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House Standing Committee on Regional Australia
“Inquiry into the use of ‘fly-in, fly-out’ (FIFO) workforce practices in regional Australia”
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The Committee for Geelong is pleased to make this submission in response to the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia to inquire into the use of fly-in fly-out (FIFO) and drive-in drive-out (DIDO) workforce practises in regional Australia.

The Committee for Geelong

The Committee for Geelong is a highly focused group with a strategic commitment to developing Geelong’s social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions.

The organisation was established in 2001 by a group of Geelong leaders who saw an opportunity to collaborate and thereby serve the Geelong community.

Membership of the organisation now includes national and international private sector organisations with a presence in Geelong as well as local firms – all committed to developing Geelong’s social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions.

As well as an organisation of these leading companies our membership also covers key public sector and non-profit organisations serving the Geelong region as such the Committee for Geelong is uniquely placed to advocate on strategic issues affecting the Geelong region.

The Geelong Region, its economy and its people.

Geelong is Victoria’s largest provincial city located on Australia’s sixth largest port by tonnage. It has a proud history as a manufacturing centre and over the past 150 years has played a role in processing the agricultural output of Victoria’s western districts. However while manufacturing is still a key part of the local economy; increased productivity in that sector has compounded with macro issues such as the current exchange rate such that manufacturing cannot support the proportion of local employment levels that it once did.

This declining employment capacity is further vulnerable to decisions by global parents of significant local employers such as Alcoa and Ford, whether in terms of their continued operations or in respect to the supply chain effects of global sourcing policies.

In this regard Geelong is regarded as an economy both in transition and at risk even though in truth this has always been so.

However as one of Australia’s fastest growing localities with extensive education and training facilities and institutions that are the envy of many, Geelong has a vitality and resilience that will allow it to meet the challenges of that transition and risk. In terms of FIFO operations, Geelong’s



proximity to Avalon Airport with its curfew free runways, capable of handling any aircraft, presents an opportunity to significantly ramp up FIFO operations originating in Geelong.

The significant unused space at Avalon should not be underestimated, also lends itself to possibilities such as dedicated FIFO lounges and car parking along with a freight and logistics hub servicing the mining industry. This flexibility can deliver a tailor integrated end to end logistics and personnel solutions that few can match.

Response to the Terms of Reference

While not all the terms of reference are relevant to this submission, the Committee for Geelong submits the following comments in respect of various terms of reference for the Parliamentary Committee's consideration.

The Committee for Geelong is well aware of public discourse particularly in Western Australia of some of the perceived undesirable effects of FIFO operations in that State's north. However the inescapable realities associated with both geography and economy mean that FIFO employment will remain a feature of many mining operations for the foreseeable future.

In Geelong's case, as with many communities that are not adjacent to major mining regions, there are opportunities to supply manufactured products or remote services to the mining industry, however there are few other opportunities for these communities to share directly in the nation's mining boom.

For large regional centres with significant numbers of unemployed workers or workers who are employed in industries that are in some type of transition, FIFO operations represent an opportunity for employment that is both relatively lucrative and avoids the personal and social costs that would be associated with relocation.

These large regional communities will often also have significant community, education and training and other infrastructure which would be quite inefficient if not cost prohibitive to provide in some remote mining locations.

For instance, the Gordon TAFE in Geelong has around 400 full-time and part-time accredited and specialist courses across a wide range of disciplines including apprenticeships, school-based apprenticeships, VET in schools, traineeships, certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas, and pathways to university.

Many of these courses and their students will be attractive to the mining industry, however even if it was possible to replicate the Gordon, with its 125 years of history and bank of delivery infrastructure, intellectual property and expertise, in the mining regions of remote Western Australia, it may not make any economic sense to do so. Many of these courses would also be attractive to the families of mining workers also and it would be just as cost prohibitive to provide the breadth and depth of the Gordon's course offering in those remote communities for mining workers' families as it would be for mining industry employees.

In this context it can be seen that FIFO operations can efficiently provide significant benefits to non-mining communities as well as efficiently provide benefits to the mining industry. The fact that FIFO operations are by and large funded by the mining industry is a commercial recognition



of both this efficiency, the personal preference of mining employees themselves and the limited scope for any government intervention to curtail FIFO operations.

The fact that FIFO can efficiently bring mining income into non-mining communities should also not be lost when the perceived cost on these communities of absent family and community members is considered. In Geelong's case, our skilled workforce, in an economy that is in transition, stands to benefit much more from FIFO operations than it would from an alternative of under or unemployment. Geelong's location, at the start of Great Ocean Road also offers a lifestyle that is both attractive as a base for FIFO workers and their families.

In summary, Geelong as a region that has much to offer and much to benefit from FIFO operations to remote mining centres. FIFO operations can efficiently deliver skills and expertise in a way that cannot be realistically supplied otherwise. This skills and expertise is readily available especially in large centres like Geelong whose economies are in transition and skills and labour may be surplus to what is required by the local economy but in high demand elsewhere.

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