




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Record of Proceedings, 29 October 2015

INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Notice

 **Mr BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (11.44 am): I am proud to stand here today and speak to the parliamentary committee report on the fly-in fly-out and other long-distance commuting work practices in regional Queensland. As a new member to this place, I must say that it was an extremely memorable experience visiting and talking to the communities that were on our inquiry list. During our inquiry we visited towns like Gladstone, Rockhampton, Moura, Middlemount, Emerald, Blackwater, Toowoomba, Roma, Dysart, Moranbah and Mackay, and we also had hearings here in Brisbane.

While we visited these communities on our travels, we heard submissions from workers in those communities, unions, local governments, service workers, husbands, wives, business owners and mining companies. During some of those visits in some of those regional towns, the emotion and heartfelt stories from the wonderful people of these mining communities really let me know that many of them feel let down by the companies that own those mines. Not only do they feel let down; they feel saddened that many good local people have had to leave their communities simply because they could not get a job in the mine just down the road.

These locals who were forced to leave are coaches of sporting teams, schoolteachers, shop owners and other important leaders in these wonderful communities. I would like to make it clear that the committee does not condone the use of fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out and bus-in bus-out, but it was strongly of the belief that if people choose to work in this fashion they have every right to do so. People in these mining towns did, however, make it quite clear to me that they simply wanted choice—choice of where they live for work and not to be forced to live in Brisbane, Cairns or wherever the job ad tells them to live. Even today there are still ads recruiting workers to work in mines, but they must reside within 100 kilometres of Brisbane Airport.

The parliamentary chair and very good friend of mine, the member for Mirani, Jim Pearce, is a passionate advocate for mining communities and has said—and I am fully supportive—that one of the biggest issues in these communities is mines which refuse to employ locals. The best way to raise families in our communities is to have good, secure full-time work and a pathway for our children to gain future employment. Everybody in Queensland should be considered for a position regardless of where they live.

The recommendation from the committee to address this is to amend the Anti-Discrimination Act. This may seem like a simple recommendation, but it will mean so much to those people and those mining towns to give them choice of where they live to work. The committee worked hard to ensure that our recommendations would make a difference to the lives of people living in regional Queensland mining towns. One of the main recommendations in our report after choice included higher scrutiny at mines and expanding the state development department's audit office program of inspectors to check that mines are complying with conditions of approval as set out by the Coordinator-General at the start of that project.

The report also recommends independent mental health services for mineworkers. We heard from people who have or who know people with mental health issues who are absolutely scared to bring it to the attention of the people who employ them for fear of losing their jobs. This has to stop. All the recommendations from the committee have bipartisan support from the government, opposition and crossbench members of the committee.

As stated earlier in my speech, this inquiry was a fantastic opportunity to get an understanding of the issues affecting our mining communities. As a committee, we covered many kilometres on regional Queensland roads on a small bus. This was a great opportunity for me to listen to the local members and hear how proud they are to represent their local electorates.

The committee's report is very detailed, and I would like to make special mention of the team who helped put it all together, particularly the secretariat and Hansard who took time away from their families to help us document the findings. To Erin, Mary, Margaret, Megan and Bonnie, I thank you personally for your assistance. I commend the report to address issues raised in relation to fly-in fly-out and other long-distance commuting work practices in regional Queensland.