




Speech By
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Record of Proceedings, 28 October 2014

MOTION

Mining Industry, Fly-in Fly-out Workforce

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (6.06 pm): This motion was an opportunity for the Newman government to clear up finally its policy contradictions, its U-turns and internal squabbling that has been the hallmark of this government that is tearing the LNP asunder on the issue of 100 per cent fly-in fly-out workers. We know that before the last election the Premier told voters in the Bowen Basin that an LNP government would not allow 100 per cent fly-in-fly-out workforces. His exact words were ‘... just simply something we would not tolerate if we get into government.’ That was a clear election commitment—an election commitment that has just as clearly been broken.

We know that there are a growing number of LNP MPs from constituencies where that broken promise is causing so much distress who have dared to be outspoken on the issue. On 26 May this year, the member for Whitsunday told APN newspapers—

Voters have made it very clear to me that it is having a detrimental effect on the Mackay and Whitsunday region. I don’t believe in 100% FIFO arrangements and I won’t budge on that.

That was very well said, member for Whitsunday. We will see if he speaks up for his community later tonight, and we will see how he actually votes on this motion. But that is not all. The member for Whitsunday went on to say that 100 per cent FIFO was absolutely despised by voters and, ‘If it’s not discrimination against our local people, what is it?’ That is indeed the question.

The member for Mirani, always to be relied upon to be a calm voice of reason, made his opposition to 100 per cent FIFO crystal clear. He even went as far as lodging a petition against it, with 3,317 names, and said he totally rejected its imposition. Also in May this year my old mate the member for Gregory described 100 per cent FIFO as ‘100 per cent evil’, and went further to say, ‘We have vacant shops and vacant houses.’ He made some pertinent points, saying that mining towns such as Springsure, Tieri, Clermont and Blackwater were reeling from a market slide made worse by mines using only out-of-town commuters.

Sadly, there are senior members of the Newman government whose views have been less clear cut—for example, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. He seems confused. In late 2012 he said the government had made clear its policy of not supporting 100 per cent FIFO mining operation workforces. But by May this year, along with the Deputy Premier, he had changed his mind, and sought instead to blame the mining unions for his change of heart. The Deputy Premier angrily told APN the debate was more about union power and union domination than it was about country towns or mining towns. Then, on 19 June, the Deputy Premier tried to clear up the confusion. He attempted to articulate a new position, insisting the LNP had never changed its policy or had never reneged on its election commitment at all.

He claimed that the government did not support further fly-in fly-out workforces and could not foresee any further approvals being made other than the two already in place. Crucially, however, the Deputy Premier failed to rule them out. Despite being told repeatedly by the opposition, his own LNP colleagues and federal members from his own side of politics of the harm being caused by the existing 100 per cent fly-in fly-out arrangements, he refused to take any action to end the practice in order to ensure resource communities were not damaged in the process. Correct me if I am wrong, but that is the Deputy Premier's position, is it not? The Deputy Premier clearly is content to not listen to the cries of people who say their local communities are dying. He simply refuses to acknowledge that some businesses are folding because the hundreds of people who work at local mines do not spend any of their income locally.

If the Deputy Premier would like, I can offer one more quote to help him understand. It comes from Moranbah resident Peter Finlay who, on 19 September this year, told the *Daily Mercury*—

"The number of businesses that have shut here in the last six months is just phenomenal," he said.

...

"The closest mine to Moranbah, which is Caval Ridge, is 6km away from the post office ...

"But you have to live in Cairns or Brisbane to get a job there."

Let me be very clear. Despite the assertions of the member for Nanango—and no doubt what the member for Cairns will assert as well—the opposition's FIFO policy is not about demonising people who are currently FIFO workers from various regions in other parts of Queensland like the southern suburbs of Cairns or the workforce that comes from Innisfail. It is about redressing the balance like the LNP said they would but have not done. Labor is about facilitating and creating jobs: FIFO jobs, DIDO jobs and jobs for local workers. We are not saying that FIFO is a bad thing—it is a commercial reality—we are saying that people should have a right to decide what living arrangements are best for their family and their circumstances. If the Newman government's so-called Royalties for the Regions policy was what it purported to be, those regions may have gotten more support from the LNP government. However, given that Royalties for the Regions is (a) not actually directly linked to royalty regimes in terms of funding source, (b) is essentially a rebadged version of the old local government grant scheme, and (c) ludicrously allows Queensland government departments to actually apply for grants designed for local authorities, one could be forgiven for thinking that it is yet another example of the LNP leading Queenslanders up the garden path.

In conclusion, in that article I quoted from a little earlier, Mr Finlay said that the Deputy Premier's response to his petition was 'total and utter garbage'.

(Time expired)