

**Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Education and Employment****Inquiry into Mental Health and Workforce Participation****Introduction**

Rio Tinto's business is finding, mining, and processing mineral resources. Activities span the world and are strongly represented in Australia and North America with significant businesses in Asia, Europe, Africa and South America. Our global workforce consists of over 70,000 people, with 20,000 employees based in Australia.

Dampier Salt (DSL) is the world's largest solar salt producer, with an annual capacity of more than 10 million tonnes. It has two operations in the Pilbara (Dampier and Port Hedland) and an operation in the Gascoyne region (Lake MacLeod). Carnarvon is the closest service town for the Lake MacLeod operations.

Rio Tinto's iron ore operations are concentrated in the Pilbara region, comprising 14 mines, three shipping terminals at two ports and a rail network spanning almost 1,400km. Rio Tinto is the leading iron ore exporter in Australia and the second largest in the world. Our Pilbara iron ore operations have expanded to an annual capacity of 225 million tonnes, with advanced plans to further expand.

The WA resources sector has grown significantly in recent years with strong growth expected to be sustained well into the future, with a project development pipeline approaching \$300 billion capital expenditure.

With this growth, shortage of skilled labour in WA has developed, presenting ongoing challenges to industry. FIFO, along with investing in skills and training, increasing workforce diversity - with more women and Indigenous employees and a flexible skilled migration program will all play their role in addressing skill shortages in the resource sector.

Submission

Rio Tinto and its subsidiary Dampier Salt Limited (DSL) welcomes the opportunity to appear before the Committee as part of its inquiry to outline work done to date, including outline of an initiative by DSL to conduct a three year Pilot Project regarding a tailored, fully integrated mental health strategy.

Rio Tinto is represented in this inquiry by:

Mrs Denise Goldsworthy – Managing Director Dampier Salt and Hismelt, with 30 years experience in Australian Steel and Mining Industries; and

Dr Andrew Porteous – Corporate Health and Safety Manager, Rio Tinto Iron Ore, a qualified General Practitioner and prior to working for Rio Tinto was a Specialist Occupational Physician.

Rio Tinto provides support for existing employees and their families when suffering from a mental illness through a range of policies. This includes the provision of Employee Assistance Programmes and opportunities for staged return to work rehabilitation programmes. Rio Tinto's The Way We Work sits at the centre of policy, and ensures that all Rio Tinto businesses ensure that all people are given opportunities for training and success in their role, free of discrimination and harassment.

This however has primarily been a reactive strategy. Mental wellness by comparison, has traditionally received little attention in the mining industry. It has been recognised, as in the wider Australian community, that mental health issues can significantly affect safety performance, employment costs and productivity, both directly and indirectly.

Whilst we continue to expand our mining operations, our workforce and our communities, both residential and FIFO, we are committed to finding new ways to help our workforce manage mental health and resilience by building and sustaining a supportive and healthy working culture.

To paraphrase the World Health Organization's definition of mental health, a resilient safety culture is best developed and maintained when individuals are able to:

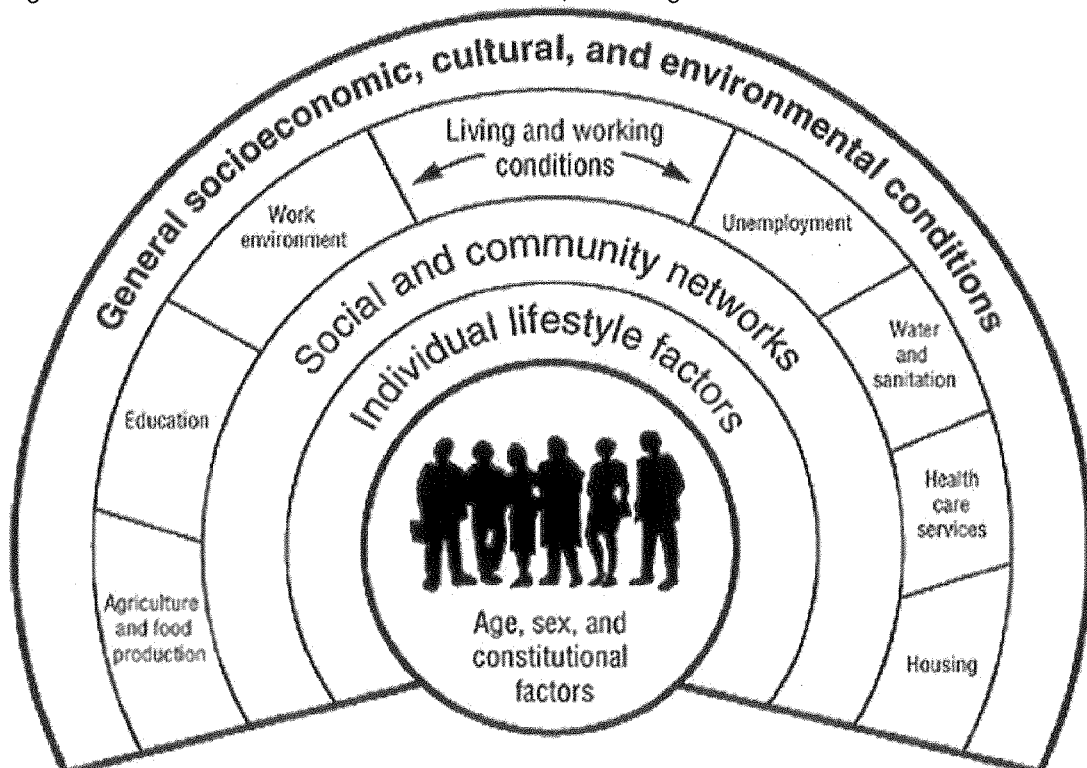
- Realise their own abilities
- Cope with the normal stresses of life
- Work productively and fruitfully
- Make a contribution to their workplace

