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Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

Fly-in fly-out work practices

WEDNESDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2011

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AUSTRALIA**

Wednesday, 2 November 2011

Members in attendance: Mr Crook, Mr Haase, Ms Livermore, Mr McCormack, Mr Sidebottom and Mr Windsor

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To 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:

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

WITNESSES

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BURGESS, Mr Mark Anthony, Chief Executive Officer, Police Federation of Australia**Committee met at 9:50**

CHAIR (Mr Windsor): Welcome. We appreciate your attendance. You are the first witness in this inquiry. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I advise you that this hearing is a legal proceeding of the parliament and, therefore, has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. These proceedings are being broadcast and televised on the internet. Mark, thank you for your submission. Would you like to make some introductory comments and then we will ask questions?

Mr Burgess: Thank you, Chair. I might just elaborate on a few points that have come to my attention post our submission. I am sure the committee would be aware that the Police Federation of Australia represents the professional industrial interests of Australia's 56,000 police officers, so it would come as no surprise that I have spoken to a number of police officers in your electorates over the last several weeks about this very issue. PFA has not taken a position either in favour or against the notion of fly-in, fly-out or drive-in, drive-out workforces. But, as I said, in preparing for today's hearing I have taken the opportunity to discuss the inquiry not only with a large number of members who work in remote mining locations, such as north-west Western Australia, but also with members who work in locations where a large number of family members of those workers are domiciled, particularly around the Central Queensland coastal areas.

Whilst most of my evidence has been obtained anecdotally, the information has been provided by members actually on the ground. Regardless of which part of the country information comes from, there are a number of recurring issues. I am sure they would be similar issues not just for policing but for a number of other services in these communities.

The main issue is obviously the difficulty in attracting and retaining police and, as I said, other essential service workers in those locations. Police numbers in many of these locations are a major issue. I am advised that research being undertaken in Western Australia alone indicates in a number of areas that police numbers are down by 15 to 20 per cent whilst, at the same time, calls for services have increased enormously in those areas. Part of the problem with police numbers is that in many locations no-one is exactly aware of how many people are drawing on the town services at any one time. There have been a number of suggestions in both Western Australia and, in particular, Queensland that police should also be employed on a fly-in, fly-out or drive-in, drive-out basis, which may alleviate some of those problems.

I am aware that research is being undertaken in both Western Australia and Queensland regarding such proposals. In fact, I have spoken to some of the researchers and I would be more than happy to provide the committee with contact details of those people, if you so wish.

If there is a view that fly-in, fly-out for police may be appropriate, I am advised that one place where such a practice could be trialled is on Barrow Island, off the Western Australian coast. I am told that Chevron are currently building a police facility on that island and that there will be two police officers stationed there for periods of 12 months at a time whilst the rest of the workforce will be on a fly-in, fly-out basis, two weeks on and two weeks off.

Another issue is the difficulty police and their families have in finding reasonable, affordable accommodation, which I am sure is the norm for others. Obviously, there is very little infrastructure in many of these communities and many police officers' families do not want to relocate there. The cost of rental is extremely prohibitive and whilst accommodation is by and large provided by the employer, the rental costs and accommodation pose serious budgetary problems for those employers.

There are a range of other cost-of-living inhibitors, of which I am sure you are aware. A few of my colleagues who work up in north-west Western Australia spent last week at CHOGM in Perth. In my discussions with them they joked yesterday that it was great to be in Perth and be able to buy a newspaper and a cup of coffee in the morning and actually get some change, as opposed to what it would normally cost at home in parts of north-west Western Australia.

I am sure the committee has read numerous other submissions about a range of social issues that have been raised and many of those social issues have been raised with me by my members. I am sure you are aware that probably more than half of the fly-in fly-out workforces are males aged between 20 and 40. They are bored; they are lonely. Police, generally, in smaller, regional communities—which I am sure you would be well aware of—know the people in their own patch and who they might need to keep a closer eye on. It is called community policing. In these communities it is the unknown factor. With an ever-changing group of residents it is hard to keep track of who is who in the community and who might need closer attention.

