

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF
FIFO WORK ARRANGEMENTS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2014**

SESSION THREE

Members

Dr G.G. Jacobs (Chair)
Ms R. Saffioti (Deputy Chair)
Mr R.F. Johnson
Ms J.M. Freeman
Mr M.J. Cowper

Hearing commenced at 1.00 pm**Mr MICHAEL JOHN BUCHAN****State Secretary, CFMEU, Construction and General, examined:****Mr GRAHAM PALLOT****Assistant Secretary, North West Coordinator, CFMEU, Construction and General, examined:**

The CHAIR: Thank you, Michael and Graham. On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I thank you for your appearance before us today. The purpose of this hearing is to gather evidence for our inquiry into the mental health impacts of fly in, fly out arrangements. I am Graham Jacobs, the chairman of the committee. On my left is Rob Johnson; on his left is Rita Saffioti; on her left is Janine Freeman; and next to her is Murray Cowper. This is a formal procedure—but we are happy to be called by our first names—and it commands the same respect given to the proceedings in the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking you to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as contempt of Parliament.

Have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the “Details of Witness” form?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The CHAIR: I forgot to introduce the executives—Mat Bates, Daniel Govus and Lucy Roberts—and Hansard will be recording this as a public hearing.

I will kick off, gentlemen. Does the CFMEU collect statistics on suicide in the state of Western Australia? If not, do you have any data on the incidence of mental illness, particularly depression, within your union, particularly in relation to FIFO workers?

Mr Buchan: As far as collecting stats on suicide within our industry and within FIFO, officially we do not, but being the CFMEU, one of our benefits is that we have insurance policies in place for all our members for funeral/death benefit. Being the state secretary, I sign off on all funeral claims that come through. Over the course of the last few years, I have noticed when a suicide has occurred amongst our membership. In saying that, given the scope within suicide and the coroner’s definitions and so on, a lot of that does go unanswered for some time, well after the grieving period and some years on. But, yes, I suppose informally we do have information on suicides amongst our membership and can sort of relate that back to FIFO workers or heavy resource workers.

The CHAIR: Are you able to give us some information and data as far as numbers are concerned?

Mr Buchan: I suppose I could sort of put that on notice and get some information back to you. I will check with our insurer to go back through the records, even before my time, and see what trends there are and forward it back to the committee. That would be fine.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Our job really, Michael and Graham, is to do whatever we can as a committee to help reduce, and ideally eliminate, those people involved in our mining sites, construction or whatever, from going down that dark road of committing suicide and suffering from

depression and so on and so forth . That is the purpose of this particular hearing. What has been coming through quite predominantly from various people who have spoken to us is the subject of rosters. What I am trying to find out is what is the ideal roster—if you have any evidence for that—that would be of the greatest benefit to FIFO workers and their families? Is it two and two, two and one, or three and two—whatever it might be? There must be a roster that is the best roster, I would suggest, that would assist—not everybody, but in general terms—FIFO workers and families in any stress that might bring on the thought of suicide.

Mr Buchan: If we break the resource sector up and the FIFO sector up into production, maintenance and construction, construction workers are more disadvantaged than their other colleagues in production and maintenance, where their rosters have been for some time now 28 days—so four weeks away from home—and a week off, but when you put it into perspective of the week off, you have to travel back and forth during that time —

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So it is really five days off.

Mr Buchan: And sometimes if they are travelling to remote or regional Western Australia, or interstate, it can be even less. It is not uncommon to go to Perth Airport any night of the week and see a lot of FIFO workers, construction workers, sleeping in the airport lounges waiting for their flight to come through or for their connecting flight the next day, which goes into their second day of R and R. That is a significant problem. As far as the perfect and ideal roster, I do not have the answer to that. I think everyone's lifestyle is different. But one thing is clear—Graham can back this up, being the northwest coordinator—is that what the workers and our members say to us specifically is that it is not the time on the job as much as it is the time off the job. If you have been working on a resource project for some six months or 12 months and you are on your way home, it is important to get that full weekend in, or even two weekends in, to spend with your family, particularly for those who have young families. They say that anything less, or when you get to five days, it takes a day, a day and a half or two days to readjust to your community, given that you have been in a camp environment, which these days is fairly institutionalised, where you are set up in a camp and you cannot go anywhere except in the camp. To then go back to your residence, your home, and adjust back into that community, takes a fair bit out of you. I experienced FIFO myself for a couple of years when the rosters were a bit longer—it was six weeks on and a week off. One of the reasons I left the industry was because I had a young family and I could not cope, or my family could not cope, with me being away for a long distance at a time. It was more so because by the time you readjusted and spent a couple of days at home, it would be time to get back on a plane and get back to it. So I would normally end up in a blue with the missus, or the kids would be saying, “Dad, you just got home and now you're off again”, or “It's Saturday tomorrow and you haven't come to the footy again”. That is a pretty long answer that I have come out with, but it is more the quality time that you need to spend back in your own family environment, more so than your time on the job.

