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Transcript of an interview with

Joanne Farrell

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Joanne Farrell in 2021

This oral history interview session between Julia Wallis and Joanne Farrell is being conducted by Julia Wallis on behalf of the State Library of Western Australia for the Mining and Energy Western Australia (MEWA) Archive. The interview is taking place at Claremont on Friday the 30th of September 2022. The focus of the interview is fly-in, fly-out (known as FIFO) work in Western Australia and how it affects both the worker and his or her family.

Joanne Farrell retired from the Rio Tinto Group in March 2020 after thirty-two years' service, with her final position being Group Executive Health Safety and Environment (HSE) and Managing Director Australia, reporting to the Chief Executive Officer. During her time with Rio Tinto, she held leadership roles in HSE, communications, government and community relations and human resources, predominately in Australasia, the Americas and Africa.

Through her work with Rio Tinto, Joanne was active in supporting indigenous capacity building and reconciliation through direct employment, business contracting and partnerships with the Polly Farmer Foundation, Clontarf and Reconciliation Australia. During the last term of Federal Parliament, she was a member of the Honourable Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians' Senior Advisory Group on the Voice to Parliament.

Joanne has been active in many gender equity-related organisations: Male Champions of Change, Women in Mining Western Australia and White Ribbon, and was recognised for contributions to gender equity with awards from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy Western Australia, Financial Review's Women of Influence and Women in Mining International.

Joanne is currently Chair of Safe Work Australia and Deputy Chair of Brightwater Care Group. Her non-executive director roles include the Royal Flying Doctor Service (Western Operations); Senate of the University of Western Australia; the Queen Elizabeth II Medical Trust and Western Australian Museum. She is a member of audit and risk committees as well as nominations and remuneration committees. Joanne is a member of the Business Council of Australia, the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Chief Executive Women. She mentors several early careerists and social entrepreneurs through WIMWA and Kilfinan organisations, as well as some private arrangements. Until recently, she was Chair of the Rhodes Scholarship (WA) selection committee.

Joanne holds qualifications in psychology, economics and executive management. Her skill set includes governance and regulation, through her HSE roles, organisation culture and design, executive remuneration and talent management through her HR roles and government and community relations through her communities and managing director Australia roles. She has led teams through all phases of the business cycle in mining, from exploration to closure and legacy sites and has a global mindset through her executive roles in Rio Tinto, in particular leading the design of a global restructure of the service and support functions.

Wallis,
Julia (JW) **Okay, so to start, I was just wondering, are you a WA lady, Joanne?**

Joanne Farrell
(JF) Yes. I was born in Perth, in Mount Lawley, so I spent – but I haven't spent all my life in Western Australia. I travelled and worked elsewhere. I think I've spent about 15 years out of the State working in other locations. But I was born in Perth and then when I was about six, moved to a farm in Esperance that we had and I lived there until I was about 13 and then we came back to Perth. Whilst I was at the farm my siblings were at boarding school in Perth.

(JW) **And what were your aspirations? Did you think about going into farming?**

(JF) No. In fact my father sold the farm because none of – neither myself nor any of my siblings were interested in farming. But, as it has turned out, as we've got older we've actually gone collectively into a farm and we now own a farm at Toodyay.

[00:05:04]

So, I think once you are on a farm it does get into your blood.

(JW) **Oh, there's your bird. Okay, so you went to school and then what was your career path after that?**

(JF) So when I first left school I thought I'd be a maths teacher, so I enrolled in university in science and education units. After that summer I decided I didn't want to be a teacher. So I converted the education units into psychology. I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do with it but it seemed like quite an interesting subject. I then took a year off university and went overseas and when I came back I wanted to be a physiotherapist but I didn't get into physiotherapy. So I continued my science degree and by that stage I had formulated that I quite like what was then called 'personnel', now called human resources. So, I did a double major in the end in psychology and economics. At that stage there wasn't any formal academic subjects in personnel/human resources. You had to go either with psychology or the commerce route and I got my first job with BHP at Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory as a personnel graduate. So that was in …

No, in fact my first job was in … No, So I applied for HR or personnel jobs and I didn't get any. So I used my economics aspect of my degree and I worked as a research officer in the state government in the Department of

Regional Administration in the North West and it was located in Carnarvon. I did that for two years and then I successfully – I still was applying for personnel jobs – and I then successfully got a graduate job with BHP up in the Northern Territory at Groote Eylandt.

I did that for two years and then I came down to Melbourne. So I was at Groote Eylandt 1979 to 1980 and then came down to Melbourne in 1981. I think indicative of the time, particularly perhaps for any professional women but particularly women in the mining industry, we were looked after by a lady, Pat King, whose job title was Senior Personnel Officer, Female Staff. We were so unique we had our own sort of personnel section looking after us, so times have changed since. I know there is a lot of media coverage about the mining industry and women in the mining industry but I can tell you in the nineteen eighties it was still quite rare to have women in professional positions in the mining industry and even rarer to have them in the traditional mining roles of truck drivers and trades roles and the like. So that's changed a lot for the good, so it's good.

