

Keynote address to the Chamber of Minerals & Energy WA

Ivan Vella, Acting Chief Executive, Rio Tinto Iron Ore

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Thank you, Robyn, for your welcome to country.

It is indeed a privilege to be standing on this land of the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation.

I also want to acknowledge their continuous connection with these lands and waters and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

I am very lucky to be speaking down the pecking order today as the acknowledgements of the many special guests has been done so proficiently.

I would briefly like to welcome to all the special guests here tonight, in particular;

- the Premier Mark McGowan and his ministers,
- leader of the opposition Mr Zak Kirkup
- leader of the Nationals WA Mia Davies
- all opposition spokespeople
- all members of Parliament

To all our guests tonight, we are very grateful you're joining us to look back on 2020 and for your continued support of the industry. It has been another year of major achievements for and by our industry.

The CME has of course played a pivotal role, displaying that strength can be delivered by collaboration across the industry.

When we met this time last year to draw the curtains on 2019 little did we anticipate the hurdles we would face this year.

Before I talk a bit more about our response to COVID-19 I want to touch on my top three highlights from all the great work the Chamber has delivered during 2020.

Starting with our COVID-19 Community Support Initiative.

We raised more than \$9 million from members for three key WA community support organisations

- Royal Flying Doctor Service Western Operations
- Foodbank WA,
- and Lifeline WA.

Our members also donated more than \$500,000 to fund the FIFO DETECT program, a COVID-19 population study involving wide-scale asymptomatic testing of FIFO workers.

Funding of the study allowed a broad range of companies to access gold standard COVID-19 testing under approved protocols.

Secondly, and possibly my favourite event on the CME calendar every year, was the 11th annual CME WIRA dinner which was held in March.

It was attended by more than 1,000 guests from government and the industry.

The event goes from strength-to-strength each year, as we celebrate and encourage the exceptional female talent across our sector.

While there's plenty more work to do we're seeing more and more female participation right across the industry.

Thirdly, the CME surveyed 53 member companies this year to determine the sector's economic contribution.

It revealed some compelling statistics.

In 2018-19, the sector made a total direct contribution of 67 billion dollars to the WA and Australian economies. We directly supported more than 70,000 full-time jobs, working closely with more than 20,000 businesses, employing a further 200,000 people.

COVID-19 has of course been immensely challenging for our industry and the threat is far from over, however, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on some positives.

As an industry, we are obviously very privileged in being able to keep our mines and oil and gas operations running and for that we are very grateful.

In doing so we kept at least 130,000 men and women employed and tens of thousands of WA households supported.

This privilege reflected the confidence the Government had that industry would prioritize the health and safety of our workforces and communities.

And I think we have more than repaid the Government's faith in our ability to operate safely during COVID.

A vote of thanks must go to the Chamber's chief executive, Paul Everingham, and his team, for driving the resources sector's COVID-19 response. As well as to the leadership of all the CME members who rallied to play their crucial role in the defence against this pandemic.

And, of course, on behalf of the Chamber and our members, I want to congratulate Premier Mark McGowan and his Government for their strong, steady and supportive leadership during this crisis.

Their approach to fighting COVID-19 and their support of our industry has been exemplary.

This takes me to another challenge facing us.

Tomorrow, the Parliamentary Inquiry into the destruction of rockshelters in the Juukan Gorge will deliver its interim report with the Inquiry expected to continue into 2021.

While there will be recommendations to Government, there is also likely going to be recommendations to Rio Tinto specifically and the industry generally.

We will need to take some time to review them and reflect further.

As you know I also stand here as the Acting Chief Executive of Rio Tinto Iron Ore.

I want to take a moment to address the events in May which resulted in the destruction of two rockshelters in the Juukan Gorge which were of extreme cultural value to the PKKP People.

It's clear that this was wrong and should never have happened. We are deeply sorry for our actions and the immense pain we caused to the PKKP. These actions are not aligned with the values that Rio Tinto aspires to.