The CHAIR: It uses this terminology “high-compression roster”, and then it talks about a “low-compression roster”. What is the union's understanding of that? How would you define that? Is it a three and one or a four and one?

Mr Buchan: I suppose something that we get a bit sick and tired of hearing, particularly amongst the resource sector, is that construction is short-term work; it does not really matter; it is short-term work; you are on a four and one, and that is the way it is; construction will be complete in two years or 18 months; and then we will look after our production and our maintenance crew, which are normally on an equal-time roster scenario.

The CHAIR: So would they have two weeks on and two weeks off?

Mr Buchan: They would have two weeks on and two weeks off, or five days on and five days off, or they have nine days on and six days off. What needs to be understood is that construction people choose to work within the construction industry as a career path—and it is a good career—and they

will work from project to project to project to project. That even goes to the point where once they finish—it might be an iron ore project—they are putting their job applications in for the next job, when they know there is about a month left to come through there. If you get a job—it might be oil and gas, or another major job—within that short time frame, all your accrued leave and entitlements and everything will just go into the bank, and it means more to yourself to get on that next project rather than taking accrued leave and having a break, with the possibility of missing out on that job after the time comes. I suppose we get a bit sick and tired of hearing that it is short-term work, the construction phase, where our members specifically go from one heavy resource project to another, and most of the time with very limited gaps in between.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: As I understand it, some companies also have a payment for them to stay for the life of the project. Is that right? Is there an incentive payment for them to stay for the life of the project?

Mr Pallot: That is not quite the case. There are incentive payments in the agreement. But that is really, to be quite frank, more about an incentive payment for production and having that enthusiasm for the job. It is not really a compensation for staying through the life of the job. But they did structure those payments when they agreed to do that. Rather than do a wage increase, they structured them on a weekly basis, most of them. So it is not really for the life, but it was designed to try and get people —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: It ends up becoming something that is an additional —

Mr Pallot: It is an argument they use, yes. If they leave or are terminated at any stage, in most agreements they still get that payment up until the point they served on the job. They have now brought in GSL payments and a range of questions that are designed to encourage the thought that once you are there, you are going to stay. But, to be quite frank, the bigger fear on the projects in regards to that is systems that you may or may not know that are called ERMS, where they will have policies between the employers on the job that if you leave, you cannot work for another employer on that project, and they will self-manage that within the contractors to make sure that people know that it is not an easy process to change employers or leave. The whole system unfortunately does operate in that area with what I call a level of bullying and harassment and the threat that if you do not get up to our performance standard, you are on a window seat. That “behind the scenes” is one of the biggest problems that you will find as you go through this inquiry. The biggest issue at the end of the day that restricts people talking, making inquiries or complaining is the fact that they believe and live in fear that if they do, they will get a window seat and they will never work on that project or in the industry again, to the extent that there was a recent example on the Wheatstone project where a worker attempted to commit suicide.

[1.15 pm]

It failed. He contacted his mate. His mate came over to assist him. They got the management involved. Management decided the way forward was to treat it as not a suicide, to the extent that that worker then went back to home in Brisbane. It was approximately two days at home before his wife knew what had actually happened. In the first instance, he wanted to hide that, because of not only the fear and embarrassment, but because they hold the view that there is such a high level of no return to work, that it is their whole income, to the extent that that worker took about three or four weeks before they would even complete whether they could get access to workers compensation or income protection insurance, because their view was that if they claimed that, they would not be working in that industry. The stress in seeking help and doing those things, unfortunately, they are seen to be a last resort, and this stuff is established through income levels, and people going there for various reasons, and constantly being bullied that if they do not do that, they will be under threat of not working in that area again. So that is the reason why people do not talk about this stuff a lot.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Can you tell me what GSL stands for?

Mr Pallot: That is a Gorgon special leave payment. On each project, we call it something slightly different. Basically, it accrues at so much per hour that is paid out at a later point in time.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: At the end when they leave?

Mr Pallot: At a later point in time.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: And ERMS?

Mr Pallot: That is BrightWater Technologies, which is a company that is used to hold data on workers in the industry. On the face of it, technically it is not illegal, because all it simply does is keep records of employees, and then the next employer will then go through that system and ring those employees. But it does go as far as if an employee does not complete his next application exactly the same as the records they hold, they will simply just get told they are not acceptable for the project. There is no reason given other than you are not acceptable for the project, and it creates a level of fear on projects that use that system.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Employee record system, I gather.

Mr Pallot: Yes.

The CHAIR: In your submission, Michael, you indicate that roster length should be discussed in a health and safety context rather than an enterprise bargaining context. Do you suggest therefore that high compression—that is what I wanted the definition for—rosters are unsafe?

