



19 AUG, 2021

## Buzz about mining's future is electric

Kalgoorlie Miner, Kalgoorlie

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### ROB CARRUTHERS

Each time I've visited Kalgoorlie-Boulder in the past couple of years, there's been a clear buzz about the future of a region that is so synonymous with the fortunes of mining.

But what I encountered at the Diggers & Dealers Mining Forum a couple of weeks ago eclipsed my expectations in terms of sheer optimism.

To some extent that's a by-product of having more than 2500 people — a remarkable achievement in the context of COVID-19 — gathered in the one place with a shared interest in the success of the resources sector.

However, it is equally true the buzz at Diggers 2021 cannot be manufactured. The optimism for the future is genuine and so is the excitement around some of WA's key commodities.

I probably don't need to talk too much about gold. With prices still healthy, strong production levels and some significant projects progressing, gold continues to be an extremely valuable contributor to the Goldfields economy and communities across the region.

It is also a massive understatement to say iron ore, including projects to the Mid West and further north, are tracking along nicely and seeking to take advantage of the record price cycle.

What really captured my attention at Diggers this year was the buoyancy around the battery minerals sector.

This sentiment has been bubbling away for a while now

but it was very much at the forefront of discussions at the conference and events that followed.

Commodities such as lithium, nickel, cobalt, rare earths and copper were central to the Diggers agenda.

Whether it was Lynas' progress on its rare earths processing facility in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, or BHP Nickel West announcing its new solar farm and battery storage projects aligned to a strategic collaboration with Tesla, the message was clear: the near and long-term prospects around battery minerals are incredibly bright.

This tied in with another of my key takeaways from Diggers, which is that environmental, social and governance considerations — ESG was the most used three-letter acronym for the week — are not just corporate slogans for mining and resources companies but something they are very much putting into practice and "living" on a daily basis.

The announcement this week by the WA Government of an "electric highway" extending from Kununurra to Esperance and out to Kalgoorlie-Boulder is another clear indication of how our future is going to look, with the Goldfields region and the commodities it produces very much at the centre of that.

On the topic of progress, I'm told that around 20 per cent of this year's delegates at Diggers were female.

The crowd I observed at the event represented a pretty wide cross-section of the resources

community but, like many mining operations, there is still work to be done to increase female and broader diversity across our sector to reflect wider society.

That's a challenge that CME and its member companies are

actively tackling at a broader level. I'm sure it is also in the

minds of the Diggers organisers, who should again be recognised for running a conference that provides safe and inclusive spaces in which delegates can gather, and which is so well-supported by local businesses and Kalgoorlie-Boulder as a whole.

I'm already looking forward to

returning to the Goldfields next August — not just to chart the exciting growth in the projects and commodities I heard about in 2021, but hopefully to see further developments in the diversity of Diggers itself.

**Rob Carruthers is CME's Director of Policy and Advocacy**



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**Rob Carruthers is the Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA director of policy and advocacy.** Picture: Ryan Ammon