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Our resilience did us proud

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OPINION
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The Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA will soon host its AGM.

This wouldn't ordinarily be the kind of thing I'd lead a column with, but as I look ahead to this year's event I'm reminded that we weren't even able to host an AGM in 2020 because of COVID-19

Strange as it may seem now, only 12 months ago there were a whole bunch of things people in WA couldn't do.

We couldn't gather in groups of more than two people. We couldn't duck down to the local restaurant for a meal. We were unable to travel between different regions of WA. And travel to other States was pretty much out of the question.

A year on and the interstate travel part can still be complicated but other than that life is pretty much "business as usual" — for most of us personally and also many of CME's member companies operating in the Pilbara, North West and Kimberley.

The 13 or so months since COVID-19 started affecting WA haven't always been straightforward for the mining and resources sector.

One of the biggest initial challenges was not just to continue operating effectively and efficiently but also to do so in a way that didn't put at risk the health and safety of our workers and the wider community.

As a recent Navigating COVID-19 report published by CME and EY made clear, the

pandemic wasn't an event anyone would realistically have planned for. A lot of behind-the-scenes and on-the-fly work was necessary to make sure we met our priority objective of keeping everyone safe. But looking back, that work was clearly worth it.

Data released last week showed a record average of 140,940 people were employed by the WA mining and resources sector in 2020. A

little more than half of them were employed by iron ore operations, while nearly 54 per cent of the total mining workforce was in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions.

Overall, our sector experienced record sales of \$174 billion in 2020.

Iron ore accounted for \$116 billion of that, with oil and gas combining for \$26 billion.

Those sales figures paved the way for \$9.2 billion in royalties paid to the WA Government, a contribution that made up nearly 29 per cent of all State revenue — and will help fund education, healthcare and other key services around WA.

Record sales also allow CME member companies to embark on hundreds of community ventures across the State each year — including a COVID-19 support initiative in 2020 that raised \$9 million for the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Foodbank WA and Lifeline WA.

It's still a little jarring to think back to April 2020 and the seemingly "normal" freedoms that we suddenly realised could no longer be taken for granted.

But when I reflect on how far WA and its mining and resources sector have come since then, I feel like we have something everyone in the State can be proud of.

Paul Everingham is the Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA chief executive