



**Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining  
Research Paper No. 4**

*Survey of local Aboriginal people formerly employed  
at Century mine:  
Identifying factors that contribute to  
voluntary turnover*

Tanuja Barker  
David Brereton

Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining  
University of Queensland, Australia

July 2005

[csr@uq.edu.au](mailto:csr@uq.edu.au)  
[www.csr.uq.edu.au](http://www.csr.uq.edu.au)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This report is the outcome of a joint research project between Century's Gulf Communities Agreement (GCA) Support Department and the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSR), University of Queensland. We would like to thank all GCA Support staff for their contributions, especially GCA Coordinator, Barbara Bailey; Community Liaison Officers: Laurel Douglas, Gina Sewter and Patrick Wheeler; Community Development Facilitator, Coreen Reading; Community Liaison Advisor, Peter Cameron; GCA Superintendent, Bull Yanner and GCA Support Manager, Lloyd Jones. Thanks are also due to the Queensland Department of Employment and Training for providing funding to undertake this project.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>i</b>
Objectives .....	i
How the research was conducted .....	i
Key findings .....	ii
Implications for current retention strategies .....	iii
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Aims of the study .....	2
Structure of the report.....	2
<b>SECTION 1: HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Participants in the study .....	3
Information sources .....	3
Survey design .....	4
Administering the survey .....	5
Data analysis .....	6
<b>SECTION 2: RESULTS</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Sample group profile.....	7
Respondent profile.....	7
Mobility patterns .....	9
Employment at Century .....	10
Reasons for leaving.....	11
Work likes and dislikes .....	13
Satisfaction levels with work aspects at Century .....	15
Training.....	16
GCA support.....	16
Post-Century employment .....	17
Interest in returning to work.....	18
Additional comments .....	19
<b>SECTION 3: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Implications for employment and mobility.....	25
Further research .....	27
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>28</b>

<b>APPENDIX A: SURVEY .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: EXIT INTERVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Procedural issues .....	36
Proposed exit interview form .....	37

#### **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1. Mobility patterns .....	9
Figure 2. Details of last position held at Century mine .....	11
Figure 3. Length of employment at Century .....	11
Figure 4. Main reasons for leaving Century .....	12
Figure 5. Conditions under which respondents would be willing to return to Century .....	19

#### **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1. Employment status of local Aboriginal employees formerly employed at Century ...	7
Table 2. Place of residence .....	8
Table 3. Native Title status of respondents .....	9
Table 4. Reasons for leaving original community .....	10
Table 5. Positive aspects of working at Century .....	13
Table 6. Negative aspects of working at Century.....	14
Table 7. Ranking of work aspect items .....	15
Table 8. Employment status of surveyed local Aboriginal employees formerly employed at Century .....	17
Table 9. Post-Century employment experiences .....	17
Table 10. Improvement suggestions by respondents .....	19

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report documents a study of local Aboriginal people who voluntarily left work at the Zinifex Century<sup>1</sup> mining operation in the Gulf of Carpentaria, northwest Queensland. The project was a joint initiative between Century's Gulf Communities Agreement (GCA) Support Department, and the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSR<sup>2</sup>), and had the support of the GCA Employment and Training Committee and Century mine. Funding for the study was provided by the Queensland Department of Employment and Training.

### **Objectives**

The key objectives of the project were to identify factors that contribute to voluntary turnover amongst local Aboriginal people employed at Century mine and to collect information that would assist in monitoring employment outcomes for local Aboriginals under the Gulf Communities Agreement (GCA).

The project was a follow-up to one of the findings of an earlier CSR study, which identified a relatively high rate of turnover amongst Aboriginal employees. That study concluded that high turnover rates were hindering efforts to increase the overall level of local Aboriginal representation in the workforce.

The specific aims of this project were to:

- identify why Aboriginal people ceased employment at Century mine
- ascertain what people did after leaving the mine and, in particular, whether they found employment elsewhere
- make recommendations, based on the findings, for retaining local Aboriginal people for longer periods at Century and increasing Aboriginal retention rates within the minerals industry at large.

### **How the research was conducted**

Century's GCA Support staff compiled from their records a list of employees who:

- were local Aboriginal people at the time of recruitment
- were employed on continuing contracts by either Pasminco/Zinifex or one of the contractors, or were apprentices / trainees; and
- had left Century mine on their own accord, either through resignation or 'abandonment', within the last three years.

A total of 73 people met the above criteria. The majority were successfully contacted and asked to take part in a structured survey. In total, 46 valid surveys were completed, representing a 63% response rate. Relatively even numbers of respondents came from the three major Gulf communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> In March 2004, Pasminco was relaunched on the stock exchange as Zinifex Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> A research centre within the Sustainable Minerals Institute, University of Queensland.

The survey contained questions about the individual's employment experiences at Century, their reasons for leaving Century, their employment record post-Century, whether they would like to return to Century, and what they thought might make Century a more attractive place to work for local Aboriginal people.

## **Key Findings**

### **1. Employment at Century**

Almost all of the respondents (92%) worked full-time in their last position at Century.

Most worked twelve hour shifts and just over half worked nightshifts. The most common rosters worked were 14/7 days or 21/7.

Forty percent had worked at Century for two years or more, although more than a quarter had only stayed at Century for 6 months or less. This indicates that the initial transition period is a key determining factor in retaining local Aboriginal employees.

### **2. Wider impacts and benefits of the GCA**

Two-thirds of respondents thought that the skills or experience they acquired at Century helped them to find other work. The majority (78%) of respondents had worked at some stage after leaving Century.

Of the 73 people in the survey target group, 38% were in regular employment at the time the survey was undertaken, including 11% who were working in the mining industry for such operations as Pajingo, Tanami and Xstrata. Thirty-eight per cent were not in the labour force at the time of the survey, and just under a quarter (23%) were Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) workers.

Nearly all survey respondents (91%) resided in the Gulf communities when they started work at Century. However, by the time the survey was undertaken, 40% were living elsewhere, suggesting that employment at Century may have increased their mobility. The main destinations were Mt Isa (20%) and Townsville (7%). Another 13% of respondents were living in cities and regional communities, such as Brisbane, Charters Towers and Mapoon.

### **3. Job satisfaction**

Overall, most respondents were quite positive about their work experience at Century. Social interactions such as meeting new people and a friendly atmosphere were cited as the *most liked* work aspects, and 'relationships with fellow workers' was the *most highly rated* work aspect. The roster patterns and living away from home were the least favoured work aspects.

Eighty per cent of respondents indicated that they were interested in returning to work at the mine, although more than half of this group (60%) said that their return would depend on certain conditions being met, such as better working hours and the resolution of workplace related issues.

#### **4. Reasons for leaving Century employment**

The most commonly cited reasons for leaving Century employment involved personnel management issues such as: workplace related tensions, disagreements with higher management, lack of team work and payment issues. There were also two cases of perceived discrimination. Family related issues were the second most common reason for leaving Century mine. These issues included ‘time spent away from the family while working at Century’, ‘starting a new family’ and ‘family problems at home’. The roster structure was cited as another reason for leaving and also indirectly impacted on family related issues.

#### **5. Retention suggestions**

Most respondents (74%) made suggestions about how Century could retain local Aboriginal employees. The main suggestions were:

- Implement culturally appropriate and family friendly employment practices, such as:
  - provide local outings to maintain connection to country
  - visiting and video-conferencing facilities to improve family interaction
  - respectful treatment of GCA issues
  - provide Murri food at the mine.
- Improve human resource management practices:
  - more flexible and shorter roster structures
  - implement career plans and annual reviews
  - improve training support and opportunities
  - recognition of skills and promotions
  - greater moral / emotional support
  - diversification of job opportunities beyond mine specific roles
  - address workplace discrimination issues
  - improve higher management and site-wide support.
- Improve site facilities and services.

#### **Implications for current retention strategies**

Based on the above findings, suggested actions for Century are to:

- Follow up on respondents’ suggestions to improve retention rates.
- Ascertain whether there is scope for more flexible working arrangements such as ‘tours of duty’, variable working hours, even-time rosters and the wider application of job sharing arrangements; investigate the impact on turnover levels of changing from a 21/7 roster to a 14/7 roster in the pit.
- Ensure that appropriate support and mentoring is provided to all new recruits and trainees.
- Introduce comprehensive exit interviewing procedures (e.g. to pick up ‘no shows’) and use this information to monitor and adapt retention strategies.
- Adopt a strategic approach to retention strategies; for example, focus on re-hires and encourage those who are about to leave to re-apply at a later date.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLO	Community Liaison Officer
CSRM	Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining
DET	Queensland Department of Employment and Training
GCA	Gulf Communities Agreement

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### *Aboriginal / Indigenous / Murri*

The words Aboriginal, Indigenous and Murri have been used interchangeably in this report and as a mark of respect we have capitalised all terms. For the purposes of this report the term ‘Aboriginal / Indigenous’ employee refers to all those employees identified as having local Aboriginal status in the GCA Excel databases, as at October 2004. The term ‘local Aboriginal’ encompasses members of GCA Native Title Groups (regardless of whether they live locally) and other Aboriginal people who have lived in the Gulf communities for five years or more.

