

QUEENSLAND COAL MINING BOARD OF INQUIRY

AFFIDAVIT OF JOE BARBER

I, **Joe Barber**, of [REDACTED] in the State of Queensland, coal mine worker, solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare:

Background

1. I am employed as a fitter (the **Position**) by Oaky Creek Coal Pty Ltd (the **Company**) to perform work at the Oaky North Coal Mine.
2. I commenced employment in the Position on a permanent full-time basis in or about 2007 and remain employed to this day. I have been on long service leave since June 2020 and plan to resign when my leave is exhausted.
3. The Oaky North Coal Mine (the **Mine**) is an underground mine that is managed by Oaky Creek Coal Pty Ltd, which is a company that is owned by Glencore. It is located approximately 16.5 kilometres, or 15 minutes of driving, away from Tieri in central Queensland.
4. I have been a member of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union (and its predecessors) (**CFMEU**) for approximately 40 years.

SSHR

5. In addition to the duties associated with my Position, I was elected by the Mine's workforce to be the Site Safety and Health Representative (**SSHR**) pursuant to s.93 of the *Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999* (Qld) (the **CMSH Act**). My latest election term was three years and it expired in approximately June 2020.
6. There are generally two elected SSHRs working at the Mine at any time.
7. I was first elected to be an SSHR in either 2013 or 2014 and I continued to be an elected SSHR until mid-2020. Each time I was elected no one else nominated.

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Signed: [REDACTED]

AFFIDAVIT

Taken by: [REDACTED]

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8. In 2017 there was another SSHR elected at the Mine, Randel Meier. He has recently been re-elected for another term of three years.

Training

9. Before I was eligible to be elected as a SSHR, I had to complete certain courses so that I satisfied the training and qualification requirements of ss.93(3) and 95(1) of the CMSH Act. I had to complete the S1, S2, S3 and S4 courses before I could nominate, and the company paid for the training and the time taken for me to complete it. That was the only training that I have been provided by the company for the performance of the SSHR role.
10. During my time as an SSHR, much of the training that I received was provided by the CFMEU. For example, I attended a four-day workshop that is run by the CFMEU on a yearly basis, except for 2020 because the workshop was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The company always allowed me to attend that training.
11. Further, the company would send myself and my fellow SSHR to an annual industry health and safety conference. The conference kept us updated about current topics, trends and innovations with respect to health and safety in the industry. I would describe the purpose of the conference as education, rather than training in how to perform the role of an SSHR.

Election process for SSHRs at the Mine

12. Elections for SSHRs at the Mine generally occur every three years or when someone resigns. My understanding is that there is also an ability for the Senior Site Executive (the **SSE**) of the Mine to extend a term of appointment beyond three years if they consider it to be appropriate.
13. When the term for an SSHR is nearly concluded there is a call for nominations from the workforce. Everyone in the pit is invited to nominate because the SSHRs are there to represent all coal mine workers, regardless of whether they are permanent employees or not, union members or not. As part of the call for nominations, I have been approached by management of the Mine and asked to nominate, and I have also been asked to nominate by other workers. You can be nominated by others, or you can nominate yourself if you want to.
14. As far as I am aware, once the nominations are finalised, the SSE then applies to the Chief Inspector for permission to conduct an election.

15. If more than one candidate nominates for each SSHR position, there will be an election. If there is only one nomination for each position, then we are appointed on an unopposed basis without the need for an election.
16. When there is an election there is a returning officer that is elected by the workforce. For the most recent election, which occurred approximately two months ago, the returning officer was the Australian Electoral Company.
17. When I was first elected as a SSHR I was sent written correspondence by way of email from the SSE confirming that I was appointed. The SSE then updated the mine record to include my appointment.
18. There was also a photo added to the workforce noticeboard so that workers were able to easily identify who I was. The noticeboard for employees at the mine contains a very small place for SSHR information and that is where the SSHR photographs are placed.
19. I recall that my appointment was also announced during pre-start meetings.
20. I am not aware of any particular problems in relation to the election of SSHRs at the Mine. The only issue that I can identify is that no one else wants to be nominated and it is always the same people being nominated and elected and re-elected. People seem to be either too scared to put their hand up to nominate for the role, or they don't want to take on more duties than the ones they already have.

