

REAP

Regional Employer Alliance Project (REAP) Central Highlands, Queensland

A Project to Develop Alliances with Employers within the Agriculture, Infrastructure, Local Government and Resource Industry Sectors

Seasonal Workforce Attraction: Matching local skill needs to the skill sets of a travelling population

MINING SKILLS AND LABOUR REPORT CENTRAL HIGHLANDS, QUEENSLAND

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Executive Summary

There are a total of 11 coal mines operating within the Central Highlands Regional Council boundary, in an area described as the Central Bowen Basin. The overall saleable coal produced in 2006/07 in the Central Highlands was estimated at 58.8 million tonnes by the Department of Mines and Energy (DM&E 2007) and worth approximately \$1.2 billion or 46.2% of the total Gross Regional Product (CHDC 2008) in the region.

Mining employed an estimated total mining workforce of 6015 at January 2008 (DM&E 2008). This makes it the largest industry sector employer in the Central Highlands. A substantial proportion (73%), of the workforce employed by participating mines, is engaged in production, development or other machinery operating roles. Contractors are an integral part of all mining operations, particularly supporting maintenance, development and production aspects of the business. In the participating mines, contractors comprise 66% of the total labouring workforce.

Through competitive salary packaging, high wages and in some cases, choices of roster, mines have positioned themselves as an employer of choice in the Central Highlands. All mines reported very low vacancy rates, some as low as 1.5%, and have little difficulty in attracting new staff.

The consensus from all mines was that many of their new employees are sourced from contractors that are already known to them, or have come from another mine. Participating mines were not untouched by the region's labour shortage; A number commented that they would normally take on all skilled tradespeople and operators but were now employing up to 50% of employees without mine experience.

Predictions on the total size of the mining workforce over the next 10 years are contradictory. However, without a greater population to draw upon, mines may find recruiting staff increasingly difficult with three new mines planned for development within the next five years within the Central Highlands, and significant advanced development in adjacent regions.

All mining operations are governed by the Queensland Coal Mining Safety and Health Act (1999) and its subordinate legislation; the Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation 2001. Strict licensing and site-specific safety requirements excludes mines from using transient workers and/or recognising common skill sets between mines.

While there may be no direct benefit to mines in participating in REAP, the additional labour brought to the region through encouraging transient workers will provide labour for contractors. This is of substantial indirect benefit to the mining industry not only due to their reliance on contractors for ongoing operations, but also as they tend to recruit from contractors providing services to the business.

A REAP database may provide applications which extend beyond the matching of a labouring workforce, and could be used to assist mines to identify job opportunities for partners of new employees, to support their recruiting practices.

Background to the Report

The Local Government Managers Association (National) commissioned Interim Mining Skills And Labour Report, Central Highlands, Queensland, (the Report) in February 2008 to provide information to REAP (Central Highlands) regarding the mining sector labour needs.

This needs analysis is a companion to analyses of labour in the agricultural, civil contracting and local government sectors of the Central Highlands, a literature review, and analyses of tourists travelling through Emerald currently being undertaken. The Key Evaluation Question for all research undertaken as part of this project is:

Can local skills shortages in agriculture, civil construction, local government & mining be met & matched to the skill sets of the travelling population?

All full report will be presented when data collection and analysis is completed across the four industry sectors in November 2008.

Objectives of the Mining Skills and Labour (Central Highlands) Report are to:

- Provide a measure of vacant positions
- Identify tasks required and at what times of the year
- Identify skills required
- Measure compatibility of short-term contracts and job-share working arrangements with mining enterprise needs
- Collect information regarding available accommodation/facilities
- Register interest of Central Highlands mining enterprises in participating in a potential REAP skill matching program
- Initiate a database of contacts of interested businesses
- Identify barriers to skill matching

This information provides the context, direction and justification that the REAP Steering Committee and Regional Project Manager can use to develop strategies to attract a Seasonal Workforce to match local skill needs.

