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INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF 'FLY-IN, FLY-OUT" (FIFO) WORKFORCE PRACTICES IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

The Boggabri Business Promotions Association (BBPA) would like to make a submission to the Inquiry Into The Use of 'Fly-In, fly-Out" (FIFO) Workforce Practices in Regional Australia.

Boggabri is a small rural town of approximately 900 people and is currently in close proximity to a number of active mine sites with the prospect of these mining activities increasing and the potential for expansion.

Boggabri is currently experiencing an increase in the number of DIDO/FIFO workers residing in the town with this number expected to continue to increase.

With this increase and the current DIDO/FIFO workforce it brings some issues and concerns to the residents and businesses of Boggabri.

Our concerns in relation to "the effect of a non-resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community, wellbeing, services and infrastructure" are as follows:

- (i) Accommodation- the current rental market has been put under pressure with rental prices increasing. This problem has only been exacerbated by the number of rental properties available being extremely limited. Housing prices have also increased making it unachievable for some people to purchase property and enter the housing market. This has flow on effects to the community with families and members of the community on lower disposable incomes (often people who are not employed by the mines) having financial stress put upon them or more often these members of our community moving away.

The accommodation problem is also an issue for any DIDO/FIFO employees wishing to relocate and reside in Boggabri as they may find it more financially suitable to stay in their home towns rather than relocate due to the cost of housing. This does not facilitate or encourage Boggabri's community to grow and develop.

As the mining industry does rely so heavily on DIDO/FIFO employment if mining companies gave more consideration to building houses to accommodate these employees and their families it would help to encourage their workers to settle within the area that they work. This would be of benefit to the community, the DIDO/FIFO employees and their families and also the mining companies themselves by creating a more stable living environment.

The accommodation shortage has also led to the MAC Group having submitted a DA to construct a village to accommodate DIDO/FIFO employees on the outskirts of Boggabri. This will result in a doubling of our current population at full capacity and in turn brings its own challenges to the Boggabri community and business houses.

Our current infrastructure, amenities and services are in their current state not capable of sustaining this influx of people without upgrades and alterations.

- (ii) The DIDO/FIFO workforce in Boggabri is predominately male and the increase in presence of accommodation options in town that is essentially single mans accommodation is not ideal for the workforce themselves or the Boggabri community as it has the real potential to bring with it socially unacceptable behaviour.
- (iii) The DIDO/FIFO workforce in Boggabri is predominately engaged in mining activities and has a relatively high disposable income in comparison with the general population of Boggabri. Whilst some businesses in Boggabri may see an increase in trade a majority of the disposable income is retained by the DIDO/FIFO employees and returned to the towns in which the employees come from. The income earned within our region is being dispersed in other towns and this spending pattern does not help to sustain Boggabri and is not conducive to assisting our town to grow and progress.
- (iv) Boggabri township relies heavily on the volunteer members of its community to enable organisations like Red Cross, Rotary, Lions, Sporting Clubs, Tidy Towns etc to operate. Many of these volunteers are retirees, pensioners or unemployed and the housing affordability issue is resulting in some of these members of our society being forced to move away. This is putting pressure on these organisations that are part of the building blocks of the Boggabri community and that are essential to the progress of our town. Whilst these organisations are indirectly affected by the housing affordability issue they are also influenced by the non engagement/involvement of the DIDO/FIFO workforce in Boggabri as well.
The nature of DIDO/FIFO employment does not encourage involvement and/or engagement with the community in which they are employed. Instead it often means that few of the employees become actively involved in things such as community organisations and volunteer committees (e.g. Rotary, Lions, sporting teams, P&Cs etc). In order for Boggabri to remain healthy, sustainable and to grow we need active participation from our community members.
- (v) The Boggabri community is not prepared for the increase in the DIDO/FIFO workforce with policing and the number of Doctors an issue. The increase in FIFO/DIDO employees

residing in Boggabri will put pressure on the work load of both the single Doctor that Boggabri has and its Police. Our Dr currently services the whole town of Boggabri and its near surrounds in addition to duties in the Boggabri hospital and being on call around the clock. The Dr to patient ratio with the increase in DIDO/FIFO workforce will drastically reduce this and place the medical needs of the Boggabri community at risk.

To attract further Doctors, Police and Teachers we also need to have affordable housing as otherwise they will be priced out of the market and moving to Boggabri would be financial unsustainable.

- (vi) Staffing of local businesses is also an issue on two fronts with the housing affordability issue making it difficult for individuals on lower wages (e.g. supermarket employees, hospitality staff, cleaners etc) to continue to live in the community. Local businesses are also posed the risk of losing these same staff as they compete with the FIFO/DIDO service providers who require cleaners, administration, hospitality staff as local businesses cannot compete with higher wages offered. In the event that businesses can compete then the local business is required to put up their prices which then is passed onto the customer (our local community members). Also traditionally many of the types of positions are filled by the wives of the families but with a DIDO/FIFO workforce families are not being encouraged to move to towns furthering this problem.
- (vii) Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPAs) are constantly in negotiation between the various mining companies and the Narrabri Shire Council. The VPAs are designed so that the developer under an agreement will provide or fund things such as public amenities and services, affordable housing, transport or other infrastructure. However, currently the Boggabri community which is the closest town to the majority of the existing and proposed coal mines in the Narrabri Shire Council region has no direct say in these negotiations or what our community believes we require. We also have no control over the time that it takes Narrabri Shire Council to implement the VPAs once agreed upon. Local input should be paramount in these VPA discussions as it would be an avenue to help address some of the deficiencies in our community and also help address some of the issues brought with the DIDO/FIDO workforce by improving our amenities, sporting facilities, infrastructure and accommodation. This would be of benefit to both the community and the DIDO/FIFO workforce.

As a collective group representing the local business houses and the wider general community we feel Boggabri needs to have a voice as to the future of our town so that we can continue to prosper.

We hope that as a proactive community Boggabri can work together with Local Government, the mining companies and the DIDO/FIFO workforce itself so that we can maintain our healthy and vibrant Boggabri community.

If we can address some of the concerns and issues and put in place measures where possible to reduce some of the negative impacts it is of a benefit not only to the health, viability and future of our community but also to the wellbeing of the DIDO/FIFO workforce and their families.

We hope that the inquiry takes into consideration our concerns and that the Boggabri community can continue to move forwards in a positive and constructive manner.

Thank you for the opportunity to have an input into the Inquiry Into The Use of 'Fly-In, fly-Out' (FIFO) Workforce Practices in Regional Australia.