Facilitation of performance of SSHR role

21. In my experience, the extent to which management facilitated my being able to perform the role of SSHR was inconsistent and was dependent on the individual approach of managers.
22. I was always released by the company to attend the CFMEU training, and members of senior management were usually pretty good in facilitating my being able to perform the role of SSHR. It generally depended on a "flavour of the month basis" as to whether or not individual managers and deputies would have an issue with my being released from my duties to perform the role of SSHR.
23. Throughout the duration of being elected as a SSHR, I was continually questioned about performance in my role as a fitter by lower level members of management. There was one supervisor in particular who was an engineer and he used to create a level of pushback about my being released from my fitter role to perform SSHR duties. There were many occasions where he said to me words to the effect of:

"Is your role as a fitter less important than your role as a SSHR?"

"Your work better not be getting affected by that [SSHR] role."

"Which role do you think is more important? The one that you are employed in or the one that you are elected into?"

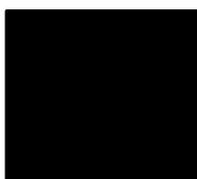
24. When I was required to do safety investigations, I would be allocated time to do that, but there were many occasions where I would have to push very hard with the lower level managers to be released from my duties as a fitter in order to perform my duties as a SSHR. I was eventually released to do the inspection, but there were big arguments needed for that to happen.
25. There was also an issue in relation to shifts whereby both SSHRs at the mine were sometimes rostered on for the same shifts. I approached the Mine's management team, including the SSE, my manager, and their managers, and tried to negotiate an arrangement for the SSHRs to be rostered on opposite shifts so that there was always an SSHR around. I was particularly interested in being appointed on a 7/7 roster because I identified that that would be the most favourable basis for which SSHR rostering would work.
26. There was a huge amount of pushback from all levels of management in relation to my request. I was accused of trying to get a better roster for myself and not caring properly about my SSHR role. Earlier in 2020, for approximately two months, I was changed to a 7/7 roster, however I was recently changed back. I have since decided to go on long service leave and intend to resign from my employment at the Mine when my leave has been exhausted, partly in response to this issue.
27. In my view it is very difficult to do both your job and the role of SSHR competently. If you get called away from your usual job for something urgent, you are inevitably met with words to the effect of, *"why haven't you done this"* and similar. It feels as though lower level members of management are constantly at you and you are always met with resistance for stopping your duties to go and deal with safety matters in the capacity of a SSHR.
28. Because of the competing priorities between the fitter role and the SSHR role, one of them always loses out to the other.

Participation in inspections

29. As a SSHR I was always told about inspections that would be occurring by the Inspectorate or an ISHR. I was always advised both verbally and by email.

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30. There were occasions where I heard a management representative tell the employees during pre-start meetings that there would be an inspection, however it didn't always happen. The workforce is also sometimes told when there is an ISHR or inspector coming to do an inspection
31. I was always released from my fitter duties to participate in inspections with a member of the Inspectorate or an ISHR. I was also released from my duties to participate in meetings with members of the Inspectorate and ISHRs.
32. During all inspections with members of the Inspectorate and ISHRs I was required to have a member of staff always present with us. As the SSHR, I still had a level of control over where I could ask the person conducting the inspection with me to go, however the staff member would come with us and needed to see what we were seeing with our own eyes. There was a perception that, in the absence of the staff member seeing exactly what we were complaining about, we were making the issue up.
33. Every single time there was a notification provided to the Mine regarding an upcoming inspection, there would always be a frantic clean-up around the Mine. In my view inspections would be much more effective if there was an ability for members of the Inspectorate or ISHRs to arrive for an inspection on an unannounced basis. They would then see what was really going on at the Mine and not just what the management wants them to see.
34. In my experience a lot of employees do not take the role of SSHR, Inspector or ISHR seriously. I recall doing an inspection one day with a member of the Inspectorate and we were underground. The workforce knew about the inspection because they had been told during pre-start and as we were walking to one heading area, we saw a worker standing on a platform and engaging in a practice that was a profound breach of the safety legislation. It was apparent to me that the worker had no respect for the fact that there was an inspection occurring, or his obligations under the CSMH Act.
35. When we saw what the worker was doing, the Inspector looked at me and said words to the effect of, *"I'll let you deal with that"*. I then approached the worker and immediately told him to cease doing what he was doing. I then went back to the Inspector and he told me that the next time he saw that worker do something he would cut his head off but the inspector gave me a chance to speak to the worker and resolve the matter at the local level first.

