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SHIRE OF  
**MANJIMUP**

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## SUBMISSION

### **INQUIRY INTO THE HOUSE 'FLY-IN, FLY-OUT (FIFO)' AND 'DRIVE-IN, DRIVE-OUT (DIDO) WORKFORCE PRACTICES IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA**

#### **Background to the Submission**

This submission pertains to the Shire of Manjimup located in the south west corner of Western Australia. The township of Manjimup is a sub regional centre located 350km south of Perth. The shire covers a geographical area of 7000sq kms and includes 4 towns and 5 communities supporting a population of 10,000.

The Shire has a diversified industry base incorporating agriculture, horticulture, viticulture, tourism and timber. Since 2001 employment in the local hardwood timber industry has been on a steady decline as a result of changes to legislation and available sawlog quotas. There is no established mining industry in the Shire.

As a sub regional centre the township of Manjimup is situated 1.5 – 2 hours from the metropolitan and regional centres of Albany, Bunbury and Busselton. Significantly, under the WA State Governments 'Supertown' or Regional Growth Centre strategy Manjimup is identified as one of nine (9) regional growth towns to be developed to defray population growth pressures on the larger urban centres, primarily Perth.

The departure of a major timber company in the town 12 months ago resulted in a coordinated approach by State and local community stakeholders to determine key strategies to encourage families to remain in the shire and to develop the town itself as lifestyle of choice for individuals to move to the area.

A key strategy involved intensive communication with key mining companies to undertake significant recruitment locally with the aim of ultimately upgrading the regional airport or providing smaller bus or flight options to connect to main flights in Busselton, Albany or Perth. Recruitment has been very successful and has enabled many families and contractors impacted by the timber industry closures to remain locally. Planning is currently underway to strategically address infrastructure shortfalls.

In conjunction with the recruitment process there has been significant communications with service agencies to ensure social and support networks are in place. These social networks appear to focus on the partner and family of the FIFO/DIDO and not the individual themselves. Support for the mining employee is something that needs further investigation both within the industry and community and by both service agencies and the mining sector itself.

Anecdotally there are an estimated 500 individuals already employed in the mining sector from the Manjimup region. The majority of these employees are reliant on a combination of FIFO / DIDO. Many individuals will drive 3-4 hours at 2-3am to meet a 6-8am flight in Perth, after arriving at the mine after a 2-4 hour flight they will then do a half day shift. Whilst in reverse, this routine is repeated with each shift. Shift management and consideration of additional regional departure points need to be considered to mitigate risk to employees who travel in a fatigued state.

A major aim of the Manjimup / mining sector negotiations have been to achieve a scenario where the local region can supply a critical mass of FIFO/DIDO workforce to one or two mines on specific rotations and thus create a sustainable justification to upgrade airport and transport infrastructure.

### **Terms of Reference**

#### ***Costs and benefits for companies, and individuals, choosing a FIFO/DIDO workforce as an alternative to a resident workforce;***

- A high percentage of mine sites are located in isolated, hot, dry environments with limited road and transport networks, medical, schooling and very high living costs. The cost of developing a 'community' in a short term environment is very difficult to justify.
- The advantage of FIFO/DIDO is that families can retain a lifestyle, which often includes extended family and support networks in their community of choice, causing less disruption to the family unit. Secondary schooling opportunities and quality will strongly influence the place of residence of families.
- FIFO/DIDO shift management to consider work/family balance such as a 2 on 2 off ratio would be of greater benefit to the family unit, community and employee. Effectively many shifts today, coupled with extensive travel times can see individuals being at home for less than 8 days in a month.

- FIFO/DIDO needs to be supported by improved telecommunication networks to support family communication. This is critical to enable daily communication between the family and FIFO employee.

***The effect of a non-resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community wellbeing, services and infrastructure;***

- Impact on volunteer and sporting participation levels. Such impacts include volunteer ambulance, bush fire brigades, sporting coaches and assistance.
- Loss of skilled labour, especially apprenticeships – conversely allows greater opportunities for residence to undertake new apprenticeships.
- Increased labour costs as local business and industry sector are forced to compete with the mining sector to retain skilled workforce. Conversely individuals not wanting to work in the mining sector have increased employment and skill development opportunities.
- Loss of families as they relocate closer to the airport as the DIDO/FIFO pressures forces them to review lifestyle options.

