

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF
FIFO WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH 2015**

Members

**Dr G.G. Jacobs (Chair)
Ms R. Saffioti (Deputy Chair)
Mr R.F. Johnson
Ms J.M. Freeman
Mr M.J. Cowper**

Hearing commenced at 10.39 am

Ms PHILIPPA VOJNOVIC

Co-convenor, FACE, examined:

Dr PAUL MARK PULÉ

Scholar in Masculinities and Director, MenAlive Australia and FACE, examined:

Mrs ELIZABETH BROOK

Researcher, FACE Network, examined:

Mr SCOTT BARTLETT

Member, FACE, examined:

Dr SUSANNE BAHN

Member, FACE, Tap Into Safety; Adjunct Senior Lecturer, Edith Cowan University, examined:

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming today, on behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee. The purpose of this hearing is to assist us in the inquiry commissioned by the Parliament into mental health impacts of fly in, fly out work arrangements. I am Graham Jacobs, the Chair; on my left is Rob Johnson; on his left, Rita Saffioti; on her left, Janine Freeman; and on her left, Murray Cowper. This hearing is a formal procedure—we hope that it is not too formal for you—but it does command the respect given to proceedings of the house itself. We are not asking you to provide evidence on oath or affirmation but it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing and there are people in the gallery and the press as well. Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. I understand, Scott, that you would prefer your comments to be heard in closed session, so when we get those, we will do that in closed session. We might leave that until the end, if that is okay; it might be easier. If you refer to any documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record. If you would like to give evidence in closed session—we have done that.

Before we proceed, I will ask you these standard questions. Have you all completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to us?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses sheet provided?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Could you please state your name and the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

Ms Vojnovic: I am Philippa Vojnovic. I am the co-convenor of the organisation FACE, which is FIFO Australian Community of Excellence.

Dr Pulé: Paul Pulé, co-convenor of FACE, but I also have my own coaching practice, having done a PhD on men and masculinities, helping FIFO fellows’ lives go well.

Mrs Brook: I am Elizabeth Brook, but Libby is what I am known as. I am a FACE executive committee member and also a lecturer at Murdoch University and I have done some research into fly in, fly out.

Mr Bartlett: Scott Bartlett, FACE member and currently a FIFO worker.

The CHAIR: Paul or Philippa, could you give as a little bit of background on FACE: How long have you been around? What are your origins, and what drove those origins to where we are at today?

Dr Pulé: FACE is FIFO Australian Community of Excellence and it really grew out of a previous permutation, somewhat, of an organisation of individuals called FARG—FIFO Agency Reference Group—and prior to that the FIFO Collective. It is actually reflective of an evolutionary process of service providers, community members and researchers coming together and building a network in order to advocate and provide information about fly in, fly out services. We have found that the agency has grown and taken on different forms, and that is why it has changed name and composition over the last three to four years.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: When were those dates? When did it change from one organisation name to another?

Dr Pulé: I formed the FIFO Collective in 2011, I believe, and was active in that form primarily with my colleague Cath Ashton, who is in the witness gallery. We functioned in that capacity as a loose network, mostly of service providers at that time. That lasted for about a year to a year and a half. We found that other individuals from the sector were interested in building a network and participating, but there was some degree of un-clarity about the focus, so we shifted that to the FIFO Agency Reference Group, which Cath was also instrumental in assisting me to roll into more of an agency representation. That had a combination service providers and mostly local and state government representatives at the time. Our biggest accomplishment was really the FIFO expo that we formed in September of last year, where we pulled together about 200 to 300 people from the community—some FIFO workers and their families, as well as service providers and agency representatives—to really talk about the issues. From there FACE really came online, almost like a convergence, if you like, of researchers becoming more and more interested in building a network in order to prevent replication of effort, but also to get a sense of what was happening at the coalface. As I am sure you can appreciate, there can be a bit of a gap between service provision and research. Researchers sometimes will have a very grounded knowledge in the published information available of a subject, but will not necessarily as easy access to the lived experience. So what FACE has become, really, is a bridge builder between those two areas in particular of theoreticians and researchers with practitioners and service providers.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Was the expo the one in —

Dr Pulé: That is right. Cath, myself and Philippa were instrumental in creating that under the auspices of FARG, before FARG sort of blended with FACE.

