

ENCOURAGING INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT IN THE GAS INDUSTRY

The gas industry should take a lead role in the development of business and employment opportunities for Indigenous groups in Australia, according to Australia's peak body representing Indigenous groups in the oil, gas and mining industry.

ABORIGINAL ENTERPRISES IN Mining Exploration & Energy (AEMEE) Chairperson Derek Flucker says mining has led the way in Australia for Indigenous participation to date and the gas industry needs to follow.

The resources sector is the largest private sector employer of Indigenous people in Australia, and where an Indigenous business is embedded in a resources project the percentage of Indigenous employment increases dramatically.

"Many of the projects in the gas sector are in remote areas and statistics show that most of these projects have a neighbouring Indigenous community," Mr Flucker says.

"Most of these communities have high rates of unemployment, which provides a good opportunity for local labour. This limits resources companies' fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) costs."

Mr Flucker, who is also Managing Director of Indigenous contracting firm RBY Projects, says there are some good models for engaging with these communities to ensure the best outcome for the company and the



LEFT: *Aboriginal Enterprises in Mining Exploration & Energy (AEMEE) Chairperson Derek Flucker*

Indigenous groups involved. Both Origin and QGC are working with RBY projects, and this partnership is providing good models for other companies to adopt.

"Some large resource projects are achieving Indigenous employment targets of up to 35 per cent, which is providing a real positive for the people being employed," Mr Flucker says.

He says many Indigenous communities are in serious trouble in terms of high unemployment and welfare dependency, and the mining industry has thrown a lifeline to Indigenous groups for many years and provided real benefits.

"The recent mining boom has been a boom for the industry and the Indigenous groups taking part in these projects. But the recent downturn has adversely affected Indigenous groups," Mr Flucker says.

Mr Flucker says the mining downturn means it is time for the gas industry to step up, and if all industries chipped in this would help stop many Indigenous groups from heading back to a welfare-based economy.

"Indigenous people don't want welfare, they want real jobs, and the gas industry can help this occur.

"The great thing about the gas industry is that the impact area is usually much greater than mining projects, as mining generally has a small geographical disturbance area, and the workers usually stay away from the community while at work. In mining they are pretty much contained to the mine site.

"But in gas projects they generally have a much larger disturbance area and we]]

BELOW: RBY workers on a gas site in the Surat Basin.



find our workers are dealing with other communities and landholders on a regular basis.

"This makes it more likely that Indigenous people are seen in a more positive light and seen as contributing to the employment markets and local economies, rather than being portrayed as welfare recipients.

"I think this is great for Indigenous Australians, as this exposure promotes greater reconciliation and appreciation between Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous Australians."

CSG DRIVING INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

Mr Flucker's company currently works in the Coal Seam Gas (CSG) industry in the Surat Basin, Queensland, and says it is great to see employees working in Roma, Millmerran and beyond showing that Indigenous people are working and worthy members of society.

It is anticipated that by 2050, 50 per cent of the population in northern Australia will be Indigenous.

Because of this increasing Indigenous population in northern Australia,

Mr Flucker argues that it is important for the gas industry to start developing business models that consider Indigenous employment, and points to the Canadian gas industry as a leader in this field.

"While I was in Canada I saw the Indigenous groups in partnerships with gas companies, I saw multi-million dollar Indigenous businesses employing many hundreds of people. I saw Indigenous businesses owning drilling rigs. It is very different to Australia but it provides good models to work from, as a lot of the same companies that are in Australia work in Canada but are doing things very differently," he says.

Mr Flucker says RBY prides itself on having Indigenous people at all levels of the business – as operators, in administration and in management and professional levels. RBY is the largest Indigenous business working in the gas sector in Queensland. Almost 40 per cent of RBY's workforce is Indigenous.

"The business is providing a model of Indigenous business development, recruitment and employment for the gas

industry to learn from," Mr Flucker says.

"We have not received any favours – we just get the job done safely, quality is high and cost-effective, and the added benefit is we give a lot of Indigenous people a real chance at life and to improve the lives of their families."

AEMEE's role as the peak organisation for Indigenous resource companies is to gain a true market share for Indigenous businesses within the mining, energy and exploration sectors and to connect Indigenous businesses with real opportunities. AEMEE has an all-Indigenous Board composed of Indigenous business owners operating in the resources sector. **GT**

AEMEE holds an annual conference, with this year's conference to be held in Adelaide 26–28 October 2015. The Adelaide conference will feature Canadian delegates from resource companies and Indigenous groups to discuss their business development and policy experiences.



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