I am also advised it appears that a number of companies and contractors have a mindset of, 'We don't care what happens after-hours as long as they show up for work and don't misbehave in the camps.' A number of my colleagues also suggest that the old concept of 'one fight; next flight' does not seem to exist in many locations nowadays and perhaps this is because so many companies and contractors are desperate for staff and they are prepared to turn a blind eye to such behaviour. So it is clearly a very complex issue. If I could just start by saying I commend the committee on the decision to inquire into such an important matter and I offer any support the Police Federation might be able to give in your efforts over the ensuing 12 months or more.

CHAIR: If you are able to give us the contact details of those people who are doing research that would be handy for the committee.

Mr HAASE: Mark, it is great to see you here. Thank you. I am terrified by your suggestion but, by the same token, I know full well that many police officers would very much like to fly-in fly-out. I suggest that it would be disastrous for community policing but a bonus for police families because relocation is a major problem. If you speak to any long-term spouse of an acting police officer they will tell you about the constant shifting—the upheaval of kids from school, the disruption of social contact and so on and so forth—but it is part of policing in regional Australia. The local police officer who comes to town and is part of the community for a period of time is part of the glue that keeps that population together. I am frightened by what you suggest but not surprised to hear it being said.

Once again, it would seem to me that it is police departments having the revenue to create the ambience of good housing, good rosters et cetera and support for family, just as is the case for companies that want local residence. I wish I could find a question in here, Chair. It is a message that I hope will enter our report that we need to do more to encourage local residence, not facilitate the absence of local residence. There are a whole range of processes that have been mooted to me. One is the FBT and the suggestion that if the cost of flying in and flying out were not able to be written off to production—this is from the mining sector—it would be less attractive. Have you contemplated—see, there is a question, Chair—what the impact would be on the police department funding if the cost of transporting police officers in and out of towns was not able to be written off?

Mr Burgess: We have not and I am not sure how in-depth is the research being undertaken into those issues at the moment, whether it delves into that area. To go back to your earlier statement, the issue about community policing in our original submission was one of the key points we made—that it is very difficult. When you are working in locations where there is very little infrastructure and very little in the way of other social services, where you have family and your wife, your husband or your partner may have previously had reasonably good employment in a capital city somewhere and you then find yourself in one of these remote locations where there is no work for the partner, I can understand police officers asking, 'Why can't I be domiciled in a major city where my family wants to live and I fly in and fly out?' I totally agree it has a whole range of other ramifications attached to it, which people really need to think seriously about, but I can understand members asking the question.

Ms LIVERMORE: You talk about the difficulties of using traditional community policing methods in some of these locations. Is any work being done or have any initiatives been developed with police to overcome some of those difficulties or new methods trying to engage with the companies of the camps?

Mr Burgess: I could not tell you all of what is happening on the ground. One of the things raised with me is that there are obviously people coming into and moving out of these communities often with interesting criminal histories. Police are not always aware of that until they have interaction with the person. While I may not want to give details here on evidence, I have been given some interesting examples of how those things have unfolded. There is a whole range of issues in that as well. One raised with me in the area you have talked about is the lack of volunteers in some of the other community activities such as rural fire brigades and those sorts of areas. When the bulk of the community do not actually reside there, they are not likely to become volunteers to work within the community itself. As the member for Kalgoorlie said earlier, police often find themselves to be the glue that binds the fabric of the community together and if they are one of the few people who are domiciled there on a permanent basis, it falls on their shoulders to do so.

Mr CROOK: If the police were to be a fly-in fly-out workforce, are you assuming this would be just to mining communities? It would be very hard policy to implement site-specific. I would suggest to you to do that in remote Aboriginal communities would be of massive detriment to the communities. Police go to those places for 12 months stints. They build up a rapport with the communities and know what is going on on the ground. If you were to have a fly-in fly-out arrangement, I think they would lose touch. Do you see a problem with implementing a policy like this, fly-in fly-out, it being to the detriment of some communities but to the benefit of others and the police?

