

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

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

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
MONDAY, 16 MARCH 2015**

**SESSION FOUR**

**Members**

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

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**Hearing commenced at 3.02 pm****Mr MICHAEL BOYLE****Executive General Manager, Zero Harm, Downer EDI Mining, examined:****Mrs DONNA VINER****Psychologist—Regional Health Adviser, Downer Mining, examined:****Ms NATASHA PALETHORPE****Art Psychotherapist—Regional Health Adviser, Downer Mining, examined:**

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for appearing before the Education and Health Standing Committee today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee with its inquiry into the mental health impacts of fly in, fly out work arrangements. I am Graham Jacobs, the Chair of the committee; and on my left is Murray Cowper, on his left is Rob Johnson, and on his left is Janine Freeman. Rita Saffioti is another member of the committee but is an apology today. This hearing is a formal procedure—hopefully not too formal—of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to 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 a contempt of Parliament. On my right is Lucy Roberts, and on her right is Daniel Govus. They are the executive who help us and keep us on the straight and narrow in running this committee and running this inquiry. We also have Hansard, which is recording your words as a public hearing and making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any documents, it would assist Hansard if you would provide the full title for the record.

Before we proceed, I need to ask you a few questions. I think they are rather silly questions, but I have to ask them anyway. 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 to a parliamentary committee?

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

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

**The Witnesses:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Murray, would you like to ask the first question?

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** That would be nice!

**The CHAIR:** A bit of a change!

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Thanks for coming along, folks. I see that you have 1 164 people on projects in WA; 88 per cent of them are male, and I suspect many of them are FIFO. If I were to become a new member of your company, can you tell me how I would be inducted and how I would be acclimatised and introduced to this working environment? Can you walk us through how I would become one of your valuable employees?

**Mr Boyle:** And valued employees.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** And valued, yes.

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**Mrs Viner:** I will tackle that one. Just to give a bit of background, I have been with Downer Mining for two years. At the start, one of the first things I was doing was looking at what was in that induction package. If you were coming into our business, we would definitely, regardless of whether you were green to the industry or had been in the industry for a while, give you a one-day induction in our Stirling Street offices, which is run by a Downer Mining facilitator. During that will be your traditional safety messages. We run a fatigue element in there, and there is also a section that I put in there as well that runs for about six slides where we talk about your health and mental health within mining. What you will find within our centre as well is that I am annoying in leaving beyondblue materials galore around the place. Our facilitator will make sure that you take with you the Downer Mining employees' support pocket guide, which has community resources in there, and it touches on the employee assistance program. One thing that we have as well, if you come through that, is that Bobbie, who is our trainer out there, is very quick to refer people through to myself in the office if they need to have a talk one-on-one with someone. So that is what happens with the induction.

**Mr Boyle:** There is a standard induction process that we use across the company. Donna has emphasized, or amplified, the connect with the employee support people through that process.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Is there anything unique that you might do in, say, a contemporary Western Australian or Pilbara environment in mining compared to other aspects of Downer's business?

**Mrs Viner:** One thing that you get if you are starting at our Karara mine site or our Christmas Creek mine site would be our on-boarding documents, which talk about temperature, give you pictures of the mess environment, the gym, and all that kind of stuff. One of the things that I did make a point of doing two years back is also getting the emergency contact phone numbers in there, and it actually puts in an EAP contact number and also my mobile numbers, as well as the employee support individual.

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** Are they all direct employees of your mining company or do you use contractors as well?

**Mrs Viner:** We have contractors as well. For example, at Christmas Creek, we have Bis, and Force, and they come under Downer Mining.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** What do they do?

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Bis is transport and security.

**Mrs Viner:** No, not security. That is a good question. What does Bis do?

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Can you say that again? Bis is transport. What was the other one?

**Mr Boyle:** Bis typically move the iron ore, using road train-type equipment. Force is a maintenance contractor. There is an Aboriginal element to Force, is there?

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Yes, and Bis.

**Mr Boyle:** We have another business that we are starting called ReGen, where we are joint venturing with different Aboriginal groups depending on the region that we are working in. So, there is a mix of subcontractors. The industry is such now that most of our operators are directly employed. In growth circumstances, we would often use, I suppose, people in a labour hire situation where people are treated as employees but engaged initially as labour hire people. We do not do that anymore, certainly not to the same extent.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** So after your one-day induction at Stirling Street, is there any other follow-up work in and around monitoring how they are travelling once they get on the site? Is there any education in relation to how they manage their finances, or on various other issues that might be attending, such as drugs and alcohol? Can you walk us through that?