I then had four years in Melbourne with BHP and that was a typical sort of personnel officer job at a time where we did recruitment. At that stage, we had an in-house medical insurance scheme. So we processed people's medical claims. I was accountable for doing graduate recruitment at that stage so did a lot of visiting the universities around Australia doing pre-selection interviews and selection briefing sessions.

But being West Australian I was then starting to get a bit homesick because I'd been away from home for – well, if you count since I went to Carnarvon, for nearly eight years. So I came home and I was still with Rio Tinto but at that time they were called CRA, and to Argyle diamonds which was like going into a futuristic workplace because Argyle was – it was a new product: it was the first time diamonds had been mined in Australia. For Argyle it was new because they suddenly had to not only have all the mining skills but they had to have diamond grading skills and diamond polishing skills and were entering the retail area. So, normally in a mine you dig it up and put it on a ship and say farewell to them; that's the end of it. But with the diamonds they went all the way through the value chain to actually selling the diamonds.

They didn't – we didn't go into jewellery but we did sell the polished diamonds.

(JW) **Did you know anything about how that was found, the diamonds?**

[00:10:00]

(JF) So, at the time the initial exploration that was going on in the Kimberley was for uranium. CRA were exploring and Ashton Mining were exploring. There's quite a famous geologist called Maureen Muggeridge that worked for Ashton Mining that was part of the team that found some of the diamonds, loosely. So the diamonds were discovered as alluvial. So they were on the ground and then they tried to figure out where they came from. So they followed river systems and creek systems to try and identify – in the Kimberley there is the big termite mounds that the termites make out of mud. The geologists were even finding diamonds in the termite mounds and other indicator minerals.

So when, there's another sort of famous story about the Argyle discovery. When CRA geologists found the indicator minerals and the loose diamonds they then, in an attempt to make sure that they had control of the area in terms of mapping, they then leased every known helicopter in the area and every known four-wheel drive and then they set about pegging the lease. So, there's lots of stories about Argyle diamonds but I think they're the two that are sort of quite interesting from a geologist's point of view and an exploration point of view.

From an Aboriginal storyline point of view the diamonds were discovered in a women's site, a dreaming site called Barramundi Gap. If you think, if you have ever seen barramundi scales, they actually glisten and so I think it's a lovely connection that the Aboriginals had named this site Barramundi Gap perhaps because they saw the sparklers and that coincided with the barramundi scales.

So there are a lot of really good books about the Argyle discovery. Then there's other stories about Argyle including the diamond thefts and Sinead Mangan's recently released a podcast on that.[1] So if anyone is interested in

[1] Pink Diamond Heist is a five-episode story by Sinead Mangan on the ABC Expanse program, 2022.

Argyle there's quite a lot I suspect and the library has all the resources there in their collection.

(JW) **All right, so it's completely different industry for you to work in, in fact?**

(JF) Yes. Look it was different in terms of the product and the line of business that it involved but importantly, CRA decided that they were going to do things very differently from an operational point of view. So, at that time the mining industry was all residential with the exception of construction and contract maintenance workers. Also, it was predominantly male and it was very unionised. So it was not unusual for a mine to have more than a dozen unions representing the workers at the mine.

Two things that the Argyle set-up team decided was firstly, they would try and make the mine as union free as possible. Or, not union free, but less complicated. So they made a decision to just have three unions representing the workers at the mine site. But more importantly, they decided to have what was called a cleanskins policy. So their recruitment strategy would be to get people who had never worked in the mining industry so that they brought in a completely new culture to the mine. So rather than have all the traditional barriers and mindsets and everything from the traditional mining industry they went for people who had no mining industry experience which allowed them then to meet one of their other goals which was to have twenty per cent women. At that time, the mining industry had about three per cent women in the workforce. So 20 per cent was a very audacious goal. They got there and they maintained it all through … They maintained that all through the life of the mine. But also, having cleanskins they were able to … they then had to have a very strong commitment to training. So they had a very sophisticated training package where every employee was trained as a learner basically and they're trained as trainer one.

[00:15:00]

Then trainer two was how those learners become teachers and then trainee trainer three was how the teachers could teach others to be teachers. It wasn't in existence at the time but the trainee trainer three would be Cert Four under our current training accreditation.

So that meant that you had people who were curious. They were learners. They were also quite innovative because they had that sort of mind set. Then the final thing that Argyle decided to do differently was it wouldn't be residential. So it would be fly-in, fly-out. So a very strong design, for how the residential would be. So for the first time ever in the mining industry there was – the rooms had ensuites so all the other mining camps it was shared ablutions.

They did a lot of work with sleep technologists and experts in biorhythms and all of those sorts of human factors about work patterns and what have you, and they elected to have an even time roster which was two weeks on; two weeks off. If you think about the FIFO now, most of the rosters are either two weeks on, one week off or what's called the family friendly roster is eight days on, six days off, which almost meets that even time roster that you are off as often as you're at work. So I think all the analysis and very deliberate design that went into Argyle made it quite a different place to work.

(JW) What about health – you know mental health and physical health, did they go into that as well?

