Working FIFO – is it for me?
A guide for Aboriginal people who want to work in the FIFO industry
What is FIFO?

FIFO (fly-in fly-out) is a popular working arrangement in the mining, construction, oil and gas industries.

FIFO employees fly in to their work site for the duration of their roster, before flying home. While on site the employer generally provides accommodation, catered meals, cleaning and recreation facilities for workers.

Some companies aim to employ more Aboriginal people, especially in the Western Australian resources industry.

FIFO can be a great opportunity offering several benefits however, being away from home and family for long periods of time can impact your lifestyle. For an Aboriginal person, this can be challenging as family is such a big part of Aboriginal culture.

Benefits and challenges of FIFO

Working FIFO is a personal choice, below are some positives and negatives to think about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>Financial rewards</td>
<td>Managing your spending, budgeting, credit card debts if you lose your job</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work/live in new locations</td>
<td>Isolation, working long shifts, sometimes in extreme weather conditions</td>
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<td>Meeting new friends and your worksite may offer free access to gym, pool or social activities</td>
<td>Relationship strain, missing out on family and social events back home</td>
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<td>More holiday time if you combine your annual leave with your rostered time at home</td>
<td>Adapting to shift work can impact your health and wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your worksite may offer free meals and accommodation as part of your contract</td>
<td>You may have to share accommodation, limited meal choices, no access to purchase meals/supplies outside of the work camp</td>
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What sort of jobs can I do working FIFO?
Different types of jobs are available, for both men and women. Below are some examples.

- Boilermaker/welder
- Chef/cook
- Cleaner
- Driver (truck/bus/other)
- Electrician
- Crane operator
- Security officer
- Nurse
- Carpenter
- Driller
- Mechanic
- Plumber
- Gardener
- Kitchen hand
- Mine manager
- Mechanical fitter

What sort of on the job training opportunities are available working FIFO?
On the job training programs available on a fly-in fly-out working arrangement include:

- pre-employment programs;
- apprenticeships and traineeships; or
- worksite specific training programs.

Where can I find out about FIFO opportunities?

- employer websites – register your interest and receive regular FIFO vacancy updates;
- employer facebook pages;
- Mining Australia International website at australia-mining.com; and
- a general internet search.

Aboriginal Workforce Development Centres
Occasionally the Aboriginal Workforce Development Centres (AWDC) will promote FIFO opportunities to registered job seekers.

AWDC contact details:

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<tr>
<th>City</th>
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<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>9224 6535</td>
<td><a href="mailto:awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au">awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broome</td>
<td>9192 6763</td>
<td><a href="mailto:broome.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au">broome.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunbury</td>
<td>9722 9550</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bunbury.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au">bunbury.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton</td>
<td>9964 6345</td>
<td><a href="mailto:geraldton.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au">geraldton.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalgoorlie</td>
<td>9091 3560</td>
<td><a href="mailto:kalgoorlie.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au">kalgoorlie.awdc@dtwd.wa.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep in mind that the amount of FIFO jobs available can change. At times there may be lots of jobs advertised but if cutbacks happen, there may not be as many jobs out there to apply for.
**Do I need a driver’s licence?**

Most companies will want you to hold a C Class manual driver’s licence, usually for at least two years, to be eligible to apply for a job with them. Some may also need you to have a Heavy Rigid (HR) licence so that you can drive heavy vehicles such as trucks and buses.

If you want to work FIFO but do not hold a licence to drive a car, start doing some driver training to get your licence. If you are still at school, your school may offer learner driver training through the Keys4Life program to get you started.

**Retaining your driver’s licence is essential. If you are working FIFO and lose your licence, this will impact on your employment, especially if you are expected to operate vehicles.**

**FIFO life**

**Roster**

Your roster (also known as ‘swing’) identifies the number of shifts you will be working. Different sites have different rosters. A common FIFO roster in mining is two weeks on, one week off. More remote sites may have longer term rosters such as one month on, one month off.

