
Options expand for Australian FIFO workers

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In a major push to attract skilled workers from other locations and industries, more and more employers are offering Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) arrangements from alternative locations.

Until recently, Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) was typically offered only from the capital city in the state of the respective operation.

Western Australia, more than any other state, has a high reliance on FIFO arrangements. In fact, more than 90 percent of workers are on FIFO rosters with most based in Perth. However, growing labour shortages together with increased choice for workers means employers have to not only look further afield, but be far more creative about work travel options.

More than 85,000 workers travel to projects across the Pilbara and Mid West Region of Western Australia, a figure expected to jump to 119,500 by 2012, according to the Chamber of Minerals and Energy.

Even Queensland, a state that has been staunchly committed to fully residential workforces is reviewing its position. A current battle rages between local councils and communities against mining giant BHP Billiton around its plans to have a 100 per cent FIFO workforce for its Daunia and Caval Ridge projects. With other major liquefied natural gas and coal projects under construction in the same region and all planning to draw from local labour pools, BHP Billiton sees FIFO as a logical and more realistic option for manning its sites. The arrangement will enable BHP Billiton to provide employment opportunities for populations in south east Queensland and northern New South Wales, communities that don't currently directly share in the benefits of the industry.

Whilst not all employers are necessarily paying the full flight fare from far flung locations, they are at least allowing employees to fly themselves to the nearest capital city to catch the company flight to site. Only a few years ago, this was frowned upon with concerns about the fatigue created by such long travel stints. It seems that employers are now finding ways to safely work around this obstacle for mutual benefit.

Just recently, Newcrest Mining introduced a weekly flight to fly local workers from Orange in New South Wales directly to the Pilbara, bypassing Perth. Already this has had an immediate impact on Orange with an increase in inter-state investment in local housing.

Rio Tinto has focused recent investment in regional airports across Western Australia in order to bring more than 500 workers from locations like Busselton, Carnarvon, Nullagine and Dampier.

Other organisations like Woodside fly approved employees from anywhere in Australia and from as far as New Zealand. HWE Mining also flies employees from as far away as Bali and recently introduced a weekly flight from Geelong directly to the Pilbara.

Recognising too, that infrastructure in residential industry hubs like Karratha, Port Hedland and even Perth are struggling to keep pace with the growth, flying workers from their existing home locations is fast becoming an appealing alternative. The arrangement means that locations that seemingly have no connection with the booming mining sector are also sharing in the wealth and benefits created by the resource sector.

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The Resource Channel received the national award for the 'Best Blog Website' at the Australian Web Awards in Perth on 6 November 2010 and was awarded 'Best Industry Job Website' 2011 by Reuters International. The website attracts more than 300,000 visitors per annum.

About Jody Elliott With fifteen years in senior and management roles across human resources, career and organisational development, and recruitment, Jody has held positions at WMC Resources, CSR, Australian Rail Track Corporation, Santos and more recently, three years with BHP Billiton, managing the Nickel West recruitment function. She is a regular speaker at conferences and within media on sourcing and skills availability.