



'Women Breaking Through' in the minerals industry

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Not many industries are still considered by the community to be as strongly the bastion of males as the minerals industry.

Our industry evokes images in the minds of many of strong, young men in stubbies; working out in the last remaining frontier towns; where the only women in sight are either the dutiful wives or the prospective ones.

Even recent mainstream media commentary on the current economic strength of the industry has been accompanied by the images of young men celebrating over an ice-cold beer in a skimpy bar.

And while towns like Kalgoorlie may perpetuate this image of a mining legacy and culture, with a ticker tape on the pub that lists the spot nickel price, the spot gold price, the counter meal, and the skimpy of the week, this is not the face of the modern mining industry.

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In truth, there are some in the industry who hang on to these images like they were the golden days of the past. In selling their products, or the industry's opportunities, they play specifically on the masculine nature of this work, and that we are in the harshest country, operating with some of the toughest equipment.

But there is a much wider appreciation within the communities in which we operate as to the extent to which this industry has transformed.

We are considered by many in our host communities to be technologically innovative and advanced.

They see that the industry no longer relies on brute strength and exposure to environments many have called 'dirty, dark and dangerous'. The recent Beaconsfield disaster is a classic example of this – what was presented by many in the media as an example of the unmitigated danger inherent in mining, was seen by many in the community as an example of the level of sophistication in the industry's emergency response procedures.

We are an industry that is highly mechanised and automated and which is continually improving its production processes to ensure that human exposure to extreme conditions or hazardous situations is minimised, if not completely avoided.

And we have shifted from being a labour intensive to a highly capital intensive industry, relying on high levels of new investment to sustain and grow production.

As an industry sector we have become very skilled at breaking through physical barriers – we mine in some of the most diverse environments globally – from the middle of the desert to under permafrost in the Arctic circle; we are experts at drilling and blasting, yet we still have not managed to break through the structural and cultural barriers that limit the participation of women in our industry.

The statistics are stark.

According to the ABS, women comprise only 18% of the total minerals industry workforce, which includes corporate office employees, site employees and a number of key service providers. This also includes the high numbers of clerical and administrative personnel located in corporate offices as well as other non-technical roles.

Focussing specifically on mine sites and minerals processing operations, women represent 3% of all employees, with the majority of these in administrative, catering or non-technical roles.

And while the figures on Indigenous employment have improved markedly across the minerals industry in the past decade, to the point where our industry is the largest private sector employer of Indigenous Australians, it is clear that gender diversity is an issue here as well, with women comprising only 12% of all Indigenous employees.

This is not to say that we don't have some leading examples of women in our industry – a small handful of female mine managers, a number of women in senior corporate leadership roles, and a reasonable cluster of women in community and environmental management roles.

But it clearly illustrates the imperative to consider why we are one of the most gender segregated industry's nationally, and what impact this is having on those women who chose to work in this industry.

And what we have found anecdotally on sites to date demonstrates that women working in the minerals industry, can be disadvantaged by discrimination and harassment that includes negative perceptions about their abilities and commitment to the workplace, their exclusion from social and other networks, and having fewer opportunities for challenging and rewarding work. And where woman have achieved they've done so on other peoples' terms.

Structural and cultural impediments to women's effective participation

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If we are to increase women's participation in our workforce, it is important to have a clear understanding of the structural and cultural impediments characteristics of the minerals industry.

Structural issues include:

- > The low level of part time work compared to other sectors, including other traditionally male oriented industries, is an obvious impediment in that around 40% of female employment nationally is part time.
- > The culture of overwork, long hours and intensity in the minerals industry can have a more negative impact on women than men because of their additional domestic responsibilities.
- > The remote nature of the industry is also a factor inhibiting female participation, though this is much less so in regard to the engagement of Indigenous women.
- > And the age profile of women in the industry is also heavily concentrated on those aged 34 and under, a significantly younger cohort than men, who on average fall in the 45 to 54 year age bracket.

This profile is likely the result of a lack of part time and flexible work arrangements for women of parenting age. Whilst women often take the decision to leave the industry to have children and to care for them, a lack of "on-ramps" exist in terms of re-engaging them with the minerals industry when they are seeking to return to work.

Where women have reported positively on their successful, if highly difficult attempts to balance children with full time jobs, their success has relied heavily on a support base of other carers. For this reason, women with children working in the industry have the most difficulty when living in mining communities in highly remote areas, or in communities that are separate to that of their families.

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There are also significant cultural impediments to women's participation that are linked to the structural issues in many ways.

