



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

ra.reps@aph.gov.au

Sydney 7 October 2011

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Dear Sir,

RE: SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AUSTRALIA ENQUIRY INTO FIFO AND DIDO WORK PRACTICES.

THE ISSUE

The concept and practice of FIFO and DIDO are neither new nor uncommon in the Australian social and geographic context. Every Member of the Australian Parliament, (with the one exception of the local Member for Canberra), Fly In and Fly back Out to their constituencies constantly. Every commuter who drives from the mortgage belts of our metropolitan centres, to their CBD's is practicing DIDO every working day.

With the relatively recent widespread coverage of this vast country by fast internet access and fast travel, many professional and creative workers are choosing to centre themselves in regional Australia, and use teleconferencing and FIFO arrangements to find a better balance between lifestyle and work pressures.

On the other hand, there has been an unprecedented growth over the past few years in the numbers of workers being employed in regional and remote areas where the mineral, resources, LNG and other extractive industries are establishing more and more new projects.

With ABARES predicting the level of investment in major new projects over the next few years to be five times the national average over the past thirty, the number of individual workers, their families and the affected communities will continue to grow, but at an even greater rate.

With the development of new projects, and the continuing expansion of others, the demand for workers in remote areas is extreme. Super-inflated wage rates is the obvious mechanism for attracting the requisite workers, and is generally seen as "compensation" for the undue hardships imposed by the standard accommodation facilities provided.

TEKTUM LTD
ACN 143 148 181

502/19A Boundary Street, Rushcutters Bay, NSW 2011, Australia
Tel: +61 2 9331 1121 **Fax:** +61 2 8003 9037
Email: info@tektum.com.au

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TEKTUM is of the opinion however, that FIFO and DIDO are symptoms of the malaise being felt by townships close to these mine sites, (but not obviously benefiting from them), not the cause. Mine operators have traditionally adopted an understandably pragmatic response in building these camps, populated with the dreaded 'dongers', as close to the mine site as is practical. In allowing them to do so, Council's may be inadvertently contributing to the very problem they wish to see addressed, rather than facilitating the rapid but inevitable social change the mining industries bring to their door.

With a growing demand from the mine operators themselves (to counteract ever increasing wage pressures); FIFO workers and their families (to reduce social exclusion); and regional communities and their elected representatives (to benefit from the mining generated wealth), the establishment of this Enquiry is both timely and well considered.

THE CURRENT RESPONSE

There appears to be a growing voice in regional Australia for "something to be done about FIFO". Often it would appear that the loudest criticisms are coming from those best placed to actually do something about it – local Council's. With the explosion in demand for FIFO workers recently, it would appear that many local Councils have been caught somewhat 'flat-footed' in their response to the development of mining accommodation facilities. Often, these "camps" are ill conceived, poorly planned and appallingly serviced in terms of basic social and community infrastructure, often leading to the headline grabbing stories inevitable when large groups of well paid, hard working but bored and socially disconnected people are overcrowded into uncomfortable quarters.

Placing these ill planned "camps" out of town, and away from the existing infrastructure is almost certain to heighten the sense of social displacement, as these workers commute in and out of these camps, leaving their families hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away.

While there is an obvious gap in the level of social and community infrastructure between the outer suburbs of our major centres, and the more populous, and perhaps more affluent inner suburbs, there is not the apparent schism which is fracturing many of the regional communities affected by FIFO and DIDO work practices, and it is this extreme "have's and have not's" feeling which appears to be fuelling a lot of the disquiet.

Notable exceptions to these urban planning disasters are to be found, in places like Copabella in Queensland's Bowen basin, where well planned and executed support villages are being delivered on the edge of the existing towns. The success of some of these villages is such that the towns have grown around them, to the extent that they are now closer to the centre of town, than the fringe. Organisations such as The MAC are to be applauded for identifying these issues and investing heavily in more appropriate facilities.

THE TEKTUM RESPONSE

Tektum designs and manufactures in Australia an innovative range of architecturally customised, sustainable, safe and affordable ready-made housing. When installed **HOUSE2.0** looks and feels like a traditionally built home. **HOUSE2.0**'s key differentiator is the ability to quickly provide quality housing into areas with skills shortages. The key innovation with **HOUSE2.0** are the design mechanisms which allow a full sized house to be transported in standard sized shipping containers, then merely unfolded on site, with all services and finishes in place. The modularity of **HOUSE2.0** allows **TEKTUM** to constantly produce the same elements - the final layout of the house is a question of shipping the right mix of elements. This generates economies of scale through strategic procurement, manufacturing efficiency, and controlled quality.

Coupling the quality, affordability and speed of assembly on site, with a well executed urban planning response will ensure that these regional towns are seen as attractive communities to which workers might relocate their families:

- more FIFO workers will choose to relocate their families to the regional towns
- those regional towns will have greater population (and revenue) bases on which to build even better social and community infrastructure
- the greater levels of social and community infrastructure that the additional (family) populations will support (from schools and shops to golf courses and clubs) will in turn add to the attraction of the towns, for otherwise FIFO workers

Organisations such as UPlan Landscape Architecture, based in North Queensland, understand the rapid urban and infrastructure changes required to cope with such sudden and dramatic growth. Equally however, they understand that the mine, and the growth it brings, may not last forever, and are master-planning their villages for life after the mines. Tektum has invested significant resource into designing the quality and feel of a traditional home for today, as well as engineering the unique 'flat-pack' approach to transport and deployment which will allow these villages to be easily 'future proofed', by removing and redeploying any number of the homes, to create urban environments with more Regionally acceptable housing densities.

TEKTUM sees a future where quality, affordable housing married with quality urban design and proactive community representation can help create sustainable, enjoyable and liveable communities, to support and benefit from the unprecedented boom in regional Australia.

SUBMISSION

TEKTUM wishes to make this submission to the Enquiry as a matter of opinion. **TEKTUM** has a commercial interest in the provision of a better standard of accommodation for FIFO workers through the design, manufacture and sales of its **HOUSE2.0** ready-made housing product manufactured in Australia.

For any further inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,

Nicolas Perren
Managing Director