

Proposed Indigenous Employment Strategy 2013 and onwards - Mining Industry

Background

The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation (IEPNP), signed in February 2009, includes a commitment to incorporate Indigenous Australian workforce strategies into all new major Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reforms.

The IEPNP estimates that 8000 jobs will be generated for Indigenous Australians under this measure. Parties to the IEPNP have agreed that core components of workforce strategies will include the acquisition of recognised and accredited mainstream qualifications and training pathways for Indigenous Australians.

Purpose

The availability of employment opportunities in the region, in which our organisations operate, along with a level of commitment from the Industry to employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, offers a significant opportunity for successful Indigenous employment outcomes.

There are sound business reasons for mining companies to partner with Indigenous Communities and Organisations to deliver better employment outcomes for Indigenous people;

In the case of individual companies, these relate particularly to fiscal incentives, the enabling of land access and the possibility of developing a regional workforce to sustain company operations into the future.

The following is an extract from a media release titled;

'Government supports mining industry efforts to boost Indigenous job opportunities'

15 March, 2011- Joint Media Release

Senator the Hon Mark Arbib-Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development, Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness, Minister for Sport

Senator Annette Hurley-Senator for South Australia

The Regional Indigenous Training Program at Mount Willoughby Station was launched today, and will offer training and support to 24 Indigenous job seekers from the Coober Pedy region.

"Australia's resources industry is experiencing a boom, and I am delighted that programs like this are bringing a share of these opportunities to Indigenous communities," Senator Arbib said.

"The participants will undergo intensive training for eight to 12 weeks, earning a mix of accredited and non-accredited training targeted specifically at the mining industry.

"They will receive nationally-recognised training in operating heavy machinery and work zone traffic management, as well as further training in welding, safe work procedures and general station work.

South Australia Senator Annette Hurley said the project had received \$435,000 funding from the Indigenous Employment Program.

The Gillard Government has a target of creating more than 100,000 jobs for Indigenous Australians by 2018.

At an industry level, there are also benefits in terms of enhancing the reputation of the industry in the eyes of government and local communities.

Questions we have considered are:

Benefits of the partnership approach?

While the partnership approach places clear obligations on government, industry partners and Indigenous communities to improve socio-economic outcomes for Indigenous people, it also offers potential benefits to all parties.

From a policy perspective, it is clearly an advantage to government to be able to link education and training with employment opportunities in the local area.

There are sound financial and policy reasons for governments to promote partnerships with Industry as a means of getting people into the mainstream workforce and becoming taxpayers.

As employers, mining companies are a potential source of new jobs for Indigenous people. Especially in regional areas where there are limited business alternatives; you may be one of only a few large-scale employers. The incentives placed around Indigenous employment outcomes are substantial and highly attainable.

Since the alternative to work for many people is welfare dependency the Government is committed to its goal of increased Indigenous Employment outcomes. Mining companies are also experienced in sourcing education and training opportunities for their employees (possibility of training being funded by government). Apart from public sector organisations, only large corporations have the resources to source and deliver targeted education and training programs. In partnership with OEC we will identify potential areas where these can be utilised.

Environmental Enablers?

The industry is motivated to take on Aboriginal employees through government programs and incentives. For example, organisations operating in areas near mining activity were more easily able to place their clients and trainees, as well as fulfilling legal requirements to take on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.

In a similar vein, the research suggests that organisations had greater success in locations where employers were supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment—whether through government incentives or partnering programs. In these cases there were often better relationships and communication between employers, the organisations and clients.

When developing our Indigenous workforce strategy we have carefully considered how an Indigenous labour supply can be supported locally and nationally.

ICaN will in partnership develop:

- An articulated training and employment pathway for Indigenous Australians interested in working in the Industry.
- Developing best practice guidelines on targeted initiatives to improve Indigenous employment outcomes
- Will provide a training, education and employment service to respond to Indigenous and industry requirements and establish appropriate pathways to employment
- Provide mentoring models and career advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and employees to build effective pathways from school to higher education; to improve the representation of Indigenous Australians in tertiary education and professional occupations in the industry
- Focus on improving retention and career development of Indigenous Australians in the workforce
- Communicate a clear business case for employing Indigenous Australians
- Highlight the value, skills and availability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, including through publication of 'good news' stories and initiatives
- Demonstrate how being an employer of choice for Indigenous Australians can improve business outcomes and workplace diversity
- Encourage and facilitate cross-cultural awareness training for the Industry and their employees

We envisage that the ways in which government 'do business' in the future will be radically different where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups are concerned. Where a greater emphasis will be placed on partnering at all levels; including future policy decision.

I look forward to discussing the possibilities that a partnership could bring to all stakeholders.

James Riley