These cultural issues can manifest themselves in terms of a lack of mentor relationships and support networks, the gender segregated nature of decision-making and task allocation, disadvantage, discrimination or harassment. At worst some female employees feel at risk of sexual assault.

And the Australian legal system has also been a significant impediment to women's effective participation in the industry, in fact until 1994, only 12 years ago, women were still prevented by law in NSW from working in underground mines.

The business case for gender diversity in the industry

It has become increasingly apparent, however, that management of a diverse workforce is critical if the Australian minerals industry is to maintain and improve its competitive advantage in resource development globally.

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The industry recognises that a focus on diversity is not just a good idea, it also makes good business sense.

We consider that the key aspects of the business case for diversity focus around:

- > improved employee attraction, retention, productivity and performance;
- > improved decision making through the inclusion of different perspectives increasing business innovation;
- > the development of cross-cultural capabilities to manage the complexity of global operations;
- > reduced safety and health risks - anecdotally we know that when women are part of the workforce, better care is taken of the equipment, there is less competitive antagonism and the overall safety record has been shown to improve; and

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- > reduced costs of equipment and maintenance - women make excellent operators of mobile equipment, with reduced tyre wear and improved frequency of vehicle servicing leading to reduced overall maintenance costs. Put this in the context of a truck worth around 1 million dollars, with tyres costing several thousands of dollars each. I should also point out that there aren't many jobs where a woman with a few weeks training and a heavy vehicle licence can be earning over \$120,000 a year.

The business case is also founded in earning and maintaining a social licence to operate, which focuses on maximising the mutually beneficial outcomes that can be achieved through minerals development, and which recognise the value in social initiatives which may be founded in principles of equality and social justice.

Sustainable Development - a new operating paradigm

The minerals industry is currently basking in vastly improved financial performance, even if that is not across the board.

But what is of great merit is that this industry is not seduced by its newfound economic significance and the increasing recognition throughout the community and among key opinion leaders of our economic strength and significant contribution to Australia's improved terms of trade, and the recent tax cuts.

The industry has transcended those considerations in understanding that the practices of the past are simply not sustainable in realising future opportunities. The industry has moved well and truly beyond getting lost in its own self-importance, to appreciating and responding to the needs and expectations of its stakeholders.

We recognise that our future is inseparable from the global pursuit of sustainable development.

Through the integration of economic progress, responsible social development and effective environmental management, the industry is committed to contributing to the sustained growth and prosperity of current and future generations.

Foundation to the industry's commitment is the concept of a social licence to operate.

To the minerals industry it is about operating in a manner that is attuned to community expectations and which acknowledges that business have a shared responsibility with government, and more broadly society, to help facilitate the development of strong and sustainable communities.

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The implementation of this approach has led to a paradigm shift in the last decade in the way we do business.

- > To effectively manage the environmental impacts of our business we have built teams of environmental scientists, geologists, biologists, hydrologists, limnologists and many other 'ologists'...
- > To ensure that our employees are effective for our business and their families, we need human resource managers, occupational therapists, industrial hygienists, dieticians, sports physicians, counsellors and housing managers.
- > And if companies are to understand the needs and expectations of the communities in which they operate, companies need competency profiles that include an understanding of cross-cultural relations, psychology, sociology, demography,

anthropology, political science (in terms of power dynamics), multivariate analysis (for complex decision making), and communication skills.

Who'd have thought a decade ago that this suite of skills would become foundation to operating a mine?

And whilst we recognise that there are women we have failed to attract in existing roles be they the science-based professions, or technical, skills based jobs, clearly this need to look beyond the traditional mining disciplines of engineering, earth sciences and metallurgy provides a real opportunity to enhance the participation of women in our industry.

The MCA Women and Mining Dialogue

The MCA established a women and mining Dialogue in late 2004 to focus on the key impediments to gender diversity in the minerals industry and to develop strategies to improve its engagement of women – both in our workforce and in the communities in which we operate.

The Minerals Council considers that diversity will be key to assisting the development of a generic industry platform on gender issues, and has engaged a broad range of experts on women's policy, community development and human resources.

The membership of the Steering Committee includes the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, the Office for Women, the ACTU, links to the MCA's Indigenous Leaders Dialogue and the External Sustainable Development Advisory Group, and a broad range of company representatives - including CEO's, a mine manager, and Senior Executives with responsibilities for issues such as community relations and human resources.

The Dialogue will provide an opportunity to analyse a broad range of gender issues associated with the minerals industry, and to develop a work program for capacity building and cultural change.

Importantly, however, the Council is not focussed solely on women in the workforce. We are taking a broader approach to address women's issues in the communities in which we operate.

