Camp site 'prisons' risk FIFO cabin fear

Peter Williams

Federal Labor MP Alannah MacTiernan has compared some resources site camps to prisons.

The shadow parliamentary secretary for regional development and infrastructure made the comment yesterday during a discussion about the mental health and suicides of fly-in, fly-out workers.

Ms MacTiernan said FIFO accommodation should be incorporated into nearby towns to prevent "cabin fever" among workers.

"Some of those camps, they are a bit like prisons," the former State planning and infrastructure minister said. "People are not really allowed to leave.

"(FIFO workers) make good money out of this and they enjoy that, and they can set themselves up. But we can make this more sustainable."

She added that roster lengths that kept employees away from families for long periods should also be changed.

Ms MacTiernan was participating in a panel discussion at the Australian Mines and Metals Association's national conference in Perth.

She found some support from Transfield Services chairwoman Diane Smith-Gander on housing greater numbers of workers in places such as Karratha. "Other countries can do it, we should too," Ms Smith-Gander said.

AMMA chief executive Steve Knott said the matter should be treated as occupational health issue.

"We should not make the judgment that everyone wants even-time rosters, or two and one rosters," Mr Knott said.

"What we need to do is make sure the safety systems are in place."

He said suicide rates at remote work sites were far worse than official statistics indicated.

Making it sustainable: AMMA's Q&A panel with Tony Jones.

Safer: Steve Knott, Dio Wang, Alannah MacTiernan, Tony Jones, Chris Back, Diane Smith-Gander and Deidre Willmott. Pictures: Michael O'Brien

Town houses: Chris Back, Diane Smith-Gander and Deidre Willmott.