

FIFO Committee report ignores realities of working in mining industry

THE national resource industry employer group is calling for sensible policy discussions after a House of Representatives Committee into FIFO/DIDO working arrangements today released a report ignoring the realities of mining employment needs in regional and remote areas.

The Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA) represented the industry in written and oral submissions to the Committee inquiry and is disappointed the report has sought to demonise what should be supported as legitimate workplace practices.

"Fly-in, fly-out and drive-in, drive-out working arrangements are as much driven by employee lifestyle choices as by resource companies' operational requirements," says AMMA chief executive Steve Knott.

"After openly participating in what was supposed to be a considered and sensible discussion about the increase in FIFO and DIDO arrangements, we are very disappointed to read Committee Chair Tony Windsor refer to these activities as a 'cancer' in his report foreword.

"The 'cancer vs. saviour' dichotomy is unfortunate when we are trying to advocate for a middle ground that balances the essential use of FIFO work arrangements with community needs and residential workforces where appropriate."

In addition to the benefits for Australian workers, AMMA's submissions to the inquiry also highlighted that the increase in FIFO/DIDO arrangements are reflective of skills and labour shortages impacting the resource industry.

Mr Knott says the large numbers of highly-skilled workers required to build world-class projects are often not available in regional areas, and labour mobility is increasingly important for Australia's resource industry to compete on a global scale.

"While it is all well and good for the committee to recommend workers relocate to regional areas to live, what that means is these workers are actually less employable after a project ends than if they were based in a metropolitan centre," he says.

"Building a highly skilled, mobile workforce that can move with shifting industry demands should be the top priority, not labelling FIFO a 'cancer' and further taxing the resource industry and its workforce.

"We are also concerned about several recommendations that will only serve to increase government revenue and offset the political fallout from the Mining Tax shortfall. These include removing the fringe benefits tax (FBT) exempt status of some FIFO/DIDO work camps and changing how the Living-Away-From-Home-Allowance applies to resource workers.

"This last recommendation, if adopted, would be yet another example of Labor breaking its promises to industry after assuring the industry FIFO/DIDO arrangements would be exempt from LAFHA reforms last year."

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