

Engagement is a must

THE minerals industry isn't going anywhere. It will only get bigger. The human appetite for resources shows no signs of abating. Technology and innovation, population and economic growth will only make that appetite stronger.

Indigenous people aren't going anywhere either and our population is also getting bigger. Minerals extraction means engaging with Indigenous people. Indigenous Australians have ownership or other rights over 20% of the continent, including most areas where mining occurs. And there are still native title claims to be concluded and compensatory funds to be invested.

Socioeconomically, there's a big gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Demographically, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia are like two different countries – the demographics of Australia are typical of developed economies; the demographics of Indigenous Australia resemble developing economies.

In 10 years there'll be nearly 1 million Indigenous Australians. Our population is growing at over 2% per year compared with Australia's population at closer to 1.5% per year. To put that in perspective, India's population growth over that period will be around 1.2% a year and Nigeria's 2.6%. The median age of Indigenous people is around 22 years, compared to around 37

for the non-Indigenous population. The population pyramid for Indigenous Australians looks like those of developing economies, wide at the bottom and narrow at the top.

Population distribution is also different. Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in the sparsely populated areas where most mining occurs, and increasingly so. By 2040, Indigenous Australians will make up half the population of northern Australia, for example.

And the country is having two completely opposite discussions about opportunities in remote areas. On the one hand, politicians talk about developing northern Australia and the need to get bigger populations there to realise these opportunities.

Then they question the future of remote Indigenous communities; say there are no jobs or opportunities, the communities should be closed and Aboriginal people should move south.

How can there be a shortage of labour on the one hand and a shortage of jobs on the other?

Over the coming decades, the minerals industry will need job-ready and educated local populations – which means job-ready and educated Indigenous people.

For Indigenous communities, the future presents a different challenge. We need our people in remote areas to get educated and



Nyunggai Warren Mundine

into jobs so those communities can have economic development.

Indigenous people and the minerals industry actually want the same thing. We can sharpen our engagement model to achieve it.

The early engagement model was royalty agreements for access to land. We all know how messed up some of those arrangements became.

Today, the preferred model is payments into trusts for the benefit of communities at large and with a focus on preservation of funds. But mining companies often retain

control or veto of the money which is another form of paternalism.

Asset management and investing is a specialist skill. Most community based groups – whether it's an Aboriginal group or your local football club – don't have the capabilities. A model we could look at adapting is the one family businesses use when their businesses grow and they come into wealth – a combination of family members gaining skills and experience as well as engaging external advisers and confidants who are trustworthy and capable and can supplement the skills they need.

Right to wealth

Traditional owners have the right to build sovereign wealth and use their asset base and it must be effectively managed. But it isn't a panacea for delivering economic development. If Indigenous people remain asset rich and skills poor, the status quo won't change.

What we need is individuals gaining skills, getting educated, finding employment, getting independence and being able to generate their own kind.

In joint ventures between mining companies and traditional owner groups, the biggest opportunities aren't from the contributions to community assets, but actually from locals getting jobs where they gain skills and business experience which they can use in their

own communities.

Here are two questions the minerals industry should be thinking about.

First, what's it doing about securing an educated local talent pool in remote Australia in 10 to 20 years? The people it will need in its future workforce and supply chains aren't going to school or getting the education it needs. Work with local communities to address that.

Second, what's it doing to help people in remote communities identify jobs, set up small businesses and generate commerce? The minerals industry is one of the most influential and well connected industries in the country and is built on entrepreneurship. There's a lot it can do to help Indigenous people gain these skills. In helping create real economies in these areas it also helps secure its future workforce.

If we address these challenges, the outlook for Indigenous Australians and the future minerals industry workforce is bright.

● *Nyunggai Warren Mundine AO chairs the Yaabubii Institute for Disruptive Thinking. He is also the independent chair of Waanyi ReGen Joint Venture, a business collaboration between the Waanyi PBC and ReGen, a Downer Mining enterprise. This article is an extract from his speech to the Minerals Council of Australia Workforce of the Future Forum on October 12.*

Lessons to be learned from NZ

RECENTLY gave a presentation as part of The TJ Ryan Foundation in my role as a research associate. The aims of the foundation are to stimulate debate on matters of Queensland public administration and to review the policy directions of current and previous state governments on economic, social and cultural issues.

My presentation was on the importance of language as an essential element that contributes to culture and identity.

