

Richard Owen's address to 2018 AMMA Centenary Gala Dinner

Melbourne, 1 August 2018

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and distinguished guests.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2018 Centenary Gala Dinner of the Australian Resources and Energy Group, AMMA.

Many of you in attendance this evening are regulars at AMMA's Gala Dinner, each year providing our industry's biggest celebration of excellence across all people areas – human resources, workplace relations, training, development, leadership.

This year however is special.

We are celebrating 100 years of industry support, engagement and leadership delivered by AMMA, the only national employer group for our industry, representing the enormous diversity of employers and businesses that fall within it.

This includes of course mining, oil and gas operators. But also engineering and construction, transport and logistics, maritime, facilities and asset management, smelting, refining and all the services and supply chain businesses, large and small, that support our industry.

My name is Richard Owen and I've been President of AMMA since 2017, but involved with the organisation for much of my 35 years in the resources and energy industry. I'm truly honoured, to this evening, deliver this welcome address.

Before I go on I wish to make some acknowledgements.

Firstly, to the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we celebrate this evening, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. I pay my respects to their Elders both past and present.

To AMMA Chief Executive Steve Knott and his team of dedicated, professional and highly capable staff.

To my fellow AMMA Board Members Melanie Allibon, Fiona Berkin, Kaye Butler, Johnpaul Dimech and Tom Quinn.

To AMMA's former Board Members and Past Presidents here tonight.

I wish to also acknowledge the many former staff members of AMMA who have contributed to the organisation's sustained success and longevity over the years.

And of course, the families and friends who have supported those working across our great industry.

We are also joined by distinguished guests from Australia's political and industrial relations community.

I wish to acknowledge the following members of the Australian Parliament:

Minister for Resources and Northern Australia, and good friend of AMMA, Senator the Honourable **Matthew Canavan**;

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service, Minister for Women, Minister for Revenue and Financial Services, the Honourable **Kelly O'Dwyer**;

The Attorney-General of Australia, the Honourable **Christian Porter**;

Senator for Tasmania and former Minister for Employment, Senator the Honourable **Eric Abetz**;

I wish to acknowledge our guests from the Victorian Parliament:

the member for Malvern and former Victorian Treasurer, the **honourable Michael O'Brien**;

And the Member for Box Hill and former Victorian Attorney-General and Minister for Finance, **the honourable Robert Clark**.

And from the Tasmanian Government, the Honourable **Guy Barnett**, Minister for Energy, Resources, Building and Construction and Veterans' Affairs.

I wish to acknowledge **Chief Judge William Alstergren** of the Federal Circuit Court of Australia.

Also the current and former members of the Fair Work Commission and its predecessors here tonight.

Also **Warren Mundine** AO, Chairman of the Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce and former Chairman of the Australian Government's Indigenous Advisory Council.

Finally to our special guests this evening, Australia's 25th Prime Minister Mr **John Winston Howard** – and former Minister for Industry Relations, Small Business, Employment and Workplace Relations, and Defence – the **Honourable Peter Reith**.

It is an honour to have you both here as our special guests.

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight is not just a celebration of AMMA, but a celebration of the role Australia's resources and energy industry has played in Australia's past and present, and its continued role into the future.

Our industry is critical to the Australian economy, critical to employment and national prosperity, and critical to the Australian way of life.

We are all familiar with the headline figures – half of the value of all Australian exports, almost 10% of GDP, 4% of the workforce, \$25 billion in annual wages and salaries and \$12 billion in taxes and royalties each year.

But you need only to consider where Australia would be today if not for the resources and energy industry. Whether it be our contribution to infrastructure development – roads, schools and hospitals – or the development and sustainability of rural towns and entire resource-rich regions.

There's barely an area of our great country that hasn't been touched by and made better by the contribution of Australia's diverse and growing resources and energy industry.

We truly have a great story to tell.

The challenge for the industry, and for individual employers, as we come under increasing pressure, is to tell our story and to explain it in a digestible way to the people of our nation.

We must better inform the broader community about why we need to explore, develop and trade Australia's natural resources - and how in turn that delivers wealth, development, prosperity and increased living standards to Australians. We must also remind Australian's about the essential goods and services that our commodities produce. I often wonder when people tweet adverse comments from their smart phone about our industry from their heated homes and offices, if they are cognisant of the irony in their message.

The other great challenge is to manage the transformative change facing our industry.

Whether that's through changes in technology, globalisation, international competitive pressures, environmental factors, political nationalism or increased expectations on our social license to operate.