Examples of FIFO rosters:

- 8 days at work / 6 days home
- 2 weeks at work / 1 week home
- 6 weeks at work / 2 weeks home
- 12 weeks at work / 4 weeks home

On most sites you will be expected to work 12 hour shifts, with a combination of days and nights. It may take two to three swings to adjust to your roster.

**Sites**

Each site will have different conditions, allowances, salaries, travel conditions and recreational facilities.

Most FIFO sites are isolated therefore, there may be little or no opportunity to go anywhere outside the camp site.

**Village life**

- Village accommodation rooms are usually called ‘dongas’.
- Dongas vary from site to site but are usually one furnished room with a small bathroom. Cleaning services are generally provided but you should still keep it clean and tidy.
- Most villages have a gym, pool, tennis and basketball courts, laundry facilities, mobile phone coverage, dining room or dry mess with meals cooked for you.
- If you are working on a construction site building a new village then you might have fewer amenities. Some villages are referred to as ‘fly camps’ or ‘construction camps’ and are generally smaller and become part of the new village once it is completed.
- Many FIFO workers (all cultures) enjoy having a drink after work to help them wind down, however research shows that alcohol does not help to reduce stress in the long term. Worksites also conduct random alcohol and drug testing so you need to stay clean and healthy.
- Companies often organise recreational activities for employees to take part in.
What can I expect from my employer?

Each employer is different however below is some general information to be aware of.

Personal leave/cultural leave

Depending on your contract and working conditions you should be able to take personal leave to cover things like illness, carer’s responsibilities or bereavement leave.

Your leave credits will start building up from your first day of work, based on the number of hours you work. If you need to access emergency leave and you do not have any credits, speak to your employer and let them know what has happened. They may have systems in place to deal with this.

Depending on your contract of employment, you may also be eligible to take parental leave. If you are unsure contact your Manager or Human Resource team.

As an Aboriginal person, you may have a personal, community and cultural obligation to attend funerals or ‘sorry business’. Many Aboriginal people have large extended families and networks so at times extra leave might be required. If this does happen, let your employer know and negotiate the amount of leave you need to take.

Safety and health

Your employer is responsible for providing and maintaining a safe working environment so you will get lots of training and will be provided with any personal protective equipment (PPE) you need to wear.

Reconciliation Action Plan

Most companies will have a Reconciliation Action Plan to show their commitment and respect for Aboriginal culture, building strong relationships and creating job opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Cultural awareness

Cultural awareness training may be in place for employees and contractors. This training will help non Aboriginal employees understand Aboriginal people and their history and why they sometimes have to participate in cultural or ceremonial events or attend funerals.

Employee Assistance Program

Your workplace may offer a free of charge workplace Employee Assistance Program for you and your immediate family members. These programs help you deal with personal problems that might impact on your job performance, health and wellbeing.

Employee Assistance Programs are usually run by external companies so that your confidentiality is maintained. An example is a free counselling or mentoring service.

Support

Your workplace may have a range of mentoring and support programs and family and community support programs. Speak to your Manager or Human Resource team.
Aboriginal culture on site

If you know someone already working FIFO it is a good idea to have a yarn to hear about their experiences. This will give you an idea of what to expect.

If you are a visitor to other Aboriginal people’s Country it is important to behave in a respectful manner. If you are not sure about this, check with your Manager, Human Resource team or if you feel more comfortable have a yarn with your Aboriginal work mates.

Listen to Traditional Owners, if you work with people from the local Traditional Owner group, learn from them and be respectful – it’s ok if they do not acknowledge you. There could be a reason, such as a cultural practice you are not aware of.

There may be some areas of land you need to access but are not permitted to enter for cultural reasons. If you know where you are going to be working maybe have a yarn with an Elder or an Aboriginal community member to find out more. Your Manager, Human Resource team, Aboriginal work mates or the Land and Sea Council responsible for the area may also be able to let you know if there is anything you need to be aware of.

