

Western Australia Legislative Assembly –  
Education and Health Standing Committee -  
Inquiry into mental health impacts of FIFO  
work arrangements

Australian Mines & Metals Association (AMMA)

*September 2014*



AMMA is Australia's national resource industry employer group, a unified voice driving effective workforce outcomes. Having actively served resource employers for more than 95 years, AMMA's membership covers employers in every allied sector of this diverse and rapidly evolving industry.

Our members include companies directly and indirectly employing more than half a million working Australians in mining, hydrocarbons, maritime, exploration, energy, transport, construction, smelting and refining, as well as suppliers to these industries.

AMMA works with its strong network of likeminded companies and resource industry experts to achieve significant workforce outcomes for the entire resource industry.

First published in 2014 by

AMMA, Australian Mines and Metals Association

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## INTRODUCTION

1. AMMA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Western Australia (WA) Legislative Assembly – Education and Health Standing Committee in relation the inquiry into mental health and fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) work arrangements.
2. AMMA's submission is based on feedback received from member companies that have operations in WA and particularly engage in FIFO working arrangements. The Committee should note that this submission should be considered in conjunction with AMMA's earlier 2011 submission to a House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia Inquiry on the use of FIFO and DIDO workforce practices in Australia<sup>1</sup>.
3. The resource industry and the use of FIFO operations is critical to the Australian economy. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics June 2014 National Accounts<sup>2</sup>, the resources industry accounted for 10.4% of the seasonally adjusted GDP, or \$163,894 million.
4. AMMA continues to highlight that FIFO work practices are an essential mode of operation for numerous projects in the Australian resources industry and such working arrangements suit both employers and employees. There is a need for sensible policy making in this area in relation to the types of working practices that assist what would otherwise be non-commercial mining operations. Western Australia is not unique in utilising FIFO (and similar arrangements such as DIDO) workforces. It remains a legitimate and important feature of operations both domestically and internationally.
5. To help inform this important inquiry, AMMA conducted a survey of its WA-based members on key issues around FIFO working arrangements in September 2014. Responses to that survey appear throughout this submission to illustrate the breadth of initiatives and practices employers have in place in relation to these important working arrangements.
6. AMMA strongly encourages this committee to ensure that the inquiry is informed by robust data and evidence. AMMA urges caution in attempting to understand the causes of mental health issues experienced by workers in this industry sector and for those workers who are in a FIFO working arrangement. As this submission attempts to highlight, the resource industry strives to provide services which will support their workforce, their families and the broader community.
7. Whilst it is important that the Committee consider mental health issues, including suicide awareness and prevention matters in the context of the resource sector as per

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<sup>1</sup> Available here:

[http://www.amma.org.au/assets/images/stories/policyinaction/Submission\\_to\\_FIFO\\_DIDO\\_inquiry.pdf](http://www.amma.org.au/assets/images/stories/policyinaction/Submission_to_FIFO_DIDO_inquiry.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>

[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/meisubs.nsf/0/4D57FAE7569ECB7FCA257D4700123D88/\\$File/52060\\_jun%202014.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/meisubs.nsf/0/4D57FAE7569ECB7FCA257D4700123D88/$File/52060_jun%202014.pdf)

the inquiry terms of reference, such issues are not unique to the resource sector and remain a concern for the community generally. Mental health issues do not discriminate and are a cause of concern for all policy makers across all state boundaries, occupations and industry sectors.

8. A 2013 Safe Work Australia (SWA) report titled *“The Incidence of Accepted Workers’ Compensation Claims for Mental Stress in Australia”* showed that the mining industry accounted for 0.6% of the mental stress claims across all industries<sup>3</sup>. Notably, mental stress claims by industry appear to be significantly higher in the health and community services sector (20.5% of mental stress claims), followed by education (16%) and personal & other services (13.6%).

