



E-MENTORING PROGRAM BREAKS DOWN GENDER BARRIERS IN GAS

A national program utilising a range of digital communications tools is breaking down traditional barriers to successful mentoring for women in remote resource industry workplaces, and connecting them with career support and inspiration.

LIKE MUCH OF the resource industry, Australia's oil and gas sector is making strong progress towards squaring the gender balance in its workforces – with better parental leave schemes, flexible working arrangements and targeted recruitment campaigns among the leading policies and practices.

However, the prospect of entering traditionally male-dominated workplaces, often many kilometres offshore, remains daunting for many women pursuing a career in oil and gas.

The latest trend in support for female resource employees, and one that is proving invaluable to retention and development of women in the industry, is mentoring.

Australian Mines and Metals Association (AMMA) Executive Director Tara Diamond says guidance and support from industry-experienced mentors is crucial to helping new entrants get off to a running start in their resource industry careers.

"Mentoring has proven extremely beneficial in the attraction, retention and leadership development of women in male-dominated industries such as the national resource industry," says Ms Diamond.



LEFT: AMMA Executive Director Tara Diamond.



LEFT: MMG geological database administrator Shauna Martin.

"With women representing just 11 per cent of the oil and gas extraction workforce, this industry could especially benefit from connecting women with more experienced mentors facing similar work pressures, challenges and career obstacles.

"But the unique characteristics of our industry – with its transient work

ABOVE: The oil and gas industry is making headway on women's participation.



ABOVE: Women in the offshore sector can access mentorship with AWRA e-Mentoring.

arrangements, remote locations and differing roster cycles – makes face-to-face mentoring programs a challenge to implement and maintain.”

AMMA is the facilitator of the Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA), a national initiative working to increase the number of women working in Australia’s mining, oil and gas industries. The organisation is confronting the geographical challenge of mentoring in the resource sector with its innovative digital program – AWRA e-Mentoring.

Through an online platform comprising multiple contact options including telephone, e-mail and Skype, AWRA e-Mentoring has laid the foundation for more than 170 mentees to gain support, guidance and information from experienced mentors, regardless of the distance between them.

To date, the AWRA e-Mentoring program has largely been taken up in the onshore mining space where, for example, women working in the rural heart of Western Australia’s Pilbara region can regularly speak with a mentor in rural Queensland or a CBD location.

One recent instance is that of Shauna Martin, a geological database administrator for MMG’s Golden Grove project situated 450 km north-east of Perth. Using AWRA e-Mentoring, Ms Martin has been mentored by experienced commercial manager Scott Pope, who works for Origin Energy in its Sydney office.

While many of the mentors signed up to program are women themselves, Ms Martin says gaining a male perspective to many of her career questions and workplace challenges has been invaluable.

And the best part, she says, was not being

limited by distance – even with her mentor some 4,000 km away.

“There’s a whole nation involved across different resource-related sectors, and there is no way I would have connected with Scott if it wasn’t for this program. AWRA e-Mentoring ensured I wasn’t just limited to mentors in Western Australia,” Ms Martin says.

“Building my confidence and developing pathways to achieve my career goals were some issues we worked on, but Scott also had lots of little tips around time management and prioritising that I could instantly apply to my work.”

On the mentoring side, Mr Pope signed on believing he had something to offer the industry’s wide push to better support women in resource industry careers. He was particularly drawn to the flexibility of the program and the way it breaks down the geographical factors that can create problems for women seeking dedicated professional support.

“I’ve worked in a number of different organisations and have a lot of experience in the energy sector, so I have a sense of different workplace cultures and the dynamics of a generally male-dominated industry,” says Mr Pope.

“When you are not bound to the same occupational category, you can assess a situation without being locked into a certain perspective, so I think the AWRA e-Mentoring Program is a great opportunity for using diverse mentoring approaches.”

After achieving positive results in the onshore mining sector, AMMA’s Ms Diamond says the program is seeking to expand heavily into the oil and gas sector, including in offshore construction and production where such support has rarely been available in the past.

“The positive feedback we are getting from mentees and mentors, both of whom find equal value and satisfaction in this program, has been very pleasing and encouraging,” says Ms Diamond.

“Given we are now seeking to offer this program more widely, we encourage women seeking an experienced mentor and any men or women who believe they have something to offer up-and-comers to get in touch with AMMA.

“This program will make a very real difference to the career development of women working in Australia’s oil and gas industry.” **GT**

Visit amma.org.au/awra to learn more about the e-Mentoring program.