Mental health is a continuum, ranging from healthy, through a range of debilitation to an individual who has become essentially dysfunctional. Some illnesses are temporary, while others are life long. With many causes and symptoms, establishing an approach that has the flexibility to deal with an infinite range of situations is important.

At Rio Tinto we recognise that many of our employees may suffer stress or reduced resilience due to the challenges of work, family and other components of modern day life. This reduced resilience can impact their ability to cope with genetic or environmental factors that can result in mental illness. Rio Tinto therefore recognises the benefits of improving the health and mental wellbeing of our workforce by broadly and proactively considering both the organisational and the individual approach to determinants of health and mental wellbeing.

Employers find it easiest to address situations when they have data. Among other information, we have used two views to underpin and inform our work. Firstly, population research increasingly shows that the health of employed and unemployed population groups is not primarily determined by health services or individual lifestyle choices, but in fact most significantly by broader influences.

Figure 1: A Model of the determinants of health, including mental health.



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead 1991

We have used this model to help shape our approach to mental health because it illustrates that health and mental wellbeing is determined by a combination of factors and barriers, and that each can contribute in a variety of positive or negative ways.

We understand that work practices, workplace culture, work-life balance, injury management programs, and relationships within workplaces are key determinants, among other factors, of people feeling valued and supported in their work roles.

Secondly, DSL and Rio Tinto Iron Ore have used the UK H&S Executive (a UK government independent watchdog for work-related health, safety and illness) promoted Management Standards for work place stress' as a basis for some of our approach to mental health.

The Management Standards cover key areas of work design that can either reduce resilience to non-work triggers, or can in extreme cases be a trigger for a mental illness. The questions cover six key areas of work (control, demands, support, relationships, role and change), work that if not properly managed have been shown to be associated with poor health and well-being, lower productivity and increased sickness absence.

These are aspects that clearly affect participation, engagement and sustainability in employment. Results have been obtained over a range of organisations and therefore allow users to identify relative strengths and weaknesses of their organisational policies, practices and culture. Dampier Salt pilot work using this standard will be referred to in more detail later.

The skills and labour shortage in the resources sector is well known. There is fierce competition for personnel and, once employees have been recruited, inducted and trained, a lot of time and money goes into retaining them.

People will engage with and stay in a job for which they have been appropriately recruited and well trained, in which they have resources available to them when needed, and in which they feel supported by colleagues and management and feel comfortable talking about work-life balance, stresses and mental health.

Mental health problems can be triggered by genetic or environmental issues. For an employer, consideration must be given to maintaining mental health within a challenging external environment, as well as management of employees with an existing condition.

An unhealthy work environment often arises from a combination of factors including poor leadership, ambiguous job roles, poor training opportunities, lack of communication, poor problem solving, an unsupportive culture and unsafe working conditions. Clearly, these factors will lead to diminished staff morale, heightened stress and anxiety and staff churn. Also, in under these conditions, productivity and profitability will also be affected.

A policy framework and culture that has a net positive impact on an employee's wellbeing will not only assist in ensuring the existing workforce remains productive, it is also one that is most likely to be suitable for employment of people with existing conditions.

Rio Tinto recognises that sustainable growth will occur in regions where residents are experiencing optimal health and access to relevant, quality medical services; as well as in areas of economic prosperity and depth in skills and education. We work collaboratively with local shires and WA Country Health to address gaps in the system, forming cross-sector partnerships to provide solutions.

