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Good afternoon. I am one of the elected members of the Isaac Regional Council but I would really like to thank Professor Carrington for the opportunity to speak here today not on my Council’s collective position, views or policies, but as a member of a regional mining community and particularly as a member of a regional mining family.

I have been living in Moranbah for six years, but coal mining towns are not new to me. I grew up in a coal mining town called Collinsville, where Donna [the second speaker] lives now, and with a family that has been working in the industry for more than five generations in Australia, and even further back to the coal mines in Wales.

Moranbah was primarily developed by the Utah Corporation as a family-based community in the 1970s, after the Queensland government of the day – Joh Bjelke-Petersen's, believe it or not – specifically conditioned those leases to ensure the development of housing, and a surrounding community.

Moranbah now is a community dancing the delicate line of population imbalance. A community completely surrounded and land constrained by mining leases, struggling with land availability and affordability. Struggling small businesses, overstretched emergency services and large scale workers camp developments, with more of these to come.

Yet despite the impacts of rapid industry development, Moranbah still remains a wonderful place to raise a family. Most of us living out there are in the same boat: we are young families and we work in a demanding and dangerous industry. Many of us are hours away from extended family. Our friends become our family; we rely on each other for support.

In my experience, if you enter a mining community with a positive mindset, living in a mining town can teach you the true meaning of solidarity, friendship and community.

**12-hour shifts**

The most obvious change I’ve seen that has altered the path of development, social interaction and community health for regional mining communities was a decision made in the 1990s, with the introduction of 12-hour shifts.

Traditional community structure in regional mining communities changed drastically with the introduction of the longer shifts. This happened for the Bowen Basin in 1993 when White Mining introduced 12-hour shifts at North Goonyella Mine.

Many long-term residents in the region remember this decision was met by strong resistance from communities, workers and their unions.
People were assured that this practice of 12-hour shifts would be contained to mines of an isolated nature.

But typical of industry, in their push to increase their profits and, in my view, decrease community obligation, it only took until 1997 for the last mines to succumb to the roster change. It took just four years to set a precedent in workforce arrangements throughout the entire region.

12-hour shifts brought with it the rise in DIDO workers. It provided the opportunity to live outside the community you worked in, and opened the doors for completely new workforce arrangements for the region.

The roster changes as a result of 12-hour shifts have really altered how mineworkers and their families engage with community.

Sporting clubs and community volunteering have been hit hard. The rosters and shift length leave little free time for any activities during your ‘tour’ [the work cycle of the roster]. Days off [in the leave cycle] are inconsistent, so it’s rather difficult to make commitments to organisations.

For example you may work a 4 and 5 roster [that is, 4 days on followed by 5 days off]. A 7 on, 7 off. Or, for example, my house works around a complicated arrangement of 4 nights work, 5 days off; 5 days work, 4 days off; 2 days work followed by 3 nights work, then 4 days off.

This decision to implement 12 hour shifts fundamentally reshaped the role of women in mining families as well. There is less shared parenting responsibilities while a partner is ‘on tour’. Family time while a partner on shift is minimal. Volunteering and sporting clubs are predominantly run and organised by the women of the communities.

Many will debate the positives and negatives surrounding 12 hour shifts and there are a lot of arguments on both sides. But what we do know it that there is no denying that this change in workforce arrangement altered the path of how workers and their families engage with regional mining communities and with each other.

The implementation of 12 hour shifts is a perfect example of not just how easily a precedent is set in industry but also how decisions made in industry impact on the development of the community roles of the women and families who are supporting it.

**Community development**

I moved back into a mining community during the biggest coal boom in Australia's history. While industry was thriving with world record profits, it was obvious companies were looking for new ways to save money, keep mines working longer and harder, despite the impacts on individuals, families and communities.

When Queensland’s biggest coal miner, BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance [BMA], announced their plans for 100% Fly in fly out workforce for the new 4 billion dollar Caval Ridge Mine in 2010, Moranbah was drawn into the political and industrial debate.

