies and their impact on the labour market and business; the social and economic impacts, including on regional communities, of replacing permanent employees, apprentices and trainees with labour hire workers; allegations that labour hire and sham contracting are being used to avoid workplace laws and other statutory obligations such as the underpayment of wages and entitlements, including superannuation, and avoidance of payroll tax and WorkCover premiums; the effectiveness of enforcing current industrial relations laws and instruments, occupational health and safety laws and workers' compensation laws in the labour hire industry; allegations of exploitation, harassment and other mistreatment of workers employed by companies; whether tendering and employment practices create an uneven playing field for competing businesses; the regulation of labour hire in Australian jurisdictions and internationally; and effective enforcement mechanisms, including bonds, licensing, registration and other forms of compliance. The committee is to table its report on this inquiry by 30 June 2016.

The hearing today is a formal proceeding of the parliament and is subject to the Legislative Assembly's standing rules and orders. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind you that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. Hansard will record the proceedings, and you will be provided with the proof transcript, which will also be published on the committee's website. To assist Hansard staff, I remind anyone who wants to address the committee to please speak clearly into the microphones and state your name when you first address the committee.

Please turn mobile phones off or switch them to silent. Please note that no calls are to be taken inside this room while the proceedings are taking place.

COLLINS, Ms Sallee, Blackwater Community Group

HODKIN, Ms Zoe, Blackwater Community Group

CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before the committee. I understand that you have received a copy of the instructions for witnesses. If you have not had chance to read it, a copy of these instructions and the terms of reference for the inquiry are on your table. You may make a brief opening speech and then members of the committee will have some questions for you.

Ms Hodkin: I am a chairperson for the Blackwater Community Group. I have lived in Blackwater for five years at the moment. I previously attended school there and high school, so basically I am pretty much, as they say, a local. The reason Sallee and I started up the Blackwater Community Group was that we were extremely saddened by multinationals starting what they now call the casualisation of the workforce—permanent employees being made redundant and labour hire companies being brought in.

Blackwater itself has suffered extremely badly from this situation and we have had many families move out of town. As you all probably know, we have more and more camp approvals popping up all over the place, so that has pretty much ignited our fire to try and save the community that we both grew up in and both love.

Ms Collins: Good morning. I am a member of the Blackwater Community Group, which we started when BMA announced the job cuts to its Blackwater mine and started using labour hire. I am a resident of Bluff and have been for most of my life. My husband and I both went to school in Bluff and Blackwater, as both of our children do now. I have owned a clothing shop, Billeez Clothing, in the shopping centre in Blackwater for the past nine years. I have already seen the gruelling effect that labour hire and FIFO-DIDO have had on Blackwater and my business. I have had to lay off my full-time employees and work the business six days a week by myself. This has had a huge impact on my family and married life. I am currently cancelling any orders for next season's stock, and I am not sure if it will be viable to stay open much longer if more families leave the town and are replaced by labour hire workers, who are put in camps and do not support the community. At this point I am facing the fact that I may have to break my lease with the shopping centre, which many businesses have already done, which will lead to bankruptcy. This then causes trouble personally in the future with regard to credit, and it may have a huge impact on my family. I am the third generation of my family to own a local business in Blackwater. My father and grandfather owned the local butcher shops in Bluff and Blackwater. They owned a thriving business then and had support from the community, local businesses and the mines.

My husband's employment—he has worked in the explosive industry in the mines for the past 24 years—is far from stable, with the threat of being undercut by labour hire employees coming in and taking what would have been a permanent position with the company before. These companies that have contracts with the mines are being forced to cut permanent, well-experienced employees and use cheaper labour hire to cut costs. Overtime is a thing of the past for permanent employees, as this goes to the labour hire employees because it is simply cheaper.

My family have been, and continue to be, involved in one of the Rugby League teams in Blackwater and we have seen the decline in committee members, supporters, players in our club and other clubs throughout the Central Highlands. As a great number of families continue to leave our town there are fewer people to take on the roles of committee members, coaches and captains for all the sporting clubs, local committees and P&C associations et cetera. Without these willing volunteers in the community there will be nothing left for our children and our families.

When I left Blackwater high school we had a choice to move on to further education or to seek employment in Blackwater, as there were plenty of opportunities for careers with apprenticeships and traineeships as well as many other full-time jobs available. With a major decrease in apprenticeships and traineeships offered and the closure of businesses, there will be no opportunities for our youth and the next generation to stay in the towns. This then leaves no other option for the kids but to seek employment elsewhere. This affects me directly with my children at this age ready to enter the permanent workforce, and it becomes very distressing and disappointing not only for me but for all the parents in the community who want their kids to have a future with a great support network as well as family.

The trend is to contract out hundreds of permanent, secure local jobs and replace them with lower paid contractors who have no job security and who cannot get loans to buy a house in the community because of their non-permanent employment, so their families are forced to stay behind. This has plunged hundreds of families here in Blackwater into deep uncertainty about our future. Labour hire is hurting our communities, schools and hospitals that we love. We need to keep these regional towns alive. We will not give up without a fight.

Mr MILLAR: Sallee and Zoe, thank you for coming along and participating in this committee meeting. This is an opportunity for us, and certainly for Central Queensland, to put on the record not only in *Hansard* but with the state government the impacts we have seen over the last five to seven years. We did have a boom in the industry where you could not find accommodation, and now we have a downturn. For the benefit of the committee, back in the 1980s when I grew up here in Emerald and Blackwater—I played football against Blackwater and lost plenty of times—they were always thriving communities. Why were they thriving communities then and why are we seeing these communities not so thriving now?

Ms Collins: I believe it started with 12-hour shifts and seven-day rosters. That is where it started to change. There was a community environment. Dads were down at the football field coaching the young ones. They were at soccer or wherever. They do not have time for that now. The ones that are DIDO or fly-in fly-out, they do not have time to spend in the community.

Mr MILLAR: It was changing from eight-hour shifts to 12-hour shifts. Did that start in the mid-1990s?

Ms Hodkin: Yes, I think that basically was the start of them cutting away at the community spirit and the community as a whole, and it just gradually got worse. Then when you start bringing in things like labour hire and your drive-in drive-out and fly-in fly-out it just adds to the situation, and that is why the town is no longer surviving.

Everybody has a choice of where they want to live and things like that—you cannot tell people that they have to live in Blackwater—but all we are saying is that there just needs to be a level playing field for the whole situation. Stop giving the labour hire workers such entitlements to stay at camp and things like that. Make it exactly the same. Do the same for the people who want to live local. Give them rent assistance and things like that. Make it a level playing field.

