

Professional Eulogy for Robert (Bob) Harrison

4 April 2022

I thank Bob's family for the honour of the opportunity to put into words what the forthright indefatigable Bob Harrison meant to the minerals industry of NSW and beyond.

I have known Bob since I first started in the minerals industry in 1995 as a shiny newish graduate, when he was already known as a master of tenure management. Our association continued to my current role as Director at AMEC, a minerals industry peak body that acts as the voice of the industry.

Today I am also the voice of the industry, and I thank the kind representatives of the minerals industry for nominating me to deliver this eulogy on their behalf and acknowledge their support and assistance.

In the sudden loss of Bob Harrison, the minerals industry has lost a Tier 1 resource. For those outside the industry, Dr Richard Schodde defines a Tier 1 resource as "*a 'company making' mineral deposit - they are large, long life and low cost*". They are the crown jewels for the industry and most of us would be lucky to find one in our lifetime.

Robert (Bob) Harrison was a one of a kind. With over 50 years in NSW and national mining title consulting, he was simply the most experienced, knowledgeable and competent practitioner of his ilk in Australia. The mining industry has lost a giant in our field, a true legend and I do not think we will see his like again.

Bob was the son of Jack Harrison, himself an eminent senior geologist in the Geological Survey of NSW. Bob started working in the Mining Titles Branch of the Department of Mineral Resources in the late 1960's when studying Mining Engineering part-time at the Universities of Sydney and New South Wales. In 1969 he resigned from the Department to start his long career in mining titles when he joined Mining Title Consultants Pty Ltd. In 1971 he formed Australasian Mining Title Services Pty Ltd. and more recently Mining Title Services Pty Ltd.

A few years ago, Bob and I drove to Maitland and back for a meeting with the Government Department and during that long drive he recounted his history of experiences with the Government and with industry that was really the complete history of the post war NSW minerals industry. Bob told the story with the style of a great raconteur with wit, bluster, forensic detail and demonstrating the breadth of his knowledge and experience. At the time I told him he should write it down, that it would make a great book, but of course he told me "*No time, love, too much to do*".

And indeed, Bob always had so much to do because with his unique combination of intelligence, experience and deep understanding of the industry, he was one of the most sought-after minerals tenure managers in NSW. For those outside the industry, tenure or mining titles are a minerals' companies' greatest asset (apart from their staff of course) and provide their legal authority to operate.

Bob was the gold standard and many, many industry members trusted Bob with their titles and have done so since he started in the industry over 50 years ago and they did until the day he died. His client list reads like a who's who of the NSW minerals industry and many of these companies are represented here today.

Bob used his boundless energy and knowledge not just to support individual companies and manage tenure but also to advocate for practical mining title administration reform, and land access regulations. Bob was working longer than I have been alive, worked under three different legislative frameworks, and worked through two major legislative reforms as well as countless other changes in Government policies, processes, and procedures.

Bob will be remembered for his vast knowledge of this ever-changing world of Government legislation, regulations and policies; his always dedicated service to his clients; his strong advocacy for improved governance on behalf of all NSW explorers, the high level of respect which he enjoyed from both

industry and Government; and, as one colleague has said, his sometimes gruff but forever charming manner.

Bob's colleague notes that to know Bob was to get a real-world flavour of the fearless, world-weary, frank and stoically honourable hardboiled fictional characters. For me, Bob like a swashbuckling pirate, with his sword poised and always battle ready, especially when it came to the Government. Another colleague likened him to Philip Marlow, the detective in the Big Sleep who said "*You don't know what I have to go through, or over, or under, to do your job for you. I do it my way*".

And indeed, Bob definitely did it his way. Fierce, blunt, direct, endlessly hardworking, unswervingly committed and intolerant of fools or the ambivalent. He demanded the upmost standards of logic, knowledge and competence from both Government bureaucrats and clients alike.

When thinking about Bob now, a colleague was reminded of a famous quote regarding the Sydney business icon Kerry Packer – "*He was not just frightening but was frighteningly smart*".

Another colleague said to me recently, "*In his day, Bob was the smartest person in NSW*".

