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**TITLE: Parliamentary Inquiry In To Fly In/ Fly Out Workers**

**SUBMISSION BY: Point Samson Community Association (PSCA)**

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## **SUMMARY:**

Our comments relate to two very distinct and separate phases of FI/FO worker policy, namely that relating to major project construction workforces and the other being the mode of employment for steady state operational workforces, once the projects have been commissioned.

The magnitude and complexity of most major projects in the Pilbara (mostly oil/gas and mining) drive a requirement for a very large construction workforce which the community clearly understands and, for a large part, accepts that short term, mostly camp based FI/FO workers are the only realistic option available.

Transient, camp based workers certainly do heavily impact local communities and for small communities such as ours, mostly in a negative way. Fortunately the impacts are normally over a relatively short period of up to a few years and with appropriate management could (but rarely are) be mitigated to a much greater extent than is currently the case.

By far the most insidious, damaging, and socially irresponsible feature of modern, non construction, FI/FO employment is the covert transition by major corporates to a policy which actively promotes and facilitates a very large, non residential FI/FO cohort employed in the local operational workforce. These people fill jobs which under traditional circumstances would be filled by folk who along with their families would be normally resident in the local towns. The jobs referred to are long term positions which will exist for the life of the project, many decades in most cases.

Small Pilbara towns have become victims of what is clearly a self fulfilling prophecy by State Governments and major Companies operating under old, concession ridden State Agreements. By jointly and very deliberately failing to ensure that community infrastructure and fundamental services in the towns are adequate, many families become disillusioned, worry about health, education etc. and are not prepared to settle permanently, hence the

breadwinner is forced to seek a FI/FO position whilst the family either relocates or simply does not arrive. As the permanent residential workforce dwindles, the prospect of improved social infrastructure and services is further degraded which drives even more FI/FO and so the downward spiral of social disintegration is established and perpetuated.

Unfortunately, this transition is actively facilitated by industry who obviously does not wish to see age old State Agreement concessions re-negotiated and then have to pay meaningful Municipal rates, for example, and State Governments who have little desire to fund development in towns other than Karratha in our particular Shire, the Shire of Roebourne.

## **ISSUES:**

### **1. FI/FO CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE:**

Below are many of the typical negative impacts associated with large camp based construction workforces.

- a. Complete lack of integration into the mainstream community, resulting in a visible and obvious 'us and them' culture. A common description of FI/FO workers is 'parasitic', i.e. they suck everything out of the community and put nothing back.
- b. Transient workers rarely make any serious contribution to volunteer based community organizations e.g. SES, Fire Brigades, Ambulance crews. Twelve hour shifts play a major role in the community disintegration as well.
- c. Overloading and stressing of social resources and infrastructure which are rarely upgraded to meet short term increased demand.
- d. Massively increased motor vehicle and industrial vehicle traffic with all the associated issues of roadside litter and irresponsible driving (particularly Company 4WD's which apparently can go anywhere). Plastic wrapped loads which shed throughout the Pilbara and into boat harbours have become commonplace.

e. Anti social behaviour.

f. Serious law breaking and non compliance with fishing bag and size limits and illegal methods of capture. Illegal crab and fish traps (mostly made in Company workshops) have proliferated in local estuarine areas.

g. A general lack of respect for community and failure by FI/FO workers to recognize that transient workers are visitors.

h. Elevated rent and housing costs as a result of high demand with the resultant impact on non project employees and people who do not work for major resource companies.

i. Abject failure by State and Local Government agencies to adequately prepare for the multiple social impacts inflicted by major project demands, particularly in the areas of compliance e.g. public drinking, roadside and recreation spot littering, on and off road vehicle operation, illegal fishing activities, heavy vehicle infringements etc. Inadequate Shire Ranger and Police resources are a prime example of this failure.

j. Inadequate and token social impact planning for major projects.

Local construction camps now house thousands of FI/FO workers and are likely to get larger with some project forecasts for workers topping 5,000. Combine multiple camps across the Shire and it is not difficult to imagine the range of impacts likely.

k. Local on site workers often face serious difficulties in achieving employment as most contractors appear to favour sourcing staff from established centres elsewhere.

## **2. FI/FO OPERATIONAL WORKFORCE:**

The insidious escalation of FI/FO workers filling positions which traditionally would have been occupied by residential workers is by far the most damaging and socially destructive component of modern FI/FO policy, particularly in towns which under normal circumstances

would have otherwise experienced sufficient population growth to reach a critical mass and thus developed into sustainable and normal communities. Wickham is a classic example where a surging Rio Tinto has elected to fill about 50% of new steady state operational positions with FI/FO occupants, thus taking about 150 potential new families out of the town in one swoop. This will have a dramatic downside and be a serious threat to the future development of Wickham and the surrounding communities of Roebourne and Point Samson.

The social engineering very evidently being perpetrated in Wickham by the Company in concert with State and Local Government Agencies will certainly lead to a sub-optimal community, battling for medical facilities, education and child support infrastructure, and small business opportunities to name but a few . The obvious and planned outcome of this is further growth in FI/FO employment and more social disintegration.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The PSCA recommendations relate to the two separate components of FI/FO employment, namely construction and steady state operational workforces which in itself is a distinction we strongly urge the Committee to examine and give serious thought to. They are very different modes of employment with vastly differing impacts, mostly glossed over by the city based supporters of rampant FI/FO who seem to be fixated on project development as opposed to the future sustainability of regional communities.

### **1. CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE:**

The PSCA recommends that:

1. Meaningful (and independent) social impact studies be a mandatory pre-project requirement . Flowing from the studies should be a binding Action and Implementation plan to address precisely how the various impacts on the community are to be mitigated. The Plan

needs to have appropriate review and monitoring mechanisms to deal with unforeseen impacts as well as assessing the effectiveness of the initial strategies.

It is imperative that the studies and the agreed outcomes are shared with the community and regular progress assessments are made public.

2. Key State and Local Government Agencies associated with compliance are adequately resourced (this means on site, appropriately trained, in suitable accommodation) to cope with the overt lawlessness currently experienced by the community, particularly in the areas of :

- a. Littering and illegal dumping (including industrial)
- b. Heavy haul vehicle operations
- c. Illegal fishing in many forms
- d. Marine operations at Department of Transport Boat Harbours, particularly John's Creek.
- e. Off road vehicle control
- f. Building standards
- g. Anti social behaviour in all its forms - drugs, alcohol, burglaries, motor vehicle use and theft etc.
- h. Environmental abuse of mangals, estuarine, low land wet areas, coastal dunes and offshore islands.

3. Communities receive meaningful social dividends from major projects. These may take many forms and ought be developed in consultation with communities to ensure models adopted and priorities are appropriate. It seems only reasonable that communities which have suffered lengthy social upheaval, for years in many cases, ought experience some residual benefit from the construction phase.

4. Construction contractors should be compelled to be far more rigorous in offering employment to local residents.

## **2. OPERATIONAL WORKFORCE:**

The PSCA strongly recommends that:

1. The construction of large scale, dedicated FI/FO accommodation and support facilities in existing regional towns associated with long term industrial operations be strongly resisted by Local and State Governments.
2. Remuneration packages for residential staff should be adjusted to provide a substantial incentive for people to take up long term residency in regional towns. This must also be extended to public sector positions.
3. Federal, State and Local Governments develop integrated long term strategic plans for regional towns and ensure that the allocation of resources is based on best practice planning principles, rather than short term political and commercial expediency which seems to be the current method of development in the Pilbara.