

**Prospect Awards, Australian Mining Magazine  
11 November 2010  
Dr Nikki Williams, CEO, NSW Minerals Council**

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Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen

It's a huge pleasure to be here tonight to celebrate the incredible talent within our industry. I'd like to thank Cole Latimer, editor of *Australian Mining Magazine*, both for organising this event and for giving me the opportunity to share it with you.

No doubt everyone in this room will understand how I feel when I say that celebrating the industry is a particularly enjoyable - but sadly rare - change from being in the muddy trenches defending it from attack.

Over the last year, our industry has faced an onslaught of challenges. Not only are we fire-fighting on the economic, environmental, political, societal and legal fronts, we're fire-fighting them all at once.

The RSPT, the CPRS, uncertainty created by the Queensland Government's draft strategic cropping lands legislation, a Supreme Court decision that nearly shut down the exploration industry here in New South Wales, blockades, protests, dust and health impacts – to list a few.

Just last month the NSW industry was subjected to calls for a complete moratorium on mining by the NSW Farmers Association and over the last 6 months more than a dozen local councils have voted (often unanimously) to oppose mining within their LGA. As nonsensical as we think such calls might be, I can tell you there are those in political office, government agencies and newsrooms - not to mention members of the public - who think this is a great idea.

And just like a bushfire, each issue seems to be rapidly spreading from one locality to another. We're seeing tensions in NSW over competing land use spark in Queensland and WA. Concerns about coal seam gas in Queensland are being fanned here in NSW. Disturbing documentaries like "Gaslands" out of the United States will diminish the credibility of the industry here despite the enormous differences in the technologies used and the vastly superior and hugely robust regulatory regime in Australia.

And, as if this weren't enough, the issues are morphing and interacting with each other in unpredictable ways, in an environment of extreme political uncertainty and global economic turmoil.

I think we have to ask ourselves how it came to this. How did such a great industry, with its proud traditions, commitment to excellence, world leading innovations, which employs probably the most talented people in the country and which invests so heavily

not just in its operations but in the social and physical infrastructure of the communities where it operates, often end up being likened to a toxic curse on our nation?

Ironically, I think the answer lies in our practical engineering focus; in our long held belief that if you kept your head down it wouldn't get shot off; that developing a public "narrative" about what we do and what we contribute was some kind of mamby pamby waste of time and money best left to retailers. And I also think that we are such focussed "doers" that we often failed to listen to what people were saying and feeling. We too often dismissed people's fears because we knew they weren't technically justified. The problem is that we weren't able to reduce people's fears, and their concerns – in many instances – now take the form of outrage.

So now, all you engineers, tech heads and accountants – not universally recognised for having a strong "feminine side" – have to deal with a whole lot of complicated emotion entwined with a whole lot of messy politics!

However, I'm pleased to say that all over the country, miners are now asking what we need to do much better than we have, and how we can better communicate our value, our relevance – and indeed our **INDISPENSABILITY** - to the quality of life enjoyed in Australia. I have seen a very profound shift in the way the industry is now approaching these problems. The very same qualities of creativity, agility, tenacity, determination and professionalism that are the hallmark of what we do at every mine in the country, are now being harnessed to generate a step change in our performance to further and materially minimise our impacts and improve outcomes for the natural and human environment. With our increasing scale comes this added responsibility.

It is these qualities that make us a great industry and will make us an even greater one. These qualities helped us come through the financial crisis – and *that* helped *Australia* come through the financial crisis.

Given the challenges we face, agility, creativity, tenacity, professionalism, determination and real listening skills are qualities we'll need in spades if we are to sustainably expand our industry over coming years.

Fortunately, overcoming challenges is what we do as an industry day in, day out, year in, year out. The history of mining is a history of innovation, driven by talented and committed individuals. But we can't continue our journey alone: we've got to do it **with** not **to** the community. We have to extend our partnerships and our thinking. We've got to acknowledge mistakes and we've got to embrace a lot more of the "female" qualities that lurk under all you macho mining types. Which brings me back to tonight's awards – which recognise talent and the people who have done things differently.

Forgive my indulgence in a few moments of parochial pride at the number of finalists from New South Wales. Half of the 10 nominees for Mine of the Year are NSW mines! The State is also well-represented in the Excellence in Mine OHS category.

I'd also like to single out Centennial Coal's Bob Cameron. I am delighted to see that Centennial is in the running for 4 awards, and that Bob is a finalist for Outstanding Contribution to Mining. Bob has chaired the NSW Minerals Council on 3 occasions (and for his sins, employed me over 6 years ago). Without seeking to prejudice the judging or to take away from the amazing contributions of all the other finalists, I can confirm from personal experience that his contribution is indeed outstanding and his commitment to excellence and the prosperity of this industry is second to none.

Finally, let me note that the talent here tonight isn't confined to the award finalists and winners. You're all a brilliant bunch, and you give *me* great confidence that *we have what it takes* to ensure this industry's equally brilliant future.

Thank you and good luck to all.