Mr Buchan: Most definitely. There are plenty of contributing factors with a four and one roster in comparison to an equal time or a more family-friendly roster. The reason I say that is put yourself in a FIFO position for a minute, in construction up in the north west. It is getting to the hot part of the year now, so you are looking at 38, 45, and 50 degrees. You are on your last week, and you just want to get home. In the last week of your swing, your mind is not on the job. It is high-risk construction work, so you will have riggers and scaffolders and tradesmen working at heights, working from elevated work platforms and suspended scaffolds and the like. My personal view, and the view that many share with me, is that that last week of work not only becomes counterproductive, but also there is a huge increase in the risks associated with the tasks that you perform and those hazards that are associated with pretty much just keeping your mind on the job.

The CHAIR: So you are saying that fatigue sets in?

Mr Buchan: Yes, fatigue issues and stress issues that come through there, and just the general feeling that you want to go home; it is just normal.

The CHAIR: Are there any other reasons why you think these rosters are attractive or unattractive to the industry?

Mr Buchan: The four and one rosters?

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Buchan: They are unattractive to the workers on the job just in their nature. As I said previously, when you put all the travel time into perspective and the time that you spend at home at the end of your swing, it is within a blink and you are back on a plane and back onto the job. There is that part of it where I believe—whether it is an equal time, or a three and one, because travel is within your working scope as well—it is going to be a lot more friendly for the worker and at the end of the day a lot more productive for the project as a whole, when morale is going to be lifted —

The CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt you, but the four and one, or the three and one—which has become, I was going to say commonplace, but it is fairly common—is that more attractive to business and industry than it is to the workers? Who is driving the fact that that it is one that has become fairly established?

Mr Buchan: Absolutely, it is more attractive to the clients, even to the point more so the client than the principal contractor. The subcontractors pretty much do what the principal contractor tells them. We have many subcontractors, which are a high employer in the industry, who employ the majority of workers there and would love to change the terms of their agreement to cater for a better family-friendly roster. However, they are governed by the decision of the principal contractor and the client in doing so. But I suppose with that, they keep going back to the fact that, well, this is short-term work, and we will make the adjustments to the roster when we put on and employ production staff and maintenance staff. There is a clear difference between the two lines of work.

The CHAIR: If they were to achieve a more family-friendly roster, as you termed it, do you think the workers would be prepared to take a moderate pay cut for that? Would they be able to sacrifice a few thousand dollars for that to make it more friendly? We get a varying view that obviously there are all sorts of variations in roster, but there are also considerations in the worker that they are earning pretty good money and they want to continue to do so.

Mr Buchan: I can go by my experience and site meetings that I have had up on the Gorgon project. We have had meetings with around 3 000 workers up there and explained to them the difference in the rosters and what they are going to lose in their pocket with a 20 and 10 roster as an example, compared to a 26 and nine or 23 and nine, and the vast majority were in favour of taking a pay cut—Graham would be more familiar with the figures—to get a better roster on the project.

Mr Pallot: Yes. Certainly in the last two years that I have been more heavily involved in the north west projects, the workforce has moved more substantially on this subject. This is no doubt in regards to particularly rosters and a few of the other things that they have indicated to us in the next round of bargaining, which is coming through now, I do not know if I would call it so much a pay cut, but they have certainly instructed us to not seek the five per cent wage increases that have been laid down—increases in that industry for a long time—and make sure that whatever the cost of a roster is, that it is taken away from that. They have put the challenge back to us to then come back and explain to the workforce that that is the case, the deal that has been done, and they have indicated to us that they would find that acceptable. It is a touch more complex than that, because what ties into that is what Mick has highlighted before, particularly for people outside the state of Western Australia. It is also about the last day of work and the first day back. It is about the travelling time. It is about getting a commitment that people are not pressured to elect Perth as point of hire, and that the rosters and all that are back to people's usual place of residence and they are back at home in reasonable time frames—not like the work on the Karara project that worked from South Australia, where they demobbed from the project at three o'clock in the afternoon and got to Perth airport at about 5.30 pm, roughly, and the employer decided that the price of airfares were too dear and put them on midnight horrors. At that time, there are no direct flights to Adelaide on the midnight horror, so they flew to Melbourne and Sydney, and then after sitting in Melbourne and Sydney airport, they then flew to Adelaide. If they live three hours out of Adelaide, effectively from the time they got up to start work that morning, they could be travelling for 36 hours, with very limited or little sleep, and, unusually, South Australia tends to get the worst of the lot. So there are all those issues into this system of rosters that are just as important, because when a worker goes to their loved ones and says "I am going to work on this roster", people automatically assume, whatever the roster is, that seven days is seven days at home, and they assume that the partner can be home in time to sit at the dinner table. They are wrong assumptions, and even some of that does apply to Perth. So certainly they are things that also need to be looked at in regards to this stuff.

