

## OIL EXPLORATION FROM THE VIEWPOINTS OF GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY

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I have worked for government on two occasions and for industry on two occasions. Altogether, I have worked 7 years for government and 28 years for industry. The shift from industry to government can be quite traumatic.

Industry expends money and manpower on gathering and interpreting data for the discovery of hydrocarbons. Naturally, industry is jealous of this time, money, and expertise and wants the material gathered kept secret for a reasonable period of time to enable it to make the best use of the data. Government tries to protect the interests of individual companies but is also interested in the ultimate availability of the data to industry as a whole so that the national development of the oil industry is not hindered. Unless we can rationalize our attitudes a sense of antagonism can develop between government and industry.

When I graduated in 1949 there was no oil industry in Australia. I was fortunate to be employed by the Bureau of Mineral Resources. The geological section then consisted of about 30 geologists, 3 typists, 5 draftsmen and 2 clerks. This small organization was run very efficiently. However, the government paid a field allowance from which you had to purchase your supplies, so living was very spartan. We even had to shoot kangaroos and dry the skins for beer money. In the early 1950s wool prices soared and we could not obtain lamb from the homesteads, so we had to live on kangaroo meat — with dire consequences. In contrast, the WAPET field camps were lavish, all the food and liquor being supplied by the company.

The duration of the field seasons was different too. BMR had a 5½ month field season with 2 weeks' additional travel. The remaining 6 months were spent in Canberra. With WAPET we were in the field for 6 months with a week's vacation at the end. After this, it was back to the field for another 6 months followed

by 2 weeks' annual leave. In the past 30 years field conditions, and the breaks away from the field, have improved greatly. It is still a disruption to family life when the geologist or engineer has to spend 2 – 3 weeks at a time away from home but in the 'good old days' the wife had to cope alone for six months at a stretch; there were a lot of broken marriages as a result.

We must always remember that all government department policies are (or should be) dominated by the thought that public money is being spent and therefore that the maximum value has to be obtained for every dollar. But this can lead to some surprising anomalies.

What about the nature of the work and the philosophies of the organizations? You might say that in government you are working for your country and in industry you may be working for international interests. In industry there is always the excitement of being in the forefront of the activity — the making of the decisions and the spending of money. In government the work is mainly regulatory, and as a public servant you are responsible for the orderly exploitation of national resources. In Western Australia we certainly tried to speed up the bureaucratic process if it was likely to cause delays in ongoing seismic surveys and drilling wells.

If a seismic survey is being conducted *offshore*, the various marine authorities need to know where the new lines are located and for how long the 'hazard to shipping' due to the recording ship and cable will be in the area. Fishery authorities have to warn local cooperatives about the ship's presence.

*Onshore*, clearances must be obtained from the National Parks Board and departments of lands and forests for new lines entering reserves. If a well programme is altered mines department engineers have to check whether the extension violates safety guidelines. If the well is unsafe because of inadequate casing depth or pump capacity or mast capacity for the proposed extension, and the well subsequently blows out, it is the mines department engineer who gets the kicks. The rule when working for government is that you do not leave yourself open to kicks.