### *Sample Group*

The terms “sample group” refers to all Aboriginal past employees recorded in the Zinifex employment and training databases who met the selection criteria for the study.

#### *1. Respondents*

Respondents are people who completed the survey.

#### *2. Partial respondents*

Partial respondents are those participants who elected not to complete the survey but who nonetheless agreed to provide basic information such as where they are currently living and what they are currently doing.

#### *3. Non-respondents*

Non-respondents are those who declined to participate in the study or who were unable to be contacted. Their demographic details were obtained from site records and knowledge held by GCA Support staff.

### *Survey*

A survey is a set of structured questions to collect information from a number of people. It can include closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions ask respondents to select their answer from a pre-determined set of answers. Open-ended questions ask respondents to provide their own answers.

### *The Gulf*

For the purpose of this report, ‘the Gulf’ refers to the communities surrounding the Zinifex Century mining operation in the southern part of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Queensland. It includes the larger communities of Doomadgee, Mornington Island and Normanton, smaller communities such as Burketown (Mungabayi) and Gregory and outstations such as Bidunggu. Larger regional centres such as Mount Isa are not included.



***Turnover***

The turnover rate is the number of employees who have departed during a given timeframe, expressed as a proportion of the total number of people employed during that same time frame. 'Aboriginal employee turnover' is simply the turnover rate for the Aboriginal workforce.

## INTRODUCTION

The provision of Aboriginal employment and training opportunities forms a cornerstone of the Gulf Communities Agreement (GCA) for the Zinifex Century mine operation. Century is an open-cut zinc, lead and silver mine in the Gulf of Carpentaria, northwest Queensland. Since the mine has been operational, Aboriginal employees have accounted for about 15-20% of the total workforce. However, previous research has indicated that the turnover rates<sup>3</sup> for local Aboriginal employees and trainees have been relatively high (Bailey, 2004; Barker & Brereton, 2004).

Improving the retention rate of Aboriginal employees at Century is important for the following reasons:

- It will not be possible to achieve a sustained increase in local employment at the mine without also improving the retention rate. Currently, the number of local Aboriginal workers leaving the mine is hampering efforts to increase the representation of local Aboriginal people in the Century workforce.
- Zinifex and the Queensland State Government are investing substantial resources in recruiting and training local Aboriginal people to work at Century. It appears that many of the recent recruits from the Gulf communities are leaving after a few months, which represents a poor return on this investment.
- It is difficult to provide Aboriginal employees with the experience and training required to fill higher-level positions if they cannot be retained for a reasonable period.
- Continuing high rates of turnover will continue to deplete the relatively small pool of local Aboriginal job applicants in the Gulf.
- Identifying and addressing the factors that contribute to high turnover would help to make Century a more attractive place for local Aboriginal people to work, which in turn, would facilitate further Aboriginal recruitment.

In recognition of the importance of these issues, Zinifex Century mine agreed to facilitate research to find out why local Aboriginal employees leave the mine. Funding for this project was provided by the Queensland Department of Employment and Training (DET), a key provider of employment and training initiatives at the site. The project also received endorsement from Century's Employment & Training Committee.

To the best of our knowledge, little research has been undertaken to understand retention issues, or the long-term employment outcomes of Indigenous employees in the minerals industry. Given the increasing focus in the minerals industry on improving Indigenous employment, the results of this study should also have broader application within the industry.

---

<sup>3</sup> Turnover rates are the number of employees who have departed as a proportion of the total number of people employed during a given timeframe.

## **Aims of the Study**

There are two key objectives for this study. The first is to identify factors that contribute to voluntary turnover among local Aboriginal people employed at Century mine. The second is to collect information that would assist in monitoring employment outcomes of local Aboriginals under the Gulf Communities Agreement (GCA).

Specific project aims were to:

- identify why local Aboriginal people ceased employment at Century mine
- find out what people did after leaving the mine and, in particular, whether they found employment
- provide suggestions, based on the findings, about how Aboriginal people can be retained for longer periods at Century and the minerals industry at large.

## **Structure of the Report**

This report is set out in three sections. The first section discusses the methodology, the way in which people were chosen for the study (participant selection), how they were surveyed and how their answers were brought together. The second section describes the outcomes from the survey and interviews, and reports the outcomes. A selection of respondent's remarks has also been included to provide context. The third section summarises the main findings of the surveys, discusses the implications for policy and practice and makes recommendations where appropriate. Issues requiring further research are also identified.

## **SECTION 1: HOW THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED**

This section of the report describes the study participants, how they were selected, and the design, implementation and analysis of the survey.

### **Participants in the Study**

Past employees were selected from the GCA employment and training databases on the basis that they:

- were local Aboriginal people at the time of their recruitment
- were employed on continuing contracts by either Pasminco/Zinifex or one of the contractors, or were apprentices / trainees; and
- had ceased employment at Century mine on their own accord, either through resignation or ‘abandonment’ some time within the last three years (i.e. between 1/11/01 and 30/10/04).

On the basis of site advice, trainees and apprentices were also included in the survey. High turnover was experienced in both groups and their course length of two and four years respectively are comparable to, or surpass, the average tenure length at the mine.

Employees who had been dismissed were not included in the study because of the sensitivity of the issues involved (a large proportion of these dismissals are for breaches of the drug and alcohol policy). Given that around 80% of departures are voluntary, impact on the sample size was considered to be minimal. However, the current procedure at Century mine is to ask employees who are faced with dismissal, to resign, in order to improve their chances of re-employment at the mine in the future. Therefore there is a chance that some people on the verge of dismissal were included in the sample.

### **Information Sources**

Information was obtained from three sources for this study:

1. Century HR, Training and GCA databases such as the GCA employment database (an Excel file covering the period up to October 2004). Demographic data on all local Aboriginal past employees who satisfied the selection criteria was compiled for this study by GCA Support staff in October 2004. The information extracted from the database included:
  - employee name
  - Indigenous status
  - town of residence, ‘moved to’, ‘move date’
  - Native Title status
  - gender
  - previous employer
  - host employer,
  - reporting department

- previous position, type and classification
  - start and finish date for previous positions
  - length of service.
2. Survey responses: The survey contained both closed and open-ended questions. The people who met the selection criteria and who agreed to complete the survey are referred to as ‘respondents’ in the report.
  3. Partial survey responses and GCA staff knowledge: General information, including current residence and employment details were obtained for all potential participants on the survey list. Two methods were used to obtain this information for those who preferred not to complete the *full* survey:
    - a) if they agreed, people provided this general information themselves (i.e. partial respondents) or
    - b) GCA staff knowledge was used in those cases where we were unable to make contact with people themselves or when people declined to participate in the study (i.e. non-respondents).

The full list of all potential participants has been referred to as the ‘sample group’ in this report.

## Survey Design

CSRSM drafted a survey containing a number of closed and open-ended questions. The closed questions required respondents to select their answer from a pre-determined set of options and open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide their own answers. The final survey, (refer to Appendix A) consisted of five distinct sections:

- Part 1: General Information  
To obtain a demographic profile, respondents were asked their gender, age group, Native Title group, marital status, and family status. In order to assess their movement patterns while employed at Century, respondents were also asked their current place of residence and the communities where they had lived at the start and end of their employment period.
- Part 2: Employment at Century  
To identify variations in employment, respondents were asked about the number of jobs they had held at Century and what their length of service was. In addition, information was sought about their last position at Century, and their reasons for leaving work.
- Part 3: Working Conditions  
To determine the working conditions of respondents in their last job at Century, questions were asked about their roster pattern and shift lengths. This section also included some questions about levels of satisfaction with a range of work aspects, and asked respondents to indicate their answer on a 5-point scale of facial expressions ranging from very unhappy to very happy:



Sad or smiling faces were used as they are universally understood and therefore generalisable across cultures (Ekman, 1971).

- Part 4: Post-Century Employment

To obtain information on the long-term employment outcomes of former local Aboriginal employees, respondents were asked if they were currently working, what work experience they had had since leaving Century, whether they thought their employment experience at Century was helpful in obtaining other work, and whether they would be interested in coming back to work at Century.

- Part 5: Additional Comments

This section was open ended to provide respondents with an opportunity to provide suggestions on how Century could improve retention of local Aboriginal employees.

## **Administering the Survey**

Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) employed by Century assisted in conducting the surveys. The Zinifex Century GCA Support Department employs CLOs in each of the major Gulf communities surrounding the mine, including Doomadgee, Mornington Island and Normanton. They are the interface between the Gulf communities and the mine. For this study, the CLOs assumed responsibility for making contact with past employees who met the selection criteria and administering the survey face-to-face, wherever possible.

CSRSM developed a survey training guide which outlined the procedures for contacting potential participants, arranging interviews and ensuring informed consent. This document also included guidelines for asking questions, reporting answers (including the need to maintain the anonymity of respondents) and returning surveys. CSRSM undertook a training session with two of the three Century CLOs at the mine site in early October 2004. GCA Support staff then trained the other CLO to help with survey administration. Based on the survey trials conducted by the CLOs, some of the interviewer survey instructions were refined prior to administering the survey.

