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Good afternoon everyone, my name is Anne Sibbel and the title of our presentation is "When the dust settles"

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How do families decide?

Slide 3

**Residential?**

or

**Fly-in/fly-out?**

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The collage features several images: a street scene with buildings, a group of people walking, a sunset over a field, an airplane on a runway, and a family of four (a man, a woman, and two children) smiling together.

Residential or fly-in/fly-out?

## Slide 4

**Overview**

**Introduction**


- Background to mining
- Introduction of fifo
- The Debate
- Significance of study
- Research Questions

**Method**

**Findings**

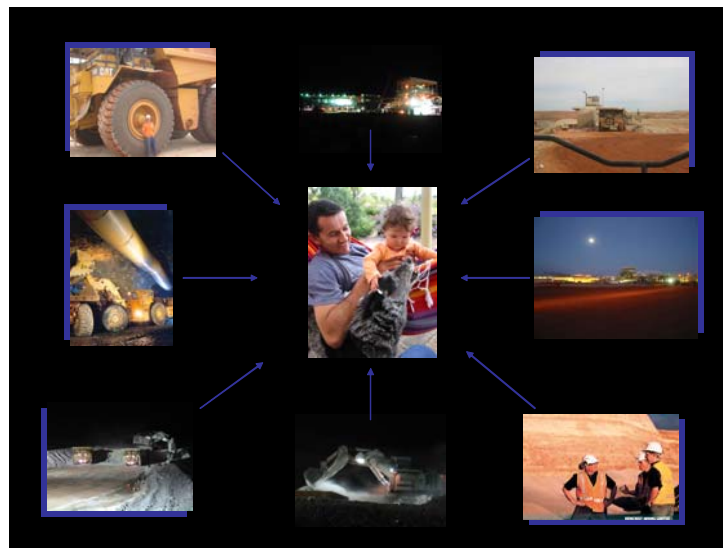
**Conclusion**

**Comments and questions**



During the presentation I will give you the background to the research project. This will include a review of the mining industry and the introduction of the employment practice of fly-in/fly-out, the public debate that has arisen as a result of fifo and which prompted this research study. I will then discuss the project itself.

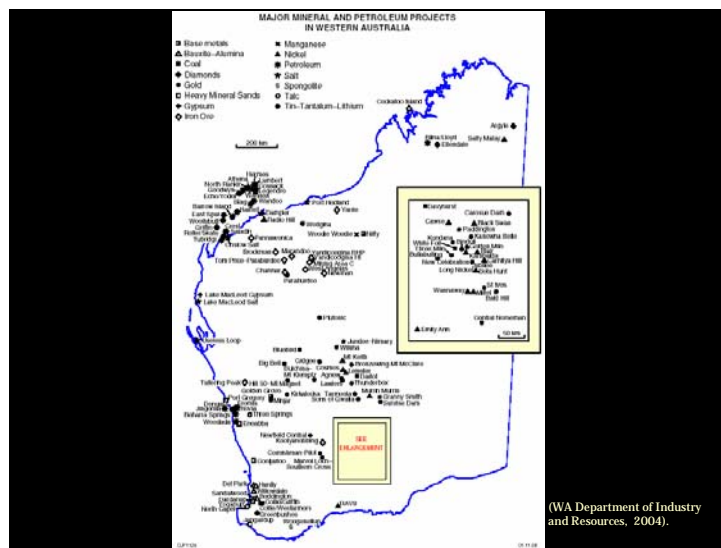
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If you keep up with current affairs you are probably aware of the boom that is currently being experienced in the Australian Mining Industry.

This is particularly relevant to Western Australia because we are one of the most productive and diversified mining regions in the world, so WA's mining industry and its employment practices impact on the well-being of many Western Australian families.

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As you can see on this map most of Western Australia's current projects are located in remote geographical areas, so traditionally mine employees and their families have lived in mining towns that were built near the mine or the processing plant. Places like Kalgoorlie, Newman and Meekatharra (Department of Industry and Resources, 2004).


However, during the last 20 years things have changed. A combination of social, political and economic factors have seen fly-in/fly-out or fifo, as it is more commonly known, become increasingly popular with mining companies and their employees.

FIFO has been used by the offshore oil industry since the 1940s but has only become common in the land-based mining industry since the early 1980s.

Argyle Diamond Mine in the Kimberley was one of the very first FIFO operations.

**What is FIFO?**

- “all employment in which the work is so isolated from the workers homes that food and accommodation are provided for them at the work site, and rosters are established whereby employees spend a fixed number of days at the site followed by a fixed number of days at home”  
(Storey & Shrimpton, 1989, p. 2)



So what exactly is FIFO? It is where the employees live and work at the mine for a set period of time and then return home for a set period of time because of the remote location of the mine.