In particular Rio Tinto addresses issues relating to the availability of medical services, particularly specialist and allied health services, and affordability and accessibility of medical services. We also support on the ground health related initiatives such as the development of the Paraburdoo Men's Shed, youth programmes and providing in kind accommodation for counselling services.

Rio Tinto is committed to improving the work conditions for our employees with a focus on fatigue management, strategies for remote living, flexible fly in/out rosters and improved services in residential towns and FIFO communities. We have a highly skilled team of health, community and HR experts, as well as access to a range of external professionals, who work to improve mental health support for our employees and their families.

Many of the health and safety strategies and programs that Rio Tinto has implemented, work to enhance access, participation and engagement in employment for people with, or who develop mental health conditions these include:

- Wellness programmes targeting fatigue management, sleep screening, health risk assessments, health campaigns and social activities
- An employee assistance program which offers independent, complimentary and confidential counselling services to employees and their families
- Health insurance assistance in the form of a medical subsidy
- Family engagement opportunities such as FIFO family visits to site, family recreation passes
- Support for our workers in different cultural groups e.g. the East Pilbara Aboriginal Employment Health Initiative; and
- Policies and Procedures i.e. Bullying Policy, Alcohol and Drug Policy

DSL Mental Health Strategy Pilot Project

DSL is currently preparing a tailored, fully integrated mental health strategy to pilot over a three-year period from late 2011.

This pilot project presents a unique opportunity to look at mental health in a mining workforce and to identify and address organisational factors which might contribute to reduced mental health.

The project will draw together theoretical knowledge, hard evidence and practical experiences to develop initiatives to be incorporated into the organisation and become a robust part of its culture.

The pilot project aims to bring a more holistic approach to mental health care, to ensure its inclusion in induction and training programs and to integrate mental health into OH&S policies and practices.

The DSL project comprises four phases – Commitment, Consultation, Engagement and Maintenance – followed by a well-defined evaluation and review process. Expected outcomes are:

- Workplace will be much more “mental health friendly”
- Employees will be better able to recognise mental health problems in themselves and each other
- Employees will have better access to mental health support when needed

The expected long-term benefits to DSL of implementing this integrated mental health strategy are:

- Improved morale
- Increased workforce stability with higher retention rates
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased Indigenous participation and retention
- Improved status as a preferred employer
- Improved risk identification and management
- Reduced safety and other incidents
- Better integration of OH&S policies and procedures
- Improved production and profitability

One preparatory step has been to collect base line data by completion of the UK HSE Management Standards analysis tool. Dampier Salt is currently engaging the Lake MacLeod workforce in a process of understanding the results for the site, which has highlighted a number of areas of relative best practice, as well as areas of weakness.

Some 37% of areas measured indicated performance at or better than 80% of organisations examined. These areas of strength included realistic work expectations and task planning, clarity of work responsibilities and on-the-job peer support. Capturing the processes that contribute to these outcomes will then be communicated to other Rio Tinto businesses.

At the other end of the scale, some 14% of areas measured indicated urgent action is required. Examples of opportunities for improvement that have already been identified

include more training for front-line supervisors, more access to line management, and improved means for accessing flexible work practices.

Conclusion

Governments, health professionals, private industry and the wider community have a common interest and each has an important role to play in addressing mental health, so that people with a mental illness are better supported to participate in the workplace.

Rio Tinto has achieved some success with reactive support programmes, however believes this is not enough. While Rio Tinto's proactive mental health strategies are only in their initial stages, they are the first step towards achieving better outcomes for our employees through supporting them to increase their resilience to mental illness, or to manage their illnesses in a more integrated way.

In seeking a collaborative approach to change, Rio Tinto will be looking to other partners to assist in areas such as:

- Increasing community awareness, to assist in removing the stigma associated with mental illnesses, making it easier for employers to have the required conversations. In particular, opportunities in regional Australia, through television and radio campaigns;
- Provision of additional support to increase the number of occupational therapists and clinical psychologists available to provide expert support to employers;
- Provision of additional support for health professionals to reside in regional Australia, to ensure the required level of high quality face to face contact can occur where and when it is needed;
- Sponsorship of conferences / workshops where specialists can talk to employers, as well as where employers can share best practices.

We recognise it will take time to strengthen the capacity of our mental health programs and their success will require our continuing effort and collaboration of our workforce.

By investing in the promotion, prevention and early intervention of metal illness it works towards our goal of having a net positive impact on the wellbeing of all our employees.