The CLOs were given access to a list of potential participants extracted from the GCA employment database and were asked to contact them. However, finding the contact details of the sample group and getting hold of potential interviewees took longer than expected. This was particularly the case for those who had moved out of the Gulf communities, or had shifted a few times. Depending on the circumstances, surveys were either administered by a face-to-face interview, over the phone or were self-completed. The survey ran from October 2004 to March 2005 to maximise the number of responses that could be obtained. Phone interviews mainly took place in cases where people had moved out of the Gulf communities. A CSRSM researcher assisted with the phone interviews.

## Data Analysis

Completed surveys were returned to the GCA Support Department in sealed envelopes and stored in a secure area until forwarded to CSRSM for analysis.

Closed responses were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences v12). Data were analysed to obtain basic frequencies, compare responses between groups and explore relationships between variables. Open-ended responses were entered into Microsoft Word and grouped according to themes. A CLO assisted with the analysis of ambiguous responses. A selection of respondents' remarks was extracted from the survey forms to give context to the results. Slight modifications have been made to retain anonymity where necessary, and these are denoted by a '[' or '...'.

There were some methodological limitations which emerged through the project and these need to be considered when interpreting the results:

- It is possible that people who were unhappy with how they had been treated at the mine were less inclined to participate in the study, in which case the survey may have overstated the extent to which people were positive about their employment experience at Century.
- The reliability and validity of surveys depends in part on the consistency with which the survey is administered (Alreck & Settle, 2004). A survey training session was conducted with the CLOs by a CSRSM researcher in an effort to address this issue. However, CLOs indicated that several participants preferred to complete the surveys themselves and this may have increased the variability of responses.
- Some of the answers to the open-ended questions were not clear. This was especially the case for the self-administered surveys, suggesting that some respondents may have mis-read certain questions, or found it difficult to express their views in writing. It is also possible that, since most of the data analysis and coding was undertaken by a non-Aboriginal person, some responses were misinterpreted.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we consider that the survey findings are likely to be broadly reflective of the views and experiences of those people who participated in the study and that this group, in turn, was reasonably representative of Aboriginal ex-employees in general.

## SECTION 2: RESULTS

### Sample Group Profile

There were 73 people who met the selection criteria of the study. Just over half (54%) lived outside the Gulf area at the time of the survey, 30% in Mount Isa and 7% in Townsville. Most of those living in the Gulf at the time of the survey were residing in the three major Gulf communities of Doomadgee (10%), Mornington Island (18%) and Normanton (15%).

At the time the survey was conducted, more than a third of the sample group was in regular employment, as indicated in Table 1. Eleven per cent had found further work in the mining industry for such operations as Pajingo and Xstrata and two had regained employment at Century mine. Others had secured employment in such areas as health, local Council and hospitality work.

*Table 1. Employment status of local Aboriginal employees formerly employed at Century (n=73)*

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>% of sample group</b>
Not in the labour force	38
Other employment	27
Mining related employment	11
CDEP	23

Those not in the labour force (38%) included full time mothers, carers, those pursuing further education and those who were not able to work due to medical reasons. Just under a quarter were employed as CDEP workers. However, it is possible that some people classified as having gained ‘other employment’ may also have been funded under the CDEP scheme. Because it was not possible to distinguish between different job funding arrangements, the results therefore may not reflect the true level of CDEP employment.

### Respondent Profile

Of the 73 people who met the selection criteria of this study, a total of 48 completed the survey. Excluded from the analysis was a survey completed by one respondent who was dismissed and, a survey by one respondent who was employed outside the designated survey time period. The response rate for the survey was 63% of all eligible interviewees.

The reported percentages provided in this section are rounded up, and refer to ‘valid’ rather than ‘actual’ percentages (thereby excluding missing data). Also note, that due to rounding, the percentages shown in tables do not always add up to 100 per cent.



Relatively even numbers of survey respondents came from the three major Gulf communities with 16% from Doomadgee, 20% from Mornington Island and 18% from Normanton (Table 2). Another 7% came from Bidunggu and Burketown (Mungabayi), and one person (or 2%) divided their time between Burketown (Mungabayi) and Bidunggu. Around 40% of the respondents were currently residing outside of the Gulf. The survey ratio of Gulf to non-Gulf residents roughly corresponds to that of the 2003 source communities of local Aboriginal employees (Barker & Brereton, 2004).

*Table 2. Place of residence (n=45)*

<b>Community / Town</b>	<b>%</b>
Mornington Island	20
Normanton	18
Doomadgee	16
Bidunggu	2
Burketown	2
Burketown / Doomadgee	2
Mt Isa	20
Townsville	7
Borrooloola	2
Brisbane	2
Charters Towers	2
Croydon	2
Kowanyama	2
Mapoon	2

Females accounted for 43% of respondents, whereas just under 30% of the Aboriginal workforce at Century in March 2003 were females (Barker & Brereton, 2004). This indicates that there was an over-representation of females in the surveyed group.

The largest proportion of respondents belonged to the Waayni Native Title group (Table 3). Respondents from all GCA signatory Native Title groups, including Waayni, Mingginda, Gkuthaarn and Kukatj were included in the survey, as well as members of other Native Title groups in the region.

Most respondents were aged between 25-34 yrs (59%) followed by 35-44 yrs (20%). Just over half were partnered or married (53%) and a slightly larger proportion of respondents had dependent children (58%).

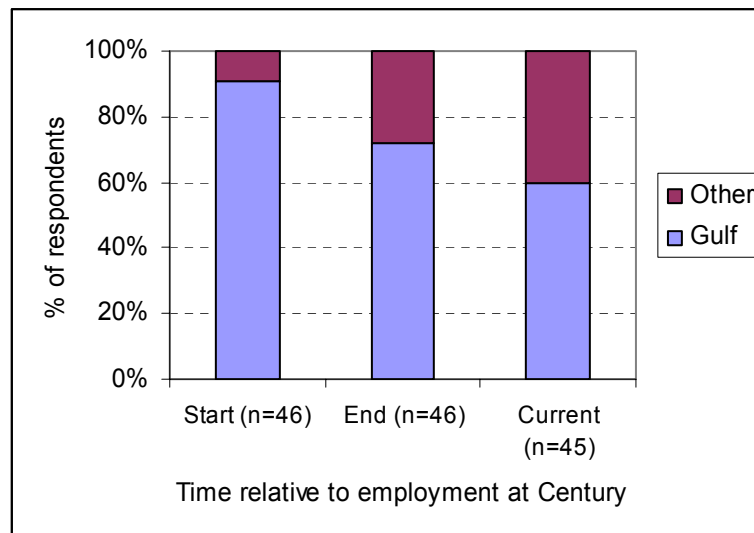
**Table 3. Native Title status of respondents (n=40)**

<b>Native Title Status</b>	<b>%</b>
Waanyi	35
Unknown	15
Gangalidda	10
Gkuthaarn & Kukatj	10
Lardil	10
Mingginda	8
Kurtijar	5
Kaidilt	3
Lardil/Gangalidda	3
Takalaka	3

**Mobility Patterns**

Around 90% of survey respondents resided in the Gulf communities when they started work at Century (Figure 1). However, by the time the survey was undertaken, 40% were living elsewhere, suggesting that employment at Century may have increased their mobility. The main destinations were Mt Isa (20%) and Townsville (7%). Another 13% were living in cities and regional communities, such as Brisbane, Charters Towers and Mapoon. The only group not to show a significant level of mobility were the respondents from Mornington Island.

**Figure 1. Mobility patterns**



None of the four respondents who lived outside the Gulf when they started work at Century indicated that they had moved back to the Gulf, and only a few cases of movement within the Gulf were evident. It must be noted that these results are likely to under-represent the extent of mobility, as the surveys only provide a snapshot at three points in time. The study did not capture continuous movement or short stays elsewhere.

The eighteen respondents who left the community they had been living in when they started work at Century reported family and community factors as the most common reasons for leaving (Table 4). For example:

- *Better education and entertainment for the kids*
- *Parents moved [out of the Gulf]. More facilities and opportunities to take care of daughter, same thing goes for adults as well*
- *'Cause of my wages I moved back to [another Gulf community] to improve the lifestyle of my community by bringing more cash into it.*

**Table 4. Reasons for leaving original community (place of residence when commenced work with Century mine) (n=18)**

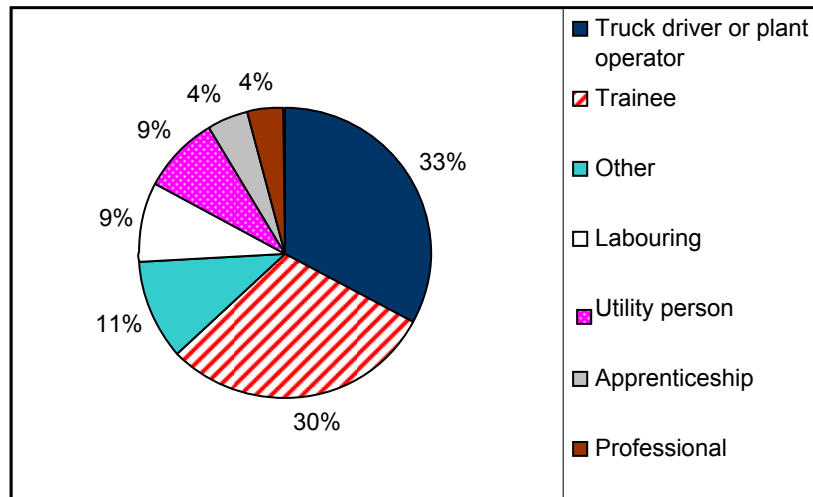
<b>Reason</b>	<b>Examples of responses</b>	<b>% of times mentioned</b>
Family / Community ties	<i>Original place of residence (family ties).</i>	43
Children's future	<i>Kids future, their education &amp; sporting activities.</i>	29
Employment	<i>For employment reasons I have stayed in [a non-Gulf community].</i>	19
Other	<i>Just wanted to see what it was like living in the mainstream.</i>	10

### **Employment at Century**

About half of the respondents (49%) had gained direct entry to their last position at Century. Close to a quarter (24%) completed a pre-vocational program and around one-fifth (22%) completing a traineeship prior to starting their position. This suggests that about half of the respondents already possessed the necessary entry-level or 'job ready' skills by the time they commenced work at the mine.

