



Speaking Notes

[These notes have been prepared after the Address to the Garma Festival on request, and reflect as accurately as possible, what the MCA Chief Executive said]

to

The 2006 Garma Festival,

**Gove, Nhulunbuy,
Northern Territory**

**Mitchell H Hooke
Chief Executive
Minerals Council of Australia**

5 August 2006

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners....

I acknowledge the traditional owners, the Gumatj people, and extend my respect and those of the MCA to the elders and their ancestors. Thank you for your warm welcome to country and your extended kindness and hospitality.

Sponsorship....

I am again delighted to participate in this Garma Festival. This is personally my third successive Festival and the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) has been a proud sponsor of the Festival for the last 4 years. It is with great pleasure that we are again, key supporters of this year's Festival.

Minerals Council of Australia....

By way of background, the Minerals Council of Australia represents Australia's exploration, mining and minerals processing industry, nationally and internationally, in its contribution to sustainable development and society.

MCA member companies produce more than 85 per cent of Australia's annual mineral output, and a slightly higher percentage of Australia's mineral exports.

Address....

In reflecting on yesterday's very good Opening Forum in the context of what I would say today, I thought I might start with a little anecdote.

On Friday night when I arrived at Gove Airport, a colleague overheard a lady asking: "what was the minerals industry doing at the Garma Festival and what possible interest could the minerals industry have in the affairs of Indigenous Australians?"

Notwithstanding what I might say to explain our interest and to justify our position, I suggest that the answers lay in the key messages of yesterday's Opening Forum, suffice for one key aspect – what you might call "the elephant in the room" – we all see it, but dare not mention it.

I come from a generation that:

- wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated systemic racial discrimination;
- promoted, without compassion, the ideology and practice of assimilation, not integration;
- was ignorant of the importance of own values and cultures to a society's integrity;
- was apathetic to opportunities denied Indigenous Australians the rest of us took for granted;
- simply had no idea how devastating is the loss of hope, the onset of despair, and abject poverty; and
- had arguably contempt for, and certainly little understanding of, how utterly miserable were, and in many cases still are, the circumstances of Indigenous Australians

Fixing that is not only the right thing to do, it is also good business sense if you are in the business of growth and development – and we're all in that business, either individually or collectively.

For us:

- 60% of our operations around Indigenous communities,
- We are currently experiencing skills shortages and we face profound people shortages, requiring some 70,000 more people or a 50% increase on current direct employment over the next decade – we are failing to capitalise on a significant human resource now, let alone if the projections are right that some 50% of the population in the top end will be Indigenous in the next 10 years;

- earning and maintaining a social licence to operate is far more enduring than a merely a regulatory licence to operate in sustaining our operations. To do that requires more than a commitment to contribute to sustainable development – it requires the commitment and capacity to build enduring partnerships with local communities in the endeavour of building sustainable communities during and beyond the life of mine. You simply can't be serious about a commitment to sustainable development if there is not a commitment to building sustainable communities beyond life of mine;

The fundamental primary platform for nailing that elephant in the room – to building those sustainable Indigenous communities – is cross-cultural awareness, appreciation and acceptance – founded in mutual respect and trust.

That's the formula of integration not assimilation.

It's the formula for the transformation from the past to the prospect of growth and improved social and economic welfare for the future – and it's the stuff of yesterday's forum.

It's the formula for getting off the mountain, and out of the pulpit - listening, learning, sharing and mutual commitment. What our friends yesterday from across "the ditch" – in New Zealand, said was the "learning talk" – analysis, critique and challenge.

There is no shortage of cheer squad of enthusiasts – what I liken to the fans in the Great Southern Stand at the MCG in Melbourne, loudly cheering for their team but little real appreciation of what to do and how to go about it where the real action is on the field. As much as we admire their passion and at times tolerate their self-appointed patronising advocacy, it is Forum's like this where the good intent and good will can be harnessed to identify the good actions, the good plans and the good progress.

Though I say it, few contest the Australian minerals industry is such an industry transformed.

The modern minerals industry measures its success in environmental and social outcomes as well as financial performance. Simply, our regard for the environment, and our regard for people in the communities in which we operate, is as important as our regard for our shareholders.

And this, not just from what we say, but what we do, as important as that commitment is.

For example, in respect of Indigenous relations:

- we are committed to respecting Indigenous rights and interests, and special connections to land and waters;
- we are committed to engagement with Indigenous communities where we operate; and
- we are committed to mutually beneficial partnerships to realise the growth and development opportunities from our mining operations and building sustainable communities – beyond life of mine.

