

**ORC/WIMARQ International Women's Day – Breakfast**  
**8 March - Sofitel Brisbane.**  
**Guest Speaker Alice Clark**

Good morning. I'll begin by acknowledging the distinguished guests here today and thank the Queensland Resources Council and in particular Chief Executive Michael Roche for the invitation to address this group on such an important occasion.

I also thank the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, The Minerals Council of Australia and the good people in the Department of Natural Resources for providing background information for this address. Thank you also Sally Dominguez for your kind introduction. I should add that my family emigrated from America in 1972 and as you may notice I have a slight accent.

Our award finalists this morning are an inspiration to everyone seeking employment in the resources industry. I'm overjoyed to see that there is good representation among the nominees from close to my home, Cloncurry and Mount Isa.

We are all aware that our business performance hinges on the attraction and retention of skilled and dedicated personnel like the people that we honour in our ceremony today. There is significant evidence that staff turn-over is lower where businesses combine flexible approaches to work rosters with a genuine diversity amongst employees. Diversity works for employers simply because the potential labour pool is larger if people from different genders and backgrounds feel welcome and are included. You have only to look around the room to see that diversity in the resources sector is essential.

We have come a long way from the 1980s when I secured my first job as an exploration geologist thinking that this is the way to a good income (and was that a sign of naivety?!).

People often say to me that it must have been so difficult then, but if it was difficult, I wasn't focused on that. I wasn't thinking about being a woman, or being in the bush, or being formally educated in an informal, even rough, outback environment. I was only interested in seeing how much I could change people's pre-conceived ideas of what I could or couldn't do. It was a personal thing. I liked surprising people, and I liked surprising myself. Fortunately I also really liked rocks and the science of the Earth. All of this meant that I was, and still am, truly excited to be in the resources industry.

Now days there are surveys to focus people on the metrics of how far women have come. However, after a few decades of using numbers to define ore bodies, I have enough statistical knowledge to be somewhat dangerous. I wonder if these surveys tell the full story. I wonder if the sample size of women at the top end (executive levels) is large enough yet to draw conclusions from. It is important to keep asking questions. For now we will have to wait till mid-year at least for the final report on the analysis of this recently collated data.

So this morning, I'll take you on a journey through the eyes of a young woman starting out in her profession as a field and exploration geologist.

I started in the 1980s, one of probably 4 or 5 women exploring for minerals in the field (bush) at that time. There had been some before me, but I suspect the 1970s downturn saw

most of them exit the industry for greener pastures. There might also have been a rare specimen in oil, gas or coal, but the communication abyss between hard rock and soft rock fields was even wider then. The 3 +/- other women in my final year took on further study and we lost touch.

I did know of another woman in the field in Western Australia who finished a year or two ahead of me. We met in a pub in Chillagoe a few years later and swapped stories that we'd had heard about each other. It was amazing how close to the truth the industry rumour was.

When I graduated I think my Dad was a bit surprised because most of my brothers went into IT or economics and I ended up doing what is still referred to at Christmas Dinner as "That Bloke's Job with Rocks". Dad knew a bit about what geologists did and decided that the appropriate graduation gift would be a lever action Winchester 30-30 his favourite rifle. Yep, it was before the gun laws and bullets were still cheap. OH&S had a long way to go back then and I got major kudos arriving on the drills site with that thing slung over my shoulder!

I remember getting my first job. It was after a chance meeting with Bob Osborne who back then managed the mineral exploration arm of CSR. I said I was a geologist looking for work and did he know of any jobs? It was the gold boom, so he asked me why I thought I was finding it difficult to get a job. I'd had a couple of knock backs and said I couldn't be sure, but it could be on account of being female. He thought this was pretty funny.

I bummed a smoke off him in the interview, still remember him rolling his eyes when he lit up and I asked if I could have one too. Within a few days of bumming that smoke, I found myself driving a 1972 model diesel Toyota from Townsville to Mount Isa as an employee of CSR Minerals and Exploration. It was to be 6 years of swags, pubs and company flats before I got to live in a proper house again.