But our industry is and will always be in the risk management business, and we have proven time and time again that our industry will adapt and transform, and will turn challenges into opportunities.

The organisation I lead, ExxonMobil Australia, has a long proud history of operating in this country. As does AMMA and many companies of which it represents. While tonight is a proud night to celebrate AMMA, we should also take a second to also celebrate all of our companies past, take time to reflect on the present and to embrace our future together.

We are acknowledging some of the best examples of success and achievement in our industry later tonight, with the annual AMMA Industry Awards.

Covering key 'people areas' including human resources, diversity, training and development, innovation and wellbeing, I congratulate tonight's award winners for the leading example they provide all employers in our industry.

I also thank the number of organisations receiving long membership awards tonight for their sustained commitment and support of AMMA.

I spoke a moment ago about the transformative change facing our industry in 2018. It was indeed transformative social and industry change facing employers that led to the Association's formation, here in Melbourne, 100 years ago.

It is fascinating to read the extracts of AMMA's first annual general meeting in 1918, to learn that repatriating Australian men returning from service in The Great War back into productive and well remunerated work, was one of the key early priorities of the Association.

In addition, AMMA's first President, a Broken Hill Mining identity named G.C. Klug, foreshadowed significant changes including mass industrialisation coming to the industry as the value of Australia's mineral resources began to be understood.

It was also noted that the trade union movement was growing in power and social significance, and that a great priority for AMMA was – and I quote – “the promotion of a better spirit between capital and labour, and contentment amongst the workforce”.

For the next 100 years AMMA would remain by employers' sides as they worked through the great industry and workplace relations changes of their time.

The earlier decades were difficult for Australia's mining industry. And there was a great period of industrial reorganisation post World War 1.

AMMA assisted employers through change including the setting of industrial awards, regulating employment conditions for the first time, milestone strikes in the iron ore and coal sectors, and the introduction of the 44 hour standard working week and various employee entitlements.

It was in the 1950s that AMMA would begin its growth from a modest industrial relations organisation to the diverse and national employer group it is today. The true value of Australia's mineral deposits were realised and huge growth meant by the late 1960s, Australia was a world force in coal and various metals.

AMMA also played a vital role in assisting employers to implement great advances in industrial technology into their workplaces during the mid-20th Century.

By the 1970s, AMMA was playing an important role in the development of Australia's oil and gas industry as the Bass Strait and North West Shelf became new frontiers.

Through thought-leading publications such as "The Way Ahead" in 1988 and "Beyond Enterprise Bargaining" in 1999, AMMA provided the most uncompromising employer voice in support of the great workplace relations reforms of the past 25 years.

And many of you would be highly familiar with AMMA's significant role during the most recent resources investment and construction boom, helping alleviate labour shortages, address policy and legislative issues, and assist with the unprecedented pressures on skilling, resourcing and people development strategies.

Tonight, AMMA celebrates its 2018 Centennial Year at a time when some membership organisations are struggling for relevance.

However, by always addressing the issues of today, AMMA remains just as relevant and engaged with members and the industry as ever. It is getting on with the job and remains in an exceptionally strong position to improve value and service to members in 2018 and beyond.

On behalf of the AMMA Board, I thank each and every AMMA member for your continued membership, support and engagement as we collectively deliver national prosperity and create a brighter future for all Australians.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, it would be remiss of me to talk about the significant workplace relations reforms of the past 25 years without acknowledging our special guest, Australia's 25th and second-longest serving Prime Minister Mr John Howard.

AMMA's focus on workplace relations and productivity is linked to many of the key reforms that the Howard Government set and achieved.

Under Mr Howard's Government our industry's gross value added rose by more than 50% and direct employment grew by an incredible 83%.

The workplace relations reforms of Mr Howard and his minister Peter Reith, who we also privileged to have with us here tonight, delivered enormous benefits to our nation.

This included wages growth at its strongest of the past 40 years and Australia's unemployment rate dramatically reduced from the 8.4% they inherited to 3.9% shortly after leaving office.

Reforms from 20 years ago continue to deliver great benefit to our industry, the wider trade and investment opportunities for Australia, and more broadly to our national prosperity and living standards.

Tonight AMMA wishes to acknowledge the achievements of Mr Howard, and Mr Reith in delivering these critical reforms. Thank you both for being here tonight to acknowledge the strong relationship between your government and Australia's resources and energy industry.

I invite Mr Howard to share some reflections on the policy environment in Australia, including the current battle of ideas for future regulation of our workplaces.

Please welcome Mr John Howard.