The other thing that has not been touched on yet is that by far one of the bigger issues outside that is communications. Even with the modern technology that is out there—not so much for me; I was not into Skype and all that type of stuff—when people go away, they expect to be able to communicate. A week ago, at seven o'clock, I spent 40 minutes trying to ring one of our representatives on the Gorgon project. I made 32 phone calls and got to speak to that rep for a total of about six minutes, because the communication system just kept failing. So I would hate to be someone who is trying to

communicate with his kids. The other point you also need to be aware of is that when I am over east and we get into the three-hour time zone and I am finishing work at half past five in the afternoon, it is already half past eight over east. These are issues with regards to communications as well; time zones and everyone trying to use the same communication systems. To top all that off, at the end they say to workers on the job, “Oh, well, when we get here and we are going to run our production side, we are going to put in cable technology and it is going to be good and we will all be fine.” They are going to do it at the end of the project, but they do not do it to facilitate the communications for the construction phase.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Graham. We have heard a bit about communications. It has come through as a bit of a theme, actually.

Mr Pallot: It is a huge issue.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Can I ask about the camps in particular? Suddenly, I have been asking a lot of the people in front of us about the level of control and the lack of flexibility for employees in the camp, and how it appears to have changed over the decades, but nowadays there is far more control and far less flexibility for workers, and as a result, as I said, beyondblue actually described having a lack of control over your own destiny, or whatever you are doing, as a key factor in depression and anxiety. Can you describe a little about what is happening in camps in relation to what you are allowed or not allowed to do and how that impacts on workers?

[1.30 pm]

Mr Buchan: Yes, I can, and I can give you a couple of examples as well. There has been a huge shift in the way that construction camps have been set up over the last five to seven years. The normal process used to be that you would have your site induction, and you would go to your camp and pick up your key, this is your room, and you would hang onto that key for the duration of the project. So there was a community feeling amongst the clusters of the dongas in that area, and you got to know who your neighbours were on either side of you and down the corridors and so on, and everyone looked after each other. That is what they did. If someone was not up for breakfast, they would knock on the door and say, “Hey, get up, don’t blow a shift”, or whatever, and come through there like that.

With the introduction of motelling, it has changed dramatically, where at the end of your swing, before you go out on break, you pack up all your belongings into a Tupperware box and you put it in the storeroom, you hand your key in, and then when you come back you could be anywhere. So you start that whole process again of getting to know or introduce yourself to your neighbours. That is a real problem. I remember when I was flying in and out, it was common practice to see a lot of workers—like, it would be your own little house. It was common to see little vegetable gardens in those Styrofoam boxes out the front with chilli or tomato plants in them. It was just the norm. It just sort of kept everyone’s—and your room sort of had your own personality. There would be posters and pictures up on the wall of your family and there would be curtains. Each time you came back from a swing, you would bring something back with you and put it in your room and so on. It is a good thing to do. There is now no scope for that, because it just does not fit into your Tupperware box at the end of each swing, and you have got to go through that.

The other example of that, or the extremes of that now that we are facing on projects on the mainland, is that where there are townships in close vicinity—so you can get there pretty easily; 10 minutes down the road—you have to give a written seven-day notice form to get permission to go into town, which is just so demeaning in plenty of respects to go through that. You may want to just go into town, go for a walk along the beach or do something, but you have to give seven days’ clear notice to come through there with that. It has got to the extreme where we have had examples of a member of ours that was on a night shift; he got back from his night shift at night, he enjoyed a bit of running, he put his running clothes on and decided to go for a run, he left the camp, went down the main road, started going up the road, and they hit the panic buttons. A poorly trained

security personnel spotted this person there, and he ended up off the project for simply not getting permission to go for a run at the end of his shift. That is very extreme as far as that goes. There are huge issues like that.

As Graham mentioned, and as you guys mentioned before with communications, communications are a huge problem on the camps. There are plenty of examples that I am sure you have heard. You can imagine, you may be reading your little kids a bedtime story or be in the middle of a blue with your missus; you get cut off; she does not know whether you hung up on her or not; you do not sleep that night because you cannot get through; and so on and so forth. So there are all those contributing factors with the camp. We believe more thought has to go into the camps prior to construction approvals, with certain standards met to be able to cater for the needs of everything, and with activities to be able to do.

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, when you put the perspective of the costs of these projects, to be able to organise fishing charters for a half day or even to the point of a flight into Coral Bay, which takes about 25 minutes, 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!*

The CHAIR: What is the prevalence of this motelling? How prevalent is it in the industry?

Mr Buchan: Motelling is occurring on all the construction sites now, except one, that I am aware of.

Mr Pallot: I guess the greater concern is that they are all indicating now that they are going to move to motelling. Originally, there was an indication that they would not do that and it would be isolated to Gorgon and a couple of other projects, but they seem to hold the view now that—we are getting the feedback directly from the employers, or the employers through the clients—they feel that is the way of the future, to organise the projects on motelling-style arrangements. So certainly that is causing us great concern.

