

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE INQUIRY —
FLY IN, FLY OUT WORKERS — SUICIDES**

Motion

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That the Education and Health Standing Committee undertake an urgent inquiry into the reasons behind the suicides of fly in, fly out workers, and recommend initiatives that industry and government can take to reduce their prevalence.

The opposition is very keen to have this house agree to an urgent inquiry by the Education and Health Standing Committee into the issue of fly in, fly out workers suiciding. This issue has come to the public's attention far more prominently in recent months than it has before. Because of the really quite extraordinary numbers of FIFO workers who are suiciding, it deserves some inquiry for two reasons—firstly, as the motion says, to examine the reasons behind the suicides; and, secondly, to look at ways of reducing the prevalence of suicide. It is a two-pronged inquiry. That is how it is different from other things that have been discussed at the moment around these issues. We do not just want to look at the reasons behind it; we also need to look with a very well informed eye at what can be done to prevent these suicides.

Mr R.F. Johnson: I think that's the most important part of your motion.

Mr M. McGOWAN: It is.

Mr R.F. Johnson: We know the reasons behind this; we need to work out what we can do to reduce it.

Mr M. McGOWAN: I agree with the member for Hillarys; that is the most important part. The beauty of what we are suggesting, now that the member has taken me down that track, is that the committee can call before it people from industry and government to hear from them what practices they have in place and what we can do to enhance or improve those practices to prevent suicides in the future. The good thing about this committee is that it has that power. Others do not have that power. Doctors do not have that power. Doctors can examine the issue but they do not have the power to call people before them. It is certainly not in any way meant to be any sort of star chamber or accusatory body examining those people. It is a way of teasing out and getting answers from people in the industry as to what they are doing and hearing from them how they might be able to work better with government, non-profit organisations or the like about what can be done. A parliamentary committee has that power to call these people forward; no other body has that power. The authority of a parliamentary committee is needed to examine these issues. This committee has shown itself to be fairly thorough and also has as its chair a medical doctor, which is quite appropriate in these circumstances.

I will give a few facts for the benefit of the *Hansard*. According to the figures that have been released, nine FIFO workers have suicided in the past year. I have not seen any figures for the years prior to that but I would not be surprised if the figures have been fairly dramatic in the same way over past years because the issues were the same in past years—as long as FIFOs have been around. This practice has been in place in Western Australia for 30 or so years. It is a dramatic number. I recognise, contrary to some people, that the fly in, fly out mode of employment is a fact of life. We need to understand that a lot of the mining industry would not be able to operate without this mode of employment. It suits the lifestyle of a large number of Western Australians; indeed, 50 000 people work on fly in, fly out rosters. It is surprising to go to the airport in the morning and see the extraordinary number of people who are engaged in fly in, fly out work. This is their life. I accept that that is the case. I understand that it is a requirement of industry. I understand that a lot of families like that lifestyle and it suits them. I want to make that plain at the outset. I am not saying that we should try to stop FIFO or that people must live in the locations in which the mines are located. Some people say that. I do not say that. I do say that the number of FIFO workers suiciding is too high and we need to get to the bottom of why that is and what can be done to prevent it in the future.

Fly in, fly out workers are a very important part of our state's economy. Almost uniformly, they are engaged in the mining industry; I would expect that 80 to 90 per cent fly in and fly out from the Pilbara. Some work in the Kimberley and some in the goldfields. There are some drive in, drive out workers in some regional centres. Some drive in and drive out from Perth, particularly to the goldfields and the south west, but roughly 50 000 people are engaged in this occupation. Naturally, with their families, that probably totals 150 000 or so Western Australians who are directly involved or are family members of fly in, fly out workers across this state.

When nine people die in the past year, we have to look at the reasons behind that. I think the reasons would vary according to each individual. Like the members for Willagee and Warnbro and some other members here, I spent some time away from home as part of my employment some time ago, though nothing to the degree that they did. When the conditions are arduous and one is a long way from home and one is young and perhaps not

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Mr Mark McGowan; MR R.H. Cook; MR R.F. Johnson; MR P. Papalia; MR W.R. Marmion; MR D.A. Templeman; MR B.J. Grylls; Mr Peter Tinley; Mr Peter Watson; Dr Kim Hames; Mr John Day

particularly mature, this can impact on how one thinks and one's attitude to life. The loneliness of someone who works fly in, fly out can become exacerbated. Anyone with a predisposition towards suffering from any sort of depression or melancholy would have those conditions exacerbated by a lifestyle in which they were away from home and family support for extended periods, particularly in a circumstance in which they are working, say, 12 hours a day, often in a very harsh and rugged environment. Sometimes the jobs that people are performing can be very mundane and very boring. I was at a mine site in the goldfields last week. Some of the people there drive trucks up and down mine sites maybe 12 hours a day; I am not sure how long. That can be a pretty mundane occupation.

Naturally, I think doing that for 12 hours a day, being in a donga or bunk for eight or so hours with four hours in which to eat, shower and do whatever else they have to do, and doing that week in, week out, is a pretty hard lifestyle to endure. As I said, for someone prone to melancholy or depression, it is a hard thing to endure. Most of those people who suicided, according to what I have read, were young men. Perhaps young men are not as understanding of the consequences of their actions as older. Perhaps they are more prone to take the drastic step of committing suicide because of immaturity. Some of the other reasons behind it, I am sure, are loneliness and distance. No doubt they exacerbate family issues such as breakdowns, divorces and splits with girlfriends or boyfriends, as the case may be. Relationship breakdown on occasion, no doubt, sparks an action from which there is no going back, which of course is suicide. A relationship breakdown has always been cited as one of the major causes of suicide. It is no doubt worse for people when something dramatic like a family break-up happens in their life and they work away from home for long periods, then fly out again without the support of their relatives or friends than if they were at home among friends. Probably the absence from home as well makes the prospect of a family breakdown more likely because they are not around all the time and family pressures can build up when they are not around to assist with child rearing, school and all those sorts of things. This issue relates no doubt to only a small proportion of the fly in, fly out workforce that I am talking about. Most fly in, fly out workers would lead lives that do not exhibit these traits. I am therefore not talking about everyone but about a small proportion of the workforce.

Another thing that experience in Western Australia bears out is that fly in, fly out workers are generally paid more than they would be paid in a similar job undertaken in the city or in a regional centre. Some can earn multiples of what they would otherwise be paid. However, as we all know, just because people are paid more does not necessarily mean that they save more. Their lifestyle can sometimes expand to meet the income they receive. Some might undertake more debt than they otherwise would. The huge number of beautiful houses around the city is testament the evidence that people undertake more debt than they otherwise would because of their expanded income. With that debt often comes financial pressure, and I think that is another major factor in people self-harming. Relationship breakdown and financial pressure can be very significant causal factors when it comes to such a thing. The fly in, fly out lifestyle can exacerbate all those financial pressures and relationship issues, and perhaps guilt at not being around enough for raising children and the like can result in these outcomes.

The key question is what to do about it. Naturally, it is a difficult issue to solve, but I think we need to look more carefully at what can be done. I understand some of the rosters that fly in, fly out workers undertake have improved significantly in recent years on what they once were. I have actually heard historically of horrendous rosters of people working six weeks on and one week off, 12 hours a day, seven days a week. I think for the construction workforce, it is often a three-week roster, 12 hours a day, seven days a week while they are away working, and one week off when they are at home. That seems to me to be a pretty demanding life for a construction worker. As we all know, people are volunteers—it is not the Army—but a three week on and one week off roster is a pretty demanding life. It is often not as harsh as that for the production workforce. When I was in the goldfields the other day, people were talking about a roster of eight days on and six days off, which is an easier and far more family friendly roster. No doubt there is anything in between when it comes to rosters.

I will not say at this time, without hearing from an inquiry, that I believe there needs to be government action on rosters. I understand the mining industry has to undertake rosters according to its needs to operate its mines and undertake construction and the like. However, I think we should hear from experts publicly; we should hear from government and government experts publicly; and we should hear from industry members about their side of these issues so that we can get a full picture of all the issues surrounding rostering, rather than bring to the issue the prejudices we might come with as people looking at the issue from the outside. Although I regard as pretty harsh a three-and-one roster, I am sure that industry will advise what it is doing about it and we might hear from others about what can be done.

I also intuitively think that a lot can be done with early intervention. Everyone talks about early intervention. It has always been talked about when it comes to mental health issues, but intuitively I think a far more proactive early intervention approach is needed. The bigger employers—the more cashed-up employers, if members like—

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probably have some sort of counselling service and the like available. The problem of course is a worker worried about their future employment might not seek counselling for a depressive condition because they are worried about keeping that job or that when there is a downturn they will be the first to be let go. People, therefore, sometimes do not access those services. To me it is about what we can do to make sure there is intervention for people with suicidal tendencies, thoughts or ideation, and that they do not resist that intervention because they are concerned about their continuing employment or their future employment if the job ends. That is a tricky question, but it is question that we need to ask in light of what has gone on recently. That is why I am saying that all of this information should come in, we should see it publicly and we should release it, as it is a big issue for our state. The fly in, fly out workforce in the mining industry in many ways—not always—defines our state, and we need to treat that workforce very, very well.