Mr MILLAR: Why do you think there is a desire for more camps? Given that there is a downturn in the industry, I believe it would not be that hard to find accommodation in Blackwater. Why do you think we are still seeing camps being approved?

Ms Hodkin: I do not know. We have asked this question of the local council. We have asked Dr Lynham. We have even sat in a meeting with Annastacia Palaszczuk, and the thing is that nobody will give us a straight answer. They hand it back. It goes from EDQ to the Premier to state government. Nobody wants to take responsibility for it. Up until the other day they are still putting applications in for more camps in Blackwater. We have something like 600 to 700 empty houses around town.

Mr MILLAR: What we are talking about here is the social impact on a once thriving and proud community. Not only does it have an impact on people who work in the mines; it has an impact on businesses. If you live in town, you are likely to shop in town. If you do not live in town, let us say you are a fly-in fly-out worker, you are likely to shop where you come from, which is possibly Brisbane or Yeppoon or Rocky, something like that. You are saying that you are struggling with your business.

Ms Collins: I do not think there are any businesses in Blackwater which are not struggling unless you have a contract with the mine. I have no contracts with mines to do any workwear anymore. I used to do all the fit-outs for BMA and Kurra and Jellinbah. We do not even get offered a look-in anymore. They go direct; they do not support local small businesses. It is all for the dollar. All these families move out of town because there is nothing. They can see the town is just shrinking and there are fewer and fewer services and shops, so the wives and the kids are moving to the coast and the husbands are going into the camps and there is no support. When they are in a camp their money is not spent in the community; it is spent where the wives and the families are, so the towns are struggling.

Mr MILLAR: There would also be an impact on the schools there. You have Blackwater—

Ms Hodkin: Two primary schools.

Mr MILLAR:—primary plus you have the high school. Are there any figures to suggest—

Ms Collins: We did speak to the high school, but it was really hard to get figures because it was the start of the grade 7s going into school so the figures were a little bit thrown out. At this stage they were about nine under last year's. I am not quite sure because we have seen quite a few families leave since Christmas.

Ms Hodkin: I know the Blackwater State School had to lose a teacher. A teacher had to be transferred because of the lack of students.

Mr MILLAR: The reason I am bringing this up is that we are looking at the casualisation of the workforce, and the impact of casualisation is not just whether you have a job or not or permanency, but it is also having an impact on the social fabric of these towns. We are seeing fewer numbers at schools. Small businesses are the lifeblood of these towns too; they sponsor the Rugby League and netball et cetera. They are the ones that do the hard yakka in raising money. If you had an opportunity to see change, what would be the answer? I know there is not one answer, but what are some of the ways that this can be corrected?

Ms Hodkin: Basically, they brought in this casualisation. I have had many conversations with DNR. When EDI took over the contract with BMA, they said that it was a localised contract so families had to move to town. That is what they wanted. They wanted families to move to town. But when you put families on a six-month probationary period, how are you going to get somebody to move to the town not knowing if you are going to have a job in six months time? I was more than happy enough. We did see a few more families come to town. Unfortunately, like always, there are ones who break the rules. We have four guys or girls living in one house and things like that.

All we want to see are the families back in town, because honestly, Lachlan, it is a vicious circle. They are never going to improve things in the town, give us hospital upgrades or grants for our schools, if we do not have the people in the town. We do not want to be negative; we want to be

positive, but you keep getting beat down all the time. What we would like to see is the multinationals held accountable for their actions. In no way, shape or form do they care about these communities or the families in them. All they are seeing is a dollar, at the end of the day.

Mr MILLAR: How do we make them accountable? I am giving you an opportunity—

Ms Hodkin: Honestly, they need to stop the casualisation of the workforce. It is wrong—

Ms Collins: Full-time jobs. They need permanent full-time jobs, not six-month contracts. You need someone to come in and do a six-month stint but then be promised a full-time job at the end of that. Obviously, they have found their little loopholes through it and they will end the contract and then start a new contract up, so there is still no permanent job.

Mr MILLAR: We are almost up to that six months with Downer EDI now. Are we finding people who have done the six-month probation continuing?

Ms Hodkin: There has been a little bit of scuttlebutt around Blackwater that apparently a lot of Downer's employees are being let go and things like that and a majority of them are the ones with families at the moment. You do not want to see that happening, because all that is going to encourage is people not to bring their families to town.

Mr MILLAR: I will see if Peter has some questions, but thank you for coming along. For us, it is the face of what we are going through here in a mining downturn. It is the communities such as Blackwater that were once and still are very proud communities. It is a great town and we need to invest in that. I will hand over to Peter.

CHAIR: Sallee and Zoe, these may be questions that fall outside your knowledge, so just bear with me. Do you know, for example, how many people have been replaced by the casualisation of the workforce?

Ms Hodkin: They were saying when BMA first announced it, it was basically 150 people. I think three departments went. From that there were either—

CHAIR: With some of my questions you will probably say, 'Why doesn't he know?', so just bear with me. When you say 'three departments went', can you tell me which three departments they were?

Ms Hodkin: There was drill and blast, there was truck shovel, pump group and mobile maintenance.

CHAIR: Those departments within the mine had employed locals and permanent positions?

Ms Hodkin: Yes.

CHAIR: With the casualisation, did any of those employees get their jobs back or were outsiders brought in?

Ms Collins: Some took VRs. Some were transferred to other mines or other departments. They had a choice of three things to take.

Ms Hodkin: Out of all of the jobs, what actually happened was that I think only one person kept a position, their original position.

CHAIR: Earlier you spoke about camps. Correct me if I am wrong: you said that there are more applications for camps. How many people are housed in a camp?

Ms Collins: It varies.

Ms Hodkin: It varies on which camp you are talking about. Near the Mine Workers Club there is Rosewood Camp. We did an estimation on it. There is somewhere between 5,000 and 6,000 rooms in Blackwater in camps in the whole area. There are ones on mine sites and things like that.

CHAIR: Are those camps fully occupied?

Ms Hodkin: No, not at the moment they are not. We have one approved where the BMX track used to be in Blackwater. They knocked down our BMX track. That was originally a caravan park. It was approved for 48 camp/caravan sites and six rooms. It has now changed to six caravan sites and all the rest are rooms.

CHAIR: What is the local authority or the local council telling you about what is happening in your area?

Ms Collins: They do not like to tell us much.