**Table 4 Mental stress claims: number, percentage and frequency rates by sex and industry, 2008–09 to 2010–11p combined**

| Industry  | Number of claims |               |               | %            | Frequency rate <sup>(a)</sup> |             |
|---|------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------|-------------|
|   | Males            | Females       | Total         |              | Males                         | Females     |
| Health & community services                     | 1 294            | 4 557         | 5 852         | 20.5         | 103.0                         | 112.9       |
| Education                                       | 12 18            | 3 336         | 4 554         | 16.0         | 92.8                          | 125.7       |
| Personal & other services                       | 2 362            | 1 504         | 3 866         | 13.6         | 238.5                         | 199.2       |
| Government administration & defence             | 1 110            | 1 635         | 2 744         | 9.6          | 78.8                          | 119.9       |
| Retail trade                                    | 708              | 1 348         | 2 056         | 7.2          | 20.9                          | 46.8        |
| Property & business services                    | 788              | 1 216         | 2 004         | 7.0          | 20.4                          | 47.3        |
| Transport & storage                             | 1 503            | 384           | 1 887         | 6.6          | 75.5                          | 72.8        |
| Manufacturing                                   | 841              | 464           | 1 305         | 4.6          | 20.0                          | 38.2        |
| Accommodation, cafes & restaurants              | 437              | 636           | 1 074         | 3.8          | 41.7                          | 58.8        |
| Finance & insurance                             | 183              | 617           | 800           | 2.8          | 16.7                          | 59.8        |
| Wholesale trade                                 | 340              | 331           | 671           | 2.4          | 19.0                          | 50.4        |
| Construction                                    | 412              | 122           | 534           | 1.9          | 10.8                          | 32.9        |
| Cultural & recreational services                | 201              | 227           | 428           | 1.5          | 29.9                          | 43.8        |
| Communication services                          | 78               | 87            | 165           | 0.6          | 9.1                           | 24.5        |
| Mining  | 126              | 32            | 158           | 0.6          | 12.2                          | 19.6        |
| Electricity, gas & water supply                 | 110              | 41            | 151           | 0.5          | 23.3                          | 33.4        |
| Agriculture, forestry & fishing                 | 79               | 60            | 139           | 0.5          | 9.5                           | 28.1        |
| <b>Total mental stress claims<sup>(b)</sup></b> | <b>118 46</b>    | <b>16 650</b> | <b>28 496</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>39.4</b>                   | <b>81.1</b> |

(a) Calculated as claims per 100 million hours worked.  
 (b) Includes claims where industry was not stated.

9. Notwithstanding the above, mental health (for FIFO and non-FIFO workers) remains a concern for employers in the resource sector. Proper mitigation strategies need to be considered to ensure risks to workers are reduced to the extent possible. Other risks such as fatigue and drug and alcohol use are those which employers continuously monitor and address. Resource sector employers consider workplace health and safety to be front and centre of their operations and mental health is part of those considerations.
10. A common theme throughout this submission is that resource companies have implemented a number of initiatives to combat any risks associated with FIFO work

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/769/The-Incidence-Accepted-WC-Claims-Mental-Stress-Australia.pdf>

practices and are committed to promoting awareness and embedding fit-for-purpose risk-based policies and procedures to protect the safety of their workforce.

## THE ORIGINS OF FIFO

11. It is important for the Committee to particularly appreciate that FIFO work practices are not a new phenomenon. Such practices have had their origins during the late 1940s in the offshore oil sector in the Gulf of Mexico. As the offshore oil industry developed around the world, FIFO work practices expanded.
12. In Australia, FIFO work practices generally commenced in the 1960s with rapid growth seen since the 1970s as air travel became more affordable and available.
13. Historically, Australia's mining operations were predominantly residential and based on the idea of establishing a mine and then a town around the mine, such as at Mount Isa in Queensland, Broken Hill in NSW, Savage River in Tasmania and Goldsworthy in Western Australia.
14. Today, we see a growing trend by companies, often driven by the desires of employees among other factors, to access FIFO work practices due to a combination of social, geographical, logistical and economic factors.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FIFO

15. The following comments from AMMA members are illustrative of how vital FIFO working arrangements are to the resource industry, with such arrangements being critical to ensuring the continuity of many operations:

*"FIFO working arrangements are extremely important – it's the only way we can operate effectively. The areas that we operate in are very remote and if we didn't fly people in and out we wouldn't be able to sustain our business."*

