



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Regional Australia Committee

SPEECH

Monday, 19 September 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Mr SIDEBOTTOM

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(Braddon) (NaN.NaN pm)

Mr SIDEBOTTOM (Braddon) (10:09): Good morning. Today I am happily representing the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia, which is currently conducting an inquiry into the use of fly-in fly-out—FIFO—and drive-in drive-out—DIDO—workforce practices in regional Australia. It has come at the behest of a number of communities throughout Australia and from members in this parliament. The member for Capricornia, for example, who is in the House at the moment, has been interested in this workforce practice for some time and was instrumental in having it referred to the regional Australia committee.

We are inviting—indeed welcoming—responses from throughout Australia about the various aspects of fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive out workforce practices. In the main, people normally associate it with mining, but it affects many other rural and regional areas of Australia as well. The committee has adopted the following terms of reference, which I would like to share with the House, in order to give a framework for people to respond:

The Standing Committee on Regional Australia will inquire into and report on the use of ‘fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) and ‘drive-in, drive-out’ (DIDO) workforce practices in regional Australia, with specific reference to:

the extent and projected growth in FIFO/DIDO work practices, including in which regions and key industries this practice is utilised;

costs and benefits for companies, and individuals, choosing a FIFO/DIDO workforce as an alternative to a resident workforce;

the effect of a non-resident FIFO/DIDO workforce on established communities, including community wellbeing, services and infrastructure;

the impact on communities sending large numbers of FIFO/DIDO workers to mine sites;

long term strategies for economic diversification in towns with large FIFO/DIDO workforces;

key skill sets targeted for mobile workforce employment, and opportunities for ongoing training and development;

provision of services, infrastructure and housing availability for FIFO/DIDO workforce employees;

strategies to optimise FIFO/DIDO experience for employees and their families, communities and industry;

potential opportunities for non-mining communities with narrow economic bases to diversify their economic base by providing a FIFO/DIDO workforce;

current initiatives and responses of the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments; and

any other related matter.

The concept of fly-in fly-out, drive-in drive-out—indeed, float-in float-out, literally, by those who arrive at work sites by boat—is a phenomenon which began in the late 1940s in the offshore oil sector in the Gulf of Mexico. As the offshore oil industry—the gas industry et cetera—developed, so FIFO expanded with it. Indeed, figures I have recently seen estimate that, for instance, in the late 1980s, with the developments in the North Sea, something like 60,000 workers were working in the North Sea as FIFOs. That of course has now developed throughout the world, particularly in the resources sector and more so in Australia. The idea of establishing a mine and then a town around the mine—and I use as an example the west coast of Tasmania, which is part of my electorate—and the town becoming a mining town meant there was a robust community of long-term economic development and a very close association between that community, the workforce and the mine. In many cases that is now breaking down.

So, we wish to discover, if this is a fact of life, what strategies exist, what strategies can exist to make that a better association and behaviour, and what are some of the detriments and strategies we can use to combat these. These are just some of the issues we will be looking at in the inquiry.