

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
MONDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2014**

SESSION TWO

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 11.15 am**Mr STEVE McCARTNEY****Secretary, Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, examined:**

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, which is a standing committee of the lower house of the Parliament of Western Australia, I would like to thank you for your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing, as you know, is to assist the committee in its inquiry into the mental health impacts of fly in, fly out work arrangements. I would like to introduce myself, Graham Jacobs, the chairman of this committee. On my left is Murray Cowper. On his left is Rob Johnson. On his left is Rita Saffioti. On her left is Janine Freeman. We have Mathew Bates and Daniel Govus, the executive, and we also have Hansard recording this, Steve.

This hearing is a formal procedure of Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to the proceedings, but you can call us by our first names; we are quite happy with that. Even though the committee is not asking witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. I would just like to ask you a few questions; this is standard sort of stuff. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form?

Mr McCartney: Yes, I do.

The CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

Mr McCartney: I did, even if I went to the wrong floor.

The CHAIR: That is all right; committee members get lost as well. Do you have questions for us before we kick off?

Mr McCartney: No; I am fine, thanks.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Steve. We have got you for about an hour. I might kick off as the chairman. Are you aware that, although the hands-on workplace itself is considered under our Western Australian legislation in both WorkSafe and the Department of Mines and Petroleum safety, the actual accommodation facilities are not considered as part of, if you like, the workplace and do you consider it should be?

Mr McCartney: There has been some confusion around our understanding about that as well. If you listen to some of the clients, like Woodside, Chevron and others, you would suspect that they run the camp. When we had difficulty entering the camp to talk to workers, we had the ABCC saying this was part of the workplace and we were not allowed in there. Now, on recent discovery, I find out that there is really no jurisdiction from any state body over the camp. I think there are also some differentials where camps are. Sometimes camps are in town; sometimes they are on the lease because it is a remote area. Each one of those has got their own issues, and I think some of them impact on local towns and some do not.

The CHAIR: Steve, in relation to that, what safety issues do you suspect may not be addressed due to the lack of the legislation's purview on accommodation facilities?

Mr McCartney: I think there is a bit of confusion. If you take your mind back—I do not know if people around the table would remember Cloudbreak and the horrible thing that happened down there—there was a lot of confusion over whose jurisdiction it was when that issue happened. I think that creates a lot of confusion. Past history tells me if you have got confusion—we do quite a bit of work offshore as well and there is always the argument between AMSA, NOPSEMA and WorkSafe—there is a grey area where no-one is prepared to take responsibility. It usually works that way, to be perfectly honest. Everyone is trying to not take responsibility, instead of the argument to take responsibility. When there are three different groups or four different groups all arguing that it is not their responsibility, you can imagine that a lot of real safety issues fall through the cracks. We have been campaigning for quite a while since before Cloudbreak to try and get something really settled around this issue, but we have not managed to get there yet.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Have you got any examples of where it does work well in particular, or better than others perhaps, that you might have seen somewhere in WA?

Mr McCartney: I worked for a couple of Rio Tinto places in my time. I worked fly in, fly out from 1982 through to 1995, so I have had a fair bit of experience. I have seen most companies do it poorly; some companies do it well. Most of those companies that do it well have really got an onus around permanent residency in local towns and us being fill-in workers flying in and out, which is a little more accommodating than when I was in construction, say, doing 16 weeks on and one week off with about 1 900 blokes at Limestone Creek, for example, which was four months away from family. There was very poor communication. The go used to be after work—I do not know whether this is appropriate, but it is the truth—you went via the wet mess; you got six cans of beer in a 12-can box, with ice in it; and you waited in line to talk on the phone, because there were 1 900 guys and about eight phones, usually about three or four of them not working. There used to be a lot of pressure on communication even in those days. The sad part about it is it is 2014 and guys have still got problems with communications.

<005> B/A [11:21:31 AM](#)

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Not to the degree that you are alluding to now in relation to 1982 to 1995?

Mr McCartney: No. But I think the expectations are a bit higher now because we have got people using Skype, face-to-face—all that—and the family's expectations are a lot higher than, say, my family had in 1982. Their expectations would be see me four times a year or three times a year and hear from me when I could get through. Now, we have got fathers and mothers telling their children bedtime stories and dropping offline, or trying to have real communication about what is going on at school and dropping offline. Sometimes the tyranny of distance causes pressure on your relationship, and there is nothing more damaging to your relationship than to be in the middle of, let us say, a discussion where we do not agree and then all of a sudden the phone drops out, because there is always the inference that you did not bother to try to get back.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: From your experience today—I do not refer to when you were doing the four months on and one week off or whatever it might have been—as head of your union, where you are in contact with your union members, I would assume, who are doing FIFO work, what is the message that you get come through from them in relation to rosters? What is the most convivial roster in relation to family life and their wellbeing in mental health terms? We are looking at the possible suicide rate and the causes in FIFO work. We are looking at mental health in general, but in this particular inquiry it is the suicides that take place in FIFO work. Do you have data from all your members in relation to the number of members that, tragically, have committed suicide in relation to FIFO work?