(JF) Yes. So the facilities – again, traditionally if there was sort of camps at a mine site it was usually for construction workers or maintenance contractors. They tended to just be beds and food whereas Argyle was constructed quite deliberately with a lot of garden space and gardens around the rooms. There was a swimming pool. There was tennis courts. There were squash courts because squash was popular then. I am not sure anyone plays squash these days but Argyle had squash courts and there was a walking track from the accommodation to the mine if people wanted to walk or run. Normally they would catch a bus but they could walk or run. Then subsequently it was enlarged to a cycling track as well. So … and they had movie nights. They had a lot more focus on enabling people to have normal social activities rather than work, eat, drink – the work, eat, drink cycle.

(JW) Did they have a limit on the drinking?

(JF) No, they didn't. Not until about eight or nine years ago Argyle brought in a no alcohol policy which was one of the few mines that has no alcohol at all. But initially there was alcohol but we never really saw really big alcohol problems because there were so many other things to do. They were 12-hour shifts too

which was also not necessarily common at the time. After you've worked 12 hours, you're pretty exhausted. Whereas with the eight-hour shifts that meant you had eight hours on, 16 hours off. So that 16 hours off might have been used for more drinking than normal. But with 12 hours on and then sleep, you've actually got not much other time to do things. I'm not sure about that. But that's my hypothesis.

(JW) **I wonder how they managed to have the movie nights and the pool and things like that, then?**

(JF) Well, there was … You did seven-day shifts and then you had 24 hours off and then went onto night shift so people … It was often in the night or the day that you sort of had the break. But also, a movie is only two hours long so you'd come back. Your shift was six to six. You'd come back, have a meal, watch a movie from seven to nine and then go to sleep and you'd still get a reasonable night's sleep.

(JW) **Did they look at the food as well?**

(JF) Very much so. So it was all smorgasbord food and at breakfast you could have an omelette or something cooked to order.

[00:20:00]

Big salad bars. Lots of fresh fruit. But there was also the unhealthy stuff. You still could get fish and chips or a pie and chips. But there was roast meals and curries and things like that. But yes, a very big broad opportunity for healthy eating if you wanted to. They would also have some campaigns on healthy eating and those sorts of things.

(JW) **So as somebody working in, is it called HR now or is it still personnel?**

(JF) No. So it's called HR. It became HR from probably – I don't know – towards the end of the nineties.

(JW) **So the problems you had at Argyle were they different to anything you had at BHP, say?**

(JF) No. You still had, you still had disagreements at work. We still, in both the BHP role and in the early days at the Argyle role you were still taking down nudie calendars of girls and that sort of stuff. So I guess they were similar problems because they were about people at work and disagreements with either colleagues or leaders. But I sense it was a … because you had more of a normal social structure in that you had more women there and because

you'd gone for this cleanskin policy, you had a greater variety of age. Certainly a greater variety of backgrounds although we probably did have a bit of a bias towards farmers. Because the two weeks on, two weeks off was fantastic for them because they were able to work their farm for two weeks, then go to the mine for two weeks while their brother or someone else in the family ran the farm. So they thought that was pretty good. But yes, I suppose they were much the same.

(JW) **And was there any problems with having more women?**

(JF) Yes and no. I mean I think no, because I think it did calm the workforce down a bit. And no because we also found that the women were kinder on the equipment. So they drove the trucks more – we actually had maintenance proof that women drove the trucks more gently. There was less tyre damage. There was less use of brakes and those sorts of things. But I think there was at times issues. Well, I suppose like the girlie calendars and things like that where we had more chance of them being discovered and people taking – rightly taking offence to them because we had women in the workforce.

Rio Tinto facilitated a change in mining law in Mongolia to allow women underground. This photo taken on 5/10/2016 would not have been possible without that change in law!

(Joanne Farrell is pictured fourth from the left.)

(JW) **And were they across all of the workforce? Did you have managers as well, women managers?**

(JF) Yes. Yes. Well, I was a manager up there. We also had – not in the technical sense, unfortunately. We also had finance managers that were women. We did have female engineers and female superintendents which was the first line of management but not enough in terms of the second levels, no.

(JW) Okay. So the FIFO then – was that copied do you think – the Argyle FIFO model?

(JF) It was. I mean FIFO existed but it existed in the oil and gas industry and in the construction industry. It never existed in an operating mine. But I think once Argyle approved it … I think also once the State Government got comfortable with the model. Because what it meant for the State Government is they didn't have to build a school or a hospital or roads or all the things that they'd had to build previously when mining towns were established. So I think the State Government also was keen on it which is quite different from the Queensland State Government. The Queensland State Governments never endorsed FIFO. I don't know whether they do now but for a long time they said it would never be put into Queensland. Whereas I think maybe because the West Australian Government, greater distances or mines occurring in places where there is absolutely zero infrastructure. Whereas Queensland has got a lot of infrastructure spread right throughout the State.

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So then it got copied and now, of course, it's almost the dominant feature of the mining industry in Western Australia. There are very few mines that are now established as residential mines. Rio Tinto and BHP obviously continue with their existing residential mines and I think you'll find it's roughly about a 50/50 split now. Of those big companies, 50 per cent's residential and fifty percent's FIFO. But all the new small ones it's 100 per cent FIFO.

(JW) Do you know how the idea came about, who thought of it first?

