



Women at the helm

DCN's Paula Wallace speaks to manager of BHP's marine operations at Port Hedland, Kirsty Timbury, about the how this division of the mining giant has attracted so many female staff

BHP produced 281m tonnes of iron ore in FY20, which was shipped from Port Hedland to destinations globally. The total throughput for Port Hedland over the same period was 513.3m tonnes.

The company is building a new iron ore mine in Western Australia. When completed, South Flank will produce high-quality iron ore for around 25 years. The project is on track to deliver first ore in 2021 and is expected to produce 80m tonnes per annum, replacing volumes from Yandi as Yandi reaches its end of economic life in the early-to-mid 2020s.

Towage operations at the port are managed by the BHP Marine Team, which holds one of the towage licences at Port Hedland. Rivtow Marine is the towage operator that manages the fleet on behalf of BHP.



Perhaps surprisingly in a male-dominated field, Port Marine BHP has 75% female representation in its workforce. Its manager of marine, Kirsty Timbury tells *DCN*, “Towage operations is responsible for the safe escort of ships in and out of the 20-nautical mile shipping channel, which is tidally-constrained and narrow compared to others around the globe.

“BHP Towage form part of our operation with a shoreside team of 12 people, with Rivtow Marine to deliver these services to port users.”

The towage operator has 29% female representation in its shoreside team and amongst the fleet there is 2.6% female participation.

“We have female representation across most facets of our operation,” Ms Timbury says.

“From a BHP perspective we have gender balance in our key senior roles – operations and scheduling. We have seen a steady increase in the female participation rate across the board within our operation.

“Roles filled by women include a number of mates and a master within the fleet.

“Both, specifically from our BHP Team we made a concerted effort to strive to be as flexible as possible and have clearly defined development strategies for our people,” she says.

The company has developed a roster for its scheduling team that allows them to be ‘on call’ overnight rather than night shift and it has re-designed some of the work to decrease the disruption whilst ‘on call’.

“This has allowed us to recognise different needs within our team and support our team with working remotely or off site if required which has enabled more engagement and retention of our great people,” Ms Timbury says, adding that the benefits of this have been evident during COVID-19.

“In addition to this we have focused on the development of our team and have a number of examples where our people have progressed into roles within our business based on their work, development and career path.

“Being a complex and dynamic operation we have been able to lever the experienced individuals and the opportunities to expose our people to different learnings and opportunities.

“This has enabled us to develop our talent internally and support from within our business.”

Ms Timbury says the company takes great pride and puts much effort into developing its culture.

“It’s important to celebrate our successes and achievements as well as learn from opportunities. Every year we set our culture plan and share this with our team and the operation,” she says, adding that this is a genuine attraction for female employees.

“The camaraderie and organisation culture within our entire operation acts in its own right as an attraction/retention package.

“We support and encourage examples of our organisational culture including the bright spots we have of people leading the way in the culture space.

“We share the exciting parts of our operation with the community and operation alike. A great culture and exciting work is contagious – it’s a great recipe!”

Rivtow Marine also has a cadetship program that is open to women.

“A number of contractor groups also have females in mate roles who will have an opportunity to express their interest to participate in the mates to masters program,” Ms Timbury says.

TAKING THE LEAD

As the manager of a towage operation, Ms Timbury is a role model for women in the industry. Prior to joining BHP in 2013, she spent 10 years in operational leadership roles at Svitzer.

“I feel that I have been extremely fortunate to have had some very supportive leaders who always encouraged me and supported my development,” she says.

“I have had some pretty interesting interactions over the years in this industry... and the overwhelming majority have been positive.”

When asked what an average day ‘looks like’ in her current role, Ms Timbury says, “My day varies from spending time onboard the tugs talking with crews all things safety and operations to routines on the mine site with the port leadership team”.

A key part of her role is ensuring the delivery of the towage service obligations under the licence and managing the contracts associated with that.

“There is a lot of focus on maintaining the integrity of the shipping channel in Port Hedland due to its unique and challenging characteristics so I am heavily

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Kirsty Timbury, Port Marine BHP

involved in leading strategic improvement work in the way we manage the risk on behalf of BHP working with the port authority, marine pilots, subject matter experts and other key port users,” Ms Timbury says.

“I love that my role is so varied and dynamic and I never know exactly what each day will bring. This keeps me engaged and striving to continue to improve the operation and business.

“To those thinking about a career in the maritime industry, be it on the water or from the shoreside... just do it. You won’t regret it – there are so many amazing people, experiences and opportunities and you never know where it will take you.

“Build your network and leverage these relationships to support you through the different phases of your journey,” she says. ■