

The \$200,000 mining commute - workers lure by generous incentives

Gemma Jones *The Daily Telegraph* May 30, 2012 12:00AM **1 comment**

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Julian Connor, 26, a mining industry consultant living in Sydney. *Source:* The Daily Telegraph

THEY have their airfares, accommodation, entertainment and meals paid for and can earn \$200,000 more than they would in Sydney.

Mine industry workers are cashing in on Australia's modern gold rush, lured from the comforts of big cities to work in remote parts of the country by generous incentives.

As controversy continues over the government's approval of 1700 foreign workers for Gina Rinehart's latest mine in Western Australia's Pilbara region, this year a recruitment company has collected 9000 people willing to try their luck at securing a mega salary.

Engineer Julian Connor, 26, from [Sydney](#), pockets \$5000 a month after tax on fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) work at a South Australian copper mine, 1000km north of Adelaide - more than he could expect to earn in NSW just four years after graduating.

The Cambridge-trained mechanical engineer spends four days at the mine before being flown home for three days. Most companies offer eight days on, six days off.

Mr Connor said the mine had a gym, a lifestyle co-ordinator to run recreation activities and his room was a "donga" with an ensuite.

"It is a big thing for companies to really provide as much as they can to keep people happy," he said.

"It is quite competitive so they will give any advantage to make life a bit better."

Former mining company director Mike Haywood set up the FIFOBids website so mining firms could bid for staff. Hays Recruitment salary figures show some mining industry workers could expect up to \$200,000 a year more in WA than in Sydney.

A project manager in Sydney on \$130,000-\$150,000 could be paid \$250,000 to \$300,000 in WA mines.

"There is a fair bit of debate at the moment," Mr Haywood said. "What this does show is local labour is available. It is actually more expensive to employ overseas - you can't pay them any less."

Living in mining towns can be prohibitive: A three-bedroom home in Port Hedland rents for \$3000 a week. Hays spokesman Simon Winfield said most mining companies were usually willing to fly in only senior workers from eastern states.

"There is an expectation you can FIFO in and out of Sydney - yes, for some senior roles, but there's generally an expectation companies will fly you to Perth and you make your own way (home)," he said.

Immigration Minister Chris Bowen said this week remote WA was not for everyone but almost 2000 prospective fly-in-fly-out workers from NSW had signed up this year.