*"It is fundamental. Remote resource projects rely on an influx of skilled workers to execute the works. Residential is not an option for many locations where resource construction projects are being executed."*

*"It is vital. If we didn't have FIFO we couldn't operate."*

*"All works for our construction projects are carried out on remote sites so it is integral to the completion of our projects."*

*"FIFO operations are fundamental to the WA mining industry. The bulk of our FIFO employees do not want to live permanently in remote Pilbara locations."*

*"If we did not offer FIFO we would not be able to operate. There would not be enough residential employees in the surrounding area to service all mines, therefore FIFO is essential to our operations."*

*"FIFO is critical to a massive amount of companies' survival. It must be maintained."*

*"It is the only option."*

16. A number of member companies provided feedback that the bulk of their FIFO employees do not want to live permanently in remote locations such as the Pilbara.
17. The permanent residential model is unlikely to work for many operations, particularly in relation to engineering and construction roles where skills and expertise are typically not located locally and those with those skills often do not want to relocate there. Particularly in WA, due to the geographical diversity and remote structure of mining operations, FIFO operations are essential.
18. FIFO is imperative to meet the industry's need for skilled labour, efficacy in the workplace, productivity and flexibility in what are challenging market conditions.

## **MENTAL HEALTH AND THE COMMUNITY**

19. The resource industry places the utmost importance on safety and safe work practices.
20. Safety is commonly recognised as a core or guiding principle throughout the companies in the industry. Mental health and wellbeing falls under the category of health and safety.
21. Whilst AMMA is concerned over any fatality connected to the resource sector, policy debate and discourse must be balanced by the best available evidence and data. One suicide in the resource sector or community is one too many. Similarly, whilst public commentary may lead to some in the community assuming there is a causal connection between mental illness (or self-harm) and FIFO workplace environments, it is important this be objectively assessed against all the available data. An inherent problem in understanding this from a public policy perspective is the lack of data on the prevalence of suicides generally in the Australian community, and even less available data to assess this from an occupational or industry perspective.
22. AMMA has attempted to use the available data to assist the Committee in its inquiry. Whilst there is no official data collected on how many people actually engage in FIFO work practices in WA, the 2011 Census data revealed that the number of workers that had a different place of residence to where they were located on Census night (9 August 2011) in WA – Outback was 48,055 people<sup>4</sup>. The same source and dataset revealed that the largest statistical difference between usual residence and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features652012-2013>

temporary location was in the Pilbara. It is therefore assumed that a significant proportion of these people are workers employed in the WA FIFO industry.

23. According to *Beyondblue*, seven people commit suicide each day<sup>5</sup>.

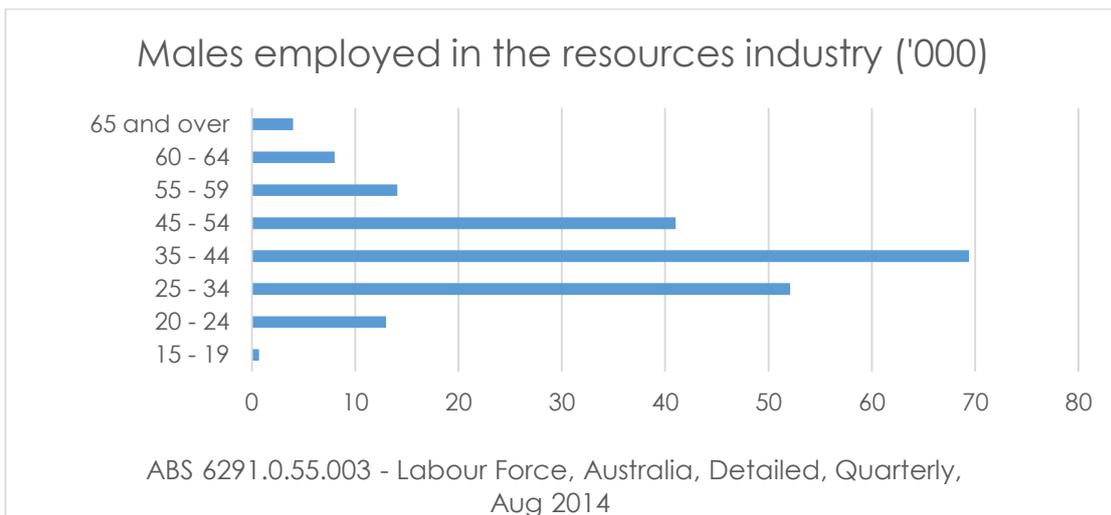
*“Over the past five years, the average number of suicide deaths per year is 2,415.”*