All of us in this place would have experienced at a mine site the extraordinary measures and levels of effort that go into making sure that safety precautions are taken. I visited Norton's gold processing plant recently, for which I thank them very much. Before going into the processing plant, the video and briefing before getting in the bus to be driven around the site went for about an hour. It was a very long briefing—and that was so that we could get in the bus and drive around the site! A lot of effort, therefore, goes into physical safety precautions at these sites but—again this is intuition—I do not think anywhere near as much effort goes into the mental health issues that the workforce might be dealing with. That is where I sit and the opposition sit on this issue.

I have a couple of other things to say. A report was conducted by Lifeline recently titled "FIFO/DIDO Mental Health Research Report 2013"—DIDO meaning drive in, drive out. The researchers conducted a survey of around 1 000 FIFO workers which came out with a bunch of findings. I will list them very quickly. It states that most fly in, fly out workers had little knowledge of the reality of the work before they started; the number one stress was the family home separation; some FIFO workers felt a distinct sense of entrapment due to the distance, the work conditions, the accommodation and the long shifts; and a significant number of FIFO workers spoke of using alcohol or illicit drugs to manage sleep, and I presume that is predominantly when they are not on-site. There is nervousness surrounding accessing counselling. The report indicates that FIFO workers are concerned that there is a stigma around accessing counselling and that they might appear soft, so that sort of thing might prevent them from accessing counselling. There was also some talk about the length of rosters and time off. I congratulate Lifeline Western Australia and whoever else for commissioning this report; it may have been the government. Lifeline interviewed 924 FIFO workers to come up with those findings.

Again, as the member for Hillarys said, I think we all understand the issues that build in people's minds. The key question is what to do about it. That is why this motion is very clear when it refers to "initiatives that industry and government can take to reduce their prevalence". What can industry and government do together to reduce their prevalence? I know that Andrew Harding, the CEO of Rio Tinto in Western Australia, has recently been appointed to the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention, and that is a great move; he is a good person. However, I think we need to do more than that. We need to hear from people about what can be done by the workforce, industry and government; we need to call them in and hear from them. That would be a valuable use of this committee's time and, over time, I am sure it will save lives.

In closing, I urge members to support this motion. I think it is a good way forward. I note that today the Mental Health Commissioner talked about appointing a doctor or clinician to look at these things. Of course, the doctor or clinician would not be able to call before them people and take evidence in a public sense. As the commissioner said, they could look at each of the cases of people who have died by suicide, but I think we need to have a broader examination and perhaps work in with what the Mental Health Commissioner has suggested. That is why we have proposed this broader examination, using the resources and powers of Parliament.

To conclude, we support the mining industry and we support the fly in, fly out workforce. We understand that it is a fact of life. We know that it works for the majority of FIFO families, but we know that it is causing grief and significant pain for a minority, and that is why we are looking at ways to address this issue.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.23 pm]: I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this motion. It is an important motion and I commend the Leader of the Opposition for bringing it to this place. We know the debilitating impact that suicide has on families and the community; those people's lives touch us all. As practitioners of public policy, it would be negligent of us not to be cognisant of the danger to young lives created by working in an isolated and difficult environment and therefore potentially exacerbating the capacity for suicide to increase. I am a huge supporter of the fly in, fly out workforce. It is an important part of our resource industry and it is here to stay. Many people in my electorate are FIFO workers. Many take advantage of the opportunities that FIFO work provides. I have heard stories about how FIFO work has saved marriages; I have heard reports about how FIFO work has destroyed marriages. I have heard that FIFO work has saved people's financial situations and rescued them from debt; I have heard that FIFO has delivered debt and untold misery to family members. And it will forever be thus. However, it is true to say that FIFO is a relatively

recent phenomenon, and there are new challenges that come with that process that we, as people involved in public policy, need to be aware of and take into account.

Of the estimated 90 000 people involved in Western Australia's mineral and energy sectors in 2011, 52 per cent, or 46 800 people, were employed on FIFO rosters. We know that there has been an increase in the workforce involved in the mineral and energy sectors from 2011, requiring an extra 7 500 by 2012, and it will remain at around 16 500 above the 2009 figures by 2015. We know that a large number of people will be involved in the resource and energy sectors and we know that we will continue to rely significantly on the FIFO workforce. Since the 1970s, we have always had the situation of people flying to the Pilbara in particular to be involved in large construction projects. They would stay a while and then leave or they would continue to live in the towns established at the time. Some of those towns continue today; others, such as Goldsworthy and Shay Gap, have since disappeared off the map. It is an expensive and difficult way for the industry to operate, and we know that FIFO will be an important part of the way the industry operates in the future. Of course, I would be even more hypocritical if I were to be negative about FIFO operations because one of the people I "just" live with is my sister-in-law, who notionally occupies the bedroom next to my wife's and mine. She is on a two-and-one roster and works up north for one of the large mining contractors driving a truck that is the size of a residential home, even though she comes up to my shoulder, so I do not know how she reaches the pedals. I do not know whether she takes a cushion to work!

Ms M.M. Quirk: Are you being shortist?

Mr R.H. COOK: Member for Girrawheen, I wish I could be shortist, but I am one of the few members of Parliament in the weakest position to pick on short people! I will leave it up to the member for Willagee and the member for Armadale to be shortist.

We know that new challenges come with the emerging FIFO workforce. In particular, we know that the workforce is predominantly made up of young men; 80 per cent of the workforce are young men with an average age of 38 years. The cohort of the population that is most vulnerable to suicide is people aged 15 to 44 years, so we know that those young men are particularly vulnerable. We know that four out of five suicides are by men. This is a particularly vulnerable cohort of the population. We do not know whether the nature of FIFO work contributes to that being a particularly difficult area in relation to suicide or whether there is an enhanced possibility of people committing suicide because they work in a FIFO situation, but we do know a number of things. Firstly, we know about the isolating impact of FIFO work. People spend a lot of time away from home, particularly if they work night shift, and have minimal contact with other people in their immediate community. We know that situations often allow people to participate in risky behaviour, and that might be in the form of drugs and alcohol or other forms of behaviour that are often fuelled by the predominantly male-dominated environment. We know, therefore, that the nature of fly in, fly out work may increase the likelihood of people giving consideration to self-harm or suicide. It is from that point of view that I think we have much to discover and that this is a very worthy motion to be passed by this place so that we can look at those issues that might impact on FIFO workers. I note from the comments of the Mental Health Commissioner that a clinical examination is being undertaken of this phenomenon, if I may use that term. I am very encouraged by that. I think there is also a need for us to look at it from a social or public policy point of view. We can learn from that process and, in doing so, we may potentially be able to put things in place that will see a reduction in the prevalence of suicide among FIFO workplaces.

There is a growing awareness in these predominantly male-related industries of the impact that mental health issues have on the workplace. As the Leader of the Opposition described a short while ago, we have a very acute understanding of the need for physical safety in the workplace. As we have all experienced, we go through very lengthy examinations of workplace safety when we visit these workplaces. The awareness of mental health issues as a safety issue in the workplace and people's wellbeing are only now starting to be appreciated and understood, particularly in the construction industry. Recently, I had the benefit of coming into contact with an organisation called Mates in Construction, a not-for-profit organisation engaged in providing onsite seminars, counselling and sessions to raise awareness of mental health issues in the construction space. They are conducted from the point of view of people not only protecting their own mental health, but also becoming aware that they should look out for their mates and take responsibility for reaching out to each other if they see signs that all might not be well in their lives. Mates in Construction describes its organisation as having a community engagement model that demonstrates that suicide is everyone's business. It says that in a traditional macho workplace culture, the mates-helping-mates approach is inclusive and safe and encourages workers to seek help. That is an important step in our attitudes, particularly among men, to issues around mental health.

Mates in Construction has shared with me some of the observations made by the building companies that have engaged it about the impact its sessions have had on their workplaces. For instance, Laing O'Rourke says —

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During 2013 1,486 Laing O'Rourke workers were trained in MIC's General Awareness Training and 136 were trained as connectors across 17 sites nationally.

MIC's training programme has been incredibly well received by our workforce, a fact which is reflected in the training take-up rates. Our workers have confidence in the confidential services provided by MIC and have appreciated MIC's efforts to break down the stigma of suicide and mental health.

Lend Lease, another of MIC's clients, said —

The program is also a great contributor to the general sense of wellbeing on site.

The key to this has been the unique way the different levels of training in the Mates program creates awareness amongst workers to the possibility that a colleague may be struggling with issues in their life.