Stopping unsafe work

36. On a handful of occasions during my time as an SSHR I was required to direct that unsafe work cease under s.101 of the CMSH Act. There was one occasion, in approximately 2016, where my fellow SSHR Randall Meier and I jointly gave such a direction regarding the safety and health management system at the mine, which direction was formally documented as required.
37. There have also been countless occasions where I have informally advised individuals about unsafe work practices that should cease, without giving a formal direction to that effect under s.101 of the CMSH Act.

ISHRs

38. I would say that 80-90% of the issues that you encounter as an SSHR are relatively trivial matters that can be resolved quite quickly at the workplace level. It is the other 10% of matters that I would usually involve an ISHR in, primarily because the issue would need to be escalated. I would also contact the ISHRs if I needed some advice or assistance in relation to resolving a workplace safety issue.
39. I would estimate the frequency of contact with the ISHRs as being at least monthly. I would generally contact Stephen Woods. I have also on occasion called Jason Hill, but that was probably only two to three times over the last six years.
40. I also had a very good relationship with the Inspectorate and have found the inspectors that I know to be very approachable and easy to deal with. I maintained an open line of communication with inspectors where possible.

Interactions with management

41. I found that the senior managers at the Mine were generally pretty good with safety issues that I brought to them in my capacity as a SSHR. The conversations were always amicable but there was often a difference in opinion. I am the type of person who doesn't back down, so it was in my nature to make management listen to me and I would keep pushing the issue until they did listen.

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42. As I have identified above, the issues that I had in relation to my performance of the role of SSHR were predominantly in relation to lower level managers. I have always found the SSEs to be approachable, but the attitudes of individual managers have always differed in terms of their approachability based on the different personalities involved. I have often found that it's how you do something as opposed to what you do, so I have always been mindful in the manner in which I approach people to avoid unnecessary confrontation.
43. There was an incident that I had with a mechanical engineer during an inspection a couple of years ago which involved him being so aggressive towards me that I ended up having to tell him to start treating me with respect. I got the impression that he had no respect for the powers and functions that I had as a SSHR and I was left with no choice but to put him in his place about it.
44. In my experience there are a lot of local level managers who don't have any respect for the level of power that SSHRs have. Senior management does, but not individual managers. I know they know what powers we have, but they make you push for it and they do their best to try and keep you in the dark about things. There have been countless occasions where I have heard about a safety incident occurring and then been left to talk to workers to find out what has really happened because local managers didn't help me to get to the bottom of it. On such occasions they didn't volunteer information and you had to do the legwork yourself to find anything out.
45. There is one local manager, the Mine Manager, Mike Downs, who is very respectful to me. I consider that he treats me with the utmost respect and I also try to do the same with him. He calls me Mr SSHR as a joke. We have a very good relationship together and I try to approach him directly about issues where possible. If I can't speak to him, I will often just go straight to the SSE and keep pushing on a matter until they relent. I find it's easier to deal with senior management where possible, so I am not wasting time arguing with lower level managers.
46. The lower level managers sometimes take things a little bit too hard when you try to talk about safety matters with them. My previous immediate manager [REDACTED] was always on my back about being a SSHR and I got the impression that he did not like the fact that I was elected into the position. He was one of the managers who always made it difficult for me to be released from my fitter duties to be able to perform the SSHR duties.

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47. There was one issue that I had with [REDACTED] who got very upset with me when I had to stop work at a jobsite for an unsafe work practice. He wrote a full report and demanded that I did the same. He then went to the SSE and slammed the full report that he had prepared onto the desk and the SSE told him to "piss off" and sided with me. The local level manager also alleged that because I had had an argument with him the day prior that I was misusing my SSHR role position deliberately to take revenge against him. The SSE rejected his claims and supported me.
48. It is these sorts of examples that reinforce what I am saying about the difference in management levels. In my experience, the higher the manager is the more likely they are to respect the role of SSHR. The lower the manager is, the less likely they will respect the role of SSHR.
49. In my role as an SSHR I was regularly invited to participate in risk assessment processes and in the review of safety and health management system documents that were due to expire. Usually those activities would be undertaken by one or the other of the SSHRs at the Mine but not both. Representatives of management listened to our input and respected our right to refuse to sign off on new documentation if we were not happy with it. Overall, I found those activities to be a very constructive form of engagement with management about safety matters.

