



Submission: Infrastructure, Planning and Nature Resources Committee - Fly in, fly out and other long distance commuting work practices in regional Queensland inquiry

Introduction

IEUA-QNT welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback regarding fly in, fly out (FIFO), drive in, drive out (DIDO) and other long distance commuting work practices in regional Queensland.

IEUA-QNT is an industry union representing ~17,500 teachers, support staff and ancillary staff in non-government education institutions and Early Childhood centres in Queensland and the Northern Territory. As an industry union, IEUA-QNT regularly participates in education and industrial debate at both state and national levels through a system of committees comprised of members and union officers.

Overview

IEUA-QNT has concerns about FIFO/DIDO workforces in small regional communities in Queensland and the impact that this has on the ability to deliver quality education to children. In particular, our concerns centre on the ability of kindergartens and schools to attract and retain quality staff and provide long term sustainable education environments for students.

The trend towards FIFO/DIDO workers has a serious impact not only on the quality of life of FIFO/DIDO workers and their families, but the residents of local communities who rely on the mining sector for employment and to support local businesses and services. This has seen these communities abandoned when local families relocate to meet FIFO/DIDO eligibility requirements, or find other employment.

The practice of relocating to other areas to be eligible to work in the area from where a person originally resides is a significant social and economic issue for families and communities.

The composition of these mining communities has also changed dramatically from one dominated by local residents to one comprising a sometimes volatile mixture of locals, FIFO/DIDO workers and families with a FIFO/DIDO worker employed in another mining community.

The result has been a decline in business and services such as health and education, and a loss of community identity.

Specific issues are discussed in greater detail below.

Disjointed education

IEUA-QNT has identified a trend toward increasingly disjointed education experience in these communities. Members point to a reduction in the quality and quantity of education available to students in areas where FIFO/DIDO arrangements are prevalent.

- Children are moving between centres and schools in different communities as employment in the mining sector moves from region to region.
- Children who come from families of FIFO/DIDO workers have a higher absentee record as their parents will keep them home from school or kindergarten when their FIFO/DIDO parent is home.
- Teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to develop and implement education plans, particularly in Early Childhood centres, due to the uncertainty about student numbers, a high turnover of families, frequent student absences and turnover of staff.

Attracting and retaining staff

As employment trends increasingly shift towards a FIFO/DIDO workforce, local families are moving out of the community resulting in the loss of those who provide education to students. As FIFO/DIDO workers coming into the community do not relocate their families, finding and retaining education professionals is difficult.

The role of parents and the community in education

The importance of parental and community involvement in education, and particularly those in small regional communities, is well understood.

Community Kindergartens, in particular, rely on the involvement of parents and the wider community for the successful operation of centres. Community Kindergartens, run by a committee comprised of parents and supported by the wider community, are experiencing a lack of operational stability due to the impact of turnover of staff and families in areas where FIFO/DIDO arrangements are more prevalent.

There are also issues emerging around community involvement in securing sponsorship and fundraising in these communities with the downturn in local business and a FIFO/DIDO workforce disengaged from the educational needs of the area as the children of these workers attend schools in other communities.

Concluding Comment

IEUA-QNT believes that the use of FIFO/DIDO workers should not be to the detriment of local communities and, specifically, at the expense of quality education. Employment arrangements that encourage people to reside and engage with their local communities are essential for the sustainability of quality education for students in regional Queensland.



Terry Burke

Secretary

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25th May 2015