

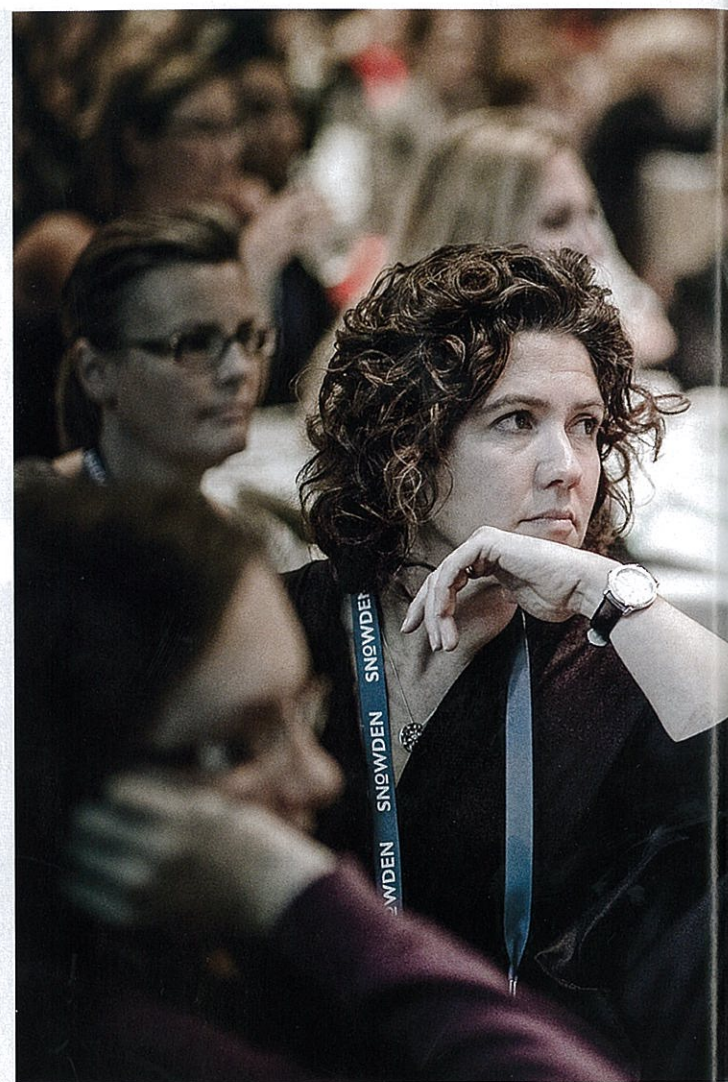
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As a major skills shortage threatens the ongoing prosperity of resources operations across the country, the Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA) has been created to further develop and engage one of the greatest underutilised sources of talent – women.

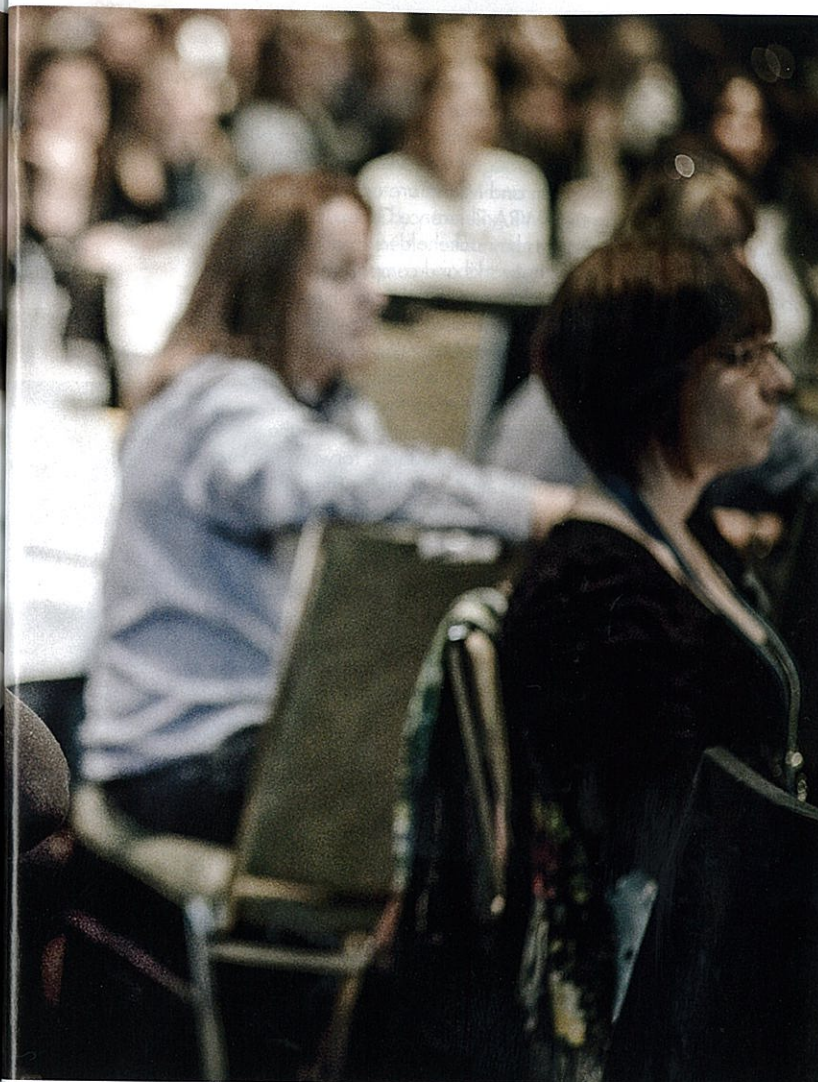
A significant cultural shift to engage more women in the traditionally male-dominated resource industry is now well underway.