REAP (Central Highlands) Steering Committee

A Steering Committee provided overview and guided the progress of the REAP project from its instigation in November 2007. The Steering Committee contributes from their experiences, representative across agricultural, mining, civil contracting and local government sectors of the Central Highlands, and provides a conduit for report information through their networks.

- Craig Pressler, Proprietor, 2PH Farms
- Ian Burnett, AgForce Queensland
- Dr Jim Sands, Australian Agricultural College (Emerald Campus)
- Mike McCosker, Central Highlands Cotton Growers & Irrigators Association
- Bryan Ottone, Councillors and staff, Central Highlands Regional Council
- Peter Dowling, Central Highlands Regional Development Corporation
- Michael Gavin, BMA Gregory Crinum Mine
- Graham Morris, Ensham Mine
- Nicola Williams, Rio Tinto Coal Australia Kestrel Mine
- Shayne Shepherd, Shepherd Diesel
- Chris Vine, C&J Excavator Hire

Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference are modified from the REAP (Central Highlands) Project Contract and informed the specific engagement of the Central Highlands mining sector by the Regional Project Manager;

1. Develop and conduct survey of employers, to gather data including the type of work in demand, skill level required, issues to consider such as accreditation, and potential employment arrangements;
2. Analyse the employer and potential employee surveys to determine skill match and training and incentives requirements;
3. Broker comprehensive buy-in to the pilot project from regional employers across the REAP sectors;
4. Garner commitments to the Project and participation in the REAP Regional Employers Alliance from representatives within and across the REAP sectors and across the designated REAP region.

Methodology

To collect both quantitative and qualitative information, each mine was approached to undertake one-on-one semi structured interviews either on-site or in Emerald. This also allowed the Regional Project Manager, Liz Alexander to extend most recent information from the project and further develop relationships with Human Resource Managers.

Methods Used

This study was undertaken at two times during 2008; Data collection was completed 13 October, followed by two days of analysis and reporting. The following data collection methods were used to compile information for the Report:

- Supporting information was collected from written and electronic research reports published 2006-07 production season, Prospectus, and mine company websites.
- An in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with Michael Gavin, Human Resources Manager, BHP Billinton Gregory Crinum Mine, 11 June 2008 to develop a mining industry case study.
- A semi-structured questionnaire was developed by Regional Project Manager, Liz Alexander and circulated via email to all human resource managers, and/or the general manager, as nominated by mining enterprises in the Central Highlands.
- 1 interview was conducted via telephone accompanied by email responses to the questionnaire. 7 mining enterprises were interviewed in face-to-face interviews. All interviews were conducted by Regional Project Manager, Liz Alexander between 3 – 13 October 2008.
- Data was collated and analysed by the Regional Project Manager.

Results

There are a total of 11 coal mines operating within the Central Highlands Regional Council boundary, in an area described as the Central Bowen Basin.

Mine Name	Location	Saleable production 2006-07 (t)	Operator	Owner / Major Beneficiaries
Blackwater	Blackwater	13,022 607	BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance	BHP Billiton Ltd (50%) Mitsubishi Development Pty Ltd (50%)
Cook	Blackwater	41,555	Caledon Coal Pty Ltd	Caledon Resources PLC (100%)
Curragh	Blackwater	8,590 211	Wesfarmers Curragh Pty Ltd	Wesfarmers Ltd (100%)
Ensham	Comet	7,503 286	Ensham Resources Ltd	Bligh Coal Ltd (47.5%) Idemitsu Queensland Pty Ltd (37.5%)
Gregory Crinum	Emerald	1,689 741 2,976 483	BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance	BHP Billiton Ltd (50%) Mitsubishi Development Pty Ltd (50%)
Jellinbah East	Blackwater	4,057 228	Jellinbah Mining Pty Ltd	Queensland Coal Management Pty Ltd (70%)
Kestrel	Emerald	3,705 289	Rio Tinto Coal Australia Pty Ltd	Queensland Coal Pty Ltd (Rio Tinto Coal Australia Pty Ltd (80%))
Minerva	Springsure	1,938 592	Felix Resources Ltd	Felix Resources Ltd (51%) Sojitz Corporation (45%)
Oaky Creek Oaky Creek No. 1 Oaky North	Tieri	481 418 3,143 508 3,927 708	Oaky Creek Coal Pty Ltd	Xstrata Coal Queensland Pty Ltd (55%)
Rolleston Coal	Rolleston	6,045 331	Rolleston Coal Pty Ltd	Xstrata Coal Queensland Pty Ltd (75%)
Yarrabee	Blackwater	1,723 971	Felix Resources Ltd	Felix Resources Ltd (100%)