Bob Osborne took a chance. He hired a girl and laid the first corner stone in my career.

Of course, Bob had flown out ahead of me under the auspices of seeing to things in the Isa. In reality there was no way he was going to sit for a thousand kilometres in that crappy beat up 4WD with no air-conditioning, no power-steering, in the middle of November.

From the Mount Isa base I was to tow out something called a "Jenny", and to ensure that I had no rear-visibility they roped a corrugated iron water tank onto the tray. I was essentially a city girl. I'd never driven off bitumen, and certainly never backed up a trailer.

As I walked around the loaded up Toyota I asked if there were any tricks to going backwards with a trailer; and someone offered sage advice. He said "well some people never get the hang of it, but for now just pretend that you are an Emu and try to keep going in the same direction."

When I met up with Bob he had a brand new shiny sun-flower yellow Toyota with power steering and air-conditioning. He drove this to the drill site with me following closely, in the dust behind, no aircon, windows down, water tank wobbling around like a Rolf Harris

song and still towing the “Jenny”. Worried that if I didn’t stay really close I’d get lost. I chewed about 1kg of Duchess Road dirt before he radioed to say hang back a bit because we weren’t turning off anytime soon.....

We got to the camp about 5 hours later and my adventure started. The toilet was a 12 inch drill hole which at one time had probably reached a depth of 30m. Over this was positioned the top half of a 44 gallon metal oil drum with a hole cut near the rim. On this sat an unattached, melted plastic toilet seat, more or less over the hole. There was no way you could use it in the day without burning either your bottom or the backs of your thighs. There was a bag of lime and a sampling trawl on the dirt next to it. We were on a mesa with few trees and no privacy. Bob suggested I should BYO toilet paper because, in his experience, the drillers were likely to use all the soft stuff, and they never replaced the roll.

When I had to move the Jenny, Bob realised that I couldn’t reverse my Toyota with the trailer on the back. He seemed impressed that I’d made it all the way out without needing to back up once! After positioning the Jenny next to a small mound of dirt, he taught me how to refuel it and start it by cranking a handle that needed to come off as soon as you ‘felt’ the engine kick in. He warned that if it got going too fast before you yanked it off, it could spin off and kill someone, so I had to be careful.

He then took two long leads connected together. They must have spanned over a hundred metres. He started to walk in the opposite direction from where our camp was set up. Where the lead stopped was to be the driller’s camp.

They came the next day. There were 5 of them to operate the big Warman drilling rig. When they piled out of their shiny new Toyotas, we were confronted by 5 of the ugliest men I had ever seen – anywhere!

Bob introduced them to us, and they were trying to work out what a girl was doing in the camp. Bob told them to find the other end of the lead running from Jenny... and this year they were not to come any closer to the geologist’s camp than that.

They all went kind of quiet and looked at me. So I turned on a big toothy smile, and as their handshakes –most with missing fingers, crushed my little paw, I told Bob that it was OK and I would do my very best to hold myself back from these stunning exhibits of the male species. It broke the ice and their weather beaten faces full of busted noses and missing teeth, laughed and they went off to set up camp.

One night when the others had gone to town for supplies, the drillers broke the rules and one of them came up to talk to me. The generator was playing up. I was certain that I’d refuelled it but something was wrong because every now and then all the lights would brown-out and it sounded like someone was strangling it. I could see the dip in the lights from the drillers’ set-up too. “Stretch” (named that because he had the body of a 7 foot tall skeleton) was chosen to come up and see if something was going on at my end of the extension cord.

As I heard him crunching up the calcrete path, in the dark, my heart was in my throat. He had to duck low to get under the tent flap kitchen arrangement and he asked what I was cooking. I’d gotten sick of heating up tinned food on the gas ring and I was having steak

tonight. I asked him if he wanted some. He said “no,” but I’d better get rid of the bloody electric fry pan before I blew up the generator!

