



Secretary

House of representatives standing committee, inquiry into consequences of mining FIFO&DIDO programmes

January 25th 2012

Dear sir,

I would like to make a submission to the above inquiry. I am now 63yrs old and have worked in the mining industry for close to 43yrs, 12 yrs in Newman in the Pilbara (1969-1981) and from 1981 until now in the coal industry in the hunter valley.

I am not against fifo or dido, where it is warranted, but the balance has swung way too far towards this means of employment, purely for means of making far greater profits for the mining companies and less responsibilities.

The facts are below all the spin etc, the companies want FIFO combined with varying rosters to destroy any solidarity within a workforce, avoid social responsibilities and create opportunity for greater profits. If only the big companies had worked together with the workforces through good times and bad, there would be far less shortages of the skilled workers they are now desperate for.

In the pilbara originally the govts made the companies build the infrastructure (mt newman & hammersley) for communities, and those communities were very successful. Newman had one census of over 100 different nationalities living peacefully together, with a vibrant social and community network. The very minority of the population was western Australians, with more than 50% of the population composed of the 10 quid poms, imported to help with the skill shortages. I'm sure that immigrants now would grab a chance to earn reasonable money and live with their families in these areas.

I saw one company executive saying they couldn't afford to build houses, well they did when the mines were producing a mere few million tonnes and the Japanese were controlling market prices. Australia needs to develop these centres, these towns are going to be around a long time. Of course some compromise has to be made to allow for repercussions of downturns or such, maybe 10 to 20% of the workforce could be FIFO OR DIDO.

What % of the FIFO workforce has been divorced or separated? I am not qualified to put a figure on the social consequences and mental and health problems caused by long term separation, both to the employee his or her partner and most of all the children.

It has been seen where FIFO has destroyed communities in Queensland and W.A. I wonder if 40 houses bulldozed in Paraburdoo (white ants) were to help the FIFO cause.

In Muswellbrook the council has allowed a mining camp to be built (sorry "village") for DIDO workers from Newcastle. MAC the camp builder and manager claims sustainable development, that they will use local produce! Unfortunately there is no local produce, the only way there can be sustainable

development is if there is more houses, and more coal mine workers live locally so that they can spend their money locally

When I spoke to local councillors or real estate agents they are locals who cannot see the bigger picture, and know little about the ins and outs of how the mining industry operates.

In the early 1980's Drayton coal was the first next big mine to open in the Muswellbrook area, local protest meetings were held to demand the company build houses for employees, as was the accepted norm then. A compromise was met and many houses were up before you knew.

It is not right or natural for children to occasionally see their father, the social consequences are too many to write in a letter, you would need to write a book. It is common sense to open up communities both for sustainability of workforces for the companies and health and well being of employees.

Des & Cheryl Nugent

Respondents have their say

“By 2015 Muswellbrook Shire will be the economic engine of Australia, if managed properly ...”

“[I dislike] people who insist on shopping continually out of town when the same services are in town ...”

“The old picture theatre should be restored and used as an entertainment venue ...”

“Upgrade shopping facilities to accommodate growth and families now living here ...”

“[Muswellbrook Shire needs] a large auditorium/conference centre/multi-use facility, available at a reasonable cost, that seats at least 300 to 400 people ...”

“It doesn't matter how much they say they monitor the dust, they do nothing about it and it covers everything ...”

“There is nothing to do for the teens and young adults here ...”

“[I dislike] the number of workers that live in Muswellbrook Monday to Friday and take the money home with them so it is not spent in the town where they work ...”

“The bypass should be treated as urgent ...”

“Reduce heavy vehicle traffic in the main street ...”

“The local industries should only employ people willing to live in the Muswellbrook Shire ...”

“Work towards reviving agriculture and promote local food growing ...”

“More activities for young families in the community ...”

Town angry over mine roster plan

A PETITION signed by more than 3000 residents of central Queensland mining towns opposed to a company's proposal to wholly staff a new mine with fly-in-fly-out workers has been tabled in State Parliament.

BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance is planning a full fly-in-fly-out workforce at its Caval Ridge site near Moranbah in the Bowen Basin.

LNP member for Mirani Ted Malone told Parliament residents were angry at the idea of employees flying out at the end of their roster, taking their money with them.

He said this type of workforce was detrimental to regional communities.

AAP

BACK

Many workers in remote regions such as the Pilbara struggle to cope with the extreme lifestyle

REBECCA TURNER

WESTERN Australia's Pilbara is no place for weakness. Every day, plane-loads of workers are flown in to grind out long shifts on the region's mines, amid the searing heat and red dust, for weeks at a time. It's a macho culture, where you are expected to work hard, play harder and earn big money.