**Ms Palethorpe:** Absolutely. We have an Enhancing Workforce Health program, which is an internally-run program which is headed by the team, and then we use on site health and safety and health advisers out on the sites to help run the programs. Basically, we have four health campaigns, and we release them once a quarter. So we will use a lot of different technologies, such as digital stories. We will often have gentlemen, and women, in the team who will have experienced a health condition, and they will be filmed talking about their own personal experience, and then we have an expert, say a doctor or an occupational physician or a surgeon come in and talk. Donna has actually done our mental health one. They will come in and they talk to that as well. So, they are fantastic digital health stories, really focused on the health issues that our ladies and gents experience out on the site. They are very specific. We have targeted quite a numerous amount—healthy hearts, cardiac health, obesity and weight loss and lifestyle, fatigue, mental health, depression and anxiety, skin cancer, breast cancer, and prostate cancer. It is a growing list and it is constantly evolving and we are always working on new ones. On top that, we do financial counselling; we do EAP updates and advocacy; we do our internal supports, and we advertise that; and we support R U OK? Day, Stress Down Day, and Movember. These are very big media campaigns that we will jump on board with as well.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** If I can just touch on that financial counselling, we heard previously today from an organisation that deals with people who are not managing their finances. I am not talking about financial planning; I am talking about budgeting and dealing with income and the like. Can you expand on that for us?

**Mrs Viner:** Absolutely. Through our EA provider, they get two free financial counselling—type sessions. We generally have information about the EAP and talk about those financial counselling sessions that are available via the EAP. We have had situations where, say, if it has come to myself, I have referred the person on to financial counselling services and that type of thing, either through their local government, or we have had some Indigenous guys come through and we refer them through to specialist services for themselves as well.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** What sorts of companies would you use to provide these services?

**Mrs Viner:** The Salvation Army has a good service, for example. My background is I came from local government, so I tend to use what is in their local government arena, if one is available there. Wesley also has one, for example. For the Indigenous guys —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** So you use the state government—funded financial counsellors?

**Mrs Viner:** Yes. We do not have an in-house financial counsellor.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** So you use the one that is generally available for the rest of the public?

**Mrs Viner:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** I am a bit worried that one can always tell us what programs are available. But how does an individual engage? How are they implemented on the ground? There was also a comment that you made about a health and safety worker, was it, or an officer, or a health and safety rep? What is that person? How many are there? Are they on site, or are we doing all this online?

**Mrs Viner:** No, they are on site. For example, I was Roy Hill just last week, and they have a safety team. We have got a back-to-back, where you will have a senior safety superintendent —

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** The ESOs?

**Mrs Viner:** Yes, ESOs and EMOs. That was already provided by the client. As a contract miner, we are on their site, so we have their EMOs and ESOs.

**The CHAIR:** So if you are working on an FMG site, or whatever, that is provided by FMG?

**Mrs Viner:** For FMG, for example, at Christmas Creek, we can utilise their chaplaincy program. We also utilise their on-site first aid or EMOs.

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**The CHAIR:** But you have your own health and safety person?

**Mrs Viner:** Yes. There are teams.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Are they just the delegates?

**Mrs Viner:** No, they are not. For example, Christmas Creek has a team of superintendent, and then you have senior safety coordinators, and you have a safety administrator, and generally health will come under their portfolio. But each site has a safety team.

**Ms Palethorpe:** Absolutely—at least three on each of our sites.

**The CHAIR:** This is not just physical safety, is it? We are talking about emotional health and wellbeing and mental health?

[3.15 pm]

**Ms Palethorpe:** Absolutely.

**Mrs Viner:** Traditionally, I would say it maybe was a focus on the trips and falls—that type of thing. The reason Tash is in the state at the moment is that we are running a mental health first aid for supervisors, starting this week. In the past we have run supervisors through that as well. Mental health is kind of changing, or we are trying to change the culture with our safety team, as well as supervisors who refer through to the safety team.

**Mr Boyle:** Perhaps it is just worth making the point about the scale of the operations. With recent announcements by FMG, Downer Mining are doing all the mining at Christmas Creek, and maintenance. We are talking—what are the final numbers going to be? Six hundred or 700-plus employees. So while we are working for a much-respected client, we are essentially running, I suppose, as a mining operation without being an owner. All the accountabilities and infrastructure to support our people really are equivalent to what you are seeing from some of the major players.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Can I lead on from that? We have just had FMG come in then, and they talked about their eight and six roster, and that it was primarily used as a recruitment tool during the period of time when they were looking at getting staff. If you are now doing all the mining, what rosters do you have at Christmas Creek, for example? Do you have the eight and six?

**Mr Boyle:** We do have the eight and six, and we have two and one for some of our maintenance people. We probably have some other variations.

**Mrs Viner:** Definitely the eight and six, and the two and one, and some people might even do a Monday to Friday; that type of thing as well.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Your enterprise agreement that was rejected recently, was that at Christmas Creek? Was that on a roster basis issue or where was that?

