

# Call for 'big picture' approach

Better planned investment in infrastructure, image building and the need to attract more young people and women are key sustainability issues facing the future of the coal industry.

This was the message delivered by Ensham Resources chief executive and Queensland Resources Council (QRC) president John Pegler to Australia's premier coal industry conference — Coaltrans Australia — in Brisbane.

Pegler told the audience of around 500 people that simply being proficient at finding and producing mineral commodities was no longer enough to ensure the future survival of the resource sector.

"Sustainability is not simply an infrastructure issue and centres on the need to replace outdated stereotypes of the mining industry and find ways to attract young people and women to the resources sector or there will be a critical people shortage in the future," he explained.

Pegler said these "big picture" issues required an industry-wide approach to put in place the necessary planning to ensure successive generations developed an appreciation of the value of mining and the extraordinary options offered by the wealth it created.

"Truth is, we are granted a licence to operate at the discretion of the people who own the resource," he said.

"Through their duly elected governments, clocks can be turned back, rugs pulled and agreements rescinded — a fact of life that's made a whole lot easier if the industry, or members of it, fail to meet community expectations.

"If we want to protect our investment — and see it grow — we must keep reminding ourselves that stakeholders are just as important as shareholders in charting our course."

Pegler emphasised the importance of a positive reputation by citing the Tylenol contamination scare in the US where, despite



▲ John Pegler

the malicious poisoning of its product, the share price of parent company Johnson & Johnson barely wavered because people trusted the organisation and how it handled the crisis.

"A good reputation in the mining industry means a real commitment to health and safety, pro-active environmental management and strong social and economic linkages with local communities," he said.

"These, among other things, help attract the best employees and leave financiers much more comfortable about the future of an enterprise actively planning for longevity."

He said the QRC was guided in its future vision for the sector by its 2004 study into the attitude and opinions of the so-called Generation-Y.

"In numerical terms, Generation-Y is larger than the baby boomer generation, but they know next to nothing about our industry and the resources sector in general," Pegler observed.

"For example, they don't know that there are up to 22 different metals in a personal computer. They are mostly unaware that coal provides the bulk of the electrical energy needed to manufacture and run them.

## Views wanted

All women who have ever worked in the minerals and energy sector in Queensland are encouraged to come forward with their experiences in this traditionally male-oriented work force.

The Queensland Resources Council (QRC) has commissioned a detailed state-wide study to learn what steps the industry can take to encourage females to continue working in the sector.

The QRC wants to hear from women wherever they might now be living and find out whether they are still working in the industry or not.

The study's aim is to understand issues influencing whether women stay in the sector and to make recommendations for a whole-of-industry response.

"We want to find out, from women themselves, what we can do to encourage them to stay in the sector for the long-term, or for example, return to us after having children," QRC chief executive Michael Roche said.

It's part of QRC's bid to increase the pool of skilled workers.

Results of the study, being undertaken by Colmar Brunton Social Research, are expected in December.

Those who have not already had a chance to have their say in the research are encouraged to call Caroline Morrissey on (03) 295 9560 or 0417 770 893 or e-mail her at carolinem@qrc.org.au or. Participants are asked to provide their location, contact and occupation details.

"If they think about us at all it is to see us through the prism of 10, 20, even 100 years ago. According to many school students, there are a hell of a lot of picks and shovels in action out there in mines."

To address this, QRC has thrown its full support behind the Queensland Minerals and Energy Academy which, starting early next year, will target students at 20 selected high schools around Queensland.

The academy is designed to increase the number of students pursuing trades and tertiary studies relevant to the minerals and energy sector and to increase student interest in jobs in the resources sector.

Complementing the academy's goals, the QRC has launched an aggressive television campaign in regional Queensland designed to motivate school leavers, including young women, to find out more about the career opportunities the industry had to offer.

"While it is true there are twice as many women working in the sector than 20 years ago, the female participation rate has only gone from 3% to 6%, which leaves them severely under-represented in our industry," Pegler added.

"In the midst of what we know to be a long-term skills shortage, we can hardly afford to discount the potential of half the country's population."

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