

Jobs boom points to acute skills shortage

By CLARE CHAPMAN

clare.chapman@dailymercury.com.au

TENS of thousands of jobs will be created as projects worth billions of dollars get under way in the Mackay-Whitsunday region over the next few years.

But as the resources sector takes advantage of a renewed global demand for minerals and energy the chances are most new developments will face a major problem – the staff required to man the projects will be nowhere to be seen.

According to a Queensland Resources Council (QRC) quarterly survey, the resources industry will create 41,000 new jobs across the state in the next 10 years but an acute skills shortage that is already beginning to affect the industry will mean tradespeople, labourers and related staff will be in high demand.

QRC deputy chief executive and director of skills policy Greg Lane said the skills shortage had risen sharply in the last quarter.

“The development of the coal seam gas and LNG industries in Queensland at the levels being proposed will need to be matched by the direct and indirect employment of more than 18,000 new employees over the next decade,” Mr Lane said.

“Alongside that, labour force outlook studies are pointing to the demand for additional operational workers in the coal, bauxite, copper, lead, zinc and gold sectors in Queensland, exceeding 23,000 by 2020,” he said.

“Most in demand are tradespersons and related categories, labourers and related workers and intermediate production and transport workers.”



Narelle Pearse.

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Regional Economic Development Corporation chief executive officer Narelle Pearse said if any of the projects that were currently still in the study stage got under way quickly massive problems would be created.

“Things are starting to ramp back up now. We have 30 billion dollars of projects sitting there under study but if they came on board it is going to create huge problems,” Ms Pearse said.

“It’s not only the jobs around mining that are affected either. It has a multiplier effect so we will potentially need more nurses, doctors and town planners, for example,” she said.

Blue Energy, which has recently discovered gaseous coal reserves just north of Nebo, is considering further testing in the area to determine whether the reserves are commercially viable.

Chief operating officer John Phillips said finding skilled staff was always a problem and he expected problems to continue, especially if the reserves were found to be commercially viable and the company expanded.

“Getting a skilled labour force is always going to be a problem because of the size of the projects involved,” Mr Phillips said.



Boilermaker Aaron Honeyball undergoes welding qualification testing at G&S Engineering Services in Mackay. There will be a growing demand for tradespeople and labourers as resources projects worth billions get under way over the next few years.

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August were traditionally times when poker machine expenditure increased, with tax cheques arriving in the mail and holidaymakers arriving in sunny Queensland.

But for some, gambling is an ongoing issue.

A recent survey conducted by the Office of Liquor and Gaming Regulation showed that problem gambling affected 12,000 Queenslanders – or 0.37 per cent of the population.

Mr Lawlor said this figure had dropped continuously since 2001 when 0.83 per cent of Queenslanders had a gambling problem.

Ms Clough said poker machines were akin to a double-edged sword.

“If you win, it encourages you to keep gambling,” she said.

“The problem is, when you lose it also encourages you to keep gambling.”

“I’ve heard of one client who said the person on the machine next to them collapsed and that they didn’t stop to check on them – they just kept on playing.”

Ms Clough said most didn’t seek help until they had almost lost everything – including all their money and relationships.

“I’ve certainly had clients who have contemplated suicide,” she said.

Mr Lawlor said the State Government was trying to balance out the social and economic costs and benefits associated with poker machines.

“There are, of course, a variety of factors that impact on gambling in Queensland and it is difficult to know exactly how much of an impact a given factor has.

“The pre-10am ban could very well be among the factors that have led to the reduction in gaming machine expenditure in Mackay,” Mr Lawlor said.

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