24. In 2012, approximately 75% of people who died by suicide were males and 25% were females.<sup>6</sup>

25. *Beyondblue* noted that from the demographic of people in the so-called working age, *“the highest age-specific suicide rate for males in 2012 was observed in the 45-49 year age group (26.9 per 100,000)”*<sup>7</sup>.

26. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 85.1% of the resources sector is male<sup>8</sup>.

27. The age group banding of males employed in the resources sector is as follows:



28. Whilst it appears based on the above that the type of worker which is particularly attracted to work in the resource sector are those which fall in a broadly defined risk profile for self-harm, there is no evidence of mental health issues being more pronounced in the resource sector (or occupations associated with the resource sector), as compared to other industry sectors, particularly when one considers the information published by Safe Work Australia on mental health claims.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/programs/mens-program/program-activities/suicide-prevention-program>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/programs/mens-program/program-activities/suicide-prevention-program>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.beyondblue.org.au/about-us/programs/mens-program/program-activities/suicide-prevention-program>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6291.0.55.003Aug%202014?OpenDocument>

29. AMMA notes that in 2013, LifeLine WA commissioned The Sellenger Centre for Research in Law, Justice and Social Change at Edith Cowan University, "to conduct research regarding Fly-in-Fly-Out/Drive-in-Drive-Out (FIFO) worker supports".
30. A mixed method approach was used which included the completion of a survey by 924 FIFO workers and the conduct of interviews with a sample of 18 FIFO workers<sup>9</sup>.
31. However, AMMA also notes research utilising data from the HILDA Survey (Melbourne University), which indicates that male workers in the resource sector are not at higher suicide risk when compared with the mental health and emotional wellbeing of men working in other industries.
32. Griffith's Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention (AISRAP) conducted the research and its lead author senior research fellow Dr Samara McPhedran indicated that<sup>10</sup>:
- "Much of the speculation surrounding employees in the resources sector and their mental health is based on anecdotal information rather than concrete data...*
- Our study in fact, found very little evidence of poor mental health or emotional wellbeing among miners."*
33. McPhedran also cautioned that "[t]here is a lot of speculation in the public domain about possible impacts of the resources sector on mental health. The language is often emotive and sensational, with phrases like suicide is epidemic ... But there is no data to back this."<sup>11</sup>
34. The above highlights how important robust data is in underpinning any policy response to this issue (whether regulatory or non-regulatory).

## RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

35. The resource industry places the utmost importance on safety and safe work practices. Safety is recognised as a core and guiding principle throughout the companies in the resource industry. Employers manage all risks in a proactive way, particularly given strict liabilities under workplace health and safety laws.
36. Many resource industry employers go well beyond what would be required from a strict liability legal perspective and strive for best practice standards. For example, a member responding to the AMMA survey indicated:

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<http://www.lifelinewa.org.au/download/FIFO%20DIDO%20Mental%20Health%20Research%20Report%202013.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.safetowork.com.au/news/male-miners-mental-health-claims-overblown-research>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

*"As a mining organisation, safety is our number one priority and we embrace this totally. We are totally proactive in managing safety and all state and federal health and safety laws are adhered to and likely we have higher standards."*

37. This was a similar theme reiterated by other respondents:

*"Federal and state work health and safety laws are the minimum benchmark in what we aim to achieve in the health and safety area; our own standards set out to achieve zero harm."*

...