The CHAIR: Paul, you talked about a bridge; what were the other drivers for the formation of this organisation? Was there a concern within FIFO, for instance, about the risk to mental health and suicide? What was the driver? Were there drivers that you saw in the industry in and around risk that caused you to think not only about a bridge between research and people who work and programs in the industry, but inherent within FIFO?

Dr Pulé: Yes, absolutely. I think that it is not just the attention that we have seen being focussed on suicides as an issue in the media, but also a lot of information that I had been receiving myself and many of colleagues through our own service provision roles, whether we are researchers or actual providers, in my case, of coaching. What was consistent amongst these practitioners was a message of alarm bells. There is actually a quiet time bomb ticking, in my view, that we often do not get a chance to put our focus on. In other words, there tends to be a degree of “don’t ask, don’t tell” in

the industry that we as providers of services in various forms are really interested in shedding light on. That is why we put so much time into the submission—compliments to Philippa especially for taking the lead on that—and why we are really delighted and honoured that we have been called to give this evidence.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: There are two trains of thought in relation to suicide in FIFO workers. One train of thought is that they are more prevalent. Another train of thought is that it is not more prevalent; it is the same as in any other walk of life, whether you be a police officer that is stationed somewhere miles away or a member of the armed forces and so on and so forth. What in your view and your experience—you have only been going for about four years by the sounds of it, from 2011—have you come up with so far in relation to the argument that perhaps suicide is more prevalent with FIFO workers? If that is the case, what are the main causes that you see or that have come forward?

Ms Vojnovic: This is an interesting question and certainly I know you have asked a few other people who have come to the hearings about this as well, and there has been a lot of debate. I wrote a paper on suicide rates among FIFO workers before the media publicity. I looked at the risk factors in the environment and within the individual workers—a victim profile, if you like, of suicidal risk. If you look at the statistics, it does not appear to be any more prevalent among FIFO workers. However, keep in mind that when you look at those ABS statistics, they include the rural and remote Indigenous populations, which we know have very high suicide risk comparatively. So those statistics are a little bit skewed, and I think we could do a better job at looking at those statistics. I would quite like to look at it more in depth myself.

In terms of mental health problems, there do appear to be higher rates of mental health problems. I have done some research with my PhD, which I have just closed, and I have been analysing the results. I have only done the preliminary analysis, but it is certainly reporting high levels of depression, anxiety and stress among FIFO participants.

[10.50 am]

Dr Pulé: I might add, if I may, that the key issue in my view is the matter of resilience. While the statistics do not suggest that suicide rates are necessarily higher amongst the FIFO working sector, it does, because of the nature of the industry and the way that people are removed from their support mechanisms, there may be higher risks of faltering resilience. What I mean by that is that ordinarily, an individual who is dealing with a mental health issue has various mechanisms at their disposal, whether or not they use them, by being based in a community regularly. When you start removing a person on a regular basis and you break down those networks of support further than maybe they already might be experiencing, you run the risk of the person being less able to weather the ebbs and flows of mental health challenges. So while I agree with my colleague Philippa that while the statistics do not support a disproportionate higher risk, if you like, what we do see is that this sector of the population is suffering, perhaps anecdotally, high risks of resilience adjustment.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Do you believe that the mining companies, the subcontractors and the contracting companies are doing enough to be supportive of their workforce in relation to the problems that obviously come with FIFO work? I think we all agree that it is not the best lifestyle being away from your family for two, three weeks, six weeks, a month or whatever; but do you think the mining companies and the other subcontracting companies are doing enough to ease the pain of these people being away from their families?