***The impact on communities sending large numbers of FIFO/DIDO workers to mine sites;***

- Large numbers of FIFO/DIDO workers may actually be easy to manage especially if the community has a strong recruitment relationship with one or two mines only. Working at a larger recruitment scale from a given area will enable the development of suitable infrastructure upgrades such as airports or bus services which help to mitigate the risk of travel accidents and workers are actually home for longer blocks of time.
- Mining employees who come from the same or neighbouring communities can also support each other better in terms of planning and communication and general networking. Families can also connect and establish support networks between themselves through closer empathy and understanding.
- A major impact is where a community has large numbers of FIFO/DIDO workers who may be scattered between 100 mines on varying shifts and schedules. It is more difficult to establish effective support networks and infrastructure upgrades when the movement of the workforce is disjointed and fragmented.
- Population decline.

***Long term strategies for economic diversification in towns with large FIFO/DIDO workforces;***

- Establishing a community as a lifestyle choice for FIFO/DIDO workers is an opportunity for economic growth and diversification in itself. By developing key infrastructure and social support networks in a growth centre community, such as Manjimup, individuals facing unemployment because of the closure of one industry sector have the opportunity to choose to work in the mining sector and remain living in their community of choice.

- Developing a FIFO/DIDO 'friendly' community will encourage people to move to the community from various metropolitan centres.
- Most regional and sub regional centres already have excellent schooling, recreational, medical, social services and business opportunities as well as land for housing development. Encouraging investment in the community, through a variety of industry options including FIFO/DIDO will perpetuate new economic opportunities.

***Key skill sets targeted for mobile workforce employment, and opportunities for ongoing training and development;***

- Partnerships between industry sectors and the Manjimup Regional Senior High school which has an excellent trade training centre and TAFE and university annex has the potential to realise training and development opportunities at the local level, directly feeding skilled labour into the various local industry sectors and mining sector.
- Local business and industry sectors need to be supported by state trainee and apprenticeship bodies to assist in maintaining and continuously developing a skilled workforce in a competitive labour market.
- Strong TAFE and adult education should be available to broaden the skill set of individuals living in the community but not directly employed in the FIFO/DIDO sector.

***Provision of services, infrastructure and housing availability for FIFO/DIDO workforce employees;***

- Many regional and sub regional centres such as Manjimup have land and housing availability and the majority of support services in place which enable an upgrade of services to be more about human resources than having to establish a service from scratch.
- Regional growth centres (Supertowns) in WA have already been identified for key infrastructure, health and education upgrades. The timeframe for investment may need to be escalated.
- Mining companies partnering a community could easily take advantage of land development opportunities that exist in these regions. Developers could work to provide house, land and lifestyle packages attractive to the mining employment sector.
- Housing affordability in the more populated areas is much far greater than in the north of WA.

***Strategies to optimise FIFO/DIDO experience for employees and their families, communities and industry;***

- Recruitment needs to become more strategic. This could include the partnering of one or two mines with a specific region/community to recruit from a given area. This could allow whole rotations/shifts coming from one area.
- Upgrade of a number of regional airports to cater for FIFO/DIDO – again this needs either recruitment for a given rotation at a given mine to be much higher.
- Establishment of transport options to transport a larger number of workers from a given area to an airport that is within a 1 or 2 hour drive.

***Potential opportunities for non-mining communities with narrow economic bases to diversify their economic base by providing a FIFO/DIDO workforce;***

- Manjimup is presently working on this but will require infrastructure/transport upgrades to fully realise the opportunities. This is likely to require considerable investment by both the State and Commonwealth governments...
- Manjimup has and will continue to pursue strong dialogue with one or two major mining companies to enable a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Appropriate airport/bus access links directly to key mine sites will allow individuals to relocate to the region of their lifestyle choice providing economic advantages in existing communities.
- Land/housing package opportunities for developers.

***Current initiatives and responses of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments; and***

- Expansion of the Federal initiative that funds a facilitator to work with mines and regions to support local FIFO/DIDO recruitment.
- WA Pilbara Cities and Supertown (Regional Growth Centres) strategies.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the use of FIFO/DIDO workforce practices in regional Australia.

Yours sincerely

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