

AMEC's Vital Role

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Former AMEC Councillor, 1987, 1990-92

I'm regularly reminded of AMEC's effectiveness in an extremely pleasant way.

I receive a cheque in the mail.

Always from one of those para-legal services that monitor 'unclaimed monies' that find their way back to Central Treasury.

So what's the AMEC connection?

In 1992 we were sitting around the AMEC board table discussing the unacceptable manner in which the State Government was charging us survey fees [<http://mannkal.org/downloads/submissions/sub19920214.pdf>] on tenements which in many cases were never surveyed and quite often surrendered, prior to any survey.

Our submission to the State Government claimed the \$6 million refunds to prospectors and mining companies for surveys that were not completed.

I've shifted address a few times since then and often my survey refunds get caught up in the 'unclaimed monies' process so it's always a pleasure when I receive another surprise payment for several thousand dollars.

Three cheers for AMEC's vigilance on behalf of its members and the industry generally.

Around about the same time we were becoming concerned at the rising fees, advertising and taxes levied and this was reflected by increases of 480%, 963%, 642% and 260% [Ref. <http://mannkal.org/downloads/submissions/sub19910822a.pdf>].

AMEC continues to rise to the Challenge

I enjoyed my two terms on the AMEC Board, last century, and it would be interesting to see how many of the issues we faced then resemble the issues of today. [Ref. <http://mannkal.org/downloads/submissions/sub20110906.pdf>].

As it is now, in 'my era', we had very effective Presidents and a great CEO in George Savell, who cemented us together like glue.

I'll mention one experience from 1990. It was the day of our annual 30-minute allotted time slot with the then State Premier (Dr Carmen Lawrence).

In we went to her office, I think there were three of us—Derek Fisher, George Savell and myself.

We had only just sat down for 'tea and scones' when Premier Lawrence launched her attack with something along the following lines.

"Why doesn't AMEC get its act together and join with the Chamber of Minerals & Energy, so that I only need to deal with one mining body, instead of having two separate meetings each year?"

I was a bit overawed by her aggression, but not George.

He instantly responded. “Madam Premier, it’s like this ...” and then he went on to explain that AMEC represents a different sector of the industry and the various reasons why. He explained the difference between exploration and production in slow, measured terms so that she could understand fully the logic.

Despite the Premier’s several attempts to interject, George showed her no mercy as he meticulously built the case for her spending not less time with the industry, but more time with the industry, and explained to her how the State would be better off for that.

She didn’t stand a chance, with George being one jump ahead of her all the way.

That’s what I call the “language of leadership”—and I saw it at its best that day.

I mention this story as I noticed that many mining industry organizations are sometimes approached with a view to merging with the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) to form one industry body. In 2009 such an approach was co-ordinated by eleven of Australia’s largest mining companies withdrawing their support from many of the industry organizations as a plan for “rationalisation of Australia’s mineral industry representation”.

This may suit some people, but it may not be in the best interests for our overall industry, or the best way of meeting our various challenges for survival. Indeed, it may even be better for the overall industry to sponsor even more representative groups, when viewed from the angle of both “primary” and “secondary” goals.

I’ll explain the difference between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ goals, as these comments may also apply to many aspects of our own lives.

If we are to preserve our industry, we must fully understand those who seek to dominate us, whether they are green extremists, climate extremists or the various groups of the community who preach and advance negative attitudes.

Yes, there is something seriously wrong with what’s happening in this country that has allowed their ‘anti-everything’ ideas to gain such extraordinary influence.

Yet, in many other cases, our present woes have not been imposed on us from outside; they are of our own making.

I’ve seen mining executives unable to defend themselves from abuse from their teenage student children about their father’s involvement in the mining industry.

Such widespread anti-mining sentiment presents a serious challenge.

AMEC’s challenge in these difficult times.

We must shoulder our burden with our eyes firmly fixed on the future, but recognizing the realities of today. We should certainly not count on hope or wishes or any misguided belief that governments fully understand our contribution to the nation, or the benefits that will flow from encouraging policies that will result in less interference and more mining.

Try explaining to a ‘Government Regulator’ that ‘exploration is really the essence of the human spirit!’

Let’s always hold clearly in our minds the productive and prosperous future that would follow if Australia was allowed to take its place in the modern world.

This is our responsibility as custodians of a much maligned and little understood industry, in which we have invested so much in terms of technology and capital, and labour, but so little in terms of philosophy or psychology.

We are fortunate with the range and quality of our resources media and we need to work more closely with them. We must encourage our media to continue asking the question: “Where are the leaders of Australia’s mineral industry in these times of economic and political crisis?”

Such opportunities to represent “productive Australia”, should not be wasted.

I mentioned earlier how much our industry spends on technology but how little it spends on philosophy.

The celebrated writer, Ayn Rand, wrote an excellent book called *Why Businessmen Need Philosophy* and this is a useful primer to help understand how we have been divided and conquered.

Yes, there is a need for the various mining and exploration organizations to work together, to fully understand each other’s role in our overall objectives.

People from Eastern Europe understand this more than we do, because they have been involved in fighting for their individual freedom and the concept of voluntary association with one another (as their ‘primary’ ideal), knowing that they would then be free to pursue their secondary ideals, once freedom was attained.

This is something that we should seriously contemplate because there are dozens of different secondary ideals within the industry at large, ideals which then split up various sections of the industry into different factions.

Each time the subject of a ‘primary goal’ for the overall industry comes up, each of the sub-groups starts talking about its ‘secondary goals’, which, of course, are almost never the same as other groups’ ‘secondary goals’.

There will be occasions when each subgroup of the industry won’t have much interest in other groups’ secondary ideals (nor should they if their agendas differ).

If all the current and separate mining organizations remain separate, but co-ordinate their activities with some overall guiding philosophy, we could be a powerful force and achieve so much more.

As the benefits of working together become obvious, you may find the many mining groups, the drilling organizations and service organizations would come on-side, but the co-ordinating group needs to be almost without any ego whatsoever, with practically no name and no office bearers.

You will find how effectively so many organizations along these lines work so successfully in various walks of life. It’s called effective networking.

Another reason why we need to brush up on our philosophy is when I see outrageous political comments go unchallenged.

Effectively standing up to political bullying is one of the many challenges that lie before us and I have total confidence in AMEC’s ability to respond with vigour to these challenges.

However, if we leave it entirely to AMEC and the other industry organizations to take on this task, we will continue to fail.

Each of us, as executives and individuals, must understand our various industries and beliefs and learn to take part in public policymaking. We must make our views known and inform the public, so that

balanced and realistic policies are produced. If we simply settle for being spectators in all this, we will continue to lose the battle.

The whole community has to be involved if Australia is to have a satisfactory future. That's our biggest challenge and it reminds me of the words of one of my favourite Austrian economists, Ludwig Mises:

Success or failure of endeavours to substitute sound ideas for unsound will depend ultimately on the abilities and the personalities of the men who seek to achieve this task. If the right men are lacking in the hour of decision, the fate of our civilization is sealed. Even if such pioneers are available, however, their efforts will be futile if they meet with indifference and apathy on the part of their fellow citizens. The survival of civilization will be jeopardized by the misdeeds of individual dictators, etc. Its preservation, reconstruction and continuation, however, require the joint efforts of all men of good will.

For thirty years AMEC has vigorously engaged and long may it continue to do so.