The program also has a positive impact upon safety by helping workers recognize that if they or a colleague are distracted and not fully focused in the workplace they may be placing themselves and/or others at risk.

It is this acceptance that mental health in the workplace is also an occupational health and safety issue. It goes on to say —

This safety awareness is achieved by identifying behaviors that a worker may "see, hear and sense" that may signal a mate is struggling.

If I may persist for a moment, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr I.M. Britza), Lend Lease says —

We have received an overwhelming response from workers on site and the focus of suicide awareness and prevention has created a positive attitude between the workers in regards to the promotion of these sessions.

I raise that in the context of knowing that from a day workforce point of view this makes sense. Organisations such as Mates in Construction are mainstreaming the issue of mental health in the workplace and breaking down barriers that might otherwise be exhibited in a male-dominated workplace, and it is empowering workers to look out for themselves and others and providing them with the mechanisms to resolve those issues.

I refer to a workforce that a worker does not see for a good period of time. My sister-in-law, for example, works the day shift for one week and the night shift for another week and goes home for a week. The interaction with her employers is very much reduced and disrupted by her work patterns as a FIFO worker. I wonder whether, as a result of that, the opportunity for her employers and her work colleagues to identify those forms of behaviour and to respond to that is as available as it would be in a typical workplace. These are the issues that I think are worth examining, especially from the point of view of whether extra obligations are on the employer to respond to that. Do we want the employers, in the name of occupational health and safety, to take a different strategy from what they would take if those employees were coming to work on a day-by-day basis? Do we then want to see whether there is another regulatory regime change that we, as members of Parliament, should pay attention to?

I raise these issues not from an expertise point of view but to say that it is a good idea that we, as members of Parliament, particularly one that has such a powerful and well-informed committee as the Standing Committee on Education and Health, utilise those opportunities to inform ourselves and the public that there is a public policy response to this issue. Two things will be going on: the Mental Health Commission will be undertaking an inquiry, which will look at a lot of the clinical-related issues, and members of Parliament will be undertaking an inquiry to consider whether public policy issues should also be looked at. I dare say this will not be the last issue we confront as we see industries evolve over time. We are in a period of great transition brought on by the digital age and the capacity to move people very cheaply. In this case, workers who live in New Zealand work in the Pilbara; workers throughout all parts of the globe travel to work in a particular workplace. That brings new challenges to those of us who want to see a regulated and safe work environment for FIFO workers. I think this is a very commendable motion and one that should not trouble either side of politics as being worthy of support. I think it is eminently worthy of support and it will be an interesting study and exploration of these issues. If nothing else, we have an obligation to make sure we have policy in place that drives down the incidence of suicide. Obviously, we know the impact it has on the individual, but it is the family and the community that that person leaves behind on which it has an ongoing and debilitating effect. As a result, we have an obligation to make sure that we are constantly aware and vigilant so that the laws, regulations and environment that we create as members of parliament are constantly changing to fit with and serve the needs of the community.

MR R.F. JOHNSON (Hillarys) [4.41 pm]: I will make a small contribution to the debate on the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. I will declare at the outset that I have a personal involvement with a fly in, fly out worker. My youngest son is a fly in, fly out worker and, like the sister-in-law of the member for Kwinana, he

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works two weeks on and one week off. The only difference between the member's situation and mine is that I get to take my son to the airport every three weeks, which is a bit of a chore but, nevertheless, I am happy to do it. Working in the industry is an arduous job and many people do it because they want to earn as much money as they can to pay off their mortgage, which is very commendable. The downside is that the person is away from home. If he is on a two weeks on, one week off roster, he is away from his family for two weeks, which can have a deleterious effect on a person's health, wellbeing and frame of mind. Certainly, from my son's point of view, he seems to be coping quite well—thank God—and I hope that he will not work for too long in the fly in, fly out industry. He would much prefer to be at home with his wife and young son, and he often talks to me about the people on his worksite, which is quite large. He started off working in security, but now he does medic work. He is not a paramedic but he does first aid work and can administer intravenous injections and various things such as that to help someone stay alive. He is also an expert snake catcher and all sorts of things, and he knows how to deal with these sorts of things on mine sites—things that I would not want to go near. However, it is an arduous job.

As far as the statistics are concerned, it is predominantly males between the ages of 15 and 34 in not only this industry, but also in different industries throughout WA, who tragically commit suicide. We know that some of our young farmers have unfortunately decided to end their lives, which is tragic. The committee that I am proud to serve on, with my very good friend and colleague the member for Eyre as our chairman, is looking into mental health. This is no secret because the media was present at our hearing today at which Timothy Marney gave a presentation on mental health. As the Mental Health Commissioner, he is also looking into that. I told him that it looks as though, to some extent, he is doing the same work that we as a committee are doing, and that we are both working in the same direction. As the Leader of the Opposition said, as a committee we have more powers than the Mental Health Commissioner to call witnesses to give expert evidence and to give evidence under oath. This is quite important when we talk about mental health and people who are driven to make the decision to end their life.

My very good friend and colleague the chairman of the committee may well move a slight amendment to the motion before the house to delete the words “the reasons behind”. We all know the plethora of reasons behind suicide, and I am sure they will come up anyway during an inquiry that the committee may or may not hold. I am supportive of the committee looking into this particularly important area because we cannot ignore the nine suicides committed during the past year by people involved in that particular industry. The lives of nine Western Australians who work in that industry have ended in a tragic way and we must see what we can do about it. The committee will have the benefit of being able to do research and take evidence from all sorts of expert witnesses to see what we can do to reduce the impact on those who work in that industry so that fewer, or hopefully no more, people will want to take their lives because of working in that particular line of work. We know the reasons behind suicide, but at this stage we do not know how best we, as a Parliament, can assist those who work in that industry to reduce the pressures on them when they get to the stage of deciding to take their life. I have great confidence in the chairman of our committee, the member for Eyre, who is a doctor and has obviously assisted many people who have had perhaps suicidal tendencies or who are suffering depression and all sorts of things. As one of the longest serving members here over the past 20-odd years, many people have presented to my office who have needed assistance for mental health problems. At the end of the day, if somebody commits suicide, it is the effect on their mental health that brings on that suicidal tendency one way or another. Suicide has a plethora of causes but we, as a Parliament, have a duty to our Western Australian citizens, predominantly our young men between the ages of 15 to 24 working in this particular area—it is not just men who commit suicide but women as well—to do whatever we can to reduce the number of individuals who take it upon themselves to perform such a drastic act and end their life. It obviously affects not only them, but also their family, their loved ones and everybody around them. I am supportive of this motion once it has been amended by the member for Eyre. It is only a small amendment. I do not think the committee would in any way use this motion in a political way. I certainly would not because the issue is much too important. Mental health and suicide is far too important a matter to turn it into a political issue. I have every confidence that members on both sides of the house will carry out an inquiry in a bipartisan way to benefit and assist those people working in this industry and come up with some suggestions, recommendations and solutions or whatever to reduce the number of deaths. One death is too many but nine is an extraordinary number. We simply cannot live with ourselves if we allow that to continue. I support the motion being amended along the lines to be put forward by the chairman because a lot of good can come out of this.

MR P. PAPALIA (Warnbro) [4.47 pm]: I too will make a short contribution to this debate on the motion. I acknowledge the likely bipartisan support—I did not anticipate that the motion would not be supported—and that a small amendment will probably be put. I support the motion that the Education and Health Standing Committee undertake this urgent inquiry. I am willing to accept the observation made by the member for Hillarys about many of the reasons behind suicide being known and perhaps that the wording of the motion

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might be adjusted. Nevertheless, one of the areas I urge the committee to look into when it ultimately conducts this inquiry is to consider and focus on the prevalence of amphetamine use and drug addiction, but specifically amphetamines because Western Australia, as we know, suffers from an extremely high rate of amphetamines abuse compared with the other states. I suspect that we also have one of the highest numbers of fly in, fly out workers in the country. Coupled with the potentially free availability of cash and ready access to funds to spend on drugs to self-medicate during absences and when someone is suffering from a mental illness, perhaps that should be considered. I am not sure whether we should be so certain that we do not need to consider thoroughly the reasons behind suicide, although I accept that many of the reasons for suicide and the rate of suicide are already well known, and it is a concern. I represent an outer metropolitan suburb and the truth of the matter is that the vast majority of FIFO workers live in this area, particularly those recent arrivals to the state who have been attracted to live here with the specific intention of working in that environment.

