

# Women influencing Defence and Resources Industries

BY WENDY PERRY, WORKFORCE BLUEPRINT

Designed to bring about collaboration and collegiate support, the Women influencing Defence and Resources Industries (WiDRI) program promotes the roles and responsibilities of women as directors and managers, coaches and mentors and industry advocates.

Workforce retention, career development and progression, professional networking, sharing experiences and coaching/mentoring activities all showcase

these sectors as great career opportunities.

With more than 150 people participating in various components of the programs, WiDRI has far exceeded its targeted numbers and engaged women in a range of technical, engineering, safety, supply chain, corporate, administration, training and operations roles. Participants have engaged in various components of the program as needed. Training and

development opportunities have included: media presentations, public speaking, presentation skills, coaching and mentoring, board CV writing and Foundations of Directorship.

The strength of this program has been brought about through a collaborative partnership between the Defence Teaming Centre (DTC), the Resources and Engineering Skills Alliance (RESA), the Office for Women and the Department of Further Education,

Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST). This project is funded through DFEEST Industry Partnership Program, which is an initiative of the Government of South Australia.

Choosing a career in the defence or resources industry offers the opportunity to work with state of the art technology, many varied projects and target customers as demonstrated by the following stories of three women in the industry.



## Sonya Weiser, Weiser Consulting

Principal Strategic Consultant for Weiser Consulting and President of Women in

Innovation & Technology (WIT), Sonya Weiser started her career in the late 1980s with the then State Bank of SA as a young computer programmer.

"I was a very shy geek, spending most of my day doing what the boss told me was needed. I soon learnt that computer programs are only worth creating if they help the people who use them, so I taught myself to interact with the internal customers of the bank," Sonya says.

"Since then I've worked my way up through the career path in many different businesses and different industries, all possible because IT is ubiquitous, needed to run any successful business."

Commencing work with the bank in 1988 as a graduate programmer, Sonya experienced first-hand the heady days of the excesses of the late 1980s under Tim Marcus-Clark's leadership, when "Tim's Tower" (now known as the Westpac Centre) was built. "Such fun!" she says.

After completing her MBA in 2009, Sonya had a career shift – establishing Weiser Consulting and

starting her board career on The University of Adelaide MBA Alumni Association executive committee. With 23 years in the IT sector and five years specifically for defence and resources sectors, Sonya has been involved with WIT since 2006 and on the WIT board since 2009. WIT was incorporated in 2004 to support women working in technology, engineering and the sciences – and has members in the defence and resources sector.

As President of WIT, Sonya is responsible for leading the team of directors on the WIT board

and for representing WIT on external committees and forums such as WiDRI. The WIT team provide members with regular networking events and run two programs; a mentoring program for female students in their final year of a technical degree (such as engineering and/or IT degrees) and a board readiness program, for women considering a career as a director.

The primary challenge Sonya says she faces as a woman is having credibility as an expert and trusted advisor/leader in technology.

"Sadly it's still very true that men expect to have other men talk to them about technology," she said.

"My dream is that one day men and women will be equally accepted in all types of technical industries and careers. It's happened in medicine – we now expect to be able to consult a female GP – so why not in all other historically male dominated industries?"



Sonya Weiser, Weiser Consulting and Tammy Chau, Babcock