The majority of respondents either held the position of truck driver / plant operator (33%) or trainee (30%) prior to leaving Century (Figure 2). The vast majority (92%) had worked full-time either on a 14/7 day roster (47%) or a 21/7 day roster (33%) for all or most of the time in their last position at Century.

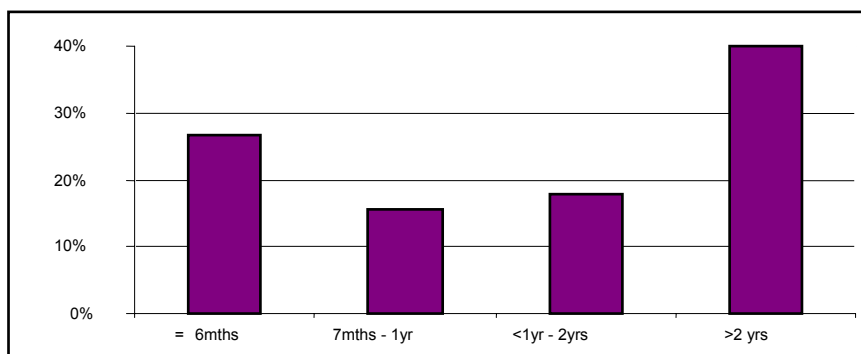
**Figure 2. Details of last position held at Century Mine (n=46)**



Most of the respondents (89%) worked twelve hour shifts and just over half (54%) worked nightshifts.

The largest proportion of respondents (40%) had worked at Century for two years or more, although more than a quarter had only stayed at the mine for six months or less (Figure 3). This finding suggests that the initial transition period is a key factor in determining whether an employee stays or leaves Century.

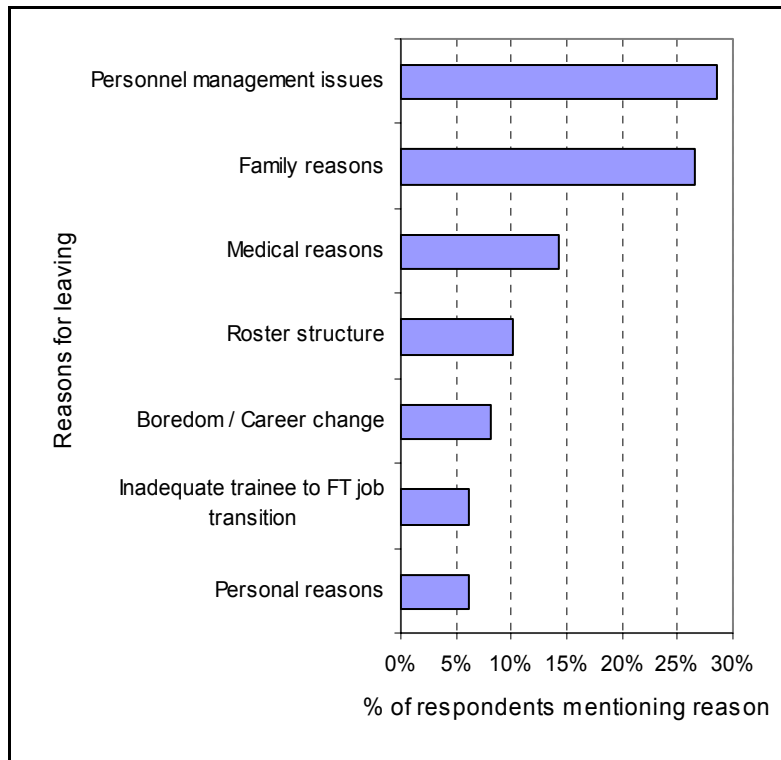
**Figure 3. Length of employment at Century (n=45)**



### **Reasons for leaving**

The vast majority of respondents (87%) provided a single reason for leaving work at Century. The two most commonly cited factors were personnel management issues (29%) and family reasons (27%) (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Main reasons for leaving Century (n=45)**



Personnel management issues included workplace tensions, such as arguments with higher management, lack of teamwork, payment issues and two respondents also indicated that they had experienced discrimination in the workplace. For example, some past employees responded:

- *Because I feel certain people are watched like a hawk, depends on who you know and not what your work experience adds up to*
- *Worked up in [area x] with a hundred guys. Experienced bullying and discrimination, being a girl in the workplace.*

Some of the family reasons provided included such responses as:

- *Family reasons*
- *Left because of family problems*
- *Found out I was three months pregnant*
- *New family (baby) – isolation.*

Others indicated that the time spent away from the family while working at Century was a problem. For example:

- *To help the family and wife out. Have a couple of older kids. The wife is stuck with them for 14 days, 24 hrs*
- *Not enough quality time for family. The one week off goes too fast. Spend two days resting and the rest goes too fast*

- *Wanted to stay with mum. Worked a 3:1 roster. On the one week off there was just enough time to see family in [one community]. Not enough time to see family in [another community]*
- *No long-term carer for children. Difficult to find a babysitter for a week*
- *3:1 roster - a bit too long, kids started fretting.*

A number of respondents (14%) cited medical reasons and several others referred to the work structure at Century, such as the 21/7 roster structure (10%); boredom with the job (8%); and inadequate trainee to full-time job transition (6%) as reasons for leaving. For example:

- *Was doing the same thing everyday, working at [x], doing all the preparation work ... 'dirty work' for more than a year. Then someone who was working in admin got put straight into [a higher] position. Thought this was unfair. Thought they would move me up to this position*
- *Got bored doing the same thing, wanted a change in lifestyle.*

### **Work likes and dislikes**

Respondents were asked to indicate what they liked most about their work at Century. More than half of the respondents gave multiple reasons (Table 5).

**Table 5. Positive aspects of working at Century (n=45)**

<b>Positive work aspects</b>	<b>% of times mentioned</b>
Meeting new people / friendly atmosphere	39
Work	24
Pay	13
Learning new skills	11
Services & facilities	9
Other	4

The social aspects of work, in terms of meeting new people and a friendly atmosphere, was the most frequently cited positive work aspect. For example:

- *Family orientated - so many people from the communities...*
- *I loved my work. Meet people from different nationalities and made friends*
- *The people, I got along with the people*
- *Friends / work mates, good atmosphere.*

The second most common theme was the nature of the work (24%), whether this related to doing regular work, the work experience or the type of work. This aspect was followed by satisfaction with pay levels (13%) and learning new skills (11%).

Both themes are highlighted in the following comments:

- *Operating machines and driving trucks*
- *Properly understand work and responsibility. I wasn't just given the job for being GCA, I did the job. It gave me a bit of value. I learned from other people (value and respect for different cultures). Century showed me a whole lot of job opportunities and showed me you need education to get there*
- *Work experience, good money*
- *Meet new people, good to see how a mine operates. See all sorts of jobs available.*

In response to the question about what respondents liked least about work at Century, the majority (62%) provided a single answer (Table 6). About one quarter (24%) said that there was nothing they disliked about the job.

**Table 6. Negative aspects of working at Century (n=42)**

<b>Negative work aspects</b>	<b>% of times mentioned</b>
Rosters, shifts, early starts	28
Workplace related tensions	20
Other	11
Payment issues	7
FIFO	7
Time spent away from family	4
No dislikes	24

The shifts (long hours, early starts) and roster structure were the most commonly cited negative aspects of work at Century. Comments included:

- *Roster – too long away from family*
- *The hours were too long. Sometimes, when we didn't have much to do, it could get very boring*
- *The hours. It was not always 12 hour shifts. Sometimes we had to do 13 or 19 hours. It varied and depended upon on when there was an emergency. Also had 3am wake ups for roadblocks (RBT). Was not paid overtime, only time in lieu.*

Twenty percent of respondents reported that workplace related tensions were an issue. Comments included:

- *Sometimes not personally agreeing with decisions made by mine management and having to explain to communities on behalf of the mine*
- *The boss and the guys really weren't used to an admin person coming in, they would snap at you and say 'its all there'*
- *Unfair treatment – seeing someone else put in the position where I should have been.*

## **Satisfaction levels with work aspects at Century**

Overall, most respondents were quite positive about the different work aspects at Century. Most either gave a happy or very happy rating for all of the 16 work aspects they were asked to rate on a 5 point face scale (ranging from a frown face to a smiling face). For comparative purposes, the average satisfaction ratings for each work aspect item have been ranked in descending order in Table 7.