**Mr Boyle:** Look, I honestly do not have those details. You would appreciate, there are many enterprise bargaining agreements across the business and I am not across the detail of them.

**The CHAIR:** Would you be able to provide some of that for us? The committee has been advised that an enterprise agreement was recently rejected by 80 per cent of the construction workers at a Pilbara project on the basis of workers requesting shorter or family and worker-friendly rosters.

**Mr Boyle:** I do not believe that was us.

**Mrs Viner:** The Pilbara is very large; it could be any mine site —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** No, it was you though; that is what we understand.

**Mr Boyle:** I think perhaps it is probably very worthwhile providing full information about the structure. The Downer Group is made up of a number of divisions. Our division is Downer Mining and we are here representing Downer Mining. Downer Infrastructure is doing, for instance, a lot of work with Chevron and at other places. I cannot speak for Downer Infrastructure.

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**The CHAIR:** We will stand corrected, because I think this might be involving Chevron.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I just want to touch upon the Roy Hill case, and there are a number of other construction businesses coming to a conclusion. Of course, there is an impact of people getting used to an income, then moving back or moving on to another project or the transition in between. Do you do any work in and around supporting people who may not be managing their money as well as perhaps they should? Obviously, people come into the mining sector because there is good money on offer. They may overextend themselves, they may do a number of things—holidays and the like—but is there anything being done by your company in relation to trying to best equip those people in dealing with the cyclical nature of construction?

**Mr Boyle:** Perhaps, again, we have the same challenge in mining. As a company we have dropped numbers of somewhere within 800 and 1 000 people in the last 12 months.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** How many?

**Mr Boyle:** We were at 4 600 or 4 700 across the business. I can send you the exact figures, but in 12 months we are 1 000 people down and we are 3 500 now. For instance, there is a large contract site in the east called Goonyella. It is run by BMA, which is a BHP JV, and a contract was stopped at Goonyella; that put 400 people out of work within six weeks.

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** A total of about 25 per cent of your workforce has been dropped?

**Mr Boyle:** In that order. That extended to people in head offices across the business; it is the challenge of the resources industry. Perhaps we could work back upstream to your question, but I suppose there is sad mechanism of having to let employees go—to make employees redundant, let us not use a euphemism—and we have done that as professionally and ethically as we can, very ably assisted by the in-house capability we have recruited in the last few years. Further back upstream there are people in our industry who perhaps have a weather eye to what the economic conditions are and what they may mean to them personally. I think we see that at all levels in our organisation. Look, again, I suppose I cannot particularly answer for where everyone —

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** It is an interesting phenomenon, what you are saying, Mike, because you have record shipments of iron ore, in particular overseas, and yet we have had such a drop in workers right across the board. It looks like to me that they are gleaning off some of these big companies like BHP and FMG and Rio. Of course everyone down that line, including Downer, have to shed some people. We are talking about fly in, fly out mental health issues here, and one of the underlying factors is relationships and the relationships often hinge upon the finances —

**The CHAIR:** There is a question there, is there?

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I have already asked the question.

**The CHAIR:** Let the man answer it, then.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** There is a link between those, and I am just wondering how you are managing that.

**Mrs Viner:** I would probably say revert back to the financial counselling offered under the EAP. We do not offer a standalone financial counselling course. I know it was bandied about for a while back. About a year it was said it would be nice to have, but there are community organisations that do that so it is probably more referring people through. Keeping in mind as well, we tend to get people who have experience within the industry. If it is the people who are coming in green—we have a subdivision called Otraco, who are our tyre fitters, and there we do tend to get people who are green to the industry. I go out and talk to those guys for a good three hours on the very first day they come in. We are an RTO training centre, and when they come in there we talk about the financial things: what are your plans; what are your goals; you are going to be on this training course for six weeks, now is a good time to start talking to your partner in regards you might be away, “If I look at my roster two weeks on, I am going to be away for your birthday, your

anniversary, Christmas”—all those types of things. They should be saying, “What is my one-year goal or my two-year goal.” I used to run a clinic out in Kalgoorlie for about two and a half years, and the classic was the family who came in and said, “We’ve been here for seven years; we only wanted to be here for one year.” It probably only starts hitting when the kids have to go up to high school; it is like, “What are the facilities that are available?” I do agree that one of the relationship issues that do come up is the financial side of things, the “How quickly could I get back to the family if there was an emergency”, that type of thing.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** How prevalent is that, returning back to the family? How often would you have someone on site and for some unexpected reason, such as a death in the family —

**Mrs Viner:** Cutting their swing short?

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** — or some sort of —

**Mrs Viner:** I am biased because probably the majority of the calls I do get is, “So-and-so is up on site at this stage, look they are going to not do their second half of their swing, they are not doing their nightshift, they are going to fly home tomorrow morning.” It is hard to estimate that; it changes over the time. But, again, I am biased because that is where I sit within the business, to be that contact point. But it does happen.