Mr McCartney: We do not keep that data as a matter of course. We have done a rule of thumb thing since I took over the job—it was done before that—and on average about four people commit suicide in the last three weeks of the working year, towards Christmas. That is an average, and it is

just something that was done by the previous secretary that we do to try to gauge where the industry is. Some years are worse and other years are better.

The CHAIR: So you pick a time—a time frame?

Mr McCartney: We pick three weeks. I really cannot explain why we pick three weeks, because it was three weeks when I started. Our previous secretary was Jock Ferguson, and Jock Ferguson, I think, just did that as a matter for his own personal understanding, or litmus test, on where the industry was.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Was that three weeks the final three weeks of the calendar year or the financial year?

Mr McCartney: The final three weeks of the year before you knock off at Christmas. Once upon a time—except for this year now, with Chevron and others—guys in construction, because of the long hours and the amount of time you are away, used to have a week off over Christmas so they could go back and see their families. I see that has been taken off them too, now. It is the three weeks before that.

Mr M.J. COWPER: That phenomenon is common. In my previous life as a police officer we had the same issue right across the spectrum of the broader community. We used to call it the troppo season. It is the case that that is a phenomenon that occurs widely in the community.

Mr McCartney: These guys are members of the community. The problem with FIFO work is you have got all the same issues that you have got in the community; it is just amplified because of the tyranny of distance, poor communication, the culture of the place and the lack of peer support.

The CHAIR: Just following on from Rob Johnson, Steve, just give us your views on what is the ideal roster, if you like, in relation to mental health and wellbeing. I know it is a difficult question but a guy of your experience talks to a lot of members, a lot of miners, a lot of people in the mining industry. Can you give us your thoughts around roster systems—rosters and rotors and swings and what is ideal?

Mr McCartney: I think the work has already been done. I think it has been done by the mining companies themselves.

The CHAIR: What is your view —

Mr McCartney: I think this is the best way for me to explain this. Sorry if it takes a little longer than you might expect. If you look at Rio Tinto, BHP and others, with their full-time workers, they are lining up rosters that are more family friendly et cetera, and that is not an accident. That is because they are trying to reduce the number of suicides on the job. They are trying to make sure they have good retention because of family friendly rosters and they care about their workers' mental health. Construction workers do not have that convenience. Construction workers are under different pressures. Construction workers and construction companies are saying, "We want to maximise the amount of time that people are on the workplace because we want to maximise the productivity." That is what they believe, anyway, that it maximises productivity.

Mr M.J. COWPER: They have got construction time lines.

Mr McCartney: Yes, but I do not know that keeping people for long periods of time away from their family maximises productivity. I know that when I was doing 16 weeks on and one week off, my first three weeks back on the job was thinking about why did I come back in the first place, and my last three weeks was really counting down my three weeks—make sure I do not get hurt and make sure I get out on time. So my head is not where my hands are. The potential for me to get hurt is a lot higher and, hopefully, that was part of the reason that the march was going to shorter time on the job. I do not believe we have got there yet. I believe we have got an opportunity where we have been talking to members recently, because, for the first time in 14 years that I know, workers are doing their own agreements on a construction site. Before that, it was all greenfields agreements.

They were agreements agreed between the union or the company, and in the 1990s, of course, it was a position where the unions did not have any say in the agreements and the companies had full say.

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This time the members are having their own opportunity to say what we believe is a good roster. I think, listening to them, what they are saying in iron ore is three and one, instead of four and one. What they are saying in oil and gas is quite clear: they want to do 20 and 10. We had a meeting recently with 4 000 workers, as the CFMEU, the AMWU and the ETU. We talked to 4 000 workers at Gorgon recently and they all overwhelmingly said they wanted 20 and 10, and that was after we explained to them that if they put their hands up for a 20-and-10 roster, they lose \$8 000 a year, and they did not care, and if they picked up another roster, which was 23 and nine, they would have made \$3 500 a year extra. So workers are quite prepared to take a cut in pay to ensure they get the time with their family. I am sure everyone understands that as these projects get bigger and longer, we have got workers who spend three or four years away on these rosters. It is not a matter of people going up for construction for three or four months or five or six months anymore. Every time people go away, these projects are for three, four or five years, and what we are asking workers to do is to spend a whole period of time away. The guys spend more time in the presence of their boss and their boss gets to see them more than their family does, but the boss does seem to have the same duty of care 24 hours a day as he should.