Mr Burgess: I am not suggesting that it happen. What I am saying is that it has been suggested and there is research being undertaken in two parts of the country—one in Western Australia and one in Queensland. I do agree with you that there is a range of ramifications, should we proceed down that path. Has it been suggested in Indigenous communities in the past? It has been, but it has not happened.

Mr CROOK: Good.

Mr SIDEBOTTOM: Thank you—you are able to help us tease out things we do not readily think of. To what extent do you understand are your association and the police forces themselves part and parcel of the negotiation and planning of these sites and camps and relationships between some of the major proponents, and you as a major service provider for community policing? To what extent are you involved in the planning process and incorporated into it?

Mr Burgess: From a police union perspective, I am not aware that there is a lot of dialogue between the police associations, or police unions, and the mining companies. I might be proved to be wrong. I would think that most of the dialogue would be between the employer, the police department, and the mining companies. Hence, I suggested also to the committee secretariat that it would be within the interest of this committee to encourage as many police employers in states like Queensland and Western Australia, in particular, to appear before the committee. They could talk to you about a whole range of the ramifications, not least of which is the planning, including the cost implications for police departments of decisions that companies might make.

In respect of dialogue between the police associations, or police unions, and probably the police employer it is more around accommodation, allowances, infrastructure for families and those sorts of things. We do that, more often than not, with the employer as opposed to the company. We would hope and trust that the employer would be doing that sort of negotiation with the company.

Ms LIVERMORE: If fly-in fly-out became a standard feature of policing in some of these areas, would you be concerned as representatives of police that you would almost be setting up two different groups within the police force? Do you think that having two different groups within the force could create difficulties for your association or for the general cultural structure of the police force?

Mr Burgess: Before I start, the last thing I want to read on the front page of tomorrow morning's paper is that we are advocating a fly-in fly-out police force for parts of Australia. For any media listening: that is not the case. We are saying that it has been discussed, research has been done and people are putting it forward as an option for the future. It is to alleviate some of the problems we are finding around encouraging people to work in those locations and ensuring that we have sufficient numbers. I used Barrow Island earlier on, I don't know a lot about Barrow Island except what I've been able to ascertain off the internet—quite clearly, in some of those cases, if you are going to have a large workforce that works two weeks on and two weeks off and almost the only people who are permanently domiciled on the island are two police officers, you might ask whether that is an appropriate place for a fly-in fly-out arrangement for police or at least for it to be trialled. I wouldn't envisage that, even if we did get to the point of some fly-in fly-out arrangements with police officers, it would be the permanent arrangement for a handful of police officers for the rest of their policing career. It would be to alleviate some of the concerns that exist in the current situations about enticing enough police or about being able to meet fluctuating demands in policing at certain times based on the stages of the development of mining sites et cetera. Again, as I said, this is just in early discussions. Research is being undertaken, but no-one is doing anything until such time as we at least see what the research might say.

Ms LIVERMORE: We have had other submissions raising issues of antisocial behaviour and increased criminal type activity in some of the locations where there is a lot of fly-in fly-out. Some of that uses documented material, others are just making assertions. For the committee's benefit, where would you point us for information? What is the best source of information for us to corroborate some of that evidence and put some hard figures around it.

Mr Burgess: You're probably like me. I'm looking to see where I can find that information. Like yourself, I've had a number of examples given to me, very much anecdotally, about some of the antisocial behaviour. This isn't the norm, but someone said to me the other day that if you watch them getting on the plane at Perth airport to head to a mine site, it is almost like watching a group of blokes going on a football trip. That's the mentality of some. That's not to say that the mine companies and the contractors don't do a great job in trying to maintain appropriate standards and appropriate behaviour, but that's the reality as it's told to me. As to how we are going to actually confirm that in some more formal sense, I am not sure myself. I have not had a chance to read all the submissions, because there is quite a number of them on your site. Perhaps there are groups that have done some more formal work on that, or it may be that you need to engage somebody to actually undertake that sort of research.