On the doing side:

- we strongly contested moves in Canberra by some, not all, to use the majority in the Senate to seek substantive changes to land rights legislation here in the Territory and across Australia that would diminish the rights of Indigenous Australians;
- the past decade is witness to a fundamental shift in this industry's attitude to Indigenous relations – compare the confrontationalist, divisive and disrespectful nature of the Mabo and Wik debates, to today's platform of mutual respect and engagement;
- there are over 350 mutually beneficial agreements across some 200 minerals operations in Australia, not one of which contested native title; and
- we have established an Indigenous leaders dialogue with the MCA Board of Directors – which comprises Chief Executives of minerals companies. As significant as creating this dialogue is, the real achievements to date has been our consensus on amendments to the Native Title Act, and our collaborative work in lobbying for better resourcing to improve the efficiency and operability of the native title system.

And, particularly significant in terms of today's forum is that we were the architects of a Memorandum of Understanding between the MCA and the Australian Government, to work in partnership with Indigenous people to build sustainable Indigenous communities – we were frustrated by the focus on corporate training and employment programs for its narrowness and relative ineffectiveness, to seeking a platform for building sustainable Indigenous communities.

Quite simply, we are committed to promoting education and training, employment and business opportunities for local Aboriginals where our companies operate.

Our formula is simple. We see all three levels of government having various responsibilities in providing the social fabric and infrastructure for all Australians – not just those living in the cities, or the coastal fringe towns, but equally in remote Australia.

We recognise our role in providing commercial opportunities in the communities in which we operate.

And if we can put a better partnership together, between the local people, the governments and ourselves, we can build better socio-economic outcomes – foundation to building sustainable communities.

You all have some idea of the range of some 30-odd government programs – very well intentioned, designed to assist Aboriginal people – employment, training, welfare, sponsoring business enterprises.

But you also know that mostly they are tripping over themselves, mostly they come as the 'great white knight bearing gifts – we're here to help you', and rarely do they stop long enough to listen to what the local communities want.

We learnt that lesson a long time ago.

We've shifted big time - from deciding, announcing and defending – to engaging, listening and learning – and we're trying to get governments to come along with us.

This new approach, we hope, will establish a process to ensure that the delivery of such programs in the future is better coordinated, better aligned with employment opportunities in the minerals and other industries, and that they deliver better outcomes for Indigenous communities.

We hope – indeed our objective – is that the MoU will facilitate improved access to:

- literacy and numeracy education;
- work readiness initiatives such as Fitness to Work programs;
- drug and alcohol services;
- financial services;
- family support services including child care and counselling services;
- human and financial capital to facilitate Indigenous enterprise development; and
- training relevant to employment opportunities

In this, mining companies existing relationships with traditional owners are our first priority. What the MoU does is formally establishes the role of government as an 'enabler' to assist communities to recognise opportunities for socio-economic development.

The first 12 months have focussed on establishing relationships and the development of processes rather than projects.

We have established 8 priority areas for the implementation of the MoU during its pilot stage. They are:

- Western Cape York (QLD) – Comalco
- Tanami (NT) - Newmont
- East Kimberley (WA) – Argyle Diamond Mine and Roche Mining
- Port Hedland (WA) – BHP Billiton
- Newman (WA) – BHP Billiton and Newcrest
- Karratha and Roebourne (WA) – Pilbara Iron
- South-West Perth – Boddington (WA) - Newmont
- Wiluna (WA) – Newmont and BHP Billiton

And we have worked to ensure the engagement of local stakeholders, the engagement of State governments, clarification of Commonwealth agency arrangements to deliver on the project and the establishment of an effective platform for national coordination.

We are close to signing a number of Regional Partnership Agreements at the pilot sites and will be shifting our focus to delivery on the ground.

Going forward we will focus on the ongoing implementation of the MoU, the evaluation and reporting of the MoU, and the development of strategy to replicate the new working arrangements between government and industry to other mining regions.

So, to my opening comments, we have set a framework for:

- commitment and mutual respect, founded in sharing of knowledge, cultures, values, needs, wants and capacities;
- commitment to building mutual partnerships with Indigenous Australians, engaging all levels of government in the process
- ensuring that the substance of those partnerships is growth and development for people and communities;
- that government's identify and respond to the social infrastructure needs of communities, meeting their responsibilities to Australia's citizens in providing equal opportunities in the social fabric of communities irrespective of whether they are in remote Australia or the coastal fringes; and
- that captures and enhances the enterprise of individuals, the commercial strength of companies, and the economic benefits of progress and development.

This is the stuff of real change and real progress, and the real betterment of Indigenous people, whom we are gathered here at this Festival to learn and respect their values and culture, and to contribute to their growth and prosperity.

**MITCHELL H HOOKE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE
5 August 2006**