In my research, I was amazed to find that in 1980, there were fewer than 100 Maori language speakers in Aotearoa (New Zealand). It struck me that, without a commitment towards change, we continue to live in the atrocities of the past unable to move forward.

Aotearoa recognised the atrocities generated against its Indigenous peoples due to British colonisation and committed to bringing the language back from the brink. Less than 40 years later, in a recent survey, 83% of Maori and 70% of non-Mori stated that the Maori language must be saved because it is part of a shared, inter-ethnic, New Zealand identity.

This is in no small part reflected in the fact that Maori is already an official language of Aotearoa and protected constitutionally.

Currently, awareness in the

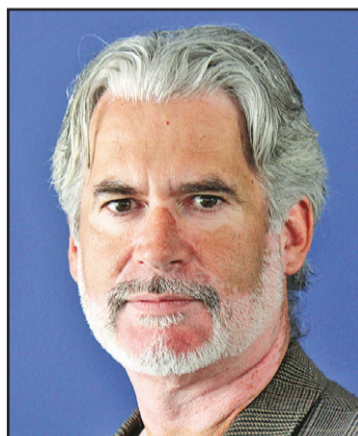
broader community about our own Aboriginal languages is very low. Most Aussies have no idea about the extent of linguistic diversity across the country, or how these languages connect to Dreaming Paths and Songlines tens of thousands of years old.

It is still too common in Australia for interpretive signage in national parks and other public spaces to display statements such as 'This is the Aboriginal word for...' rather than acknowledge local and regional dialects.

When back home on country, I often think how easy it would be to simply have "gilliwaa" above public toilets with Marri (Men) and Yinarr (Women) signs. Just imagine how that would increase inclusion if we saw such signs every time we stopped to buy petrol, food... or use the gilliwaa with an acknowledgment of the local language.

We often hear that it would be too difficult to implement Aboriginal languages throughout Australia as Maori only speak one language. That is simply not true – Maori have a number of dialects associated with various regions. Linguists state that there are major dialect divisions in Maori. Within these divisions there is also regional variation, and within regions there is tribal variation.

Older speakers of Maori are more likely to speak Maori



Woolombi Waters

identifiable with a particular dialect or region. Observations are that a considerable amount of dialect mixing is occurring amongst younger speakers, especially those living in urban areas.

As Aboriginal children, we are taught that when on other people's land, you respect the local culture. Therefore, the fact that many Aboriginal languages are spoken is not problematic; you teach the local language of the region. And with language comes history and place – not just for Aboriginal people, but for non-Aboriginal too. Rather than

divide the culture, we all become richer.

How else do you think we communicated when we came to participate in collective ceremony such as the Bunya festival, where more than 30 mobs were represented? Or do people think we all turned up and didn't talk to one another because we didn't know the local language? Of course not.

It is this easy... rather than teach only 'Brisbane' in schools also teach that the name of the place is Meanjin, the same with Sydney and Warrang, Kambarri for Canberra, Melbourne is Narrm and Perth is Boorloo.

International studies also show that bilingual teaching improves literacy, participation and access across schools. Bilingual children often outperform monolingual children in tasks of cognitive control. This advantage may be a consequence of the fact that bilinguals have more practice controlling attention due to an ongoing need to manage two languages.

In finishing, I want to ask readers one simple question that highlights just how important language is to our identity: How old is the Dreaming?

The truth is not nearly as old as you think – its use as a term of reference only came into acceptance 78 years ago through an anthropologist called A P

Elkin. In the late 19th Century, Francis Gillen, the stationmaster in Alice Springs – an Arrernte speaker – became the first person on record to use the expression "Dream Times" as a translation for the complex Arrernte word-concept *Ulchurringa* ("Alcheringa"), describing our mobs' religious faith and belief systems.

Anthropologist Baldwin Spencer popularised Gillen's words in his 1896 account of the *Horn Expedition*. Without academic endorsement by someone of Baldwin Spencer's standing, the term may never have survived.

But it was not until Elkin's 1938 book *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them* that the "Dreamtime" and the "Dreaming" became accepted as a term of reference.

So let's start acknowledging the past and recognise our future and begin a cultural shift that enables better understanding of who we are and what we represent by making the effort to save our languages. After all we have more language speakers today than Maori did less than 50 years ago.

If they can turn it around why can't we?

● *Dr Woolombi Waters is an award-winning writer, educator and academic at Griffith University.*