*"Our safety record in the industry is very good. We employ sufficient personnel to fulfil our project requirements and recruit on an annual basis to bring more offshore workers into the industry. We have strong safety processes and practices in place and all staff are aware of these. Medicals are carried out regularly and if any member of the offshore team has an issue, we have an open door policy for them to discuss this not only with HR but senior management."*

38. While the overwhelming feedback from AMMA members is that FIFO working arrangements are absolutely essential to their continued operation, the industry takes seriously managing any risks that could arise due to the lifestyle challenges associated with remote working arrangements.

39. Whilst the resources industry continues to promote awareness and implement mental health initiatives that best fit their workforce and operations, policy recommendations should not attempt to shift (whether implicitly or directly) an unfair burden or expectation for companies to recognise and / or treat mental health illnesses. This should remain the proper domain of mental health experts and supporting services.

40. A common theme of feedback from AMMA members is that the FIFO lifestyle and working conditions do not suit everyone. It remains as a matter of choice for each individual as to whether they are suited to pursue such a work / lifestyle commitment, and many companies go to great lengths to ensure people are selected appropriately at the recruitment stage.

41. According to one AMMA member:

*"The industry and all who work in it need to acknowledge that remote conditions can be tough and it's not going to be all beer and skittles. Individuals need to be able to make informed decisions about the pros and cons of working in a demanding environment"*.

42. Resource organisations have recognised this and have incorporated such considerations into their pre-screening recruitment processes. This is designed to help organisations examine and assess the strength and suitability of candidates for FIFO

roles, as well as to enable workers to make informed decisions about whether FIFO is for them.

43. In many AMMA member operations, candidates are advised of the FIFO requirements and the roster at the pre-employment stage. If they have not worked FIFO arrangements previously, the mine site and camp facilities will be discussed at length and candidates will often be shown a video to provide them with some idea of what to expect. This process is not too dissimilar to what occurs in other occupations such as the defence force or emergency services. Clearly there are mental and physical requirements that certain occupations demand and the industry has attempted to provide job seekers with as much information at the front end of the process so they are fully appraised of both the opportunities and the challenges that may be inherent in such workplace environments.
44. Comments from companies responding to the AMMA survey highlighted that the following types of pre-employment screening are generally utilised to assist both the candidate and the employer to make fully informed decisions.

*"For those new to the industry, the recruiter and the hiring manager talk openly about the challenges of FIFO work."*

*"We conduct pre-screening for suitability for the FIFO lifestyle."*

*"We do a pre-employment health check and check previous FIFO experience."*

*"We do pre-employment medical screening; psych testing is available if required. Behavioural-based questions are used in the recruitment process to assess health and safety attitudes."*

*"We conduct psychometric and medical testing."*

*"Included is a pre-employment medical and fitness for work assessment. We also assess suitability to work particular hours, shift work, rosters etc."*

*"All employees undergo a medical for fitness to work in the offshore industry and are given industry training as a standard including common safety training as well Basic Offshore Safety Induction & Emergency Training / Helicopter Underwater Escape Training etc."*

*"They undergo a pre-employment medical looking at suitability for work in remote locations. They also undergo a psychometric assessment as part of recruitment ... which looks at supporting & cooperating and adapting and coping skills."*

*"We do a pre-employment medical by a company general practitioner that is familiar with the role and constraints of the environment the candidate may be going into."*

*"We provide general information on FIFO, camp facilities, fatigue management, FIFO Families Booklets, managing FIFO information, Employee Assistance Program information."*

*"We have an Employee Assistance Program addressing issues facing FIFO workers; relationships, drugs and alcohol, stress, etc."*

*"We provide roster information, working hours information, information relating to the site and facilities (e.g. camp, gym, internet/mobile access etc.) flight schedules and Employee Assistance Program information. We also specifically ask about previous experience working shift work, working in remote sites and techniques used to stay focused, energised and healthy when working long hours in a FIFO environment."*

*"We provide booklets providing useful tips such as support groups, communications, newsletters and the like."*

*"We conduct medical screening in terms of increased risk to self / others and the company. We establish healthy lifestyle plans and fitness for work programs."*

