

# Mining show on a roll: Blackwoods a key participant

QME was a little-known acronym 15 years ago. Today it's a mining-world legend. Brian McCormack was at the first show in 1993 and writes on its impetus.

**A**s exhibitions go, QME is as much a growth phenomenon as the central Queensland industry it serves.

I was amongst a slightly curious bunch of people to attend the first-ever Queensland Mining Exhibition back in 1993 and it rated rather well as a successful middle-weight regional show and a nice little earner for Mackay.

But how things have changed in 15 years!

Today QME has as many exhibitors as the 500 who front Australia's International Mining Exhibition (AIMEX) in Sydney every four years, and it draws about as many visitors – around 12,000! And nowadays visitors don't just filter in from the region – they fly in from all states of Australia, and from countries like China, Russia, Europe, India, and the Americas. Mackay literally bursts at the seams: ships arrive in port to serve as “hotels” and buses ferry in the overflow from Airlie Beach and further a field.

The show's growth is not surprising because with coal alone contributing more than \$20 billion a year to Queensland's economy, the Mackay region and the Bowen basin now account for 70% of that. Currently, developments worth \$25 billion are either underway or up and coming. These include five new mining projects, a massive capacity increase for the Abbot Point coal terminal, \$5.3 billion worth of manufacturing and construction projects and a



In this aerial shot the Blackwoods Pavilion is shown at the far right.

new coal terminal down the coast at Wiggins Island in Gladstone.

To give some idea of how fast the region is growing as the world's largest exporter of seaborne coal, Abbot Point terminal's capacity will be ramped up from its current 21 million tonnes a year to an ultimate 100 million tonnes in several phases over the next few years.

With all this action now going on, it's vital that engineers in the area are kept informed about cutting edge technology through a forum like QME. And in this respect, Blackwoods' suppliers have had a regular and growing presence at QME, with the Blackwoods Pavilion spread over

600 sq metres at the most recently held show in July.

“A total of 35 manufacturers participated in the Blackwoods pavilion and a constant stream of visitors filled the aisles of our elegant structure,” said Andy Reid who, as Blackwoods' regional sales manager for North Queensland, coordinates the company's presence. In fact the QME buck has always stopped with Andy, and he was another of those QME first-timers when he coordinated the inaugural show in 1993.

“Mate, that first show saw us in a little 6 x 6 tent like most everyone else, and I had a handful of suppliers with high expectations,” he said. “But things

never looked back – the growth was exponential and here we are with 600 sq metres today.”

But despite its current size and spread, QME still retains its original country feel of informality – perfectly conducive to the interchange of ideas and the hands-on inspection of tools and equipment – something Blackwoods suppliers have always found beneficial. Staged in the open at Mackay Showground, its scores of large and small marquees give it a traditional marketplace atmosphere, far removed from the more formal exhibition environments of say Sydney Showground or Melbourne Exhibition Centre.

Once again Blackwoods had a wide range of equipment exhibited this year from safety products shown by companies like Uvex, MSA and Masterlock through to hand or power tools by the likes of Robert Bosch and Makita. Adding to the variety and depth was welding gear from Cigweld, storage products from Phoenix and lubrication technology from Alemite-Lubrequip and Macnaught, to name but a few.

The show is organized by Reed Exhibitions and the next one is in 2010. But if you head up there, be wary about gazing into real estate windows with a ‘sea change’ in mind, because Mackay was recently rated Australia's sixth fastest growing real estate city according to a BankWest report on housing costs this year. And with all that influx, it's not surprising!