

Environmental Excellence

For minimising environmental impact on the Irvine Island project, Pluton Resources have won the **EXCELLENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AWARD**, Margaret Tra reports.



Aniche company Pluton Resources has taken out the Excellence in Environmental Management Award for developing a unique, minimal impact and highly successful exploration program at its Irvine Island project in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Environmental and approvals co-ordinator Ric Davies said the award meant a lot to Pluton because of the significance the company attaches to responsible exploration and development.

“The award recognised the company-developed hydraulic drilling platform, which all-but eliminates environmental impacts of exploring for minerals,” Davies told *Australian Mining*.

The island is characterised by high cliffs, rock gullies, dense tropical foliage and crocodile infested waters.

These elements made the Island fairly difficult to work on, as it contains no existing infrastructure.

In addition to these setbacks, the island holds such significance for the local indigenous group, (the Mayala people) that no company has ever been successful in getting onto Irvine before.

To combat these problems, Pluton decided a unique and innovative approach was needed for the island.

The company invested a considerable amount of time and effort in developing a strong working relationship with the Mayala.

This relationship ensures the Malaya have a significant say in the operations conducted, in addition to providing a sense of ownership and significant training and employment opportunities.

“About half our workers are Mayala, and they have been putting together these platforms safely and efficiency as part of their general exploration project duties. They



Pluton Resources' Ric Davies and John McDougall celebrate winning the award for Excellence in Environmental Management.

are a key part of our workforce,” Davies said.

Pluton designed a patented exploration drilling platform, which eliminated the need for traditional access track clearance and drill pad preparation – the Universal Drilling Platform.

The UDP can serve as both a base for drill rigs and a helicopter landing pad.

It offers a number of unique advantages in that it can be used in rugged and steep terrain and does not cause the ground disturbances which typically come with drill pad preparation.

The platform also allows for vegetation regrowth beneath the platform whilst a site is being drilled.

According to Pluton, the UDP has the potential to be-

come a global industry standard for diamond core drilling operations in areas where the minimisation of environmental impact is paramount.

Pluton's drill pad also covers significantly less ground than a drill site – just over 5m2 whereas a regular pad uses up to 30m2.

It also complies with occupational health and safety to provide a stable, flat work platform at a drilling site to ensure safety in the mine.

Pluton has marked out an astonishing 452 million tonne inferred iron resource on the Irvine Island after drilling at fifteen locations.

Each square meter of ground disturbance from drilling has equated to a discovery of approximately 6 million tonnes of resource.



The Universal Drilling Platform in action at Irvine Island.



Orica Mining Services' Richard Brown presenting the Highly Commended award to SRA Information's Che DeDear.

The company is continuing drilling at its project sites and further resource upgrades are expected.

To further understand its adherence to high environmental standards, Pluton has formal Government approval to clear up to 11 hectares of vegetation for exploration purposes, but has only impacted one hectare in the two years of drilling.

The Irvine Island exploration program is an exemplary example of the challenges that will increasingly be faced by exploration programs.

Pluton is setting high benchmarks in ensuring that the environment is a serious issue that needs to be fully addressed when working in the mining industry.

Highly Commended

High concentrations of dust from industry activity in Port Headland presented potential health risks to residents.

Dust particles that are inhaled can cause irritations that range from coughing and sneezing, to hay-fever type reactions and asthma attacks.

SRA Information Technology has won the highly commended award, due to its EnviroSys website which addresses this issue.

“SRA is proud to have received this award amongst

a group of such high calibre finalists,” environmental solutions consultant Che DeDear said.

“We feel that the recognition gained through this project will encourage further adoption of technology solutions to assist in solving serious environmental management issues within the overall resources industry.”

EnviroSys is a real time dust monitoring website, the information from the site will allow industries to make informed decisions regarding dust suppression design and technology into ore handling equipment and practices, in order to comply with regulatory license conditions and commitments.

What the judges said

The judges were impressed with the use of Universal Drilling Platform which restricts footprint of drill sites.

One judge said the ability to minimise impact of exploration activities in sensitive areas indicated that protecting the environment was a main concern for Pluton.

“The parallel constraints, and the accommodation assists in agreement to explore in sites normally off limits.”