We have only to go to the suburbs from Warnbro south to Rockingham and the northern suburbs of Mandurah—I am talking about Warnbro, Port Kennedy, Secret Harbour, Golden Bay, Singleton and particularly Baldivis, which is one of the suburbs experiencing rapid growth—to see that they contain a vast number of people who have newly migrated from interstate or immigrated from overseas. They have undergone a significant disruption to their lives and left behind their support mechanisms, their families and their normal existence. In many cases they have sold everything they owned and come to a completely new country and a new state. If they have children, their children have been moved from their usual supports and they then reside in outer metropolitan suburbs that are often still being built where there are few services for them and there is not much in the way of a historic town centre with community support mechanisms. Beyond the sporting clubs and schools, there is not much there at all. They are then engaged in this disruptive and unusual work practice whereby they go away for an extended time and leave their families and their friends and all their problems with a spouse or a partner. In the absence of the person who has gone off on their FIFO task, the family gets its act together and falls into a set routine, only to be disrupted by the individual when they come back. That type of scenario has a lot of similarities to the defence services, and I have always made that observation.

People in the military, particularly the Navy, have a similar experience. It is not so much the case for Army and Air Force personnel because unless they are going on deployment, they are based at a home location for an extensive time. Obviously, in recent times Army and Air Force personnel have deployed operationally, so they have encountered it too. People who have embarked on a naval ship have always encountered this challenge. One member of a partnership or a family goes away for an extended time and everyone experiences that disruption. The family then settles into a routine and that routine is completely disrupted when that person returns. There is conflict just through engaging in that process, quite apart from the fact that in the FIFO world are the added challenges associated with workers having left their extended family, friends and support mechanisms. The workers' kids have also left their family and friends. In many ways, all those things take the type of environment that has been confronted for a long time by the military and magnifies it.

Mr B.J. Grylls: The research shows that FIFO is multiple occasions of that. Whereas defence is for a longer period away, FIFO workers often work in two-week blocks.

Mr P. PAPALIA: We take all those things and magnify it. The families are stripped of all their external support mechanisms in the form of their extended family and friends, which is a serious challenge.

Another observation to make is that the Defence Force has become far better at supporting its people than it ever was. Historically, it was useless. Over the years, as it has become more aware of its responsibilities and, by necessity, in an attempt to retain and support people, the Defence Force and the federal government have provided far more support mechanisms. Members of Parliament would be aware that in communities with a large number of military families, the federal government funds a transition mentor for any school with more than 40 children from a military family. That individual is paid to support the kids of Defence Force families because the federal government acknowledges all the challenges associated with that lifestyle. That is going on right now. Beyond that, internally within the Defence Force are structures within the command structure to ensure that someone is responsible for the wellbeing of subordinates at all times. The Defence Force takes that seriously and it considers the challenges associated with families being left behind and disrupted and all that goes with it. FIFO workers are employees of somebody and the entire extent of their care is focused on the worksite and the remuneration. When they go home, no-one is there to provide a support mechanism to wrap around these people.

I acknowledge Tim Marney's observation today that, as I understand it, in his view there is no need for an inquiry. He seemed to understand that the proposal was for an inquiry predominantly into the reasons for these workers committing suicide. I agree with the member for Hillarys that the inquiry should largely focus on the potential actions and precautions we can take to reduce the damage and the threat. I think that is where the inquiry's focus should be. It has a valuable role to play through the powers that it has and through the wider scope that I think we can bring to it. That does not undermine the suggestion by Tim Marney. I fully endorse his

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proposal and both actions would be complementary of each other. This is a serious matter and it would be remiss of the Parliament of Western Australia if we did not respond. There are significant concerns in the community that we represent. People are crying out for some action and attention to be given to this problem, and I do not think we can just ignore it.

Looking back at that relationship between this sort of experience by the FIFO workforce and the military and the similarities with the problems and the challenges encountered, I had the pleasure of working with a number of other former Navy divers a couple of years ago to establish a trust to support Navy divers and their families who have been damaged physically and mentally through the course of their service. I supported the SAS Resources Trust for some time before that and I observed something that we as an institution can provide. The very nature and existence of those trusts serve a purpose to the people who are confronting those challenges. The trusts tell them that someone cares enough about them to create an organisation—in this case, the SAS Resources Trust and the Navy Clearance Diver Trust—to fundraise and draw attention to the threats and damages that those people sustained over the course of their service. That is a role and a purpose within itself. Just paying attention is a valuable contribution.

For the Parliament of Western Australia to look into this threat and this challenge and at the tragedy of such a high suicide rate within a relatively small section of our community sends the message that we care. This is an isolated and identifiable section of the community that engages something like 50 000 individuals—or 150 000 with their families—and has such a high suicide rate. Parliament taking the action to engage an inquiry sends the message that we care about them and they are important. An important state institution cares enough about these workers to carry out an inquiry into this issue and the inquiry will undoubtedly make strong recommendations that will support FIFO workers. That is an important role. It is important to conduct an inquiry and quickly find out what is causing this problem, but bringing to the attention of the public potential responses is an important action in its own right and makes a contribution. I do not think that should be at all dismissed.

I fully commend the motion to the house. In anticipation of any minor amendment, I am sure that that would not really conflict with the intent of the motion and I am sure it will not be much of a drama for the opposition to accept.

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Minister for Mines and Petroleum) [4.57 pm]: I rise to make a small contribution from the mining perspective and also from my brief personal experience of being a fly in, fly out worker back in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, in my day it was a six days on and one day off roster. The one day off was in Derby. Some people would suggest that that was not a particularly useful one day off! That was the roster I had as, I guess, a professional. The crew I supervised were on a three weeks on and one week off roster from Perth. But in those days, we had no television and no Skype.

Ms J.M. Freeman: You tell people that today and they won't believe you!

Mr W.R. MARMION: I know. We had no recreation facilities. We had a wet mess with no limit on how much alcohol we could drink.

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Yes, but it did not reach Derby or the campsites. We have moved on, thank goodness, from those days and the mining industry takes safety as the most serious issue. Indeed, as people visit mine sites—we heard the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Kwinana talk about their experiences—safety, and WorkSafe, is a major aspect of mines these days. One safety concern is that when someone is not mentally alert on the job, he or she is most likely in danger of having an accident or causing an accident for other people. A person's mental health or wellbeing on the job is a serious issue. The member for Kwinana talked about a program in the construction industry called Mates in Construction. Unfortunately, the member is not sitting in his seat. The next level of improvement with work safety is to address mental health. Indeed, most mining companies have programs in place. I will talk about Rio Tinto's program in a while, which is quite detailed.

Turning to the responsibility of the Department of Mines and Petroleum, which regulates the mining industry, if there is a death or a suicide onsite, it becomes the responsibility of the police and the coroner. Of course, obviously the department provides any assistance it can. The Department of Mines and Petroleum is involved in supporting workshops and distributing material to ensure that employers understand mental health issues. Mining companies these days are jumping on board to make sure that they have systems in place to address such matters. I will talk about onsite support first, but most mining companies are involved in supporting some of the not-for-profit organisations that provide services offsite, such as FIFO Families and, of course, the Mining Family Matters organisation, which I may talk about later.

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To give members a bit of a snapshot of what Rio Tinto does, it sees suicide not as a particular issue about fly in, fly out workers, but as a bigger issue than that. It sees it as the health and wellbeing of their employees. I am not an expert on this matter; my wife works in the area and when I have discussions with her, I learn all the time! I am not saying that I am an expert. However, one thing that companies must do when dealing with the issue of mental health is to actually talk to—to communicate with—employees to know what is going on in their workplaces. As the member for Kwinana said, companies must work on their teams to ensure that workers have mates and that everyone knows what is going on in each other's lives. I had a discussion with a general manager of a major mining company in Western Australia who said that on a dangerous site, such as a worksite, if he suspects that a work colleague has issues going on—that is, he or she might have just flown in and something might have happened on the home front—he would put that person straight back on the plane to fly back home. If someone has stuff going on in their head, that needs to be addressed because they are an extreme liability to themselves on the worksite. I think there is a great understanding about that in the mining industry.

In terms of health and wellbeing programs at Rio Tinto, each site has a health officer and a wellness officer. We know what facilities it has onsite these days, and the goal is to support its employees on the site to ensure that they are fit for work every day they work. In the Pilbara, Rio Tinto has the Pilbara wellness program that provides access to check-ups, including mental health check-ups. It provides injury management support services. It actively supports a peer support program across the entire business—that is, volunteers from their workforce are trained to assist workmates to deal with stress. Rio Tinto also provides an employee assistance program with a confidential counselling service for employees in crisis, which has been operating for over 20 years and is available at any time. Rio also has a crisis response process for remote sites, including the remote transport guidelines to transport its employees for medical assistance. Also, it provides a very strong induction program, the aim of which is to prepare employees for the life of a fly in, fly out person so they have knowledge of what it involves.

Ms J.M. Freeman interjected.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Mr Acting Speaker, I did not interject when anyone else spoke, and I would like to address this matter without interjections. Thank you.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): I will give you protection, minister.

Mr W.R. MARMION: Thank you. It is hard enough concentrating without having interjections.

