



Industry mining for more women

By **ANGELA CLUTTERBUCK**

WOMEN have been encouraged to throw their hard hats into the ring for a share of new jobs on offer when mining activity ramps up in the Dubbo region.

It comes after a meeting in Melbourne last week brought together mining company representatives and industry group leaders to discuss ways of attracting more women into the natural resources industry.

The meeting was an initiative of the Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA), which is co-funded by the Australian government and the Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA).

AMMA executive director industry services Minna Knight said the proportion of women working in the mining sector was about 16 per cent, up from 9 per cent a few years ago, but still short of the 25 per cent the organization hoped to achieve by 2020.

Strategies discussed at the conference to continue to boost the number of women in mining included attraction, retention, liveability and cultural organization change.

"We've established a leaders group who want to champion the cause of getting more women in - its leader is OZ Minerals managing

director Terry Burgess, whose company has a great diversity program," Ms Knight said.

She said initiatives mining companies were undertaking included visiting schools to showcase mining careers to girls, advertising blue collar jobs in such a way that they were inclusive for women and setting targets to try to interview as many women as possible.

When it came to retaining female staff, Ms Knight said, the conference was also told how companies were re-examining the way remote sites were set up in order to make them more appealing to women.

"It might include ensuring proper wifi and Skype access to talk to their kids, making sure security is adequate, looking at the culture in camps to ensure there is not unreasonable alcohol consumption and bringing in more family-friendly shifts," she said.

Ms Knight said some of the biggest barriers to entry for

women seeking jobs in the mining industry were the less tangible ones.

"Some research done on the issue at Origin Energy's Surat Basin project showed child care was an issue but overwhelmingly more so was confidence - women had a tendency to look at selection crite-

ria and underestimate their abilities."

Many also had the impression that jobs were too physically demanding.

"It's no longer the 'pick and axe show' - there are a range of different geology, corporate, health and safety and instrumentation roles, and an increasing number of women are moving into electrical apprenticeships," Ms Knight said.

"There's a range of roles available on fixed and moving equipment, and we hear from Western Australia it's well known that women tend to be more gentle with the equipment too.

"Across the country there are examples where companies have put in place female-friendly policies so that women can perform school and split shifts or under job share arrangements."

Ms Knight agreed while both men and women might be attracted to the industry because of attractive salaries, mining jobs were not for everyone.

"There can be unrealistic expectations," she said.

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AMMA director Minna Knight.

Photo: AMMA

She said initiatives mining