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**CFEMU ADDRESS TO FIFO INQUIRY**

**25 MAY 2012**

THE CFMEU WELCOMES THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS THIS COMMITTEE AND TO SPEAK OF BEHALF OF OUR MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES REGARDING THE PRACTICE OF FLY-IN, FLY-OUT (THIS INCLUDES DRIVE-IN, DRIVE-OUT).

WE ARE ALSO GRATEFUL THAT THE COMMITTEE HAS RECOGNISED THAT FLY-IN, FLY OUT (FIFO) IS A PRACTICE THAT IS MORE THAN SIMPLY A DIFFERENT WAY OF GETTING TO AND FROM WORK AND THAT IT IS HAVING CONSEQUENCES NOT ONLY FOR THE EMPLOYEES DIRECTLY INVOLVED BUT FOR THEIR PARTNERS AND FAMILIES, THE COMMUNITIES WHERE THE FIFO WORKFORCES TEMPORILY RESIDE AND FOR THE BROADER AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY. WE APPRECIATE THE EFFORTS OF THIS COMMITTEE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THAT IMPACT. YOU ARE THE FIRST PARLIAMENTARY BODY THAT WE ARE AWARE OF THAT HAS SOUGHT TO ADDRESS FIFO.

THE CFMEU HAS MEMBERS EMPLOYED IN THE FRONT LINE OF  
FIFO – THE CONSTRUCTION AND MINING INDUSTRIES IN RURAL  
AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA. WE ALSO HAVE MEMBERS WHO LIVE IN  
THE IMMEDIATE AREA AND WORK WITH FIFO WORKERS.

TOWNSHIPS SUCH AS MORANBAH AND KARRATHA COME TO MIND.  
AS SUCH OUR MEMBERS AND OFFICIALS HAVE A STORY TO TELL.

TO USE A METAPHOR, FIFO IS A BIT LIKE PATTERSON’S CURSE – AN  
INVASIVE SPECIES INTRODUCED FROM OUTSIDE AND HAVING AN  
ADVERSE IMPACT ON THE AREA IT INHABITS. AND LIKE  
PATTERSON’S CURSE TOO MUCH OF IT IS TOXIC.

CURRENTLY FIFO IS UNREGULATED AND GROWING LIKE TOPSY.

ON OUR ANALYSIS THERE IS ESSENTIALLY ONE WINNER FROM  
FIFO – THE CORPORATIONS THAT USE IT. FOR THEM IT’S  
CHEAPER THAN THE ALTERNATIVE. THE COST SAVINGS MADE  
ARE, IN PART, ATTAINED AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS.

SURE IT MAY BE ARGUED THAT THE FIFO JOBS PAY WELL. BUT  
HIGH WAGES ARE NOT A PRODUCT OF FIFO BUT RATHER A

PRODUCT OF THE SECTOR IN WHICH IT OCCURS – THE HIGH WAGE RESOURCES SECTOR. BUT WE WOULD AGREE THAT HIGH WAGES ARE AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT OF FIFO. REMOVE THE HIGH WAGES AND IT'S A SAFE BET THE LABOUR SUPPLY WILL DISAPPEAR. FURTHER, EVEN WITH HIGHER THAN AVERAGE WAGES, LABOUR TURNOVER IS ABOVE AVERAGE.

THERE ARE VARIOUS AND INTERRELATED EFFECTS OF FIFO ON THE WORK FORCE AND THEIR PARTNERS/FAMILIES, THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY.

THE STUDIES WE REFER TO IN OUR SUBMISSION, TOGETHER WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF OUR MEMBERS AND, FROM OUR OBSERVATIONS, MUCH OF THE EVIDENCE BEFORE THIS COMMITTEE, REVEAL A NUMBER OF SERIOUS PROBLEMS. SOME OF THE MORE OBVIOUS ARE:

- LONELINESS, STRESS AND DEPRESSION AMONGST WORKERS AND THEIR PARTNER/FAMILIES
- DIFFICULTY WITH COPING WITH LONG AND REGULAR PERIODS AWAY FROM HOME
- RISKS OF FATIGUE

- POOR ROSTERING
- INADEQUATE FACILITIES IN CAMPS
- ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE
- THE “FLY-OVER” EFFECT
- IMPACT OF LARGE GROUPS OF TEMPORARY WORKERS IN TOWNSHIPS – RESENTMENT, VIOLENCE, CRIME, ALCOHOL ABUSE
- IMPACT ON HOUSING COSTS IN TOWNSHIPS
- LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES TO DEAL WITH THE INFLUX OF TEMPORARY RESIDENTS
- LACK OF FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO MEET THE INCREASED COSTS OF A LARGE BUT ITINERANT WORKFORCE.
- SKILLS DEFICIT AS A RESULT OF RESOURCES CORPORATIONS FAILING TO TRAIN AND RELYING ON HIGH WAGES TO ATTRACT WORKERS TRAINED ELSEWHERE.