(JF) Ooh, no. I don't. I would hypothesise that because it was dominant in the oil and gas industry - it was the only way you could run an oil rig. You couldn't have families living on an oil rig. You could only have workers on an oil rig. So that's where I think the model started. On offshore oil rigs. Because yes, you can't put a hospital and school and houses for families on an oil rig.

(JW) And how integrated is it then the whole mining, oil and gas? Do you all talk to each other and find out what you are'll doing?

(JF) It used to be very separate. It was almost two worlds. I think because they were seen as two very different business models. The oil and gas industry was very heavy on spending capital. So their cost base – for instance their salaries and wages was probably 10 per cent of their cost base because everything else was in the infrastructure of the oil and gas platform, or rig or what have you. Whereas the mining industry is probably closer to 30 or 40 per cent of the cost base is labour. I think as more companies started – so BHP then had a petroleum arm, I think as more of the companies had both mining and petroleum arms, they got similar and more and more interactions. Then I think probably the unifying thing is safety. That was the last years of my career was in health and safety and environment. Safety for someone working in the petroleum industry is similar to safety in the mining industry. It's about risk mitigation and making sure that all your procedures and processes and training and knowledge and all of those things are designed to make the job task safe for each individual.

(JW) Yes. I didn't ask you about the safety at Argyle. So did they have someone who was driving that – a health and safety person?

(JF) Yes. So in my … My initial role at Argyle was in Perth which was a training role and then I went to site in the manager role and I was manager of human resources. Yes, I think it had changed then. So that was the eighties. So human resources and HSE – or H&S – I didn't have an E[2]. E was in the technical department. So I had health and safety as well as HR. So we had onsite nurses that were … that usually had more than the basic registered nurse training. Many of them were also midwives or had emergency medicine training. Some of them had paramedic training. Because we were 20 minutes' flight from Kununurra or four hours' drive. So if something happened at the mine, we had to have very good first responders.

The health and safety team were very much engaged with things like fatigue and dehydration which were the two big health issues, particularly with the 12-hour shifts and the heat of the Kimberley.

(JW) So were there any bad accidents?

[2] Environment.

(JF) Not while I was there. After I was there, we had one – luckily no injury but it could have been significant – where a truck didn't get its tray back down to where it should be and so it was still elevated when it went under power lines. So the truck became an electric field and it grounded by blowing out one of the tyres.

[00:30:00]

So, firstly the driver didn't get injured in the cab and secondly, there was no one in the line of fire of that tyre. But a number of years after that, there was a young truck driver killed, it was a collision on the mine site. I think there was a couple more. Rio Tinto, like most mining companies, had fatalities somewhere in the world every year until four years ago. So in my last year of employment at Rio Tinto[3] we had our first fatality-free year for 147 years and they've kept that record. They haven't had a fatality anywhere in the world for the last four years which is remarkable.

(JW) I was just thinking when you were talking about trucks, it's not just health and safety is it? It's maintenance of all the equipment as well?

(JF) Yes. Yes. In fact, we did a partnership with the University of Western Australia in about 2016 or 2017, somewhere around there, where they analysed all of our injury data to see what patterns there were. Was there a pattern in terms of beginning of shift or end of shift or beginning of roster, end of roster, time of the day. They didn't find any temporal correlation. There was nothing that was clearly evident in terms of when these accidents happened but they found that more of our injuries happened in the maintenance workshop than anywhere else in the mine.

That was people cutting themselves or dropping a tyre on themselves or not slinging the – often they had to sling a piece of equipment to work underneath it, and not slinging that properly, or what have you.

(JW) There is actually a lot that can go wrong, isn't there?

(JF) Yes. Yes. Yes. In fact, arguably in the truck and the mine you are probably the safest you can be.

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[3] 2019.

(JW) Okay. So you've employed a lot of women but what about Aboriginal people?

(JF) Yes. So Argyle had a … Before the land use agreements and the like, Argyle started with what was called a Good Neighbour Policy and that was a policy where they worked with local Aboriginal groups that surrounded the mine in terms of partnerships of funding but also employment and education and scholarships and things like that. We had Aboriginal kids coming in as apprentices but also that was when the Australian Government first introduced the traineeship system where kids could learn clerical work, almost like an apprenticeship. So there was structured training that happened during TAFE. So we had a couple of Aboriginals in my team under the traineeship scheme. That worked its way through.

Argyle again set itself targets of Aboriginal employment and I think by closure had got up to close to 30 per cent Aboriginal employment which when you think the Kimberley population of Aboriginals is about 12, 12 and a half per cent. So although Australia is just below three per cent obviously there's areas that have got larger Aboriginal populations. So Argyle was basically employing twice the number of Aboriginal people that represented the population in the Kimberley, so they did a really good job.

(JW) And how did the Aboriginals feel about working there?

(JF) A lot of them seemed to enjoy it. One of the things that Argyle seemed to achieve more than other mining companies was retention. So a lot of Aboriginal people get employed by the mining companies but they don't stay – for whatever reason. But Argyle had quite strong retention as well.

It became potentially contentious when Argyle went underground. There were some Aboriginal employees who weren't prepared to go underground because they didn't feel culturally safe underground, as well as they didn't necessarily feel physically safe. So I remember when they went underground there was an exchange programme with people who were employed at Argyle if they wanted to, could transfer to the iron ore group and come and work in the Pilbara. Again, some wouldn't do that because it was leaving the Kimberley and going to the Pilbara. But some did as well. That was the benefit of having a big company you could do creative things like that.