Notification of HPIs

50. As a SSHR I am not always told about notifications of HPIs that occur at the Mine. I would say that I heard about most of them but that is only because I speak to the other SSHRs and the ISHRs.
51. If you are not the SSHR that received the verbal notification of the incident then you are normally not told about it. The mine only ever verbally advises one SSHR and basically requires the SSHRs to keep each other in the loop.
52. I have never received a single written notification about an HPI; I have only ever been verbally notified about them. Further, I have only ever been involved in a handful of HPI investigations. It seems like the company has always deliberately excluded the SSHRs from investigating incidents.

53. There was an incident that occurred at the Oaky North Mine in relation to a worker being electrocuted in 2019. I had heard about it and was allowed to look at the scene the next morning, but that was as far as my involvement went. I heard nothing further about the matter, including the outcome of the investigation. That was despite my repeated attempts to try and find out more information, which were always rebuffed.
54. I asked Mr [REDACTED] the SSE Brad Watson and the Health and Safety Officer Linda Cardinaels for updates about the investigation and continually received responses to the effect:
- "I don't know. The investigation is ongoing".*
55. Despite the fact that I had shown great interest in the outcome of the investigation, I was never advised of the outcome of the investigation (if any). That was a great source of frustration for me as I felt that the workforce needed closure following such a serious incident and would have benefited from an opportunity to learn, based on the findings of the investigation, what went wrong and how to avoid the recurrence of a similar event in the future.
56. Gas exceedances frequently occur and result in an HPI being notified. I am not aware of any particular gas exceedances being unreported. In my experience, gas exceedances are very difficult situations to manage because you need to be there when it occurs to be able to do anything about it. Mines are generally very quick to get to the bottom of what has caused a gas exceedance and then putting in preventative measures to stop it from happening again.

HPI on 6 December 2019

57. I was verbally notified of the gas exceedance that occurred at the Oaky North Mine on 6 December 2019. I spoke to Mike Down, Mine Manager, who gave me some information and verbally notified me of the incident, but he did not give me much detail.
58. I was not advised until three hours after the event had occurred and, by the time I found out, they were back in production.
59. I tried to follow up the events the next day because I wanted to know why the incident occurred and what was done to prevent future incidences from re-occurring. I was denied any form of meaningful discussion in relation to that matter by every manager that I tried to speak to.

60. I know that there would have been an investigation into the issue, however I was not involved in it nor was I ever told about it. I am aware that Mr Meier also asked questions, but he was ignored as well. I know that because we personally discussed the matter.
61. After the explosion that occurred at the Grosvenor Mine on 6 May 2020 Mr Meier and I started asking a lot more questions regarding gas exceedances. I found that the easiest way to get information is to ask different managers different questions so I can gather different bits and pieces from each of them individually. I would never be told everything by the one manager.
62. I have found that the HPIs into gas exceedances, particularly the one on 6 December 2019, became more of a blame game than anything else. As soon as the gas exceedance occurs the Mine has to be evacuated, which means that they are not making any money. They then look for someone to blame, which is consistent with the culture in the mining industry regarding production over safety.

Communication of safety matters

63. There are safety updates provided to the coal mine workers at the Mine during the pre-start meetings, which occur each day. At the start of each shift, everybody talks as a big group and then we split up into individual work groups.
64. There are noticeboards at the Mine to provide updates about different types of matters to the workforce, but they are not updated with information about HPIs that occur. Generally, the only information that coal mine workers at the Mine get about HPIs that have occurred is delivered during pre-start meetings. During the pre-start meetings the workforce is sometimes told about what happened, but they don't get told about why it happened or any action that has been taken to stop it from happening again. For example, a worker might get their arm cut off and everybody would be told that the arm was cut off; but they would not be told how or what has been done to ensure that no one else's arm gets cut off.
65. During the pre-start meetings I have seen coal mine workers ask a lot of questions about HPIs that have occurred, and the standard response is usually words to the effect of:

"We are still investigating it".