The CHAIR: I can understand where the mining company is coming from, because basically this would be a cost to them. If you have got a room there, Michael, and we keep your room when you go away and you have your days off, obviously the mining company cannot put anybody who is coming back in on swing in that room. So that would be a cost to industry, would it not? What are we talking —

Mr Buchan: No. In the scheme of the cost of these megaprojects to begin with, you are looking at \$50 billion to \$80 billion projects, be it in oil and gas, and \$50 billion for some of the big iron ore projects. There is a project out there at Cape Lambert where the management on that site have refused to introduce motelling. They get some of the best workers from the industry working on that project, for the simple fact that they do not have to be in a motelling arrangement. They will work at Cape Lambert, and they will have their room, and it will just be like the camp of five, six years ago. I believe they get the rewards from that, because they are getting the cream of the crop. But, like every industry, the word gets around, “Hey, this camp is great. It’s just like it used to be. You get your own room and you stay there till the end.” And they are managing to keep those workers on.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Argyle used to have a shared room—two workers. The worker who was off for the two weeks—it was two weeks on, two weeks off—would have their own lockers in that room. They could store tinned food, all sorts of stuff, there—their own hi-fi, computer system and everything they wanted—and that worked really very well. Does not that happen now in other mining companies?

Mr Buchan: No, it does not work how it used to work at Argyle. I am familiar with what has been done there. Now it is a bit different. On the island at the moment they have got double-bunking arrangements, where it is not double-bunking as in you share a room with someone and they are there; it will be a night shift and a day shift. So you have got your own bed. Day shift will come in and they will have that room for 12 hours, and then night shift will come in and have the top bunk for 12 hours.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In the same room?

Mr Buchan: In the same room. But the outfall of that is appalling.

The CHAIR: It is almost like hot-bedding.

Mr Buchan: It is almost like hot-bedding, without the bed. You only have a bunk coming through there. But we have examples of—there might be a lot of inclement weather, or you get sent back to the camp for some reason, where production cannot go ahead —

Mr M.J. COWPER: Cyclone.

Mr Buchan: Cyclone—and you cannot stay in that room, and you get instructed to remain in common areas until the start of that night shift comes through to transfer into that room. So then you have got workers who are just loitering around the common areas and want to get back to their room, and people who want to use the common areas as common areas cannot, because everyone is lying on couches and so on and so forth as it goes through. So where it is being used at the moment, it just increases the problems.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How does that impact on their mental health? Does it have a frustration effect?

Mr Buchan: It would impact on my mental health.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Graham, you spend a fair bit of time up north, I understand. The nature of construction is that it is there during the building phase, and maybe one, two or three years, depending on the size of the project. I hazard a guess here that you may be familiar with the Hearson's Cove facility, which I think housed about 4 000 people at one stage. It had two cinemas and two wet messes, an oval the size of the MCG, and an Olympic-size swimming pool and the like, and now there is nothing there. But that had capacity for families to join during construction phase. Whilst I understand it was very expensive exercise, I just want to know if you had any comments in and around that.

Mr Pallot: I think, substantially, that is definitely one of the differences that have been highlighted here. Those camps have now moved from, I guess, informal arrangements, except for Cape Lambert, to the extent where they are run pretty much like prison camps. I am aware of one instance where a wife and child fronted up to the front gate in 40-degree heat wanting to get in to see their partner, and they were refused. They were just left out in the heat. There is no doubt in my mind that particularly for projects that are near communities—towns or whatever—there should be some preference in looking at accommodation within those towns. We have got to the ridiculous stage now that on projects like Onslow you are not even allowed to take a car. If you did want to bring up a car—because that is what used to happen; people bought a cheap car and got it up there to get in and out and get a bit of mobility—you are not actually allowed to do that. It is forbidden to the extent that you can get people who might live at Geraldton, and there might be a project at Karara, but they cannot go from Geraldton to Karara. They actually have to fly from Geraldton to Perth, and from Perth to Karara. I am surprised we do not hear a bit more from the regional communities about some of the impacts in regards to their towns and their sites, because there is no doubt there is a community value that is happening in the regional towns and work for regional people on those projects. Certainly for people who live in that area, I get feedback that they feel like they do not get the opportunity to work on these projects like they should and to be able to commute on a drive in,

or bus in, or on a drive in, drive out basis anymore. There is certainly a stronger preference for fly in, fly out.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Many of those mining towns through the Pilbara in particular had a number of activities outside of working hours—football clubs, rugby clubs, tennis, whatever it might have been—and they were always sources of great support from people either in construction or those that are there during the ongoing running of that particular mine. I think Newman had three football teams at one stage. Collie had two, and now it is one. There are many examples. I believe that some of these clubs acted as, if you like, social depressurisation because of the simple fact now that you cannot leave these camps. That now has to be facilitated or factored into the systems offered by the project itself. How are you going to do that? Obviously, they have what are called wellness lifestyle coordinators, which I suppose is an attempt to try to address those issues. But the nature of construction is that they are not there for a long time.