AND WITHIN THESE PROBLEMS WE IDENTIFY OTHERS. AN EXAMPLE FROM THE BOWEN BASIS IS WHAT MANY REGARD AS ROAD ACCIDENTS RESULTING FROM FATIGUED WORKERS DRIVING LONG DISTANCES HOME AFTER THEIR LAST SHIFT AND/OR THE RAPID INCREASE IN TRAFFIC VOLUMES ON ROADS BUILT FOR REGIONAL TRAFFIC DENSITIES.

THE LIST GOES ON.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS WE PROVIDE IN OUR SUBMISSION ARE AN ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCTIVELY ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS.

WE ARE NOT SAYING THAT FIFO MUST OR OUGHT TO BE BANNED. IT IS RECOGNISED THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THERE IS NOT A REALISTIC ALTERNATIVE, SUCH AS REMOTELY BASED CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS. AND THERE ARE TIMES WHEN A COMBINATION OF RESIDENT BASED AND FIFO MAY BE NECESSARY – DEPENDING UPON THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

ON THE OTHER HAND WE ARE OBSERVING FIFO OPERATIONS CREEPING CLOSER AND CLOSER TO MORE DENSELY POPULATED AREAS WHERE, ON ANY REASONABLE VIEW, FIFO IS NEITHER NEEDED NOR DESIRED BY WORKERS AND THE COMMUNITY.

AND WE ARE OBSERVING A LACK OF GENUINE EFFORT BY CORPORATIONS TO WORK WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY TO ATTRACT WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO THE AREA.

UNREGULATED AND UNCONTROLLED FIFO IS BAD NEWS  
ALLROUND.

UNDOUBTEDLY MORE AND MORE COMMUNITIES WILL STAND UP  
TO OPPOSE IT. IF THAT MEANS OPPOSING THE VERY PROJECT  
ITSELF THEN THAT MAY WELL BE THE CASE, PARTICULARLY IF  
THE ALTERNATIVE IS A SCENARIO WHERE FIFO TRAMPLES  
UNHINDERED THROUGH TOWNSHIPS AND EFFECTIVELY  
DESTROYS THEM.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS SEEK TO ESTABLISH AN ORDERLY AND  
OPEN PROCESS WHEREBY ALL INTERESTED PARTIES CAN  
ADDRESS ANY PROPOSAL FOR A FIFO WORKFORCE. THE ONUS  
SHOULD LIE WITH THOSE WANTING IT TO PROVE IT IS ESSENTIAL  
AND, IF THAT CAN BE DONE, TO SHOW HOW IT WILL ADDRESS THE  
NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.

WHERE FIFO IS UTILISED THE NEEDS OF THE WORKERS AND  
THEIR PARTNERS/FAMILIES MUST BE ADDRESSED AS A  
PRERQUISITE TO ITS INTRODUCTION. UNATTENDED PROBLEMS  
WILL NOT DISAPPEAR BUT GESTATE AND MANIFEST THEMSELVES

IN ONE OR MORE UNDESIRABLE WAYS. CONSULTATION WITH WORKERS' REPRESENTATIVES PRIOR TO AND DURING ITS OPERATION IS ESSENTIAL.

WE ALSO SEEK TO OVERCOME PROBLEMS INHERENT IN THE USE OF FIFO AS A VEHICLE FOR RESTRICTING AN EMPLOYEE'S RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION BY AMENDING THE LAW TO ALLOW EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES A RIGHT OF ENTRY INTO CAMPS.

THEN THERE ARE THE BROADER ISSUES THAT ATTRACT THE PUBLIC INTEREST. THIS INCLUDES THE LACK OF PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND AMENITIES IN REGIONAL AND RURAL AREAS BEING EXACERBATED BY FIFO AND THE FAILURE OF CORPORATIONS PAY THEIR WAY. IT INCLUDES THE ONGOING COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE FAILURE OF CORPORATIONS TO ADEQUATELY INCREASE THE SKILLS BASE IN THIS COUNTRY. IT INCLUDES ENSURING THAT CORPORATIONS DO NOT DERIVE UNMERITED ADVANTAGES THROUGH FIFO, SUCH AS TAX CONCESSIONS AND COST SHIFTING.

TO ADDRESS ALL OF THESE ISSUES THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS A PROPER DATA BASE TO DERIVE ACCURATE AND CONTEMPORARY STATISTICS AND TO ESTABLISH A WIDE RANGING AND LONGER TERM INQUIRY INTO FIFO. THE REPORT OF THIS COMMITTEE CAN ONLY HELP IN THAT RESPECT.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE RESULTS OF YOUR LABOURS AND WISH YOU WELL AS YOU STRIVE TO NOT ONLY PUT THE ISSUES OF FIFO ON THE AGENDA BUT RECOMMENDS WAYS AND MEANS OF DOING SO.