(DM&E 2007)

The overall saleable coal produced in 2006/07 in the Central Highlands Region was estimated at 58.8 million tonnes by the Department of Mines and Energy (DM&E 2007).

There are an additional three coal resources which the DM&E (2008) suggests could be operating mines within 5 years:

- Minyango, Blackwater
- Togara North, Orion
- Yamala, via Comet

The Galilee coal project is situated near Alpha in the Barcaldine Regional Council but is another consideration due to its close proximity and Emerald's status as a major service centre. Granted "significant project" status; the 25 Mtpa coal mine, once constructed, is expected to produce its first coal in 2012, and employ 600 staff (DME 2008).

Respondents

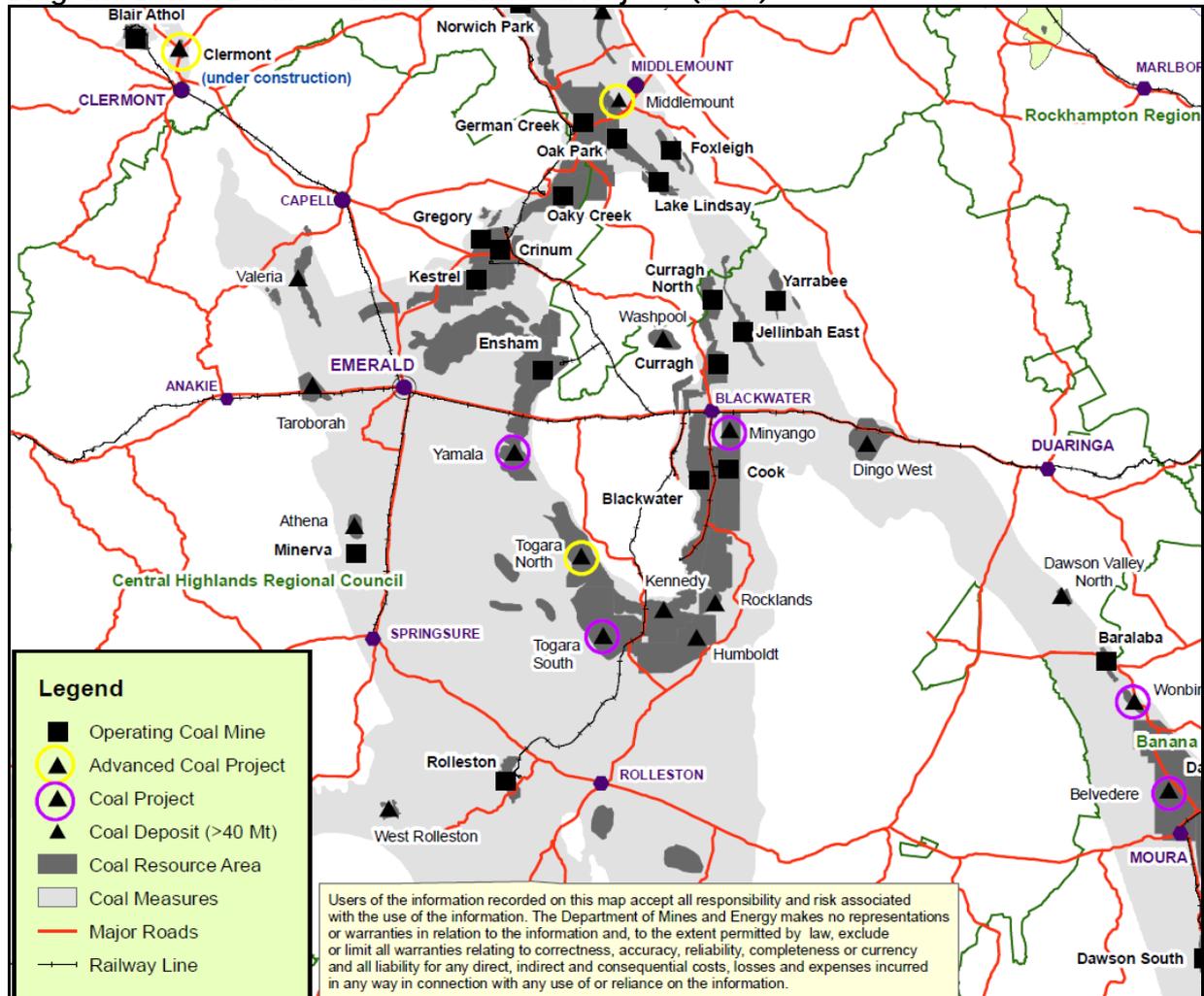
A total of 7 mining enterprises have participated from the Central Highlands to date. Three mines are yet to be approached: Oaky Creek, Jellinbah East and Cook. One mine, BMA Blackwater was approached but is a potential non-respondent.