However this movement is not simply driven by the notion of gender equality and diversity for the sake of diversity, but a commercial and economic necessity to recruit skilled employees from a wider pool of talent.

Around \$590 billion worth of resource projects are in various stages of approval or operation around the country. This unprecedented level of activity promises widespread economic and societal benefits, but only if the significant challenge of labour and skills supply can be overcome.

Industry reports indicate the shortage of professionals will double throughout 2012. Demand for trades and labour during construction activities will peak at 83,000 by 2013 and operational staff shortages are expected to reach 85,000 by 2016.

The National Resource Sector Workforce Strategy (NRSWS) identified a number of key ways Australia's resource industry can plug this skills gap, with women noted as one of the greatest underutilised sources of talent.



▲ above: Minna Knight
◀ left: Alison Morley

From this Australian Government recommendation, resource industry employer group AMMA has been engaged to roll-out the Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA) – a national initiative created to further develop and increase female participation in the resource industry.

AMMA director and leader of the AWRA project Minna Knight, says the evidence that greater gender diversity results in a highly productive and dynamic workforce 'is compelling'.

"More major projects are ramping up and Australia's tightening labour market coupled with low unemployment and an ultra-competitive recruitment landscape is rapidly leading to one scenario – a major skills shortage in the resource industry," Minna says.

"How prosperous this new age of resources activity will truly be depends upon one thing – how well the industry and governments address this skills shortage now.

"AWRA will facilitate the increased attraction and retention of women in the resource and allied construction sectors and provide employers with a major competitive advantage – strength through workforce diversity.

"Women have an essential role to play

in the mining boom and as an industry, we need to effectively attract and retain them."

AWRA is an inclusive program that involves various stakeholders and representatives from industry, government and academia, working together to increase the number and proportion of females working in resources – greatly assisting the industry to meet its increasing demand for skilled labour.

Women currently represent 45 per cent of the total Australian workforce, but in the mining sector, women represent only 16 per cent of the workforce.

In order to support the skills shortage, Minna says simply increasing the number of female entrants through recruitment drives and marketing campaigns will not do.

"We also need to retain our skilled female workers within the industry," she says. "AWRA's key objective is not only to raise the representation of females in resources employment to 20 per cent of the workforce by 2020 – but to continue an upward trend over the decades to come.

"This will not be an easy task, particularly when the staff turnover rates for some roles in resources are already among the highest in the country. A concerted industry effort must be made to address the lack of women's participation in the

resource industry from all angles."

Minna says the mining, oil and gas and allied sectors must work on changing its image and engaging with more women to promote the industry as a viable, long-career path.

She highlights a need for greater family-oriented infrastructure near mine sites such as child care centres, schools and other support facilities – all of which promote greater flexibility in the industry and break down significant barriers.

"Misconceptions about working in the resources must be addressed. The industry has evolved greatly in recent decades to offer a diverse range of career and lifestyle options," Minna says.

"And, most importantly of all, encouraging best practice workplace policies and procedures will facilitate the appropriate cultural shift towards a more diverse workforce and greatly bolster the industry's talent pool for staff."

In Western Australia's bustling resource industry, you don't have to go far to find numerous examples of the cultural shift towards greater workforce gender diversity. Only a few short years ago it would have seemed unfathomable that a young female executive could balance motherhood and

women in mining

promising managerial career in the highly competitive mineral exploration sector, however Alison Morley champions the notion

The Brumby Resources CEO admits it will take time for the concept to flow down from corporate roles into operational lifestyles; however the widespread support of her peers, colleagues and staff suggest the industry is headed in the right direction.

"People are often surprised when they learn that along with being a mother of young children, I'm also the CEO of an ASX-listed resource company," Alison says. "However I am just one example of how conceptions and attitudes about women working in mining, oil and gas, and the allied sectors are evolving. Resource employers are recognising the benefits of employing more women to help address the industry's critical labour shortage.

"Women are now increasingly represented in city-based resources jobs, but our next challenge is to introduce flexible working arrangements and increase widespread gender diversity at remote worksites.

"The practical approach of AWRA is to take small steps that encourage larger cultural change. Simple things like ensuring that remote worksites are designed to cater for women's different requirements are important in attracting and retaining women to site based roles."

As AWRA grows its network and reach across the industry, senior resources leaders will act as champions for change and actively become involved across various workforce development areas including attraction, retention, and industry and organisational culture.