**Mr Boyle:** Look, if the need is there, the permission certainly to leave site is made and support is provided. We do not hold people on site if there is a significant issue at home or a significant personal issue at site.

**Ms Palethorpe:** That would be the same for drive-in sites as well as fly in, fly out sites. We have almost an even spread.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Are your workers mostly trade qualified and above or they —

**Mr Boyle:** Mostly operators, so about 16 per cent of our total workforce are maintainers. The vast bulk are operators, obviously with —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Is that a trade or a certificate IV or upgraded?

**Mr Boyle:** It is essentially internally trained.

**Ms Palethorpe:** Trained.

**Mr Boyle:** So they will be equipment operators.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** What percentage of those, sorry?

**Mr Boyle:** I do not have the breakdown, but I know the maintainers are around 16 per cent, and then I suppose it depends how you split your management and support staff and head office. But the bulk of our employees in FIFO are equipment operators.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** The accommodation, do they access the accommodation facility provided by the mining company?

**Mr Boyle:** By the client.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** So, for example, at Christmas Creek, where you are pretty much, by the sounds of it, the mining—you are the only people there, and other, obviously, contractors —

**Mr Boyle:** It is transitioning, yes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** You access the accommodation. Who provides the accommodation, say, at Christmas Creek?

**Mrs Viner:** Karntama Village?

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Yes.

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**Mrs Viner:** FMG would provide that, and it is serviced by Morris, for example, as the accommodation village provider.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** For those workers at the accommodation village, which safety act do you think covers that accommodation?

**Mr Boyle:** Look, it is on a mining lease, so we are working under a mining —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** The mine safety and petroleum act? In terms of the mine safety petroleum act, would you say that your duty of care at that accommodation goes to mental health issues in that accommodation?

**Mr Boyle:** Look, I think the go to mental health is not location-specific, so they could be operating the equipment, they could be in the workshop, they could be in their accommodation, or, frankly, they could be on their days off. Our approach does not really take into account, “We are in the camp, we have this particular approach.”

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** That is the Zero Harm approach, is it not? Do you want to go into that approach a bit?

**Mr Boyle:** One point I would make to a question before, which concerns the question you have just put to us, is that the question was around how people arrive in our company and how they go to site. We gave you an answer from a functional perspective, which is we provide all the support information. I think it is really important to emphasise that as they go to site they are met by supervisors and superintendents and introduced to the work crew. There is that peer support, and in fact we have done some work, again with the professional input of my colleagues, about increasing the capability of peer-on-peer support. This is not turning our own employees into skilled counsellors, it is just to be able to see the early warning signs and potentially give those indications. So, I think, right back to your question, if one of our employees was in a situation where things were getting too much for them, the symptoms or the catchpoints in the accommodation would include how they were at work, from the pre-start meet, how they are interacting with their fellow employees. As an equipment operator a lot of your contact is via radio through your shift. So as we do that peer-on-peer capability and the other work with supervisors, it is just about just recognising those early symptoms and providing a reference point: “Look, perhaps we can help you with this.”

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** What about the stigma attached to it though? We hear the concern is that people will get a window seat. How do you address that?

**Mr Boyle:** Look, I would make a comment, and my colleague, Donna, will certainly help me with the details. I made that point right at the front end about valuable and valued employees. It was not entirely flippant—it was not flippant at all. Some of our more challenging work environments are with our tyre fitters—with Otraco—because typically you are a small crew with a working supervisor and you are working for all the major players in the Pilbara. Now, to train a tyre fitter, as Donna indicated earlier, we train people for six weeks and then we send them out and they are under the wing of someone else, and on and on it goes. We have intervened many times in the last 18 months to support our tyre fitters because, frankly, if we lose a tyre fitter, we are six weeks behind.

[3.30 pm]

**Mrs Viner:** It is probably 12 months behind if you lose —

**Mr Boyle:** I can tell you hand on heart, ours is an organisation that cares from our CEO down, but there is a fundamental economic driver for keeping skilled people in your workforce. So, this window seat —

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Perception?

**Mr Boyle:** I think it is perhaps a perception more than a reality.

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**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Have you ever worked in construction?

**Mr Boyle:** I have.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Is it more of an issue in construction?

**Mr Boyle:** I am just trying to think of the last time I was intensely involved in construction; it was probably less than a decade ago. I suppose people accept that construction is more cyclic. Often in construction you will see crews of people who will travel together from site to site. I think the people who have been in construction for some time who are in those core crews are pretty resilient, given the work challenges they have.

