

# Minerals council is mining job figures

Costs to the community must also be considered, writes **Lee Rhiannon**.

AS concerns grow about local health and environmental impacts of coalmining in the Hunter, the industry understandably pulls out all stops to protect its interests.

A favourite whip the NSW Minerals Council cracks to shore up support for the coal industry is the jobs growth claim.

No matter what concerns are raised over the effects of coalmining – the threat to water resources and prime agricultural land, coal's heavy contribution to climate change, the long-term health impacts of air pollution – its response is a predictable "coal means jobs".

There is no doubt that people are employed in mining, and that these jobs create and support other positions.

But there is room for debate around how many jobs are actually created and whether they justify the industry's considerable costs.

The *NSW Minerals Industry Annual 2006-07*, prepared by the NSW Department of Primary Industries, stated that "for every direct mine site job up to an additional three positions are created in other sectors of the economy".

This figure does not necessarily represent jobs in the community where the mines are, but even if it did, the best ratio would be three positions for every one direct mining job.

The minerals council has a rubbery relationship with this ratio.

According to the minerals council, from August to November 2008 the number of indirect jobs supported by the 14,000 people employed in coal jumped from 60,000 to 70,000: a jump from 3:1 to 4:1. That's quite impressive.

The minerals council's elasticity becomes even more impressive in March 2009 when complaining about the impact of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

In a media release it claimed 30,000 people are directly employed in mining, supporting 100,000 indirect jobs.

And then in November last year it



**RUBBERY RATIOS:** There is room for debate around how many jobs coalmining creates.

publicly asserted that 30,000 mining jobs were now supporting 200,000 other positions, exploding the ratio to almost seven jobs created for every direct mining job.

A more realistic approach to mining jobs is set out in the Australia Institute's *The benefits of the mining boom: Where did they go?*

This reveals that while mining industry profits increased by more than 140 per cent, labour costs increased by less than 85 per cent.

Even without considering the ever-higher salaries executives pay themselves, the obvious conclusion is that the more profits mining companies receive the less benefits go to either direct or indirect employment.

We should keep this in mind as the Labor state and federal governments keep the foot on the accelerator to generate the new mining boom.

We should also consider that the increased exchange rate buoyed by low commodity prices in a resource

boom encourages de-industrialisation and the de-skilling of the workforce.

This comes about when it becomes too expensive to export anything else, and so manufacturers send jobs overseas.

The same report by the Australia Institute questioned to what extent the last boom benefited Australians in general.

It didn't doubt the profits generated, or that investors in relevant companies saw strong dividends. But what it did question was the knock-on effect to the general economy.

A key finding of the report was that "real wages increased at roughly the same rate after the onset of the mining boom as they did before it".

Findings such as this suggest that mining booms are no panacea to job creation and other larger issues within the Australian economy.

The costs to the economy of environmental damage from mining, health problems in local

communities and the longer-term impacts of climate change must be considered.

Are effects such as these an equitable trade-off for the increased profits received by mining investors and executives?

It's about time the NSW Government and the Federal Government woke up to the costs of the coal industry and stopped relying on the warm stories of job creation being peddled by the minerals council.

The culture of corporate welfare for mining must end. There is no economic sense in the long term of locking the Hunter into fossil-fuel dependency.

We must invest in industries that create sustainable jobs, support communities and deliver real economic benefits to all Australians.

Lee Rhiannon is a NSW Greens MP.

## Topics today



### Today's fact

Wolverines mark their food with a foul-smelling musk to stop other animals eating it.

### Today's word

**Foment:** To instigate or stir up trouble or sedition.

### It happened today

**From our files – 1889:** The first stone of the convent for the Sisters of St Joseph was laid next to the Catholic Church at Carrington on Sunday.

