

Our region is paying the price for resources boom

A comparison cost of living survey shows we are paying more

By MELISSA GRANT

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IT'S what we all knew – if you live in Mackay or a nearby mining community you are paying the price of the resources boom.

Everything from groceries to alcohol to the roof over your head has a "miners' tax", figures in a survey comparing the cost of living in Brisbane to 43 regional centres show.

The survey revealed Moranbah was the most expensive place to live in Queensland with housing costs a whopping 65.4% more than in Brisbane. But Mackay is also expensive with rent and the cost of food, alcohol and tobacco more than 6% higher than in the state's capital.

The release of the Office of Economic and Statistical Survey came just ahead of Prime Minister Julia Gillard's visit to Moranbah where she met yesterday with a group concerned about the affordability crisis in the state's mining regions. Queensland Mining Communities president Kelly Vea Vea said the group expressed its concerns about housing in mining towns, particularly the lack of suitable family accommodation.

"We emphasised that we do support expansion of the industry but we feel strongly about our community growing sustainably," she said.

Ms Vea Vea said the group also stressed that with high proportions of fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) miners and too few housing options, Moranbah and other mining communities would be headed for disaster.

"We were pushing the fact we don't want our re-

THE GREAT MINING TAX

How much more you pay compared to Brisbane:

■ Housing costs including rent, electricity and other household fuels:

Mackay: 5.9%
Moranbah: 65.4%
Rockhampton: 16.7% less

■ Rent:

Mackay: 6.5%
Moranbah: 71.6%
Dysart: 77.2%
Rockhampton: 18.3% less

■ Food, alcohol, tobacco:

Mackay: 6.2%
Moranbah: 7.6%
Dysart: 11.1%

■ Other groceries:

Mackay: 5.8%
Moranbah: 0.8%
Dysart: 11.3%
Rockhampton: 0.6% less

Figures from the Index of Retail Prices in Queensland Regional Centres survey

gion to end up like Western Australia where a lot of communities have become unviable," she said.

Ms Vea Vea said Moranbah's affordability crisis was the result of a comprehensive failure of regulation.

"Moranbah is land locked by mining leases, they literally come right up to the doorstep of the town; constraining growth, and putting enormous pressure on prices," she said.

Ms Vea Vea said Ms Gillard had promised to discuss the issues raised with Premier Anna Bligh, who the group met with on Thursday.

In response to the survey, Treasurer Andrew Fraser said housing costs drove the results in the mining towns while low housing costs balanced out expensive groceries in remote towns.



JOBES FOR WOMEN: MP Kirsten Livermore and Prime Minister Julia Gillard, centre, with women from BMA in Moranbah.

PHOTO: ALAINA EARL

Gillard highlights women in mining

By ALAINA EARL

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AUSTRALIA'S mining boom is great for the economy but it must include women, Prime Minister Julia Gillard declared as she addressed hundreds of women miners in Moranbah yesterday.

The country's first female PM said women represented just 13% of resource and construction employees but it was hoped this would reach 20% by 2020.

Drawing from her own experiences, Ms Gillard spoke about how over time women had shown they had

the physical and mental strength to tackle male-dominated roles, not only in industry but in politics and all sectors.

The main thread of her speech was that we as a nation need to strive for the day that being a woman in any workplace is normal.

"Women's roles need to be normalised. Having a woman Prime Minister is no big deal, this is the new norm," she said.

Ms Gillard took time out of her busy schedule to be the guest of honour at the Women in Mining and Resources Queensland (WIMARQ)

networking event at the Moranbah Community Centre. The event was for women who work in the resource industry, particularly coal.

Ms Gillard encouraged all present to work hard, get a good education and aim high. Jobs need to be competency based, not gender, she said. Inspired by the likes of Hillary Clinton and former Victorian Premier Joan Kirner, and the strong women in Australia's history, she said these tough, independent minded women had helped inspire her and get her where she is today.

Ms Gillard finished her speech by saying that looking out at the women in the workforce in front of her, it was "not a case of yes you can, but a case of yes we have".

As Jennifer Mackenzie closed the event, she echoed Julia Gillard's words about women in the workplace and making women in mining the norm. Ms Gillard posed for many photographs with different women and different workforces and freely stopped and talked, and took the time to answer questions and even to ask a few of her own.

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