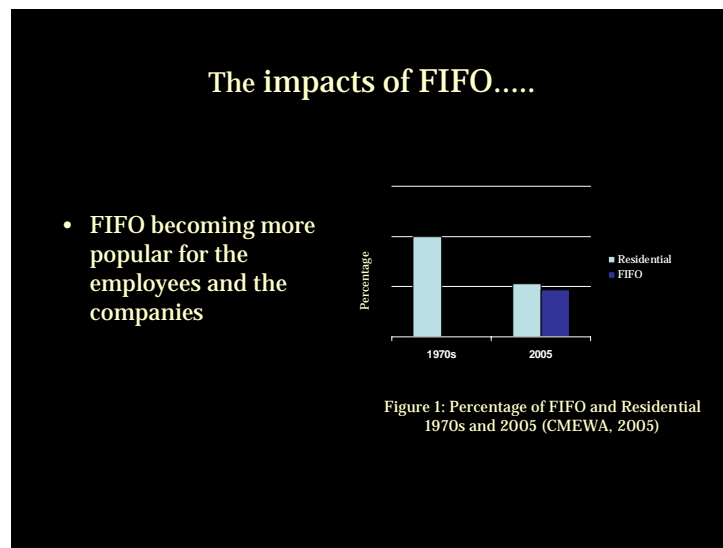
Sometimes workers may drive in and out from the mine rather than fly, depending on the location.

The workers usually fly in and out from a large city, a coastal community or a large well-established mining town.

Their work rosters can vary but at the moment the most common rosters are 2 weeks away and 1 week home, 9 days away and 5 days home or 8 days away and 6 home.

During the 20 years since the introduction of fifo the time spent away from home has become less.

The majority of current Australian fifo mines are in Western Australia.




So WA mining employees and their families have the option of both fifo and the traditional mining town residential lifestyles.

The number of companies offering fifo and the number of people choosing fifo over residential is increasing. You can see from this graph that it was 100% residential in the 1970s but now a recent survey by the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy of 100 mines reported that 53% of mining employees were residential and 47% were fifo. (CMEWA, 2005)



### Impacts of FIFO.....

- Few Australian research studies on the psycho-social impacts of FIFO (e.g. Beach, 1999; Gent, 2004; Sibbel, 2001)
- Some research currently in progress
- FIFO effects rural and mining town sustainability (Maxwell, 2001; Storey, 2001).
- Public debate around fifo and its impacts (e.g Lambert, 2001; Laurie, 2005; Watts, 2004)



However, our understandings about fifo and its impacts have not kept pace with it's popularity.

There have been very few Australian studies researching the psycho-social impacts of fifo; although this year has seen a small number of studies get under way and their results should be out later this year.

There is one thing we do know about fifo is that since its introduction and increasing popularity, the populations of many of the smaller mining towns have decreased and consequently their sustainability or even existence is threatened (Maxwell, 2001; Storey, 2001).

As more mining employees choose fifo over residential the populations of the towns diminish and they lose corporate and government support.

And as a result a very public debate has arisen around the relative merits of fifo and whether or not mining companies should be allowed to offer the fifo option to their employees. This debate is taking place in formally organised forums, in the press and in political arenas. (e.g. Lambert, 2001; Laurie, 2005; Watts, 2004).

### Is FIFO responsible?

- “Cancer of the bush”
- Linked to child abuse
- Child antisocial behaviour
- Divorce
- Drug and alcohol problems


(e.g. Lambert, 2001; Laurie, 2005; Watts, 2004)



The rhetoric of this debate has seen fifo, and by implication those who choose this lifestyle, being publicly blamed for the demise of the bush. In a recent article in the Weekend Australian magazine a Western Australian government minister referred to fifo as the “cancer of the bush” – in addition community leaders have publicly blamed fifo for causing child abuse, child antisocial behaviour, marital break-up, as well as community drug and alcohol problems. If fifo is so destructive and is causing all of these problems why are increasing numbers of people choosing the lifestyle?

Key Questions.....

- Why are people choosing FIFO or residential?
- How do they make this decision?
- Is this a life long decision or can it change?



Why do people choose fifo or residential?

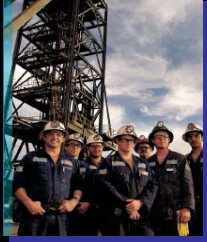
How do they make this decision?

Is this a life long decision or can and does it change?

Answers to these questions may help inform the debate and could allow the stakeholders - government, industry and community - to better address the issues associated with the choices.

### Method.....

- Part of a larger study
- Qualitative
- Two mine sites – one residential, other mix of FIFO and residential
- Purposeful cross-sectional sampling frame
- Interviews, 15 participants
- Focus groups, 12
- Total of 90 participants



This exploratory study aimed to provide some understanding of these questions.

It is part of a larger study that investigated work satisfaction and the impact of family friendly policies on fifo and residential mining employees.

