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WA miners prove worth to WA

Kalgoorlie Miner, Kalgoorlie

NEWS
FEATURE
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While many economies across the world have ground to a halt amid the coronavirus pandemic West Australian mining has been riding a tide of goodwill off the back of a strong response to help communities in desperate need and keep our economy ticking over. It has been a welcome change in tack of public opinion to see those outside of mining towns realise the importance of the sector, where previously support has been divided.

And it has not just been those in the cities taking aim in recent years; the resources industry's contribution to regional

communities has on several occasions been brought into question too. The 2017 State Election campaign saw regional

WA's biggest political name, Brendon Grylls, square off against the iron ore industry in his own electorate, a fight some argue cost him his job.

That was a fight for the hearts and minds of voters in the world's iron ore

heartland, a rallying cry to communities mining built that they should expect more from the iron giants which exploit the resources of the place they call home.

More recently the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder last year took aim at the gold industry, or more specifically companies the City believed had failed to contribute adequately to life in the Goldfields — whether that be through local employment, procurement or sponsorships.

This fight is ongoing, the City wants to reverse population decline and one day see 40,000 residents call Kalgoorlie-Boulder home.

Each challenge was a clear message to mining companies big and small about the importance of maintaining a strong social licence. Now, in the midst of a global pandemic which has wiped out economies right across the globe, the mining industry is once more proving its worth to WA. New jobs have been created, interstate workers have been relocated and grants have been provided.

The mining industry has stepped up to the plate, and it has done so without being pushed.

Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA chief executive Paul Everingham said government desire to see resources projects keep operating to generate revenue for hospitals and schools led companies to look elsewhere to see how they could help.



Evolution Mining's Tara McRobbie-Rout and Goldfields Women's Refuge's Mandy Reidy with supplies donated by Evolution to the refuge.



Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA chief executive Paul Everingham.



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BHP has donated \$220,000 to help those most at risk in the Goldfields during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured are BHP services superintendent Barry Dixon, Bega Gambirringu Health Service social worker Tim Ayam, Bega social support unit manager Dwayne Shaw, and BHP Kalgoorlie Nickel Smelter general manager Matthew Terry.

"Because we were given that exemption to remain open I immediately saw amongst almost all of our company CEOs that they were extremely grateful," he said.

"A lot of the CEOs and companies said well because we have been allowed to operate that means we will keep being able to produce and bring in revenue and keep people employed.

"As a result of that we wanted to put back into the

communities we operate in because we could see there were a whole bunch of small and medium businesses being forced to shut and we know they are doing it tough."

This support comes despite the fact the resources industry has faced its own COVID-related challenges.

Many commodities are struggling, markets have been turbulent and the way in which workforces get to site and operate on site

had to be completely and rapidly reimagined.

Examples of the ways mining has helped during the coronavirus crisis range from pitching in millions of dollars to the RFDS, Lifeline and Foodbank, to Goldfields miners funding ads for local businesses in the Kalgoorlie Miner.

"We set up a fund to contribute to RFDS, Lifeline and Foodbank, and member companies put as of last month \$10 million into that," Mr Everingham said.

"But also that doesn't stop Saracen and Northern Star individually putting millions of dollars up to support local Kalgoorlie businesses.

In a recent interview with the Kalgoorlie Miner Association of Mining and Exploration Companies chief executive Warren Pearce said the coronavirus was a golden opportunity for mining to prove how critical a role it played for the Australian economy and Australian life.

"One of the things COVID does bring out is the importance of the mining

industry, people recognise and can see how critical it is to our economy," he said.

"I would expect our social licence and indeed the way in which the community views our industry actually will continue to improve during this period as people recognise the critical importance of it.

"I think the reality our industry has come to over the past 10 years is that we need to be constantly putting positive messaging about our industry out into the broader community no matter what is happening."

It is unlikely the current level goodwill shown to miners will last forever — Mr Everingham himself says the industry can always do better — but the virus has highlighted once more to Australia just how critical a healthy mining industry is to the success of our nation.

"Yes, sometimes our role gets called into question and we are open to those questions, but I don't think

Association of Mining and Exploration Companies chief executive Warren Pearce.

anyone can deny we are not big contributors to the communities where we operate," Mr Everingham said.

"We usually employ most of the people and a lot of the businesses in those communities are reliant on those mining projects."