*Table 7. Ranking of work aspect items*

<b>Work Aspect</b>	<b>Average Satisfaction level*</b>
Relationship with fellow workers	4.4
Standard of accommodation	4.4
Recreational activities	4.3
Living and working in a multi-cultural environment	4.3
Pay	4.3
Type of work	4.2
Social activities	4.2
Induction training	4.1
Level of on-the-job training	4.0
Flexibility of leave arrangements	3.9
Flying in and out of work	3.9
Career development training	3.9
Level of support received from GCA dept	3.8
Supervisors in workplace	3.8
Living away from home	3.7
Roster pattern	3.6

\* Average satisfaction levels were obtained by dividing the total score for each work aspect by the number of respondents who answered that particular question. As a guide, the following ratings correspond to the following satisfaction levels: 3 – Neutral; 4 – Happy / Satisfied; 5 – Very Happy / Very Satisfied.

Care must be taken when interpreting the raw scores for these items, as respondents may have been reluctant to utilise the negative end of the scale. However, the table provides a good indication of relative levels of satisfaction with different aspects of work at Century.

The data show that the vast majority of respondents were happy with their relationship with fellow workers, with their pay, with living and working in a multicultural environment, and with the standard of accommodation and availability of recreational activities. By contrast, respondents were least happy with living away from home and the roster pattern. This is consistent with other findings from the survey.



## **Training**

Most respondents (89%) were happy with the induction training they received. However, some negative comments were recorded, including:

- *Three days is pretty long*
- *A bit mundane, but you always get that*
- *Cultural awareness training was a bit dead – should be more focussed on community issues. The delivery is more mainstream. People from Mornington Island who went to cultural awareness training didn't know what [the instructor] was telling them...It should be more in-depth, talk about peoples relationship to country. They should be flying in Elders from Mornington Island and Doomadgee to help. Also need to let the Indigenous [workers] know what to expect (e.g. keep living arrangements tidy), attitude at work (listen to boss, have to do some things you don't like doing).*

Most respondents (85%) were also happy with on-the-job training, although several comments made elsewhere in the survey indicated otherwise. For example:

- *People I worked with got shafted, wouldn't be given training*

Likewise, most (82%) indicated that they were happy with the career development training they received. However, given that no formal career development training has been delivered on site, this question may have been misinterpreted.

## **GCA Support**

The majority of respondents (67%) were satisfied with the level of support they received from the GCA Support Department. The most commonly cited types of support were:

- HR and training support
- General helpfulness
- Emotional / moral support.

Several respondents made reference to individual GCA Support staff members for their helpfulness and support. For example:

- *If I had problems, [X] would lend a helping hand and listen*
- *I got on well with [Y]. He always asked if I was ok*
- *Real helpful, was told GCA resources and who to ask for assistance, which made me feel comfortable.*

Twenty-one per cent of respondents were neutral about and 12% were dissatisfied with the level of support they received from the GCA Support Department. This result may indicate that these respondents were not aware of the functions of, or had a lack of contact with, the GCA Support Department.

The question relating to the ‘helpfulness’ of the GCA Support Department showed that 18% regarded the department as ‘not helpful’:

- *Sometimes, but there was no support for contractors. They had non-Indigenous people who do not know much about the communities, didn't know nothing about the agreement in terms of training and development*
- *They didn't come up and visit*
- *I never got any help from them. You see them around, but don't understand what they are there for. I had adequate relations with the boss. I could sort stuff out with the boss myself.*

### Post-Century Employment

The majority of survey respondents were working at the time the survey was conducted (61%) (Table 8). Just under a quarter were CDEP workers (23%) and others were employed in occupations such as trade persons, labourers and clerical, sales or service workers.

**Table 8. Employment status of surveyed local Aboriginal employees formerly employed at Century (n=46)**

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>% survey respondents</b>
Not in the labour force	39
Other employment	28
Mining related employment	10
CDEP	23

Table 9 provides details of the employment history of past employees from the time they left Century until the survey was conducted. The table indicates the number of employment positions held during the survey period, not the number of respondents who were working, as some respondents reported multiple employment episodes.

**Table 9. Post-Century employment experiences (n=44)**

<b>Type of Employment</b>	<b>Number of times mentioned</b>
CDEP	11
Not in Labour Force	11
Clerical / Sales / Service	8
Labouring	7
Trade	5
Mining	5
Education	5
Utility	4
Health	4
Utility	4
Other	4
Pastoral	3
Management / Professional	2

Work history details of respondents reveal that the majority (78%) had worked at some stage since they left Century. The proportion of those who had stayed out of the mainstream labour force for the entire time, or who had only worked as CDEP workers only, decreased to 16%. The breadth of work experience of respondents across different sectors was substantial.

Around two-thirds of respondents (66%) thought that the skills or experience they acquired at Century helped them to find other work. Most people provided straight yes or no answers, but some elaborated:

- *Yes, I gained a lot of work experience since working at site. Office skills and communicating with other people*
- *Having it on the resume and the certificates, for example pre-vocational certificates helped*
- *After I left Century, my experience and skills got me another job at a mine site in [another state].*

Those who reported that the work experience at Century did not help them to find other work (29%) included respondents who had work experience or connections before coming to work at Century mine. For example:

- *I worked in [the public service sector] for ten years before Century*
- *Didn't get any experience. People here already knew me from before*
- *Already had truck driving experience in [another state], but every time you go to a mine it's a different experience, different truck.*

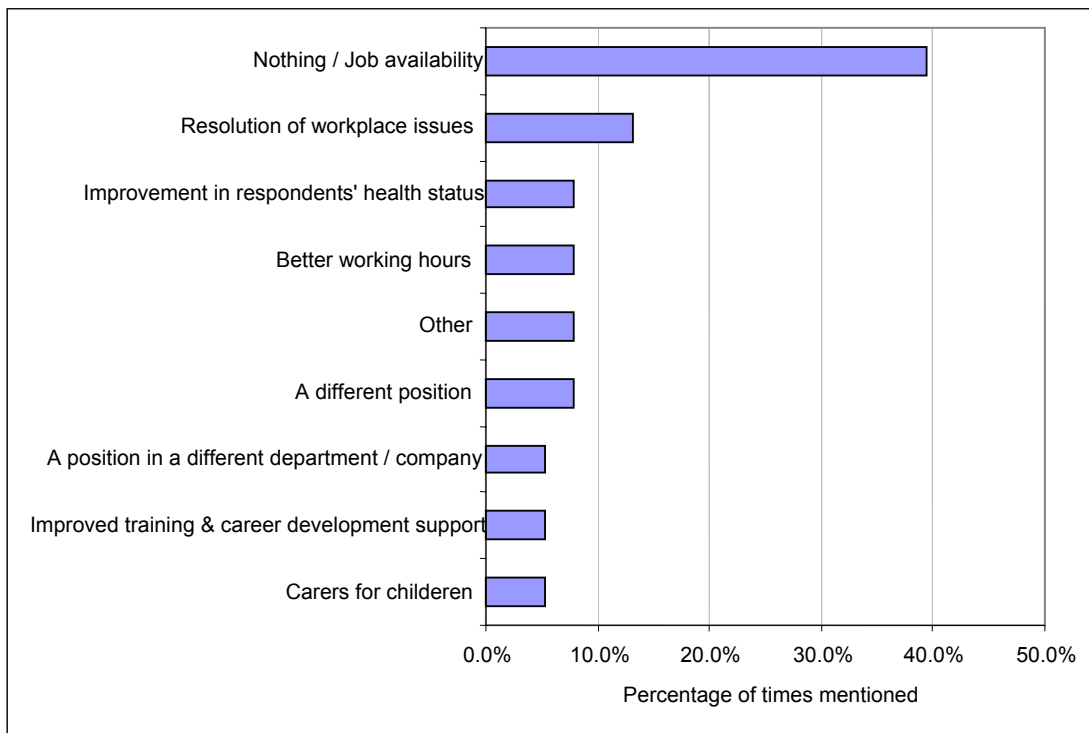
### **Interest in returning to work**

Eighty percent of respondents indicated that they were interested in returning to work at the mine. When asked whether there were any conditions that had to be met for them to return to Century, 40 per cent of this group indicated that nothing was preventing them from returning to work at the mine (Figure 5).

Sixty percent of the respondents who were interested in returning to Century said that their return would depend on certain conditions being met, including:

- better working hours
- carers for children
- resolution of workplace related issues
- improvement in respondents' health status
- better training & career development support
- a different position
- a position in a different department or company.

**Figure 5. Conditions under which respondent would be willing to return to Century (n=31)**



### Additional Comments

Three-quarters of respondents (74%) provided suggestions on how Century could improve the retention of local Aboriginal employees (Table 10). Culturally appropriate and family friendly employment practices were the most commonly cited factors; followed by improved training support and activities.