[1.45 pm]

The CHAIR: There is a question here somewhere!

Mr M.J. COWPER: The question is: can you tell us the unique problems that construction workers face in respect of acceptability in those towns when they do have access to them?

Mr Pallot: I think most of the construction workers would like to get access to the towns and work with the local communities about what they can or cannot do. Obviously, it depends on the length of the project how much that can happen. But the restrictions are from the clients not wishing to facilitate that. Like I say, there is a position now; rather than manage the few times that something may go wrong, what we do now is we run it like a prison camp and no-one has any rights or freedom anymore and you just do not get to go there, or if you do, you are allowed in town for two hours and your supervisor has to go with you and basically escort you. There needs to be —

Mr M.J. COWPER: Have you ever talked to some of your members out there?

Mr Pallot: There needs to be a system that steps back from where it is. The camp security has gone from someone that helped and assisted, and helped people on the right trail, to simply being, “I am in charge.”

Mr M.J. COWPER: Where I wanted to go with this whole line of questioning was: when you have someone new who comes into a project—let us say there is a new project that you have signed on for, someone who is new or has never done it before—what support is on offer there for newcomers?

Mr Pallot: Not a lot, that I know of. That is one of the issues there that you would obviously be aware of. We used to get access to camps and accommodation to go in and talk to workers in their time and at a place of their choosing. We were able to go in and talk, and help and assist them; offer a whole range of questions to new people.

Mr M.J. COWPER: What about before they get on site—inductions and things like that?

Mr Pallot: They run most of the inductions in Perth before they go up now.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Do you get access to inductions?

Mr Pallot: Not usually, no.

The CHAIR: Is there a mental health component to that induction?

Mr Pallot: Not that I am aware of.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: You do not get access to the camps and you do not get access to the inductions with the union. The accommodation in the camps, they are not seen as a workplace under the act, are they?

Mr Pallot: No.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: How do they stop you getting access to the camps? Is that on the basis that it is private accommodation?

Mr Pallot: Because the right-of-entry laws do not facilitate, and clearly do not allow access, to accommodation.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Because they do not see them as workplaces, and yet they compel people to stay in them because they are working. They say they are not workplaces and yet they compel them to stay in there. How do they do that if they are not workplaces?

Mr Pallot: Obviously to me that is an issue. The workplace is for workers' compensation. We constantly have issues as to whether health and safety departments, mines and metals or WorkSafe about recognising them as workplaces or not recognising them as workplaces. It is a very hard area to facilitate getting something happening in regards to issues within camp accommodation.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: If you injure yourself in accommodation, I assume that you get WorkCover or you get workers' compensation because it is seen as being attached to or in the course of your employment, not because it is seen as a workplace. It is not seen —

Mr Pallot: That appears to be the distinction they are trying to make, yes.

The CHAIR: What will the union's view be that under the Mining Act, the actual accommodation—this has been tested because there were issues in and around where the mining companies should locate these, even if they were close to town. The courts have said that the accommodation is part of the mining operation. Having said that, if we accept that, what would the union's view be about when we come to talk to WorkSafe or the department of mines, or anybody else for that matter, they say the accommodation is an unregulated site and we do not have jurisdiction over it?

Mr Buchan: A cop-out.

Mr Pallot: I was going to say a lot of crap, excuse the language!

The CHAIR: What was that, for Hansard, please? It is a cop-out, I think you said.

Mr Buchan: Graham, it is a very valid point because we get frustrated to the max with the different departments that just handball it amongst each other and say, "We haven't got jurisdiction." It is a big demarcation over jurisdiction from government departments, and none of them have been prepared to take aim and make change happen. That is the fact of it.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: While we are on the point of accommodation: Brendon Grylls said in *The Sunday Times* recently that he was concerned about miners refusing to phase out FIFO camps despite big investments in regional cities and that he wanted measures investigated for fees, levies or charges to ensure that where there are capacities to use towns that have had money injected into them, growing towns, that those companies should use those towns. What is the perspective of the CFMEU on saying if you are in close proximity to townships, you should be using the township?

Mr Buchan: Absolutely.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Why would that be? Any particular —

Mr Buchan: I think it goes back to some of Murray's comments as well. There is many a construction worker that would love nothing more than to be able to play in the local Karratha footy team.

Mr M.J. COWPER: No, not Karratha!

Mr Buchan: Port Hedland or Roebourne.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Roebourne is all right!

Mr Buchan: To go through like that. In saying that, there are many construction workers who would love to go out and just watch and play on those days off, to buy goods and services, and sort of give something back to that town to come through here. We have heard it all from our members.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Have the family fly up so that they can have holidays together.

