

The Wrap



DIGGING AROUND: *Regional Australia Committee members in Mongolia*

Fly-in worker experiences explored

Learning from the experiences of other mining nations was the focus of a recent parliamentary committee visit.

MPs on the Regional Australia Committee say a recent study visit to Canada and to Mongolian mining sites has provided valuable insights into how other communities grapple with the challenges posed by fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers.

The committee is inquiring into the use of fly-in fly-out and drive-in drive-out workers in several industries such as the mining sector.

Members of the committee travelled to several locations in Canada including Newfoundland and Edmonton as well as a new mine in Mongolia to gather

and share information with other places confronting similar issues.

The delegation was part of parliament's annual program which allows a committee to undertake a study visit to two Asia-Pacific countries.

Speaking in the House of Representatives, committee chair Tony Windsor (New England, NSW) said the committee felt wider research was needed to inform its recommendations.

"Even though the Canadian experience and the Mongolian experience are different, there is an enormous amount for us to learn from their experiences," he said.

"The delegation findings prove that a balance can be found between utilising a fly-in fly-out workforce and building local, sustainable communities as long as strong leadership from all levels of government is put in place," he said.

Committee member Kirsten Livermore (Capricornia, Qld) said she was interested to discover that local governments in Canada play a very active role in decision making for their regions.

"So I got the sense that local governments there were possibly more empowered than our equivalent local governments in Australia and certainly were not afraid to use the powers that they did have," she said.

"I am talking about things like planning and licensing powers both for the mines and very particularly as to the question of temporary accommodation to facilitate mining development at the construction phase."

Ms Livermore also described her visit to Fort McMurray in Alberta as being like "Moranbah on steroids" with around half of the 100,000 strong population FIFO workers.

The central Queensland mining town of Moranbah is dealing with huge numbers of transient workers who have come to the Bowen Basin to work on projects flourishing in the mining boom.

Riverina MP Michael McCormack said the committee's visit to Mongolia was also to reaffirm the two countries' friendship and look for ways Australia can support Mongolian development, as well as to inspect a new mine around 600km south of the capital Ulaanbaatar.

"Australia and Mongolia are facing a similar challenge with the social impact of FIFO work practices and the impact on infrastructure, water, housing costs, food supply, school needs and the social fabric of regional areas," he said.

The committee is hoping to release its recommendations early next year. A video interview with Tony Windsor on the visit to Canada and Mongolia is available at: www.apf.gov.au/international •

LINKS

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