Ms Vojnovic: I think there is certainly a lot more that can be done. I have been on a few site visits through the course of my research and I have also interviewed a number of FIFO workers and obviously talking to my colleagues at FACE. I think some companies are really doing quite well and we recognise that they are doing a good job of putting in some new programs and assistance, but overall, no, I think a lot more can be done and whether that comes through the work health and

safety or HR avenues—exactly how to deliver those services is another matter to discuss. But, yes, I think a lot more can be done and, no, they are not doing enough at the moment.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Libby, do you have a background in occ, health and safety or did I just pick that up?

Mrs Brook: I hinted to Philippa that it is one of those issues that perhaps is juggled between the two and hopefully does not fall through the cracks, but may. As part of organisational psychology, which is my area, human factors and health and safety overlap a fair bit with the area, so I know a little bit about it. My husband is a health and safety manager so I hear from him. It is probably one of those issues, from what I understand—I think it is one of those things that if HR and OHS work really well together, then great, and some organisations I think have people specifically focusing on mental health as well, which is fantastic, but for others, maybe smaller companies, it might fall through a little bit to some extent, but I cannot give you specific examples. That is from what I have heard.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: One of the difficulties we face is that the mining companies have two separate occ health and safety regulations that apply to them. The mine sites have the mine and safety act; in the accommodation sites they have the occ health and safety act for the employees at the accommodation site and then there is an argument that accommodation is not a work site. The difficulty for us is understanding from a parliamentary regulator point of view, how do we put in safeguards? I have asked whether they use the code of practice on working hours and various other things. My question to you is: how do we use the existing frameworks to ensure that we build resilience, if that is what required, or we build welfare into it or we build a greater mental health aspect into it? Has FACE ever thought about any of those issues?

Ms Vojnovic: In terms of work health and safety, someone in the audience, Dr Susanne Bahn, is an expert in that field. If you would like her to talk about work health and safety, she is probably best placed.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: She might have to fill in a witness sheet.

Ms Vojnovic: Sue has done a lot of work in the mining industry.

Dr Pulé: In the interim, while that administration is being sorted, I wonder if I can add a couple of other comments. Further to the comment that I made initially of the notion of a culture of “don’t ask, don’t tell”, I think part of what we are dealing with here is that there is a tendency to overlook the fact that we are blessed in some ways here in Western Australia to have access to enormous resource wealth, which has translated into a large sector of the population earning pretty decent salaries, which is fair enough and it is wonderful for those families and there are knock-on effects obviously politically and economically for that aspect of our reality here in WA. However, what you tend to find with men, because it is such a male-dominated industry, is that it is very hard for a man bite the hand that feeds him. What I mean by that is that if you are paying somebody a pretty decent salary, even if they are experiencing some risk factors, it becomes very difficult to push past the fact that you are being reasonably well compensated for your time in order to fess up to the fact that you might need some help.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It is danger money.

Dr Pulé: Yes, it is danger money. One of the things that I am really hopeful about with this particular hearing and the series of questions that you have been asking, having read other contributors’ transcripts, is that this is not just an opportunity to gather information, but actually bring about policy change. The key thing that I have experienced is that many guys that I work with—I do focus specifically here on men mostly because it is 80 to 90 per cent fellas, not to exclude the impact on women—bring to the table that for men in particular it is very difficult to be honest and revealing about what it is they are struggling with. There need to be some mechanisms

put in place beyond an OHS policy that can for many guys especially at the coalface just look like “tick and flick”, if you know what that means.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Is any work being done to that component of the mining sector that is not fly in, fly out? For instance, are there similarities in relation to the needs and requirements of those workers who, for argument’s sake, live in Newman, Tom Price et cetera? Is it the case that the issues that you have discovered are exclusive to fly in, fly out or is broader or is it the case that it is just an amplification issue?