To date, the activities of the Women and Mining Dialogue have focussed on:

- > identification of key demographic trends around women's education, employment and geographic distribution;
- > engagement with the national agenda on the role of women in non-traditional industries;
- > promotion and awareness raising of the issues associated with women's effective participation in the minerals industry and the articulation of the business benefits of diversity; and
- > establishment of a work program on Indigenous Women and Mining, addressing cultural issues as part of the MCA's gender diversity framework; in conjunction with senior indigenous women.

The establishment of the Dialogue has attracted high-level political attention and has sponsored the development of programs on women and mining among State related organisations, including the Queensland Resources Council and the Tasmanian Minerals Council.

To support this, the MCA, in partnership with the Office for Women, has established a program of baseline research.

The research, being undertaken by the Centre for Socially Responsible Mining at the University of Queensland, and the WISER Unit in the School of Business at Curtin University, focuses on two aspects:

- Firstly - an analysis of the impact of existing workplace policies, structures and cultures on women's employment in the mining industry and an identification of alternative strategies, including policies and practices, to address these issues; and
- Secondly - an analysis of the impact of existing workplace policies, structures and cultures on the attraction of employment in the mining industry to skilled and professional women and an identification of alternative strategies, including policies and practices, to address these issues.

The outcomes of this research will be critical to enabling the minerals industry to be properly informed of the range and extent of gender based issues associated with our operations, and to provide an additional catalyst for change - particularly

in addressing some of the much more difficult issues around cultural impediments, discrimination and harassment.

As Donald Rumsfeld said, *"the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence"*, and the research will be a critical input to the MCA's development of a national dialogue on women and mining.

This National Dialogue, to be held in late 2006 or early 2007, and supported by the MCA Board of Directors, will provide an opportunity to bring together a range of key stakeholders from industry, government and the community, to develop a five-year action agenda.

The action agenda will focus on key aspects associated with the minerals industry and gender issues, including:

- > Structural and cultural impediments to the attraction and retention of women in managerial, professional, technical and support roles;
- > Work and family issues, including focussing on women as the spouses of minerals industry employees;
- > Strategies to improve the effective engagement of women in the communities in which we operate, including their involvement in community decision making processes;
- > The identification of strategies to ensure the effective engagement of Indigenous women in employment, enterprise development and community engagement; and
- > The identification of strategies to attract women into undertaking studies relevant to the range of employment opportunities available in the minerals sector.

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What this amounts to is that as an industry we realise the value of a diverse workforce and the importance of engaging effectively with women in the communities in which we operate. But with a culture more accustomed to finding engineering based solutions, we have had to recognise that enabling women to break through the barriers in our industry will require structural and cultural change, much more than just a good dose of ammonium nitrate.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today as just one of what we at the Minerals Council hope will be a growing number of women pursuing challenging and fulfilling



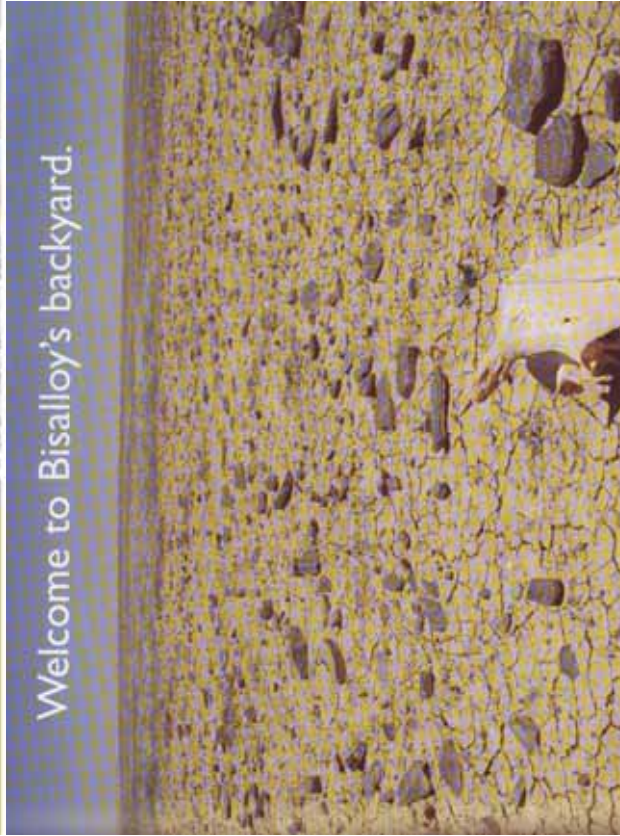
Women breaking through in the minerals industry