*"Candidates are provided with a detailed site assignment provision document that outlines the requirements for the site and the obligations of both parties for the duration of the assignment."*

*"All new staff are advised of the nature of the work we are involved in during the recruitment process."*

*"During induction we provide information on fatigue management and on the employee assistance program, as well as travel options and what happens if there is an emergency at home while the person is onsite."*

*"We discuss their previous FIFO experience if applicable. Non-FIFO experienced candidates have a longer discussion about the suitability of the lifestyle for them."*

*"We provide specific information about support facilities, employee assistance programs, FIFO Families, camp facilities, internet, phone coverage, etc."*

*"Included in the pre-employment medical and fitness for work assessment is an assessment of their suitability to work long hours, shift work, rosters, etc."*

*"All employees undergo a medical for fitness to work in the offshore industry and are given training as a standard including common safety training as well as specialised offshore training."*

*"We offer membership to FIFO Families and access to an employee assistance program."*

*"Our onboarding program includes the RU OK field program information that we promote."*

*"Depending on the level of the position, a site visit is conducted as part of the recruitment process. This is normally an overnight visit to the mine site for the recruit to understand not only the daily work process but also what camp life is like."*

*"We conduct drug and alcohol testing to ensure they are fit for work, as well as a pre-start briefing on the current project status."*

*"We have introduced a new role – health adviser (employee support). This role is filled by a qualified psychologist with an EAP background."*

45. There are various forms of FIFO arrangements used in the resource industry. There is no leading practice solution or a one size fits all approach or methodology that can be consistently adopted throughout the industry to pre-screen and recruit FIFO candidates from a mental health perspective. For example, testing/screening methodologies may differ for FIFO workers that work underground, offshore or in remote or semi-remote locations etc.

## ROSTERS

46. There has been public commentary in the media about the possible link between FIFO rosters and mental illness/self-harm. In reality, resource industry rosters on remote sites are driven by factors, many of them according to employee preference and logistical considerations including:
- a. Providing work / life balance;
  - b. Fatigue management issues;
  - c. Safety;
  - d. Flight and accommodation availability;
  - e. The availability of experienced, quality crews;
  - f. Industry standards for rosters;
  - g. Attraction and retention.
47. Below is what some of our members had to say about the drivers for rostering arrangements in a FIFO context:

*"We operate in offshore locations such as FPSOs [floating production, storage and offloading vessels] and platforms which we cannot permanently accommodate employees on."*

*"Drivers for staff rosters are work-life balance and ensuring more frequent trips home to be with family and friends are taken which adds to morale, productivity and reduces turnover."*

*"FIFO operations are driven by the award of projects to the company from rig positioning, construction and geophysical projects."*

*"Rosters are structured to attract experienced employees, due to the location of the mine site and ensuring family-friendly rosters."*

*"Rosters are a key to employing and retaining employees and has a large impact on decisions for people to join [the company]."*

## MANAGING FIFO CHALLENGES

48. AMMA's members have implemented over a significant period of time a number of proactive and remedial actions and strategies in response to FIFO challenges, with a focus on supporting workers in the face of lifestyle and isolation challenges.
49. Many of the challenges involved in FIFO operations are challenges for the employer in managing logistical issues and seeking to make life easier for employees based at remote sites. Such challenges include:
  - a. Getting people home for unplanned events;
  - b. The distance from central medical facilities if someone is unwell;
  - c. Limited accommodation being available locally and it being expensive compared with other areas;
  - d. Remote issues with telecommunications;
  - e. Communication while in international remote locations;
  - f. Logistical difficulties due to inclement weather and road closures;
  - g. Challenges associated with being able to grant employees leave and have someone to cover their shift at short notice;
  - h. Difficulties redeploying people if FIFO is no longer suitable for their personal situation;
  - i. Transport delays;

j. Logistics involved in moving hundreds of personnel every few weeks.