Using the overall saleable coal figure of 58.8 Mtpa (DME 2007), the proportion of coal production represented by respondents is 71%.

Location within Central Highlands

Diagram 1 shows the location of operating coal mines and advanced coal projects within the Central Highlands Regional Council boundary marked in green.

Diagram: Bowen Basin Coal Mines and Coal Projects (2008)



(DM&E 2008)

Type of Operations Run in Business

Mine	Product	Mine Method
Blackwater	Coking & thermal	Open cut
Cook	Coking & thermal	Underground
Curragh North	PCI, coking & thermal	Open cut
Ensham	Thermal	Open cut
Gregory Crinum	Coking & thermal	Open cut Underground
Jellinbah East	PCI, coking & thermal	Open cut
Kestrel	Coking & thermal	Underground
Minerva	Thermal	Open cut
Oaky Creek Oaky Creek No.1 Oaky North	Coking	Open cut Underground Underground
Rolleston Coal	Thermal	Open cut
Yarrabee	PCI & thermal	Open cut

(DM&E 2007)

About the Workforce

Full-time Employment

The mining industry is a substantial employer within the Central Highlands. In 2006, the mining sector employed 3140 people, representing 22.3% of the total labour workforce (CHDC 2008).

Interviews and later research indicates that the total employment figures are far higher. This may be explained by Fly-In Fly-Out, Drive-In Drive-Out (FIFO/DIDO) component of mining workforce that reside outside the Central Highlands and not captured by the 2006 Census, and/or mine expansion.

A Report on a Survey of Mining Industry Employment and Accommodation Practices (Wilson 2008) estimated the total number of employees (including contract labour) at 7122 for 2007. The Report estimated that this figure would decrease to 6324 in 2010 and remain steady to 2016.

DM&E estimates that the total mining workforce totalled 6015 at January 2008. It estimated an additional 650 employees to join the mining workforce if Yamala, Minyango and Togara North become operational, and including the Ensham Project (DM&E 2008).

In 2007, Queensland Resources Council cited an additional 10,000 employees would be required to support mining growth in Central Queensland in the next 8 years, doubling their current numbers, and directly competing with rural industry (QRC CEO Michael Roche, ABC 23/5/07).