One interesting support service is provided by Mining Family Matters. I will not go into the background of how it was started, but the book was launched in February 2010. Basically, it has produced a survival guide for families involved in fly in, fly out. I will list the topics in the book: what to expect in the first few months; helping kids to cope; sharing time and avoiding conflict; dads and discipline—I suppose it could also include mums and discipline—tackling loneliness when apart; are you making excuses about sex?; and identifying stress and depression. This book is encouraged to be read by all people involved in the fly in, fly out workforce.

The member for Warnbro raised the point of comparing fly in, fly out workers with Defence Force personnel. It is a pretty tough job in the Defence Force, I have to say, given its members are away for a lot longer than three or four weeks. Obviously, a lot of wraparound services are required for Defence personnel—even more so, I would have thought, than for fly in, fly out workers. The member made the point: what does the mining industry do when a person comes back home and is away from the site? Workers can still ring up the support services if there is an issue, but a lot of mining companies now support the FIFO Families process, which brings people together when they are no longer on the worksite by putting people in touch with other people. That is a fairly new program, and hopefully it will be one of the services that fly in, fly out people can link into when they are not onsite.

Mental health is a very important issue. Any suicide anywhere in any profession is a big issue. As the Minister for Mines and Petroleum, that is certainly the case in the mining industry, and I do not want to see suicide in any other industry either.

MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah) [5.08 pm]: I would like to make a contribution to the Leader of the Opposition's motion before the house this afternoon. I commend him for moving the following motion —

That the Education and Health Standing Committee undertake an urgent inquiry into the reasons behind the suicides of fly in, fly out workers, and recommend initiatives that industry and government can take to reduce their prevalence.

I understand that the member for Eyre may be moving an amendment, which I hope will indicate that the government will support the thrust of this motion.

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It is important that the committee undertakes this inquiry. As we heard in the Leader of the Opposition's presentation, the number of fly in, fly out workers who unfortunately have taken their lives is significant and a tragedy. The urgency of this is understood. I hope also that there will be scope in the inquiry, which no doubt will be discussed and ultimately framed by the committee itself, not to disregard the number of Indigenous citizens, particularly in the north west of the state, who are involved in fly in, fly out work because it is in our Indigenous communities where statistically we have the highest number of suicides. I know that the member for Kimberley, in both previous grievances and motions to this place this year, highlighted the absolute tragedy that unfortunately has been unfolding for many years, but particularly in the Kimberley region over the last 12 months, of the number of Aboriginal men and women who have taken their lives in her electorate. Although this motion specifically narrows the inquiry to fly in, fly out workers and their mental health needs and to initiatives that will reduce the prevalence of suicide, I am mindful that a tremendous number of young Aboriginal men and women have also taken their lives in the numbers of which we speak in this motion. Having spoken earlier to the member for Kimberley, I know that a number of young Indigenous men and women are fly in, fly out workers, so perhaps there is some scope in this inquiry to look at the specific interests and needs of those young Aboriginal men and women and they can be captured by the spirit of this motion and the work of the committee, if government decides to support this recommendation.

I also want to highlight that the Peel region, of which I am a representative member, has a large population, the second highest regional population in Western Australia behind the south west. Among the benefits and attractions for people settling in the Peel region, with its close proximity to Perth, are not only the lifestyle opportunities of locating their family in the Peel, but also close access to Perth and Perth Airport. There are suburbs in my electorate, including one that I fondly refer to as "nappy valley", in Lakelands, which is a northern suburb of Mandurah. I call it nappy valley because whenever I go doorknocking or there is an event there, I am astounded by the number of young families who have settled there on affordable house and land packages. Many of them are young couples with two or three children and many of those families have a breadwinner who is a fly in, fly out worker. In a locality such as Lakelands, which is rapidly growing but still has to catch up with its infrastructure, there are some issues that I am very mindful of for those families. For many of the families, the onus ultimately falls on the person who stays at home, whilst the partner flies into and out of various parts of the state as part of their work to be the primary caregiver of those children. It can be an isolating experience if a young mum or dad is in a new suburb that until recently did not have its own primary school or they do not have any immediate family living close by to call upon. The frustration can also be felt when a loved one is away from the home for significant periods and they are not able to be there when things happen—emergencies occur, kids get sick or things need to be done—and a mum or dad does not have the options of addressing those issues quickly. We all need to be mindful of that. It is part of the modern era.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, 50 000 people in this state are fly in, fly out workers, which is a significant number. Those workers are making a significant contribution to the building of the state and of the nation. Many of them have young families and have needs there as well. The Standing Committee on Regional Australia concluded its deliberations on the fly in, fly out and drive in, drive out workforce last year. Its focus was on models of rostering. I am always quite amazed by the diversity of rosters that exist. I have people in my electorate who are on four weeks on and one week off, four weeks on and two weeks off, two weeks on and two weeks off, and all sorts of models in-between. We also know that many of these workers are flying to mining operations in various parts of the state and interstate, including the Northern Territory. I am mindful of the unique nature of the work that they are embarking upon and the issues that can create. Interestingly enough, in Mandurah and the Peel region, and in other parts of the state, including the metropolitan area, fly in, fly out support groups and networks have been established. They are very well established in Mandurah. There are some great networks available, and social media is one means by which people connect and maintain connections with fly in, fly out families in that area. Groups such as Teen MOPS and Mums of Mandurah exist to support the caregiver who is staying at home and looking after young children. Teen MOPS is a group established through a woman called Heather Kell and others from the Mandurah Baptist Church a few years back, initially to support teenage mums who had young children but which has expanded a bit because that group is attracting quite a number of young mums who have partners who are fly in, fly out workers in the state. The formal and informal networks are very much operational and certainly help to support the needs of people who work in the fly in, fly out regime. I understand that the member for Pilbara has something to say. I understand that the member for Eyre may move an amendment to the motion. It would be great to get some indication of whether he supports this motion. I look forward to the support of government members, particularly those backbench members who, like me, have a significant number of fly in, fly out constituents living in their region.

MR B.J. GRYLLES (Pilbara) [5.20 pm]: It is a good debate to be having on a Wednesday in the fine Parliament that we are sitting in. This is a really important issue for the state and families. I start by giving my condolences to the families who have lost loved ones who have taken their lives while working in the fly in, fly out

environment. I think that is tragic and very, very sad and our hearts go out to them. It also needs to be put in context that suicide is a major challenge across the wider community, not just with FIFO workers, but also, for example, in the Indigenous community that the previous member spoke about. It is devastating. I do not think we can say that the FIFO lifestyle is a bigger challenge and is causing more suicides. I think it should be put in context that the number of FIFO workers has dropped substantially over the past few months. If the nine deaths in the past 12 months is higher than the previous 12 months, that is coming in an environment in which the number of FIFO workers are substantially reduced. For example, there are 10 000 FIFO beds in the City of Karratha. I think the occupancy rate is about 25 per cent at the moment—maybe less. The numbers of FIFO workers has really reduced. That is off the back of the construction phase when essentially a lot of workers across the Pilbara were building stuff. That stuff is now essentially built. Therefore, there is no work for the builder once the building is built or the construction projects have finished. I think there needs to be an understanding of exactly where we are at in that cycle.

The thing that I want to talk about—a couple of members have mentioned it—is that we all revert immediately to FIFOs as being an essential part of delivering the resource sector in Western Australia. It is an important part in the construction phase we have been through. I hope that we as a Parliament and as a community are not resigned to the fact that no-one really wants to live in the regions, so we had better build big donga camps so all workers can stay there because it is much nicer to live in Mandurah, Perth or Busselton. Without a doubt, some workers love living in Mandurah; it is a beautiful place to live. I am sure that they very much enjoy the lifestyle that FIFO work affords. To a degree, FIFO has become prevalent in Western Australia due to the policy failure of government—that is, when the huge energy infrastructure of Collie was built, it did not require big donga camps on the outskirts of Bunbury. We had sensible planning, growth and development. The City of Bunbury could absorb that growth in a construction workforce. People drove from Australind out to Collie regularly. The member for Collie–Preston talks about the safety of the road network, as many people do. The challenge has been faced by the Pilbara in particular. Policy failures by multiple governments—I am not assigning blame—lead to the fact that when growth was required to deliver the expansion of the projects, the only option available was to build a big donga camp to house that workforce. That is why the numbers are so great. Invariably, when we talk about FIFO, we talk about the Pilbara region. That was a failure of planning, a failure of investment and a failure of predicting what was going to happen, even though predicting what is going to happen is very, very difficult.

There is a further step in this. I think the companies like FIFO more than residential workforces. The companies do not like to say that too loudly publicly but I think they like the control of a FIFO workforce. They like the idea of a worker getting into their uniform, getting to the airport, being delivered to the airport at the other end, getting onto a bus, getting out of the bus, going into the camp and then living that regimented life that follows from there. I would hope that in and around a debate about suicide and mental health in the FIFO workforce, we also have a debate about what FIFO means and why it is happening and what are the greater issues in and around that. The companies, to their credit, have started to try to mitigate this. That is why they drive the agenda that they are doing FIFO out of Geraldton or Albany and the like. That is a company that is trying to respond to the questions being asked about why FIFO is so prevalent. I think they are trying to gain a degree of control over their workforce, which I do not think is completely healthy.

