

MINING MEMORIES

with former AMMA boss

In a 27-year career with Australia's resource industry employer group, former AMMA chief executive David Young saw everything from landmark industrial relations agreements to new mineral deposit discoveries and the emergence of Australia's oil and gas industry.

WHEN FOUR GENERATIONS of successive AMMA chief executives get together, there are sure to be a few old war stories on everything from industrial relations to the ups and downs of Australia's national resource industry.

It would be hard to top those told by David Young, the oldest and second longest-serving AMMA chief executive of the group (behind current CEO Steve Knott).

Young started with AMMA in 1955, cutting his teeth in the Melbourne head office, which at the time 'comprised of just two blokes' looking after a range of ports, manufacturing, mining and construction operators from Newcastle to Sydney, and out to Broken Hill.

A few years later, he moved to Brisbane during Queensland's emergence as a national mining force. Mount Isa Mines had doubled production, Mount Morgan was at the peak of its powers (closed in 1981), and there were new discoveries at Weipa and Mary Kathleen (former Rio Tinto mining settlement in north-west Queensland).

"The major difference between then and now was probably the strength of the unions at the time. In Queensland, there was about 80 per cent unionisation," Young says.

"'Boom time' at Mary K's was very rich. The union wanted to make a name for itself and they'd come up, flex their muscles and cause some trouble.

"Or perhaps the blokes just wanted a break from the climate and to get back to civilisation, given Mary K's was out in the sticks. Half of the disputes up there would be about what breakfast cereals they could choose from.

"So we'd be putting out spot fires all the time. A lot of claims had no merit, though occasionally they had merit. We were like unofficial conciliators. Nobody was keen on litigation costs and with the tyranny of

distance in those days, it was in everybody's interests to settle things on the spot."

Young also speaks fondly of his work at Weipa, in particular restructuring its industrial arrangements during the mine's early and rapid development.

However, Young didn't only have a knack for clever industrial arrangements, he also led AMMA through a significant growth period, which included the organisation cementing its position within the emerging oil and gas sector.

The discovery of oil at Moonie and other places on Australia's east coast was the beginning of a whole new industry.

"Given the only other holes that had ever been drilled in Queensland were water bores of maybe 100m deep, I saw an opportunity and grabbed it with both hands," Young says.

"Some of the American companies came out and had strict instructions to never be unionised because that's the position they had in the United States. Others would walk straight into the union office and try to make a deal.

"I opened up a new branch in the Brisbane office with three staff, had two new staff in Sydney and another six to cover the Bass Strait divers, helicopters and all the maritime work that was involved.

"And then we had the iron ore discoveries in the west that saw AMMA open a branch office in Perth."

When Young retired from AMMA in 1982 after 27 years' service, he had overseen the growth of the organisation from a handful of industrial officers to 40 staff on the books nationally.

"My function changed greatly from being entirely hands-on and sitting with the blokes to try and assess their claims, to a more strategic and management role," Young says.

"There are certainly a few highlights from my time as AMMA CEO. The mining industry overall is a very attractive place to work.

"It's made up of people who like to work in different circumstances and get away from the 'humdrum' of other jobs. There's certainly something special about it." **RP**



Four generations of AMMA leadership: (L-R) Rex Whiffen (started 1969, CEO 1982-93), Steve Knott (started 1996, CEO 1997 to present), Norm Amos (started 1970, CEO 1993-97), and David Young (started 1955, CEO 1966-82)