

Earthwatch Annual Dinner
Fiona Wild, Vice President Environment and Climate Change, BHP Billiton
Melbourne, 17 September 2014

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

Before I commence, I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this Land and pay my respects to their Elders, both past and present.

It is a great pleasure to be amongst many fellow scientists here tonight - including eminent PhD holders like Dr Linden Ashcroft who won a prestigious Eureka Award last week.

I also acknowledge those of you who work for non-government organisations and in the community to protect our natural environment.

And it is great to see many peers here tonight from Australia's business community - scientists that are daily pursuing the application of scientific learning in the work place.

It is inspiring to hear about the journey of Tom Holman and his family who are bringing the wonder and enthusiasm of science to their children and their children's children.

It's wonderful to be amongst you all, because we have a common goal, as scientists, to better understand our environment.

Earthwatch, is a global leader in promoting understanding and action for a sustainable environment.

And it has created a forum where science reigns – and real progress in our understanding of the environment is the ultimate prize.

As scientists we should celebrate that and acknowledge Earthwatch's achievements.

BHP Billiton is a very proud partner, along with the Earthwatch Institute Australia and the Federal Department of the Environment, of the Bush Blitz program.

Bush Blitz is Australia's largest nature discovery project. It represents a multi-million dollar three-way partnership to document the plants and animals across Australia's Natural Reserve System.

The first stage of the program ran for three years from 2010. Since then, it has discovered more than 827 new species of plants and animals and recorded more than 17,000 known species in 65 remote reserves across Australia.

And yet there are an estimated 560,000 species in Australia – around three quarters of which we are yet to scientifically identify and report.

It is an exciting challenge for Bush Blitz and for us all.

As a key partner in Bush Blitz, 43 of our employees took part in 7 expeditions – acting as research assistants in the field, along with other volunteers to help scientists trap species, collect plant samples and process specimens.

An unforeseen but significant bonus for us, has been the professional development opportunity for our people.

They return with passion and enthusiasm, and have not only learned survey techniques from experts, but they truly value the connections made with other expedition members and with Australia's unique biodiversity.

I confess my own Earthwatch expedition was not quite so successful. In the early 2000's, I spent two weeks with Earthwatch in the Anangu Pitjanjarra lands looking for the elusive marsupial mole.

It was so elusive in fact, that despite two weeks of scouring the desert, searching high and low, I never saw a single one. The only evidence I found was a small pile of poo.

BHP Billiton believes strongly in the value of Bush Blitz, and two months ago, we signed on to the program for another four years.

Our total commitment is just over 10 million dollars, and as well as discovering some of those estimated half a million hidden new species – it will provide baseline scientific data that will help all of us understand and protect Australia's unique ecosystems for generations to come.

What I want to do now is give you an insight into how BHP Billiton thinks about the environment – and how we put our thoughts into practice.

We are a global, resources company.

The mineral and energy commodities we produce are crucial at all stages of economic development. Our businesses operate in 21 countries and many more ecosystems.

We mine some of the world's highest quality and largest ore deposits. Almost 125 thousand people work for us, and millions of Australians have invested more than 14 billion dollars in our shares through their superannuation.

Last year we contributed over 240 million dollars to community investments and we contribute tens of billions through wages, supplies, taxes and royalties to the countries and communities where we operate. So it's important that we get our approach to environmental management right.

Our Charter communicates who we are, what we do, and what we stand for as an organisation, and is the basis for our decision-making.

The very first value in *Our Charter* is Sustainability, which we define as “putting health and safety first, being environmentally responsible and supporting our communities.”

This is not lip service - it underpins everything we do and every decision we make.

We know that maintaining access to our current resources, and gaining access to new resources, is dependent on our environmental and social licence to operate.

While our Charter underpins this effort, we also use Group Level Documents, or GLDs as they are affectionately known to communicate mandatory performance requirements for all our global operations. We then measure, audit and report against those requirements.