Mr P.B. Watson: Do you think it's the time they spend on site that's the problem? Some are three weeks on, one week off; some are two and two. Do you think there is a happy balance there so they get their home life?

Mr B.J. GRYLLES: We currently have calls in the Pilbara for shifts to be reduced and pay cuts to follow those shift reductions. That is all about trying to get a better work–life balance. There is no doubt that if a young guy is willing to work 12 hours a day for 30 days on and a few days off, he has an objective in mind. As other members have said, I do not know how long people can manage that. As someone from an agricultural background, I equate that to harvest. Harvest time is from November to December. On the farm, we would work 16, 18 or 20-hour days—again and again and again. We were hoping that we would finish harvest by Christmas, and then we moved out of that phase of working.

Ms J.M. Freeman: You still got to come home every night.

Mr B.J. GRYLLES: Yes, we still got to come home every night, although it was really only into a bed and then back out of it again. To try to drive productivity, we have these workers working almost at the maximum of their capacity. If we take anything to the maximum of its capacity, that causes challenges. I welcome a debate that looks at the shifts and how the shifts work to try to better that work–life balance.

The Minister for Regional Development was in Karratha looking at FIFO camps in the past couple of weeks. He made a really interesting point when driving into Karratha. Either side of the main drive into Karratha now is a brand-new four-lane highway, street art at the roundabouts and two brand-new subdivisions on either side of the

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highway. Jingarri has 100 new houses built by Rio Tinto for its residential workers in Karratha, and Madigan Estate has 50 new houses built by Yara Australia for its new TAN plant built on the Burrup. Right next door to that is the 2 500-man camp called Gap Ridge, which is Woodside's operational FIFO camp. The Minister for Regional Development said, "At what stage of a city's growth don't we need a 2 500-person donga camp on the outskirts of town?" That is a really interesting observation. We do not have that in Bunbury, even though there is a lot of industry in and around the town.

Mr P.B. Watson: We could do with that for the Anzac commemoration.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: The member might want it for a couple of weeks and then he will want to get rid of it really quickly.

It was a really interesting observation and I congratulate the minister for making it. That is the question that the community is starting to ask and we as politicians will be asked in coming years. Is there a role in a city of 25 000 people such as Karratha, with new schools, new hospitals, new main streets, street art at the roundabouts and some of the best sporting facilities in Western Australia, for 2 500 workers living on the outskirts of town in a boom-gated donga camp with barbed wire around it, essentially delivered there by a bus, put into 12-hour shiftwork and then flown back at the end of their shift? There is no great encouragement to engage in the town. The minister asked whether a bus ran from the camp into town to buy a lotto ticket or have a drink at the local hotel. No, there is no bus.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Do they play sport?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: No. They have a gym in the facility.

Mr P. Papalia: I have a better question. Why don't you make inquiries into whether they are complying with their rules?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I am sorry?

Mr P. Papalia: Don't worry.

Mr M.P. Murray: More seriously, is there any check on a person who may not come out of that camp for, say, three months? He does his three weeks and he has had a problem at home, then he does the fourth week and goes back into his three weeks off. Is there any check to make sure those people do get a break? I don't know.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I do not think I know that answer.

There are two different arguments here. There is no doubt that some people like the lifestyle and the family likes the lifestyle—and good luck to them. The point that I make is that I do not think the companies are trying hard enough to revert to what we would consider to be a more normal lifestyle, and at that point the only option becomes fly in, fly out. People come to my electorate office in Karratha and say, "We've been resident in Karratha for 15 years. Finally, government infrastructure support and service delivery has caught up. Our kids are going to a new school. There's a new hospital just started construction. We're swimming in the best swimming pool in Western Australia. I can get dressed up and my wife can put a nice frock on to go down to Blanche Bar on Friday night and I've just been told by my employer that my residential job has been converted to FIFO." Members can understand that that would create a fair bit of discord in the local community. They are the challenges that we are going through at the moment. I therefore welcome the debates in and around this issue. Mine locations at Christmas Creek and other remote mine locations are obviously going to be a camp lifestyle, but for people on the outskirts of Karratha and Woodside having almost 50 per cent of its workforce FIFO, questions have to be asked about how we got to this. To Woodside's credit, the reason for that big camp there is that seven years ago when the Pluto expansion was underway, there was no option. There were no new schools, hospitals, dual-lane highways, swimming pools, bars, cafes and restaurants and street art in the main street. That is why the camp was built. However, now there are those facilities. The camp is still there and its lease is up for renewal. They are therefore interesting questions.

Ms J.M. Freeman: Is that only Karratha or do you have other examples of it?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: No, that is every Pilbara town. I think a lot of these camps in Tom Price, Paraburdoo and Newman have lease renewals coming up. That is why I said that if there were truly a willingness from the companies, they would say, "FIFO was a necessary outcome of a huge construction workforce needed to build the plant, but when we move into the operational phase we as a company are going to phase our workforce back into residential living." In Newman there are new big subdivisions and in Port Hedland there are new big subdivisions. The government has actually caught up with all the infrastructure but the companies are still saying, "No, we need an operational workforce on a FIFO model and we want to continue with that." Government has the policy question in its remit to ask, "Are we going to continue to renew these leases or are we going to seek from the companies a transition so that everything gets put in black and white? You, Grylls, oppose FIFO. That's not going to be a sensible outcome because what about the mine that's 200 kilometres

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inland with no town?” I perfectly understand that, but I would have some confidence, if at a location it was possible and suitable and the companies were beginning to transition, about how they view the world. The fact that there does not seem to be much of a desire is when I start to worry about that. If the companies were starting to talk about softening the rosters to make them a little more family friendly, I would start to have a little more confidence about where they are heading.

Ms J.M. Freeman: You said before that Rio had done that but other companies had not, or is it just across the board?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: No, that debate at the moment is around Cape Lambert, and I think it is the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union or the Maritime Union of Australia that is talking about changed rosters to make it a bit more family friendly, bearing in mind that all the workforce there is living in and around the community at Wickham. Rio, to its credit, has built 300 brand-new houses in Wickham and Karratha in the past two years. From talking to Rio, I believe it is having great success in building a residential workforce. Rio mentioned that it is probably looking to wind down some of its camp facilities; obviously it costs money to have them sitting there as well. Rio is probably the best example at the moment of a company that is doing that, but I want to get away from this notion that we have to have FIFO. There are 25 000 people in Karratha. A city the size of Karratha can employ 300 people and it is not FIFO anymore. The Yara fertiliser company has a big new infrastructure project building 65 new houses, and all the workforce for its new project will be residential—that is, highly qualified and skilled chemical engineers and the like. They are not labourers; they are highly skilled individuals. The company is confident that it can bring a full residential workforce into Karratha and it is doing that now. It is very much a contrast between Yara and Woodside, which are essentially operating in the same space, and one has a full residential workforce and one has not.

Mr P.B. Watson: But in that situation the money of the highly skilled ones is in their wages for their skills; whereas these other people coming up probably do not have a lot of skills, so they need the hours to get the money that these other guys can get by living in the town.

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: Yes, except that all the jobs in the resources sector now are highly skilled. I think that counts out in a construction phase a labourer providing a general hand on a construction site. But we are just about out of that phase now and into purely operational jobs. So, when we talk about Karratha and Hedland, there are port operations there but the mine is well inland and the Haulpak drivers are inland. The coastal jobs are train drivers, port workers and equipment operators on that site—highly skilled jobs. Although government will give consideration to this issue, there has been some work done. To me the bigger debate happening at the moment is, as the Minister for Regional Development put it: at what stage do we not need a 2 500-man operational camp on the outskirts of a major regional city? They are questions that people are asking in and around the growth of Kalgoorlie. It is certainly a question in Karratha and in Hedland. In Hedland there is still a bit of construction going on with the Roy Hill project and the like, so Hedland is more in a construction phase than Karratha, Newman and so forth. There are thousands and thousands of donga beds. They are a major investment by the mining companies. If we add the major investment into those beds to the level of control a company can gain over its workforce by having them in a regimented-camp outcome, I think that might be a place where government has to start to look at. As we make policy decisions on how we want to support our workforce, how we want to shape the state and how we want to drive regional development and see growth in the north, they are questions that need to be asked. We have to remember that the default position from industry and others is that FIFO will always have its place—yes, in remote mining operations absolutely! I struggle to understand why half the companies in Karratha can operate a residential workforce with kids in school there and people participating in the community, yet the other half say the exact opposite: that they cannot do that. They are some of the things as the local member for Pilbara that I am investigating into the future.