Let me explain further. To be employed in this mine situated just 6kms from town, you must relocate to Brisbane and work fly in, fly out [FIFO]. You can’t be a local and apply for a job there and you will be discouraged from moving to the community once you are employed.

For those of us living in the coalfields, it’s obvious that this is a new precedent set throughout industry that will not only affect the development of our communities, but deny us the ability to make living decisions as mining families.

Don’t get me wrong; living in regional communities is not for everyone. Most mining communities accept that FIFO is a necessary part of industry today. What mining families do
know is that choosing to live apart for up to 6 months per year in total is a tough decision to make and fundamentally alters family relationships.

Regardless of the FIFO lifestyle working for some and not others, many of us advocate for choice. Because the decision should be in the hands of those families, and what we know is that companies and State Government have the ability to facilitate that.

The reality is that the mining industry wants longer and longer rosters. More and more FIFO. Less and less community obligation. More and more profit.

That means they are driving everyone away from living in communities. They save money, lengthen shifts, reduce connection to community outcomes and, ultimately, mine the area with more freedom and less scrutiny.

Most of you may have heard in Brisbane that the coal mining boom is over? It’s doom and gloom days for the industry? Yet in the midst of all of this doom and gloom, whilst companies are putting the fear into State Government and their workers of the mining industry's future, we have a major industry employer applying to further expand the already brand new Moranbah airport.

If approved, the Moranbah airport will have the potential to accommodate 480,000 passengers per year. Moranbah will have an airport that could potentially cater for up to 35 flights a day. This investment is a clear indication of the profitable future for the mining industry, and the future workforce arrangements for new and established operations.

**Population balance**

We know that population balance – that is, the number of permanent residents compared with non-resident workers (FIFO and DIDO) – is the key to sustainable mining communities.

Essential services and social and economic infrastructure are funded based on the number of permanent residents. When a community becomes overwhelmed with a non-resident population, the funding does not stretch to service the needs for both resident and non-resident workers.

Our communities are often very pro industry development. But that shouldn’t be taken as development at any cost.

Development without constraint, development not matter what the individual, family and community outcomes are.

Companies must develop responsibly, and governments have to get the policy settings right.

Our communities need to maintain company incentives for regional living; provide an affordable supply of family housing. We need strong economic and social development strategies for regional mining communities to support those on lower incomes, small business owners, and workers in education, health, hospitality and service workers.

We need appropriate investment in social and economic infrastructure from industry and, given Governments are still making billions from mining communities; it’s not too much to ask.

The not-so-amusing fact in all of this debate is that we know greater proportions of permanent residential workers is also better for business, which makes some industry decisions border on illogical.

Research demonstrates that residually based operations with lower rates of FIFO have substantially higher retention rates, and lower turn-over. That means residential operations are often better for the industry, because one of the number one issues the industry confronts is skills attraction and retention. It has been said to cost them hundreds of millions each year.  

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Conclusion

I have had a rich and fulfilling family, community and social life in mining communities. I have also experienced the joys and opportunities of city living. The choice and balance for my family is clear cut, as it is for others who make a different decision.

Professor Carrington’s independent research has received the usual heckling from increasingly extreme organisations like the Queensland Resources Council. It’s funny how they never disagree with the outcome of studies they fund themselves.

QUT and Professor Carrington are to be congratulated for their hard work and dedication to understanding the impacts of individual, family and industry development decisions in recent years.

The research undertaken, that was not funded by industry with a predetermined agenda, or set of conclusions, gives us an important insight into how industry, government and individual choices are all related – and ultimately how they can fundamentally alter the health and wellbeing of families and communities.

So where to from here?

If you start with the research to reach your conclusion, the case is clear.

Companies must behave responsibly and governments have to get the policy settings right.

