

Lack of regional childcare

By AAP and Emma McBryde

BHP is calling for the Federal Government to boost access to childcare in mining towns such as Emerald and Blackwater, arguing that the shortage creates a barrier to attracting and retaining a workforce.

An assessment commissioned by BHP identified significant childcare shortages in Emerald and Blackwater, as well as Moranbah and Dysart.

BHP said it has funded access to childcare in these communities because of the impact of its absence on employing and keeping workers.

The CEO of Emerald childcare centre First5Years, Melissa Webster, said several people had told her they would not be able to move to the region unless they could secure a place in childcare.

"I also think the mining companies have a responsibility as a stakeholder to work creatively with companies such as ours, govern-

ment, and the community to co-create better solutions for their workforce," she said.

"Dysart is a good example of where this has happened.

"Of course, the regions would be able to attract more talent if families had better access to childcare and housing, as well."

The head of the new 93-place childcare centre set to open in Emerald between late April and early May this year said while locals had many options for children over three years old, there are very few options for children under three.

"Families, and in particular women, are left with little choice but to put their careers and study on hold for years, due to a lack of quality care options," she said.

"This challenge can lead many families to seek out unregulated day care operated by unqualified childcare minders."

Aiming for a gender-balanced workforce by 2025, BHP's social investments include educa-

tor recruitment, training and converting housing stock into family day care centres.

Ms Webster has found the toll of a lack of childcare on families can be far-reaching.

First5Years and Sojitz Blue recently conducted a design-led thinking workshop with mining families to understand the barriers to childcare they face, the impact it has, and what they would gain if these barriers could be solved.

"One of the most heartbreaking themes that emerged for me was the stress and pressure a lack of childcare puts on relationships and marriages," Ms Webster said.

"When one partner is earning big money in the mines, the burden of childcare inevitably falls upon the other, yet they often have a career too and feel hard done by in the tug-a-war of whose job, career or study is more important."

The Federal Government last month announced a Productivity Commission review of the early childhood education and care sector,

to be headed by international expert Professor Deborah Brennan.

BHP said the commission should examine ways to increase the childcare workforce in regional areas, including more skilled migration, and solve the shortage of suitable facilities in regional areas.

The commission was heartily welcomed by Ms Webster.

"There are many barriers to development and investment in childcare for private operators," she said.

"Having just been through a new design and build, they are numerous.

"Right now, the numbers don't stack up for a private operator to develop more childcare in Emerald."

BHP said there is potential for federal and state government public/private partnerships with big businesses operating in regional areas to construct or upgrade compliant childcare facilities.

CQUni school of mining is now open for business

CQUniversity's School of Mining has officially opened in Rockhampton.

Specifically designed for people moving into a career in mining, Capricornia MP Michelle Landry said she was pleased to see funding delivered by the former Coalition Government come to life.

The Coalition Government invested \$30 million for the establishment of a School of Mining and Manufacturing at two of CQUniversity's campuses, along with \$18.5 million for the Mining School in Rockhampton and a further \$11.5m towards Gladstone's Manufacturing School.

"It's great to see the completion of this important facility that will boost local skills and jobs, as well as elevating Australia's role in mining and advanced manufacturing," Ms Landry said.

"I am proud to see another one of the projects I secured funding for come to life and produce some of Australia's most highly skilled mining professionals."

The funding has also contributed to the purchase of state-of-the-art equipment and technology, including virtual reality, drone operations and 3D printing to support the delivery of high-quality education,

training and research.

"CQUniversity's School of Mining will attract students to study in Central Queensland but will also provide the opportunity for students to train locally and gain specialist skills in cutting edge technologies," Ms Landry said.

"These facilities will also enable Central Queensland mining and manufacturing industry partners to access a highly skilled workforce and within the region which will drive future economic growth.

"The resources and mining sector is on the precipice of another mining boom, with global need for minerals and metals beginning to grow with the development of new technologies."

In the 2021-22 financial year, the Queensland Resources Council reported the resources sector employed 1918 locals in Capricornia and \$315 million of gross product was produced.

Central Highlanders now have the opportunity to study all facets of the mining industry with the opening of CQUni's school of mining.



Welcome rain, but water security is still our top priority



It's been another wet week around the Central Highlands, with welcome rain and good falls throughout many areas in Queensland.

Many northern areas have again been flooded and I appreciate that we have been fortunate to have not received that much rain in Flynn.

With the excessive downpours, it raises the question - why have we not built more dams, weirs and water infrastructure to take advantage of these rain events?

Water is the essential ingredient for prosperity and life. How can Queensland expand and give security to high value agriculture, industry, business, and modern urban living without the provision for more water? Our populations are continuing to grow and with this is the need to feed Australia.

Emerald may not have become the centre of the food bowl it is today if not for a decision in 1948 by the British Food Corporation to grow sorghum in the area. Sorghum's success demonstrated the viability of cropping in the region's rich black soil, and Emerald's fortunes changed.

As agriculture grew, the need for stable wa-



Colin Boyce at Rookwood Weir.

ter supplies grew with it, and the decision was made in 1968 to build the giant Fairbairn Dam, the state's second largest. Construction was completed in 1972 and the storage it formed, Lake Maraboon, holds 1,301,000 ML.

As of 9.30am on the 14th of March 2023,

Fairbairn Dam's current water capacity is 44.59%.

The Bjelke-Petersen era built 53 dams and weirs in Queensland in 19 years of government.

In the past 20 something years in

Queensland we have only seen one major piece of water infrastructure completed - Paradise Dam on the Burnett River which is also (arguably) the greatest engineering debacle in Queensland's history, after the current Labor Government halved the capacity. This puts at risk the future of a multibillion-dollar food growing industry in the Bundaberg area. A region that supplies 25% of Australia's fresh food needs.

The Rookwood Weir on the Fitzroy River was announced in 2016. Six years later it is still being built. It is too slow. Why has it taken so long?

With agriculture poised to reach \$100 Billion by 2030, this need for infrastructure is only increasing.

The hydrogen industry plans for Gladstone will also need water. It takes approximately 10 litres of fresh water to make 1 kg of hydrogen. If we are serious about making a world class hydrogen industry in Gladstone that can create industrial quantities of hydrogen, and I am talking about millions of tonnes annually, where is the water going to come from? Where are the ideas and plans for the supply of more water?

If the Nathan Gorge Dam at Taroom was built with its planned capacity of 880,000 ML and an annual yield of 66,000 ML - half of this would only create 3M tonne of hydrogen. Not even close to industrial capacities needed for the hydrogen industry to function.

To the Federal and State Governments, I say let's get on with building more dams to improve water security and reliability for Queensland.