[00:35:00]

At one stage the underground mine at Argyle got flooded so work couldn't happen for six months. So the iron ore group which was part of Rio Tinto said anyone who wants to come and work with us while the mine is closed, can. So lots of people throw rocks at big companies but there are some benefits of a big company as well.

(JW) **How about cultural training for people coming to the Kimberley?**

(JF) Yes. So it was compulsory to do a two-day cultural awareness training for all new employees. That was run by Aboriginal people. That was them telling the stories. There was very strict guidelines about access beyond the camp. So because you couldn't – you know you weren't allowed to go to some areas so it was easier to say you can't go to any areas. Because often Aboriginal people rightly don't want to share where their sacred sites are. So it's hard for non-Aboriginal people to say where these places are that you can't go to because they might not know about them. So it's safer to say you can't go off the lease.

(JW) **So it is men and women who are coming from the Aboriginal community?**

(JF) Yes. Yes. In fact, one of the trainees in my team was a young girl who is now a young woman, Lena McGinty, and after she finished her training with us, she stayed with us for a while. Then she went back to Halls Creek and then she worked most of – I think she has finished working now but she worked a lot of her subsequent life in the administration of Halls Creek. So she worked for the Aboriginal community in Halls Creek with the skills that she got from us. So, that's nice.

(JW) **Great. So is there anything else that we need to discuss about Argyle?**

(JF) No. After I left site I went back to Perth still with Argyle and I worked on a project where Argyle, or CRA, was looking to do a joint venture in Russia. So that was very interesting. I never went to Russia but we hosted a lot of Russians at Argyle and showed off our training programme and what have you. I think that whole training ethos went into a lot of the stuff that Argyle then did.

So in terms of a diamond, you obviously have a rough diamond then you cut and polish it for it to then be a diamond that goes into jewellery. The cutting

and polishing industry – Argyle was one of the ones that established that in India and they established it by having again, this training ethos. There's now probably a million people employed in India in cutting and polishing and a lot of that started as a result of the work that Argyle did in partnership with Indian cutting and polishing.

(JW) But how did you get your expertise? Did you have to go to South Africa to get people who understood the diamond trade?

(JF) Well, we did. There were people in Australia. We got people from England. We got some people from South Africa. So in looking for diamonds you often look for indicator minerals. So the mineralogist is as important as the geologist in that regard. One of our best mineralogists actually came from Zimbabwe and she trained the mineralogists in Australia and then when Rio Tinto discovered diamonds in Canada she went and trained the Canadians. She was a native Zimbabwean. She was a black Zimbabwean. She was the last of the product of the Ian Smith education era of Zimbabwe.

(JW) Because it is very different isn't it, the diamond industry?

(JF) Yes. Yes. And for the trading we were part of the de Beers structure for about the first ten years. So we learnt a lot from de Beers. Then we sensationally broke away from de Beers and started doing our own marketing and sales. Everyone predicted that it would be the demise of Argyle but in fact they just went from strength to strength after that.

(JW) It sounds like that was a real big part of your career, really, working for Argyle?

(JF) Yes. I think it set so many foundation stones for the latter part of my career. I think it's where I formulated my strong interest and passion for capacity-building of Aboriginal people.

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It was the first health and safety job that I had and I sort of kept that. I kept adding that to my HR career throughout my subsequent moves and then eventually decided no, that's where my actual passion lay and so that's the last ten years, as I say of my Rio career was in health and safety and environment. I think too, it's where I got a belief that female diversity was possible. You just had to work pretty hard at it but it was about structurally

changing things to get more women in the workforce. You can't just wish for them to appear.

(JW) And how about the environment sort of making it nice after the mine?

(JF) Yes. So, luckily through my career I've worked … So, I had after I left Argyle I then went to underground coal in New South Wales and then I went into exploration. So I was five years with exploration. So I've been in exploration and I've been in operations and then in the last five – no, in the last eight years of my career in Rio, I also had accountability for what was known as the legacy sites. Then, the last three years as well as the legacy sites for actual full closure of the mine. So I've seen the full gamut of the life cycle of the mine from the first discovery through to turning it back into maybe, like one in Switzerland was an aluminium smelter and we took all the hardware out of the sheds and it's now an elite training field for athletes who need to train at high altitude. So there are some really interesting things that can happen with closed mines and closed mining facilities.

(JW) Okay. Because you do get the impression that they just leave a big hole in the ground and that's it.

(JF) Yes. I can remember once someone saying, "Do you fill the holes back in?"

I said, "Well, just think about that for the environmental point of view. You've got this hole where do you get the dirt to fill it in from other than clearing more land to get more dirt to fill in the hole."

So, no. You must leave the holes because to fill them in actually would create more environmental damage but you've got to make the holes, you've got to make sure that it's stable. So there's not going to be cave-ins or rock falls or what have you. If there's going to be water collected in the hole, depending on the rainfall, then what's the quality of water and does it need any water treatment? So we had an old mine up in Washington State in the US called Holden that Rio Tinto never operated but they inherited it from when they bought Alcan. We're going to treat the water there for a hundred and twenty-five years. So there's … So a mine closing, doesn't mean you clean it up and then you walk away. Often you've got long, long legacy commitments to keep the place either safe or healthy.