[11.30 am]

Mr M.J. COWPER: Typically, what hours are they working on shift?

Mr McCartney: Between 10 and 12 hours each shift.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Night shift?

Mr McCartney: There is a big push at the moment for companies to try to reduce their breaks while that happens, and this is where I think all the things add up.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What do you mean by reducing the breaks when that happens?

Mr McCartney: They try to give them 11 and a half hours—paying for 11 and a half instead of 12—then they try to get them to have an early knock at the end of the day to miss their mid-afternoon break. The aspect of knocking off early sometimes appeals to workers, but it potentially puts them in more harm because they do not have that break and have to concentrate for longer.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How many dry camps have you got as opposed to wet camps?

Mr McCartney: Most of the camps now, to be perfectly honest, are restricted to around four mid-strength beers. In 1982 there was huge problem with mental health and alcoholism and whatever. I think there have been some real steps about addressing the alcohol issue on the job, but there are still those other steps they need to take.

Mr M.J. COWPER: What is the union's position in relation to alcohol consumption on worksites?

Mr McCartney: I am not an advocate of people getting drunk, deteriorating their own health and possibly impacting on their workmates on the job. I believe having a smart education program on these jobs to improve people's health and wellbeing is a smart thing. We just want them to take the same steps with mental health.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Like normal human nature, there are those who want to go beyond their four mid-strength beers and there are others who do not drink at all. There seems to be a bit of bargaining going on round the place—horsetrading or whatever you want to call it.

Mr McCartney: I suppose if there was any horsetrading, unless they are pretty proficient at it, at best they might grab a couple of extra cans, but I could not imagine someone storing 24 cans in their room with their tops off. Do you know what I mean? I think it would be a very quick afternoon on a long hot day.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: They open the tops?

Mr McCartney: All the cans are open, so the myth about people collecting all these cans up and having drunken parties in their rooms is exactly that, because you are not going to keep open cans in your room. I know my dad used to chuck a spoon or something into the top of the bottle to save it every now and then, but I think they would not have enough spoons in the room to save them!

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can you just go through what you believe are the factors that place FIFO workers at risk in terms of mental health and illness? You have talked about family and stuff like that, but did you want to talk about some of the other risks?

Mr McCartney: From my own personal experiences, if you talk to your workmates about your mental health, you are considered weak. You get threatened if you keep carrying on about it.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: When you say “threatened”, threatened by your workmates or supervisors or your bosses?

Mr McCartney: Both. When I had a problem years and years ago—it was a pretty traumatic thing that happened in my family—I was doing 13 or 16 weeks at the time, shifts, and you only get X amount of time off for bereavement leave, which I think is three days. You do a seven-day swing, so you have your five days off or seven days off—seven days is really five days because you are going home and going back. You have your five days off, go to a funeral and go back to work. You go back to work too early, you start, you know, getting a little bit depressed, you start talking to a few people, and the word is “Toughen up, princess”, all sort of stuff. If I could eradicate one sentence out of the Pilbara, it would be “Toughen up, princess.” I think “Toughen up, princess” has probably added to more suicides than anything else in the Pilbara. What that really means is that we need companies to help educate people and we need companies to understand, too, the stigma around mental health. We have to change the culture and that is why Mick Buchan and I and others are working so hard with our members about this. We do have to change the culture up there and part of changing the culture is good leadership. Part of good leadership is the unions and the companies working together to make sure that we have an environment where people can have good education around mental health—they can have peer support from a third party, not from management on the team. We need to be able to connect and have people help connect our members to the mental health they need. We need to have a system in place, similar to workers’ comp, where if someone does have a mental health issue, there is a return-to-work plan for that person and there is something in place where companies have to return to work. Some of the people I have had the pleasure or honour to talk to who have opened up to us have failed attempts at suicide. Part of the issue is—I am paraphrasing—when you think you have lost your family and you have lost everything, the only thing you have actually got left is your job. If you know you have to put your hand up, if you put your hand up about mental health on that job, that is last time you will be there as well, and that means you have successfully lost everything. Sometimes that thought, which amplifies in an empty room every night, leads people to make decisions that they would not necessarily make in a different environment. We believe that communication with your family and your friends needs to be improved to a situation where it is up to 2014 standards, where people can have a face-to-face with their children or can talk to people about issues that are bothering them for any length of time. They need to have a position where they can go to work, and if they have got a mental health issue, put their hands up and say, “I’ve got a few problems”, and the company and their workmates support them to get through those problems. That is the perfect environment for us.