Dr Pulé: Absolutely. I will respond to that very quickly by saying that the way that I talk about the issues that we are addressing here, as a masculinity theorist, is that these are issues that are common amongst all men. What we find with fly in, fly out is that it is basically like taking the volume dial and turning it up a bunch of notches. The issues of isolation, family and marital breakdown, a lack of emotional vocabulary, for example, these are all issues that are quite common amongst men across the whole community and how that translates into drug and alcohol abuse, domestic violence, mental health issues, self-sabotage et cetera are indeed present amongst workers who are not FIFO as well. But if you think of how the defence forces address these issues and if you think about how the prison system addresses these issues, basically what we are dealing with is the intensification of those same risk factors in fly in, fly out rosters in the same way as any other male-dominated industry is actually being pressured, if you like. I tend to talk about it as an intensification of turning up the volume dial. It is not a necessarily unique set of circumstances. My colleagues may have different opinions on that, but that is my experience working with men.

[11.00 am]

Mr M.J. COWPER: This phenomenon of amplification because of the nature of flying is not new. We know farmers are isolated on their machines out the back of nowhere and isolated from family and colleagues wondering whether it is going to rain because their whole financial future depends on whether it rains and they get a crop in. What I am saying is that this is not a new phenomenon; however, it is a phenomenon that has now become acute because of the nature of our workforce.

Dr Pulé: Yes, it is a very specific response. I think we have a lot to learn from the support services that have been put in place to support that sector of the community. If we look at what has been put in place for those individuals and then make adjustment to suit the fly in, fly out sector, I think what we are doing is saving the government and the community an enormous cost.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Having lived in remote towns in the Pilbara and the Kimberley, I note that you have a situation where football clubs and social clubs and service groups become a fundamental part of that community in which bind, if you like, and act as a pseudo-method of alleviating some problems. If you have ever spent any time in the towns, you will see that there is a decent them-and-us-type attitude.

Ms Vojnovic: I actually grew in Albany in a country town and spent some time in Jerramungup as well, which is in the middle of nowhere, so I can definitely relate to football clubs and other things where the community spirit is really, really important. What I see is that that is an aspect that can be built into the workplace culture in the FIFO context. Some camps have different organised activities on site. Some people I have spoken to have really enjoyed that because it gives them another option rather than going to the wet mass, so there is potential. Another part of that is the concept of “motelling” which typically disconnects people from building a community on site. That is an area we could look to improve.

Dr Pulé: Further to that, Cath and I actually got a pretty great handle on this working towards the Joondalup expo where we learnt from the local government representatives that were part of FARG at the time that they were experiencing the need for service provision for both the workers and the families on both ends. They were not sure how to do that and that was part of why they were

coming to individuals like us to ask us for assistance in order to enrich the programs that they providing at the local level.

Mr M.J. COWPER: We are only talking about the top end. There is also the backend of this issue, which is the families that are left behind in the communities. Having been the vice president of a footy club and trying to get coaches and the workers are all away is problematic; nine out of 11 of our coaches are women. There is nothing wrong with that, but it gives you an indication.

Dr Pulé: Part of what the municipalities communicate to us is that they were supporting the sporting clubs to come up with unique membership structuring. Part of what was keeping people away when they surveyed their ratepayers was a concern about putting money down for membership and then got getting the full value of it and of changing membership structures specifically for fly in, fly out families so that that could be addressed and also shifting even things like the roster of when games were going to be played to work with different swings, possibly even having two tiers of membership that were syncing up with swings. Of course, there are massive complications with that because everybody is on different rosters, but then you increase the likelihood of grabbing people when they are available to be able to engage and contribute to communities' supporting clubs. The other thing that I will say is that while it is true that sporting clubs can serve as an important surrogate family, there is the issue of plunging into the deeper issues that a beer with a mate at the bar after a sports game will not necessarily address.

