



24 JUN, 2021

Mining skills shortage needs to be addressed

Kimberley Echo, Kununurra

Page 1 of 1

Mining skills shortage needs to be addressed

OPINION PAUL EVERINGHAM



We've known for some time the mining and resources sector in WA is being affected by a skills shortage — but until recently we haven't known the full extent of how significant the issue is.

A report released this week, commissioned by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy and undertaken by independent labour market specialists Pit Crew Consulting, has forecast demand for an additional 40,000 skilled workers by mid-2023, with a potential peak shortfall of 33,000 workers if the situation goes unaddressed.

In isolation, those figures are concerning, but it's when you consider the mining and resources sector is currently

producing at record levels, and there are \$140 billion of projects in the pipeline across WA, that the potential impact becomes most stark.

We can't take full advantage of these opportunities — and the community benefits they will create — if we don't have the workforce.

In the North West, those opportunities are underpinned by long-term production plans for Rio Tinto, BHP, FMG, Woodside and Chevron, and new opportunities like the Havieron gold project, and exciting discoveries like De Grey's Hemi gold and Rio

Tinto's Winu copper deposits.

As it stands, there have never been more people employed in WA's mining and resources sector — some 140,000 in total — with many roles in the North West.

The reasons behind the shortages are varied.

COVID-19 has played a major role, halting international migration and reducing workforce mobility between States.

Then there are the flow-on effects of the Government's economic stimulus to fuel the recovery out of the pandemic, such as large-scale infrastructure projects and widespread construction projects programs across Australia.

Interstate workers, who in previous growth periods might have moved to WA, now have strong job opportunities at home.

The same forces are at play for people within WA weighing up whether to move to regional areas like the Pilbara for work.

There is no shortage of work opportunities, which makes WA such a great place to be — and the resultant challenges, in a sense, are "good" problems.

The upshot is there is a nationwide skills shortage across many industries at a time when the WA mining and resources sector has an unseasonably high near-term demand for shutdown workers and strong forecast growth in demand for both operational and

construction roles.

We also know we can't address these issues alone, which is why the CME will be among a wide range of industry bodies participating in the WA Government's Skills Summit later this month.

All options to increase the current and future pools of skilled workers need to be on the table.

Paul Everingham is the Chamber of Minerals and Energy chief executive. To see some of the jobs available in the mining and resources sector, visit jobsinresources.com.au