So where there are more family friendly rosters, more time together, shared parenting (where there are children involved), less travel time, less social disorder due to greater proportions of resident workforces, there is also better health and relationship outcomes for families and mining communities.

The Mining Social License needs to be reinvigorated to take specific responsibility for industry’s part in shaping social and development outcomes in mining communities. This includes meaningful contributions towards:

1. Better company incentives for regional living.
2. Quality and affordable supply of family and other housing.
3. Strong economic and social development strategies for regional mining communities to support lower income, education, health, hospitality and service workers.
4. Appropriate investment in social and economic infrastructure from the companies and governments making billions from mining communities.
5. Strong community development planning to maintain the social fabric that binds mining regions together and provides women in particularly - and families - with the active and engaged community life required to maintain strong relationships.

In my view, if companies genuinely commit to acting responsibly and governments set the appropriate boundaries for development and conditioning mining leases, then all stakeholders can benefit with:

- **Companies** having less turn-over, in an industry affected by skills shortage.
- **Individuals** – getting better health outcomes, less depression, avoiding long and irregular shift-induced health and diet problems.
- **Families** –preventing women more prone to depression and isolation in FIFO relationships, larger portions of time alone, difficulty sharing parenting, absent father issues, higher divorce and separation rates.

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Communities – less crime from higher rates of residential workers with a connection and stake in their local communities, more investment in infrastructure and social services, which is based on realistic population numbers. More active sporting clubs and healthier local small businesses that add to social and family amenity.

And The State – The regionalisation of our population is a key policy objective for both state and federal governments because cities are becoming over-crowded. Less compulsory FIFO, more incentive for regional family living.

After the federal parliamentary inquiry report into FIFO delivered such a devastating analysis of the impacts of FIFO on individuals, families and communities, we have to act. It was a unanimous report, supported by all political parties represented on the inquiry.

We can’t afford to let that report gather dust, particularly because – there is a better way.

Once again, thanks to QUT for leading the way in giving insight into the some of the challenges and solutions we can consider, in an industry that has been – and will continue to be – an important part of Australia’s national story.

Thank you for your time today.

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1 The views and opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Isaac Regional Council or any other organisation or individual.

2 The findings of that research were further reiterated by Brereton, Beach and Cliff 2010 from the University of Queensland’s Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining in a research paper titled *Employee Turnover as a Sustainability Issue*. The authors reported that:

In 2001, Newmont Australia, which operates in the Gold sector, reported turnover rates ranging from 8 per cent to 31 per cent for company employees at its Australian operations (Newmont 2001, p.32). Four of the Newmont sites – all FIFO operations - had rates above 20 per cent. By comparison, in 2002 Anglo Coal reported turnover rates for five Queensland and Hunter Valley operations ranging from 4.5 per cent to 17 per cent, with the overall average being 9 per cent (Anglo Coal 2002, p 9). (Brereton et al. 2003: 2)

Additionally:

Our own study of employee turnover at remote area mines in Queensland and Western Australia found evidence of wide variation between sites (Beach et al. 2003). The average turnover rates of company employees at the seven FIFO sites in the study was 20.2 per cent, with the range being from 9.7 per cent to 28.3 per cent. Some of these sites had, in the past, experienced annual turnover in excess of 60 per cent. (Brereton et al. 2003: 3)

Brereton, Beach and Cliff (2003) also reported that the mining operations and sectors with high FIFO numbers experience far greater turnover than that in the coal sector because coal is traditionally, largely residentially based.

In 2001 the Western Australian Mines Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Board (MOSHAB) conducted a survey of the health and safety attitudes and behaviours of employees in the Western Australian mining industry. The results, based on data from 4700 respondents, provide the most recent and robust information about workforce stability in the Australian mining industry. The survey measured employees’ length of service at their current workplace as one of the survey items. The proportion of employees that have been at the workplace less than 12 months is a reasonable proxy measure of the level of employee turnover. (Brereton et al. 2003: 3)