



Resource employers ramp-up call for skilled women

WITH A RANGE OF NATIONAL PROGRAMS TO BOOST THE NUMBER OF WOMEN IN ITS WORKFORCE, AUSTRALIA'S RESOURCE INDUSTRY IS PROVING THAT EFFECTIVELY ENGAGING NEW SKILLED DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS IS CRITICAL TO THE SECTOR'S ONGOING SUCCESS.

Prominent Hill processing plant at sunrise. Photos courtesy OZ Minerals

A decade's worth of record investment activity has taught the resource industry many lessons about stakeholder engagement, from managing regional community concerns to effective government and public relations.

As director of group services with resource industry employer group Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA), Tara Diamond says the industry's need to expand the pool of workers from which it recruits has driven a newfound strategic focus on engaging with untapped labour demographics. Women are top of the agenda.

"When it comes to unlocking new doors to highly engaged, skilled and motivated employees, women have emerged as an absolutely critical stakeholder group," said Ms Diamond.

"But despite operating at the forefront of technology and offering boundless career opportunities and benefits, resource and related construction companies have traditionally struggled to attract women employees."

According to government analysis, the

participation of women in resource employment is sitting at around 15 per cent. Move up the career ladder and the gap gets wider with women occupying just 10.5 per cent of managerial positions and around two per cent of CEO positions.

In response to an Australian Government recommendation to increase the number of women in the resource sector in order to meet the industry's growing skills demand, almost two years ago AMMA launched the Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA).

"The project brings together a network of resource employers and industry groups with an ambitious goal to increase in the level of women in resource, construction and allied service employment to 25 per cent by 2020," Ms Diamond says.

"Engaging with more women in the jobseeker marketplace is especially important to maintain Australia's competitive advantage; that is highly skilled, technologically advanced workforces.

"There is no escaping that our country has become a high cost place to do business and there are emerging global competitors biting

into our international market share.

"But the mining boom isn't over. Australia's resource portfolio still ranks as one of the world's strongest with \$268 billion worth of major projects under construction and a further \$350 billion in the pipeline.

"While the demand for labour may have petered slightly, attracting and retaining skilled labour, especially to remote locations, remains one of the greatest challenges and opportunities facing resource employers."

While targeted recruitment campaigns are critical, the complex challenge for resource employers is to both break down the male-dominated image of the sector and effectively communicate that message to its target stakeholder groups.

A number of innovative projects rolled out by AWRA have achieved widespread interest, including the industry's first internet-based mentoring program.

"AWRA e-Mentoring matches women in the early stages of their career with an experienced male or female mentor and guides them through a nine-month relationship using a web-based platform," said Ms Diamond.



“The program offers a niche solution for women who have found it difficult to access mentoring opportunities due to transient work arrangements, remote locations or non-traditional working hours.

“Since its launch seven months ago we have received very positive feedback and matched more than 80 mentor-mentee pairs as far apart as Karratha, Western Australia and Queensland’s Surat Basin.

“It’s a fantastic example of how technology can drive the development of creative new engagement tools.”

AWRA followed up this success with the launch of The Way Forward Guides—a package of information manuals that provide guidance and feedback on company diversity strategies and benchmark against international best practice.

“We are also assessing employers under the AWRA Recognise Program which rates them according to their achievements and commitment to workforce policies and performance in gender diversity and women’s workforce participation,” said Ms Diamond.

“Even long before this program was

launched, a number of individual resource employers were proving to be some of Australia’s best when it comes to workforce engagement strategies.

“OZ Minerals is one shining example, having succeeded in lifting its direct female participation to 24 per cent overall and working towards 25 per cent female participation in every job level.

“While Caltex’s BabyCare Bonus for new parents is encouraging the retention of women workers and demonstrating the company’s appreciation of the skills and productivity returns of employees.

“Adapting to diversity is something that employers in our industry take very seriously and can translate to great benefits not only for individual organisations, but also for the industry’s contribution to wider economy.

“We’ll continue to celebrate these initiatives and grow AWRA’s scope of programs to establish the resource and related industries as the number-one career choice for talented Australians—male and female.”

Tara Diamond
AMMA