Mr HAASE: Mark, to perhaps clarify it and to put the collective mind at ease, there is some fly-in fly-out policing being done in Western Australia already, in the mid-west of Western Australia where towns are very difficult to start and infrastructure is minimal. Geraldton has been a base for a number of fly-in fly-out officers rotating on a regular basis. So I do not think you can anticipate a headline tomorrow. My question is: do you have any process in train about or any increasing concentration in relation to companies being encouraged to do alcohol and drug testing at the workplace on either a routine or a random basis? Is there an effort by police forces to encourage that more readily?

Mr Burgess: Some of those questions might be best put to a police department, but my understanding, and the committee may correct me if I am wrong, is that I thought at most mine sites compulsory drug and alcohol testing was now the norm. I say this as someone who 25 years ago, before becoming a police officer, worked 10 years as an underground coalminer, so I understand the rationale behind the notion of drug and alcohol testing in such a dangerous occupation. But I can only say that my colleagues do tell me that some of the other antisocial behaviour after hours suggests that perhaps people may be able to elude that. I do not know whether that is the case or not. But you would think that if someone were partying all hours of the night on drugs and alcohol they would be picked up at the mine site the next day in some form of test. I am assuming that tests are done in most of these sites. I would be surprised if they were not.

Mr HAASE: I was alluding to the new chemicals that are being used as recreational stimulants and to the difficulty in detection. To your knowledge it is not something to be aware of?

Mr Burgess: Again, I think those are probably questions that you might want to put to the mine owners as well as the mining companies and the mining unions.

Mr HAASE: Thanks, Mark.

CHAIR: As there are no further questions, thank you, Mark, for taking the time to give evidence today. You might be able to provide that material in terms of the research. You will be sent a copy of the transcript of your evidence to which you can make corrections, if there are any. We do thank you for the evidence that you have given and, on a broader level, for the work that your people do right across the nation. We all respect and admire the work that they do on our behalf. Thank you for coming.

FINDLATER-SMITH, Ms Margaret, President, National Council of Women of Australia

[10:14]

CHAIR: Welcome. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise you that this is a legal proceeding of the parliament and therefore has the same standing as proceedings of the respective houses. These proceedings are being broadcast. Thank you for taking the time to be here. Would you like to give a summary of your evidence before we ask you some questions?

Ms Findlater-Smith: Yes, thank you very much, I would like to do that. The National Council of Women of Australia is an umbrella organisation for women's NGOs. We have councils in each state, we have about 350 affiliated women's organisations and we have about 500 individual members. We have existed since 1896 and have been instrumental in advocating for improvements to the lives of women and children. As our concern is the wellbeing of women and children, we have an interest in the impact of fly-in fly-out on families and, in particular, those women and children. We appreciate the opportunity to present a submission and to speak at this hearing.

Our submission points to some issues of concern, but I would like to further highlight other matters. My knowledge is focused on the towns of the Pilbara, where I lived for three years just as the concept of fly-in fly-out was beginning. No-one could have foreseen the enormous impact it was going to have on those towns.

Karratha was established to provide a stable workforce for Cliffs Robe River, Hamersley Iron and Dampier Salt. It was a small town which grew. When I went there in 1985, it had a population of about 10,000 people. There were very few facilities in the town, but most of the small businesses evolved because the wives wanted to work and therefore they opened small businesses. That is what kept the town together. Most people lived in subsidised housing either for mining companies or for federal or state government. So everyone in the town apart from business owners—and there were some business owners who came there individually—had subsidised housing, subsidised air conditioning and all sorts of benefits of living in a remote area.

