

to rural and remote health in areas of shortage and in some communities there is no other choice.

But it said the design and operation of FIFO health services must provide support to healthcare workers already on the ground rather than contribute to the closure of existing health and aged care services.

“The dismantling or deterioration of existing health infrastructure and shrinkage of the local resident health workforce makes it even harder for the community to retain its existing health professionals or to attract a new workforce — even a visiting one,” the submission said.

While advocating for its own members, NRHA has also raised concerns about the health of the growing number of FIFO workers it sometimes ends up treating, such as mining staff. It has recommended that there should be research into the impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing of FIFO workers and their families.

The Australian Medical Association’s Western Australia branch agrees. AMA WA president David Mountain told the inquiry there is a “noticeable dearth” of research and evidence into the full impact of FIFO practices on health, communities and small business.

“Recent reports have shown significant health concerns around FIFO workers, ranging from diabetes, to obesity, mental health and heart issues, and it is important that any review involves this key area,” Dr Mountain said.

In its submission to the inquiry the Royal Flying Doctor Service emphasised the importance of using FIFO staff to supplement local services. It also raised concerns about the impacts on its budget and ability to deliver services of increasing numbers of FIFO workers.

“If the FIFO workforce continues to grow the strain on RFDS health services is likely to increase,” it said. •

## LINKS

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# Ghost town warning

## Soaring insurance costs hit unit owners.



GETTY IMAGES

**HIGH RISE:** *Complaints about insurance hikes for units*

**T**he north Queensland town of Airlie Beach, renowned as a base from which to explore the Whitsundays, could become a ghost town because of massive increases in insurance costs.

At a community forum on residential strata title insurance, the House of Representatives Social Policy and Legal Affairs Committee heard that an increasing number of unit owners are finding themselves in arrears and in some instances forced to sell, as they face massive increases in levies brought on by insurance premium hikes.

These unit owners — often retirees — do not have the option of increasing the rents they charge to help cover their costs because there are already so many vacant units in the small town.

Airlie Beach unit owner Saro Kelly told the committee about the stress she is experiencing after her body corporate insurance increased more than 400 per cent in one year.

“I am the chair of the body corporate for a group of eight units. I have owned my unit there for almost

nine years. We have had no insurance claims over that period at all. As of just over 12 months ago, we were with Zurich Insurance and we were paying — this is for body corporate insurance — \$3,500 per annum. We went to renew that policy and they came back to us with a renewal amount of \$18,283.42,” she said.

“We then started, after having a bit of a moment, to look around at other insurers. There were two things upsetting at that point. One was that there were only a handful of insurers that were offering body corporate insurance. The second was that the best offer we could find ended up being through one of our local brokers, Oceanic Insurance — the policy was from AMP — and was for \$7,877.”

She said her unit has become unaffordable and she is going backwards financially.

“I cannot put the rent up. I have had to give my tenant a rent reduction because there are so many vacant units in our area. I am lucky to actually have a tenant and I am grateful for that.

## NEWS

But the financial hardship out of the situation has been extreme.”

Anthony O'Rourke, chairman of a body corporate of nine units in Airlie Beach, told the committee insurance premiums had risen 225 per cent in one year.

“In 2009-10 our insurance was \$4,500. That increased in the following year, 2010-11, to \$14,500. Then last year, 2011-12, it went up to \$32,500. It was actually \$35,000 but I managed to get our broker to waive his fee, so we made a saving there.”

He said there was a glimmer of hope with an increasing number of miners coming to the town looking for places to rent.

While Airlie Beach appears to have been particularly badly affected, the financial difficulties caused by insurance hikes are affecting towns right along the coast, including Mackay and Proserpine.

Mackay resident and treasurer of a 20 unit body corporate, Mark Faulkner said their insurance costs went from around \$25,000 to \$102,000 in just a year.

“Our research has shown that if you have a stand-alone, four bedroom, split level house, your average insurance costs for that sort of dwelling are around \$2,000 to \$2,500, depending on your provider. On our calculations, we are paying in excess of \$5,000 per unit for having our insurance cover,” he said.

Mackay body corporate manager, Susan Seymour, said the insurance increases are impacting coastal areas.

“I am a branch manager for Body Corporate Services in Mackay. We look after over 120 buildings in Mackay, Moranbah, Emerald, Airlie Beach, Yeppoon and Rockhampton. The increase in insurance is coastal. You can get insurance for the inland and it has remained fairly stable. Airlie Beach has been hit significantly harder than any other region on the coast,” she said.

“Airlie will become a ghost town with empty units.”

The committee's report was released in March. •

## LINKS

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# Strike fighter may fall short

## Concerns raised over combat capabilities.



DEFENCE DIGITAL MEDIA

**DOG FIGHT:** *Aircraft performance questioned*

**A**viation experts have warned federal parliament's Defence Committee that Australia's multi-billion dollar Joint Strike Fighter program looms as an expensive failure due to the jet fighter's limited stealth ability to avoid radar and weapons systems.

Peter Goon from the aviation think tank Air Power Australia told the committee he believes the F35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters, due for delivery in 2015, will struggle in combat against more stealthy fighters being developed by both China and Russia. He said the F35 was developed to complement the faster, more agile F22A Raptor, which the United States government will not sell to its allies.

“The Joint Strike Fighter is now more expensive than the larger and over three times more capable F22A Raptor,” Mr Goon said.

“Russia and China are now well advanced in their production of advanced stealth fighters specifically intended to be competitive with the superior United States F22A Raptor. The inferior Joint Strike Fighter, defined in aerodynamic performance and stealth only to attack lightly defended battlefield ground targets, has no prospect of ever successfully competing against these larger, more agile, higher flying and

much faster foreign stealth fighters, which also happen to be better armed.”

Mr Goon said the very limited stealth capabilities of the Joint Strike Fighter were inadequate for avoiding and surviving from threats such as advanced long range surface-to-air missiles and modern counter-stealth sensors and detection systems.

Air Power Australia's Dr Carlo Kopp queried the limitations in modern warfare of an aircraft with only enough stealth to evade attack from battlefield surface-to-air missile systems. He claimed the JSF's joint operational requirements document set very low expectations for the aircraft's speed, turning performance and agility and also for its stealth performance.

Dr Kopp told MPs that of the current range of stealth aircraft out there, the only ones that are difficult to see from nearly all directions and by a wide range of radars are the B2 batwing bomber and the F22 Raptor. He believed the JSF was really only stealthy in performance from the direction over the aircraft's nose, meaning it is only hard for radars to detect from the front, but can be seen from the sides, behind and below.

“That has big implications in combat, because if you are going up against a 1980s Soviet air defence system