50. Below is some specific feedback from AMMA members about what they do to mitigate the challenges associated with FIFO work for employees:

*"We provide telecommunications, phones, internet etc. to stay in contact with families. We provide flights for employees back to their families in the event of an emergency. We provide information across the site via noticeboards for help lines such as Beyond Blue / Lifeline."*

*"Supervisors are required to monitor their crews for any signs of distress. We encourage every day conversations such as 'are you ok' to ensure a culture of watching out for each other is cultivated."*

*"We provide family friendly rosters and health and wellbeing coaches."*

*"We provide policies, procedures, plans and information in response to depression, alcohol and drug abuse and relationship issues."*

*"We have in place risk management plans and procedures. We have travel policies which take into account family responsibilities. We provide counselling services."*

*"We encourage employees to discuss any issues they have. We ask employees if they are having any difficulties if a change in their behaviour is evident."*

*"We have a fatigue management hand scanner system. We have mental health first aid stations."*

*"We have an Employee Assistance Program and a chaplain program."*

*"We conduct culture and wellbeing surveys."*

51. A common theme of feedback received from AMMA member companies is that they are attempting in good faith to actively promote mental health awareness and to provide a safe and supportive environment where an individual can request help and assistance.

## **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR FIFO WORKERS**

52. Additional assistance provided by AMMA member companies to their FIFO workforces includes:

- a. Financial planning advice;
- b. Employee assistance programs;

- c. Contact officers onsite for advice or referral;
  - d. Health coordinators in place at villages to assist;
  - e. Entertainment facilities in villages;
  - f. Family-friendly days on site (one AMMA member company twice a year invites 600 employees / family members onto the site to see the working conditions and working environment);
  - g. Assistance with work performance issues;
  - h. Relationship / marital issues support;
  - i. Career path and retirement counselling;
  - j. Support for concerns with children's issues;
  - k. Grief and bereavement support;
  - l. Mobile phone capability wherever possible;
  - m. Wellness coordinators onsite;
  - n. Private health insurance for employees and their immediate families;
  - o. Onsite mental health presentations including "watching out for your mates";
  - p. Salary sacrificing arrangements;
  - q. Recreation rooms, gyms, libraries, phone booths and wide screen TVs and telephones in each cabin; and
  - r. Lifestyle advisers.
53. It is obvious from the above initiatives that the resource industry is proactively implementing wellbeing initiatives for FIFO and non-FIFO workers.
54. Our industry places the utmost importance on safety, which is commonly recognised as a core or guiding principle – not just a legal requirement.
55. Common feedback provided by AMMA member companies is that they continue to raise awareness of mental health issues amongst the workforce and are embedding procedures to address the risks associated with this complex issue. However, this is not just isolated to the FIFO operations and is considered an important issue amongst all workplaces.

56. However, it must be acknowledged that responsibility for managing mental health issues is a shared one. Persons who are experiencing mental health problems often feel they will be stigmatised for seeking assistance and help.
57. AMMA has encouraged companies to consider initiatives such as the *Beyondblue Heads Up* campaign to assist companies in providing simple, yet effective, information to supervisors, line-managers and employees and to encourage workers to seek professional assistance and help. This also assists in raising awareness amongst the workforce and again is not limited to FIFO.
58. Resource organisations internally promote the use of their Employee Assistance Programs and have designed and deployed those programs to be accessible and commensurate with the lifestyle and working conditions of their FIFO workforce.
59. A number of resource organisations have invested into non-work related initiatives (such as providing external financial planning advice) to help mitigate the risk of events that could contribute to anxiety or stress while away from home.
60. The industry, including many resource organisations, have entered into partnerships with external support organisations/initiatives such as *Beyondblue's Heads Up*, *RU OK?* and *FIFO Families* to offer further support to their remote workforces.
61. In short, the industry is providing significant support and assistance to employees. The industry should be commended for those innovations and encouraged to continue to build upon initiatives that have been beneficial to the resource sector, but also to other sectors.

