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**RESOURCE COMPANIES TURNING THEIR BACK ON
INDIGENOUS BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITIES**

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Australian resource companies need to hold fast their commitments to support and advance Indigenous workers and their communities despite the downturn in the resources sector, according to the peak body for Indigenous businesses in the mining sector Aboriginal Enterprises in Mining Exploration and Energy (AEMEE).

Derek Flucker, Chairperson of AEMEE and Managing Director of Indigenous mining contractor RBY Projects, said big companies' recent decisions to withdraw work from Indigenous contracting companies would have dire consequences for Indigenous business and employment.

He said the resources sector had made a contribution to Indigenous advancement in terms of employment and training, but their commitment was being tested by the current downturn in the resources sector. "I hear the calls of pain from Indigenous businesses in the sector across the country on a daily basis and the position taken by the resource sector is really hurting".

"I call on major resource companies to demonstrate their continued commitment to Indigenous Australia by producing mandates to prioritise engagement of Indigenous business and employment of local people.

"Despite the downturn, employment in the resource sector continues to provides key opportunities for Indigenous people, who are often reluctant to leave leave their own communities to find employment due their cultural connection, connection to the land and family ties.

“Resource companies benefit from using Indigenous contracts as they are more likely to source a local workforce that can significantly reduce the costs associated with fly-in-fly-out workers and increase retention by reducing employees that shop around.

Statistics show that the majority of resource projects have a neighbouring Indigenous community and the resource sector is the largest private sector employer of Indigenous people.

“We call on the Australian resources sector to invest in our communities and our people rather than pushing them back to a welfare based model where governments are providing the economic base for communities.”

Mr Flucker said his company has above-average retention rates for his Indigenous workers due to the fact that they were often working close to their own communities. He said he regularly saw the ‘value-add’ that Indigenous workers brought to resource companies due to their familiarity and knowledge of the local landscape and their commitment to minimising damage to land and cultural heritage.

“I was recently in Canada and the commitments and advances they have made there in relation to their Indigenous peoples and the way they’re treated in the mining sector is years ahead of Australia.

“We have so far to go in this area – there are no firm expectations on companies to employ Indigenous people and sometimes these companies are just doing it because they feel it’s the right thing to do.

“That reason is not going to hold in times like this – and the people who will suffer first are local communities and their workers.”

ENDS

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