Ms Hodkin: There was one that went up for approval the other week outside, on Yarrabee mine site. We lodged an application against it, but we have not heard any more about that. It could be located on the mine site; therefore we have no jurisdiction on it.

CHAIR: Are all those camps on mine sites?

Ms Collins: No.

CHAIR: Obviously, the one on the BMX track is not.

Ms Hodkin: That is actually approved, but it has not been built yet.

Ms Collins: It has been approved for a couple of years.

CHAIR: When something is happening in the community like a new camp site being applied for, where did you get your information from? How do you find out about these things?

Ms Hodkin: We were sent a photo with all the information on it of the actual approval on the mine site. We followed it up—

Ms Collins: On the council website.

Ms Hodkin:— the council website and it is in an email.

CHAIR: Does that come from the council or the mine owners?

Ms Hodkin: No, that came from the council. It had 'CHRH' on it. That was through the council.

Mr MILLAR: Just to clarify, I could be wrong here, but it is not just council that gives the approval. Council has to follow through the state government, through EDA. I just wanted to defend the Central Highlands Regional Council. The approvals for the camp sites are made through the state government, so there is some ownership on this side. It is not all councils. They get it and then they tick. I just wanted to make sure of that.

CHAIR: I did not want to mislead people. I was just trying to understand. Obviously, the council has something to do with it.

Mr MILLAR: They do, but Blackwater is also under the jurisdiction of a state government department in the approval process. I just wanted to clarify that. Council does have a role.

CHAIR: Sallee and Zoe, we have about 10 minutes. You were fairly comprehensive in what you told us, but I do not want to cut you short. Lachie, obviously you have something to say?

Mr MILLAR: Taking into account what you have been able to say in the past 20 minutes, there has to be some sort of solution to the situation we find Blackwater in. We have a community that wants to continue to have localised employees but also an opportunity for the town to continue to grow. Blackwater is one of the original mining towns in the Bowen Basin. You were talking about a private company making decisions, but is there anything that you think the state government can do in regard to correcting some of the issues that you feel strongly about?

Ms Hodkin: It is hard. Do not get me wrong: we have looked at this in many different ways. The casualisation of the workforce is a federal matter. That falls under Fair Work and things like that. Maybe doing some recommendations. A major part of this, as you said, is the social justice of it all—the social impact that it is having on families, on children growing up without parents and things like that. Maybe some recommendations along those lines, just on drive-in drive-out and maybe tougher fatigue management policies to stop these sorts of things happening. That is an idea I can think of. Can you think of anything?

Ms Collins: Not that I can say.

CHAIR: When you talk about fatigue management, a lot of that could fall under workplace health and safety regulations and state legislation. The committee is conscious of the overlap between Fair Work and other pieces of legislation that are state legislation. As someone who has a business in the community and obviously is very community minded, is there anything else that you can think of that would alleviate some of the issues that you have spoken about?

Ms Collins: What we need is families in town. That is what it comes down to, for there to be families in town to support the businesses and the schools. That is the answer. How we get that to happen, that is the question.

Ms Hodkin: And the biggest thing is to stop any more camps coming into town. That is the biggest thing: to stop the camps.

CHAIR: Do we know how many peoples are in the camps? Has the workforce increased as a result of the casualisation and the camps being built or has it stayed the same?

Ms Hodkin: It is hard to answer that. Because the town is so transient, you never really know who is coming or going at one time. The camps are not going to hand over that kind of information to us. They look at you strange if you go around there taking photos—not that we do that often. That is

the thing. It is so hard. With labour hire and with Downer, you could never guess how many people are in town at one time. You could have four or five single people living in a house and that is getting back to the old-style boarding houses. That is what it was like in the boom. It is the hot-bedding and things like that.

Mr MILLAR: Could a way through this be, from a state government point of view, that we do an audit on accommodation facilities already in Blackwater and, if there are plenty of accommodation facilities such as houses, that should be taken into consideration before a camp site or a camp proposal is given the tick?

Ms Hodkin: Yes.

Mr MILLAR: I know there are other proposals in town. You have to have a certain amount of need for it before it is approved: if there is accommodation and it is quite cheap accommodation—

Ms Hodkin: Yes.

Mr MILLAR:—it already exists, it is close to the school, it has all the amenities that you need. Would that be a way, that there be an audit process before any more approvals of camps are made?

Ms Hodkin: Yes, definitely. That is something that I think they definitely have to look at.

Ms Collins: Some of these camps have been approved in Blackwater. There is one in Bluff as well across from the new one at Jellinbah—sorry, it is a village; it is not a camp. They have been approved for three or four years, but nothing has been done. They were approved in the boom. We do not need them now. There has to be some sort of legislation brought in that, if they do not act on their approvals in so many years, they have to look at these again before they can do anything with them again.

Ms Hodkin: Yes, put a statute of limitations on it.

Mr MILLAR: But could there be a trigger point where you say, 'Hang on, let's do an audit of the accommodation that is already existing in towns such as Blackwater, such as Dysart, such as Moranbah, Middlemount'? You drive around those towns and there is long grass and you know that these houses are not—

Ms Collins: There is no pride left in them.

Mr MILLAR: There is no pride, but they could be very good accommodation facilities. Maybe there should be an audit before any more camps are approved. Would that be a possibility? That is just off the top of my head.

CHAIR: You spoke about a BMX track being taken away. Was the BMX track provided by the local authority? Was it leased off them for a peppercorn?

Ms Hodkin: To be brutally honest, it had not been used for many years. They took the BMX and our skate park. The skate park had a lot of repairs needed to be done to it. They destroyed them both on pretty much the same day BMA had made all of these announcements for the casualisation. It probably struck home very hard. BMA does not support the town—'We don't support kids in the town.' It just put a very negative taste in everybody's mouth.

CHAIR: It was more symbolic. It sent a message.

Ms Hodkin: Yes.

CHAIR: You spoke about the BMX track and the impact on the community. Are there any other examples that you could give us of perhaps other sporting facilities or other sporting clubs?

Ms Hodkin: There are sporting clubs. There are also two clubs, the Blackwater Mine Workers Club and the Blackwater Country Club. I am also a board director on there. As of 30 May, both of them went into voluntary administration. You know times are tough when the pubs are struggling. People will have a drink when they are happy. People will have a drink when they are sad. These are very hard times.

CHAIR: I understand that there is a canteen, for want of a better word. Are there canteens on the camp sites where they can access drinks so they do not need—

Ms Collins: I know some of them are dry.

