



WA GIVES WORLD A JUMP-START

Ashlee Mullany

WHEN drivers around the world jump in their eco-friendly hybrid cars, it's more than likely the materials in the battery are from WA.

Like all resource companies, Galaxy Resources is moving ahead at lightning speed to keep up with global demand. For Galaxy it's coming from China, where there is likely to be a shortage of lithium carbonate to make long-life batteries for electronic cars, mobile phones and computers.

From the ground to the end product, lithium carbonate is passed through a number of hands, but it all starts here in WA at the company's Ravensthorpe operation.

TEAM PLAYERS

According to managing director Iggy Tan, the key to running a successful mining project starts with a good team and good communication.

"It's like a footy team when people are engaged and they understand what's happening in the whole game, they are more likely to be more involved in the company," Mr Tan said.

"In Ravensthorpe there's a whole range of roles. There may be people who are driving trucks, to drillers, to shot-firers, geologists, engineers, people who run the processing plant and people who work in the

laboratory."

Mr Tan has worked with Galaxy from the ground up, starting in 2007 with the feasibility studies, test work and organising finance and support for the project.

GROWTH INDUSTRY

During that time the company's market capitalisation has gone from about \$20 million to \$300 million. Its workforce has also grown from five to 273.

"We've grown very quickly and part of that process was raising the capital," Mr Tan said. "We built the plant in Ravensthorpe in less than 12 months for \$80 million."

As part of that planning, the company also established a residential site in Ravensthorpe, where more than 100 employees now live.

While most companies have fly-in, fly-out workers, Mr Tan said he made it a priority to support regional communities.

"In my career I've worked in communities in WA and as a family we've lived in those communities," he said. "Country towns are great places to bring up families and we found it highly rewarding."

"I think the important point is that while there's a lot of fly-in, fly-out workers in mining today, it is very rewarding being part of a community and being part of the projects in those areas."

"It was an important priority to make sure that our workforce was a residential site because that's one way of supporting the community."

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

As well as its 100 workers in Ravensthorpe, Galaxy also has about 150 in China, where it is building a processing plant.

Over the mine's 18-year expected life span, Mr Tan says the biggest challenge for the company and industry in general will be finding workers.

"The minerals and petroleum industry will require something like 38,000 workers over the coming years and they are skilled and semi-skilled workers," he said.

"The roles are varied from professional roles to technical roles, to maintenance support and processing. There's plenty of opportunities for school leavers, graduates, skilled migrants and people returning to the workforce."

Mr Tan says while good salaries are part of the lure of the mining industry, there were other rewards.

"Pay's important but I think there are other aspects to it – it's about the job opportunities and career opportunities," he said.

"Our focus is on the people and the culture. We have a can-do culture and we try not to have any bureaucracy or politics in the organisation."


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