The CHAIR: At this time I will welcome and introduce Susanne to the inquiry. You have filled out a detail of witness form. For the sake of Hansard, can you explain who you are and what you represent?

Dr Bahn: I am completely unprepared! You have thrown me into the deep end! I have a slightly different focus and I have to declare a slight conflict that may be in place. I am adjunct senior lecturer at the Edith Cowan University School of Business. I resigned from a fulltime research role in the middle of last year to take up private business that is actually looking at health and safety tools. One of them is mental health and wellbeing tracking stress, depression and anxiety with a particular focus on providing tools for business, rather than individuals. We just released a product two weeks ago, which has an affiliation with FACE that we are just working out, but a commercial product is available. What I am finding when I am out talking to business, which I am regularly in mining and services to mining, is that business does not really have an idea of how their entire workforce is progressing in terms of mental health. The only time that someone presents is when they present with a problem and they are then looking for counselling. I am advocating through our business very strongly that it is time that business had a tool to track how people are going every day and that we can actually see when someone has an issue because they are filling out psychological tools in a very nice way, which is an interactive tool, that is web-based or computer-based et cetera in a very easy, nice scenario-based, nicely ordered and disclosed and so on. In that way, we can actually see when someone does start to present with an issue, because we all fall off the rails every now and then. If we can intervene early enough, then we do not end up with a situation where we are looking for specific counselling. That is what I am clearly suggesting.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How do we make sure that the regulations make that a process where people are assisted and not stigmatised and dismissed? How do we make sure that something like that is part and parcel of safety? For example, in the occ health and safety act there are a series of issues around falling to prevent falls. We put a whole series of systematic lifting and different things in place—I am thinking of nursing homes to prevent falls—and if someone falls we do not then dismiss them because they fell; we look at what happened to look at our systems. How do we ensure that mental health becomes a system-based analysis and not an individual-based judgement that ends up with someone being disadvantaged because of your tool?

Dr Bahn: You need a positive safety culture in the first place to support —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How do I do that through regulations?

Dr Bahn: It is a very, very good question. I think that a requirement to have some stats and some data on your people would be the first start. At the moment they do not collect anything much at all and suicide is not even in our deaths or fatalities stats, is it? Secondly, we have the option within the tool to have it come in as an anonymous entry so that you do not actually have to have your full name in there at all and then that way you get aggregated results. So even if you have aggregated data across the month on how people are tracking in your workforce, that would be a step up from what we have got now, because at the moment we do not have anything.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So under the occ health and safety act, they took out welfare in the 1980s and changed it so that it became the occ health and safety act. Do believe that the general responsibilities of an employer under the act go to mental health issues?

Dr Bahn: I do not think they can avoid it, because it permeates through everything that they do. If a worker is not mindful—is not on the job with their mind—because they are having an issue at home, and particularly with FIFO when they have had a problem and they have had to leave and go on a long swing and they are trying to manage that at night on Skype and on a mobile phone when they do not have a signal. Yes, it does fundamentally fall within their responsibility—it is duty of care, straight up, in my view I do not know how to solve it. I am just trying to give it a tool.

[11.10 am]