It was a qualitative study which used family life-cycle/ecological systems frameworks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Data was collected from 2 Western Australian mine sites of one company.

One site was purely residential and the other had both fifo and residential options, although it was predominantly fifo.

It used a purposeful cross-sectional sampling frame in order to gather the experiences of as wide a sample from the workforce as possible. This meant employees from the mining company as well as the contracting companies were included. All employment bands and all departments across the sites were included.

A total of 15 individual interviews and 12 focus groups were conducted.

These were all tape recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after the event.

Thematic analysis techniques were used



	<b>Residential</b>	<b>FIFO</b>
<b>Male</b>	25	22
<b>Female</b>	10	8
<b>Age: Range</b>	19 – 54 years	23 – 57 years
<b>Mean</b>	38.11 years	34.13. years
<b>SD</b>	7.77	9.36
<b>Single</b>	5	10
<b>Couple: no children</b>	4	8
<b>Couple: children at home</b>	18	9
<b>Couple: empty nest</b>	7	0
<b>Divorced</b>	1	3
<b>Years in position: Range</b>	0.5 - 22 years	0.1 – 8 years
<b>Mean</b>	6.0 years	2.45 years
<b>SD</b>	5.63 years	2.16 years

This table presents some demographic details for the members of the 10 focus groups for employees. The proportions of fifo and residential participants reflect the proportions in the workforce as highlighted earlier. It is interesting to note that a larger percentage of single people, single divorced people and couples with no children were FIFO rather than residential, note also that this is reversed for those with children.

In addition, 2 focus groups with a total of 10 participants were held with the partners of residential employees.

8 residential and 7 fifo interviews were conducted

### Decision making.....

- Informed choices are made
- FIFO and residential have “different things to offer different people”
- 2 main criteria used – work satisfaction and developmental needs
- Work satisfaction used to be the main criteria but now more evenly weighted
- May move between fifo and residential depending on needs at time
- May aim to eventually be non-fifo and non-residential

So what did we find out? Overall we found that

Generally informed decisions are made by mining employees and their families when they choose either fifo or residential mining employment because each lifestyle has “different things to offer different people”

In addition, they use 2 main criteria as part of the decision making process - one is work satisfaction and the other is the developmental needs of family members, we'll look at these in more detail shortly


As well, many people move between fifo and residential depending on their individual and family needs at a particular time. Very few seemed to be adamantly fifo or residential. Most were flexible in their outlook and appreciated having the options.

In addition, only a few people see themselves doing fifo or residential for ever – most aim to be able to have a non-fifo, non- remote residential lifestyle eventually.

## How families decide....


Work satisfaction

- Remuneration
- Working hours
- Training and advancement



Family life cycle

- Children's educational needs
- Family support
- Health services
- Social activities
- Career opportunities for family
- Accommodation



If we look at the 2 decision making criteria in more detail we can see that Work satisfaction includes remuneration, working hours also career opportunities for training and advancement.

The developmental needs of family members include the educational needs of children and other family members; the availability of family and other psychosocial support; access to health services; social activities together with employment and career opportunities for family members.

Work satisfaction was reported as being the main criteria to be addressed in the past but recently more people with families are giving even weight to both family needs and work satisfaction – this could in part be related to the boom in the industry and the associated skill shortage

Some people in the study stated they would never try the alternate option ie if they were residential they would always be residential and similarly if they were fifo. This was based on moral or ethical reasons or was based on personal experience.

Some people with a rural upbringing were more opposed to fifo while those who had an urban upbringing and family in Perth were less likely to opt for residential employment.

Those who had extended family in mining towns were more likely to choose residential employment.



For the majority of participants, an adapted version of the family life-cycle provides a useful framework to help answer our questions of how and why individuals choose either fifo or residential employment at any particular time.

### Ages and stages: Singles.....

- FIFO
  - Social and sporting life
  - Opportunities to form relationships
  - Savings
  - Access to family



“I’d say about 50% of our people are fifo – single women, single blokes.”  
(Contract supervisor)

More single people in our sample chose the fifo option. The reasons they gave for choosing this were the social and sporting options offered in Perth. It gives them a better opportunity to form relationships and to meet potential partners.

Those on the shorter rosters also had the opportunity to participate in weekend sporting teams. They believe the fifo option allows them to save more as they were less likely to spend money while in camp. They did acknowledge though that some potential partners were “put off” when they said they were fifo workers.

