

Unique contracts approach a winning indigenous formula

A formal signing ceremony at AngloGold Ashanti Australia's Perth office recently marked the latest, five-year Indigenous contract award at the Tropicana Gold Mine in Western Australia.



Bundarra employees Brett Jordan Lewis (left) and Michael Boddington at the Tropicana landfill site. Bundarra has the day works contract at Tropicana. Photo taken by Karl Schoemaker.

"We really put a lot of thought into how we could construct some contracts to provide opportunities for Aboriginal businesses," Tropicana General Manager Duncan Gibbs said.

Triodia Mining (which means Spinifex in Latin) and Doorn Djiil Yoordaning, the Indigenous contracting business of Macmahon Contractors, have formed a joint venture to operate the light vehicle workshop at Tropicana.

A unique approach to indigenous engagement and employment at Tropicana has already resulted in AGAA awarding around A\$30million in contracts to Aboriginal businesses at the site.

Tropicana, located 330 kilometres east north-east of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, is 70% owned and managed by AGAA with Independence Group holding the balance.

AGAA's commitment to the promotion of indigenous business started out in the 1990s with indigenous contract miner Carey Mining at the Sunrise Dam gold mine – a relationship that has since been expanded to include Tropicana where Carey Mining provides ancillary mining fleet and personnel services through its role as a sub-contractor to Macmahon Contractors.

However, to ensure further indigenous participation, AGAA took the innovative step of custom-designing some of its contracts to entice new players.

"We really put a lot of thought into how we could construct some contracts to provide opportunities for Aboriginal businesses," Tropicana General Manager Duncan Gibbs said.

"Most of those Aboriginal businesses and aspirants, with the exception of Carey Mining, are pretty small scale, family-type businesses, rather than established companies."

The first step, and part of Tropicana's environmental approvals process, was to engage with potential indigenous stakeholders.

The indigenous groups in the Tropicana area include the Wongatha People of the Goldfields region of WA and the Tjuntjuntjara (Spinifex) Community to the east of the project.

In the years prior to development approval, a number of community meetings held in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and the remote Tjuntjuntjara Community acted as the backdrop to facilitate expressions of interest from potential indigenous enterprises.

To overcome the challenge of scale for new indigenous entrants, AGAA unbundled and designed a number of smaller contract packages in the areas of both construction and operations at Tropicana, targeting existing skills and capability.

While tapping into the construction side of the business proved a challenge, contracts in the operational space at Tropicana came up trumps, resulting in the award of new contracts to indigenous groups Bundarra, SMC Services and Triodia Mining.

Triodia also offers cross cultural training at the site, provided by Pam Gordon and her aunty Sandra, descendants of the previous Wongatha People.

The mining arm is headed by Terry Gordon as the general manager.

For his mother and matriarch of the family, Nancy Gordon, the new JV with Macmahon represents a big step forward for her people, aimed at providing a better future for the younger generations.

"It is going to be a long road, but we are ready for the long haul...it is a big opportunity and a dream come true for me, but we have to make it work," she said at the ceremony.

Doorn-Djiil Yoordaning General Manager Tony Noonan said the agreement marked the first commercial venture by the East Wongatha people and would support the remote community through funding of development programs from the JV profits.

As for the newcomers, the longest running of these is the Bundarra day works contract, which has been in place for the past 12 months.

Headed up by Brett and Patricia Lewis, the Leonora-based company currently has six staff based at Tropicana.

With a fleet of small and mobile equipment such as a front-end loader, backhoe and trucks, the company holds the rubbish collection contract for the Tropicana operations and accommodation village and provides assistance to exploration crews through services such as track clearing, sump excavations and rehabilitation works.

Bundarra also undertakes some small scale earthworks across the site and delivers fuel to mobile power generation sets.

Bundarra, which fought off a number of applicants to win the day works contract at Tropicana, also provides services to Independence Group's Jabiru base metal mine in WA, as well as a number of other parties in the Goldfields region.

Gibbs said it was the group's track record and recommendations from other industry organisations that gave Bundarra the winning edge.

A more recent contract recipient is SMC Services, run by David Canning.

Canning was previously a commercial manager with Anaconda Nickel at Murrin Murrin before establishing his own company and running an on-site laundry service and retail shop at the nickel mine.

SMC Services has the wet mess (tavern) and retail services contract at Tropicana and with three employees on site, is looking to now expand this to include postal and other services.

Again, this was a unique approach by AGAA to separate out the wet mess contract from the standard catering contract, which in the case of Tropicana is held by ESS.

Left: Tropicana General Manager Duncan Gibbs (left) with Triodia General Manager Terry Gordon, officially sign the five-year joint venture contract to operate the light vehicle workshop at Tropicana, at AGAA's Perth office. Right: SMC Services, run by David Canning, has the wet mess (tavern) and retail services contracts at Tropicana. Photo taken by Karl Schoemaker.