## EAST COAST v WEST COAST FIFO OPERATIONS

62. AMMA understands the Committee may be particularly interested in any material differences in FIFO arrangements on the west coast compared with operations across other parts of Australia.
63. AMMA members that have provided feedback to this submission engage in FIFO activities across Australia, some of them internationally.
64. Whilst there are site-specific differences, they appear largely dependent on the operation rather than the geographical location. This will also depend on whether workers are flying offshore or onshore.
65. Arrangements will also depend on whether operations are within driving distance from airports or capital cities such as in New South Wales or Queensland. As one member indicated in terms of their multisite workforce, their operations in WA have the largest FIFO workforce:

*"WA by far has the largest FIFO workforce of our organisation. Operations in other regions such as Qld and NSW differs as the sites are either residential or driving distance. In WA, the geographical spread and diverse*

*commodities in the resources and mining sector make WA unique in this sense and provide additional challenges to employers and organisations that work in this space. Rosters and working hours in particular differ between the regions, for example, due to the closer proximity of mine sites in Qld and NSW, field service and DIDO is an option."*

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVESTMENT

66. Far from being isolated or removed from local communities, resource industry organisations that utilise FIFO working arrangements continue to invest significant capital and in-kind support into the social fabric of the communities in which they operate.
67. Not only does this help to provide an organisation with a social license to operate, it contributes to the sustainable resilience of the local community.
68. Examples of benefits / assistance provided by AMMA member companies to remote communities include:
  - a. Investments in educational facilities and community infrastructure;
  - b. Utilising rental housing in some remote areas;
  - c. Partnerships with local indigenous groups;
  - d. Community awareness and training programs;
  - e. Career days for local schools;
  - f. Financial donations to local community groups;
  - g. Assistance for community sporting teams and race course events;
  - h. Allowing staff to volunteer in local communities during work time.
69. The following comments are illustrative of the efforts and contributions that companies are making in local communities:

*"Most projects require a Community Engagement Plan which covers sponsorships, access to local employees, traineeships, Indigenous employment and training and utilising local businesses to perform lower tier work."*

*"The business is heavily involved in Community Development Programs with the traditional owners of the land and the local community. There is regular cross cultural training conducted onsite by the local traditional owners so that all employees and contractors have an opportunity to gain a greater appreciation for the land where we are operating. There is a lot of*

*cultural/spiritual significance/rock art/land sculptures around our operating area."*

70. This investment in social infrastructure and programs (such as gymnasiums, recreation, health and lifestyle programs, education and community engagement etc.) is designed to increase the wellbeing and improve the quality of life and opportunities of the individuals, including FIFO workers, in the remote region as well as those living in local communities.

## APPENDIX 1

### **Mental Health Initiative – Bristow Group and “RU OK?” case study**

#### **Bit about Bristow Group**

Bristow Group is a global organisation with a presence in 22 countries, the Australian Business Unit is unique due to its geographical diversity with ten operating bases spanning across the country.

#### **Bristow Group and “RU OK” Day**

Bristow Group felt the RU OK initiative was an excellent fit for their organisation due to the fact that employees such as engineers, pilots and operational staff who work in remote locations coupled with a predominately male workforce in a safety critical environment can potentially be subject to an increased risk which could lead to an escalation of mental health illnesses.

Internally, Bristow recognised that mental health was equally as important as physical wellbeing and needed promotion, attention and focus to raise awareness, highlight support services available and equip their staff with tools to confidentially engage in conversation with each other with the aim of stopping little problems becoming bigger. The organisation considered this was aligned to their Code of Business Integrity core values.

In 2011 Bristow Australia did something about this and partnered with the “RU OK?” Foundation, sponsoring the Afield Program which develops resources targeting the FIFO and DIDO sector.

Bristow could see alignment between their organisations core values and with the “RU OK” Day message.

“RU OK's” mission is to encourage and equip people to regularly and meaningfully ask “are you ok?” This philosophy of a conversation could save a life and the promotion of it is OK to say you are not OK resonated with the Bristow Group.

Raising awareness and breaking down the stigma attached to mental health illnesses has given Bristow staff the confidence to be able to share personal stories of their own struggles with their workmates for the first time enabling closer relationships within their workforce, and increasing understanding of the needs of some employees.

Their Employee Assistance Program has also seen an increase in usage, demonstrating that the message is resonating within the workforce on a positive and practical way. For more information about the RU OK? Foundation visit <https://www.ruok.org.au/>