As one of these AWRA representatives, Alison believes many remote worksites have already taken positive steps towards attracting a larger number of female job candidates.

The concept of fly-in, fly-out worksites has also greatly evolved in recent years, with a wide range of recreational facilities and services creating a more enjoyable working environment for Australia's resource workers. Alison says simple improvements such as a yoga room, women-only gym areas or a mess that serves lighter food options would be of high value to female workers.

"Brumby Resources and our industry in general employ many skilled and experienced female staff in both technical and operational roles," she says.

"We know that employers in other industries value the skills these women have, so this isn't really a gender equality issue. We need to keep these women interested and engaged in the resources sector – it makes commercial and economic sense for us to recruit from the widest talent pool possible.

"As someone who champions the

participation and career development of women in resources, I was happy to become involved in a new national approach facilitating a cultural shift that promises to strengthen the resource industry through workforce diversity."

Alison and Minna are active participants on the AWRA Reference Group, which comprises key stakeholders from industry bodies, networks and companies representing the resources and allied construction sectors. With a common dedication to increasing the attraction and retention of women in the industry, they are leading the charge and providing oversight of the project.

"This national project thrives on the philosophy of cohesiveness, forward-thinking, inclusiveness and innovation. The right people are in place, the interest is there and the objectives agreed upon, now all we need is for the entire resource industry to get onboard with AWRA," Minna says.

"Whether you are a worker in the industry or a resource employer interested in supporting AWRA – you can become an instigator for positive industry change.

"The first step to contributing to AWRA's core objectives is to fully support and utilise the services this project will be providing directly to the resource industry's employers and enterprises.

"If you or any of your female friends

women in mining

or colleagues are moving into employment with a new company, you should be asking if they are AWRA-accredited. This demonstrates that the company supports workforce diversity and our objectives."

AWRA aims to prepare the Australian resource industry as it rapidly enters its new phase of prosperity by providing employers with a major competitive advantage – strength through workforce diversity.

By closely liaising with state and federal government agencies such as the Equal Opportunity for Women in

the Workplace Agency (EOWA), AWRA will help resource employers meet workplace best practices and targets.

Minna says the AWRA project will measure its performance and results over the project duration, with the end benefit to resource employers and all the workers within the sector.

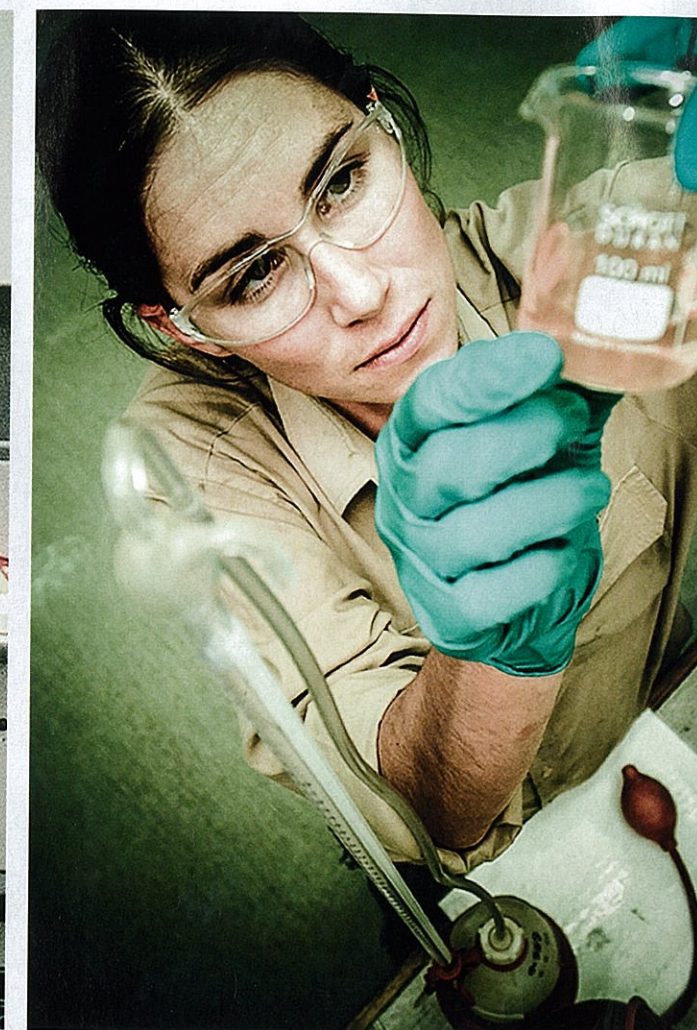
"In the long-term, it's simple really – with your support of AWRA, the resource industry will have access to a greatly strengthened pool of skilled employees," she says.

"This will allow the mammoth investment

in our resource industry to reach its true potential and its economic and societal benefits to flow-on to all Australians. The time to significantly evolve our resource industry workforce is now."

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For more information about the AWRA project, please contact Project Officer Marie Henry via marie.henry@amma.org.au



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