



Wanted: women in hard hats

Oil and gas companies are striving for greater gender diversity in their workforce

DEBBIE GUEST

WITH an abundance of job opportunities, great pay, the chance to travel the world and a new push for gender diversity, now is the time for women to enter the oil and gas industry, according to employers.

Massive new gas projects are coming on line across the country, particularly on the west coast, and the figures are staggering when it comes to how many workers are required to get new developments up and running. Between 4000 and 5000 workers will be needed for the construction phase of Inpex's \$US34 billion Ichthys project in Darwin; about 6000 mainly construction workers are required for Chevron's \$29bn Wheatstone project at Onslow in Western Australia; and about 4000 workers are needed for Chevron's \$43bn Gorgon liquefied natural gas project, also in WA.

The resources sector as a whole is looking for 36,000 trade professionals for a variety of projects, says the Australian Mines and Metals Association's executive director Minna Knight.

The wealth of job opportunities comes at a time when the industry is implementing a variety of programs designed to attract and retain women in the oil and gas sector. Last November AMMA launched the Australian Women in Resources Alliance and companies have ramped up their programs to increase gender diversity in the workforce.

To counter the perception that oil and gas is predominantly a male industry, changes are being made to increase female participation and companies say there are many reasons women should be attracted to oil and gas.

Excellent pay is one of the reasons women should be looking to the industry, according to Caltex Australia's group manager for diversity Marie Irwin.

"One blunt reason is, if you look at female-to-male earnings across Australia, the comment is often that women earn less than men," she tells *The Weekend Australian*.

"If we attract more women into roles in oil and gas, we will hopefully do something to address the gender pay gap; that's one thing women should think about. It's also exciting, it's a growth area. (And) because people have to travel far, there's a camaraderie about working in this industry."

Knight says many women would welcome the opportunity

to earn a reasonable salary and be able to save, but points out that working in oil and gas also has many other benefits.

"It's the variety associated with the roles that you can potentially undertake, it is not only domestically in Australia that you get to see some pretty amazing sites but also internationally," she says.

"It's a very well-paid industry with a high regard for safety... It's also working in an industry that arguably is contributing more to the Australian economy at the

moment than virtually any other industry."

There is a huge range of jobs on offer, with women working as engineers, truck and crane drivers, construction workers, electricians and machine operators, apart from taking up the traditional female dominated roles in human resources and administration.

Irwin says Caltex Australia ramped up its focus on increasing female employees in 2010, when changes were introduced to the Australia Security Exchange's reporting requirements on workforce diversity.

"We were late starters, we started in 2010, and since then we've really invested energy and time," she says. Thirty per cent of Caltex Australia's workforce is now female, and Irwin says the company is investing in retaining women and training them to be the leaders of tomorrow.

"Last year we put 90 per cent of our women through career development programs, we put them on programs of resilience, networking skills, self awareness," she says.

"Half of the women also got individual coaching. We really invest in and support our women in their careers.

"Our ultimate goal is to have more women leaders at the top of our company."

Chevron is backing programs that break down barriers for women in the industry and has supported an engineering course at Challenger Institute of Technology in Perth.

The course involves the mentoring of women from diverse backgrounds in a supportive learning environment.

"We are thrilled to be able to offer additional support and guidance to the women by providing some of our female engineers to mentor and share their experience and advice," Chevron Australia general manager human resources Kaye Butler told the company's internal magazine earlier this year.

Knight says the AWRA program is developing initiatives to attract women to the industry initially and then keep them, even when they start families.

Attracting women to the industry begins in high schools and Knight says AWRA is working with schools so that the idea of a job in oil and gas or the resources sector is planted in the minds of girls early on.

"If you don't attract them (by Year 9, you've missed out on a whole group of women who have decided to do other things," Knight says.

Simple changes are also being implemented, with AWRA focusing on changing job advertisements to make them more attractive to women. Knight says the wording in job ads is being changed to make job descriptions easier to understand, and more women are appearing in advertisements.

An industry-wide mentoring project has also been initiated by AWRA with the aim of linking women with colleagues in their area of specialisation.

"We've also got a leaders group, because to get change, you've got to lead it from the top," Knight points out.

'Our ultimate goal is to have more women leaders at the top of our company'

MARIE IRWIN
CALTEX AUSTRALIA