Stretch then invited me down to the driller’s camp for what was the first of many dinners. As we walked down to their camp, Stretch said that it was really stupid of Bob to leave me out here with that fry pan for cooking and we’d all be in deep shit if the Jenny blew up. I didn’t fess up that the fry pan was mine and Bob didn’t know I had it.....

Those men built a corrugated iron screen around the toilet. They taught me how to ‘survive’ in the bush by keeping a cool head, play poker and shuffle the deck of cards “without scraping the boobies off the Queen”. Also how to shoot my Dads rifle, drink scotch in my coffee, change tubes on a split rim, and service a diesel engine. When I left I could build a hot and cold shower out of a 44 gallon drum. This they called a DONKEY...go figure?

Most importantly, while driving me to the hospital in Mount Isa with a busted up lip and chipped tooth, they introduced me to the anaesthetic properties of scotch *without the coffee* as they taught me that when you forget to take the handle off after starting the Jenny – it’s OK, just get away quick and don’t go near it till it runs out of fuel. If you can find the handle out in the bush later no one will ever know. “We’ve all done it but only once!” they said.

I taught them how to use a clinometer and compass to line up a rig properly, to get ringers to bring out fresh water, and I insisted that they use their safety equipment while on the rig. I was useful for getting at a particular bolt that kept coming off the new rig because my hands were the only ones small enough to get at it and tighten it up. I could also remove splinters and bandage cuts.

We spent about 6 months drilling together out at Trough Tank. The Osborne mine (named after Bob, shortly before he died) hadn’t been discovered yet. Later I found out that they put down the discovery hole a year or so after I left and CSR sold the company to Placer. We actually pre-collared through the top of it for some of our holes. Even back then Bob knew we were close. It was exciting. I thought all exploration was like that.

Looking back I think Bob was fussy about which drillers he wanted out there with us. I think he’d hand-picked them. Some of them now hold management positions in large international drilling companies and we meet up often in various airport lounges.

After exploring over most of Queensland and NSW, I left CSR and joined MIM at the Ravenswood Gold Mine working for Bob Dennis and later Leigh Neindorf. I transferred out to the Isa for a 2 year stint in 1990. Some 20 years later I’m still there.

The first flexible work arrangement that I had was in 1995 when Leigh Neindorf arranged for me to stay at the mine during my pregnancy as a Senior Mining Analyst. I had been the Senior Geologist for the Lead Mine but the Plat Man wouldn’t let me on the cage to go underground once he realised that I was pregnant. I snuck on a couple of times but eventually he got wise and there was no arguing with him.

After our daughter was born Michael Rosengren convinced senior management to allow him to employ me as the Hilton and George Fisher Mine Planning Superintendent, working as many hours as I could get day care for. Day care was and still is a concern in

our mining town. There had never been a female mine planning superintendent in the operations before, but I'd been around for 7 years by then, we didn't make a fuss and I don't think anyone noticed!

In 1998, thanks to the faith that John Gooding showed in me, I was appointed to the position of Chief Geologist for the copper and lead/zinc mining and exploration operations on the Mount Isa lease.

This job set another corner stone in my career.

The role was challenging, there hadn't been a female appointed to a technical management position at the Isa Mines before, and I was younger than the other managers. Again the rest of the management team didn't make a fuss about it. Times were tough and we were all serious about the job at hand. I had an annual budget large enough to define ore in one of the world's biggest mines, and a bit left over to explore the mining lease at Mount Isa. It was a real buzz.

Somewhere in there I got married, studied for my Master's Degree in Economic Geology and we have a beautiful daughter.

In 2002 when she turned 5 and started school I left MIM. I thought that if I could start up a geological consulting business that I could balance the needs of my family with my desire to continue working. Over the years in the industry, I found that I had developed a huge network of colleagues some of whom had moved up the ranks in different companies. Many of these people are now my clients.

My consultancy has grown at a managed pace and now employs sub-contractors and part time staff to provide service and advice to mining and exploration companies. I still work the same hours – just not at the same time of the day. This move has allowed me develop an environment where I can continue learning in my profession and have a meaningful presence at home. This has not been easy, but nothing worthwhile ever is.