Dr Pulé: I wonder if I could offer more from the qualitative end in response to that, as assistance. For me, it seems that mandating a mosaic of services is key. What I mean by that is that it is one thing to have two tiers of legislation through OHS requiring certain responses to situations, including mental health, to keep workers safe and well, but I think that what we need to do is actually address the stigmatisation of mental health directly, front on. The way to do that is to recognise that what we are dealing with in the fly in, fly out sector is some individuals who will be very comfortable going to an EAP; some individuals who will really want to go for a walk around the block of dongas at the end of their shift with the chaplain; some individuals who will want to work out really hard in order to get the endorphin rush; some workers who will want to have immediate and really thorough and well-supported access to their families back home, and to know that at a drop of a hat, they can get home if there is an emergency; some individuals who are really struggling quietly and will only really open up with an individual who is trained to listen to them et cetera, et cetera. I mean, I could go on and on with the permutations, so my response to support the more quantitative approach of having the data to back shifts in policy is to actually make sure that there is a mosaic available for the dichotomy of need.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: From a regulatory point of view, what you do to make the mosaic, like the falls example, is you put a regulation that says, “You need to take this into account.” So, duty of care includes mental health is pretty much it. So you get that mosaic, because you get that when you are delivering a safe or a well workplace.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Obviously, your high compression rosters have been a theme that we have taken up from everybody who has come before the committee, and it is one that I am very interested in. It would appear, certainly from my interpretation, that the shorter rosters—you know, one and one—are great. Two and one, that is not too bad. Three and one is getting worse, four and one can be very bad, and longer than that can be a disaster. The question I have to ask you, in your experience and in your research is: what effect do the high compression rosters have on the mental health—not just mental health, but the wellbeing, because I have a view of those two things: you do not have to be mentally ill to commit suicide. I do not think you do. There are different reasons why people commit suicide. It could be the spur of the moment, marriage breakdown, all sorts of things. But mental health is a theme that runs through, I think, what we are looking at. What in your experience and what in your research have you found in relation to high compression rosters and the effects of mental health on FIFO workers?

Ms Vojnovic: We saw from the Lifeline study that the roster compression made a difference. The rate they reported was not a huge difference, but it was certainly significant. My research, which has 629 participants—I am still doing the data analysis—is also showing differences in symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress with the roster compression. Qualitatively, we have had a lot of reports that the longer swings are tougher, in a whole range of different social ways, and on mental health. It is a really important issue; I think it is probably the biggest issue almost that we are looking at with this whole inquiry.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So what is the most acceptable swing in your experience?

Ms Vojnovic: It looks like the more we get to the even roster, the better.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Two on, two off; one on, one off.

Ms Vojnovic: Yes. However, you have to balance that with the finance of the resources companies, obviously. If there can be a compromise between them—some workers will do much better with higher compression than other workers, and it may be a matter of assessing the workers before employment, working out their strengths and working out their preferences, and that would fit within the research that has been published so far as well.

Dr Pulé: A couple of things to add to that, which are that with the de-unionisation of the fly in, fly out workforce, part of what happens is that each individual will often have to negotiate that on their own if—and that is a big “if”—they have the option of negotiating their rosters. I would like to advocate for the re-unionisation of the mining workforce. I think as a key piece of this inquiry, it would be very interesting to see what was brought forward from the unions as a way of addressing some of these concerns that you raise. To link back to your earlier question, Janine, I think that mandating an onboarding and off-boarding requirement—are you familiar with onboarding and off-boarding as terms? That part of it, if I understood your question correctly, is that there could be added to the fly in, fly out experience that companies are actually required to go through a very thorough and personalised onboarding process with each individual, including using tools to assess their mental health, their financial circumstances, their hopes, dreams and aspirations, their goals that they have set, through to when—as happens for everybody at some point—they actually come off those swings, and how are they transitioned off, as opposed to saying, “Do you know what? The iron ore price has dropped. We don’t need you anymore. Thank you very much. Goodbye.”

Ms Vojnovic: If I could just add in as well, roster compression is linked to work–family conflict, which Libby has done some research on and might want to speak on as well, because work–family conflict is also related to mental health.

Mrs Brook: We found that swing ratio was particularly important, but there were also other variables, such as how many children people had as well, which also influenced how they perceived how much they liked the swing ratio. Basically, the more even, the better it was, the more happy someone was, the more likely they were going to stay in the job, and they found that the uneven rosters were the more problematic or least favoured.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Have you written an article on it, Libby?

Mrs Brook: We have got a draft here.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You have got a draft? Are we allowed to —

Ms Vojnovic: It is not mine; it is Libby’s, and she might have to get back to you on when she can submit that, if that is something that you wanted.