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66. That is the same response that the SSHRs get when we try to ask questions. It feels like we are all kept in the dark about HPIs that occur, and we only hear what management wants to tell us.
67. There was an incident at the Mine where a person got hit with the bucket of a loader. I got to participate in the early stages of the investigation, but that was only because I pushed it with the SSE. After that, I was kept in the dark throughout the remainder of that investigation and still don't know the outcome. From this I concluded that I was deliberately excluded from any engagement with the investigation other than the early stages.
68. There have also been occasions where safety alerts are read out to the workforce during the pre-start meetings. They probably spend more time reading out safety alerts than what they do on HPI's, which they basically just really brush over.

Reporting processes

69. The SSE and management of the Mine are frequently communicating to the workforce during pre-start meetings that they should be reporting incidents and completing hazard reports when incidents occur. I personally have never heard of anybody being sacked for reporting a safety issue, however I have seen people hassled for it.
70. The people that generally hassled workers that report safety issues were the lower level managers. I have never seen an SSE hassle anyone who had raised concerns about safety.
71. There was one contractor working at the Mine who had injured himself while he was at work. This sort of treatment then creates a culture of fear because people saw how he was treated and are then too scared to report things themselves. By teaching one person a lesson you then allow another hundred see it. I think this is counter-productive to senior management's assertions that there should be an open dialogue in relation to safety and that people should report safety concerns that they have.
72. Every coal mine worker at the Mine is required to carry a Stop Look Assess Manage (**SLAM**) book with them, which is what most people know as a "take five" book. It contains lists of processes to follow when you are risk assessing a task before performing it. It is mandatory for coal mine workers at the Mine to use that when they are risk assessing a task that they are about to perform. There are also hazard forms in the SLAM book, which people are encouraged to fill out and complete.

73. As a SSHR, I am constantly communicating the need for an open dialogue between the workforce about safety issues. I have told several coal mine workers about the need to report everything and to ensure that they are constantly following the correct processes. In my view, there needs to be a paper trail created before something will be done about it and for something to be taken seriously.
74. The process that a coal mine worker must follow when identifying a safety issue is to complete a hazard report. Provided the hazard report is completed, it will always get followed up by management.
75. There have been some people, predominantly contractors, who have come to speak to me about their concerns about speaking up about safety issues and completing hazard reports. In those circumstances I try to calm them down and then I will offer to complete the hazard report for them so that my name is on it and not theirs. Many people have taken me up on this offer and I have completed hazard reports for them, so their name was kept out of it.
76. As SSHR, I was also constantly pulling people aside and trying to talk to them about completing hazard reports because I knew that a lot weren't doing so. In that respect, I would describe the role of SSHR to be constantly putting out little spot fires about safety related matters.

Contract and labour hire

77. There are approximately 130 permanent employees at the Mine plus a further 300 who are contractors or labour hire (I do not know how many of them are contractors and how many of them are labour hire). In the recent past the number of permanent employees has decreased from about 180 in 2017 to 130 today. Permanent employees that leave are generally not replaced by new permanent employees, but rather, by contractors or labour hire.
78. In my experience, I believe that contractors and labour hire workers take more risks than permanent employees do. I believe they do that because they are pressured to get the job done and they have absolutely no job security. They definitely receive more pressure to get the job done by management than what I have observed being applied to the permanent workforce.

79. I believe there is a culture amongst labour hire workers that makes them feel as though they have no job security, and that makes them too scared to report issues. They struggle to see why they should stick their neck out and lose their job in circumstances where they know that they can be let go for no reason. They are frequently let go for no reason and people see that and assume it is because they have said something that has upset somebody. The lack of information about a sudden departure of labour hire workers and contractors also creates a culture of fear.
80. In my experience, many contractors won't even to talk to SSHRs. You hear rumours about things that have occurred and then as a SSHR we need to go and find out what has happened ourselves. The contractors do not volunteer any information and we have to talk to other workers to get to the bottom of it.
81. There was recently an incident where a labour hire worker was disciplined by management and warned about unsafe conduct. Someone overheard him complaining about it in the crib room and when I was told about it, I went and spoke to the Supervising Engineer and sought permission to speak to him. The worker had turned off and restarted the ventilation fan in the development panel without the ERZ controller present. The ERZ controller is supposed to do checks before turning on or off the ventilation system and that didn't happen. There was gas in the panel at the time and he could have been sacked for what he did.
82. The permission for me to talk to him was granted and then I pulled the individual worker aside and showed him the regulations and spoke with him in a room one on one. I don't think he even knew what the legislation said until I showed it to him. He didn't seem to have any insight into what he did wrong. I quoted the relevant regulations and his obligations as a coal mine worker. I also gave a photocopy of them and gave them to him.
83. I also took the time to explain his obligations under the CSMH Act to work safely however he didn't seem very interested in speaking to me about the matter any further. He just shook his head and clearly knew that he had done something wrong.
84. In my experience coal mine workers, regardless of whether they are, labour hire, contractors or permanent employees, don't really care about the CSMH Act or the regulations.