(JW) I was going to say you must use a lot of water mustn't you in mining? I hadn't thought about it before.

(JF) You do – well, depending on your environment. So, in the Pilbara you obviously are using water for dust suppression so you have to put water on the roads. Some of the ores you need to, the processing requires water and so there's a really strong push to make sure that water is recycled. So in any mining company's annual report they will report on their water usage and they'll talk about freshwater use. So stuff that they've taken either from public mains or water systems, dams, creeks or what have you and then recycled. Over the years you will have seen most mining companies have increased recycled water and decreased freshwater use.

(JW) And what about using solar and electric vehicles is that something that they're doing as well?

(JF) Oh, very much so. Very much so. So each of the big mining companies have got very big projects on electric vehicles and also not just the trucks and the cars but also the trains. Then most of the mine sites will have some solar capacity and that's increasing.

[00:45:00]

One of Rio's new mines in the east Pilbara is very heavily renewables. They've got all sorts of creative renewables not just solar but they've got wind and they've got some things, so using gradients for that sort of power.

(JW) Yes. It's just things that you've had to think about probably over recent years?

(JF) Yes. Yes. Absolutely.

(JW) So you must have seen things change a lot since you first started in the eighties?

(JF) Oh, yes. Quite a lot of change. From something as basic as what people wore to work. Singlets and shorts because it was so hot everywhere – or certainly in a Rio mine and I'm pretty sure for a BHP mine, and I think for all mining companies now it's got to be long, long. So long-sleeved shirts and long trousers so that you are fully covered from the heat and dust and all those sorts of things. Much improved use of safety equipment like helmets and glasses and all the vehicles having seatbelts whereas probably in the eighties not all the vehicles had seatbelts. Even the buses transporting people between sites wouldn't have had seatbelts and now they do. Through to all the technology. Some of the technology is absolutely brilliant. The

remote technology now. When you think both Rio Tinto and BHP operate their mines from Perth.

(JW) Yes. Were you involved with that at all?

(JF) Yes. So I was in the iron ore group when we were doing the project for the remote control centre at Perth Airport and it was a fully loaded capital project. So we had all the normal design and feasibility studies and pre-feasibility studies and then bankable feasibility studies. Because there was a lot of expenditure. But also it was probably the first big project where there was so much that had to be considered from both an IT point of view, because if you've got somebody in Perth telling the truck driver 2000 kilometres away where to take the truck, you've got to be pretty sure the communications links can work. Or if you're monitoring the pay load on a train, you've got to make sure that the sensors underneath the train in the Pilbara are sending the right signal to Perth. So it's one of the reasons why Perth Airport was chosen as a site because it's federal land and for power sources there's two priorities. The first priority for power outages is hospitals. The second priority for power outages is the airport. So there's really reliable power supply to that precinct.

(JW) What happens where there is cyclones and things up north is it still able to talk?

(JF) Yes. Yes. In fact there was lots of unanticipated benefits from that project. The first was we assumed that when we closed the local operating centre at one of the mines and brought the people to Perth, only about half of them would want to move. So that we thought we'd have to have a huge recruitment campaign and that didn't prove correct. About eighty per cent of people moved. So the recruitment still had to happen but nowhere near the scale that we thought.

The second was we hadn't anticipated the impact that weather had had on the local operating centre. So if there was a cyclone with certain alerts everyone had to go home which meant that the operating centres couldn't operate. So the mines closed down. When you're in Perth those people don't have to go home when there's a cyclone so they could keep – particularly for the inland mines. So our productivity went up just by not losing what we called 'weather days'. So, yes.

(JW) **And has that been copied around the world?**

(JF) BHP certainly copied it. Their operating centre is in their building in central Perth, the CBD. Certainly Fortescue copied it. I am not sure about around the world but I would think so.

(JW) **I was trying to think where would be comparable.**

[00:50:00]

Like Russia or Canada. Where would be the sort of big spaces?

(JF) Yes. Yes. I'd be surprised if it hadn't been copied.

(JW) **So it sounds like we are quite innovative here then, after all?**

(JF) Yes. Well back in the mid-2000s, so about 2008, 2013 I was on a group called the Committee for Perth, that still exists. A very good group in terms of driving development and in terms of the arts industry or urban design in Perth. But one of the things that they were trying to push and there was strong credibility for it but it didn't get enough legs, was that Perth should actually be the equivalent for the mining industry as Houston in the US is for oil and gas. In terms of the level of expertise, the level of innovation. Both our – at least two of our universities have got very strong research arms into the aspects of the mining industry. We've got tried and tested – we've got plenty of pits to experiment on. So we should be. We should be the Houston of the mining industry.

(JW) **Do you think Perth is quite well respected though besides us thinking we are?**

(JF) Oh, I think so. I think there is still the East–West divide in some people's minds but I think there is now quite a bit of respect for stuff that goes on in Perth.

(JW) **Because you've travelled a lot haven't you?**

(JF) Yes. Yes.