Mrs Brook: Sorry, it is a little bit awkward with the publication process.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Certainly, what your draft article shows is that the compression of rosters has an impact on family relationships at home. We hear that there is a higher than normal divorce rate in FIFO, and that would give some sort of reasoning behind that.

Mrs Brook: I can submit it to you under privacy, so it would have to be a confidential document, if that is all right. I will pass it around and you can have a look through it. I also wanted to just pose a question, sorry. You got me thinking when you were discussing how to regulate it, and it has just reminded me of an issue with FRMS—fatigue risk management systems. Whereas there are bigger issues—potentially really individual issues—when it comes to fatigue, organisations are taking that on board, and some do it a lot better than others. Industry pressure is leading to more of a framework to guide companies, so perhaps—I was just thinking on the spot—I was drawing parallels and thinking maybe that could be something that could be mandated—a risk management system that specifically targets mental health. Also, I agree with the onboarding thing as being very, very important, and some organisations do that very, very well. They have a six-month plan, up to a year, of following up with individuals and making sure that they are coping well; they have got sufficient training to meet their needs. The research shows that the better you do the onboarding, the quicker the employee performs at their peak—at their best. So there is an incentive, from an organisational perspective as well, to be able to do that well, and have their employees functioning really well, really quickly, so that they perform well.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Are you able to tell us, either in public evidence now or later in confidential, who are a couple of those organisations that do that well?

Mrs Brook: I might do it confidentially. I have not spoken to them to get permission; I am so sorry.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: That is all right. That is good; it helps us.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I would like to ask a question about the camps in particular. We were talking about the risk factors before, and I think you described it very well, that the FIFO environment just increased the volume, and you talked about a number of the risk factors. Some of the discussions we have had have been about the accommodation camps and the changing nature of those camps over time, where originally they were town-based communities, then they went to more open camps. Some of my colleagues travelled up north in February and saw some of the extreme ends of the control of the camps—that they are not a jail, but a very closed camp with not a lot of flexibility for the workers. It has been put to us, I think through Lifeline, who said that the lack of control and the lack of the ability to control your daily agenda is a significant risk factor. Could you provide some comment on that?

[11.20 am]

Dr Pulé: I will jump in first, just to say that I wrote a paper during my Master's on the parallels between human society and ants and bees, and doing this has taken me back to that paper that I wrote. One of the really interesting things is that I have heard from some workers that they feel like they are part of an ant colony, and we all know that ants and worker bees are expendable. That translates out into the sense that some workers have when they are—I do not know how many of you have been on site, but especially when people are getting to the busses to come on shift or when they are coming off, there is all this high-vis moving around; everybody is sort of docked-in, looking for their meal, or going to the bus. There is this sense of a bee or an ant colony and that can dehumanise a person. That is the key issue. With that, the other issue that I want to raise is that men in particular, already are socialised to operate in isolation, whether we are living our normal lives down here or we are on a FIFO swing. When you go into a FIFO roster, you are exacerbating that sense of isolation in many cases. You couple that with a sense of being dehumanised or becoming a number through this institutionalised or prison-like or AFD-type lifestyle. Suddenly the person is dealing with an exacerbation of that isolation and all the issues that are connected to it. I think that actually calling the spade a spade; really getting some voices from the trenches of lived experience, having the companies actually take the data and the lived-experience and change policy to be able to actually address these issues in a real way shifts the whole experience of fly in, fly out from workers becoming human doings to becoming human beings.

Ms Vojnovic: That is really nice—sorry to jump in, because that was a really nice quote. Can I just add from a psychology perspective that the role of having a lack of control—a feeling that you do not have a say over what you do and when you do it in your environment—is really linked to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, which are both linked to both depression and suicide. So there is an important relationship through those two concepts to mental health problems and suicide.