There is no doubt that my personal performance bar has been raised considerably from the drilling camp days. Now I'm very aware that fluctuations in financial markets impact our industry – and I understand the reasons why that is so.

I've become acutely aware of the progress made in business management and labour relations during the last 40 years in Australia. Many of you will remember the industrial situation that Australia found itself in the 1970s. I'm no expert on the politics of this period, as my family had just emigrated from America. But the TV news was filled with images of strikes, protests, old buildings coming down in the middle of the night, and Joh Bjelke Petersen feeding the chooks.....

Imagine trying to deal with the Global Financial Crisis in the industrial relations environment of the 1970's. I doubt very much that people in the workforce of the day would have accepted reduced hours, forced leave and even lower wages to save a company from the brink. If it's the same 1970s that I watched on TV in my parents' lounge room, I think they been out on the grass painting placards before Fanny Mae went 'booty' up.

Contrast that with our recent experience. We saw flexibility in labour market arrangements allowing business managers and employees to work together. This carried Australia when other advanced economies stumbled (and continue to stumble).

If we are indeed through the crisis then Australia may yet prove to be a leading example in the global economic arena.

This is the result of the powerful combination of sensible private sector management and government approach to maintaining the right mix of market regulation and a balanced and disciplined labour policy.

With this lesson fresh in our minds, Government and industry leaders must resist a reversion to short term ideologies rooted in days gone by. We must continue to look for balance, diversity and flexibility in our approach to labour regulation and labour relations. Sustainability of our industry and economy depends upon it.

But here is the hard part. Women have traditionally been the back-stop for families. In this time, many women want to work and many more have to work to support their families. The Labor Party realised this early on with that catchy, start to every 2007 electioneering sentence: “Working Families”. It might have become irritating but there is a truth to the cliché – certainly in the resources industry.

There are no limits imposed by gender within this industry – many young women already realise this. Women don’t want special treatment, as my early career experience can attest, they just want flexibility. If employers understand this they will find an abundant skilled labour resource to be tapped.

For women to be able to participate, they may need a little support at the front end. It’s not just about mining engineers, metallurgists and geologists. Every trade, degree, administrator and operator has a potential job in the resources industry. There are still blockages and I will finish on the two things that I believe represent the biggest blockages.

The first is an address to anyone who currently sits on a company Board or in a senior management group. Think about this. Only last week the Greens called for affirmative action on corporate Boards through punitive regulation. The Rudd government appears to be ‘softening-up’ ASX listed entities for perhaps slightly more digestible affirmative action policies that dictate minimum gender representation percentages on boards.

This, in my view is a reactionary approach to the gender imbalance on boards and it is regrettable. I *have no faith* that affirmative action policies will work in the Australian culture. It is a credibility issue, and gender-based, regulator-driven quotas will make it harder for women in the long run.

If I’m given a shot at a Board position, I want it to be because I have something to contribute, and because that Board needs me there to make that contribution. So Boards out there looking for new blood don’t miss opportunities to expand the views represented around your table. Consider that there are many capable women who will bring experience and sound judgement to that circle. Don’t limit your search to lawyers and accountant for these positions for by now there are metallurgists, engineers, geologists

and others out there with sound operational experiences who understand the industry and its position in a global economy. These people also know the decision makers who are important to your company's future.

Finally, to the policy-makers in the room and in government offices around Australia: I don't understand why governments on both sides of the fence keep talking about "Working Families".

"Working Families" means that Mum and Dad both work. If you really want to see working families, then we stop 'phaffing' about on child care and get out there and fix it. Child care is the number one issue for "working families" and it is the number one issue on every list for women in the workforce and an increasing number of men in our industry. It is time to fix it.

Thank you for sharing my journey this morning. I know that many of you have walked a similar path.

The messages are

- Maintain balance, diversity and flexibility in our approach to labour regulation and labour relations.
- Look outside the traditional roles for women in the board room
- Fix child care with a sense of urgency.

I give my congratulations again to the award finalists.

Enjoy the rest of your day. Get out there and make a difference!

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