

The State Planning Strategy 2050 (WAPC, 2014) promotes substantial growth in population in the Pilbara over the next 30 years and seeks to balance competing demands. Statement of Planning Policy No.3 – Urban Growth and Settlement (WAPC, 2006) seeks to promote a sustainable and well planned pattern of settlement across the State, build on existing communities with established local and regional economies and manage the growth and development of urban areas in response to social and economic needs of the community, and in recognition of relevant community values. The Pilbara Planning and Infrastructure Framework (WAPC, 2012) anticipates that fly-in fly-out (FIFO) will have a lesser role in the work-living equation as the level of services, facilities and general amenity increase in cities and towns, making them more attractive places in which to live. There has been substantial investment in making this transformation.

The incorporation of workforce accommodation in a community is a complex issue. The resources sector and its peak bodies (i.e. the Chamber of Minerals and Energy) have a position that access to FIFO labour is an essential element of their operations. Local communities benefit from having workers and their families permanently located in their towns and can suffer negative impacts from a large FIFO presence.

It is acknowledged that the need for workforce accommodation is always changing. Experience shows that workforce accommodation can be established quickly to accommodate sharp spikes in demand but it should not be the preferred long term strategy. The supply of workforce accommodation should therefore be managed. This in-principle position has implications for any existing or proposed workforce accommodation development. The primary implications are that workforce accommodation should be subject to a time limited approval to allow for their need to be reviewed over time and that any workforce accommodation proposal should be justified based on demonstrated need.

Four main categories of workforce accommodation can be identified. Each has different requirements for accommodation arising from a combination of the nature of their work, their work hours/shift roster and the specific requirements of the project on which they are working.

1. Construction workforce, major projects. Workforce scale is very large with extended work hours and a temporary workforce.
2. Construction workforce, general projects and sub-contractors. These generally are engaged for a relatively shorter timeframe, with variable shift patterns, and may seek accommodation in general market workforce accommodation facilities provided by independent operators.
3. Periodic maintenance shutdown, major projects. These are characterised by very short term engagements of multi-skilled teams and extended shift patterns. The nature of the project task means that resource companies prefer control for the period of works with a preference for dedicated workforce accommodation facilities.
4. Operation workforce. These are more likely than other categories to include long term FIFO arrangements and for some to have shorter shift rosters.

The Council's preference is for workers to be accommodated in more integrated forms of town-based accommodation wherever possible, preferable dwellings. Operational workers are employed on a long term basis and ideally from a local community perspective, these workers should be residential. There should at least be plans or options for these workers to transition to residential.

While Council's preference is clear, where FIFO operational workers are to be accommodated on a long term basis, Council expects their accommodation to be: of a high standard; suitably integrated with surrounding development and the community; and not a typical camp design or layout appropriate to an isolated/remote camp. Integration can bring a range of advantages – to the community in the form of an increased population within commercial catchments with consequent commercial and social benefits – and to the FIFO workforce with opportunities for involvement in the wider community on a regular basis.

The objectives of this Policy are consistent with the report on the parliamentary enquiry into FIFO practices by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Australia which noted:

...the (FIFO) work practice is eroding the liveability of some regional communities to such an extent that it is increasingly removing the choice to 'live-in' rather than simply 'cash-in' and Policy makers must develop a policy mix that ensures the FIFO/DIDO (Drive-In Drive-Out) work practice does not become the dominant practice, as it could lead to a hollowing out of established regional towns, particularly those inland.

In light of the above, workforce accommodation must be managed carefully, with a long term aim to minimise its use and maximise the residential workforce. This is a consistent approach for policy settings across all tiers of government in most if not all communities with a strong resources economy.

The City of Karratha's position on Workforce Accommodation is set out as follows:

- a) The Council acknowledges the critical role Workforce Accommodation plays during the construction phase of major resource projects and to accommodate peak short-term workforce requirements associated with maintenance shut downs;
- b) The Council recognises that there needs to be a base-level supply of Workforce Accommodation beds. A base-level supply has been identified (AEC report 2016) which will be regularly reviewed and updated;
- c) The Council acknowledges the need for remote Workforce Accommodation for specific projects;
- d) The Council's preference is for operational workers to be town-based and the City will work with industry and the State Government to pursue options for increasing town-based workers;
- e) The Council's aspiration is for workforce accommodation needs to be met as much as possible through more permanent forms of town-based accommodation;
- f) The Council is committed to helping to grow and develop the local community and the local economy. Workforce accommodation facilities incur a relative loss of contribution compared to a resident workforce;
- g) It is Council's intention to transition towards a residential workforce over time. Accordingly, workforce accommodation is approved on a temporary basis in all cases. The intention to transition over time towards a residential workforce should be shared;
- h) Only Workforce Accommodation developments that are sufficiently integrated into the community shall receive longer term approval provided they meet the requirements of this policy; and
- i) The Council believes a community contribution should be made by Workforce Accommodation proponents at the time of initial approval as there is a relative loss of community service and benefit in approving Workforce Accommodations due to association with FIFO working arrangements.