### Today in history

**1875:** *The Times* of London becomes the first newspaper to print a daily weather chart.  
**1924:** Adolf Hitler sentenced to five years in jail for high treason after his abortive 1923 putsch.  
**1933:** Nazi Germany begins formal persecution of Jews with a boycott of Jewish-owned businesses and seizure of Jewish people's bank accounts.  
**1939:** Spanish Civil War ends with Nationalist victory, 1 million dead and a 36-year dictatorship.  
**1955:** Hobart becomes the first Australian city to introduce parking meters.  
**1976:** Direct dialling from Australia to overseas countries becomes available with OTC and Telecom introducing ISD.  
**2002:** Euthanasia becomes legal in the Netherlands.

### Born today

**Sergei Rachmaninoff**, Russian composer (1873-1943); **Sir Paul Hasluck**, Australian politician and governor-general (1905-1993); **Debbie Reynolds**, US actress-entertainer (1932-); **Ali MacGraw**, US actress (1938-); **Jimmy Cliff**, Jamaican singer (1948-); **David Gower**, pictured, English cricketer (1957-); **Lachy Hulme**, Australian actor (1971-).



### Odd spot

Authorities say 29-year-old Brenna Reilly of the Washington suburb of Arlington pretended to be the FBI's director of forensics and conned her neighbours into taking jobs as her assistants. Two of those neighbours put personal information such as their social security numbers on fake job applications. She gave the assistants tasks that included writing condolence letters to family members of agents killed in the line of duty.

### Today's text

Jesus said, "I am giving you a new command. You must love each other just as I have loved you." **John 13:34**

# There's no liberation from online technology

The inbox takes precedence, writes **Melissa Gregg**.

LAST weekend I took apart my home office. It's the first step in reclaiming my life after finishing a book manuscript.

In my tiny two-bedroom apartment, there's not much room in the first place. But for the past year I've been writing every weekend to meet a deadline. Sometimes I just couldn't face going back to work to work.

My book describes other professionals doing just the same thing: working from home on weekends beyond paid hours.

In the past three years I interviewed 26 workers in a range of information jobs – journalists, librarians, academics, marketers, IT officers, media producers and managers. I asked how online technologies were affecting their

work and home lives. Email overload was easily the biggest problem.

None of the workplaces I studied had policies advising when to answer email. This meant that workers felt obliged to keep checking inboxes throughout the day and night, just in case something was waiting.

Workers claimed it was their "personal preference" to stay in touch with work to take responsibility for fast turnarounds. But it was also because these diligent workers were too polite to question the culture developing around technology use among colleagues.

A mother of twin boys checked the email every half hour, even while cooking dinner. Another mother working part-time took her laptop when playing with her boys outside on her days off. Fathers would come home from work only to spend the rest of the night upstairs in the home office, where kids knew not to disturb

him. Couples regularly spent weeknights together on the couch, each on their laptops, after putting baby to bed.

One project officer hid her email habit from her partner, who disapproved of her working extra hours: "I try to limit it but I sometimes find myself quickly checking my email before he gets home, when he goes to the shop, when he is downstairs gardening." Her work compulsion had all the trappings of a seductive affair: keeping in touch with the office sounded like a kind of adultery.

For families, multiplying laptop screens kept parents and children separated in different rooms of the house. With mobiles, wireless and Blackberries, others would claim to be spending time with kids while also checking email.

This "distracted presence" was described by one worker as the feeling that "you're there but you're not really". Little wonder that kids

are growing up dependent on computers – they are learning this from their parents.

Have we actually admitted our own internet addictions when worrying about young people's habits?

The big promise of online technology was that we would be liberated from the nine-to-five office. Now we choose when, where, but never how much we work. Working from home may be convenient, but for many professionals it means pursuing work at the expense of all other sources of intimacy. It's these that I'm hoping to rediscover as I finally close the lid on the laptop.

**Dr Melissa Gregg works in the department of gender and cultural studies at the University of Sydney. *Work's Intimacy* (Polity Press) will be published in September.**