Our Environment GLD is designed to minimise environmental impacts and deliver enduring benefits to biodiversity, ecosystems and other environmental resources. It applies to all our operations, regardless of commodity, jurisdiction and stage of development.

Our Iron Ore business in Western Australia provides a good example of how the GLD works in practice. It has developed a more integrated way of thinking about water management, taking a stewardship approach to managing this increasingly valuable resource.

Iron Ore’s approach to water stewardship is now considered a model practice by the WA Department of Water, as well as the CSIRO, as it better balances the competing water needs of business, people and the environment in a given region.

The key difference of the approach was that the team didn’t start by saying “we need this much water to run this piece of equipment and that process”.

Instead - they started by considering the three water catchments where our mines are located in the Pilbara.

They identified the essential tributaries, water flows and characteristics of the catchment that were essential for sustainability. And they then considered all of the water users in the catchments – local residents, farms, mines (including ours and others) – and together with the regulators made a plan to meet everyone’s needs and better protect the water resources.

It is a fundamental shift in the way we approach water stewardship and has potential application across all of our sites. As important is its simplicity and scalability. It can be adopted by companies and regulators as they look to adapt to the impacts of climate change on global water resources.

Our Iron Ore colleagues have also put biodiversity research into practice. After a five year study of subterranean fauna, we’ve created a Pilbara Seed Atlas and developed a native seed store that is specific to each of our operating sites. It means when we rehabilitate areas, we use specific seed mixes and have improved germination success.

We've operated in the Pilbara for over 50 years. Today, it is one of the most successful iron ore businesses in the world in terms of productivity, profitability and environmental management.

What all this shows is that business success and strong environmental management are not mutually exclusive.

Beyond managing the environmental impacts of our operations we are also committed to supporting areas of national and international conservation significance.

We have contributed more than 30 million dollars to a number of projects, including the Valdivian Coastal Reserve in Chile where we are working with The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International.

We are creating a 50,000 hectare Reserve that includes one of the world's last temperate rainforests. This past year the project generated Chile's first certified carbon credits.

And closer to home, we are working with Conservation International and the Tasmanian Land Conservancy on the Five Rivers Conservation Project which covers 11,000 hectares in the Tasmanian World Heritage area.

It includes old growth forests, wild rivers and alpine wetlands and is home to several unique endangered species.

Together, these 2 projects conserve 60,000 hectares for 16 globally threatened species.

One final area of international significance that I would like to touch on is climate change.

This is an issue close to my heart. I spent 6 months of my PhD at the Australian Institute of Marine Science in Townsville – investigating how coral skeletons can be used as environmental indicators of climate change.

It helped me learn more about my area of study, and cemented my love of Australia, so much so that I emigrated here 3 years later.

And now climate change is a major focus of my role at BHP Billiton.

We recognise that sustainable growth requires an effective response to climate change. We accept the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's assessment that the warming of the climate is unequivocal, the human influence is clear and the physical impacts are unavoidable.

We recognise our responsibility to take action by reducing our emissions, increasing our preparedness for the physical impacts of climate change and working with others, including industry and government, to enhance the global response.

We have been setting greenhouse gas targets for our Business since 1996. Last year we set ourselves an absolute target - to limit our emissions below our 2006 baseline by 2017 while we grow our business.

In 2014 we have reduced our emissions by 1.7 million tonnes, despite increasing our production by 9 per cent*.

Through our GLD, all of our businesses are required to identify, evaluate and implement projects that prevent or minimise greenhouse gas emissions and we are seeing progress. There is always more to do and we are looking at a range of options to improve our energy efficiency and implement additional reduction projects.

Let me finish up.

I hope the corporate acronyms are not too much at this time of the evening. I wanted to give you an insight into how our company addresses its environmental responsibility and manages its approach.

We want to do the right thing, we use a process to do this and we measure and act on data. We openly report our performance and we welcome input and feedback from all our stakeholders.

Finally I want to thank Earthwatch for bringing us all together as fellow scientists – not just tonight – but over the past 40 years. Together, no matter our expertise or interests, they are enabling us to put science first.

* Copper equivalent production