Mr M.J. COWPER: How addictive is the money to the workers?

Mr McCartney: It is addictive. I know; I did it. The money is addictive, because what you do is, like anyone, I suppose, you get a high roller’s job or you get a job that is going to earn a few quid, and you adjust your lifestyle to suit that money. Of course, once you have been in that game and are used to working on that money, that becomes the way you live your life. If all of a sudden that money gets taken away, you have got to start thinking, “Well, what do I do now?” There is also a

thing when you have done FIFO for a long period of time of coming back and fitting in to your family when you stop.

Mr M.J. COWPER: If there was a young person, a nephew, niece, daughter, son or whatever who was looking to go and work fly in, fly out, what is a piece of advice you would give them?

Mr McCartney: My son has started fly in, fly out, and the advice I gave him was, “Try to keep your head together while you are there. Keep your head on your job so you do not get hurt on the job. Communicate with us about any issues that you do have—nothing is too small. And, make sure you come and see your family on your time off.” I have worked up there long enough and I have seen enough people blow up in the industry. One thing I think is important that everyone knows around the table is that there is like a cone of silence around this stuff. If you have a mental health issue at Rio Tinto, you will not get a supervisor or anyone talking about mental health on that job. People have been told in the past not to mention that on the job. People go away from the job, and we have had a lot of mental breakdowns play out on the job in construction when it was 16 and one.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Eighteen years of age before you get out on a mine site; is that too young?

Mr McCartney: I think that is a good question. I think it actually depends on the maturity of the kid and I think it also depends on what sort of support mechanisms you have got on the job. If you said now, I would say no. If we have got some ways to improve the culture and some legislation around making it safer for your mental health on the job, I would say yes, it would be the same as any other workplace. I think it is important to remember that if I was at home and I was working at the garage up the road and I had a few problems, I have a whole network in Perth to chase up. I can go down here just behind the hospital there to—I forget the name of them—Sammy’s or whatever and I can go and talk to them. There are a lot of people who you can go and have a face-to-face discussion with, and/or people or peers within your family. You cannot do any of that up there. There is no sense of community now they are motelling the rooms. Once upon a time, your room was your room when you went to a project for three or four years. Your neighbour was your neighbour and the 24 people you lived with in your little clutch became another little community of workmates that you could share things with or they could see when something is going wrong. But if you are constantly changing your neighbours and constantly the ground is moving, you never get to build that sense of community, around even those small workplaces, and that is damaging.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Steve, you would have started up Limestone Creek in your time —

Mr McCartney: Smoke Creek and I then went to Limestone.

Mr M.J. COWPER: So you would have been underground there for a little while. Underground versus open pit, any particular issues there?

Mr McCartney: I might be the worst person to ask about underground; I hated underground. I reckon you spend a lot of time there after you are dead, and I do not want to spend too much time there while I am alive! I did do some work underground and I have to say I spent more time looking at the ceiling than I did anything else. Underground is not safe. It is less safe now than it was before. It is less safe now that they have changed the blast restrictions on 500 metres. Once upon a time everyone cleared the pit; everyone cleared the hole when you had a blast. Now, if you are at the 750-metre level doing the pumps, which most fitters are, and they are blasting at the 200-metre level, you go and sit in the capsule. That does not do your mental health good.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Steve, I am a bit surprised that you as a responsible union are not keeping better data on those of your workforce, your members, who are suffering mental health problems, particularly those who suicide. I am surprised you only have the end three weeks of any calendar year over the Christmas period. I would have thought that a responsible union, which I am told you are, would have excellent data on your members and their health issues, whether they be mental health or physical health issues. Are you going to change your practice and try to get that data together?

Mr McCartney: We are going to try to get that data together more. I suppose it would be a lot easier for us to attain that data if we had more of an open policy with the companies and if the companies were more open and honest around mental health, and shared the data they had with us. I do not know whether they collect any data, and if they did, they definitely have not been forthcoming with us. We always try to act as a responsible union, but I suppose if we could have some responsible management around these issues on the job and an attitude where we shared information on those particular projects, we could all be enlightened a bit better and we could probably all take some common steps to fix the thing.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: I can accept that, but you have obviously got representatives who are based on site—a representative at least—surely part of that person’s job description would be to collate any information on your members and their wellbeing.