From interviews undertaken to date, mines report 1645 full time employees, of which 1209 (73%) are described as 'outside', 'waged' or 'production' and refer to the workforce employed in production and trades. This includes occupations such as machinery operators and drivers, and electrical and mechanical roles. Specialist plant operator roles include

drag lines and face shovels in open cut mines, and continuous miner and shearers in underground mines. Losses from idle machinery are magnified in the mining industry:

*"A shearer in my mine cuts 1000 tonnes in about 35 minutes. With coal selling at up to \$250/t, the mine likes to keep it running."
(Pers. comm. Mine Employee 21 October 2008)*

Use of Contractors

Contractors are used in differing manners by mines. Some mines have integrated contract labour into their operations and report a reasonably static number. Other mines contract labour on a needs basis. The interviewed mines employed up to 2334 contractors of full time equivalency. Not all mines were able to give an exact figure, and two provided a maximum for any one time during the year.

Of the total workforce reported to date, contractors comprised 58%. Of the total labouring or production workforce, contractors comprised 66%. It appears that all mines, including those who employ a greater proportion of staff, are heavily reliant on the contracting workforce.

Female Engagement

All mines reported little interest by females in production roles within their employees. When advertising for vacancies, a small amount of applications were received for the more automated and less labour intensive aspects of mining. The largest number of females reported in a labour role by a mine was 11, employed as truck drivers.

Average Age

The average age of production employees described by most mines was early 30s, with two exceptions. Gregory Crinum estimate their Gregory workforce to be, on average, 20 years older than the workers at Crinum, reflecting the physically more demanding work required from an underground, longwall operation. Only one mine estimated that most of their workers were in their early 20s. Bar Gregory, a number of other mines mentioned workers aged 60+ who tended to be landholding neighbours to the mine site.

Production Staff Turnover

Reported figures of staff turnover were very low, ranging from 1.5% to 15.6%. The most common figure estimated by respondents was 2-3%. Trade positions also ranked highly for vacancy rates, with up to 5.7% turnover described.

Wages and Conditions

Wages

The interview did not collect exact dollar amounts for wage earners. The consensus from respondents was that mining wages are very high and comparable between mines. Many of the mines specifically noted that they do not compete for employees on the basis of being 'the highest paid mine', but concentrated on a number of other measures such as competitive packing, attractive rosters and reputation.

Employment Agreements

Of the mines surveyed:

- 1 negotiated employer agreements solely through Union Collective Bargaining agreements
- 4 had a non-unionised workforce, using Industry Transitional Employment Agreements
- 2 allowed employees to choose either a Union or non-Union contract

Work Rosters and Hours

Shifts varied from mine to mine, reflecting the type of operation and role. Many mines operate with a number of shifts to ensure continuing production, particularly in long wall extraction. These include:

- 12 hour shifts on a 4 day on, 4 day off roster including night shift
- 5 & 1/2 days, 1&1/2 days off shift for production staff allowing Sunday as 'family day'
- 7 days on, 7 days off for maintenance staff including night shift
- 5 days on, 2 days off
- 7 days on continuous day shift, 7 days off for support staff
- 12 days on, 4 day weekend for maintenance roster
- 7 day continuous split 3 days on, 2 nights on, 4 days off rotating for a total of 14 of 28 days

Salary Packaging

Salary packaging offered by the mines is comprehensive and highly competitive.

Participating mines offered all or some of the following:

- Ability to salary-sacrifice a vehicle lease
- Complimentary bus services to nearby towns
- Interest or rental subsidies
- House purchase and maintenance grants for those living locally
- Superannuation of 9-12%
- 6 weeks leave for shift workers
- Training and professional development opportunities
- On-site accommodation
- Varying bonuses and incentives based on production targets, rosters or skill improvement
- Employee share schemes

Where do Employees Live?

The majority of mines reported a policy of no FIFO/DIDO for their employees;. One mine reported a FIFO/DIDO cap of 15%. This response did not include contractors. The majority of mines near Emerald and Blackwater estimated the majority of their workforce lived locally.