MR M.J. COWPER: We have heard that fly in, fly out works for some people and suits their situation. I would be interested to know is there any work being done by FACE, for instance, looking at a way in which, perhaps, putting a plan together for workers who have the notion of going into a fly in, fly out? Obviously, the driver is income; there is the attractiveness of the pay packet. Some have a view to killing their mortgage off, some have a plan so set themselves up in business, or whatever it might be, and then there are those who are just fly in, fly out because they want to. I am just wondering whether any work has been done prior to engaging this to setting up an objective and a plan to say, “Here I am. Obviously, I am in construction and the construction finishes when the construct finishes”, but we are seeing an increased number of people working in production these days. So it may be the case that I am going to work for this company for two years and in that time I am going to save X amount and I am going to do this and then I am going to move on. How disciplined does one have to be and how strong, if you like, is the term “golden handcuffs” being made?

Dr Pulé: I would like to defer to you on that one. I have something to contribute at the back end.

Ms Vojnovic: Okay, sure. The financial over-commitment that we see in a lot of FIFO workers is a huge problem and that could be better managed through, again, the induction onboarding process with better education around budgeting and expectations, better goal-setting within the set-up at the beginning as well for the worker so he is clear on his goals. Also, things change; maybe someone gets a divorce halfway through. That will affect their finances as well.

MR M.J. COWPER: Or another baby.

Ms Vojnovic: Yes, another baby. So I do think that is important. I think it is important that there is more work done around that as well.

MR M.J. COWPER: Is that something that FACE could assist with, particularly through your structures that you have got already?

Mrs Brook: There are some consultants that I know that do actually work really hard with this information about what FIFO is likely to be like. I have one colleague in particular who worked both with the families and the workers, educating them as to what it is like. It is similar to military model—the full pre-deployment. It is, I guess, an education—this is what it is going to be like. The literature talks about realistic job previews. To what extent that is possible in this kind of scenario, I do not know. I think the cost there might outweigh or prohibit them doing that to some extent but I know that there are organisations out there that do those information sessions.

MR M.J. COWPER: Just to round that one off, doctor, the issue of the impact of local environmental conditions—the weather, for instance; it can get mighty hot there, obviously—when I was a serving police officer in the Kimberley we used to call it “troppo season”.

MS J.M. FREEMAN: When Graham and I went up to Karratha and I would ask the question, “At what temperature do you take your workers off the job?” They said, “We don’t. We don’t take them off the job. We give them more breaks and we bring in the ice-cream truck. And they really enjoy their ice cream truck.” I asked, “I am sorry, when does it get to the point when it gets too hot for workers to be on the job?” And they do not.

Dr Bahn: They cannot.

Ms Vojnovic: High temperature is really linked with aggression and anger as well.

MS J.M. FREEMAN: They do find temperature is linked with aggression?

Ms Vojnovic: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Ladies and gentleman, we might just go into closed session now, so while the gallery is being vacated, may I ask just one question that is an open question: does FACE agree with the committee's assertion in its discussion paper that resource companies employ a cohort of workers who are statistically at risk of suicide?

Dr Pulé: Yes.

Ms Vojnovic: Yes. That is consistent with the paper I wrote as well.

The CHAIR: Philippa, could you provide the committee with the research work and the research papers that you have done that you mentioned today?

Ms Vojnovic: What I can do is provide you with two papers. I can email them to your office later. That is already published, but I am currently working on my data analysis, so I am part way through analysing. I just closed it. As those results become ready, I can share them with you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, that would be great.

Dr Bahn: Can I just add one thing? I am actually Philippa's supervisor. She is doing her PhD by publication, so as she does release results, they will be published papers. Therefore, they are documents that will be public documents, so you will have that information. She is about to put more results into a paper very shortly that we are submitting to the *Journal of Health, Safety and Environment*, which is an Australian journal. They publish very quickly, so it is very likely you will have a published journal article on the stats.

[The committee took evidence in closed session]