The population of Karratha has not changed. It is about the same now, probably 40 years after it was established, as it was then. It is about 11,000. This indicates that it is not growing very much. The service industries that came in also helped the towns of Dampier, Wickham and Roebourne. Roebourne had its own problems, mainly Indigenous and mainly alcohol. But that has been improved. The change has come about with the shift to fly-in fly-out workers. Now it is understood there are 10,000 workers flying in and flying out of Karratha. That is a huge number of people impacting on a town of 10,000 or 11,000 people. The fly-in fly-out workers do not pay rates. They do not contribute anything to or spend anything in the town apart from the taverns. They do not form part of any of the sporting teams of which there are now very few. They do not have children they send to school and they do not buy anything. Therefore, they are not part of the community and do not become part of the community. So you have huge camps of single men living on the outskirts of a town with no engagement whatsoever with the community.

Businesses in town are having enormous problems getting staff. They cannot afford to compete with the mining companies, who do have staff in town. Rent is about \$2,000 a week. You cannot afford to subsidise your employees if you are running a small dress shop at that sort of level. So they do not get staff and therefore eventually businesses close and the town drops down again.

Community facilities are old and need improving. There is no accommodation for tourists, and tourism was a big thing in the north-west. All this accommodation is taken up by the mining companies. All the hire cars are lent out to the mining companies. So you have a stagnant town with very little in it and not much for the local people. The impact of that on the women is enormous because they have got to live in the town and they are not getting many facilities. There is, I understand, a move which is called growing the Pilbara. There is a dream that in 2020 there will be 50,000 people in Karratha. That is terrifying because more than half of those will be fly-in fly-out still not engaging with the community.

The problems with fly-in fly-out are not confined to the Pilbara. There are many small mining towns in other parts of Western Australia having problems with a huge influx of workers. The impact it is having on the towns' volunteers who run the fire brigades and the ambulance services is also enormous because the mines draw on those community services to service the mines. You have a small local ambulance service called out for all sorts of things at the mine. They might get a small contribution but not very much, and they just cannot service the town. If you have a small town of 150 people trying to run an ambulance service, a fire brigade and other ancillary services as well as service a mine, it just does not work. Most of them are farmers anyhow.

On the other hand, fly-in fly-out families have their own problems. Often the wives are living in isolation on the outskirts of Perth or in small country towns. There are difficulties managing isolation and then having the husband return for a week and go off for two weeks. There are discipline problems with their children. There are

anecdotally high rates of mental health issues and family breakdown. The turnover of the fly-in fly-out staff is very high which indicates that some of these problems might be impacting on their ability to continue working.

There is no doubt fly-in fly-out is very attractive. The income for the basic unskilled person is about \$120,000 a year. It is an opportunity to make a lot of money very quickly, but unfortunately there are no apprenticeships for the children in these towns, there are no jobs for the people working in these towns because they only hire fly-in fly-out. You have the difficulty of people wanting jobs in the towns and wanting to stay, but there are no jobs. Unless they can find alternative industries or employment, they will never grow these Pilbara towns to any appreciable size because there is no other industry. They have talked about horticulture and they have talked about agriculture; it is a very harsh climate. Trying to grow vegetables in the Pilbara is very difficult, believe me.

I am very disappointed that we are looking at an issue which is getting worse rather than better. Fly-in fly-out has not brought the big mining boom to the towns of Australia, it has brought it to the mining companies. The towns are not getting any benefits at all, but the shires are having to provide extra water and facilities, while not getting rates to cover that. We are not looking after our regular rural and remote residents, and I think we should be looking at that issue.

CHAIR: Thank you for using a community as an example. I think that paints a picture we can all get our heads around even though we may not have been to your particular area. Obviously there are different stories in different parts of the country, but you gave a very insightful snapshot of what you believe is happening in your community.

Mr HAASE: I am mightily impressed with your submission and your delivery. When were you in Karratha?

Ms Findlater-Smith: From 1985 to 1988 I was a shipping master at Karratha.

Mr HAASE: I lived there for 20 years.