I know, it has had a significant impact on the operations of all the Chamber's members, and the industry at large.

At Rio Tinto, it's led to a significant period of reflection in terms of how we think about the interaction we have with cultural heritage and how we engage with Traditional Owners.

I would like to briefly share with you a few of our key learnings and some of the changes that are underway.

Firstly, we've have had to face up to a confronting reality that our relationships with Traditional Owners in the Pilbara were clearly not as good as they needed to be.

We were not listening as we should have.

We weren't focused enough on building inclusive and productive partnerships which would have allowed us to better understand the full impacts of our actions.

Secondly, our operational leaders were not enabled to take accountability for relationships with Traditional Owners and communities, leading to failures in linked-up decision making and a de-prioritisation of this aspect of our business.

Clearly, we had to change, and we have made strong progress in recent months.

- We have worked closely with the PKKP to re-establish a working relationship.
- We have completed the immediate containment of the site around the Juukan gorge knowing that the wet season was about to commence.
- We have extended a moratorium area around Juukan Gorge in consultation with the PKKP to allow further work to be completed to understand the cultural values of the immediate area and its surrounds
- We have moved some of the artefacts previously salvaged from the rockshelters to a purpose-built facility with the support of the PKKP Traditional Owners
- The boards of the PKKP and Rio Tinto recently met to discuss how we jointly work to address the damage done and how we can rebuild a trusting relationship step-by-step.

- We are reassessing any activities which have the potential to impact heritage sites and have implemented a new process for consultation with Traditional Owners including over existing Section 18s.
- We will continue to review our plans to ensure the protection of sites of exceptionally high cultural value and have increased monitoring of any activities with potential to impact heritage sites.
- We have started the process to modernise our agreements with Traditional owners.
- We are in the final stages of preparing to commence a business wide cultural competency programme.

I can assure you there is a lot more work underway and there is a lot more work that needs to be done.

We do not underestimate how long it will take to rebuild the trust of PKKP and other Pilbara Traditional Owners.

Now, clearly, I recognise the considerable ramifications our actions have had for the industry and the broader reputation of mining across the community.

If I put my Chamber hat back on, I have tried to reflect on how the events of Juukan Gorge can be a catalyst for positive change.

Certainly, it has served as a stark reminder of the heightened public expectations on all of us and the impact society can and will have on our operations if we don't get it right.

Rightly so, society's expectations of our industry are greater than ever before, not just in relation to heritage, but across a broad spectrum of ESG issues.

As an industry, I feel there is a great opportunity here for us to work together on a new approach to Indigenous heritage and engagement.

I would like to use this opportunity tonight to call on the industry to harness this moment.

We've shown how we can collaborate when faced with shared challenge like COVID, so, as we begin this long journey, I think it's important to recognise that we all have an opportunity to invest in and collaborate with the world's oldest living culture.

Celebrating this culture in everything we do can make us a truly unique industry which brings to life Aboriginal cultural values in a way that respects their integral role in our shared future.

The CME has already been proactive in this area engaging members and working to align on key principles for heritage management.

We have engaged extensively with Minister Wyatt's office on the new heritage bill and we actively support the long overdue reforms.

I feel, if we as an industry can take a collaborative approach to engaging and partnering with Traditional Owners around heritage and the broader celebration and protection of their ancient cultures, we can deliver some really positive outcomes.

Finally, before I close, I want to reflect on the leaders of our resources sector, government and other key stakeholders in Western Australia many of whom are in the room here today.

No one anticipated the events of this year. When COVID-19 hit, it required all of you to go above and beyond, to lead from the front and, let's be honest, burn the candle at both ends.

Family time was sacrificed because COVID-19 stopped for no one, personal physical wellbeing was ignored and while we worried about the physical and mental health of our workforce, we often forgot to check in with ourselves.

So, as the year winds down, I do hope that all of you have an opportunity to take a deep and fresh breath, recharge the batteries, spend valuable time with those closest to you, and come back fit and healthy in 2021.

Our industry needs you.

Thank you.

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