**The CHAIR:** Are the rosters more compressed?

**Mr Boyle:** Absolutely, and I suppose the evolution just since—I have been involved in the resources industry to make more lifestyle-friendly rosters. You can certainly see where that has come through with operating companies. With construction, the focus is often to get the thing built, make the big money while you can, and you cycle in and cycle out.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Have you had to deal with anyone who has either attempted or been successful in harming themselves, in a mining sense I am talking about?

**Mr Boyle:** I am going to pass to my colleagues with that. I have knowledge, but these are our internal resources.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Can you walk us through how you deal with that?

**Mrs Viner:** We have to be careful with confidentiality and being a psychologist.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** I understand.

**The CHAIR:** No, no.

**Mrs Viner:** It is probably the—I think a typical one that will come to mind—yes, to answer your question; yes. Like, I have been with Downer Mining for two years; before that, with an EAP company for six years. Most definitely there are people with attempted suicides, and successful suicides; that happens for sure. If I think about one example, what we will get is the guy returns to site, is not travelling too well, has maybe a bit of verbal altercation with someone and then it turns out going, “Actually, I attempted suicide on the weekend.” The guy will still be on automatic pilot going, “Look, that might have happened Saturday, I’ve still got to get on the plane on Monday” and maybe this verbal altercation happens on the Tuesday or the Wednesday. What I generally find is the guys are like, “Well, I’ve just got to get back to site”, “I’ve got to do my job”, “I’ve got no leave” or “I’ve got to pay my bills”—that kind of stuff. But as soon as they have expressed this, though, it is then getting myself on the phone. Where I physically sit is near the domestic airport, so I will talk to the individual in their room, because we are very aware, cognisant, of somebody sitting in their room, maybe at 11 o’clock in the morning, going, “I am not flying out until eight o’clock tomorrow morning.” I will have lovely HR people on site who will go and knock on that guy’s door. I had one the other week, where it was like, “Can you make sure you take him some food, a drink, make sure he has got actual stuff in his room, that kind of thing?” Then I basically track, get their mental health evacuation—I have met people at the airport before, most certainly.

The individual I am thinking of at the moment, I actually liaise with their family member, and that person, thankfully, had some mental health background and we were able to get straight onto things, and that individual came and saw me the very next day. We have a chief medical adviser—occupational physician who will also back us up and help us out in these situations.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Is the evacuating mostly back here to Perth or the eastern states?

**Mrs Viner:** It varies. I must admit I had one the other week where the individual was then going on to Brisbane, which makes it a lot harder. The area manager straight up said, “If that individual needs

to be put into a hotel for the night” and that guy even would go and have dinner with the guy and then make sure that he was travelling okay. Generally enough, once that person —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Did he travel alone to Brisbane?

**Mrs Viner:** At that point, yes, he did travel across to Brisbane, and we talked to family that would be picking him up at the other end—because he was going on to the Gold Coast, it was like he would normally get picked up anyway—so getting him to travel through.

**Mr Boyle:** One point I would make here is that the responses are not—we see in our organisation, it is not just FIFO; in fact, we have many sites that are drive in, drive out. Also a lot of support is offered to people in office roles. I suppose just to let the committee know, we do not see a particular spike when we look across the work arrangements in our business for people who are travelling well or not travelling so well from a mental health perspective.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Do you keep those stats, do you?

**Mrs Viner:** We keep a database, and Tash and myself have a confidential database that only we look at. We will give these guys the statistics. I kept stats for the first 12 months and in that there was one particular site that had the most interactions with myself and the next one down was actually head office, because it is that warm transfer, that was like, “You’re that lady that I can go and have a chat to.” I would go and meet people for a coffee break around the corner, that type of thing. It is not necessarily the FIFO guys, it is across—which kind of replicates when I was in EAP as well. We had everything from state government departments, small business, resource sector et cetera, you will find behind the scenes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** One of the people who came and gave evidence said to us that if you look at the factors around mental health and particularly around suicide or, you know, sort of that getting to that place—isolation, control and, obviously, age is one thing. But what they said is that that is not exclusive to FIFO, but by placing them in a FIFO situation you ratchet that up. What is your comment on that in terms of does it increase that risk? We are not saying that that hazard does not exist in the general public, but does that increase that hazard?

**Mrs Viner:** It is so hard to generalise, because for each individual I could not answer that professionally or personally.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** I suppose our perspective is that we are interested because we need to generalise because we are looking at regulations and legislation and codes of practice and things like that. The question is: is it a hazard that is a greater hazard in the fly in, fly out industry? That is really something that we need to assess. It is okay if you cannot answer that.