Ms Findlater-Smith: It is a wonderful place to live. I loved Karratha.

Mr HAASE: Yes, beautiful. Do you have any suggestions as to how we may progress in a practical way to have the outcomes you suggest in your submission? You suggest primarily more support for towns and less advantageous benefits for those flying in flying out. Do you have any suggestions for legislation or regulations that may change this practice?

Ms Findlater-Smith: You could do it in one stroke—cut out the 100 per cent tax rebate on fly in, fly out. If there is no tax benefit the mining companies will think of another way.

Mr HAASE: Do you have in your mind any idea of what the companies might do—those notorious bean counters?

Ms Findlater-Smith: I think they would have to take another look at what they are doing and how they are doing it, and perhaps look to re-establishing a more stable workforce in some of these towns. The difficulty is that it is very advantageous to do what they are doing. There is a place for fly in, fly out; I have no doubt about that. If there is a very short-term project such as laying a railway line or laying pipelines, I do not have any problem with fly in, fly out. It makes a lot of sense. It is the impact on the established towns that is the big issue—not in the remote areas where there is nothing and they will go away leaving, as they say, only a small footprint. It is what they are doing to the towns that exist. That is what we have to look at and see what we can do to support those towns in developing other ways of becoming established communities so that the impact of fly in, fly out is not as important and they do not have to be used as bases for these camps. Give them something else.

They used to talk about a university in the Pilbara. There is a TAFE in Karratha, but that is about all. It is frightening when you hear that they fly in, fly out cleaners at the high school because they cannot do it any other way. Tax is probably the way to go—a better tax deal for people living there but not such a good tax deal for the mining companies to fly in, fly out.

Mr HAASE: You would be aware that the taxation zone rebate is paid to fly in, fly out workers and residential workers alike.

Ms Findlater-Smith: Yes, I am. That zone rebate is not a great amount. The fly in, fly out people have no costs at all. All they have to do is get themselves to the airport and then everything is taken care of. As you would be aware, the airfare from Karratha to Perth costs \$800 each way. That is a lot of money if you live there and you are not subsidised.

Mr HAASE: Have you thought of the problem of the very high cost of accommodation because of the high cost of building, and if there was any increase in the available housing stock how that would potentially devalue the capital value of the existing housing?

Ms Findlater-Smith: Yes, it would have an impact. I do appreciate that. I know it costs twice as much to build a house in the north-west as it does in Perth. There are going to be some losers and some winners, unfortunately. There needs to be something that encourages people to settle there, to become part of the community and not just working for a mining company or working for the government. You can only do that by giving benefits to encourage people not only to go there but to stay there. Everything is expensive. A very ordinary hotel room is \$460 a night. No-one goes there for tourism anymore because they cannot get accommodation. It is a bit hard.

Mr HAASE: Are you aware of Premier Colin Barnett's vision for Pilbara cities? He has an idea that Karratha would possibly have a population of 50,000 by 2020. Of course there is a great deal of effort going into making that a high proportion residential population, and that is requiring diversity. It is an uphill battle but a great deal of effort is being put in by the Barnett government right now to encourage that. The old days of Sir Charles Court and the creation of Karratha in the first instance, with great taxation concessions, may be a solution that we can reapply today.

Ms Findlater-Smith: It could be done. I have seen the population projections for Growing the Pilbara 50,000 in 2020. It also grows fly in, fly out people and a lot of that 50,000 are fly in, fly out—they are not permanent residents.

Mr HAASE: Thank you Margaret—that is a valuable contribution.

CHAIR: Margaret, if I could ask a question in relation to some of your membership from farming backgrounds. Can you give us a bit of a snapshot of what issues you are seeing in terms of social stresses and family issues?