**Table 10. Improvement suggestions by respondents (n=27)**

<b>Suggestions</b>	<b>% of times mentioned</b>
Culturally appropriate & family friendly employment practices	26
Improve training support & opportunities	18
Improve employment strategies for local Aboriginal people	15
More flexible / shorter roster structures	12
Improve site facilities & services	9
Greater emotional / moral support	9
Diversify job opportunities beyond mine specific roles	3
Address workplace race relations / discrimination issues	3
Enjoy work	3
Unsure	3

Suggestions about how retention could be improved include the provision of local outings to maintain connection with country, improved family interaction through outings, visits and videoconferencing, respectful treatment of GCA issues and the provision of Murri food at the mine. Some of the comments regarding improvements were:

- *...Most of the issues people raise are looked down upon, but they are genuine concerns from our GCA point of view. Issues include, problems with supervisors, compassionate leave, training, bitching about work. Don't get no bush tucker at the mine. The ability to go out for 4 hours or so and go fishing and live off the land is important to keep the harmony. All cooped up in one area, that's the hardest part. Can do this during shift changes, take a morning off with a group of blokes*
- *Help locals get out bush more, so they can keep their cultural ways (fishing, camping, attending ceremony)*
- *Diet – keep Murri's regular food, video conferencing in CLO offices for more contact with families...*
- *Family visits or if they could stay on site on their break.*

Several respondents indicated that further training opportunities and support would be helpful (18%). Suggestions included:

- *...a clear understanding of on-the-job training opportunities to be reviewed annually as part of the career plan review*
- *Give the training they need and ask what they want to improve their skills*
- *...give Aboriginal females a chance to learn other than to drive a truck. I wanted to be a shovel operator.*

Several other respondents suggested that improvements in employment strategies for local Aboriginal people would be helpful. These included increased support from higher management, the implementation of career plans and annual reviews, change in payment structure, the recognition of skills and promotions where appropriate, site-wide support for local Aboriginal people, including contractors and workers in the pit, and improved communication and functioning of the GCA Support department.

- *...A career plan needs to be developed for every local employee to be reviewed annually. More regular sessions on employment conditions / rules, particularly in the first 6 months...relevant resources put into the HR dept to deal with issues quickly and effectively. Effective systems to be put in place to allow GCA team to be better utilised i.e. early intervention with disciplinary process. More utilisation of local people in recruitment drive. Management being consistent. Line department take ownership of local employee from day 1 – therefore GCA Dept seen as support dept, not fix it dept*
- *Encourage people in the communities – haven't seen this. Go out and talk to people in the community. Go out and have inductions and support them with these. Give them an idea of what it's like, for*

*example by using a model of the mining process. Have suggested this to HR, but nothing has happened*

- *...fortnightly pays instead of monthly, more promotions when they are due – if Indigenous people can be recognised for their level of skills*
- *Supervisors get to know you well*
- *Supervisors should look after black fellas. Talk to them more, more yarning with local blokes. It's okay between black and white fella workers. Workers are okay, supervisors is where the problem is...*
- *Supervisors need to have one rule for workers and no cover up for any particular person*
- *...Most of the local employees are in the pit, but the support is not provided there. A community support position for contractors is needed.*

Some respondents sought improvements to the roster structure. Comments included:

- *Do less days if possible. For example, 3 days on and 2 off. This could be a short term arrangement*
- *The main problem is the roster. Most are not used to being away from their families. They may give it a couple of weeks and then say 'bugger that'...*

Several other respondents suggested that improved in site facilities and services would be helpful, particularly in terms of providing alternative modes of transport.

- *Stop hot bedding rooms out. Could get bus to come and get people after the R&R is up instead of flying all the time. Change the locks on pod doors. Have phones in pods like they have in motel rooms*
- *Investigate other means of travel i.e. bus*
- *Pay rent and provide food at Karumba. Can't financially support self in Karumba and wife/family in Normanton.*

Some respondents also suggested that greater moral support of local Aboriginal employees would be helpful. Comments included:

- *A lot of Aboriginals that was at Century found it hard to talk about things what's on their mind. Then it gets bigger, then they don't know how to talk about it, then they go walkabout, then it's too late. It's like they have a future, but they can't see it and are living day by day. Have someone check up on them to see if they are achieving their goals, so that they can see the future and what it holds for them, even if it's a small thing*
- *Mentoring / support network*
- *To make Indigenous mine workers feel that they are not the bad egg, as others make mistakes also.*

Finally, seven respondents explicitly stated that no improvements were necessary. Comments included:

- *They're doing alright now*
- *There's a lot of training. It's up to the people to make a commitment*
- *Up to individual to make the best of it. Century couldn't get it better, just the fly in and out.*

## **SECTION 3: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

This concluding section summarises the main findings of the survey, discusses the implications for policy and practice, and makes recommendations where appropriate. Issues requiring further research are also identified.

### **Working at Century**

For the majority of those surveyed, working at Century mine was, on balance, a positive experience:

- most expressed satisfaction with the pay, their relations with fellow workers and living conditions at Century
- most said that they were happy with their induction and on-the-job training
- around two-thirds (66%) thought that the skills or experience they acquired at Century helped them to find other work
- 80 per cent said that they would be willing to consider working at Century again.

However, some specific aspects of workforce management practices at the mine attracted criticism, such as working time arrangements and workplace related tensions. In addition, more than half of the survey respondents offered suggestions about how these practices could be changed to improve the retention of Aboriginal employees. These suggestions mainly related to the implementation of culturally appropriate and family friendly employment practices.

### **Why did people leave?**

The most commonly cited reasons for leaving were work-related. These included dissatisfaction with working time arrangements, a perceived lack of support from higher management and discord in the workgroup. Two respondents also indicated that they had experienced discrimination in the workplace.

About half of the respondents cited personal circumstances, such as health and family considerations as their main reason for leaving the mine. However, in several of these cases aspects of the workplace – in particular the roster structure and the need to be away from home for long periods – clearly also contributed to the personal difficulties that people experienced.

Notably, none of the respondents said that they had left because they saw better career opportunities elsewhere, or because they were dissatisfied with the pay.



## **Implications for improving retention rates**

No mine can expect to achieve a zero turnover rate; nor should this be an objective, as static workforces present their own management problems. However, for the reasons stated at the outset of this paper, an increase in the retention rate of Aboriginal employees at Century would certainly be desirable. Some possible actions that management could take to address this issue are to:

### *1. Follow up on respondents' suggestions to improve retention rates.*

As noted previously, many respondents provided suggestions as to how Century could improve the retention rates of local Aboriginal employees. While not all of these suggestions may be practical, they should be seen as valuable data. Retention and recruitment strategies that address the issues identified by respondents are much more likely to be successful than responses that do not take account of these views.

### *2. Investigate opportunities to implement more flexible working arrangements.*

Several respondents cited the roster structure as the main reason why they had left Century. Respondents who cited 'family reasons' often also talked about the problems that were caused by being absent from home for extended periods. In addition, 'shifts and rosters' were the most frequently identified negative aspects of working at Century. These findings suggest that the introduction of more flexible and less onerous working time arrangements could make a significant contribution to improving retention rates for Aboriginal employees at the mine.

In early 2004, Century moved from a 21/7 roster in the pit – where many Aboriginal employees work - to a 14/7 roster. The impact of this change has not yet been evaluated. Based on experience at other mines it should have had a positive impact on retention rates. However, a 14 day stints is still a long time away from family and opportunities for greater flexibility need to be investigated.

Other initiatives that warrant consideration include: the introduction of optional short term, renewable, contracts ('tours of duty') for employees who prefer seasonal to permanent work; even-time rosters for employees who are prepared to take a commensurate reduction in pay; and the wider application of job sharing. The economic and management implications of adopting more flexible working time arrangements need to be carefully considered, but this should be balanced against the known costs of high turnover rates and the loss of trained employees.

### *3. Ensure that appropriate support and mentoring is provided to all new recruits and trainees.*

More than a quarter of the respondents to the survey had left Century within six months of starting work there. Conversely, many respondents who made it past the first six months stayed at the mine for two or more years. This points to the value of having effective mentoring and support systems in place to assist new employees through this initial settling-in period. For example, at Argyle Diamonds mine, the Training and Apprenticeship Division supports the resolution of work as well as non-work related issues by maintaining regular contact with trainees and apprentices, and providing 24 hour phone access to the division. People with significant personal issues are identified on a weekly basis and provided with the necessary support.

Family members are involved, where necessary. Strategies at Century that assist family and social interactions to occur across the operation should also be acknowledged and supported.

#### *4. Seek out opportunities to re-hire former employees.*

The high level of interest amongst respondents in coming back to work at Century (80%) indicates that former employees potentially form a useful labour pool for Century. The challenge for Century is to find better ways of accessing this pool. This could involve, for example, encouraging suitable former employees to reapply for positions, providing certificates of appreciation when employees leave and decreasing the negativity surrounding single exit events.

#### *5. Improve monitoring processes.*

Implementing site-wide exit interview procedures would provide management with more timely information about why employees leave and assist in developing and adapting suitable retention strategies matching the needs of local Aboriginal employees. Information from exit interviews could also be used as an active HR monitoring tool to investigate trends and patterns over time. For example, with enough information it should be possible to compare the reasons for leaving across different groups of workers, such as trainees and employees, those who live within and outside of the Gulf and the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workforce. Proposed exit interview procedures for Century's consideration are provided in Appendix B.