(JW) **You've gone to different countries so –**

(JF) Yes. And it's not just in the mining industry. You think about the Square Kilometre Array. Perth is going to become very well-known for astrological stuff as well and space.

(JW) **All right. What else should we talk about that we haven't discussed? Is there anything else that you want to sort of say that I haven't asked you?**

(JF) Well, I think after I left Argyle then I went into exploration. That took me to London. To have a global perspective is … The couple of highlights of my career is probably Argyle, getting the global perspective and then some of the really good stuff we did in safety towards the end of my career would be if I was going to call that three highlights. I think the global perspective meant that when you came back to Australia you (a) could appreciate actually what Australia could offer and had and to make sure that that was sort of starting to go back to the rest of the world. But (b), also to bring other world views into Australia.

I worked in the States for a couple of years and that was very interesting. There's a book that most expatriates are encouraged to read which is called 'Divided by Common Language'.[4] That's where you think because people speak English it is going to be exactly the same. But it is quite a culture shock when you are starting to work in America, I think anyway.

Then, yes. So coming back then, I came back to Brisbane to the aluminium business which was again quite different from mining …Yes, it starts with mining bauxite but then you are manufacturing basically. You are concentrating and refining and smelting and that is a very different industry in terms of its cost pressures, the health and safety is very different. It's all residential so there is no FIFO in that industry so again, that was quite different and people live very close to work. So there was more interaction between work and home. That brings opportunity and challenges I think to the workplace. Then to be given the opportunity to step out of HR and then fall into health, safety and environment where … Yes, I think that's where I got a big part of job satisfaction.

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Because you really knew that the work the team was doing was impacting everyone in the workplace. It was full of some tragedies too. I've had to knock on a mother's door with a policeman and say, "Your son is not coming home."

[4] *Divided by Common Language: A Guide to British and American English*, Christopher Davies.

That's something I don't think anyone should have to do and that's why I am so passionate about safety.

(JW) Did you have to do more study as part of –?

(JF) So after my undergraduate degree then through my career with Rio Tinto I did various management courses. I did one at the Australian Graduate School of Management. I did one at the London Business School and attended quite a lot – a lot of the learning was actually seminars and so much of it was on the job. I used to drive some of my team members crazy with my questioning because they were the experts in their subject but I wanted to know a little bit more! So, yes. You learn a lot on the job.

(JW) And when did you take part in the restructure?

(JF) So that was 2011 to 2013. So 2011 it started. It was called the Strategic Support Review and that's where Rio decided at a global level that its services support costs were becoming too out of kilter with the rest of its operating costs. So there was the design phase that was led by a fellow called Bob Vassie Then I … So, he identified the problem and then I – so he was the discovery phase. So he did the discovery phase and then I took over the design phase where we said, okay now we know the size of the problem, what are we going to do about it and how are we going to redesign how services and support are structured throughout the world. So that's the finance team, the IT team, the HR team, the health and safety team, the sales and marketing team. So all the things that were not touching the ore. So not operations or maintenance basically.

(JW) So did you come back to Rio from being in the East? Because you were –

(JF) Yes. Sorry, so after I was in Brisbane with the aluminium, then I came back to Perth to iron ore and that's when we did – so in that role I was human resources and health, safety and environment and communities. That's when we did the Remote Operations Centre and things like that.

Then I stepped out of that role to take on the strategic support role which I did for about eighteen months. So, during that time we had lots of design workshops, consultations, implementation plans. Then I stepped out of that role and so it was sort of the discovery phase was Bob; the design phase was me and then there was the delivery phase which was another team.

So after I had done the design phase I then stepped into Global Head of Health, Safety and Environment and Communities which I did for three years. So that was two positions below the CEO. Then I was promoted up to Group Executive Health, Safety and Environment which was reporting directly to the CEO and I also became Managing Director for Australia which was a representative role. So I was the accountable for all the big partnerships in Australia, for the relationships with the Federal Government and various other bits and pieces. It was sort of an ambassadorial role, the Managing Director for Australia, but it had a small team. But then my principal role was Group Executive Health, Safety and Environment which was global. I had previously had legacy with that one and then I also got closure. So legacy were mines that had closed. Closure included the planning for and anticipation of mines that were currently operating to go into closure phase.

(JW) **Is that unusual then for a woman to be doing that job or by then were there more women right up in the top ranks?**

(JF) When I was appointed Group Executive there were three women, four women on the team of eleven.

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So, head of legal was a female. The head of corporate affairs was a female. The head of human resources was female and then myself.

Prior to that there had been operational females. So the head of aluminium for a period of time, Jacynthe Côté, she was a Canadian woman who headed up the aluminium division. That was unusual to head up an operational P&L. But now the current Rio you've got Sinead Kaufman who's a mining engineer by training who heads up the minerals division. Kelly Parker has taken on my old job as Managing Director for Australia.

