

Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Regional Australia  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Inquiry into the use of ‘fly-in, fly-out’ workforce practices in regional Australia**

The issue of fly-in, fly-out workforce practices is one of great relevance to Western Australia and has significant implications for the economic, social and physical health of our community. In order to fully understand and respond to the impact that this expanding industry has on the community, it is vital to carefully consider both the positive and negative effects the industry creates, particularly in relation to fly-in, fly-out work practices.

The Australian resources industry provides many economic benefits, as outlined in the Chamber of Minerals and Energy report (2012). Resource companies provide a range of employment opportunities, attracting workers to remote and regional areas; enabling resource companies to respond to ever changing labour requirements; enabling many resource projects to be viable; offering benefits to families across the state and nation; and providing a choice of lifestyle.

However, there is evidence that the fly-in, fly-out lifestyle may have a significant negative impact on workers physical and mental health, which has the potential to cause a range of short-term and long-term health and social harms. Evidence suggests that in certain situations the health of the worker’s children can be affected (Dockery, Li & Kendall, 2009), along with the partners of these workers as they find it difficult to adjust to work related departures and returns, disruptions to their social life, and associated feelings of loneliness (Kaczmarek and Sibbel, 2008).

The ongoing expansion of the fly-in, fly-out workforce in our State means it is more important than ever to understand and be prepared to respond to the impact of fly-in, fly-out on people’s health. These issues include (but are not limited to) the following.

- The use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Poor diet and physical inactivity, overweight/obesity, which can lead to a range of chronic disease.
- Increased incidence of sexually transmitted infections.
- Mental health issues.
- Work-related injury and illness.

Furthermore it is important to consider the broader impact the industry has on both the host and home communities, which include the (but are not limited to) following.

- Access and delivery of health and other services.
- The cost of living.

- The shortage of housing, such as in the Pilbara.
- Family stress leading to family breakdown.

To better understand the impact of fly-in, fly-out occupations on workers, their families and communities (both positive and negative) and to develop appropriate responses to these, it is important that independent freely available research be conducted. There is speculation that research funded by the resources sector is unviable, particularly as the results are often not made available to the public or for use by other organisations (e.g. stakeholders, researchers, regional government) (Solomon 2008). This perception could be addressed through the support by resource companies for independent and transparent research.

Independent research would enable the objective gathering of evidence in many areas (Solomon 2008), such as the impact of:

- Fly-in, fly-out systems on workers, families, children and communities.
- The resources industry on Indigenous employment.
- The resources industry on other industries.
- Resource companies on decision making processes and human rights.
- Resource companies on regional and community development

PHAA WA Branch recommends that the Inquiry carefully consider the impact of the fly-in, fly-out workforce on the health of workers, the host and home communities, and put in place processes for research to gather evidence to measure the impact of this industry. This information should then be used to re-orientate, develop and deliver appropriate programs and services that meet the health and social needs of the communities

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our concerns to the *Inquiry into the fly-in, fly-out workforce practices in regional Australia*. We look forward to the opportunity for PHAA to be involved in working with other key stakeholders, including the mining industry to develop practical solutions to address these concerns.

Jonine Jancey

## Terms of reference

1. the extent and projected growth in FIFO/DIDO work practices, including in which regions and key industries this practice is utilised;
2. costs and benefits for companies, and individuals, choosing a FIFO/DIDO workforce as an alternative to a resident workforce;
3. **the effect of a non-resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community wellbeing, services and infrastructure;**
4. **the impact on communities sending large numbers of FIFO/DIDO workers to mine sites;**
5. long term strategies for economic diversification in towns with large FIFO/DIDO workforces;
6. key skill sets targeted for mobile workforce employment, and opportunities for ongoing training and development;
7. **provision of services, infrastructure and housing availability for FIFO/DIDO workforce employees;**
8. **strategies to optimise FIFO/DIDO experience for employees and their families, communities and industry;**
9. potential opportunities for non-mining communities with narrow economic bases to diversify their economic base by providing a FIFO/DIDO workforce;
10. current initiatives and responses of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments; and
11. any other related matter.

### **Public Health Association of Australia (WA) Branch**

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia and works to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. PHAA seeks better population health outcomes based on prevention, the social determinants of health and equity principles. We are a national organisation comprising around 1,700 individual members and representing over 40 professional groups concerned with the promotion of health at a population level.

As the leading public health advocacy group, PHAA aims to drive better health outcomes through sound, population-based policy and vigorous advocacy by:

- Advancing a caring, generous and equitable Australian society
- Promoting and strengthening public health research, knowledge, training and practice
- Promoting a universally healthy and sustainable environment across Australia, including tackling global warming, environmental change and a sustainable population
- Promoting universally accessible and health promoting primary health care and hospital services; and complementary health and community workforce training and development
- Promoting universal health literacy
- Supporting health promoting settings, including the home, as the norm
- Promoting the PHAA as a vibrant living model of its vision and aims
- Assisting other countries in our region to protect the health of their populations, and to advocate for trade policies that enable them to do so.

## **References**

- Dockery A, Li J, Kendall G. 2009. Parents work patterns and adolescent mental health. *Social Science & Medicine*, vol 68 :(4)689-698.
- Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA Inc. 2012. A matter of choice: Capturing the FIFO opportunity in Pilbara communities. Perth, Western Australia.
- Kaczmarek E, Sibbel A. 2008. The psychosocial well-being of children from Australian military and fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) mining families. *Community, Work & Family*, vol 11: (3)297-312.
- Solomon F, Katz E, Lovel R. 2008. Social dimensions of mining: Research policy and practice challenges for the minerals industry in Australia. *Resources Policy*, vol 33: 142-149.