



Fly in, Fly Out and other long distance commuting work practices in regional Queensland

Cairns Regional Council welcomes the inquiry into Fly-in, Fly-out (FIFO) and other long distance commuting work practices in regional Queensland.

Cairns has had a very long history of supporting Fly In, Fly Out and other long distance commuting work practices operations, being a base for government services, mining operations, construction and defence. Cairns was founded in 1876 as a mining port to service hinterland mineral fields and more recently; Rio Tinto Aluminium Weipa since the late 1950's, Cape Flattery Silica Mines since 1967 and Freeport Indonesia for over 20 years and now BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance's Daunia and Cavel Ridge mines in Central Queensland.

Cairns not only provides a FIFO workforce across the broader Tropical North Queensland region but also other areas within Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Papua New Guinea and Papua Indonesia.

Cairns is a lifestyle destination which has the necessary infrastructure (incl. Cairns International Airport and Cairns Seaport) as well as health, community, sporting, business and education facilities and services to support FIFO workers and their families.

Affordable living costs add to the region's attractiveness for FIFO workers and their families with lower weekly rents and median house prices.

Cairns has a very strong sense of community and is very supportive of FIFO workers and their families. Council works in partnership with the resource industry, key stakeholders and relevant Government agencies to connect FIFO workers and their families with existing community networks. Council has a proven track record with this approach, partnering with the Australian Defence Force. Council also provides an extensive range of community services and facilities as well as a range of sporting facilities and opportunities, to foster social well-being. Council has developed a Living in Cairns Guide that is distributed to local real estate agents to provide to new residents, home buyers and renters.

Council recognises the potential health and social challenges associated with FIFO work practices. The Cairns community has a strong and active mental health network and experience with remote primary health care. Cairns Alliance of Social Services provides a network of social service organisations delivering government and private programs across the community.

Post: PO Box 359 Cairns Q 4870

Council Chambers: 119-145 Spence Street, Cairns Q 4870

Web: www.cairns.qld.gov.au **Email:** council@cairns.qld.gov.au

Phone: 07 4044 3044

Fax: 07 4044 3022

ABN: 24 310 025 910



Council strongly encourages mining companies and contractors to review existing roster arrangements to ascertain whether there is scope to introduce shorter, more balanced rosters to allow for more family time and better work life balance for FIFO workers. Council also supports initiatives by mining companies to reduce travel time and distance's for their workers from FIFO destinations such as Cairns.

Our historical and ongoing support for FIFO operations has enabled Cairns to develop a substantial pool of a skilled and ready workforce. The Cairns region also has a long history of attracting and holding on to its workforce.

These labour force advantages, combined with affordable living costs and lifestyle advantages, our extensive experience and history in servicing FIFO requirements, our geographic location and proximity to key mining operations, supporting infrastructure, health, sporting, community, business and education facilities and services, have all contributed to the Cairns region being recognised as a preferred destination to source FIFO workers.

This recognition as a preferred FIFO destination was exemplified when Cairns was chosen to host a two year pilot project funded by the Commonwealth Government through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations – *The SkillsDMC's Cairns Fly In-Fly Out Coordinator Project*. The project, which was launched in November 2011, was a key recommendation from the National Resources Sector Employment Taskforce and formed part of the National Resource Sector Workforce Strategy launched in March 2011 by the Commonwealth Government. Key objectives of the project included identifying the potential FIFO workforce in the Cairns region and establishing a pathway to link this workforce to mining, construction and infrastructure jobs required by existing and emerging resources projects in Northern and Western Australia, working with resources enterprises, local employment services providers and registered training organisations to facilitate the selection and gap training of unemployed FIFO job-seekers and establishing Cairns as an expanding and reliable point of hire for FIFO workers.

FIFO operations have had a major beneficial impact on the Cairns economy. FIFO workers contribute significantly to the economy as their wages are typically higher than those of workers in other sectors. The existence of FIFO air services has provided opportunities for local companies to supply airfreighted equipment and perishable items. Companies have established corporate management and administrative offices which are also linked to FIFO operations. Additional road and sea freight opportunities have also been realised as a result of FIFO operations.

The Cairns region has a very high indigenous population and FIFO operations provide and support opportunities for indigenous employment and economic development.

Council would like to highlight to the Queensland Parliament that any outcomes of this inquiry restricting FIFO work practices will have a significant impact on the Cairns economy.

Council would also encourage the Queensland Parliament to consider not imposing any restrictions on FIFO work practices that would disadvantage regional Queensland over Brisbane and south east Queensland.

Council would like to highlight that FIFO operations provide part of the labour force solution for Governments and companies when delivering and servicing projects, and support to regions, which do not have in place the necessary infrastructure, services and labour required.

Council also considers that workers should also have a variety of choices when they make their decision on where they decide to live and the lifestyle they choose for themselves and their families.