Site tour / inspection at Boyne Island, Queensland on 15 February 2019 to examine health, safety and environmental issues at Rio Tinto's Boyne Island aluminium smelter

Left to right: **Megan Clarke** (AO), (then and now) Rio Tinto Board member and Chair of the Sustainability Committee; **Joanne Farrell**, (then) Group Executive Health, Safety and Environment and Managing Director Australia, Rio Tinto; **Nina Mankovitz** (then and now) Vice President Health, Safety, Environment and Communities, Aluminium Division, Rio Tinto – based in Montreal Canada; **Kellie Parker** (then) Managing Director Pacific Operations, Aluminium Division, Rio Tinto – (now) Chief Executive Australia (sort of taking over Joanne Farrell's old job); **Julia Wilkins** (then) Senior Manager Government Relations Eastern Australia, Rio ; Tinto, (now) Senior Manager External Affairs, Rio Tinto – based in Brisbane

Then in BHP you're starting to see more females in the senior levels so it's starting to be felt. It's still not where it should be. But I think when you look at what you call the feeder roles, so the roles at managing director level they're well populated now by females. So in years to come those managing directors will become executives.

(JW) **So are the women mentoring the women?**

(JF) Oh, very much so. Both formally and informally. I still continue some informal ones and I also mentor formally through Women in Mining Western Australia which is an organisation that has existed for about ten years now. Also I mentor not just females but CEOs of not-for-profit organisations through a group called Kilfinan.

(JW) **Okay. So you've mainly been involved in kind of health and safety and people. You are very much people and environment, of course. Yes. But when a mine closes is there an impact then on the economy of that place? Do you have to take that into account as well?**

(JF) Oh, absolutely. So, the jobs reduce to – they don't reduce to zero because you've always got jobs to do for the rehabilitation and the monitoring and what have you. So immediately the local employment disappears but also, in

the case of many mines, they are also paying royalties to traditional owners, or just basics. Like we're sponsoring a local footy team. So that's why with the closure planning there's various stages where you start consulting with the community about what you are going to do. By five years out from closure you've got very firm community plans. Ten years out from closure you've got substantial but not detailed plans. Fifteen years out from closure you've started talking about it.

So it can be – if I think about some of the things. It depends on what the land can be used for after the mine is closed or the smelter or whatever. So in Anglesea for instance, in Wales in the UK, the site of one of the aluminium smelters was to be turned into a holiday park which are very common in the UK where they've got caravans and what have you. In the end, the employment that that holiday park generated was more than was employed in the smelter. Of course it was bringing in discretionary income. People on holiday were then spending more in the gift shops, so it changed the spending profile as well.

Whereas if you think about Argyle, it's in the middle of the Kimberley. There's no infrastructure to or from it. There's not much that can happen from an employment point of view. So what does that then mean? What does that mean for the income stream that the traditional owners were receiving? So then you start looking for, okay, we know we're going to be doing monitoring whether it be air or water or soil monitoring. Even monitoring of insects to determine the flora, fauna and the recovery of that.

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So then you start thinking about what are the training programmes that are required to enable the local community to undertake that monitoring service and things like that. So there's no single answer. It depends on where the sites is and what are the possibilities for the site.

(JW) **So it sounds like when you're thinking about going somewhere you include the community in the consultation and they're there with you throughout?**

(JF) Yes.

(JW) **And then at the end, they are asking what you are doing and you are asking what you can do for them. So it's a complete –**

(JF) Yes. It's a true partnership if it is done well. It is absolutely a true partnership.

(JW) Yes. I wonder how many other places do that in the world? Do the whole from 'go to whoa'?

(JF) Well, they certainly don't do in Africa. They just walk away. The Rios and the BHPs of the world don't but a lot of the other companies do. Spain is a perfect example of bad practice, bad historical practice. They don't do much mining in Spain now but there's a lot of old mines and they're just left with copper leaching. Beautiful blue water but the reason that water is blue is because it's fully toxic with copper.

(JW) So really, we're doing pretty well here then from a lot of points of view really?

(JF) Yes. Yes.

(JW) Okay. Is there anything else I haven't asked you Joanne? You got interested in the Royal Flying Doctor as well. Was that because of the remoteness of being in Argyle?

(JF) No. It was … Rio was principal sponsor of the RFDS and in fact we bought the first jet. Rio bought the first jet and in fact Rio has just bought the third jet. So Rio bought the first and the second and the third jet which has been an absolutely phenomenal impact on the response time to get to the injured patient and to get them back to the tertiary hospital. In the twin props it might take eight hours of flying and in the jet you're there in two and a half hours. Things like that. It's been a game changer.

So I was always interested in that and I think probably coming from a farming background, also we had RFDS to Esperance and things like that. So when I was given the opportunity to join the board I jumped at it and we've got a great board. We've got people like Fiona Wood on the board, Angus Turner who is a leading ophthalmologist. Yes. So we've got great people on the board. So that's always important that you enjoy working with the people that you work with and we're Australia's favourite charity. [*Laughs*] So yes, the product is very good as well.

(JW) Yes. Right. Oh, well it has been very interesting. Have I covered everything do you think?

(JF) I think so.

(JW) I think it has been very interesting. So it just goes to show how you can start in a job and you can branch out and do all these other things?

(JF) Yes. Whenever I am asked to give sort of speeches on leadership or career advice and careers and everything I always say, always look at what's being offered as an opportunity rather than something that's a threat or what have you.

Because I got given some great opportunities and I took them and that's how I developed my career – by saying 'yes' rather than saying 'no'. [*Laughs*]

(JW) Great. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW 01:08:58 minutes