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**Submission to  
the House of Representatives Standing Committee  
on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
Inquiry into the high levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and  
young adults in the criminal justice system**

**Sydney, Friday 28 January 2011**

**Andrew Charles Burrow**  
Superintendent, Work Readiness and Education, Rio Tinto Iron Ore

### **Introduction**

This submission provides a brief overview of the Work Ready (WR) programs that Rio Tinto Iron Ore (RTIO) runs or supports in the Pilbara and further afield, as well as its engagement with the Roebourne Regional Prison. Although the primary focus of both these initiatives is the employment of Aboriginal people in the Pilbara, they have some relevance in respect of breaking the cycle of offending and recidivism.

RTIO has a declared intention to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed in its workforce to a level consistent with the broader Pilbara population demographic. There are also legally binding land access agreements that have been signed with Traditional Owner (TO) groups in the Pilbara. These include training and employment commitments.

The two main recruitment streams of Aboriginal people into RTIO include:

- Applicants who have the necessary education, training, experience and meet the other requirements to be considered for filling available vacancies, including apprenticeships.
- Graduates of the WR Programs that RTIO runs or supports in the Pilbara and further afield.

### **Work Ready Programs**

WR programs have been run or supported since 2006 in several Pilbara communities including Paraburdoo, Tom Price, Nullagine, Onslow, Roebourne, Karratha and South Hedland. Programs are also run in Broome / Dampier Peninsula. Last year programs were run or supported in Karratha, Roebourne, Tom Price, Broome / Dampier Peninsula and Perth. This year the list includes Carnarvon.

The WR programs are usually run in collaboration with the Pilbara (or other) TAFE, as well as other stakeholders such as potential employers, Job Service Providers and CDEP or organisations acting on their behalf. RTIO also supports the WR program that is run by the Roebourne Regional Prison.

The programs typically run for three to four months, once or twice per year at a particular location. They are designed to equip unemployed Aboriginal people with a set of basic:

- vocational skills
- life coping skills
- workplace coping skills

This is to assist them to get into employment and then stay there.

The vocational skills component is typically based around a Certificate II in Metalliferous Mining or Resource and Infrastructure Operations. The vocational component also provides a framework and mechanism to keep the group busy and intellectually stimulated for an extended and uninterrupted period. This provides the opportunity for relationship building and informal intervention by mentoring staff as well as more formal intervention by outside agencies to assist people to develop their workplace and life coping skills.

Approximately 210 WR Program trainees have graduated (or exited WR programs early to take up employment) and 150 have entered employment. Failure to meet minimum driver licence requirements of potential employers was the most significant contributor to WR Program graduates not getting employed, particularly in the early years.

Where possible we feed WR Program graduates into so-called "Rotation" programs that run at some of our operational sites. The programs at Dampier and Cape Lambert are the most developed. WR program graduates are taken into these programs on a probationary 6 month contract. This provides them with the opportunity to work in a number of entry level roles in order to build up work experience and develop the related coping skills. It gives them time to get an understanding of potential longer term career opportunities in the mining industry and decide whether they want to continue working for RTIO in the long term.

### **Unemployment, Driver Licensing and Incarceration**

The Committee will be aware that there is a strong correlation between unemployment (and the associated socio-economic and education issues facing individuals, families and communities) and incarceration. It will also be aware that the mining industry (including RTIO) is one of the major employers in the Pilbara.

In addition to the lack of relevant skills, workplace experience and adequate education (particularly beyond Y10), the lack of driving licences is a serious obstacle to young indigenous people trying to get into the mining industry workplace. Although the minimum driving licence requirements have started to be relaxed for specific roles at certain of RTIO's operating sites, the majority of the available jobs (particularly at its inland mine sites) still require at least a C Class and preferably a HR licence.

The obstacles facing youngsters from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to getting a full C Class licence are significant and include:-

- High cost.
- Lack of access to licensed driving instructors and roadworthy vehicles.
- Long licensing process timeframe (typically 2½ - 3 years in WA, depending on individual circumstances).

