



Research Director
Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Introduction

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Queensland Parliamentary Inquiry into “Fly in, fly out (FIFO) and other long distance commuting work practices in regional Queensland” being conducted by the Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Committee. ACL believes that the current FIFO framework is creating social issues including family stress, breakdown of the family home and related health issues. Current practices are also eroding the economics of a number of once vibrant Queensland towns and cities. Social isolation and routine separation from family support which is further complicated by the lack of the sense of belonging to a community is having serious negative impacts on the well-being of FIFO workers and the communities in which they work.

We provide this submission in response to four of the specified terms of reference being considered by the committee –

- The health impacts on workers and their families from long-distance commuting, particularly mental health impacts, and the provision of health services in mining communities;
- The effects on families of rostering practices in mines using FIFO workforces;
- The effect of a 100% non-resident FIFO workforce on established communities; including community wellbeing, the price of housing and availability, and access to services and infrastructure;
- The commuting practices for FIFO workforces, including the amount of time spent travelling, the methods of transportation, and adequacy of compensation paid for commuting travel times.

Health impacts on FIFO workers and families

On Wednesday 13 February 2013, the Federal Government’s **Standing Committee on Regional Australia** tabled its report on an Inquiry into the use of “fly-in, fly-out” (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia. The information in that report (attached for your easy reference) is relevant to this current Queensland Inquiry. The Federal inquiry heard of alcohol and substance misuse and the health impacts of FIFO work, some of which are directly related to the social isolation of the FIFO experience. The Mayor of Kalgoorlie, a very proud mining community, is quoted in the report as saying that he believes the FIFO workplace practice to be the “cancer of the bush”, eating away at

the integrity of his community. This was a view that was embraced by other mining towns, such as Broken Hill in New South Wales and Moranbah and Mount Isa in Queensland.

The most common concern about the wellbeing of FIFO workers raised in the inquiry was the excessive use of alcohol and, increasingly, other substances. Some of the impacts cited include:

- the use of alcohol and other drugs;
- poor diet and physical inactivity;
- increased sexually transmitted and blood borne infections;
- mental health issues;
- fatigue related injury;¹ and
- an increase in injury related to high-risk behaviour.²

In their submission, the Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA), said that it was their belief that long periods of separation from family in FIFO conditions contributed to problematic alcohol and other drug use.³

Queensland Nurses' Union alcohol services worker, Danny Hember, stated in the inquiry that over the 13 years he had been working in Mackay, he had seen a significant increase in alcohol misuse in FIFO workers:

I think the culture has changed in the mining towns and in the mining camps. People tend to drink on their own, which is not a social situation. People tend to focus more on the alcohol: alcohol becomes the focus rather than the social situation. I believe that this is leading to a change in the reasons that people drink and to a change in the drinking culture. I have come personally to name this 'miner's syndrome'.⁴

The New South Wales Government confirmed at the inquiry that social service providers in the state have been reporting an increasing use of alcohol, drugs and prostitution and a greater level of alcohol-related violence, including domestic violence.⁵

Depression and anxiety were also consistently raised as a serious concern for FIFO workers.⁶

The Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union (AMWU) submission maintained that the social isolation experienced by FIFO workers can lead to alcohol and violence problems:

¹ Public Health Association Australia, Submission No 220 to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, 2012, p 1.

² Evidence to Standing Committee on Regional Australia, House of Representatives, Perth, April 17, 2012, pp 1-2, Associate Professor David Mountain, President, Australian Medical Association (WA).

³ Western Australian Network of Alcohol & other Drug Agencies, Submission No 191 to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, March 2012, p 4.

⁴ Evidence to Standing Committee on Regional Australia, House of Representatives, Mackay, February 23, 2012, p 26, Danny Hember, Member, Queensland Nurses Union.

⁵ NSW Government, Submission No 145 to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, October 2011, p 18.

⁶ Evidence to Standing Committee on Regional Australia, House of Representatives, Karratha, March 28, 2012, p 2, Vivien Kamen, Member, Soroptimist International of Karratha and District.

