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In this exclusive column, Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA) chief executive *Steve Knott* talks jobs creation, skills, FIFO and workforce initiatives.

## NEW ERA DAWNING



**Q**ueensland has always been famous for its sun, surf and sand tourism image but as we rapidly move through another industrious year, the state's burgeoning resource industry is continuing to steal the limelight.

Given the advancement of the three major LNG projects and ongoing expansion in the state's coal activities, we only expect the focus on our industry to increase.

As the resource industry's national employer group, AMMA's industry forecasting indicates just how significant this unprecedented level of resource activity really is.

There are 105 resources projects in various stages in Queensland, totalling more than \$160 billion in capital value. To give you an indication of the longevity of the state's 'resources boom', more than half of these are not-yet-approved.

The job creation from this activity will be phenomenal. The Queensland Government has stated that 38,000 new jobs will be created from the state's resources projects by 2015 and our figures are almost identical.

While the full export capacity of the state won't be reached for some years to come, it's the construction phase of many large-scale projects throughout Queensland that are providing great opportunities for local workers.

The sentiment AMMA is receiving from its array of Queensland members is one of overwhelming positivity and ambition. However the unique position of Queensland's resource industry is also seeing complex and uncharted issues arising.

Compared to Western Australia, the intricacies of Queensland's state economy require a more cautious approach for its diverse range of industries to coexist with equal prosperity.

With around 4.5 million inhabitants, the Sunshine State's population is almost twice that of its larger Western counterpart and, while WA is primarily a commodities export giant, Queensland's agriculture, tourism and property development sectors have been finely balanced for many decades.

Fortunately, most of these sectors are through the worst of their respective downturns, but they haven't recovered

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enough for Queensland to shake the 'patchwork economy' label that adds a whole range of new complexities to managing the surge in the state's resource activities.

Issues that arose and are ongoing in the West are largely amplified in Queensland's bolstered resource industry and include local content provisions on resource companies, managing conflicting interests over land use and the interaction between the resource industry and environmental interest groups.

However the areas in most need of strong leadership and strategic management are those related to 'people' issues.

The debate around 'fly-in, fly-out' (FIFO) workforces is a prime example. In the remote worksites of WA, the use of entire FIFO workforces is a well-established way-of-life and a necessity for manning projects across the vast state.

In Queensland however, the dense population and widespread agricultural activity means a number of resource projects are in close proximity to rural communities. The challenge comes when interest groups adopt an agenda which involves demanding that only local workers are used for such projects.

Those people working on the ground in or around resource projects will tell you there simply aren't enough people living in regional areas, or willing to move permanently to these regions in order to fulfil the mammoth demand for workers on these projects.

While AMMA continues to maintain its position that federal and state governments must work with industry to ensure the appropriate funding for regional development sees these rural communities benefit from nearby resources activity – we also know that restricting the ability for employers to engage FIFO workers and properly staff their projects is not in anyone's interests.

With the state government looking closely at setting up tourism areas such as North Queensland and the Gold Coast as FIFO hubs, this issue will surely continue to rear its head. As an industry, we must work towards effective outcomes for both our employers and the future of the state.

The immediate focus however, remains on filling the widespread skills shortage expected to occur at the peak of the state's resources activities.

Some of you may have participated alongside AMMA at the state government's Work For Queensland Mining and Gas Jobs Expos. We were encouraged by the interest shown in our industry by attendees at these events.

However, as many of you will have experienced, in some areas the resource industry isn't faced with a 'people shortage' but rather a 'skills shortage'. The vast majority of people attending the expos indicated they have little or no experience in an industry where the safety of individuals can be severely impacted where a worker does not have the requisite skills required for the job.

With the assistance of government departments and our member companies Australia-wide, AMMA is supporting the national focus on up-skilling the current workforce, transitioning new workers from other sectors into resources with the appropriate skills and importantly, promoting the wider resource industry as a prosperous long-term career option for all Australians.

Driven by resource employers, Queensland's new era of economic strength and employment prospects is upon us and we've all got a role to play in bringing it to fruition.

**AMMA has been serving the national resource industry for more than 90 years, with its member companies today directly and indirectly employing more than half a million working Australians.**

**Steve Knott** has been AMMA's Chief Executive since 1997. Steve is a passionate advocate of the need for flexible labour relations arrangements at the enterprise level that facilitate direct employer-employee relationships.

Steve actively encourages resources sector employers in Australia to embrace flexible labour relations legislative changes and leads AMMA's lobbying efforts on their behalf to relevant government, opposition and minor party politicians at state and federal government level.

Before joining AMMA, Steve held senior ER/HR positions with the Hydro Electric Commission Tasmania including the positions of Employee Relations Manager and Human Resources Manager.

Steve is a member of the National Workplace Relations Consultative Council, the International Labour Advisory Committee, is AMMA's representative on the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry's General Council and holds various other representative roles on behalf of AMMA.



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