

Regional cultural plays

ALTHOUGH they are at the heart of Western Australia's resources boom, regional communities are only just starting to receive the downstream benefits from the state's strong economy.

Despite the recent increase of new cultural programs implemented in the regions, involving the support from BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto, some participants in the recent *WA Business News* business and the arts forum said a lot of work remained to be done in regional WA.

The Crossing Roper Bar Tour 08, launched by Deputy Premier Eric Ripper last week, is the latest initiative. It involves a partnership

between Perth-based contemporary music organisation Tura New Music, and a new player on the corporate sponsorship scene, French multinational Total E&P.

"Total is involved in corporate responsibility around the world. We are here [in Australia] for the long term and we don't want to stand apart from the community," Total E&P Australia managing director Adrien Hodgson told *WA Business News*.

Mr Hodgson said he noticed a "relationship issue" between white Australian and indigenous communities when he moved from England to Perth.

"The tour [Crossing Roper Bar] is an embodiment of integration combining the effort between two groups representing those two communities, it seemed to be a really good thing to do," Mr Hodgson said.

Total E&P set up its Australian subsidiary in 2006, to develop an LNG project off the Kimberley coast in partnership with Japanese company, Inpex.

Crossing Roper Bar is the result of a joint venture between the musicians of the Australian Art Orchestra, under the direction of Paul Grabowsky, and a group of performing artists of the remote indigenous community of Ngukurr in the Northern Territory.

The outcome of the collaboration is informed by the songs and music of indigenous culture imbued with the music of Western traditions.

Form and BHP Billiton Iron Ore have also been busy in regional WA during the past year or so through various programs including the Canning Stock Route project, a cultural initiative celebrating the stories of Aboriginal people from the countries surrounding the Canning Stock Route.

The Form/BHP partnership also had a dedicated focus on both Newman and Port Hedland's visitor centres and cultural facilities.

The 2007 Australian Business Art Foundation awards acknowledged the work of CBH Group Ltd with the WA Symphony Orchestra in the Wheatbelt, as well as Rio Tinto Iron Ore and the Shire of Roebourne in the Pilbara communities.

However, Form executive director Lynda Dorrington told the forum that regional WA is still missing out on cultural development.

"The regions are driving the economy of the state and actually driving the economy of the country, and where there is little social cultural programming we have enormous disadvantage and I don't have to go any further than the Pilbara to give clear examples of that," she said.

"We are at the front desk for the resource sector in WA, yet we don't use the enormous capacity of social cultural programming to address systemic innovations in the regions."

Australian Business Arts Foundation WA manager Henry



INITIATIVE: The paintings from Warlayirti artists, laid out at Lake Stretch are part of the Canning Stock Route project, a joint venture between cultural think tank Form and BHP Billiton Iron Ore. **Photo: Tim Acker**



Boston believes artists are an important part of a society, which mining companies have to take into account when they plan residential developments attached to the mine sites.

“The cultural layering within any development community is crucial,” Mr Boston said.

“If you look at what BHP Billiton Nickel West is doing in Hopetoun, they’re building a large accommodation centre, but where is the planning of the social side of it?”

“It is that cultural element which gives a particular place sense of identity and I believe that’s really what the greatest strength of artists

is to communities, the articulation of that sense of place to communities – it’s an investment for business.”

Ms Dorrington said there was a shift in thinking, particularly among some of the larger companies looking to establish big projects in regional WA.

“When these companies start to approach the marketplace, there are two things that come to mind – how are they going to attract and retain the world’s most talented people to this state,” she said.

“And secondly, how are they going to build the development with an approach that looks 25 years down the track about a social cultural program.”