

Submission to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government, The Hon Simon Crean MP, regarding his inquiry into *the use 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in Regional Australia.*

Term of Reference

***The effect of a non-resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community wellbeing, services and infrastructure;***

My name is Miriam Fessler I live in Broome Western Australia and work as a Family/Carer Support Worker in an Australian wide organization linked to mental health.

In 2011 I participated in the Rural and Remote Mental Health Conference in Newman. Not surprisingly a big percentage of the conference concentrated on the mental health issues individuals and their families are faced with when employed in a FIFO/DIDO workforce.

The Australasian Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health informed the public last year that:

- The risk of suicide for male miners is 4 times higher than for the average male society! The stress of isolation, working conditions, loneliness, separation from loved ones (FIFO/DIDO workforce) and a sense of not belonging either adds to the issue or created it in the first place.
- Family members left at home by FIFO/DIDO workforce also face a higher percentage of Mental Health Illnesses compared to the average Australian population.
- Every Year every third employee in the mining and resource sector will experience a mental illness. This statistic rises for FIFO/DIDO. This is much higher than an average of one in five people who will experience some sort of a mental health issues in the general Australian population.
- A company like for example WOODSIDE who is planning to FIFO/DIDO up to 8000 people to Broome in order to build the proposed gas refinery at James Price Point, will have to expect that 2666.67 of their employees will suffer with a Mental Illness this year alone!

I am truly concerned how existing small communities like Broome, which is already working on the limit of our resources, are meant to deal with such an impact on the health system?

- Broome is renowned for its lifestyle, multi culture and after all for "Broome time". FIFO/DIDO employees have no sense of our community spirit. Communities are made out of Families who feel a responsibility towards their town and the people who live in it. This cannot be said for FIFO/DIDO workers. A high percentage of this Workforce concentrates on their work and will either take their money home, not adding anything to the local economy, or they spend their money for alcohol and drugs.

- A high percentage of FIFO/DIDO employees are males aged 40 to 45, this fact only adds to social problems in regards to the sex business and families who can't feel safe to let their daughters out of their eyesight. One only needs to visit Port Hedland and Karratha to see the sexual assaults, general violence and street fights sparked by miners most influenced by alcohol and drugs who are out for a "good time" after a few weeks locked away working.
- The other issues are the ridiculous living costs in communities riddled with FIFO/DIDO. How is anyone who doesn't work in the mines able to pay up to \$2000. - rent per week like it is common for North West mining towns?
- I would like to add another issue FIFO/DIDO workforce has created for the Broome community in 2011. Last year Broome has been faced with FIFO police officers from all over the state. This workforce was sent in to deal with present protest in Broome. One may think that this is responsible and justified. I don't. This protest are held by a combined and holistic community who where traumatized by FIFO officers who showed no respect for the community, the community spirit, the community effort to protect our home, the different ethnicities, traditional cultures groups and elders. No respect to what makes this community unique, why people choose to build their home here, grow up their kids and why locals call Broome their home. Local employees of the Police force, or any local organization, live, love and work in this community. Locals know how to deal with each other and how to respect each other. Local employed know and respect that we all use the same services, facilities, schools and recreation areas, locals have to live with the consequences of their actions, FIFO employees don't! I understand that laws have to be followed; however the traumas created by the FIFO police force are left behind, to be carried by a community who is loyal to their home!

I ask you to carefully consider the overall effect of FIFO/DIDO on our society. It is clear that a FIFO/DIDO workforce does not promote a happy and sustainable community.

Yours Sincerely

Miriam Fessler