But news earlier this year that one of them had lain dead in his donga, a portable accommodation hut, unnoticed and apparently unmissed, for up to two weeks at a work camp for Woodside's \$14-billion Pluto liquefied natural gas project disturbed many.

"I hate to think that he had a stroke on the Tuesday and died on the Friday and he didn't get the help he needed," says Steve McCartney, the WA secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, who spent many years in the Pilbara.

The loneliness of the 55-year-old's death, which is still before a coroner, highlighted just how isolated life in these mining camps can be for the thousands of fly-in, fly-out workers who are paid handsomely to stoke the engine room of the Australian economy around the clock. It's just one of the factors social workers believe is contributing to a dark social consequence of the resources boom: depression, anxiety and even suicide among mine workers.

Unions and companies are united in their concern over this side of the WA mining boom, which is just finding its second wind, with billions of dollars of investment and thousands of workers to flow into projects over the next few years.

For example, the Pluto project, with a 3000-strong workforce, should be completed this year. Chevron's \$43bn Gorgon LNG project will hit peak construction next year, with 10,000 construction workers and 3500 permanent staff, while 4500 workers are involved building of Citic Pacific's \$5.2bn Sino Iron magnetite mine.

OzHelp, a suicide prevention group funded by the federal government to run programs in the Pilbara, estimates suicide rates among mining and construction workers to be up to 70 per cent higher than the national average.

OzHelp points to a male-dominated culture, bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, and a low emotional capacity to work through problems as key reasons why these workers are at risk. Add to this the social dynamics of life in a mining camp, where hundreds of workers live side-by-side in identical dongas and work 12-hour shifts away from family and friends for weeks at a time, and you begin to understand how mental health problems can develop.

Talk to anyone who has worked in the Pilbara and they have a story about a FIFO worker whose relationship has broken down, is depressed or who finds it hard to

cope with not being able to say goodnight to his kids.

Many will also, quietly, acknowledge a problem with suicide; they haven't seen any statistics, but they have heard stories.

According to the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics figures, the national suicide rate in 2008 for men was 16 deaths per 100,000, while for women it was about five per 100,000. OzHelp uses data collected by the Construction and Building Industry Superfund, which shows that up to 172 of its 36,499 WA members committed suicide between 1998 and 2003, a rate of 79 per 100,000 compared to the average for fund members of 43 per 100,000.

Anecdotally, McCartney also believes, from his discussions with members and investigations into workplace deaths, that suicide rates have risen in recent years.

The problems also trouble the top end of town, where Rio Tinto's head of iron ore, Sam Walsh, openly discusses his concern about the suicide risk among his workers, mentioning two incidents in 2009. He also sits on the WA Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention. His right-hand man and new president of

'The problem with anxiety and depression is when you stop work and are by yourself in your room'

STEVE McCARTNEY
AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURING
WORKERS UNION

Rio's Pilbara iron-ore operations, Greg Lilleyman, can recall at least two attempted suicides by employees in the past year.

As it gears up for an expansion of its Pilbara operations which will involve around 8000 FIFOs, Rio Tinto Iron Ore is focusing on fatigue, with its negative effects on mental health, and changing the culture of the mining camps as part of its mental health strategy.

For example, it is investigating driverless trucks (the company says vehicle accidents are its biggest workplace safety problem, with fatigue playing a big role) and has overhauled its complex roster of Pilbara flights to try to ensure workers aren't exhausted before they catch a plane from Perth.

Many FIFOs fly to Perth from other states, or drive from homes in regional coastal towns such as Mandurah; if you add up this commute to check in for an early morning flight, plus a three-hour trip to Karratha, then a 12-hour shift, it makes for a very long day.

Accommodation pressures in the Pilbara, especially in the service towns of Karratha and Port Hedland, have seen some workers having to undertake a double

FIFO. Last year some FIFO workers were based in Port Hedland but were forced to take a daily 90-minute flight to work a 9½-hour shift in Karratha, then fly back home to Port Hedland.

Lilleyman is no stranger to the FIFO lifestyle, having worked away from his family between 1997 and 2001, and acknowledges it's a tough gig, especially when your children are young.

"It's very difficult to maintain a relationship with your kids over the phone," he says. But he says the lifestyle also has its advantages, such as having a long block of time at home with the family during the off-weeks, as well as financial and career opportunities.

McCartney, who also worked as a FIFO in the Pilbara, says the experience helped his family financially but that now, aged 60, he regrets missing so much of his kids' childhood. "It tears at me," he says.

There are plenty of stories of FIFOs who do handle the experience well, usually those with a clear idea of what they want to achieve and people to support them in these goals. Others are often unprepared for the consequences of earning a lot of money and separation from loved ones.

