



Standing Committee on Regional Australia  
House of Representatives  
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### **Inquiry Into The Use of 'Fly-In, fly-Out' (FIFO) Workforce Practices in Regional Australia**

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry Into The Use of 'Fly-In, fly-Out' (FIFO) Workforce Practices in Regional Australia and in particular I would like to address the "effect of Non-Resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community wellbeing, services and infrastructure".

I am a resident in the small rural town of Boggabri, NSW with a population of approximately 900 people.

Mining has been in the general region for a number of years however the number of mines and the level of production have exponentially increased with future growth and expansion expected to continue for 20-30 years and possibly beyond this with further exploration and expansion projects.

Due to the large number of workers required by the mines for construction phases and production, the specific roles and skills sets and the timeframe with which the mines require things completed there is not enough local workers to fill these positions. This has led to the increasing number of DIDO/FIFO workers being utilised and present in our town.

This FIFO/DIDO workforce brings with it many concerns and issues including:

#### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

- **ACCOMMODATION AND HOUSING**

It has created a problem of where to house the DIDO/FIFO workers within Boggabri and the surrounding towns. Housing affordability has become an issue in both the rental and buying market with demand outstripping supply. This has led to rental properties becoming a scarcity and rental prices increasing beyond some individuals means (particularly those who do not derive their income from mining employment).

It has also caused inflation in the housing prices and this is resulting in local residents being squeezed out of the market and also financially discouraging any FIFO/DIDO workers who may wish to relocate their families to our town.

The housing affordability issue also has a wider reaching socioeconomic impact in that it places a difficulty in being able to attract workers such as teachers, pharmacists, nursing staff and even Doctors (anyone who works outside the mines) as they cannot afford to enter the housing market or to pay the rent. At this present moment Boggabri Public School has a vacancy for its Principal position and if there were not teacher housing available this housing affordability issue may have made it increasingly difficult for the school to attract and secure the ideal candidate for the position.

Boggabri has and is also experiencing a scenario where by families are leaving Boggabri and relocating as it is cheaper to rent in other towns. With this we are losing families from both of the primary schools in town and this is extremely worrying if the trend is to continue for the future of our schools. It also a concern demographically as we need a population that is diverse in age.

The housing affordability issue has an extremely detrimental impact on being able to sustain our community's workforce needs and inhibits our ability as a town to grow if we cannot have housing that is affordable to the general population.

It is due in part to the accommodation shortage that there has been a DA submitted and that is currently being processed by Narrabri Shire Council that a MAC Group village be constructed within close proximity to the township of Boggabri with the potential to accommodate a DIDO/FIFO workforce of up to 816 people.

This development on its own has the potential to essentially double our population, however our current services, amenities and infrastructure will not be able to cope with this influx of population.

It will have a large impact on our town and be felt widely by all community members and the effects both positive and negative of this development are yet to be realised by our small community.

The building of various types of accommodation to cope with the influx of DIDO/FIFO workers also creates another problem for the established businesses (Supermarkets, Cafes, Service Stations, Clubs and Pubs etc) as they have to compete to keep their current staff that may be drawn to work in the industries servicing the DIDO/FIFO workforce (e.g. cleaning staff, cooks, and administrative staff). This puts financial pressure on local businesses that in many cases may not be able to compete with the level of remuneration being offered by these service providers. This poses the problem of where do local businesses and farms find their employees? If they are able to match the remuneration levels offered by competitors, prices then have to be increased in their businesses to reflect this increase in wages and the community is then being passed down the cost.

## **COMMUNITY WELLBEING**

- **COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS**

The fact that the DIDO/FIFO population is predominately male brings concerns to me as both a woman and also as a parent of two young girls. Like many rural towns, Boggabri and its surrounding towns has a “shortage” of females in the population in comparison to the males. Having large numbers of males living in “single man’s” accommodation whether it be a group accommodation village, motel style accommodation or apartments I do not believe it is a healthy or stable situation for all involved and brings with it the potential for socially unacceptable behaviour and problems.

The housing affordability issue mentioned previously also results in the community demographics being distorted with lower socioeconomic groups of our community (i.e. pensioners, unemployed etc) being unable to afford to live within our community and moving away. It is often from these groups that many of our volunteer members are drawn and that are essential to keep things like Rotary, Lions, SES, schools, Op shops etc operational in small communities like Boggabri. A reduction in this demographic will have a negative impact on our volunteer organisations and the wider community they help alike.