**Mrs Viner:** I really cannot answer it. It is so general. I could say person X and person Y. Person X might have those variables et cetera; they might be the person who gets up to site and then goes, “Do you know what? I’m talking to my supervisor; I’m on the next plane home; I’m dealing with this.” I think it is too hard to generalise to say these people with these variables, chuck them in that environment and you are amping up—like, you are putting a flame underneath.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** No, it is not those variables. The variables are isolation, control—so they are not variables on an individual—and demographics because you are taking it from the highest risk demographic and you have 88 per cent of them. So the question is: are you increasing the hazard on those risk factors by FIFO? That is my occ health and safety question. So you have the risk; identify the risk; look at the hazard. Is the hazard increased?

**Mr Boyle:** I think that in the period of high growth, there were the people who were attracted to the industry for certainly the financial gain, and the demand from the industry. Really, perhaps one of the outcomes was: were there people who came into the industry that frankly would not get into the industry now? I have to be careful. I suppose as with any career or any profession, there is an element of self-selection about how and where you go and where you end up. With the change in

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resources—I suppose we are seeing it across Australia—it is actually pretty hard to get into the resources and stay in the resources. I know that perhaps gets to an earlier question about the window seat question that you cannot actually say there is something wrong.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Because you want to stay in, because it is so hard.

**Mr Boyle:** I believe that the people who are coming into our industry are coming in with their eyes open. In terms of mitigating the hazard that you have described well before, seeing it through our submission and, frankly, the seven-plus years of connect with QUT, and again based on over 4 000 question-and-answer surveys with our employees, yes, I suppose our approach to mitigating the FIFO hazard in that space you are asking the question around is, we believe we are doing as well as we possibly can. I believe you have had a lot of other submissions from other industry groups and organisations questioning the relativity of the FIFO workforce compared with the general population. We are not really coming from that point of view at all. The point of view is our employees, we realised seven or eight years ago, were of a certain demographic. Really, we were not approaching the health aspect of it. We really did not have the in-house capability, so we enlisted this university. We got information back from our employees that obesity, musculoskeletal and mental health were the issues, and we have been systematically working on it ever since. Perhaps it gets to a point that we are trying to make in our submission, that our approach was built from that initial starting point, which is really caring for your employees and valuing them, and then over five or six years building up the musculoskeletal and obesity and then you are taking that step further into and getting in-house skills to enhance our capability around mental health. It has really been a build-up of an approach, and it perhaps gets to the point you are making. In discussing the paper we submitted and discussion continued with senior managers before appearing at the committee, how would we react to a legislative requirement and could we build, frankly, a complete and sustainable approach that we are proud of. We are not saying it is perfect. It is a difficult question and I am not sure whether we are landing on an answer, but we cannot see how we would have potentially got to where we are today if it had been externally driven.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** So, when you were talking, my question was: how do we as regulators get other mining companies, in particular construction, to adopt the approach you do? You are saying that there is no way you can do that, it all has to come from the heart and internally, and then suddenly there is some sort of epiphany you get and you go to QUT and it happens that way. You have adopted a systematic approach and you telling me there is nothing in system analysis in occ health and safety that can drive someone to that sort of systematic approach?

**Mr Boyle:** I am not sure I have an easy answer for you.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Occ health and safety is all about systems. You have adopted a system. I am saying what is it in the system that is going to get other people to adopt a systems approach like you have?

**Mr Boyle:** One of the things is leadership and continuity of leadership. Frankly, the senior leadership churn in our organisation is lower than in many of our client organisations. So it means that when you start a project or an approach like this, which is values founded and really has a long run, we can stay the course.

**The CHAIR:** But we as legislators do not have control over that. What can we do as legislators to actually mimic your template and what can we do in the regulation space to make that happen at other sites as well, and with other companies and other contractors?

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Or to get a company to go through a process that you have to adopt a structure and a process that is best fitted to them? I get that you do not want us to put something on because you are saying, “We did it this and it is best fitted to us this way.” Frankly, we have had that from other companies who have said to us, “We’ve got a system and it is best suited to us, and if you regulate us, we are not going to do it.” Meanwhile, we are stuck with a whole bunch of

outliers out there, and how do we make those outliers go through a process that you have gone through to adopt the best process for their workers to ensure that those issues are taken into account?

[3.45 pm]

**Mr Boyle:** I think there is a tension there between obviously an option to put regulations in, but is there another option where you could talk to your—I do not suppose the existing legislation around duty of care provisions extends to health and safety. Is it a matter of actually working with your inspectorate? Case law certainly gets the attention of senior people and, if you like, it is less a framework and more starting to define outcomes.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** But we stopped doing occ health and safety by case law in the 1980s.