Exit interviews are a potentially valuable source of information, but they have a narrow focus and may not always generate reliable data. Some departing employees may not feel comfortable about disclosing their reasons for leaving and may be hesitant to speak frankly about their workplace experiences (especially if they are considering re-applying at a later date). Consideration should therefore also be given to conducting periodic employee satisfaction surveys – for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees alike. This would provide a broader and more representative sample of employee views and, hopefully, enable some potential causes of employee turnover to be identified and addressed at an earlier stage.

#### *6. Adopt a strategic retention approach.*

Sites with lower Aboriginal turnover rates have recognised retention as a key issue and have developed Aboriginal employment strategies and implementation plans. The incorporation of retention objectives, measures, targets and accountabilities in Century's employment and training plan with periodic reviews at CE&T Committee meetings is recommended.

### **Implications for employment and mobility**

#### *Employment*

Another objective of the survey was to find out whether former employees had found other employment after leaving the mine. This information is important for assessing whether Century is providing its Aboriginal employees with transferable skills and

experience, and thereby contributing to the long-term development of human capital in the Gulf region.

The survey findings are reasonably positive in this regard. As already noted, 66% of the respondents thought that the skills or experience they acquired at Century had helped them to find other work, although not enough information was gathered to be able to specify which type of skills they benefited from most. Around three quarters had worked at some stage since leaving Century and 61 per cent were currently employed<sup>4</sup>. Of those who were currently employed, 62 per cent were in regular employment, with the balance being on CDEP.

The fact that some respondents were still dependent on CDEP for their income is most probably due to the paucity of employment opportunities in the Gulf Communities, rather than indicating that respondents were not suited for other kinds of work. It is also important to note that some CDEPs (such as the Normanton program) and some positions (e.g. foreman) are seen by some respondents and community members alike as providing legitimate jobs.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which people's employment prospects were improved by working at Century. This would require a comparison study of a control group (that is, a comparable group of Aboriginal people from the communities who had never worked at Century). Some respondents already had a good work history prior to starting at Century and may well still have found employment anyway; however, on the data available there is certainly a strong *prima facie* case to be made that at least some respondents have been advantaged by having worked at the mine. The challenge is to find ways of increasing the range of employment opportunities in the region to ensure that these former employees are able to build on the skills and experience they have acquired at Century.

### *Mobility*

A final, very important, finding of the survey is that employment at Century appears to have facilitated the movement of people out of the Gulf. Around 90 per cent of the survey respondents resided in the Gulf communities when they started work at Century, but by the time the survey was undertaken 40% were living elsewhere. It is likely that some respondents would have shifted regardless, given the general outward migration of people from smaller remote communities to regional centres and beyond, however it is doubtful that this general trend would account for all of the movement that has occurred.

Several factors could account for this apparent increase in mobility:

- Century's practice of flying-in workers from several locations, including Townsville and Mt Isa, has provided a means whereby people can re-locate while they were still working at the mine
- increased incomes and improved employability may have made it easier for ex-employees and their families to bear the costs of re-locating
- people's aspirations for themselves and their families may have changed as a result of working at Century.

---

<sup>4</sup> The 39 per cent of respondents who were not currently in the labour force included full time mothers, carers, those pursuing further education and those who were not able to work due to medical reasons.

This trend is potentially very significant and raises a number of issues. For example, to what extent, if at all, are the 'home' communities disadvantaged by former Century employees moving to other towns and cities in the region? What would need to change in the communities to encourage more of these people to stay? When people re-locate, is it likely to be permanent or temporary? It is beyond the scope of this current study to address these questions, but they certainly warrant more detailed investigation.

### **Further research**

The survey results have pointed to a number of areas that require further research. These include:

- How do the reasons that respondents gave for leaving compare to the knowledge and HR records held by Century staff? Are there different views about the reasons for leaving held on site amongst HR staff, Aboriginal employees and in the communities? If so, what are the implications?
- How do the reasons for leaving and work satisfaction levels compare between the non-Aboriginal and local Aboriginal workforce?
- What is the relative cost of continued turnover versus the cost of implementing retention strategies?
- What motivates local Aboriginal people to work at Century? Is a job at the mine viewed as a long-term commitment or as a base from which to gain skills and/or income and then move on?
- Is periodic rather than continuing employment likely to be preferred by some Aboriginal people? If so, can retention strategies be designed around 'tours of duty' rather than a single exit event?
- How do the post-Century employment profiles of Aboriginal ex-employees compare with:
  - their pre-Century profile;
  - employment statistics for the Gulf workforce as a whole?
- How do the mobility patterns of ex-employees compare to mobility rates for the Gulf as a whole?
- How can the skills and experience gained by Aboriginal people at the mine be better utilised to contribute to the economic development of the Gulf?
- Is there scope for a partnership approach between mining operations to increase Aboriginal employee retention within the industry?<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, for those local Aboriginal employees who have moved out of the Gulf or who have indicated that they like to work for another operation, can relevant contact be maintained between HR departments of different operations and referrals or references be made on behalf of interested local Aboriginal employees?

## REFERENCES

Pamela Alreck and Robert Settle (2004). *The Survey Research Handbook*. New York: McGraw-Hill/ Irwin.

Barbara Bailey (2004). *Retention Rates GCA Local Employees, Zinifex Century* internal document, January 2004.

Tanuja Barker and David Brereton (2004). *Indigenous Employment at Century*, Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, Brisbane, April 2004. Accessible at: [www.csr.m.uq.edu.au](http://www.csr.m.uq.edu.au)

Ruth Beach, David Brereton and David Cliff (2003). *Workforce Turnover in FIFO Mining Operations in Australia: An Exploratory Study*. Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, Brisbane. Accessible at: [www.csr.m.uq.edu.au](http://www.csr.m.uq.edu.au)

Paul Ekman (1971). Universals and cultural differences in facial expressions of emotion. In J.K. Cole (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, 19: 207-283. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

John Hall and Mark Driver (2002). *Queensland Support for Training and Employment through the Gulf Communities Agreement and Century Mine*, Department of Employment and Training, January 2002.

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY

### Century - GCA Former Employee Survey

*(Interviewer: Before starting the interview, check that you've given the information sheet (first page) to the participant and that you've kept the signed informed consent form (second page).*

#### Part 1: General Information

1. Gender (*Interviewer: please tick the appropriate box*)

- Female
- Male

*(Interviewer: Please read aloud the following questions and tick the appropriate boxes)*

2. About how old are you? (*Interviewer: please tick the appropriate age group*)

- 18 - 24 years
- 25 - 34 years
- 35 - 44 years
- 45 - 54 years
- 55 - 64 years

3. What Native Title group do you belong to?

- Gkuthaarn / Kukatj
- Mingginda
- Waayni
- Non-Native Title ties
- Unknown
- Other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

4. What community did you live in when you started work at Century?

- Bentick Island
- Bidunggu
- Burketown
- Doomadgee
- Karumba
- Mornington Island
- Mount Isa
- Normanton
- Townsville
- Other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_

5. What community were you living in when you stopped work at Century?

- Bentick Island
- Bidunggu
- Burketown
- Doomadgee
- Karumba
- Mornington Island
- Mount Isa
- Normanton
- Townsville
- Other (*please specify*)\_\_\_\_\_

6. What community do you currently live in?

- Bentick Island
- Bidunggu
- Burketown
- Doomadgee
- Karumba
- Mornington Island
- Mount Isa
- Normanton
- Townsville
- Other (*please specify*)\_\_\_\_\_

7. If you are now living somewhere different from when you originally started work at Century, what was the main reason for moving?

---

---

---

---

---

8. When you started working at Century were you:

- Single?
- Partnered or married?
- Separated or divorced?

9. Do you have dependent children?

- Yes
- No

10. How difficult was it for you to keep in contact with your partner / family members while you were working on-site at Century?

- Not at all difficult
- Somewhat difficult
- Very difficult

## Part 2: Employment at Century

11. How long did you work at Century?

- 6 months
- 7 months - 1 year
- more than 1 year - 2 years
- more than 2 years

12. How many positions did you hold at Century?

- 1
- 2
- 3 or more

**(Interviewer: Mention that the following set of questions (13 through to 21) relate to the persons LAST POSITION at Century, if they had more than one)**

13 a). What type of work did you do?

- Administration
- Apprenticeship (*please specify type*)\_\_\_\_\_
- Cultural and Community
- Labouring
- Management
- Professional (*e.g. technician, engineering*)
- Trade person (*e.g. electrician, carpenter*)
- Traineeship (*please specify type*)\_\_\_\_\_
- Truck driving or other plant operator
- Utility person (*e.g. kitchen hand, cleaning*)
- Other (*please specify*)\_\_\_\_\_

b). In which operational area of Century did you spent most of your working time?

- Administration (MAC, PAC/ZAC)
- Civil road works
- Mill & maintenance
- Pit
- Port
- Darimah village area
- Other (*please specify*)\_\_\_\_\_

c). Which company did you work for?

- Bonds Laundry Service
- Eurest
- Hookeys
- Pasminco / Zinifex
- REJV
- Willetts
- Other (*please specify*)\_\_\_\_\_



d). How did you come to get the job?