"When you spend lots of time away, that absence begins to deteriorate the marriage. It causes relationship breakdown, tensions, and affairs can develop," OzHelp chief executive Brenton Tainsh says. "So everything that they've been working for can just fall apart. That causes an almost instantaneous suicide in people's minds because they think, 'there's no point me going on because that's what we're working for'."

Groups such as OzHelp, as well as unions and companies, agree it's imperative to change the culture of the FIFO industries.

On the personal level, McCartney says his union wants men to stop being so macho about mental health and begin to talk about their problems. "The problem with anxiety and depression is when you stop work and are by yourself in your room," says McCartney. "You start thinking and it gets worse, which affects your fatigue."

At a broader level, everyone is working towards making the camps become more like a normal community, where you can play sport and be involved in regular activities, instead of just drinking in the wet mess after work.

Those who were FIFOs during the fledgling years of the Pilbara would think today's workers are molly-coddled. FIFOs are hardly forced to take the jobs that offer a salary of up to \$150,000, with meals, serviced accommodation and entertainment thrown in. They certainly get no sympathy from many in the Pilbara community, who see them as highly paid whingers who live in luxurious camps with swimming pools, tennis courts and Foxtel, and don't contribute to the local community.

Whatever your opinion, these local attitudes are a good example of the macho culture of the Pilbara and the social isolation of many FIFO workers, who seem to live between two worlds.

Fly-in, fly-out miners kill towns

Communities want workers to stay, writes **Cosima Marriner.**

MINING booms once spawned prosperous outback towns, such as the lead-zinc-ore bonanza of Broken Hill or the gold rush town of Ballarat. But as Queensland heads into another resource boom, mining towns are being downgraded to commuter stops, with most workers shipped in.

Now BHP wants to staff an entire mine in central Queensland with transient workers, who are flown in for a 12-hour day, seven-day-a-week roster, then flown back to their homes on the coast or in Brisbane for a week off, taking their sizeable pay cheques with them.

"It will be the death of us," said John King, who has run the news-agency in nearby Moranbah for 19 years. "When people reside here, they add to the community. They buy products from the town and they support other industries ... If BHP do 100 per cent fly-in, fly-out, there will be no more people coming to town but they'll be taking our resources."

Flying in workers makes sense in isolated mining regions such as the Pilbara. But BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance's proposed open-cut coal mine at Caval Ridge is 10 minutes down the road from Moranbah and 160 kilometres inland of Mackay.

"Fly-in, fly-out doesn't do any-



Working for change ... Moranbah residents (from left) Kirby Ramage, Kelly Vea Vea, Karen Low, Vikki Oldfield and Leanne Kettleton lead the protest march. Photo: Colette Landolt

thing for our schools, our shops, our medical centres," Isaac Regional Council mayor Cedric Marshall said. The central Queensland shire produces the most coal in the state.

"The cities are overcrowded now. We need people out of our cities living where the jobs are; we need workers living with their families. We want to see as much residential accommodation as we can get to keep our towns viable."

BHP's plan to make Caval Ridge its first 100 per cent fly-in, fly-out Queensland operation has met fierce local opposition, with concerns it will set a precedent for other mines. "It's caused a lot of animosity in the town - a lot," Mr King said.

A petition of more than 3000 signatures has been tabled in State Parliament, calling on the government to reject BHP's application for a 100 per cent fly-in, fly-out workforce on

the basis it will hurt the Bowen Basin region socially and economically. Yesterday Moranbah residents staged their first protest march to highlight community angst.

"This could change the path of the mining industry," Moranbah Action Group president Kelly Vea Vea said. "I don't want to sit back and reminisce with my children about the good old days when families lived together near the mine."

BHP said it has to offer fly-in, fly-out shifts if it is to attract and retain workers in a highly competitive jobs market. "BMA has high job vacancy rates ... and needs to widen employment options," a spokeswoman said.

It is a painful irony for central Queenslanders that their towns are rapidly depleting in the midst of a mining boom. In Dysart there will soon be nearly two transient workers for every one permanent resident. Yet while the inland towns suffer, the coastal communities that fly-in, fly-out workers call home are prospering.

Mining companies using fly-in, fly-out workers are accused of ducking their social obligations to local towns. "The mining industry is a profitable industry. It should make a commitment to these towns," local MP Ted Malone said. "They're wiping their hands of the whole issue of supporting a town."

BHP said it invested \$16 million in Moranbah last year, including building 100 residences.

Despite the Queensland government policy of encouraging settlement in regional areas to reduce the pressure on the crowded south-east corner of the state, it is reluctant to interfere with BHP's plans.

Queensland's Mining Minister, Stirling Hinchliffe, told *The Sun-Herald* the government "doesn't tell people where to live".

"Employers and employees will make their own decisions about accommodation which are appropriate for their circumstances."