Ms Findlater-Smith: Yes. The big issues in farming areas are fuel, education and lack of medical facilities—so access to hospitals, the need to go to large regional centres or cities to get any sort of treatment and the lack of rural doctors. It is a huge issue for women, particularly women giving birth and who have to go to a large centre if there is no local hospital or the hospital has become a nursing home. Often they are away from their families. It impacts also on Indigenous women who are out of their communities, not giving birth in their land. So women do it tough. While things are starting to improve on the farm, the towns are dying. As you would know, some of the Riverina towns are dying because they have not got water. The water is being diverted. Look at towns like Leeton and small places like Gilgandra who are suffering greatly: the rice crop is no longer there, the towns have not got decent broadband, they have not got many facilities. We should be really encouraging these people to stay in the country because we need population outside the big cities.

Mr CROOK: I have a comment along the lines of what you are talking about, Margaret. I agree totally with you with respect to health services and the like. People do not leave country towns because the roads are no good. They leave because there is no hospital and there is no education and there are not all the other things that are focused around such communities.

Ms Findlater-Smith: And there are no banks.

Mr CROOK: I think you are spot on with that. The other point I want to raise is one that Barry raised. It is to do with the Pilbara Cities project in the west. I think it needs to be a broader picture, not just one that is focused on Karratha. I think all of those regional towns need to be really kicked along for the very reason that you mentioned in your last bit of commentary.

Ms Findlater-Smith: Kalgoorlie is having the same problem.

Mr CROOK: Exactly. I live in Kalgoorlie and fortunately we have got a pretty good amenity. But the Royal Flying Doctor Service still flies two patients a day—it's '1.8 patients'—out of the regional hospital. So there is still that drift to the city.

Ms Findlater-Smith: There are very small rural communities in Western Australia where suddenly a mine has appeared down the road and the town butcher closes because they will not buy meat from him and there is nothing in the town that is used apart from the local electrician, who might get a call out once. They do not use local services. The people are there, the mines are there and the workers are there but the town is not benefiting at all. There are a lot of small communities in Queensland and Western Australia with problems like that.

CHAIR: I want to follow that up. In the area that I come from there has been substantial mining for many decades. There is this enormous explosion of activity—and potential activity—that is occurring now and in some communities they are developing town camps, in a sense, for people to drive in and drive out and there is this issue of whether the mining company will use the local community for access to goods and produce et cetera. Have you had any circumstances, given those issues that you have just raised about the butcher—and the baker and the candlestick maker—not being used by the mining companies, where questions have been raised with the

companies themselves? What sort of interaction is occurring at a community level to say, 'We welcome you but we would like you to become part of our community and use our community'?

Ms Findlater-Smith: I think town community organisations do try very hard. The mines try—there is no doubt about it. I think the mining companies want to do something for the town but there is the difficulty of the transient population and the long working hours. I do not know what happened to an eight-hour day. They are working 12 hours a day and they are doing it for eight days at a time. That is a big ask, as you have got no time to do anything else. I think that the sheer size of the camps probably makes it difficult to source a lot of things locally, particularly in small country towns, which depend very much on food being trucked in anyhow. But in areas where there are facilities that they could use, they use big suppliers and big organisations like Serco, who service all of these mining camps and the detention centres. They are huge. They have the buying power. They have the facilities and they can walk in and do it, whereas maybe a small town might find it hard to get geared up to provide that. So they find that they are just an adjunct and they go along in the same old way and they gradually shrink as the population gets older because no-one new is coming into town.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. That was excellent evidence, and the submission was very good. Thank you for taking the time to come here. There will be a copy of *Hansard* sent to you and if you have any corrections please let us know. If you have any further information on this issue given the line of questioning you might like to follow up with us.

Ms Findlater-Smith: I might suggest if you are going to Karratha—and I hope you are going to Karratha—that you talk to the Soroptimist club of Karratha, who have put in an excellent submission on what happens in their town. Also you should talk to the Mayor of Port Hedland, who is a woman and can give you some very good information. They would be excellent people to speak to.

CHAIR: Thanks for that.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Crook**):

That this committee authorises publication of the transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 10:36