<007> A/3 [11:44:17 AM](#)

[11.45 am]

Mr McCartney: They do, right up as far as workers’ comp. We have only got X amount of facilities in a union and we have only got X amount of money to spend on what we need to do to deliver the best thing for our members. The best way we can deliver good mental health on the job for our members is do what we have done now, which is to lobby the government to get them to understand that there is a real issue out there, and to get companies to share their opinion and hopefully come up with a real answer to mental health. Whether I took statistics for the last 10 years, or not, this is the first time that any government has actually looked into this particular issue with any vigour. I actually congratulate you for doing it, because it is well and truly overdue.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We want to try and find out, if we can, the causes of it, and if we can find out the causes of those people that have such serious mental health problems that they consider committing suicide, then we have got to do something. We have got to try and put something in place to divert them from that tragic end.

Mr McCartney: I think that is very right, Rob, and the answer to that is treating mental health issues like workers comp issues—making sure that the company has to document it, making sure that that documentation goes to a third party, and making sure there is some legislation in place to ensure that they have got some more protection. Then you might get some people that actually put their hand up. It is like what they have with the safety triangle. If somebody puts their hand up for a near miss, you can add up the things at the bottom and you can just about predict when there is going to be a death on site. If we had people that had an atmosphere and a culture on the job to put their hand up when they are having mental issues, then we could understand how many underlying mental issues there are on the site so that we could do something about it to avoid the end game.

I went to a lecture from Mates in Construction on the hospital up here—Fiona Stanley Hospital. It was an absolute eye-opener, and I hope you are talking to those people as well, because when I was sitting in the room with 50-odd people, and they asked put your hand up if you have been or you have been in contact with a relative or a workmate who has had a mental health issue or tried to commit suicide, 95 per cent of the people put their hand up. They filled a questionnaire out—I am not trying to steal Mick Buchan’s thunder here—but they have done some great work with mental health, the CFMEU. The survey said out of every 100 people that come to that course, four of those people have contemplated committing suicide. So, four in every 100 people on that workplace of 1 500 were contemplating suicide. They are the sorts of startling statistics that should get any company motivated.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: In relation to your submission, one of the key points was the theme of lack of control by the employee, where the employer controls so much of the life of a FIFO worker. That is something that I think is coming to prominence compared to other workers, that the employer controls so much of the employee. It is actually interesting, because the beyondblue person this morning said one of the key factors that led to anxiety and depression is when someone feels that

they do not have any control over their lives. Do you think an employee's lack of control—you mentioned, for example, that the employer controls everything including the accommodation, the transport, what they do in their spare time, and what they eat—is one of the key factors in some of the mental illness issues?

Mr McCartney: Our campaign Camps not Prisons was all about that. At the end of the day, when I was working FIFO, I had a sense of freedom after work, because I was free to leave the camp. I was free to do anything any other responsible person was allowed to do—go fishing, go and look at the scenery, go into town, go wherever I needed to go—as long as I was responsibly back in a fit condition to go to work the next day. Now, you are controlled whether you can leave the camp, you are controlled what you do when you are in the camp, you are controlled how many people can visit you in the camp, and you are controlled where you live in the camp; and every time you go back to that camp, you live in a different spot.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: What do you mean by “how many people can visit you in the camp”?

Mr McCartney: You have to apply for a visitation in the camp.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If someone wants to come on site?

Mr McCartney: If someone wants to come on board, they have to go through all the processes to get in. If you are a union official and you want to go in there, well, good luck.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: My understanding about leaving the camp is they just do not want you to leave.

Mr McCartney: You only have to look at Chevron, Wheatstone and Onslow, that is a classic example of that, and what that has done to that town.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Steve, I am very interested to know what your organisation does when they get a report of someone who has attempted self-harm, and what support you have for your members and their family?

Mr McCartney: We have got a mental health support unit attached to the AMWU, and if we get any of our members, we point them in that direction and send them to get as much help as possible. We also engage our legal team and open a file and basically get that feedback from our members, and then we wait to see whether they have got a job or not, and then we hopefully argue successfully and get them back on the job; but more than likely, no.

The CHAIR: You said we have got to change the whole culture, but you also talked about some legislative change and some regulative change. Can I read you something out of the Mines Safety and Inspection Act 1994? It is part 2, “General duties relating to occupational safety and health”. Section 9 is headed, “Employers, duties of”. Where I am going with this is I just want your opinion about where mental health and mental illness fits here. It states —

- (1) An employer must, so far as is practicable, provide and maintain at a mine a working environment in which that employer's employees are not exposed to hazards and, in particular, but without limiting the generality of that general obligation, an employer must —

It then talks, in paragraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d), about exposure to hazards. I do not know whether this has really been tested or not, but one of the views that I hear anecdotally is that this encompasses mental health and mental illness, and the hazards include exposure to, obviously, issues that impinge on people's mental and emotional wellbeing. What is your view about that?