### Ages and stages: Childless young couples.....

- FIFO
  - Partner's career
  - Social/sporting life
  - Saving
  - Access to family
  - Separate work and home




"FIFO is the better option for us at the moment, my wife would go crazy if we lived up here, but there's no way I'm going to do fifo forever." (FIFO husband)

"My partner is a professional and there is no demand for her type of work up here, FIFO works well so far, we are very independent people." (FIFO partner)

The next stage in our adapted lifecycle is that of young childless couples. These couples often chose fifo to satisfy the career and employment needs of the non-fifo partner for example one young married FIFO female employee explained how her husband doesn't want to live in a mining town as his family is in Perth and they have very strong family ties. The wife's family are all in the eastern states so she doesn't have the same need to be in Perth. FIFO at this stage in their lives allows them both to fulfil their needs.

**Ages and stages: Parents with young children.....**

- **Residential**
  - Home every night
  - There for milestones
  - Safety of small town
  - Sense of community



"In my circumstances with a young family I would find it hard to be away from them. We would prefer city life but being together as a family is more important."  
(Residential Dad)

"I did FIFO for nearly 2 years but stopped because I had young kids, it was affecting my lifestyle. . . being away from the kids all the time you miss out on so much."  
(Residential Dad)

In the next stage which is parents with young children the distribution changed in favour of residential. Young couples who had started a family were less likely to choose fifo citing the desire to be home every night so they could share in and enjoy their children's development.

In addition, parents valued the perceived greater safety for their children in the small town, where traffic was less of an issue, the children could run free and parents felt they didn't have to be so vigilant as in the city.


Parents also valued the sense of community and belonging in the town, the friendship and the bonds, where "you might not necessarily like everyone but you try to get on, where there's always someone who'll put up their hand to help".

However parents also expressed concern that they "didn't want their children to miss out on anything" and it "depends on their kids age".

Parents were also concerned about disruptions to family life because living in a mining town left employees much more vulnerable to "call outs" during their time off.

### Ages and stages: Parents with teenagers.....

- FIFO
  - Education choices
  - Social
  - Sporting options
  - Employment
  - Shopping
  - Work and home separate




"If the kids are older there are benefits for FIFO, it depends on their age" (FIFO Mum)  
"Up to primary school it's ok but high school and on I don't think it's a good place to have kids in this town." (Residential Dad)

As the children reach their teenage years families were more likely to consider the fifo option so their children have access to a wider range of social activities and opportunities for interaction with peers and importantly, access to a wider choice of secondary and tertiary education. The secondary and tertiary education options in mining towns were not necessarily seen as adequate although this does depend to some extent on the size of the mining town. As well, some partners wanted more access to employment and social activities as the demands on their time by their children became less.

### Ages and stages: Empty nesters & Divorcees.....

- FIFO
  - Be near extended family
  - Save for retirement
  - Partner's career
  - "City life"
  - Real break from work
- Residential
  - Moving easier
  - Sense of community
  - See the country



"At the end of the day it wouldn't matter whether we were here or there as long as we're together." (Residential employee)

"It depends on where you are in your life and what you want." (FIFO employee)

Once the children eventually become independent parents have the option to consider their own needs in the decision making process.

Some long-time residential employees spoke of changing in the near future to the fifo option so they could be near their children or elderly parents in Perth – yet others talked of maintaining residential employment with short term jobs as a means to travel and experience remote Australia “while they still could”. The single divorcees in the study were also split in their decision making. One chose the residential option because she enjoyed the sense of community and belonging in the smaller town. Other divorcees said the advantage of fifo allowed them to have regular access to their children or a better social life with access to prospective partners.

**When the dust settles.....**

- **Informed decisions are made**
- **Work satisfaction and family developmental needs**
- **Decisions are flexible**
- **What fits at the time**
- **Having the choice of FIFO or residential is valued**



So when the dust settles we can conclude that mining employees and their families make informed choices that are based on employment satisfaction and on their developmental needs and those of their families. These include educational, health, employment, career, social and support needs.

The salience of these needs varies according to their position in the family life cycle. At certain stages one particular mining lifestyle option may be perceived as being more suitable to meet that family's developmental needs than at another time.

In other words.....it depends.....

It is concluded that the current debate would be better informed and the arguments more respectful of those to whom the debate applies if government, industry and community stakeholders acknowledged and understood these findings.

An appreciation of these factors would assist these stakeholders to more adequately address the developmental needs of mining employees and their families.

In turn this could impact on the wellbeing of these families and on the companies ability to recruit and retain both fifo and residential employees.

And as for the answers to those other questions about the psychosocial impacts of fifo on individuals and families? All I can say at the moment is Watch this space!



## Acknowledgements....

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  - BHP Billiton Iron Ore
  - Terex



I would like to acknowledge and thank those people and the employers who generously participated in this study.

As you may have noticed I like to use strong visual images in my presentations as an aid to understanding and memory.

It's probably the result of my former life as a teacher.

So I would like to acknowledge the photographers and the photographees, most of whom are family members and some of whom work in the mining industry.

Also the companies who permitted me to use the photos of their operations, and Jon Davison who provided the .flying photos

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Thank you for your time. Are there any questions or comments?