

IBM To Open NRSC

IBM has announced its planned establishment of what it has termed the National Resources Solution Centre (NRSC) in Perth, which it has stated will provide technology and business solutions for the resources sector.

IBM stated the centre will: “focus on reducing exploration and operational ... costs; creating financial and operational efficiencies; and improving workplace health and safety through smarter solutions such as integrated operations and asset lifecycle management”.

IBM WA State Manager Bill Stewart told *PESA News* the project has been in the works for the better part of two years.

“There was an article in the *AFR* about a year ago, outlining the range of investment [in WA], particularly in LNG, as being world-class. We used it as our business case in terms of getting the NRSC off the ground”, he said.

“We took a business case to the IBM executive in Australia/New Zealand. It was signed off. So, we started developing our capability about 18 months ago.”

Stewart said the credit crunch proved little hindrance.

“You just had to look at the research we did internally and look at the demand coming from China in particular, India and the developing nations overall, to see that in the long term that the demand is going to be there.

“You just have to focus on the demand for energy, and LNG in particular as the new green fuel or green energy source, and if you look at the five to 10 year horizon you can see that this was a blip along the way.

“We tried to get out in front and look at the long term rather than just focusing on what’s happening on a year-to-year basis.”

IBM Solution Specialist David Haake noted IBM has similar centres worldwide.

“This is, I think, the sixth similar type of effort on our part. So, it’s not a uniquely new standalone idea to do industry centres. In fact, we have several oil industry centres already. The Calgary Oil Sands Centre is the closest thing to a mining emphasis that we had historically”, he said.

“WA is, at least arguably, the world’s centre of mining, with the big companies based here. Many of them are important clients of ours—this is all part of a pattern of extending virtual IBM.”

Haake said IBM has worked with individual petroleum companies to develop customised ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) templates.

“What IBM is particularly good at is strategy and change analysis of the problem. Quite often a client will bring us in to direct the activities of multiple niche firms”, he said.

“Big clients want to have an integrated, not just compliance, environment, but actually an environment that will drive continuous improvement of those topics. That’s the seachange in HSE, is to change from just doing what any government requires of you to doing good practices in those areas because it’s good business, and then the reporting falls out the back.

“There we’re just really trying to give program structure to big corporate efforts. The thing called smart performance management.”

Haake said smart asset management is another major IBM initiative.

“What our focus in this lab is about, is that it’s not enough to just put in nice new systems for your nice new capital projects, the state of the war is that the legacy environment is so much bigger than the future.

“These are trillion dollar industries, and it’s all screwed into the ground, and it operates 24 by 7. So, how do you refresh and enable an old asset? Smart middleware is our answer to that, so that you don’t have to shut things down and replace everything in order to open up the data for new analyses.

“Embedded in both of the smart performance and smart asset management is a concept of improving the software infrastructure ... We think it’s a pretty shrewd way to go, because rewriting the apps is terribly expensive, replacing the equipment is almost not rational. And so, how do you make progress? Well, you improve the communications between the automation and the ERP environment.”

IBM is involved in discussions with WA:ERA, seeking to develop innovative solutions in the areas of product optimisation, carbon management and containment solutions.

“The IBM NRSC’s mission fits directly with our research strengths of Earth and resource sciences, carbon storage and geothermal energy”, commented Mark Stickells, WA:ERA Chief Executive. “We welcome the establishment of the IBM NRSC in Perth. This builds on local research strengths and capabilities, thus reinforcing WA’s growing reputation as an important regional centre and innovative R&D hub for the upstream petroleum and LNG industry.”

“From the very beginning it’s been a discussion with them as a group on what we as an extended community want to do together. And so far the sequestration is one of the most obvious”, Haake said.

“In the global sense, Australia’s probably as conscious of this issue as any country in the world. You have more beautiful beaches and more big capital projects than anywhere else I’ve ever seen. We have a very common interest there, and, again, everything we’ve done in other environments is relevant to them.”

“I suppose the other comment to make is that some of the organisations that WA:ERA are working with are the same organisations that we’re working with. So, we have the opportunity to take the best of both and provide a more comprehensive solution to those organisations”, Stewart added.

“The next step with them is to sit down and work out what are the research collaboration projects that will have resonance with the organisations we’re jointly working with.” ■