



6 February 2015

Dr Graham Jacobs MLA  
Chair  
Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee  
Level 1, 11 Harvest Terrace  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

Via email: [laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:laehsc@parliament.wa.gov.au)

Dear Dr Jacobs,

**RE: Shining a Light on FIFO Mental Health – Discussion Paper**

The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association (APPEA) is the peak national body representing Australia's oil and gas exploration and production industry. APPEA has more than 85 full member companies exploring for and producing Australia's oil and gas resources. These companies currently account for around 98 per cent of Australia's total oil and gas production and the vast majority of exploration. APPEA also represents over 240 associate member companies providing a wide range of goods and services to the industry.

Western Australia's oil and gas industry is a major contributor to the state and national economies. More than \$100 billion is being invested in production infrastructure and the industry invested \$3b in 2013-14 exploring for oil and gas both onshore and offshore Western Australia. Petroleum activities onshore WA and offshore in Commonwealth waters contributed over \$1.2b to the WA state budget in 2013-14.

APPEA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee's Discussion Paper: *Shining a Light on FIFO Mental Health*. APPEA and member companies contributed to the development of submissions from the Western Australian Chamber of Minerals and Energy (WA CME) and the Australian Mines and Metal Association (AMMA), which reflects the use of fly-in, fly-out workforce models across the broader resources sector. APPEA supports the WA CME and AMMA submissions and recommendations as they relate to petroleum activities. APPEA's submission should also be considered in conjunction with the individual submissions of our members.

**Workplace Health & Safety**

The oil and gas industry places great emphasis on having a fit, healthy and happy workforce. Fit for work means that an individual is in a good physical and/or psychological state to perform their duties in a manner which does not put the safety or health of themselves or others at risk. A healthy and happy workforce is committed and productive.

As submissions from resource companies and employer groups detail, the resources sector has a large number of programs in place to promote employee's mental well-being, including support and intervention provisions through the use of independent, complimentary and, importantly,

confidential Employee Assistance Programs. These suite of initiatives cover the full spectrum of employee's mental well-being, from motivational and educational initiatives, through to support and treatment programs. These initiatives are continually reviewed to ensure trends are identified and interventions are undertaken.

### **Mental Health**

The discussion paper touches on an important public health issue in that there appears to be a lack of consistent data on mental health occurrence across the general community and the prevalence of suicides potentially related to the workplace.

Based on the evidence presented to the Committee, the Western Australian Coroner's Office appears to be the most appropriate body to ensure the maintenance of a comprehensive record of deaths by suicide in the state. Additional State Government funding will enable the Coroner to collate and analyse data looking at contributing factors and demographic information to enhance understanding of at risk populations and key risk factors relating to these deaths. It also appears that internal government reporting processes need to be established that link relevant OHS investigators with coronial reports that identify a workplace connection.

APPEA's own reported safety incident data<sup>1</sup>, data from the international oil and gas association, IOGP<sup>2</sup>, and the submission from the Department of Mines and Petroleum, all point to a low incidence of mental health factors in workplace health and safety incidents in the oil and gas sector. The industry's focus on a fit, healthy and happy workforce is why there are strong collaborative efforts globally in such areas as fitness to work, managing stress, substance misuse and managing psychosocial risks. These efforts are continually improved to ensure that risks are reduced to as low as reasonably practicable.

In our view, the Inquiry can best complement these efforts by taking a broad societal view of mental health issues and focus on identifying strategies to improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes across communities, sectors and rural and regional areas within the state. This includes addressing the societal stigma associated with reporting mental health concerns. Given the incidence of mental health occurrence throughout the community, governments have an important role to play in removing the stigma associated with mental illness. Industry stands ready to support these efforts.

### **Workforce Models**

The Fly In-Fly Out or FIFO work practice has been used in the Australian oil and gas industry for decades, and the international oil and gas industry for even longer. In the offshore environment, FIFO is the only option available. A variety of workforce models are deployed during the long-life operations phase of projects. Both residential and FIFO practices are used, where appropriate.

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<sup>1</sup> Provided to the Committee as part of follow up actions from APPEA's appearance on 5 November 2014

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

FIFO, as with all workforce models, brings with it challenges as well as benefits and these are addressed through a suite of initiatives with examples cited in various submissions to the inquiry. FIFO is also a response to the demands from the workforce to provide flexibility for employees to choose where they work and live. Similarly, the variety of FIFO rosters in place reflects a range of both personal, health, safety and productivity preferences. There is no one-size-fits-all roster.

FIFO has, and will continue to be, important in a State in which remoteness and harsh climatic conditions influence the choice of workforce model in a variety of sectors. In the resources sector it does help underpin an important part of the State's economic growth. Working a FIFO roster is a choice, based on a number of personal, professional and sectoral factors.

### **Conclusion**

APPEA appreciates the opportunity to support the inquiry and improving society's understanding of this priority public health issue. Should the Committee require further information, please contact Mr Adam Welch, Senior Policy Advisor, on 9426 7205 or [awelch@appea.com.au](mailto:awelch@appea.com.au).

Regards,



**Stedman Ellis**

Chief Operating Officer – Western Region