PROSPECT AWARDS WINNERS PROFILE

AUSTRALIAN MINING SPEAKS TO ABERGELDIE COMPLEX INFRASTRUCTURE WHICH WON THE CONTRACTOR OF THE YEAR AWARD AT THE 2015 PROSPECT AWARDS.

Since its beginnings in 1994, Abergeldie Complex Infrastructure has serviced a range of mining and civil projects throughout Australia's east.

In 2015, the company received the Contractor of the Year award at *Australian Mining's* Prospect Awards for its innovative approach to drilling blind bore vent shafts.

Abergeldie constructed a blind bore ventilation shaft at a mine in the Southern Coalfields, around 45km northwest of Wollongong in New South Wales. The five meters finished diameter (6.2m drilled) shaft reached a final drilled depth of 517m, which at the time was the deepest blind bore vent shaft the company had drilled.

Lining of the shaft took slightly over a month, with crews working around the clock to see the 170 composite steel/concrete liners sections – each three metres long and weighing almost 50 tonnes – installed to make a hydrostatically sealed shaft at five meters finished diameter.

Speaking about the technique, Abergeldie executive chairman Michael Boyle told *Australian Mining*, "The rock material is extracted through reverse circulation so that means that the shaft is kept full of water during the drilling process."

"We inject air down the drill pipe and create a flow that extracts the drilled material and it travels up the drill pipe and is delivered into a pond on the the surface.

"Keeping the shaft full of water helps keep the shaft wall stable during excavation and the whole drilling and lining process happens without anyone having to be within the incomplete shaft – so it's a very safe means of excavating and lining shafts."

Boyle welcomed the award win and said it was good for the company, despite the current lack of mining clients requiring the award winning shaft design and construction services.

"That project in the southern coalfields is the last shaft that we've completed," he said.

"So our three large diameter drill rigs have in essence been mothballed since around about 2015 when the investment in mining development in Australia pretty much stopped."

However, this has not stopped Abergeldie from continuing to grow, as it has focussed on the civil sector.

Boyle said the company is multidisciplinary, with all the teams it had for blind boring work now operating in tunnel and shafts projects in the civil sector.

Since 2015 Abergeldie has worked on a rail tunnel in Strathfield in Sydney, which Boyle said was complex as they had to tunnel under live suburban rail lines.

The company is also working on a pipe jack tunnel in Brisbane for Queensland Urban Utilities and is about to begin a pipe jack tunnel in Melbourne for Yarra Valley Water.

"We're also carrying out a pedestrian tunnel under a rail line in Sydney at Sydney Olympic Park," Boyle said.

"So we're still doing a lot of underground work but we've focussed more on the civil sector in recent years because of the lack of opportunities in the mining sector."

Following a recent report from Engineers Australia on the low number of students taking up science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) related subjects in high school, Boyle said it is essential that initiatives are implemented to encourage students into these subjects.

Boyle has been involved in civil engineering at The University of Sydney, working as chairman of The University of Sydney's Council of Civil Engineering. He said there is a great need for students proficient in the STEM subjects as these have a large

ABERGELDIE COMPLEX INFRASTRUCTURE EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN MICHAEL BOYLE

part to play in a range of technologies critical in the world today.

"I think two things we need to do is to encourage students to study the STEM related subjects and also to encourage students or younger people to train in the trades," he said.

The company also has graduate programs for university students that have studied engineering which has been very successful so far.

"People that have come through the graduate program have been, and continue to be, key employees of Abergeldie," he said.

Boyle has noted a growing optimism in the mining sector particularly over recent months as the company has begun to receive tenders for work at mine operations.

"I have noticed over the last probably three to six months that there is discussion of investment and opportunities within the mining sector and we have started to submit offers and tenders to provide shafts on mines," Boyle said.

"I'm pretty confident that we'll have a project delivering a blind bore shaft somewhere along the east coast of Australia before the end of this calendar year."

Boyle also mentioned the positive outlook for Abergeldie going forward. Historically, one third of the business was in the mining sector and two thirds in the civil and mechanical sector. Despite very little work in the mining sector in recent years the company has still been able to grow.

"I see some strong growth for Abergeldie as we continue to grow our civil sector and the work within the mining sector returns," he said.

Boyle added that the company's key strength is in its diverse capabilities and in the technology it has developed which will bolster its continued growth.

"I'm reasonably confident that as investment in mining comes back we'll see many opportunities in Australia, and with our technology, I envisage we'll find opportunities right across the world." AM

The Contractor of the Year award has been renamed Contract Miner of the Year. The 2017 Contract Miner of the Year award is proudly sponsored by Atlas Copco. Nominations for the 2017 Prospect Awards are now open. To nominate, visit www.prospectawards.com.au.

ABERGELDIE CONSTRUCTED A BLIND BORE VENTILATION SHAFT AT A MINE IN THE SOUTHERN COALFIELDS