Ms Hodkin: They are supposed to be dry, but it does not stop them from bringing in their own.

Ms Collins: For example, the new camp at Bluff, the Jellinbah camp—village—has a pool, a walking track, a tennis court. They are great big rooms. The money that that mine put into that village. If that was put into the community of Bluff for everyone to use—we have a tennis court that is in ruins.

CHAIR: They are providing alternative facilities to a limited—

Ms Collins: They are in a little cocoon. They do not have to associate with the community at all. They are picked up from the village by bus. They come home by bus to the village. There is no association with the rest of the community whatsoever.

CHAIR: These are single men's quarters?

Ms Collins: Not just single men—single women's; they are everything.

CHAIR: But there are no families in there?

Ms Collins: No.

Ms Hodkin: No. It is basically a town inside a town.

Mr MILLAR: A satellite town.

CHAIR: Yes, but when you say 'satellite', it is not a real community in the sense of the word where you have families, you have single people all living together. They all go to the same shopping centre, they all go to the same club—maybe not the same club, but you know what I am trying to say.

Ms Hodkin: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before the committee today. The secretariat will be in touch to provide you with a copy of the transcript of the hearing or for anything further that the committee may request from you. Thank you for giving up your day to come to speak with us. It is an important part of the whole process. We are really grateful that you came along and took the time out to speak with us.

GRILLS, Mr Jason, CFMEU

CHAIR: Welcome, Jason. Thank you for appearing before the committee. A copy of the instructions for witnesses is on the table. You can take a minute to read it if you need to. The purpose of the hearing is to receive evidence from witnesses on the committee's inquiry into the practices of the labour hire industry in Queensland. The inquiry was referred to the committee by the Legislative Assembly on 2 December 2015. A copy of the committee's terms of reference for this inquiry is also on the table for your information. Hansard will record the proceedings and you will be provided with a proof of the transcript, which will also be published on the committee's website. To assist Hansard staff, I remind you to please speak clearly into the microphones and to state your name when you first address the committee. Again I ask that mobile phones be turned off or switched to silent and that no calls be taken inside the hall while the proceedings are taking place. Jason, you can address us about your knowledge and then we can open it up to questions. Feel free at any time to expand on anything that we ask you. This session is to conclude at 1.20 pm.

Mr Grills: I am Jason Grills. I am a third-generation underground coalminer from the Hunter Valley in New South Wales to Queensland and back again. I have spent many a time in the last five years as an organiser for the CFMEU. I believe that I have a wide breadth of knowledge of what has occurred in that time.

I started in the mining game back in 1996 in the town of Middlemount. Back then, they were very different times. I am talking about in relation to the communities, agendas, social events et cetera. Back in 1996, we had a football team that fielded three sides. We had a Rugby League team. We had a social golf club that played golf on Thursdays and every Sunday and we also put teams together to go to Tieri, Clermont and Iwasaki to play in the pro-am. We had squash clubs. We had a roller-skating rink. There were no casuals or contract labour hires living in Middlemount during the 1990s to late 1999, when I left.

I went straight down to New South Wales and came back up again in 2011 as an organiser for the CFMEU. I drove around these mining towns a fair bit, bypassing Middlemount for a long time, but I eventually landed back there two years ago to give a few coalmining sites a hand. When I drove in there, I could not believe what I saw. I will be quite honest with you. Before there was a township of 2,000 people with families and schools. The Caltex was open right through to midnight for the last shift. The pub closed over a month ago. Over a two-year period everything deteriorated. The pub closed. It has now reopened with backpacker staff who flew in from Sydney. The three full-time employees who were working at the Middlemount hotel were told to pack up their gear and they were no longer required. The backpackers—there is no ill against the travellers, but it has been reported to me last week that the bar staff cannot even pour a beer because they cannot understand English. That is what people are dealing with out there.

We have gone from no camps—I will not say 'no camps'; I will say a very small camp that held about 40 or 50 people at one particular time—to three villages and a Spotless camp that can house up to 1,000 people at any given time. Half the houses are empty. Back in 1996, I used to pay \$7.80 a week. Now, they are paying \$86 per week and they have to enter into a rental agreement. The coalmining company does not want to take any responsibility for the town. This is supported by the fact that they have to enter into tenancy agreements through the government rather than taking \$7.80 out of your pay every week. No maintenance gets done on the properties. Half of them are empty.

There is no more football club. The president stepped down two weeks ago. The golf club is now condemned—closed. You cannot even get a Chinese meal anymore or go and have a game of golf. If you do, you are going to sit in a canteen container and have a beer. The bowls club is open only two or three days per week for about four hours at a time. They cannot get people to turn up there, because nobody lives there anymore.

Capcoal at German Creek went through a round of redundancies last year. At that particular time it would have been 80-20—80 per cent full-time employees and 20 per cent contractors and at any given time around 200 to 300 contractors on site at German Creek, Lake Lindsay. They went through a redundancy process. The ratio changed. I was talking to the lodge president last week and it is now starting to become a 60-40 per cent ratio. They have taken off full-time staff and just brought on more contract people.

Back in 1996, when I was there, we had arrangements set in place with our employer. Back then it was Shell. The regulatory body was literally comprised of the employer, being the mining company, and the enterprise agreement and the relevant union. A labour hire firm came in to perform a specific job for this set amount of time under the same wages and conditions that we were entitled

to. Hence, they ended getting paid more than what we did. I cannot recall the exact figure that I was on back in 1996, but they still have a figure of \$28 an hour out there plus penalties. When the contractors came on site, they brought all the gear, they reinspected the gear and made sure that it was safe. The terms were very clear on how long they could stay for. They got paid \$28.60 an hour, plus casual loading, plus penalties, plus bonus. It does not exist anymore. They come on site now for less money.

As of two weeks ago—I had to do some research because of my job—there are currently two contracting firms out there, not specifically at Middlemount but a little bit further north up the road, and they are competing for the contracts. The guys are turning up one week and getting paid \$35 an hour flat and if they turn up the following week while they are rostered off for the week—the two organisations are fighting with one another—they are only getting paid \$30 an hour, so he has dropped \$5 an hour by taking seven days off work because of the competing labour hire companies out there. I know this is a Queensland inquiry, but in New South Wales it is very different. They are held to account. The unions are stronger and the companies tend to work better with the unions, so there are more enterprise agreements down there and contractor arrangements for hire services are actually tied into enterprise agreements. They are all set, they do not get varied and they do not jump from month to month depending on who is trying to come along and undercut you. They have set wages and they are always paid the same, if not a little bit more, than the full-time employees down south. That is a vast contrast to up here.