*Non resident workers endure exacting working conditions, isolation, boredom, limited living conditions and community isolation causing in some cases an increase in drunkenness and violence.*⁷

Health experts are also raising concerns about rising rates of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases due to the unregulated prostitution industry in mining towns.⁸

Effect on families

A student of Moranbah High School, Queensland, having experienced her father as both a FIFO worker and a residential worker stated that "life is a lot better when you get to see both your parents on a daily basis."⁹

In every town visited through the course of the inquiry, residents reported being unable to field sporting teams, provide coaches for kids sport or run the Rotary club because they are unable to fill volunteer rosters. In small communities, volunteers run many of the services taken for granted in larger towns, indeed small communities are absolutely reliant on volunteers for the delivery of some basic services, such as the ambulance.

The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM) state that:

*Members have observed that since the minerals industry went from five days per week, 8 hour shifts to continuous 12 hour rosters, the fabric of regional town societies has fundamentally changed with significant impacts on sporting clubs, volunteer groups and social events.*¹⁰

A report by Griffith University found that the long working hours for FIFO workers are leading to an erosion in family life. The facts are that despite the resource industry being the first to achieve a 35 hour week, it now has the second longest hours of any industry (second only to road transport).¹¹

The Queensland University of Technology have also bought into the problems surrounding the practice of FIFO. A 2011 report warns that thousands of men flown in to work at mining sites in Queensland and Western Australia are "catastrophically" denigrating nearby towns and turning them into dangerous crime hot spots. The report warns of impacts from alcohol abuse, increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases and mental health problems on individual mine workers that would also damage families and communities.¹²

⁷ Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, Submission No 32 to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, October 2011, p 3.

⁸ Cole Latimer (9 September, 2011), 'Miners record spike in HIV', *Australian Mining*, <http://www.miningaustralia.com.au/news/miners-record-spike-in-hiv>. See also Andrew Duffy (7 November, 2011), 'Sex workers strike it rich in mining towns', *Australian Mining*, <http://www.miningaustralia.com.au/news/sex-workers-strike-it-rich-in-mining-towns>.

⁹ Evidence to Standing Committee on Regional Australia, House of Representatives, Moranbah, February 22, 2012, p 28, Chantelle Winter, Student, Moranbah State High School.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, Submission No 58 to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, 2012, p 12.

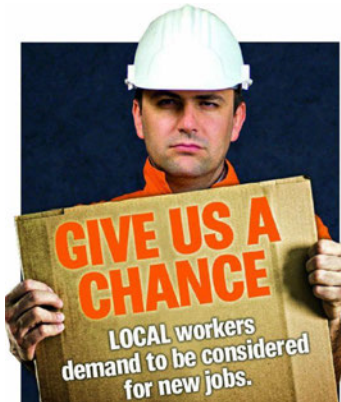
¹¹ D Peetz and G Murray, "'You get really old, really quick': Involuntary long hours in the mining industry,' *Journal of Industrial Relations*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2011, pp. 13-30.

¹² Kerry Carrington, Russel Hogg and Alison McIntosh, 'The resource boom's underbelly: Criminological impacts of mining development', *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, vol 44, no 3 2011, pp 335-354.

The increased demand for prostitutes in mining towns, primarily from thousands of men in towns hours away from their loved ones, is also having a catastrophic detrimental effect on families and marriages. Mount Isa police district Inspector Paul Biggin reported that vulnerable young women from South-East Asia are being trafficked to the mining towns in Queensland to work as sex workers to fill demand – also on a fly in, fly out basis. And he believes some are being coerced and threatened into doing it. Inspector Biggin reports that officers in the inland Queensland city and other mining towns are increasingly being confronted with the problem. He spoke of "women and girls who cannot speak English, or who have a very low level of English, and a very low level of education, who are basically being trafficked for sex, from one mining town to the next".¹³

100% non-resident FIFO implications

ACL believes that FIFO/DIDO/BIBO workers should be able to choose whether they live in the town they work in, or commute. In some parts of Queensland companies demand exclusively fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workforces, meaning that local workers can only be employed if they move away and fly in with everyone else.



The previous two governments in Queensland - both ALP and LNP - have endorsed the principle of allowing mining companies to have 100 per cent compulsory FIFO, even when there are skilled regional workers with families living nearby. Workers in the long-time Central Queensland mining town of Moranbah who want to work in the nearby BHP mines of Caval Ridge and Daunia must fly in to work. Toowoomba, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone and Moranbah are all wanting action to stop 100 per cent FIFO deals in their area.