Mr McCartney: My view of that is since 1979, when I first went onto a mine, but let us just say since 1982, I have had to fill out forms to make sure I have got my boots on; make sure I have got my glasses and my hardhat on; make sure that if I am a metre high, I wear a belt; make sure that I do not work in the dark; make sure I do not work by myself; make sure that I have done a tag 5 every time I do any work on the job; and make sure that if there are any issues around that, I go to a

supervisor. Out of all that, there has never been one form or one tick off or one discussion about my mental health since 1982. The only time I ever hear about anyone's mental health is when they talk about stress-related incidents around bullying and harassment, and mainly that discussion is around whether my peers are attacking me or not on the job, and never much of an inference about management. So, I would say mental health should be at the forefront of all that, because, at the end of the day, there is a silence around mental health. All that you discussed there, it is implied—that your mental health should be looked after as a general aspiration. Show me anywhere else in there where it says anything about dealing with someone with a mental health issue, what they are going to do, what is their journey back to work et cetera, et cetera. I do not think there will be anything in here.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Just to talk about that, since you began, until now, that is a change in culture to putting in a systematic process to ensure safety in the workplace, away from blaming the individual and working towards a systematic change. How do we get that same systematic change in terms of talking about wellbeing around mental health in workplaces in the mining industry?

Mr McCartney: I think companies have got the capacity to do that, because I have seen the companies use that same capacity to improve our physical health on the job. So it has gone from, once upon a time, you know, turning up for work, making sure you got your boots and your hardhat on, to all the stuff that we have got now. My first induction was three hours. Now, you cannot do an induction in under two days, because they want to make sure that they cover every aspect of the job. I bet you nowhere through those inductions is there a discussion about mental health.

The CHAIR: When this talks about hazards, you do not believe the issues impacting on a person's mental health and wellbeing are encompassed by this word "hazards"?

Mr McCartney: I do not believe it. Maybe many lawyers will. But I bet you, if you read that to a supervisor or a manager, in any context, not in this room, and asked that manager what does that imply, it would be, "I want to make sure they have got their boots on" et cetera. That is the culture I was talking about.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Does not mean we need to change the legislation and the definition of "hazard" to include wellbeing?

Mr McCartney: All I know is when you legislate to say if a bloke gets killed at work, you go to jail, they make sure that you do not get killed at work. All I am saying is if you look at changing the regulations to make mental health have a similar standing as workers comp, where it becomes a responsibility of the company instead of an aspiration, then you have got more chance of people putting their hand up because they have got some chance of understanding that if they do get it right, they can get back on the job. Until that happens, you are going to have people that are silenced by fear. In our survey, it is the same people that will not take—I am trying to think of the word for it—their anti-depression medication, because if it comes up in a urine test, it shows they have got a mental issue, and they might get the sack.

The CHAIR: Tell us about that. Does that really happen?

Mr McCartney: I have got to say, I was as surprised as anyone when I read the results from the survey. I did not picture that as an issue myself, mainly because I do not take those tablets myself. But to even think that our people are thinking that has got to show, I think, where the culture of the job is. For people to be too scared to take their anti-depression tablets for fear that it will show up in a urine test and they will have to answer questions about their mental health, I think condemns the position where we are now.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So should the medical person on the site who takes those urine samples be empowered to be able to keep confidential from management any information that is found from urine tests or other tests, where there are drugs within the system that are not illegal—such as antidepressant drugs, which are legal—so that the confidentiality which a doctor and a patient

would normally have is maintained? To me, it makes sense that the person who is taking those samples has to by law keep that information confidential, unless the drugs that are found within the system are illegal drugs?

Mr McCartney: I suppose that would work. I suppose that is one way of addressing it. I suppose the sad part is that we have to keep it from the employer. The sad bit is that the first thing you think about is, “How do we keep this from the employer so that the guy will not get the sack?”

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: But is it not better to keep that person alive by taking their antidepressant tablets than telling the governor, if you like, that this bloke has got some problems?

Mr McCartney: I understand that.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Surely if you have got somebody qualified who is taking those samples, and you have got somebody on site who is acting as a chaplain, if you like, who can talk confidentially with the workers, that would help keep those people alive.

Mr McCartney: Invariably, people with mental health issues end up having to take time off work with those mental health issues. Sometimes, it gets to that point. The difficulty is their disappearance from work and coming back, and how do they get back.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So that that does not just trigger —

Mr McCartney: I know exactly where you are coming from, and I do understand what you saying, and that would be a way to protect the worker, for sure. But the ultimate way to protect the worker is making it illegal for the boss to do it.