A lot of non-government organisations are participating in this space looking to deliver support, if inquiries from government, NGOs and the resources sector are anything to go by. If there are gaps, there will be plenty of NGOs ready to fill those gaps. I have often said that we are spending billions of dollars in infrastructure in Perth. We have just announced a new railway out to the airport, and FIFO workers are mentioned in that conversation as the economic driver; we are building new road networks to get to the airport, and FIFO workers are mentioned in that; and we are asking the airport to build a bigger airport, and FIFO workers are mentioned in that. We are spending billions and billions of dollars in Perth to create an environment so that FIFO workers can fly away from their families up to modern regional communities —

Mr P. Papalia: You can't make them move!

Mr B.J. GRYLLS: I know that we cannot make them move there but I still make the point that if 25 000 people have moved to Karratha and 15 000 to Port Hedland, it seems strange that we have modern vibrant communities where half the people think they can live there and the other half think they cannot. The federal government has

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 13 August 2014]

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Mr Mark McGowan; MR R.H. Cook; MR R.F. Johnson; MR P. Papalia; MR W.R. Marmion; MR D.A. Templeman; MR B.J. Grylls; Mr Peter Tinley; Mr Peter Watson; Dr Kim Hames; Mr John Day

a role to play in this, with fringe benefits tax and the way it treats fly in, fly out workers as opposed to residential workers. Those questions need to be asked. Rather than the companies waiting for parliamentary inquiries and the like, I would like to see them start to make an effort to normalise their workforce. We do not have donga camps in Perth to provide workforce accommodation for all the industry and activity that happens around Perth. We do not have them in Mandurah, Busselton or Geraldton. We have them only in the Pilbara. I hope that, as time goes on, FIFO workers in remote mining camps will absolutely have a role. I also hope that the companies start to think about the types of workers they want travelling to those communities. It is an interesting debate.

MR P.C. TINLEY (Willagee) [5.40 pm]: I thank those members who have already spoken for their contributions. I want to make a couple of points. I fully support the motion that the Education and Health Standing Committee should investigate the issues in relation to suicides in the fly in, fly out workforce. There are enough members on the committee with the brains to look at this matter logically. One of the things I would implore those members to do in the development of their terms of reference is to understand the baseline case. As members have asked previously, is there an over-representation of suicides in the FIFO population compared with those in the general population? We have to understand whether there is a problem in the first instance. We have an identifiable workforce that presents a certain number of suicides. As tragic as they are, it is really important that we understand the nature of the problem, but we also need to understand it in comparison with other circumstances. The committee could avail itself of some baseline information about these sorts of issues from other jurisdictions and other agencies, not the least of which is the Australian Defence Force, which has done a significant amount of work and commissions a lot of studies on mental health issues generally, and also mental health issues as a result of separation. It is not just the duration of separation, as some members have said. When I say “separation”, I am talking about separation from family and the safety of the known comfortable home environment. The frequency is as important as the duration. Sometimes the ideal and adaptable duration is longer than we would intuitively think. It is also relative to the family circumstances of the individual undertaking the activity—in this case, FIFO work.

I think it is really important that the committee look at this issue. I sit on the Economics and Industry Standing Committee, which looks at a lot of things to do with the resource sector from an economic point of view and a state economic benefit point of view. We are a resource state. We have more state agreements with resource companies than any other jurisdiction in this country. Queensland is second only to Western Australia, but it is a long way behind. The business of this Parliament and this government is that \$115 billion behemoth in our economy—the resource sector. If we have a whole body of work on the economic impacts of the resource sector on this state’s future, it is entirely appropriate that we also look at some of the social benefits and social problems that accrue as a result of being in that industry. It is really important that Parliament has the opportunity through the committees to aggregate and report to Parliament on the body of work that is out there to ensure that we get a clearer picture of the nature of the problem before us. Firstly, is there a problem and is it over-represented? The committee would then have to determine so what; and, if there is an over-representation of suicides in the FIFO community, what are we going to do about it? That is an important component of this particular issue that I think the committee should consider. It is no good just identifying the problem. We have no shortage of people in this state who have identified where we are going wrong. We have no shortage of people in this state who will identify a problem that needs fixing without contributing to its solution. I urge the committee to undertake as much as it can within its time and resource constraints to offer some method by which we could at least move forward and undertake some remedial action if indeed it finds that there is an over-representation of suicides in a discrete part of our workforce.

The points that the member for Pilbara raised about the nature of work in the resource sector are very important, because they also will shape potentially some of the recommendations that the committee may make on this issue. The first time I went to the north west in 1974 with a friend’s family, it was a very different place from the place it is today. In those days, Port Hedland was a very rough-and-ready town, with a lot of young families making their way in the world, but that is now not the case. Karratha is now a city. Port Hedland is a city. These places are not devoid of all the amenities that would be found in any other country town in Western Australia, so we should pay due regard to what has been said in this chamber today about the circumstances of the workforce and the opportunities for people to take up residency in and make a contribution to the community. We all know that community participation is as important as the remuneration that people receive for an hour’s work.

The other issue that I hope the committee will take up is—I am not sure it will have the time, but there is certainly a body of work that is worth investigating or including some evidence on—the second and third-order effects of people suffering from mental illness. The families of FIFO workers are indeed the silent victims. As I have said in this place before, we know that mental illness as a result of military service has a significant impact on the families of veterans. I am almost positive that there will be some representation in the knock-on effect of people with mental illness in the FIFO population and its impact on their families. I urge the committee to consider the breadth of the issue, not just on this discrete workforce.

That is about as much as I would like to contribute to this debate. I think it is really important that the government supports this motion on no other basis than it is our duty as a resource state to understand every dimension of that particular industry sector.

MR P.B. WATSON (Albany) [5.48 pm]: I would like to talk on this motion. I am a fly in, fly out worker, as are the members for Kalgoorlie and Pilbara, and maybe the member for North West Central. We are FIFO workers. We fly to Perth on a Monday and leave our families at home. We miss birthdays and school assemblies. I am lucky that my children have grown up and left home, but when I first came to Parliament, I missed those sorts of things. Sometimes members go home to an empty house at night after a strenuous day in Parliament. This FIFO thing affects not only those who work up north, but also members of Parliament. Some have family in Perth but we have to do our own washing and all those little things. We are away from our offices, but we still have to make decisions over the phone concerning issues that constituents take into the office. When members in Perth get up every morning, their family is there and they can go straight home at night and have their meals cooked; someone is there. When I started in this job, probably 14 years ago, seven or eight guys used to fly with me from Albany to Perth on their way north. Every one of them has had a family breakdown. They are all either divorced or separated.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr P. Abetz): Members, can you keep your voices down please. Member for Albany, please resume.

Mr P.B. WATSON: I could not hear myself talk.

Rio Tinto Group flies fly in, fly out workers directly to Albany and back again. The majority of FIFOs who live in Albany drive to Perth first. After they have finished their 12-hour shift, they get straight onto a plane and fly to Perth, which takes two or three hours. They then get off the plane, and two or three of them will hop into a car and drive to Albany, which takes probably four or five hours. These are other issues we have to look at. Some companies fly the workers all the way through, but some of the younger ones—especially with the cost of airfares to Albany—say that they will not pay around \$500 return to Albany; they prefer that four guys chip in \$50 each to pay for fuel. The majority of these guys go home late at night and they are tired. These are the other sorts of things we have to look at. We have to say to the mining companies that if they want someone to fly from Albany to Perth to the work site, they can pay for their airfares. The next issue with air travel is stress. One of the biggest issues in Albany is Virgin Airlines flying to Albany. The Virgin operation of the Albany route is very dysfunctional. Guys come off their shifts from up north and when they get to the airport the plane is delayed for six or seven hours or until the next morning. It is a protected route. People can go there on any night of the week and if there is a delay, they do not have to look any further than Albany because the Albany route is protected. After a 12-hour shift these guys get to Perth and their families are waiting for them at Albany airport. Suddenly they get a phone call saying the flight will be half an hour late, then they say it will be two hours late, then three hours late and then the flight is cancelled. This is a huge issue in Albany. If members look at the FIFO internet site, they will see that is what upsets families the most. If workers who work three weeks on and one week off have to sleep overnight in Perth, that is a day they cannot spend with their families. These are the things the inquiry must look at. We must take a broadbrush approach. We cannot say mental health problems are due to loneliness on the work site. Loneliness is worsened by all these other little things. We cannot say mental illness is due to just the loneliness of being on site. We have to look at the fact that workers are away from home and the issues with travelling to and from work.

Life as a FIFO member of Parliament is different, but we get used to it. People who have young families find it hard missing out on their children's birthdays. As I said, I was lucky because most of my kids had shifted to Perth when I became a member of Parliament. I may not be a FIFO, but I could be a "DIDO"—drive in, drive out. The member for Collie–Preston comes to Perth on a Monday and goes back to Collie on a Friday.

