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The Secretary of the Committee
House Standing Committee on Regional Australia
House of Representatives
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To whom it may concern,

Submission to the House Standing Committee on Regional Australia regarding 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) and 'drive-in, drive-out' (DIDO) workforce practices in Regional Australia.

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) is the peak non-government youth organisation in Western Australia with a membership of over 300 youth service organisations, community organisations, academics, individuals and most importantly young people themselves. Established in 1980, YACWA has worked tirelessly for 30 years to deliver high-level representation and advocacy for the Western Australian youth sector and young people.

Our role is to:

- Act as a lobbying group for the non-government youth sector and Western Australian young people aged 12-25
- Provide information and support to the non-government youth sector
- Work to promote fair and positive outcomes for young people in our community
- Promote equity, equality, access and participation for young people in Western Australia
- Advocate to all levels of government on the best interests of Western Australia's young people

- Encourage the active participation of young people in identifying and dealing with issues that are important to them
- Improve youth services by exchanging ideas, information, skills and resources
- Provide a strong, united and informed voice capable of effectively advocating for the non-government youth sector and the young people with whom they work

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia is thankful for the opportunity to submit to this inquiry. Fly-in, fly-out work practices are incredibly common in Western Australia and disproportionately impact on young people in the State.

Overview

Due to the nature of the mining, oil and gas industries in Western Australia and the constant demand for regional labour fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers are an incontrovertible fact of life for the people of rural and regional Western Australia. In addressing the Committee's terms of reference In this submission The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia will focus on addressing terms of reference 3, 5 and 8 with a particular emphasis on the social impact of fly-in, fly-out workers in Western Australia.

Social impact

Fly-in fly-out work practices have many negative effects on the people involved, specifically on:

- The communities that accommodate the workers;
- The families the workers leave behind and;
- The communities they return to during their furlough.

The common understanding that FIFO work practices place undue strain on marriages and familial relationships is supported by a plethora of research that indicates working inflexible and irregular hours makes maintaining healthy parental or marital relationships increasingly difficult. Research has indicated that while the family is a typically resilient structure the partners and children of FIFO workers manage to cope with these frequent absences while still incurring significant personal cost.

A concern particularly for young Western Australians, is the trend for young, almost exclusively male workers returning to their residential communities in Perth with inflated wages, a superabundance of spare time and a significant degree of pent up stress to relieve. This often culminates

in drug and alcohol abuse and a simmering resentment existing in the wider community amongst individuals that don't have the comparable spending capacity.

In September last year the Queensland state parliament legislated to mandate social impact assessments on communities in areas near potential mining projects¹. While Queensland has made attempts to mitigate the potential impact of Fly-in Fly-out workers and the mining industry generally no such efforts have been made in Western Australia resulting in detriment for which the local communities are not prepared.

Anti-social behaviour, violence and social mayhem are often associated with young men and alcohol consumption. Statistically this statement is supported by research in both rural and metropolitan areas. However the risk of being involved in some form of male-male violence increases dramatically with the comparative level of geographic remoteness². Statistics taken from rural, regional and remote areas involved in mining indicate that:

- More than a third of local 14-19 year olds and approximately two-thirds of young people aged between 20 and 24 have experienced some form of alcohol-related violence, including physical and verbal abuse³ and;
- Certain mining towns have experienced an up to 250% increase in violent crime since the introduction of FIFO workers⁴.

The victims of this violence are frequently local young people either working in the industry or simply caught up in the desultory displays of alcohol-fuelled masculinity exacerbated by boredom, high levels of stress and feelings of isolation and social disconnectedness.

Governments must act in order to mitigate the harm caused by the sudden influx of young men into regional Western Australian communities that don't already have satisfactory social infrastructure in place to

¹ Department of Infrastructure and Planning (Qld), *Social Impact Assessment: Guideline to Preparing a social impact management plan*. <http://www.dlqp.qld.gov.au/resources/guideline/simp-guideline.pdf>

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2008), *2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, Cat. No. PHE 107*. Canberra: AIHW.

³ Williams, P. (1999), *Alcohol-related Social Disorder and Rural Youth: Part 1- Victims, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No. 140*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology

⁴ Carrington, Kerry and McIntosh, Alison and Scott, John (2010) *Globalisation, frontier masculinities and violence: booze, blokes and brawls*. *British Journal of Criminology*.

accommodate the workers' needs. Social impact assessments must form the foundation upon which any future government action is built.

The Federal and State governments must mandate compulsory social impact management plans for all proposed mining projects around the country. At the very least those plans should mirror the scheme currently in operation in Queensland since September 2010 and require⁵:

- An overall summary of the proposed project;
- A detailed list of impacts identified through investigation, research and most importantly community consultation;
 - An impact analysis that must also include harm mitigation, harm minimisation and project management strategies.
- A comprehensive review system including reporting and review mechanisms;
- A community engagement strategy that seeks to establish trust, respect and mutual understanding between the local residents and the non-resident workers and;
- Far-reaching, inclusive dispute resolution mechanisms.

General impact

Young people within the mining industry's sphere of influence are also impacted in a range of other ways crucial to the Committee's inquiry:

- Young people in rural, regional and remote areas are often presented with a dearth of recreational activities other than sport. This can lead to boredom and causes young people to feel isolated from their community.
- If a community does have a youth service provider those workers are often employed on a fly-in, fly-out basis which can make developing and maintain relationships difficult.
- Young people, particularly women, often feel marginalised and unsafe in communities with large numbers of non-local male workers.
- Young people often feel excluded from important decision-making that affects their community.

YACWA feels that the most appropriate way to address these concerns is by directly involving young people in important policy decisions. Inevitably when the voices of young people are given weight in significant discussions

⁵ Department of Infrastructure and Planning (Qld), *Social Impact Assessment: Guideline to Preparing a social impact management plan*. <http://www.dlqp.qld.gov.au/resources/guideline/simp-guideline.pdf>

the outcomes will be more beneficial to young people generally. The impact of fly-in, fly-out work practices on young people is an element of this issue that has largely been ignored in the conversation thus far. We feel the treatment of young people and the impact these work practices have on young people should be the single most important aspect of the FIFO discussion. YACWA recommends the Committee undertake extensive consultation with affected young people in areas utilising FIFO work practices and use their findings as the fundamental basis for any future policy direction in this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the inquiry into fly-in, fly-out work practices in regional Australia.

Kind regards,

Craig Comrie
Executive Officer

24 OCTOBER 2011