I will expand on the cost issue. In Karratha / Roebourne, depending on how hard pricing is negotiated, driving schools charge \$70-\$110 per hour. Assuming that it typically takes a novice driver 40 driving hours to get their Provisional ("P Plate") licence, this costs

between \$2,800 and \$4,400. This would increase to roughly the \$8,000 - \$12,600 range if the current logbook phase was increased from 25 to 100 hours.

This results in a "chicken and egg" situation. Many young people can't get a job because they haven't got a drivers licence. Because they haven't got a job they can't afford to get a licence particularly if their family is unable to pay the practical tuition costs and / or provide the access to a suitable vehicle and supervising driver. Boredom and peer pressure inevitably lead many youngsters down a path of anti-social behaviour (including driving and licensing related infringements) that can lead to incarceration. We understand from our contacts at the Roebourne Regional Prison that in the order of 60% of the inmates have driving and/or licensing related convictions.

### **Driver Training in WR Programs**

It is clear to us that the lack of affordable practical driving instruction resources is one of several significant and well documented contributors to unemployment and incarceration of young Aboriginal people in the Pilbara.

Consequently a significant component of our WR programs includes assistance with:

- Driver theory training
- Practical driving instruction
- Resolving licence suspensions and unpaid fines issues

This is achieved through a combination of:

- Engaging local driving schools, where available;
- All our WR team in mentoring roles are licensed driving instructors, or are in the process of getting qualified;
- We have purchased two dual control vehicles to provide practical driving instruction.
- Assistance and support from a network of local contacts in the State's traffic and judicial departments.

In addition, this year we are collaborating with several local state organisations (that have interests in road safety, licensing and related areas) to integrate a series of workshops into our WR Program curriculum. This is to augment the practical driving instruction and is intended to:

- Reinforce the learning's gained from passing the Learners Licence theory test.
- Develop the knowledge and belief system essential for a person to become a responsible driver who can safely drive "according to the conditions".
- Equip people with the knowledge required to keep their drivers licences.
- Give people a basic understanding of what is required to maintain a vehicle in a roadworthy condition.

Ongoing practical driver training is provided, if required, to WR Program graduates entering the "Rotation" programs to enable them to get their Provisional Drivers Licences.

## **Engagement with Roebourne Regional Prison**

As previously mentioned, RTIO has been supporting the WR programs run by the Roebourne Regional Prison at their DECCA training facility (approximately 20km east of Roebourne) for several years. This support has taken several forms including:-

- Supply of workshop machinery, sundry equipment, timber and consumables
- Job / vocation opportunity awareness:
  - o Regular visits by members of the WR Team and other RTIO employees to the facility to engage with staff and inmates
  - o Organisation of site tours to ore stockpiling and ship loading facilities at Dampier and Cape Lambert
- Assisting people to get employment after their release from prison
- Assistance to get access to specialised vocational training vendors and equipment

More recently a Prisoner Employment Program (PEP) has been set up. This is a collaborative effort between Roebourne Regional Prison, WorkPac (a labour hire company) and various RTIO departments.

The program provides the opportunity for up to four low risk prisoners, who have a few months of their sentences to serve, to work day shift at RTIO's Cape Lambert Operations. They are engaged as contractor employees via WorkPac who pay their wages. They are fed and accommodated overnight at the Prison and are taken by bus to site. Here they work as members of the clean-up crews under RTIO supervision. The intent is that PEP participants, once released, will enter the RTIO workforce, hopefully on a permanent basis.

The PEP program is still in its infancy and has encountered the inevitable "devil in the detail" teething problems. Nevertheless the program is considered to be an important initiative with the potential to deliver some capable employees to the organisation. It also has very important social benefits as it provides hope to the participating individuals, their fellow inmates, immediate family and the wider community.

## **Conclusion**

It is hoped that, in the fullness of time, these initiatives will flourish and in a small but significant way contribute towards keeping people out of prison in the first place and reducing recidivism.