Mount Isa Mayor, Hon. Cr Tony McGrady AM, has called for the state government to reverse the decision to allow mines to employ a 100 per cent fly-in, fly-out workforce.

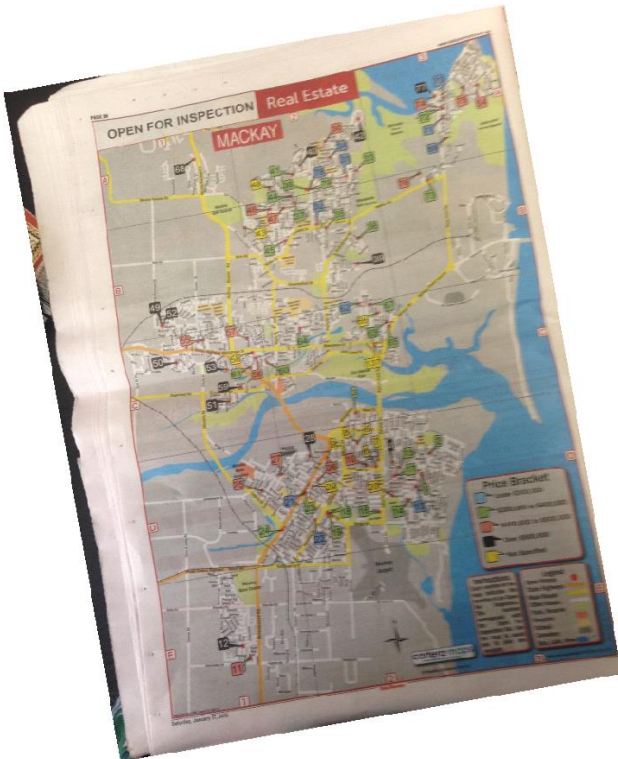
Many small town businesses are suffering as workers earn their money there but spend it out of town. Once full and prosperous shopping centres now have more vacancies than occupants. In many towns in Queensland the FIFO worker presence is starting to dominate and the resulting transient feel to the town is making it less desirable for both existing and new residents.

¹³ Caroline Overington (10 July, 2012), 'Sex traffic 'serious' in mine towns', *The Australian*, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/sex-traffic-serious-in-mine-towns/story-e6frg6nf-1226422026998>.



This sign in Moranbah reads “100% FIFO, 100% anti-community”.

Real estate in mining towns has taken a huge hit and this adds to low morale for the residents remaining. For example, at the moment Moranbah has around 150 houses for sale and 200 for rent.



Mackay’s local paper needs a full page to show open house inspections for just the central area.

Time spent in commuting to and from work

Fatigue- and congestion-related traffic accidents (including a high rate of fatalities) are a serious concern in areas such as the Bowen Basin in Queensland, with a high concentration of mines and DIDO employees. Evidence provided to the Federal Inquiry revealed a high accident and death rate

on regional roads for DIDO workers completing a 12-hour shift and driving three or more hours home.¹⁴

Concerns have also been raised by Annette Hennesey, Qld State Coroner, about fatigue related accidents and mortalities due to non-resident workforce arrangements in the Qld mining industry.¹⁵ Under current conditions, fatigued non-resident workers are more likely to be killed or injured in motor vehicle accidents as they commute either end of work cycles than in the workplace.¹⁶

Conclusion

The concern surrounding FIFO practices in Queensland, in particular when this is a 100 per cent practice, is shared by most of the community. ACL encourages the Committee to consider the importance of addressing the very serious implications of this practice which is destroying families and communities. We thank you very sincerely for this opportunity to step back and re-evaluate the practice.

Yours sincerely



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¹⁴ Australian Research Council Research Team, Submission No 95 to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, *Inquiry into the use of 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia*, 2012, p 14.

¹⁵ See *Inquest into the deaths of Malcolm Mackenzie, Graham Peter Brown and Robert Wilson*, Coroner's Court, Rockhampton, 23 February, 2011.

¹⁶ See McCullough Robertson Lawyers (2 March, 2011), 'Coronial inquest findings – fatigue affecting mine workers', http://www.mccullough.com.au/icms_docs/104475_Resources_-_2_March_2011.pdf; Paul Robinson (24 February, 2011), 'Road deaths prompt call for mine fatigue crackdown', ABC, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-02-23/road-deaths-prompt-call-for-mine-fatigue-crackdown/1954702>.