**Mr Boyle:** Perhaps my terminology reflects the fact that I am a chemist. We pay serious attention to legal cases and, generally, it is always bad news. You are looking at companies, for instance, in other jurisdictions that are saying, “We have a fantastic system” and then the judge asks, “Was it ever usable?”—and there is a whole world of pain there. That helps organisations understand it is not about just having the external focus or the facade; you have actually got to make it work. If I just retreat to Downer Mining and say, “Bring it on; we can handle any regulation”, is that going to get the outcome? I suppose that is why you guys are deliberating on this. You may get, again, a beautiful facade of this is what an organisation is doing, but how the regulators actually make judgements on whether —

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** I suppose what you do is give the regulators the capacity to prosecute, because that is obviously what matters: there is a big stick at the end of the day, because that is what you have just told me. It is the big stick that makes them change, because it is all about them getting prosecuted.

**Mr Boyle:** That is not quite what I meant.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** That is how I took it.

**Mr R.F. JOHNSON:** We do not want to put words in your mouth.

**Mr Boyle:** No. All organisations pay attention to whatever regulatory environment they are in. Certainly, in overlapping spaces, bullying and harassment cases are, I suppose, the beginnings of this conversation at a regulatory interface level.

**The CHAIR:** The problem we have and I think Janine is elucidating to is that we accept your interpretation of duty of care and your company responsibility, and that is fine. You do accept, as you have said, emotional health and wellbeing, mental illness, the effective disorders and all those issues, and you do not discriminate whether it is on the tools, in accommodation or happened at home off-shift. But when push comes to shove in some jurisdictions and in some companies, if you actually look at the regulations and the legislation and the codes of practice in and around that, that is where it can get hazy and that is where the interpretation from other companies is not your interpretation. The interpretation of hazards, and physical and emotional health and wellbeing, and the interpretation of the jurisdiction, whether it be on the tools, is, yes, okay; it is on a mining tenement but is that applicable to a guy who goes off-shift in his donga at night in his accommodation facility? That is where we are at. We understand what your mission is and what your focus is and what you are doing, but, as legislators, we think that there are some areas there that need tidying up.

But may I just change tack for a little while? If you have a contract with your head company, there is a requirement for you to perhaps manage and provide services in and around mental health for the employee. What does that oblige you to do and does the head company provide services for mental health for your employees, too, in some cases? What services do they provide? We have had issues of who provides the EAP. The smaller contractors sometimes do not have their own EAP and they

use the head company's EAP. Do you pay a fee in order for your employees and contractors to access the services that they provide that you cannot or do not? Just talk us through a little bit about you as the head contractor and then the company.

**Mr Boyle:** I will make a couple of comments and then pass to my colleague for the detail. I think that is a really worthwhile question, but it might be better directed at a smaller contracting company. The scale of where we are at in our major projects here in the west, which are Roy Hill and Christmas Creek and Karara, is essentially we are doing —

**The CHAIR:** You provide everything.

**Mr Boyle:** We are doing the mining. We would connect with the chaplaincy service offered by FMG.

**Mrs Viner:** Maybe with Otraco, our smaller business, where it is tyre fitters, you might have a two-person crew that is on a Rio Tinto site, for example. Yes, they can access the peer support program as provided by Rio Tinto. For example, when I go up for a site visit, I will very much be going, "Hey, guys; heads-up. Our provider is DTC. You will see that Rio Tinto's provider is BSS. So when you go to the toilets or you are wherever and you see that sign, guys, this is actually our one."

I just want to reiterate that, as someone who used to be an EAP, if you take the after-hour phone calls, there were plenty of times you would take that, as a psychologist and professionally. If someone rang through in a crisis situation, you would not be stopping and saying, "You're not my company." That is in my professional experience for myself. I did actually read through some transcripts saying, "No, no; don't talk to us; you're not our company." We had ones where it was like we will just have to wear that.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** I made a mistake on our tour when they had the wrong company on the booklet. They had changed it eight months ago and still had the old company. I missed the chance of ringing the old company and saying, "Hi; I've got a problem. Can you help me?" I thought that would have been a bit mischievous, so I did not do it.

**Mrs Viner:** It is not regulated which organisation to go with. I know I was up at a Rio Tinto site and had to very much emphasise that BSS is yours. Even when I was at Christmas Creek, I made a point, as someone who goes in there and tries to increase mental health literacy and awareness, to say that is why the force and Bis came into my head before. I had to say, "Downer employees, this is our company. Bis, yours is through this." I must admit to talking to some of the smaller companies who say, "Our EAP provider is EAP." I am like, "No; that is what it is. Who is the provider? It is going to be OSA Group or Converge International or BSS." There is misunderstanding about that.

**The CHAIR:** In some of the accommodation facilities we visited, there was this thing plastered on the back of the door and there would have been 20 different EAPs with print about that size.

