



The Standing Committee on Regional Australia will inquire into and report on the use of 'fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia, with specific reference to:

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.*

**My submission refers to the following terms of reference:**

- the effect of a non-resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community wellbeing, services and infrastructure;
- costs and benefits for companies, and individuals, choosing a FIFO/DIDO workforce as an alternative to a resident workforce;

I am a Wangkamarra Koori from New South Wales and I work in Indigenous community development as a manager, researcher and academic in Broome and the West Kimberley. My partner of over 20 years was born and grew up in Broome. Her mother was a Nyikina woman from the Fitzroy River and her father was a Timorese hard hat pearl diver. I have lived in Broome and the West Kimberley for over 20 years, much of that time in remote Aboriginal communities. I have raised two children in Broome and I am recognised as a grandfather many times over through my extensive extended Indigenous family network throughout the region.

I am very concerned about the current and potential exponential increase in negative impacts from FIFO workers on the social, cultural and economic fabric of our Broome community. Broome is a much loved and internationally recognised tourist destination. There has been a great deal of sunk cost investment into the tourism industry in terms of the build and natural environment; exotic past; the training of local people and the adjustments that local Aboriginal people have been making over the past 20 years to incorporate tourism into the psyche of local people.

Broome is already under stress. There is already insufficient accommodation in town for people who were born and raised here. The state housing department has started kicking long term residents out of their family homes to make way for new people coming into town. For example,

for over 20 years my sister-in-law established her yard, raised her children and now often takes care of her grandchildren and many other peoples grandchildren in her yard yet she has been told to vacate her home because she 'earns too much'. The fact is she is a 55 year old Indigenous woman, suffering with health issues and has 5 to 10 years of working life remaining. She has worked in the community in Indigenous health for over 30 years and there is no way she will ever afford to buy her own home, and due to poor health her salary could terminate at any time. She is unable to secure private housing and will not be able to afford private housing, if she can find it, when she stops working. Her youngest daughter still lives at home and she provide accommodation to many who are transient helping them to get established and functional so that they can participate independently in the wider society. She would be 'better off' being unemployed or working for less however her experience and training have made her a vital component in progressing Indigenous health in the region. There are many stories in Broome about the crisis local families are experiencing regarding housing and the tsunami of FIFO predicted to service industrialisation of the Kimberley has only just began.

The Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WACCI) claim that mining is driving the economy may have some justification however I am concerned about the poor workplace practices and destructive mining camp environments where truth is suppressed by confidentiality clauses workers are required sign in order to get the job. The requirement for workers to sign confidentiality clauses as part of mining workers agreements removes access to the type of fair treatment and justice Australians expect as a fundamental human rights. The truth regarding the extent of the poor social experiences of workers is suppressed by the contractual legalisation of restrictive company policies. There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates international FIFO workers have even less protection from exploitation and human rights violations than domestic workers.

The CFMEU is quite right to expect to be able to treat the workers camp as part of the worksite. There is no rational argument that the rooms that workers use while on the remote site are in any way homely. This is particularly evident in the situation known as 'hotelling' (by definition not a personal home) where a worker does not have exclusive use of a room as it is shared with other workers on different shifts and workers do not return to the same room each trip. Once a worker

has left home to go to work i.e. left to travel to the airport then he/she is the responsibility of the employer until they return home at the end of the trip. All of the time they are away from home they are the responsibility of the company, this includes the time they are not on shift in the workers camp. I note the Fair Work Act section 493 explicitly protects the privacy of individual workers by distinguishing between work sites and private residences. A FIFO work camp is clearly not the workers private residence, any attempt by the WACCI to claim that it is, is an attempt to manipulate an understanding of the law to further disadvantage workers rights and wellbeing.

Where accommodation is provided as part of an employment package the standard of that accommodation must reach basic minimum standards. Unions have traditionally played a role in establishing and maintaining minimum standards for workers for companies to comply with. There are stories around Australia and locally in Broome about the overcrowding of accommodation for both migrant workers on 457 visas and FIFO domestic workers. The usual health regulations regarding the number of adults living in a single dwelling seems to be over locked.

The Broome community have raised genuine concerns about the wide range of social issues that have impacted on other communities in the past from the influx of large numbers of workers recreating and/or living in town. Woodside has responded by announcing that all workers will be restricted to the site. Former Secretary of the CFMEU, Kevin Reynolds made the point that these men in the camp are workers, they are not prisoners and are free to visit Broome any time they like.

There is a huge impact on regional towns due to the intransient nature of a FIFO workforce. The impact of resource development related FIFO workforce forces up accommodation costs so much that other industries are forced to employ a FIFO practices for workers in other industries not directly related to mining. For example, Karratha in the Pilbara residents tell stories about FIFO toilet cleaners and McDonalds workers because the cost of accommodation is so high normal service workers can no longer afford to live in the town. It appears that the Australian Government is promoting the use of FIFO workforce through the taxation system. The tax office allows corporations to deduct air travel and other FIFO costs from their tax. Therefore it is the Australian people who are paying for the resource corporations extravagant expenses flying works on transnational commutes, accommodation and meals. There is serious concern about the use of taxation to promote a potentially socially destructive process. There is a reasonable

argument to consider using those taxes to invest into regional community infrastructure, to make environments families want to live in, together.

Gary Slee former President of the Karratha Chamber of Commerce has warned the people of Broome about the detrimental effects of significant numbers of FIFO workers descending on a remote town. Mr Slee has clearly identified that FIFO culture destroys the social and cultural fabric of a community. The WA Deputy Premier Brendon Grills has acknowledged the destruction of this community from a predominantly FIFO with the allocation of over a billion dollars to the Pilbara Cities program to try and build the quality of life/liveability of Pilbara towns that have been devastated by the practice of FIFO.

Like many residents in Broome, I am extremely concerned about the negative cultural shift that will be imposed on Broome from the influence of FIFO workers. Broome is a unique multicultural tourist town built on pearling, pastoral industries, tourism and the arts. The Karratha model demonstrates the many factors regarding how a vibrant community such as Broome will be devastated if FIFO work practices become significant in the West Kimberley region. Young people in town have advised me that there has already been a rapid increase in the availability of drugs not previously common in town such as crystal meth, crack, speed and ecstasy. They have also indicated that there is an increased level of violence and aggressive behaviour at local hotels and entertainment venues.

I hear a new term 'business tourism' which is a euphemism for FIFO. I have heard people in the airline and hotel industries talk about how this new business tourism is filling a gap in other tourism shortfalls. Unfortunately the impact of FIFO workers is not benign in regards to mainstream tourism in fact it is clearly detrimental. The high visibility and often loud behaviour of FIFO workers devalues the holiday experience of genuine tourists. FIFO workers do not generally spend their money in the local tourist shops, restaurants or tours. FIFO is a genuine risk to our tourist industry.

The FIFO model may have some applicability to providing employment in remote mine locations, however there is no place for this type of employment practice near established rural

and remote cities and towns. I urge the committee to make strong recommendations to protect the social, cultural, physical/environmental and economic integrity of our country communities. County communities perform a vital role in populating our country; we have a right to a quality of life that is not diminished for the sake of providing city folk with FIFO employment.

Yours faithfully,

Ian Perdrisat