I travel anywhere from Moura to Newlands. I have had to organise four mine sites in the last five years and it does not change for me. People come and talk to me about the same thing—‘I just got a pay cut with this firm. They want to take another \$3 an hour off me,’ or, ‘I’m not getting paid my superannuation and they’re only paying it at this rate instead of my full total earnings.’ There is clear evidence out there. I am actually starting to become a little bit disheartened, to tell you the truth, being a third-generation miner fighting for what we fought for throughout the years. My eldest daughter is 21 and my youngest is 18. What have they got coming to them? Are they moving into a whole new generation of no more full-time work and no more full-time retirement and all you are going to be is casual—that is, they are told, ‘You work when we tell you’? There is no such thing as flexibility when it comes to being a casual. My youngest is 18 and she worked at McDonald’s. She took a day off and she had to go and get a medical certificate just to prove that she was ill, and that particular time she was in hospital for the whole weekend. They will just turn around and put the roster out. They do not consult with her but put the roster out and say, ‘This is when you’re working.’ My understanding of being casual has always been, ‘What works for me and works for you,’ and vice versa. That is what some people may call flexibility. There is no flexibility in that whatsoever. She ended up leaving her job one month ago. Her employer walked in to her current form of employment and said, ‘What are you doing here?’ My daughter said, ‘You obviously haven’t heard I left.’ He said, ‘You’re actually rostered on next week.’ My daughter said, ‘It’s not my problem. I don’t work there anymore.’ He said, ‘Can you organise somebody else to take your shift for you?’ This is how casuals are actually dealt with.

CHAIR: You said there were two companies operating where on one week you could earn \$35 and then the next week it was \$30 and that was mainly brought about by the two labour hire companies competing with each other. Are you able to tell us who the two labour hire companies are?

Mr Grills: One Key Resources and WorkPac.

CHAIR: Thank you for that.

Mr MILLAR: Jason, just looking at the social impacts of what you are talking about through your members and people that you know, have they struggled to get loans and struggled to be able to get a mortgage?

Mr Grills: My full-time members no, because they have been full time for a long period of time. This is quite concerning because I have full-time employees coming to me saying, ‘Listen, I’m thinking about taking a VR. What do you think?’ I say, ‘What’s that going to achieve?’ They say, ‘I’ll get a VR and then I’ll just take a break and then I’ll go and get a job with a labour hire firm. There’s a hell of a lot of them out there.’ My concern with that is if you take a VR and lose your full-time job you are never going to get another one again, the way things are going. You will never get another one. When it comes to non-members, because I deal more with non-members, they cannot get loans. They try but they cannot. These guys and ladies are finding it hard just to get paid correctly and have a regular routine roster. We have contractors out there that I have been personally engaged with for the last two years working at the same mine site on the same roster but yet cannot get a full-time job, either

with the host or with the direct employer. I had only ever been a contractor for eight months because you have to get into it somehow, but at least the labour hire firm I worked with after a period of time put you on full time. That was pre regulation and pre the reforms. It is completely different now. I live at Yeppoon and every second or third vehicle used to be a mining vehicle, and you knew they were contracting mining vehicles, and now they are one in 10.

Mr MILLAR: What I am getting at, Jason—and you are right—is young people getting married. They want to have a family but the first thing they want to do is they have to get a house and they go into a bank applying for a mortgage. They are on good money because, say, he is working at the mines and she may be a teacher or she may be working at a kitchen at the RSL. Because he is labour hire, is he struggling because the bank says, 'We're not going to lend to you because you're not full time'? Is that happening?

Mr Grills: That is happening. I have a very close personal friend who cannot get a loan even though he is earning \$150,000 plus. He cannot get a loan because they keep saying there is no security for him.

Mr MILLAR: Even though he has the deposit?

Mr Grills: Even though he has been in it for three years. He went from New South Wales to Mackay and back again, so he has been working in the industry for over 11 years now on a casual basis.

Mr MILLAR: Could we be running into a generation of regional Queenslanders who are not going to invest in the most important asset you probably could invest in, which is a house, because they are not seen as having full-time employment?

Mr Grills: That is what I believe is going to occur, and it all comes back to casualisation and the inability to get a full-time job. In 1996 I used to work at Southern Colliery. You could go to Southern Colliery one week and if you did not like it you could go to Oaky Creek North and get a job the following week full time. Now the casuals cannot even go from one place to the next. Full-timers definitely cannot. If you walk out of a full-time job now, you are not going to get one. The ladies were talking earlier about Blackwater. I know for a fact my daughter's boyfriend's father was out there. He took a package and he got a phone call last week from Downer saying, 'Come on back.' He said, 'Come on back to what?'

CHAIR: He was offered his job back at Downer but through a labour hire?

Mr Grills: That is correct, yes.

CHAIR: Jason, did he get to the point where they told him what his pay would be or his conditions?

Mr Grills: He is going through the process currently.

CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Grills: He was first approached six months ago and then there was some—

CHAIR: Just from your knowledge and experience—I know you have spoken about \$35 an hour to \$30 an hour. Are you able to give us a number, for example? Let us take the example of a truck driver. I do not know if that is too basic, but can you give me an idea of, say, someone who is employed in a particular department who is on full time and then ends up taking a job through the hire company?

Mr Grills: Yes, I can do that. Generally, a full-time operator in full-time employment by the company—say, a truck driver—ranges anywhere from \$43 to \$52 an hour depending on the mine site and the enterprise agreement. That is full time. When it comes to the labour hire firm, they do not even start at \$40. They are below and it is all inclusive of all penalties and loadings. Those on \$43 an hour or above, they are still getting their penalties and they are still getting their bonuses, long service leave, sick leave, holidays. That is the difference. If you want to throw a figure out there of what all of that would be worth, it would be about \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year per person when you encompass all of that, and that is notwithstanding superannuation differences. I get paid 15 per cent whereas those employed by hire firms get 9.2 per cent or 9.4 per cent or whatever is legislated these days.

CHAIR: The impact is long term on your super because you actually end up getting less in your super for your retirement.