**Mrs Viner:** And you are like, "Which one is actually me?"

**The CHAIR:** I would have thought that perhaps someone who was not being able to cope would be thinking: which one do I ring?

**Ms Palethorpe:** That is one of the nice things about this model that Downer has. We are an internal role, so when people are unsure of where to go, because Donna and I get out to site and every site constantly—it is like our life is the airport and the boys and girls who are on FIFO—we are seen and they know that if they are in doubt, they can call us. Supervisors are the same: "Who do I call? Who do I contact?" The first port of call is Donna or myself. It does not matter what number is on those pocket guides; our numbers are on those as internal resources. So we filter and we make sure they get to the right supports, the right resources and the right services, and if they are in a holding pattern until they can get face-to-face or a telephone counselling session with our EAP, we will then

hold them because we have the professional background and experience to do so. So we support them and we do the interim. That is what is lovely about this model.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Mike, if you were to have the opportunity to employ someone locally in a provincial town—let us say you had a workforce in Port Hedland—would you first seek to employ local as opposed to external?

**Mr Boyle:** That is certainly our model in other parts of Australia.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** What about in WA?

**Mr Boyle:** We will employ workforce from right up the top of—I am trying to think of the —

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Kalumburu, One Arm Point?

**Mr Boyle:** Halls Creek, Wyndham, Fitzroy Crossing. But the people will travel to site. Let me think this through. Some of our Karara employees are drive in, drive out employees.

**Mrs Viner:** They are more Geraldton based, for example, and they come across on a little short flight rather than to Perth. Fitzroy Crossing is more our Indigenous program very much there. I know Natasha in the east has got Boggabri —

**Ms Palethorpe:** Boggabri, Blackwater and Goonyella Riverside, as Mike was mentioning before, all have been drive in. Most of our Downer Blasting Services sites are all drive in, drive out. Otraco on the east coast tends to be more drive in, drive out, so they stay in hubs like Emerald, Rocky and Moranbah.

**Mr Boyle:** I suppose it reflects perhaps the vastness of WA, and with a more distributed population through Queensland and regional New South Wales, there is almost always a local town.

**Ms Palethorpe:** Only a couple of hours away, there is a large town from pretty much anywhere in Queensland.

**Mr Boyle:** Again, a town might be founded around one industry. The resources towns we are familiar with through the top of Western Australia and across to the Northern Territory rise and fall on the commodity export price.

**Mr M.J. COWPER:** Given your time in mining, Mike, you have seen an evolution of fly in, fly out becoming a minority of the workforce to now becoming a majority of the workforce. Notwithstanding the fact you have got a 25 per cent drop in your workforce, we are still seeing the high prevalence of fly in, fly out. What I am saying is: do you have any comments in and around your experience in relation to the suitability of fly in versus, say, for instance, those living in these mining towns? Having lived in the Pilbara myself, the towns have almost been depleted of football teams and local service groups and the like and people are choosing to fly backwards and forwards, and then there is the issue in the back end where you are seeing our local communities suffering where they live. I am just saying: is there scope within the business that might see a pull back from FIFO, and whilst I think FIFO will be around for a long time, is there some scope for locating people in these regional towns, as was proclaimed by Brendon Grylls last October?

**Mr Boyle:** What I would offer, I suppose, is that we are a service provider. A long contract for us would be five years, so in terms of our direct capability to essentially set up a residential accommodation close to a mine, it cannot stack up for us. That is probably a question more for the long-term owners. I would say that I had seven years in a Northern Territory regional mining area and it was some of the best experiences I have had—but, anyway, that is perhaps an aside. I think perhaps the nation has moved on from the populate or perish thinking that drove a lot of the development of those towns in the 1960s and 1970s. I think I share your recognition that the situation is changing. I do not have a solution. I do not even have the beginnings of a solution of how to deal with it.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mike; thanks, Donna; thanks, Natasha.

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**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Can I quickly ask: when you talked about the suicides and attempted suicides, just before when we talked to FMG, they said that they reported it to the Department of Mines and Petroleum; do you report yours to the Department of Mines and Petroleum?

**Mrs Viner:** The ones that I was referring to were attempted suicides.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** They said attempted as well.

**Mrs Viner:** Again, it is sort of behind with the professional or ethical. The short answer is no. It is probably something I would not be aware of, for example, needing to do.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you all for your evidence before us 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 time, we will deem those to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered, but should you wish to provide additional information or you have given an undertaking to give information, please do so and include this as a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you, Mike, thank you, Donna, and thank you, Natasha, for your time today. It was a very long half-hour; sorry.

**Ms J.M. FREEMAN:** Are you self-insured?

**Mrs Viner:** No.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for coming early to see us.

**Hearing concluded at 3.59 pm**

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