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[12 noon]

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, but you can do that at the same time if you wanted to.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Steve, I just want to walk through that issue in relation to the medication that has been not taken. My understanding is that they obviously test for common recreational drugs—THC, meth, prescription drugs, habituates and that sort of thing—but unless you actually request a test to identify, let us say, Diazepam or something like that that might be an antidepressant, are you saying that to your knowledge some mining companies are testing for that?

Mr McCartney: Every mining company tells you, “If you are taking any prescription drugs, write them down on a bit of paper before you do your test.”

Mr M.J. COWPER: So they just have to declare it?

The CHAIR: In my early days, if I wanted to screen someone for whether they were taking illegal medication, you itemised what you were looking for. The screening test is not a blunder bus. So, if you were going to detect an antidepressant within the urine test, you would specifically ask for it.

Mr McCartney: I do not know anything about testing, but the sad bit is —

The CHAIR: It is coming up.

Mr McCartney: —these guys either do not know either, or they are not game to find out or they are not game to ask the question. That is the culture and the atmosphere that is there. I do not know if any of the boilermakers, fitters or TAs know the make-up of the test. I am sure doctors do. It is the fear of that. If you are asking the worker to be honest—every one of my members is—if they are going in there, they are going to write down the medication they are taking. If they take that medication, they have already flagged to the boss that they have got an issue. That is the problem. If you lie on that one, you might be encouraging them to lie on others as well, and I do not know if that is really where you really want to be. I do not want my members there; I want my members to go on the job and say, “I have had a mental health issue, I am taking medication for it, and it is okay”, and expect to get a plane ticket the next time. That is what I think they would expect.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Most people would like that to happen, and that may happen.

Mr McCartney: Mining might be one of the few professions in Australia that determines whether you work there or not. I suppose the Army and the police and all that would be the same. But I do not know if they should be under the same rigours as the Army and the police. Because you can have a mental health issue in Parliament and get away with it.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: We never tell lies!

The CHAIR: Is it true that in the mining medical, if you like, these issues about medication would be revealed in that pre-admission, pre-mining questionnaire and medical report and examination before a person got the job?

Mr McCartney: Yes, and you would never know whether that stopped them getting the job or not. You do not know. I think these are the people who have engaged in some support post-employment.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Very often, fortunately for many people, mental health issues are not lifelong issues. They are issues that last for a period of time. They fall into depression and anxiety, and eventually, sometimes through medication and sometimes through other types of therapy, they get out of it and they then lead a normal healthy life and their mental health is restored. We do not know the average length of any mental health issue for any one person, but in the inquiry that we are looking into with FIFO workers, I personally think that the roster system has a bearing on it. The length of time that you are away from your wife, your children, your loved ones, your friends, your peers, your support group, if you like, must have a bearing.

Mr McCartney: It does.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The longer you are away, to me, probably the risk goes up. I have spoken to a lot of FIFO workers outside of this committee. My son is a FIFO worker—two weeks on, one week off. But the one week off, you are quite right, it is not seven days, it is five days, because one day is coming back and one day is going up there, and that is part of your off time, and you are travelling and you cannot do anything else; or you might be coming off the nightshift and whatever. The best shift would appear to be, from what I can find out, a genuine two weeks on and then one week off completely, which is your week, not travelling time. Would that be pretty common, would you say?

Mr McCartney: That would be pretty common. I did two and two with Rio Tinto for five years or so.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Two and two would be lovely. I am sure my son would love two and two.

Mr McCartney: I think most people would. Two and two was a good roster. If you remember rightly, that was the first fly in, fly out roster in Western Australia for permanent workers for mining.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: You would probably not mind losing a day travelling up and a day travelling back if it is coming out of two weeks rather than one week.

Mr McCartney: It made you feel really bad, though. If you were working there as a contractor and everyone is doing two and two and you have 13, 14 days—six weeks, in those days—by the time the mine started, we had already had two big blues on that job, and we got it down from 16 and one to six and one. You will see that in history. We were doing six and one, while every miner on that job was doing two and two. That disparity does hurt when you see them flying in and flying out.

Mr M.J. COWPER: What about the ones that were flying from Kununurra to the camp?

Mr McCartney: Every day. The albatrosses used to do okay. They would be home every day. Usually, though, there were not too many blue-collar workers on that plane.

The CHAIR: Steve, you just touched on bullying and harassment a bit earlier. Obviously, your union is aware of that being a problem in FIFO accommodation, away from the on-tools

environment. Can you tell us a little about that, if you are aware of bullying and harassment, for instance, in the camp itself?