Mr Grills: Yes. Over time you just get less and less and less—not just the normal take-home weekly, but over the next 30 or 40 years that poor individual is going to end up with a few hundred thousand dollars less super in their account than I am going to, and that is notwithstanding what it

has done to the communities. I drove in yesterday. I have a house near Blackwater that I stay at when I need to. I woke up to a thud and the refrigerator decided to give up, so I have woken up to that this morning. I have driven around Blackwater trying to find an appliance or furniture store. I ended up going through McDonald's and asking 'Where's the furniture store gone?' I was told that that went 18 months ago because of the mines. I spent most of my morning this morning driving around Harvey Norman and Betta Electrical—the only two stores, mind you, in Emerald—that I could get a fridge and some furniture from, because I want a new lounge anyway. That will not be delivered until tomorrow. Harvey Norman could not deliver that until next Tuesday, so I am now going to go back and throw out a fridge full of food. I could not just go down the road and get a new fridge. These are the impacts that are happening.

CHAIR: You have highlighted some of the social impacts like the golf club and the social activity of being able to participate in the pro-am down at Yeppoon. Obviously that is a good thing for the community because going away on those trips builds that social cohesion and friendships which are important.

Mr Grills: Yes.

CHAIR: Are there any other examples that you can think of to help us, because we are very interested in the social impact and having evidence of that?

Mr Grills: The social impact is that there is no social activity anymore. It has just gone. Like I said, 15 years since living for three years in Middlemount and then going in for the last two years and helping out members and non-members and the community as well mind you, because I use all of the facilities while I am there, there is just nothing there.

CHAIR: Because of your role with the CFMEU, do you get access to the camps?

Mr Grills: I can have access to the camps, yes.

CHAIR: Can you tell me about your experience of the camps and what you have witnessed?

Mr Grills: When I go and have a meeting with members and non-members at Foxley Village I have free, unfettered access. I can walk in and out of there whenever I want, not a problem. Any camps within Middlemount I can walk in and out whenever I want, not a problem. In terms of the camps on mine sites, I need to serve them with a right of entry, which is classed as a little bit hostile, so I do not do that. With regard to the camps in general, many reports are about the condition of camps. In terms of Foxley Village camp itself, one-third of it was shut down due to mould and leakage, failure of the air conditioning and general cleanliness, or the lack thereof. They generally have a donga which is about, say, the width of this but only from here to the wall and in there was a pool table, a fridge, a TV with chairs if they wanted to watch something and a dartboard.

Rolleston is classed as the elite camp. They get to bring their wives and kids in on the weekend. There is accommodation for that. They also have a pool. I know at Ensham they have a pool and a wet mess. Their family can visit on the weekends. These guys are working 12-hour rosters and seven on, seven off. I can advise you that none of their family members have taken up the offer to come and spend the weekend on the mine site. They are designed for people to come and do what they have to do and get out.

CHAIR: We heard evidence about when the 12-hour shifts started—I forget the date off the top of my head. What is the solution to 12-hour shifts? I know that it is a very complex solution. What were people working previously? There would have been people doing 12-hour shifts, would there not?

Mr Grills: When I was at Southern Colliery and Grasree we were working Monday to Friday. There was no weekend work. We had deputies on seven-day rosters. That is for OH&S and to make sure the mine was still safe. We worked Monday to Friday. The day shift was from seven to three. The afternoon shift was three to 11. The night shift was three to seven on Friday morning. It has gone from that to the 12-hour shifts.

German Creek has just gone back to a Monday to Friday operation. They are doing five days. They are actually doing eight-hour days but only ever doing seven hours. They are doing one less night shift. They have kept the wash plant on a seven-12 roster and put the production lines back to a Monday to Friday roster. It has created division. Before you could line up to get together and now you cannot.

CHAIR: You spoke earlier about your experience in New South Wales compared to Queensland. You said that if we had the same system in Queensland as they do in New South Wales it would eliminate some of the problems. Can you expand on that?

Mr Grills: Labour hire companies, unlike unions and to some extent coalmining companies, are not accountable to anybody. They can pop up overnight. All you need is an ABN, a public insurance policy, have 20 or 30 people and you can kick off. They can fall down again a month later or as soon as that contract expires.

Pre the reform passing everything was deregulated—it was open slather. The union body lost the ability to openly discuss with mining companies what is in the best interests of the mining companies and the employees and communities. Let us face it, every coalmine is tied to the community.

I was from the Hunter Valley. Cessnock is one of the biggest coalmining towns in New South Wales. It all fed in. We used to have Christmas parties. Everybody in the community, and even the mining companies, came together. In Middlemount you have Anglo America now. At the operations at Foxleigh, Lake Vermont, German Creek or Lake Lindsay—it depends whether you started in the 1990s or now—and Grasstree, which was previously Southern Colliery, every Christmas the pit would put on a party. We would all come together. There would be a band, there would be presents for the kids, there would be iceblocks and barbecues. We would all sit on one big footy oval. There are more kangaroos on that footy oval now than there were people then.

CHAIR: You said that New South Wales is not having the same issues as we are having in Queensland. What is the difference?

Mr Grills: When I was a contractor in New South Wales the union ran the contract firm—the United Mining Support Services—and there were only two others. There were only three labour hire companies in New South Wales from 1996 to 2004. How many have we got in Queensland?

CHAIR: We do not know.

Mr Grills: I can tell you that as of last week three are going to merge into one. Without doing research on it, there would be 13 to 14 companies supplying labour in some capacity to the mining industry within Queensland. New South Wales only has a handful. They are managed by a true understanding between the company and the unions. They all have enterprise agreements down there. There are not many greenfield mine sites. Everything is negotiated within the employer and employees enterprise agreement. The biggest firm you have down there is WorkPac. WorkPac employs 2½ thousand people.

CHAIR: Am I correct in assuming that the enterprise agreements in New South Wales are different to those in Queensland?

Mr Grills: The only thing that varies is the ability to use contract labour. I was president of Newpac No. 1 Colliery from 2004 to 2007. In my workplace agreement it stated the firm to use and the scope of work they can do. If they were there for a period of time they must be offered the opportunity to come on full time; otherwise we had to remove that labour hire from the mine site. The rules were there. You had terms of reference. In the Queensland agreements there are only three references to labour hire—the employee will decide the amount of hire, what they will do and how long they will be there.

CHAIR: Do the agreements that you are referring to here in Queensland go through Fair Work Australia?

Mr Grills: Every agreement has to go through Fair Work Australia to get ratified.

CHAIR: In existence in the coalmining industry in Australia there are basically two types of agreements that you are aware of—there are probably a lot more than two. There is the one in New South Wales that set out how you will engage whereas the same agreement here in Queensland does not have that prescription in it?