Mines such as Ensham, Rolleston and Curragh offer accommodation on-site, referred to as Single Person Quarters (SPQs). A number of the mines also offer subsidised rental in mine owned houses in both Blackwater and Emerald. Both options provide the mine workforce with reasonably priced accommodation choices to support their employees. An example provided for the cost of SPQ and food per night was \$90 per day, and \$70 for 'hotbedding'. Hotbedding described the practice of sharing a room between two employees who are doing alternate night and day shifts.

Wilson (2008) reports that mining companies in the Central Highlands do not house any employees in caravan parks.

Attraction and Retention Strategies

There was shared consensus from all mines that the typical profile of new employees is that from contractors that are already known to them, or have come from another mine.

All mines advertise in the newspapers in the Central Queensland area, including Gladstone and Mackay. Mines reported different success rates ranging from very successful to not such a good strike rate via the media. Some also advertise nationally in the print media, but this is done more generally for management or technical positions.

A number of mines identified the company website as being their best source of applicants, but were unable to quantify how the individual was directed to the website. Mines such as Kestrel only accept job applications through their online forms. A number of mines also use recruiting agencies for specific roles, for example engineering staff, technical staff or 'cleanskins'; those who have not worked on a mine-site before.

A small number of apprenticeships, cadetships and traineeships are offered by all mines bar one. These appeared to be considered more of a community service than a strong recruitment tool.

As the average age of nearly all mines employees is around the 30 year age group, most retention strategies are directed towards maintaining staff satisfaction through salary packing and friendly rosters to avoid their loss to another mine. The one exception, Gregory, where the average age of employees is older, was the only mine developing strategies to accommodate an aging workforce, through the introduction of job sharing across the workplace.

Word of mouth was another strategy mentioned by most mines, who rely on their reputation as an employer, a business and their safety record, to attract interest from applicants. Certainly most of the mines have a definable outlook that characterises their current workplace, or their workplace goals. Qualities cited as integral to mine identity were:

- Family friendly
- Family-oriented
- Part of the community
- Adaptability
- Directly engaging leadership
- Low conflict
- Stable environment
- Negligible duplication of roles and the valuing of individual contributions

One mine noted that they had no problem in attracting skilled staff. Other mines' responses were more qualified. Most were able to fill positions without problem however noted that the make up of their intake had changed. Whereas they may have been able to employ all experienced staff, now they have found that they are employing an increasing number of clean skins – with figures of up to 50% quoted. One mine also stated that they had embraced younger less experience staff as their workforce, and expected their staff to turn over after 3 years as these people looked for higher level jobs elsewhere, once skilled.

A number of mines indicated that they were increasingly asked by new mine employees to assist in the placing of their partners n non-mine businesses.

Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation

All mining operations are governed by the Queensland Coal Mining Safety and Health Act (1999). Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation 2001 is subordinate legislation to the Queensland Coal Mining Safety and Health Act (1999). Part 11 (Pages 64-66) prescribes training requirements for mine workers.

Section 85(2) states:

A coal mine worker must not carry out the task at the mine unless the worker has been assessed as competent, and is authorised by the site senior executive or the site senior executive's representative, to carry it out.

(Pg 66)

Section 82 (2c) also prescribes that the Mine's training scheme must establish:

the workers' training needs about the safe performance of the mine's coal mining operations, including, for example, training needs about the mine's standard operating procedures; (among other provisions)

(Pg 64)

This has significant impacts on both the portability of workers between mines and new worker induction. The legislation requires the mine to ensure that employees are aware of the different types of operating procedures and work hazards on-site. It also requires that all employees have demonstrated their competency on any machinery they operate.

"From a safety point of view, because the Act doesn't prescribe responsibilities for companies, everything is based at the senior site executive level, so that individual has got ultimate responsibility for everyone on their site."

As each mine site has its own Standard Operating Procedures, there is no portability for employee competencies between mines. Competencies are site specific; an executive can only assess workers as competent at their own mine, as they are unlikely to have intimate knowledge of how another mine operates.