Deadly salary

Some companies offer deadly salaries to attract and keep employees – your salary will depend on the type of work you are doing.

It is a good idea to learn how to manage your salary and budget to make the most of your money. For example, saving or paying off existing debt and managing your day to day expenses.

Some companies offer budget management training for employees who have suddenly gone from small to very large incomes.

Your extended family or friends might expect you to help them out once you earn a regular wage. Family, Elders or friends working FIFO may be able to offer some advice on how to manage this.

Tips

• Have a yarn with your bank about setting up a second bank account to put away savings and learn how to reduce bank fees.
• Your company may also have arrangements in place to manage your salary in different accounts. This is something you can discuss with your employer when you start.
• Enjoy your well earned money but remember to plan ahead – it is easy to get carried away with buying a new car or signing up for credit cards but make sure you also save money at the same time.
• Keep some money aside for unexpected costs. If you miss your flight back to the worksite, some companies might ask you to pay for the flight, you might need money for fuel to get to the airport or you might need to catch a taxi.
• The FIFO industry can be unpredictable and sometimes companies need to downsize or put off employees. Avoiding debt or committing to expenses too far into the future makes good sense.

Set some money saving strategies. Check out the following resources to get started.

**Money Smart**
W: moneysmart.gov.au

**Australian Securities and Investments Commission**
Indigenous Help Line
T: 1300 300 630
FIFO tips

FIFO working arrangements have their challenges and it will take a little while for you and your family to adjust to this new lifestyle. Below are some tips to help you and your family decide if FIFO is the right choice for you.

When considering a FIFO working arrangement
• Have a think about what it could mean for you and your home/family life before you apply for a job.
• If you know someone already working FIFO have a yarn with them to hear about their experiences so that you have an idea of what to expect.

Before you start
• When negotiating your employment contract, consider the roster that will best suit your lifestyle.
• Get all of the details about your employment contract and the conditions before you start.
• Have a plan in place for emergency situations for your family at home. For example keep a list of contact numbers, such as your family doctor, local hospital and your company’s airline and share this with your family.
• Have a plan in place with your family if you need to take emergency leave for a sick child or family member, you might be working at an isolated site that you cannot get home from immediately.

Getting into the swing of it
• Put up lots of photos of things that make you happy. This could be a partner, family, friends, favourite holiday spots, pets, whatever you like. Just remember if you are sharing accommodation you may need to put these away when you go home.
• It may take two to three swings to adjust to the longer working hours and the night shifts so make sure you get plenty of sleep and eat well.
• Make a real effort to exercise and maintain a healthy diet, this will help with mood and motivation.
• Make time to relax by reading, artwork, exercising, socialising with your work colleagues/friends so you feel less isolated.
• Have a yarn with your work mates, family members or friends about any concerns or difficulties you may be having. There is no shame in talking about how you are feeling.
• Remember that other Aboriginal work mates can be a great support as they will understand the challenges you face. They might have some ideas to help you adjust to the FIFO lifestyle.
• If you start to feel isolated or depressed and your employer has an Employee Assistance Program, you can use this to seek professional help. You might prefer to have a yarn with a mate, your Manager, Human Resources, your partner or whoever you feel most comfortable with. Some people feel asking for help is a weakness but it is actually a strength.
• Don’t be too hard on yourself. Allow time to adjust to your new FIFO lifestyle. Working FIFO is different to a regular local job. It’s a lifestyle change as well.