- Direct entry (e.g. by advertisement)
- After completing a pre-vocational course
- After completing a traineeship
- After completing an apprenticeship
- Re-hire

e). Can you tell me the main reasons why you left work at Century?

---

---

---

---

---

### Part 3: Working Conditions

14. Were you working:

- Full-time?
- Part-time?
- Casual?

15. What was your roster pattern?

- 5 days on & 2 days off - 5/2
- 9 days on & 5 days off - 9/5
- 10 days on & 4 days off - 10/4
- 2 weeks on & 1 week off - 14/7
- 3 weeks on & 1 week off - 21/7
- 4 weeks on & 1 week off - 28/7
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

16. Did you work night shifts?

- Yes
- No

17. How long were the shifts?

- 7.5 hours
- 10 hours
- 12 hours

18. In which way was the Pasminco / Zinifex GCA department helpful to you in your time at Century?

---

---

---

---

---

19. What did you most like about work at Century?

---

---

---

---

---

**20. What did you like least about work at Century?**

---



---



---



---



---

**21. We would now like to ask you about particular work aspects at Century. How happy were you with the following?**

*(Interviewer: Please ask how happy the participant was with each of the following and show their level of satisfaction by ticking the appropriate face. Please also note down any reasons why they were happy or unhappy).*

	Very Unhappy	Neutral	Very Happy	Notes
a) Type of work you were doing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
b) What you were being paid	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
c) The roster pattern	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
d) Flexibility of leave arrangement (e.g. compassionate leave)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
e) Flying in and out of work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
f) Living away from home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
g) The supervisors in your workplace	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
h) Relationship with fellow workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
i) Level of support received from Pasminco / Zinifex GCA department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
j) Living and working in a multi-cultural environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
k) Induction training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
l) Level of on-the-job training received	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	-
m) Career development training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
n) The standard of accommodation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
o) The recreational activities available	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
p) The social activities available (e.g. raffles, barbecues)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	

## Part 4: Post-Century Employment

22. a) Are you currently working?

- Yes
- No

b) If yes; What type of work are you doing?

---

---

---

---

---

23. What have you done since you left Century (e.g. what kind of jobs have you had)?

---

---

---

---

---

24. Has the skills / experience acquired at Century helped you to find other work?

---

---

---

---

---

25. a) Would you be interested in coming back to work at Century?

- Yes
- No

b) If yes, what would this depend on?

---

---

---

---

---

## Part 5: Additional Comments

26. What suggestions do you have about what Century could be doing to keep local Aboriginal employees?

---

---

---

---

---

**THANK YOU !**

*(Interviewer: Place the completed survey in the envelope provided in front of the participant and seal. Return to [x] onsite.*



## APPENDIX B: EXIT INTERVIEW AND FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

While it is understood that REJV has recently re-introduced one-on-one exit interviews for all of its employees and Zinifex's HR department conducts exit interviews with their non-Indigenous workforce, there are currently no site-wide exit procedures in place at Century.

Conducting exit interviews with all employees, trainees and apprentices is important for the following reasons:

- Capturing the reasons for leaving will assist in the design of appropriate retention strategies.
- Monitoring turnover patterns and trends across the operation will allow retention strategies to be adapted accordingly.
- Exit interviews provide an opportunity to maintain a good rapport with workers departing the operation – an extension of the mine's community relations role.
- Exit interviews also provide the mine with the opportunity to find out whether people are interested in returning to Century in the future - as part of a re-hire strategy.

### Procedural issues

The basis elements of the exit interview procedures proposed here are based on the work conducted by Beach *et al.*, (2003). In the context of this report, exit interview procedures are intended for unplanned, voluntary departures from the mine, rather than internal movements, planned departures (such as retrenchments and end of contracts) or dismissal cases.

Several procedural issues can impact on the likelihood of implementation and the usefulness of the information obtained from exit interviews. Considering those processes which promote the likelihood of participation, an openness in responses, enough detail to inform management practices, and cost considerations are recommended (Beach *et al.*, 2003). A few strategies which may assist in this regard include:

- a) *Conducting exit interviews with someone outside of the immediate work / training area.* As noted by Beach *et al.* (2003: 13):

“many people find it difficult to express critical comments directly to managers or their representatives, especially if they wish to leave open the option to return to the workplace at a later date. Also, some explanations – such as finding a ‘better job’ – are more acceptable to put on a form whereas others – such as ‘family reasons’, or ‘conflict with supervisor’ – are expressed more comfortably in a conversation”.

The use of an independent third party, HR staff or GCA Support staff to conduct exit interviews are some of the options.

- b) *Provide the person departing with the option of choosing an appropriate interviewer, where possible.* A specific person may not be available at the time of departure or the person leaving may feel more comfortable talking candidly to another person. Having a number of people available who are able to conduct exit interviews (such as mentors) and who have been provided with the appropriate training, could assist in this regard. Monitoring should occur, to ensure that the role of exit interviewer does not fall on one particular person or within one particular section of the mine, such as the GCA Support department.
- c) *Confidentiality issues.* In practical terms, the confidentiality of the information collected during exit interviews cannot be assured, given the relatively small local Aboriginal labour pool, the timing of departures, and the chance of data entry being conducted on-site. These factors alone are likely to restrict the openness in responses. It would therefore be critical to clearly explain at the outset that the exit interviews are voluntary, which sections will remain confidential and the purposes for which, and by whom, the information will be used.
- d) *Conduct exit interviews on site, where possible.* Where practical, exit interviews should be conducted on site, due to the ease of capturing information. A trigger to conduct exit interviews should be included in existing departure processes once a person notifies that they intend to resign. In the cases of abandonments, conducting exit interviews in the community with the use of CLO's might be a possibility. Another option is to conduct periodic exit interviews through surveys such as this one. This type of survey would be useful for obtaining information on post-employment outcomes and mobility impacts. However, these exercises are logistically difficult, especially when potential interviewees have left the Gulf.
- e) *Integrate information into current HR systems and processes.* Non-confidential information should be entered into an existing database and used to monitor turnover patterns and trends over time. Periodic reports (such as half-yearly or annual reviews) can then be produced and used to evaluate current strategies.

### **Proposed exit interview form**

The exit interview form proposed below is an adaptation of the template produced by Beach *et al.*, (2003). It is suggested that a standard exit interview form be developed for the whole site.

**Exit interview data collection form**

Date of survey:

Name of interviewer:

Name of person departing:

GCA status:  local Aboriginal (GCA)  non-GCA Aboriginal  non-Aboriginal

Gender:  Female  Male

Age:  18-24 yrs  25-34 yrs  35-44yrs  45-54 yrs  55-64 yrs

Where were you living before you started work at Century?

Place of Residence

Gulf →  Burketown  Doomadgee  Mornington Isld  Normanton  Other \_\_\_\_

QLD Regional community / town →  Charters Towers  Croydon  Other \_\_\_\_

QLD City →  Brisbane  Mt Isa  Townsville  Other \_\_\_\_

Interstate

Overseas

What type of work were you doing before you started at Century?

Work

Another mining operation

Trade

Clerical / sales / service

Pastoral

Management / professional

CDEP

Labouring

Other work (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Not working

Training

Type of departure:

resignation

abandonment

company transfer

retirement

Position:

Administration

Apprenticeship \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural & Community

Labouring

Management

Professional

Trade person

Traineeship \_\_\_\_\_

Truck driving / plant operator

Utility person

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Operational area:

Administration (ZAC)

Civil road works

Darimah village

Mill & maintenance

Pit

Port

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Typical work pattern (nights, days, days off): \_\_\_\_\_ N \_\_\_\_\_ D \_\_\_\_\_ O

Typical shift length:

10 hrs

12 hrs

Length of service:

≤ 6 mths

> 6 mths - 1 yr

>1 yr - 18 mths

>18mths - 2 yrs

> 2 yrs

Termination reason: What were the main reasons why you left Century?

---

---

---

---

---

---

Was your decision to leave Century influenced by one or more of the following? (check all boxes that apply)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better career opportunity / change                  | <input type="checkbox"/> FIFO / work roster impact on self            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased pay elsewhere                             | <input type="checkbox"/> FIFO / work roster impact on family          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Return to study                                     |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict on site                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of moral support                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dissatisfaction with supervisor                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of flexible working options             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of culturally appropriate employment practices |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of training & development opportunities        |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No or limited opportunities for advancement         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Payment issues                                      |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate trainee to employment transition         |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family health reasons                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal health reasons                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family circumstances                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal reasons not associated with the job |

Would you consider working for Century again?  Yes  Not at this stage

What suggestions do you have about what Century could be doing to improve the workplace?

---



---



---



---

Where are you going to next?

Live

- Gulf →  Burketown  Doomadgee  Mornington Isld  Normanton  Other \_\_\_\_
- QLD Regional community / town →  Charters Towers  Croydon  Other \_\_\_\_
- QLD City →  Brisbane  Mt Isa  Townsville  Other \_\_\_\_
- Interstate
- Overseas

Work

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Another mining operation   | <input type="checkbox"/> Trade                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clerical / sales / service | <input type="checkbox"/> Pastoral                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Management / professional  | <input type="checkbox"/> CDEP                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Labouring                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other work (please specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not working                | <input type="checkbox"/> Further training / education      |