Mr Buchan: You talk about family fly-ups: we are going through a situation at the moment where there used to be a time not that long ago where they would rotate the Christmas rosters. If you were rotated on, just like emergency services and so on, you would not do two in a row. What they are doing now is pretty much rejecting construction workers' leave at Christmas time and saying, "No, you are rostered on and you will be on." There was a time, Janine, where those who were actually on during that shift, they would make up for it. They would offer to fly their partners up or their kids and give them a mine tour over Christmas Day. Santa would come and so on. All that is scrapped and out the window. They are saying now, "You're rostered on, too bad, so sad."

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The argument that Colin Barnett puts forward is that you cannot expect these workers to travel 30 minutes in a bus to their work and then from their work. I travel more than 30 minutes every day when I come in to Parliament, and I live in Perth. Nobody is standing up for my being tired from journeying.

Mr M.J. COWPER: There is your age factor as well!

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Of course there is. You have always got to consider that, absolutely.

From the union's perspective, would you prefer to see your members—construction workers—being able to live within a town that might be 30 minutes, even 45 minutes, away from the actual construction site?

Mr Buchan: I think I could speak for the majority of our members: they would much prefer to live in a township environment or have the camp in a township environment so they can do their own little bit of personal shopping to go through there, to put something back, go for a run, belong to whatever; rather than being stuck behind barbed wire fences in an accommodation village that is part of a mine site.

Mr M.J. COWPER: Behind barbed wire?

Mr Buchan: Absolutely there is barbed wire around them.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Some of your members work on construction sites in the city centre here.

Mr Buchan: Yes.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Many of those, I would assume—you can correct me if I am wrong—would travel at least 30 or 45 minutes from their residence from wherever in the outer suburbs. What sorts of shifts do they work? Do they work 12-hour shifts at any time?

Mr Buchan: Our workers within commercial construction in the city, as in today the sun is rising around 5.30, so they start around 6.00. Concreters may have a concrete pour on three times a week. They might work right through to six or seven o'clock, but the majority of the time they are on average anywhere between a 46 and a 56-hour week, including five hours on a Saturday.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: The information I am trying to gather from you, Michael and Graham, is that there is no difference really in working on a construction site in Perth, in travel time from where you may live in the outer suburbs to what there is in some of the mine sites that happen to be within 30 minutes, or even 45 minutes, travelling distance of a regional town.

Mr Buchan: Yes.

Mr Pallot: I think, Rob, if you looked at the Wheatstone project, definitely the workers on there would have preferred the camp to be within the town. It might take an extra 10 minutes a day in travelling time, realistically, but to be in the town to have that more perceived freedom. What is

underestimated in this is the community values. As it is, they go in and help with the rodeo and a whole range of things. Workers, when they are there, have limited time off and do not have any problem in looking at the community values of this and being involved in the community. After all, everyone in that town is a worker as well. I think that is underestimated in the argument the other way. I actually do not believe half an hour to 45 minutes is an issue with members of the CFMEU.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Nor do I.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: In the hearing when the metalworkers came in, they raised drug testing and the impact it has on people with antidepressant medication. They raised a concern that they had done a survey of members and that those members had indicated that they were discontinuing antidepressant medication because of the fear of drug testing. Are you aware of any similar sort of trend in the construction industry in terms of your members, or is there a concern about members not wanting to talk about their antidepressant medication or not wanting to disclose that or not wanting to disclose mental illness?

Mr Buchan: I think to answer that, there is a range of personal issues that can jeopardise your employment in these days as it goes through. No-one is really comfortable at all discussing those with their employer or with their employee —

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Assistance program.

Mr Buchan: — assistance program. That is why I think it is pretty essential, or it is absolutely essential, that there are independent programs available that are a distance away from their employers, from unions, and act 100 per cent independent to everything coming through there so they can have confidence if they need assistance, that they can get it and be reassured that it is private and confidential. It puts an emphasis on how big their issue is; all the more reason why they need to be looking at ways to fix accommodation or fix the FIFO issues. They need to look at the bigger picture. I personally could not tell you how many people are on those sorts of medications that go through there. I am not familiar with much of it. To me, that indicates just that there is a problem and something needs to be done. You do not fix it with medication.

[2.00 pm]

The CHAIR: Michael, can I just follow-up on the FIFO accommodation environment versus the on-the-tools environment? Separate from the on-the-tools environment, the accommodation itself and the FIFO accommodation, is your union aware of the bullying and harassment being a problem within FIFO accommodations' area?

Mr Buchan: Yes.

The CHAIR: Has that come to you often as an issue? Noting the comments that, of course, this environment is not part in and around a WorkSafe purview or basically a department of mines safety area, what is your view on the incidence of bullying and harassment in the FIFO accommodation environment?

