

# SHIRE OF ASHBURTON

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All communications to be  
addressed to Chief Executive Officer

21 January 2015

Dr G.G. Jacobs, MLA  
Standing Committee Chairman  
Education and Health Standing Committee  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
Harvest Terrace  
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Hon Dr Jacobs

## RE: SHINING A LIGHT ON FIFO MENTAL HEALTH

We would like to make a contribution to the FIFO Inquiry discussion paper '*Shining a Light on FIFO Mental Health*'.

The report highlights the complexity of the matter at hand, with issues like isolated work locations, weather considerations for a home location, wage/salary level requirements, and employer costs, being just a few. It is indeed a "wicked problem" and one that we have all contributed to in some way or another.

The Shire of Ashburton would particularly like to highlight one portion of the report and to offer a comment upon it. The portion quoted actually refers to a place within our local government, but that is not the purpose of raising it. Our contribution is "transportable" and relevant to any community in the Pilbara, or even any community in Australia.

The excerpt below refers to rostered days off:

...arrangements made for workers to undertake activities on their rostered days off (sometimes known as "fatigue days"):

*One of the biggest complaints we get on these so-called fatigue days – so a half-day Sunday, or a half day where you have to have a fatigue day – is that there are no actual activities for the workers to participate in on that day. If you are out on Onslow, we believe it would not be out of the way for the principal contractors, ...to be able to organise fishing charters for a half day or even to the point of a flight into Coral Bay, ...and spend some time in town like that, to be able to sort of have a real fatigue day off, with activities that can come back and really mean something, rather than saying, "That's your fatigue day", and you just spend the day walking up and down the corridors like in *The Shawshank Redemption!*<sup>203</sup>*

The Shire does not oppose the suggestion of a fishing charter, but we would like to particularly highlight the existence of groups in towns that would welcome these employees into their organisations, the participation in which has mutual benefits. These groups might be a local fishing club, or a football club, or a service club (like a Lions or Apex). Participation in these groups would achieve two important goals, firstly, to provide an existing structured opportunity for a FIFO worker to engage with others in the vicinity of a workplace and to enable them to feel the psychological benefits of making a meaningful contribution to society, but also, it will consequentially result in an actual improvement in the wellbeing of the community of the local area. The mutually beneficial outcome seems therefore, to be of considerable value to all parties.

A small example of the above was where the Old Onslow Cemetery received a recent "make-over" - Chevron's employees kindly volunteered their time, the Shire of Ashburton provided the necessary equipment, and the result was a simple but effective weed clearing operation at the small but historic Old Onslow Cemetery. Whilst a formal survey was not conducted following the activity, as a participant in many volunteer activities, I am confident that those that took part:

- a) enjoyed a change from their "normal life" at the Wheatstone Project,
- b) enjoyed learning a little of the history of the district they work in,
- c) enjoyed the company of others in a different way to their normal work day, and
- d) enjoyed the psychological benefits of the feeling of "making a volunteer contribution".

There are many ways people can contribute to society and it doesn't need to be physically removing weeds from an old cemetery. It could be coaching a kids footy team, organising a darts competition, or helping cook hamburgers to raise funds for a third world country's education or immunisation programs. Every person has different personal values and physical abilities, and choice is the key to contribution.

We would suggest that the above not only benefits FIFO employee health, but it also supports the state government's policy position to see the Pilbara grow and prosper.

Yours sincerely



Kerry White  
**SHIRE PRESIDENT**