Mr Grills: We heard about the mining boom earlier on. When I went to New South Wales and came back, New South Wales did not really change that much. When I came back up here and started driving around my neck was getting sore from turning around looking at all the mines that had popped up. There were no initial rules or legislation put in place. When the mining boom took off up here it took off 500 times more than in New South Wales. It was, 'Bang, off we go. Get all the infrastructure done. We are getting good prices for coal so let us get set up for the next 10 years.' That was the mindset: 'Let's get up and running for 10 years and don't worry about anybody else. Don't worry about the damage we leave behind. Don't worry about the damage along the way.' Nobody was keeping an eye on things. There is no registration. You do not need a licence. You do not need anything. There is no accountability for labour hire firms.

CHAIR: You were talking about the two different agreements. Were those agreements with the same labour hire companies?

Mr Grills: There was never anything defined—that is, ‘we must use this labour hire firm’. It was always a conversation between me and the mine manager: ‘Who are you thinking about using?’

CHAIR: Do you know who the labour hire company was that was used in New South Wales? For example, is WorkPac operating in New South Wales and Queensland or is it a little more defined than that?

Mr Grills: WorkPac predominately opened in Queensland. They have made their way into New South Wales. I finished down there in 2008 and WorkPac was not there. I worked for Wilson’s Mining for a short period of time. They are well-established mining companies. They had respect. The respect was built up over time between the hire firm, the companies and the unions. Where things may have strayed was that that relationship was not built up here.

CHAIR: That brings us to the end of the time allowed. Is there anything else that you think we need to know, Jason?

Mr Grills: There is something else we really need to look at. I do not believe it is a state-by-state issue. I believe it is occurring throughout Australia. My main concern is for the next generation coming through, whether they are coalminers or work in McDonald’s or pump petrol. It does not really bother me as long as they have something to look forward to. I do not want it to turn out like the MLC superannuation ad when they are excavating around and they pull out the golf club and say, ‘What is that?’ You really need to put some boundaries around this and make it fair for everybody and give everybody something to look forward to.

Mr MILLAR: You also had a Rugby Union team in Middlemount?

Mr Grills: Yes, we did. That was quite entertaining.

CHAIR: Thank you for appearing before the committee, Jason. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript to review before it is published. Thank you for giving up your time today.

HIBBLE, Mr Rick, President, Callide Valley Lodge, CFMEU

Mr Hibble: I will just clarify a few things that Jason said and clarify the questions you asked as far as the agreements are concerned. From my understanding, they are all different. You have WorkPac agreements and you have One Key agreements and all the others. Pending the boot test and whatever goes out there they can all be different in terms of what the employees' benefits are. There is not just 'one shoe fits everything'—as long as you are aware of that.

CHAIR: I did appreciate that they were different. I was just trying to drill down into what the difference was and why the New South Wales one was better than the Queensland one. That was answered. I do appreciate that that is only a sample; it is not a global situation or Australia-wide.

Mr Hibble: At the end of the day, they come and go, these labour hire companies, as Jason was saying. You have the bigger players in there that are starting to control and dominate the industry out there. At the end of the day, casualisation is not helping the Australian workers at all. We do see, as we have talked about, loans being unable to be sought by these people, the conditions and wages are breaking down, the intimidation that is happening out there if you do not do this or you do that, or you take unsafe jobs and perform those sorts of things. They are going to come back and bite you at the end of the day. People are frightened to speak up; it is as simple as that.

CHAIR: That brings me to something that I could ask anyone: do you believe that safety on mine sites is compromised by casualisation and also by the 12-hour shifts being introduced?

Mr Hibble: Twelve-hour shifts have been around for 10 or 20 years now, so they have been there a long time. They are not good for the communities. The day we start looking at going back to the old eight hours might be a good thing. As far as intimidation and casualisation affecting safety, there is no doubt that will happen. As we see more and more of the casual worker coming in, he is there to do his job. If he does not do his job and do as he is told by the boss, the day will come when something will go wrong. We are seeing it now on our permanent work sites out there, where they are picking us for the most trivial things: failing to stop at a stop sign or having a day off and not notifying. They are little things that we have dealt with in the past and are not an issue, but they are being brought forward now so that people's minds are all about that they must do their job and not ask questions. I have no doubt.

CHAIR: Do you know of any incidents where there have been accidents on mine sites that—

Mr Hibble: Of course. At our own mine site we have incidents with water-cart rollovers and near misses that often happen, whether that is to do with the fatigue or people's minds not on the jobs and that sort of thing, and the fear that if they do not do their job and have this go-go-go attitude they may not have that job later on. There is no doubt about that. Our Callide lodge has put a submission in. It is out there. The more we go down the casualisation line, we will see more and more of it. It is not a good thing for the communities, particularly the country communities, the rural communities and things like that. It is just killing the towns. It is not good.

CHAIR: Can I ask you a little about your history?

Mr Hibble: Sure.

CHAIR: How long have you been involved in mining?

Mr Hibble: I have been 34 years at Callide mine. I have lived in Biloela all my life, too. I am aware of the towns like Moura and Blackwater and how they have struggled. We have seen boom towns come down and fade away and come back again. The bottom line is that it is all about the corporate greed of the multinationals. They come in and rape and pillage. They take everything and then spit us out at the end. I do not mind saying that. That is what is happening. We need to get back to a bit of normality out there and start looking after and caring about people, the communities and the jobs that are needed. It is not just the mining industry; we are seeing it right across Australia, as the inquiry would find.

CHAIR: One of the things that the committee is grappling with is that we want to be able to write a report that contains suggestions. With your experience in the mining industry for all those years, what are two or three things that government could do to improve things?

Mr Hibble: At the end of the day, there is only one thing: it is permanent jobs. Employ people as permanents for those positions. If you have a permanent job, it means stability for you, your family and the communities. I do not know how governments can force companies and businesses to do that, but it is up to the businesses to stand up and be good corporate citizens and say, 'We are here to look after the communities and the towns. We want to encourage people to live in this town and

work for us and reward them with permanent jobs.’ In that way, you reward your workers and the workers will reward you by doing the job safely and doing the work. The bottom line is that permanent jobs is what we need.

Mr MILLAR: I should have asked Jason this, too: do you think there is any value in the state government doing an audit on accommodation already existing in the Bowen Basin town communities before they approve any more camps?

Mr Hibble: This is fine. There are definitely available homes out there. That would be a step to it—

Mr MILLAR: What I am trying to say is that when you look at places such as Blackwater—and I know Biloela has been—

Mr Hibble: It is not too bad.