Balancing work life/home life/relationships
• Stay in regular contact with your family by telephone, email or Skype.
• Keep your communication open and honest. If you are having a hard day or feeling down, talk to your family.
• Plan some quality family time when you return home. This may include picnics, going to the beach or having a BBQ.
• Make time to take your children out on your own during your break to have some one on one time with them and to give the other parent a break.
• Speak to your children as often as possible while you are away, preferably before bed time.
• Reschedule family and holiday celebrations to dates that fall during your time home.
• Take care of yourself and take some time out for ‘you’ after work or when you are home.
### Support for you and your family

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<th>Service</th>
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| **Family Help Line**                        | A confidential telephone counselling and information service for families with relationship difficulties. | T: 1800 643 000  
W: dcp.wa.gov.au/crisisandemergency                                                |
| **Relationships Australia – Moorditj Yarning**| An opportunity to have a yarn about issues worrying you. Moorditj Yarning can come to you if you prefer or you can visit them. | T: 1300 364 277 or (08) 9489 6381  
W: relationships.org.au                                                              |
| **Beyond Blue – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Program**               | Provides support and information around anxiety and depression.              | T: 1300 884 636  
W: beyondblue.org.au                                                                  |
| **Moorditj Yarning**                        | An opportunity to have a yarn about issues worrying you. Moorditj Yarning can come to you if you prefer or you can visit them. | T: 1300 364 277 or (08) 9489 6381  
W: relationships.org.au                                                              |
| **Religious Australia – Moorditj Yarning**  | A crisis support and suicide prevention service, available 24 hours a day, seven days week. | T: 13 11 14  
W: lifeline.org.au                                                                    |
| **Mensline Australia**                      | Offer a national telephone counselling, support and referral service for men. | T: 1300 737 732  
W: menslineaus.org.au                                                                 |
| **Women’s Information Services**            | A women’s service seeking information and/or referral for health issues, finances, legal matters, counselling and domestic violence. | T: 1800 199 174 or 9264 1900  
W: health.wa.gov.au/services                                                            |
| **Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service (AADS)** | Provides culturally secure and holistic programs and strategies for individuals and families. | T: 1800 198 024  
W: aads.org.au                                                                             |
| **Alcohol and Drug Information Services (ADIS)** | A confidential, non-judgemental helpline for assistance with alcohol or other drug use. This is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. | T: 1800 198 024 or 9442 5000  
W: dao.health.wa.gov.au                                                                  |
| **Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service Inc**     | Provide a range of health services for Aboriginal people including counselling. | T: 9421 3888  
W: dyhs.org.au                                                                               |
| **Health Direct Australia**                 | Provides a range of free health services plus a 24 hour health advice service. | T: 1800 022 222  
W: healthdirect.gov.au                                                                  |
| **FIFO Families Enhancement Service**       | Provides FIFO employees and their families with information, tools and support to ensure they can effectively manage FIFO arrangements. | T: 1800 998 399 or 6330 5400  
W: fifo.whfs.org.au                                                                              |
| **Parenting Line**                          | A telephone information and support service on parenting that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. | T: 1800 654 432 or 6279 1200  
| **Australian Securities and Investments Commission** | If you feel you need help with your money, there is assistance for Aboriginal people. | T: 1300 365 967  
W: moneysmart.gov.au                                                                 |
| **Ruah Community Services**                 | Offers a range of free, confidential services to address the health and social needs of the community. | T: 9485 3939  
W: ruah.com.au                                                                               |
Salathiel’s story

I absolutely love my job! Working FIFO has allowed me to earn a deadly salary and means I can permanently base myself in Europe and fly to Australia for work.

My roster is two weeks on, two weeks off, then two weeks on and four weeks off (over a 10 week cycle). Basically I only work four weeks out of every 10 which means I only work approximately 20-22 weeks each year.

This kind of roster is not very common but it works for me and gives me lots of extra time to travel and do the things I enjoy.

When considering a FIFO working arrangement work towards getting a position with a roster that suits your needs and lifestyle. It’s great to earn good money, but there is no point in burning yourself out by working an insane amount of hours in an isolated area without your family and friends close by. I also recommend ensuring your loved ones back home have a reliable support network around them so that in the event of an emergency they will be taken care of in your absence.

Salathiel McKay was the WA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year in 2009.