

NRCoP Webinar 13 April 2022
From Cairns to Margaret River (and everywhere in-between):
Regulating in the Regions
Additional Q&A

Q1: Sometimes we have to collaborate with the community to prevent or address issues, but also regulate at the same time. That's not always easy. How do you cope with contexts like that, and are there things that you can do in the regions that might not be possible in a big city?

Iain Dainty, Director, Worksafe Industrial and Regional, WA Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety

Good question! I think a lot of this has to do with understanding your role as a regulator and being clear in it – it may be that you have to educate or remind those that you are regulating of what you can and can't legally do. I don't think there is anything you can't do in one environment that you can't do in the other – we have a range of enforcement tools and our role is to use the right one, in the right environment at the right time. One of the questions I ask my inspectors is, 'how would you feel if your regulatory actions made the front page of the paper?'

Q2: Do you find that there are times when “people in the cities” make rules that don't work so well in regions? How do you manage this?

Matt Cuthbert, Manager, Planning and Regulatory Services, Shire of Augusta Margaret River

Yes – frequently. No matter how frustrating this can be, its always important to maintain relationships. One way we attempt to manage our relationships with 'city stakeholders' is by inviting them to meet in the regions and using that as an opportunity to show them around and better understand the local context. There is little point complaining about situations where inappropriate rules are created in the city for the regions if you are not prepared to be involved in improving things in the future. As such, we try and get involved in any/every opportunity to contribute to policy development where it likely to directly affect us. Sometimes our advocacy can also include partnering with other local governments and/or our peak body to ensure the state gets a consistent message across a range of channels. In most cases, we can avoid the worst of any new 'rules' where we can demonstrate that they will have a genuinely negative impact.

Iain Dainty, Director, Worksafe Industrial and Regional, WA Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety

Yes, there are! I don't always think this is always the intention, but it can be the result. One way is to have stakeholder engagement and hopefully hear someone else's argument and if you can, take it into account. This isn't always possible if you want to implement something at a national or state level (ie new regulations) so there is an increased level of expectation management and explaining 'why' something is being done. WA has just introduced the harmonised work health and safety legislation, not everyone is happy with it, but I'm not aware of any one or any group violently opposed to it – there has been significant levels of information and engagement provided as part of the implementation process; there's also been some transition rules to allow people time to adopt the change requirements.

Q3: How is managing a regional workforce different to managing one in head office? What are the challenges and opportunities of managing a team in the regions?

Iain Dainty, Director, Worksafe Industrial and Regional, WA Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety

It's very different, I'm conscious that people in regions work and live in a different environment and often at a very different pace of life. The main challenge, to me, is making the time to visit them and see how their world operates. If I visit them in person I have the opportunity for them to be heard, to see what they deal with on a daily basis, to hear their issues in person. Long distances create communication issues so seeing and talking face to face shows my investment with them. It helps everyone to feel included and it also allows me to reiterate the head office message, we can work together on ways to implement that. Reporting back to our superiors on the good work being done in the regions also reinforces our need to be there, it also allows the regional officers' voice to be heard at head office.