85. Many labour hire workers don't even know about the CSMH Act or the regulations and it just demonstrates that there is a lack of education coming from the labour hire companies. The same can be said with some of the permanent workforce and it is not from lack of trying by management to educate people, but at the end of the day you can do as much training as you want to, but that does not guarantee compliance.
86. In my experience there have been several new starters who have been inducted at the Mine who were not told about the SSHRs or the roles that we perform. If I saw new employees being inducted while I was walking around the Mine, I always made an effort to go up and introduce myself to them. As far as I am aware, there is nothing in the induction pack that refers to SSHRs or the role that we perform.

Bonuses

87. As far as I am aware at the Mine everybody, including permanent employees and labour hire workers, gets a coal mine bonus. I am not sure whether the coal mine bonus for the labour hire workers is the same as the permanent workforce.
88. The bonus and number of metres achieved is always written on the noticeboard. By contrast HPIs and safety matters never are. This is a clear example of incentives being pushed to try and drive production, however very little regard is given to keeping the workforce up to date about serious safety-related matters.
89. I believe bonus structures do encourage people to not report safety incidents or injuries and to take shortcuts. Bonuses are an incentive to cut as much coal as possible, so there is the incentive there to not report things that will create downtime. It also creates an incentive to cut corners, so more coal is cut and the bonus is higher.
90. I have also heard rumours that if there is a reported injury there is no bonus payable for that month. I don't know whether that is true, but it would definitely encourage people to not report injuries if it is.

Suggestions and concerns

91. There are a variety of measures that I believe through experience could be put in place to promote a culture of safety in the coal mining sector. They are as follows:
- (a) I think that it should be mandatory for every single coal mine worker who is inducted into a coal mine to be educated about the role that SSHRs perform, and who the SSHRs are at the mine. This does not currently occur;

- (b) I believe there should be unannounced inspections conducted by both the ISHRs and the Inspectorate. This would enable a proper investigation to occur where everybody can see what is really going on at the mine. It takes away the ability for that frantic clean-up to occur so that obvious safety contraventions are not removed before the inspection;
- (c) the role of SSHR should be made a permanent full-time job on its own. SSHRs should not be required to perform alternative roles and changing this requirement would enable them to focus primarily on the role of SSHR and safety related matters. There is easily enough work to be done to justify full-time SSHR roles;
- (d) there should be legislation that mandates the rostering in relation to SSHRs to ensure that there is generally at least one SSHR on shift. It would be preferable for SSHRs to be on opposite rosters and for there to be minimal overlap;
- (e) there should be more job security in the coal mine sector. In my view job security will increase safety, because coal mine workers would have more confidence in reporting safety issues without fear of losing their jobs;
- (f) Contractors (or casual employees) are unlikely to want to perform the SSHR role because there is a job security issue, and there is also a separate issue in relation to them gaining alternative employment if they are dismissed because as soon as they advise a new employer what they did at the last mine, specifically citing that they were a SSHR, they are likely to not get the alternative employment they have applied for;
- (g) labour hire companies should be legally obligated to do more to educate labour hire workers on the legislation and regulations; and
- (h) SSHRs need to be taken more seriously and treated with more respect.

Affirmed by the deponent on 28 July 2020 at Mackay in the presence of:

Signed:

[Redacted signature]

Deponent

[Redacted signature]

Solicitor/Justice of the Peace

Olivia Lee Morgan

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Signed:

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Taken by:

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