- **NON ENGAGEMENT/INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY**

A DIDO/FIFO workforce also brings with it the potential for non engagement in our community. A healthy community needs active participation and involvement in organisations (such as Lions, Rotary, Home and Aged Care (HACC), P&C committees, SES, Fire Brigade etc.) and in sports teams for example. Where employees do not have an attachment or sense of ownership to the community they are living in, there lays a danger that we see non participation in these organisations and groups.

It is not only a non engagement in the community that the DIDO/FIFO employee works but also in the township in which they come from with limited time and an inability to commit to local sports clubs, community organisations etc. in both communities.

The transient nature of FIFO/DIDO also means that employees are away for large amounts of time from their own families which again brings with it its own problems of reduced involvement/engagement including family breakdown and the care of any children being placed for a large amount of time on one parent for example.

- **SOCIO ECONOMIC ISSUES**

DIDO/FIFO in comparison to local residents are also spending less of their disposable income in the communities in which they are employed. Instead and also understandably a large portion of this money goes back to their families to support their needs including rent, mortgages, groceries and utilities. Essentially this results in our local community and businesses providing services and amenities for the DIDO/FIFO workforce to utilise but

seeing little economic benefit from the income drawn by them as they take their money out of the district.

This also helps foster the 'us and them' mentality and a degree of animosity from some people within the community that do not see any benefits from having a large DIDO/FIFO workforce within our town.

Having a healthy, viable and sustainable community means having a diverse population demographically, socioeconomically and educationally. A large DIDO/FIFO workforce does not encourage or foster this structure.

## **SERVICES**

- **ESSENTIAL SERVICES- POLICING, MEDICAL, AMBULANCE ETC**

Due to the transient nature of the FIFO/DIDO workforce the increase in population is not reflected in census and population data and therefore the need for an increase in essential services such as Policing, Doctors, Nursing and Ambulance numbers is overlooked. However this increase in population and in our case a potential doubling of our population with the MAC Group Village puts real additional pressure on an already strained medical and essential services system.

The Boggabri Medical Centre currently only operates with one medical practitioner (GP) who also performs duties at the Boggabri Hospital and is on call 24/7. The increase in DIDO/FIFO population is only going to make this situation harder for the Doctor to operate within and also more difficult for the local residents to gain access to medical attention.

Police numbers and presence is also an issue with the increase of FIFO/DIDO workers. Boggabri currently has only two police officers on rotating rosters and for part of their work hours they do not police the township of Boggabri instead being delegated to duties in Narrabri. We do not have 24hr policing and with a population that is increasingly working more irregular hours we need to have both an increase in police presence and availability at all hours. We also have a main highway dissecting our town and it is the main arterial road for workers to travel to the mining sites increasing traffic through flow. The increase in population and gender imbalance as a result of the DIDO/FIFO should also encourage a stronger police presence.

Whilst I realise that there is no easy solution to this problem the FIFO/DIDO employers have a corporate responsibility and I think that there needs to be very careful management of the DIDO/FIFO workforce and the impact they have on communities (that often have no say in their presence) with the aim for a reduction in FIFO/DIDO workforces where possible.

Planning and approval of mining operations take a considerable time so in that time is there not an opportunity to put in place measures such as training local staff in the required skills by initialising training venues and courses (e.g. TAFE), having more on the job training and mentoring programs, building housing, relocating whole families and establishing infrastructure and services in communities to alleviate some of the reliance on DIDO/FIFO workers where possible.

For example if there were a program initialised by Federal, State and Local Governments for the mining employers as part of their mining approval process to implement a building program for houses within the communities they plan to operate in this would assist in reducing the pressure put on local housing markets, provide an environment where mining employees may have a greater opportunity to relocate and integrate within the community in which they live. The employees may even then be able have the opportunity to purchase these houses. This would be beneficial for the local community, the families that relocate and the mining employers (who would have a happier, more stable workforce).

I believe that long term DIDO/FIFO employment can be detrimental to both the communities where they are employed and also to the communities and families that the employees come from.

I hope that this enquiry takes into account all comments and suggestions and that it is an avenue to learn from previous errors and that the foresight is given to helping communities in the present and future (both where the FIFO/DIDO workers are employed and also the communities and families they come from) cope with the challenges this type of employment brings.