Worker Induction

Due to the legislative requirements, all new workers on mine sites, including those with formal qualifications and/or skills undergo an industry generic induction (Black Coal Competencies) current for 2 years, provided by external providers. Each mine then provides site-specific and area-specific inductions which take up to a week. Mines provide this induction to all permanent employees. All contractors are also required to undertake the appropriate inductions, provided at the mines' cost.

Interest in Seasonal Travelling Workforce

Strict licensing and site-specific safety requirements directed by the Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation excludes mines from using transient workers and/or recognising common skill sets between mines.

A number of mines felt that though they would receive no direct benefit from such a scheme, that the additional skills and people brought to the region would support their contractors, and other community businesses.

Summary

Limitations

There are limitations to the data collected which are unable to be checked or corrected. It is assumed that all information provided by the mines is accurate. Some mines provided figures at the date of interview, while others provided rolling averages across the 2007/08 year. Results do not identify individual mines except where permission has been granted. This has meant that where mines have contributed information that would identify a mine individually this was unable to be shared.

Conclusions

There are a total of 11 coal mines operating within the Central Highlands Regional Council boundary, in an area described as the Central Bowen Basin. The overall saleable coal produced in 2006/07 in the Central Highlands was estimated at 58.8 million tonnes by the Department of Mines and Energy (DM&E 2007) and worth approximately \$1.2 billion or 46.2% of the total Gross Regional Product (CHDC 2008) in the region.

Mining employed an estimated total mining workforce of 6015 at January 2008 (DM&E 2008). This makes it the largest industry sector employer in the Central Highlands. A substantial proportion (73%) of the workforce employed by participating mines is engaged in production, development or other machinery operating roles. Contractors are an integral part of all mining operations, particularly supporting maintenance, development and production aspects of the business. In the participating mines, contractors comprise 66% of the total labouring workforce.

Through competitive salary packaging, high wages and in some cases, choices of roster, mines have positioned themselves as an employer of choice in the Central Highlands. All mines reported very low vacancy rates, some as low as 1.5%, and have little difficulty in attracting new staff.

For most labouring positions, mines rely on advertising in the local newspapers. This is supplemented by the use of job websites and in specific cases, recruiting agencies. Mines also cited 'word of mouth' and company reputation as supporting successful recruitment. The consensus from all mines was that many of their new employees are sourced from contractors that are already known to them, or have come from another mine. Women have demonstrated little interest in applying for operator roles; the most common labouring occupation they undertake is truck driving.

There was discussion regarding the changing profile of new recruits and it appears evident that the labour shortage is having some impact. A number of mines commented that they would normally take on all skilled tradespeople and operators but were now employing up to 50% of employees without mine experience. Without a greater population to draw upon, mines may find recruiting staff increasingly difficult with an additional estimated full-time mine force of 600 required for three new mines planned for development within the next five years, within the Central Highlands and significant advanced development in adjacent regions.

Staff are generally aged in their early 30s and live locally in their own homes or rental housing. SPQs were provided by 4 mines for staff. No staff live in caravan parks in the Central Highlands.

Generally, salary packing, wages and rostering are relied upon by mines to retain staff. Due to the comparatively young average age of most employees, retention strategies for the older workforce have not been a priority for most mines.

All mining operations are governed by the Queensland Coal Mining Safety and Health Act (1999) and its subordinate legislation; the Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation 2001. Strict licensing and site-specific safety requirements excludes mines from using transient workers and/or recognising common skill sets between mines. Comprehensive and lengthy worker inductions are required for each mine-site, and operator competencies as assessed by the mine are site specific.

While there may be no direct benefit to mines in participating in REAP, the additional labour brought to the region through encouraging transient workers will provide labour for contractors. This is of substantial indirect benefit to the mining industry not only due to their reliance on contractors for ongoing operations, but also as they tend to recruit from contractors providing services to the business.

Should the REAP project be implemented, a database will be built to matches skills and vacancies. This tool has applications which extend beyond the matching of a labouring workforce, and could be used to assist mines to identify job opportunities for partners of new employees.

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