Melanie Stutzel - Director of Environmental and Social Policy
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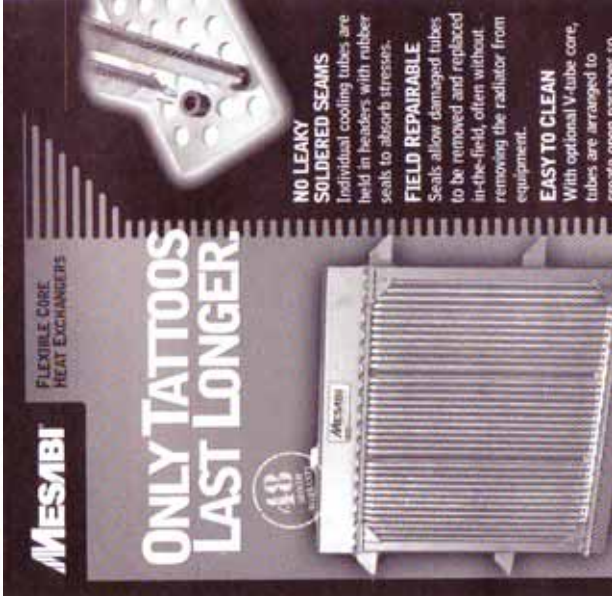
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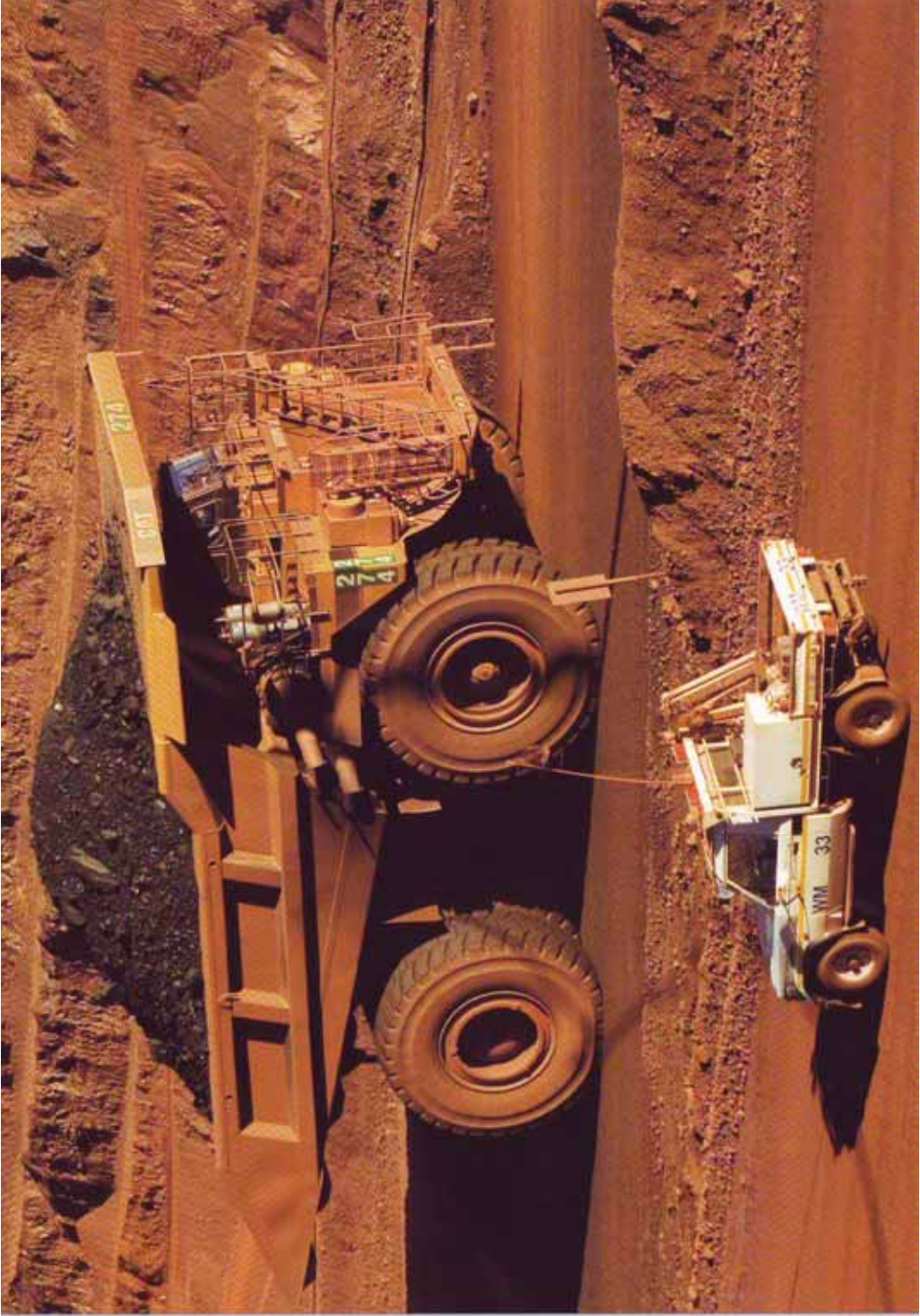
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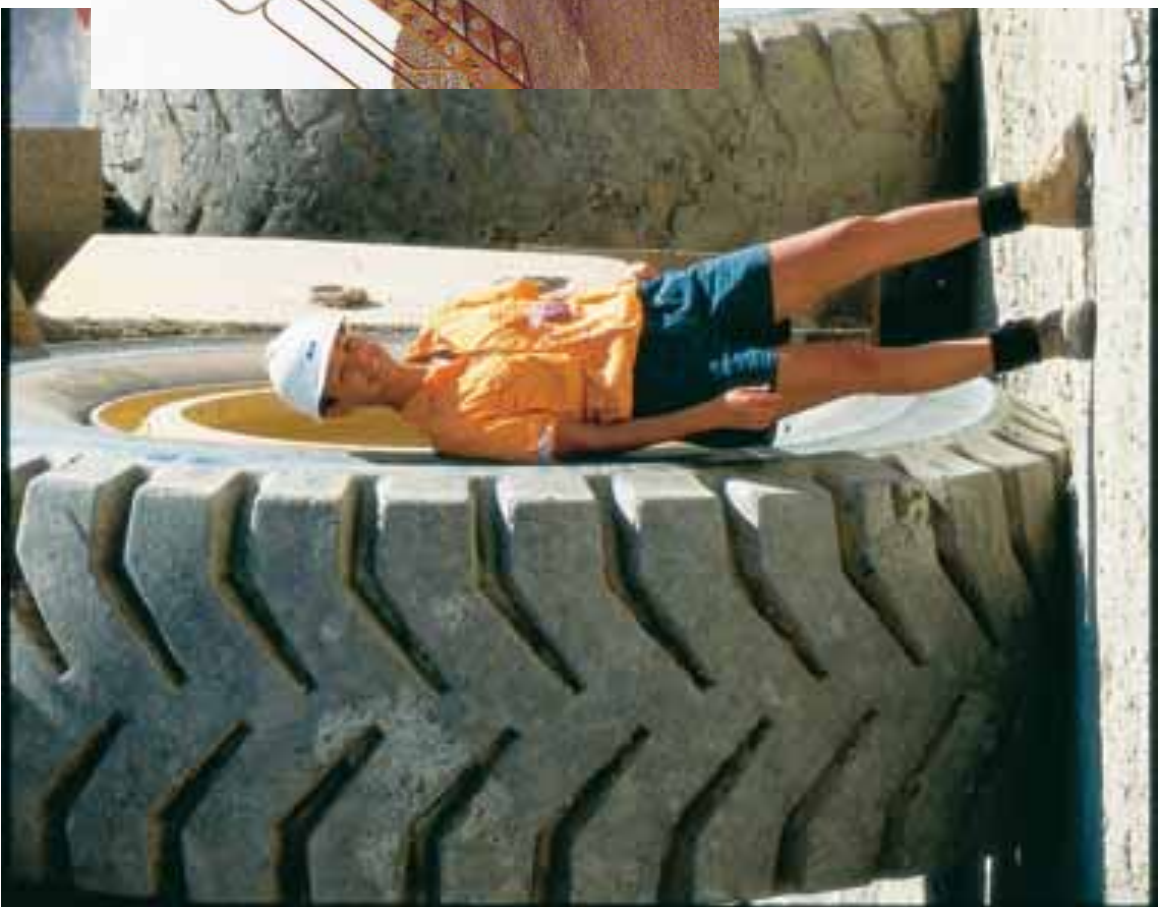


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“These women didn’t want to stand out as being different, and nor should they have had to. It was my behaviour that had to change. I really believe that, as a leader, you have an obligation to create a working environment that recognises and is inclusive of a diverse workforce”

**Wayne Osborne - Managing Director
Alcoa World Alumina Australia**

