

Engaging and Listening to Communities speech – Dean Brown 15 October 2009

25 Minutes with questions

During the 1960s, 1970s, & 1980s, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and various UN agencies were spending billions of dollars on development projects in developing countries. Despite the vast amounts of funds spent, the development projects usually did not have a lasting impact and often failed during the project period.

In the 1980s a project in the highlands of Thailand to establish cash crops as an alternative to drug crops was failing to get the support of local communities. A sociologist from Adelaide identified why and he proposed a means of rectifying the problem. The local natives were more concerned with running water being plumbed to their homes and similar issues.

Lesson: Deal with the immediate needs of the local community before they will engage with your project.

For a mining company that means understanding the local concerns of your proposed development and dealing with them – not just telling people how good the project is.

PIRSA now require a formal community consultative committee (CCC) during the permitting stage and the operational stage.

Key points to remember:

1. Set it up as early as possible.
2. Independent chair (not from immediate community)
3. Select members who represent a good cross section of the local community – who have community respect.
4. Open and frank discussions.
5. No votes rather rely on general consensus and dealing with concerns raised.

Example:

Strathalbyn Community Consultative Committee for the Angus mine of Terramin. Despite broad community opposition, the real concerns were:

- a) A zinc /lead mine close to local school (about 1km)
- b) Large trucks travelling through Strathalbyn with ore concentrate, fuel and explosives.
- c) Noise, dust, blasting and visual impact on surrounding houses.
- d) Community left with an ugly, exposed and potentially damaging tailings storage facility at the end of operations.

Positives were jobs, local employment and economic benefits for local town.

Need to communicate and engage with broader community as well. 6 month process was to build trust and respect, and to reassure the community on issues.

So work hard to listen to and convey facts to schools, community groups (e.g. Rotary Clubs, Probus, Senior Citizens, Churches) and individuals with particular concerns.

Kanmantoo Copper/ Gold project of Hillgrove Resources. Concerns were:

1. Heavy trucks through Kanmantoo (which did not emerge as an issue until the very end.) – HGO will build a by-pass road.
2. Taking water from the River Murray which is already in a state of crisis.

-Solution – use treated effluent water from Mt Barker – better processing water.

3. Protect remanent native vegetation

-Solution – not mine a low grade pocket of ore.

Communicating with people is a two way process if it is to be effective:

- You tell them what you propose to do.
- They tell you their concerns, at which stage don't become defensive.
- Public meetings can be a disaster, as Terramin found out at Strathalbyn.
- Consultative Committees can be effective, but must then inform the wider community.
- One on one consultation can be effective but it is expensive and time consuming. -BHP Billiton EIS Consultation.
- Listening posts and displays especially at public events e.g. Wooden Boat festival at Goolwa with River Murray.
- Added value if organised by local community e.g. series of community work sessions at Meningie, chaired and organised by Coorong Council, on future of Lake Albert.

Follow up with regular Newsletters on Frequently Asked Questions & Answers.

River Murray Crisis – worst natural disaster – I have learnt much.

With the local communities involved in the current River Murray crisis, I have learnt the lesson to focus on “what can be done” i.e. the positives rather than the negatives, e.g. operation of ferries and the ferries Working Group representing local communities – after a disastrous public meeting.

Complaint handling Procedures

1. Rapid response
2. Listen carefully to the actual complaint
3. Written response

Many of the issues I have discussed are set out more formally in ICMM Paper.

Remember Effective Engagement of the Community is achieved through mutual *trust* and *respect*.