Mr MILLAR: It is not too bad, but if you look at places like Blackwater, Middlemount and Dysart, we have accommodation facilities and houses that are just sitting there, the grass is growing and no-one is in them. Before we approve any more camps sites—

Mr Hibble: Why approve camps? Why don’t we approve permanent people to live in those houses and families to move back into the houses? Why should we be even considering approving further camps down the track when we have all this accommodation? We should be encouraging families to come back.

Mr MILLAR: That is what I am trying to get at.

Mr Hibble: Yes. We need to encourage families to come back there and the only way that you are going to do that is to offer permanent jobs.

Mr MILLAR: Because you do not have any camps. If we do not approve any more camps, it is more likely that those families will say that there is accommodation out there.

Mr Hibble: Yes. There are houses there.

Mr MILLAR: There are houses there, there is a school, there is a high school.

Mr Hibble: That is exactly right. We have seen that. The way to get the towns to grow again is that you have to have permanent work. You have to have stability for the people, their families and the communities. That is what we are all about.

Mr MILLAR: Would that be a way that the state government could play a role in this?

Mr Hibble: The way is to cancel any further camps. To fix it, we need to go back to encouraging businesses to employ permanent people. It is simple as that. Move away and give security for the towns. As you say, we have built the hospitals and everything is there. The schools are all there. As casualisation comes, people leave and they die and they close down. Then you lose those benefits. We need the people to come back and maintain that. It is about the community. It is not about the big cities and everything else. We need to get back to the rural side of things and to the communities.

Mr MILLAR: That is why I live here.

Mr Hibble: We all do, mate. They are great towns to bring kids up in.

CHAIR: I am going to again invite people to speak in the public session, but if there are no further takers I will close the hearing. I am also mindful: does anyone know of anyone who is on their way, whom we may not be aware of? I do not want to be seen to be being disrespectful to the community. Please come forward.

BLACKWOOD, Mr Darren, Callide Valley Lodge, CFMEU

Mr Blackwood: In response to you asking if we know of anyone else who is coming before you close the public session, I have a comment with regard to that. I drove from Biloela. I stayed here last night. I will be driving back to Bilo today. While I was in town this morning, I asked five different real estate agents if they knew whether this was on today. Obviously it involves real estate and it involves people being able to get a job. It involves the community. Real estate is a driver of the community, as you know. I asked five different real estates in town and not one real estate knew that this hearing was on. It involves the whole community but there was not one. I asked a person when I was at the motel I stayed at last night and they knew nothing about it. These are the people who are affected by casualisation in the industry and it has not been communicated to them about what is happening here today. If they had a chance to come and knew it was on, I imagine they would be here, but they are not here because they did not know.

I want to know what sort of communication has been given to the people in this town or the community in surrounding areas to know? The only reason I knew about it was through my union. The community people in this town and other towns around the place, I believe, have not been informed about this gathering and were not given an opportunity to come because they did not know.

CHAIR: As chair of this committee, I would say that it is a challenge for us to get the information out there. We do use all the local media outlets that we can access, including national outlets. We are limited in a sense. We do advertise in the local paper that the hearing will be on and also the work of the committees. When we come into the regions, it is a lot of word of mouth. I know that the secretariat has spoken to many of the people who are involved. To an extent, we have to rely on submissions we receive to get the word out through the community. When we are coming to the regions, we do really rely on word of mouth to get the message out there, as well as the radio and normal media channels that we have access to.

Mr Blackwood: You are saying that there was an advertisement in the local paper and on radio for this function to happen today at Emerald, at the tavern? That was put in the local paper, you are saying, and on radio; is that right?

CHAIR: We provide the information to the local radio and whatever other news people are out there, to advertise what is going on.

Mr Blackwood: So you do not know whether it actually happened?

CHAIR: We do not know. The problem we have with the radio is that we do not know whether they pick it up and broadcast it.

Unidentified Speaker: I heard it yesterday.

Mr MILLAR: You heard it yesterday?

Mr Blackwood: Do you know whether it was actually in the local paper?

Mr MILLAR: Media releases are put out. Whether the editor of the paper runs that media release is not up to us; it is up to the editor of the paper. Media releases are put out.

Mr Hibble: We find that ourselves with stuff that we try to get into the paper. It does not happen.

Mr MILLAR: My electorate goes all the way out to Longreach and past Windorah. I have been to meetings where we have put out media releases, we have done everything we can to promote it and we find that three people turn up. One of the biggest problems we have out here is that people who are living in this town have jobs that they have to do. Do they make time to be able to get here? Sometimes they do not and sometimes they do. I am sticking up for the committee and the chair. We give as much effort as we possibly can to try to get the message out. Sometimes we get people; sometimes we do not.

Mr Blackwood: I do not think the message has got out because, of the people I talked to in the town of Emerald—and I have been here for two days—nobody knew about it. The message has not got out. You would think that the real estate agents in the town would know.

Mr MILLAR: I do not think it is from a lack of trying to get the message out.

Mr Hibble: Personally, I think it is also a reflection of society and community today and how people think. They are all worried about themselves more than everybody else. It is a sad reflection. The submissions that you get and the people who do come obviously are quite important, as to how you get back to what your decisions are or what the outcome of the inquiry will be. It is a start and it will grow. All of a sudden, people will realise it is too late and they have not been able to do anything. I really do see an importance for this and those who do attend.

CHAIR: The other aspect that came up while we were putting the hearings together was that there were people who were fearful of coming forward, even just to be observers. We were very conscious of a whole range of things. We are very conscious of the fact that we need to get the views of the community and every effort is made by the secretariat to make sure that that occurs.

Mr Hibble: As Darren said, as far as the union is concerned we were aware of it, so I am assuming that other lodges would have been, too. I do not know how many other lodges are here. I just know we have come from Biloela to make the effort. It is a reflection across everywhere.

CHAIR: If you take one message away, it is that we are concerned and the secretariat does everything in their power to make sure that the word gets out there.

Mr MILLAR: They do.

Mr Blackwood: Well, it did not get out there.

CHAIR: I understand we had the opportunity to use social media through the Blackwater community. We try to use as many mediums as we physically can make contact with.

If there are no more witnesses for the public part of this session, I intend to close this hearing. We will have a short break and then recommence the private hearing. Obviously, we will need to clear the room for the private session. I really do appreciate everybody's attendance here today and your contributions. It has been invaluable. Thank you.

Committee adjourned at 2.00 pm