Mr Buchan: More has to be done to protect individuals in camp arrangements on bullying and harassment. I think it goes back to a point I made earlier with the camps prior to motelling where you knew exactly where your cluster of units were and everyone looked after each other. I think a lot of this bullying comes from misunderstandings of who your neighbours are. You take an environment where you are living in E block, for an example, and you know that on every Wednesday night Mick who is next door has a blue with his missus on the phone. So, the first week when you moved in there you used to bang on the door and tell Mick to shut up. But after the fourth week you realise, "Hey, it's Wednesday night to come through there." I am just using a bit of an analogy "to come through". Now what happens is that whenever this fellow is sort of at the end of his swing sort of comes through, someone is banging on his door every Wednesday night because he is at different accommodation over the duration of the project; therefore, he in some aspects can respond to that, which results in bullying and harassment and so on, and that element of sort of

looking after each other disappears. I think the other lines of that are something that Graham touched on, you know. For the first time that I have been aware of, Alsatians have been introduced to the Wheatstone project.

Ms J.M. FREEMAN: Alsatians?

Mr Buchan: Yes, German shepherds.

The CHAIR: As guests or as security?

Mr Buchan: Yes. So where they have security guards, in my view poorly trained security, that go through there that sort of patrol their accommodation clusters during the night, there might be someone sitting or having a cigarette, whatever, or cannot sleep or do whatever that will be approached by the security guy and he will say, "Go to bed, it's way past your bedtime", which will end up in an argument and harassment and so on; whereas it never used to be the case not so long ago.

Mr Pallot: I think the other point there, Graham, is if I live in a motelling arrangement and, for whatever reason, there is a couple opposite that disappear from me when I am moving around, if there is someone I particularly do not get on with, I cannot actually avoid that anymore because I do not know where they are or are not anymore. If something happens during the night and I want to go and seek some help or talk to someone, I do not know which door to knock on anymore. Outside losing the home-away-from-home atmosphere and your personal belonging and personal feeling, you lose a lot of the security blankets that apply both to males and females. And our feedback from our members is that is a huge issue to people living in accommodation. It is very underestimated on the salesmanship that it is like living in a hotel and it is all great. You pack up, you go to that, you take your luggage, you can store your luggage but you know what happens if you store your luggage and they sack you while you are away? All your gear disappears. And when we try to chase up and find out where people's personal belongings are, the employer will say, "Nothing to do with us, you've got to go talk to the camp managers." When we go and talk to the camp managers, they say, "Oh, we don't know where it is. It wasn't collected within so many weeks. We can't find it." So, there is a range of other hidden issues that come out in this motelling in regards to peace of mind, making a home away from home and making the best of your circumstances, and that is all taken away from you in a motelling arrangement. And I am sure on the details you can pick up quite a lot of other examples about where that is valuable to know where your next door neighbour is.

The CHAIR: I have one final question, if I may. What does your union do to promote mentally healthy workplaces in terms of providing support and education to your members?

Mr Buchan: How much time have you got?

The CHAIR: Maybe you could provide it to us in written form.

Mr Buchan: I will give you some further information. But with commercial construction, because this is where it started, we got involved or picked up the Mates in Construction model out of Queensland, and we used that as a pilot program at the Fiona Stanley Hospital site with great success. Since that has happened, Mates in Construction now work independently in the industry.

The CHAIR: Yes, we heard from them earlier just before you.

Mr Buchan: You will have heard from them.

The CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Buchan: And we use them as a point of contact for all of our members.

The CHAIR: Do you contribute to their charity?

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: Yes, \$50 000.

Mr Buchan: Yes, \$50 000 a year. We contribute significantly and we promote and get them up and running where we can. They have in the last 12 months sort of outreached or moved within the resources sector, given there were mainly construction workers in the commercial city, during the downturn. They went out to the resources sector and were ringing up and asking for assistance, coming through and saying, “There’s big problems up there.” They visited those sites and now they have been working quite actively in that sector coming through there. But we are quite proud of the fact that we worked towards bringing Mates in Construction in Western Australia and now that it is established independently from the employer groups or union groups and so on and can go out there and just do their business to look after the health and wellbeing of construction workers. Whether they are a white-collar worker or a blue-collar worker, they go out there and they do their job and they do a mighty job. So, I suppose we are sort of pretty proud that we do that and we will continue to support them and we will continue to work with them.

Mr R.F. JOHNSON: So you contract them out.

Mr Buchan: Can I just highlight too in Mates, because I am sure you picked it up, that the other critical difference is about the training of people to help people. And particularly blue-collar workers, we are not that good at going over to a colleague and saying, “Are you thinking of this or thinking of that?” Not only do they help the person that is considering the suicide, they actually train the workers on the shop floor to have concerns about their work colleagues and go ask the question and help get the help. And that is a critical difference between Mates and the other facilities.

The CHAIR: Thanks Michael and thanks Graham for your evidence to the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on a particular point, please do. Please include the supplementary submission for the committee’s consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you again for your time.

The Witnesses: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 2.08 pm