Dr K.D. Hames: It's only two and a half hours.

Mr P.B. WATSON: Yes. Some people who live down that way take only half an hour to get home; it depends on what they do. All I am saying is that an inquiry should look at all aspects. FIFO work affects everyone. We should not say it is just the shift they are on; we should look at the overall picture. A lot of young people are working up north making good money. I see fewer and fewer FIFO workers at the airport these days. I talk to them every Friday morning; they always come up and say hello, but they are really concerned about their jobs. There is extra pressure on them, because although they are making really good money and have made plans for their future, suddenly they think that maybe their job will not be there in a few weeks and wonder what they are going to do. As I said, I fully support this motion, but we must take a broadbrush approach to this whole project.

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [5.54 pm]: I am not sure, but I think I am one of the few members of this house who has done fly in, fly out work—a real FIFO, not a member of Parliament one — Several members interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: I have a son who has done fly in, fly out work. I admit that my FIFO work was a long time ago, during my university days, and was out of Kalgoorlie. We used to fly around Leonora, Laverton and Sandstone where we worked three or four weeks on and a week off. I have to say that we thought that was pretty good because we earned good money. My son who was in Afghanistan came back here and I have to say that FIFO has been fantastic for him. His partner has come over from Sydney with their child. He earns exceptionally good money. I think he earns about 160 or 170 grand a year, without a lot of training. He left school early to join the Army. That sort of income—more than backbenchers of Parliament earn—has been fantastic in giving him the ability to buy into a house and bring his partner here and have a good lifestyle. I have worried about him as a result of his trip to Afghanistan. Things have happened there, as they have to many soldiers, that could increase his risk of a mental illness, but he is a pretty down-to-earth, good semi-country boy, who understands life and has coped very well with that. In some ways, there have been good and bad aspects of him working three weeks on and one week off. The good aspect is that in some ways he sees his child more than I saw my children when I was working. When we work pretty hard, particularly doing medicine, we see the kids briefly in the morning before we go to work while they are getting ready for school, but by the time we come home from work—I was a member of the local council as well—the kids are nearly always in bed, and I often had weekend work. I worked in the surgery on Saturdays and every fourth Sunday and attended council meetings for an average of three nights a week. I hardly ever saw the children. With six of them, that made life pretty difficult for a while. I was not a great dad, to be honest, because I did not get lots of time to spend with the children. My son does not see his child for three weeks continuously but has a week when he is with him for just about every minute of the day he is awake.

FIFO work causes stress, but we do not know how much stress it is. As the member for Willagee asked when he made some very good comments about what we should do and how we should manage it, what should be the breadth of scope of this proposed inquiry? Is there an increased risk of mental illness in FIFO work or would those people who are having mental health problems have had them whatever job they were in? Are they people who are prone to mental illness? We know the incidence of mental health problems is very high in just the general community. We know that the actor Robin Williams committed suicide very recently. The incidence of suicide, particularly in Aboriginal communities, is enormous. Is this just part of the standard background mental health problem whereby if people who might have an issue —

Dr A.D. Buti: The idea of the inquiry is to find out.

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is right. I did not hear the member for Armadale interject on the member for Willagee when he said exactly the same thing. I am agreeing with the comments the member for Willagee made. Is the mental health problem part of a person's background or is the absence from family support an increased risk? Do the companies need to do extra work?

I listened to the member for North West talk about companies not employing so many FIFOs. I agree with him to a degree in the sense that there are beautiful places in Western Australia such as Karratha and Port Hedland where we have spent a huge amount of money improving their facilities. As we know, the previous Liberal government built the new hospital in Port Hedland and we are about to build a new hospital in Karratha and one in Onslow with funding coming from Chevron. We have built lots of other facilities such as boat ramps and community halls, mostly with royalties for regions money. It has made an enormous difference to places. It is great that people can now live in a much better community so that people do not have to be FIFOs and fly up and back all the time and leave their families. It is far better for them to come back and be with their families. What about those who live further out of town? What will those who live good distances from Karratha or Port Hedland do? Should they live in Karratha and fly in and out of town? It would be a shorter distance, but perhaps travel time would not be affected that much. How would flying home every night affect their work hours if they had to go to the airport every day and fly out to, say, Cloudbreak, do their work and get home? It would significantly reduce work time or companies would give workers very long days so that they would have to leave at the crack of dawn and get home late at night. I do not think those things would work that well and it would create another level of stress for those families. For example, my son works for CITIC Pacific Mining, which is not that far south of Karratha. It is may be only an hour by plane or helicopter to get there. It takes a lot longer to get there by road, of course. All those things take time.

We just had some meetings recently with mining companies which talked about the actual work time for someone who is on a 12-hour shift. It is only about six hours. I was blown away to hear that. For a 12-hour shift a company gets six hours of productive work out of a worker. That is because all the safety things have to be gone through automatically at the start of each day. There are handover tasks and going through what the actual job is for the day. Then they get to work, but then there are morning and afternoon tea breaks, meal breaks and closing down breaks. The mining companies said to us that they get only six hours of productive, on-the-job work over a 12-hour shift. Imagine that a part of that 12-hour shift is to fly to the mine site; it would significantly

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reduce the number of productive hours. Remember the whole reason for FIFO and how those companies operate is for Australia to be competitive on the international market, particularly with the cost of getting ore. These companies have to get ore to China, or wherever it goes, at a relatively cheap rate that is certainly below the international market rate. Big companies such as BHP and Rio manage to do that, but smaller companies such as Atlas Iron are much closer to that cut-off line at which it is not profitable to mine anymore. If we are to change things to significantly increase the cost of mining, the by-product of that would be that a lot of companies would have to close down and, as a result, unemployment would increase and the massive boost in this state from the mining industry would be significantly reduced. We need to be careful about those things. Just because it would not be as successful to have everyone based in a town and flying out to those communities on a daily basis, rather than what they are doing now, does not mean we can ignore the plight of the people doing the work—nor is it reasonable or acceptable to say, “Oh, well, bad luck; that’s their lot in life. Whatever happens happens.” The companies and the state have a responsibility to make sure that those workers get the absolute best care. If there are issues around increased rates of suicide or mental health with people working in the fly in, fly out industry, we need to make sure we get it right because it is a major component of this state government’s development, the income of our state and federal governments and our reputation as a country. We need to make sure that we look at every aspect of the mining industry and address issues such as that to make a determination. A determination might find that FIFO workers are not at increased risk of suicide. Personally, I think that is less likely. If they are at increased risk, what do we do about it? Whose responsibility is it to do something about it? My feeling is that if the companies decide that they want to have their workers operate on a FIFO basis because it is much better for productivity, they certainly need to play a big role in helping to manage those staff who have an issue.

Mr M.P. Murray: It’d take another two hours off those six you’re talking about.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Maybe it would. Maybe it is as simple as making sure that there is a psychologist in the camp or a visiting psychologist so that after someone finishes work, they can have discussions with the psychologist. Treating people with mental illness is very difficult. It is not simply a matter of talking to a psychologist and suddenly the person is better; there are lots of other issues. However, perhaps if they pick up early that someone has a significant mental illness, they can determine that that type of job is not the best for that person. That person may decide that they are not coping and they need to find alternative employment. However, it is no good waiting and putting up with the job and hanging in there if suddenly the person kills himself. That is a tragedy by any measure of it. There might be simple things that could be done to support someone and help them to cope with that difficulty of being away from family. Perhaps the rest of the family should be made aware. The extended family, the parents or the partner could be told that their husband, son or daughter is having a significant problem with this and needs lots of support, encouragement, comfort and care. Lots of things need to be looked at.

Again, as the member for Willagee said, it is very important that we look at the breadth of the inquiry and not only at numbers. We need to look at circumstances, influences, things that can be done to make it better and whether counselling is required, and whether people need to be onsite or offsite to access that counselling. There are lots of options. From my son being a FIFO worker, I know that they do 12 hours on and 12 hours off. I know from my own experience that there is not a lot of time in a worker’s free time to do stuff because they want to sleep for probably eight hours, which gives them four waking hours. Someone might use two or three of those at night. They might knock off work and want to have something to eat and relax a bit and have a drink. We used to play Euchre when we finished up at the camp. In the morning workers really have only an hour left in which to get up and have breakfast before they are off to work. There is not a lot of spare time, but there is some.

Mr D.J. Kelly: It’s an interesting anecdote.

Dr K.D. HAMES: Is it? I am glad the member for Bassendean likes it.

Mr D.J. Kelly: No.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The member for Bassendean is just prejudiced. Here we are telling stories about fly in, fly out, and explaining what fly in, fly out workers do as part of their relaxation, which does not seem unreasonable to me. It is the member for Bassendean’s choice to interject, and, I have to say, I always expect the member to be critical. That is all from me. It is very important, in my view, to make sure that these issues are looked at.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr J.H.D. Day (Leader of the House)**.