Mr McCartney: There are a couple of things. There is bullying and harassment in camps, and that is education and sometimes having to weed out the bullies from time to time. There is no shortage of supervisors, security people and others, understanding how much power they have got. If you are earning \$170 000 or \$180 000 a year and you want to protect that, they know how badly you want to protect it. They know that their job and their accommodation depends on it, and all of a sudden people feel more empowered than they should when they are working in a place. So maybe the attitude of some security guards, and I have been personally involved in one of these, where security guards just overstep because they think they can and because at the end of the day they think they have got the power to go back and report you, and you lose your accommodation. So some people—like most people, I suppose; a cross-section of people—abuse that power, and some people do not. Sometimes security guards and other staff push the envelope too far, and sometimes people overreact and then they go missing. Sometimes it is like schoolyard crap, to be perfectly honest, where guys just pick on people on the job. We should be able to be, hopefully, in an environment where we can put our hand up over that.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: One of the things I have experienced as the member for Mirrabooka is a feeling of racism on those sites, when African workers go off and work there. I have one young man that I am dealing with who feels that he was dealt with and picked on because of his race. Are you aware of that?

Mr McCartney: If we ever have another one of these on racism, I could be here for a day or so. I would hate to be an African worker or a Filipino worker or a worker from any other part of the world at the moment and be an Australian citizen working here, because there is a lot of perception that “there are 457s on the job, and my mate cannot get a job” et cetera. A lot of angst has been generated around 457s and 457 workers. I can imagine that it would be difficult for some African or Filipino and any other person who has English as a second language coming on that job because of the amount of stuff around 457 workers. The reason we wanted to put so much protection in place on the job around 457 workers is we wanted to change culture about that. I know I am on my bike about this, but at the end of the day, if you had proper market testing for the job, could you imagine this as the situation we have got? We have proper market testing for the job. We do not have the adequate skills for the job, so we will import those skills to come on the job to help us finish the project. But because we have identified that we have a skills shortage, we are putting apprentices on to compensate for that. That changes the whole attitude to people coming on the job. It does not demonise the worker for coming over here and supporting the project. I do not know if management want that to happen. I think they like to divide and conquer on the workplace. I think that is why they do not change that culture.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Just talking about that, in your submission you said camp should be treated as a workplace for the purposes of reporting injuries, medical issues and union access. Can you just talk about the importance of union access in terms of mental health issues and worksites and accommodation?

Mr McCartney: Sometimes one-on-one conversations with our members is the only time that they can talk to us about their issues and see if they can get some help. Other times they contact us by email or telephone. But the best contact is with those guys. Sometimes you can assess those blokes just by talking to them and seeing how many problems they have got. I have worked with companies in my past that are worker-friendly companies to ensure that that person gets some help.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Do you communicate through Skype at all?

Mr McCartney: We try to, but it is very difficult out there because it keeps falling over. That is the problem. One of the biggest problems out there is the communication off that joint is terrible. I had

my iPad over there the other day and I wanted to download—this is in the middle of the day when there is no pressure on the system—two pages of a document and it kept timing out. I give up now.

The CHAIR: Where are you talking about—Barrow Island?

Mr McCartney: Barrow Island. Barrow Island is shocking. There are big gaps in the Pilbara as well, as you know. It is about the bandwidth that companies are prepared to pay for.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Is it really? They could get better communications if they paid for more bandwidth?

Mr McCartney: Absolutely.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: So it is not a technical problem; it is a cost problem?

Mr McCartney: Most technical problems are cost problems.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Are you sure about that—it is a cost problem rather than a technical problem?

Mr McCartney: Absolutely, because if you get bigger bandwidth, you can have people on the game. It is the same as we had the argument offshore. Once we won the argument offshore about bigger bandwidth, communication got better. It is about how many people are using the band at the one particular time. So you can imagine knock-off time—it goes mad. They do not have—or they do not buy—the capacity that takes that pressure.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Previously you talked about making mental health workers comp covered. Are you able to tell the committee what that entails or would you like to come back to us with something that talks about what that entails?

Mr McCartney: We can put that together and come back if you like.

The CHAIR: So you commit to giving us, perhaps, some legislative or regulative changes to step us through that?

Mr McCartney: Yes. We can give you our opinion on how we think it could work.

The CHAIR: That would be good, Steve. Thank you.

Thank you for your evidence before us today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you. You could correct it for minor errors if you so wish. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days. If you do not do that, we accept that you think it is okay and it does not need any corrections. New material cannot be added via these corrections, but we appreciate what you have given an undertaking to provide for the committee, and you can provide that when you return your transcript. Please include any supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you do return that. Thank you very much for your time and for being open and frank with us. We appreciate it.

Hearing concluded at 12.14 pm