His high standards didn't discriminate. A colleague noted that he projected an overwhelming force of "*get it right, don't waste my time or get lost*". Irascible for the reluctant, but an invigorating and rewarding challenge for the willing.

I remember the day that Bob rang me to say he would join our member association as one that I took as a great professional accolade. It was also the day that I knew that my workload would increase as Bob was nothing if not demanding and endlessly persistent for improvement. I also knew that our work as the voice of the minerals industry would be better for having Bob in our corner.

We will all miss Bob's abundant enthusiasm, his passion for every challenge in his life, his deep understanding of the minerals industry and its governance, as well as his unique style of communication.

The Government bore the brunt of Bob's wisdom and drive for improvement. A previous head of the Geological Survey noted politely "*Bob had a wonderful approach to me and other Departmental people*".

Bob had the list of phone numbers for just about everyone he needed to know in the Department and would go down the list making calls until someone answered, or he called me with that full head of steam saying "*There is nobody bloody there, where are they all? Is anyone else working today*".

With Bob, there was always bluster, but also a bloody good point. Another colleague put it well when he told me "*By Jeez, Bob found some holes in stuff that was proposed over the years*" and another comment on his advice "*Wait to see what Bob has to say, he unpacks things pretty good*".

Professionally, Bob was his own brand. There was only one Bob. Just like supermodels and superstars, Bob did not need a surname. If someone in the Department was told "*Bob is on the phone*" or "*I've just got an email from Bob*" then everyone knew who that had come from and braced for the fallout.

The true mark of his respect and standing with Government, was demonstrated in a call from the Head of the Department just after the news broke that Bob had died, to pass on the condolences of the Department and offer support to show their respect. She also said, "*Bob gave it to us straight and that is what we need*".

Indeed, Bob gave it to us all straight. Many of us received regular phone calls from Bob or a 'Blast from Bob' when things were not up to his exacting standards or when he saw issues that needed to be rectified. The calls usually started with "*You will never believe what they have done this time....and get this...*" and would only ever be short if he had another client calling on the other line.

I think it is fair to say that in those calls, most of us did more listening than talking. But Bob always had a point, a good point, and with that fierce intelligence, deep history and razor-sharp focus, it was often one that had not yet been picked up by others.

These calls were usually followed by a comprehensive email, with that unmistakable and unique big, bold blue font and multicolours for extra emphasis. I was foolish enough to suggest once that he changed his email to a more standard form but of course he said “*No love, that’s my way*” and indeed Bob always did it his way – in fact, you can imagine his response when I also suggested to him that he should not refer to female colleagues as “love” or “girls” ...

But a blast from Bob was a little like a burst of Sydney rain – strong and ferocious to start but then softening at the end and just occasionally leaving a rainbow.

There will never be another Bob. He will be acutely missed by many, and with his passing we have lost a great champion.

Bob said it all in his website that describes his service with just three words – Passion, Experience, Diligence.

Bob was a lionhearted expert in exemplar.

His long service to the minerals industry is immeasurable and the void left following his death will be long felt, especially for the NSW exploration sector.

Bob may have dedicated much of his life to work, but those of us who worked with Bob often heard about his family, taking up skiing and his trips to Bali and the snowfields, and his pride and love for them all.

There are many things that so deeply sadden us all with the sudden loss of Bob.

That so many companies have lost their ferocious tenure defender, and his safe hands to manage their most valuable asset.

That we will never have his wisdom on Government reform, just as we have more legislative reform on the table and pending policy changes.

That we will never have another ‘blast from Bob’

That we will never have one of his blue and multicolour emails.

That, like all good things, it was over too quickly.

And, worst of all, that we never really had the opportunity to fully show him our deep appreciation and gratitude for his service and life’s labour.

However, I take comfort when I had the thought last week that Bob is now up with St Peter analysing, managing and improving the Pearly Gate processes, helping to allocate clouds and probably tweaking the blue colour of the sky to get it just right.

Then I can see him sitting back in the clouds with his old friends, sparing partners and family at the end of another day’s toil, glass in hand and holding forth.

When we look up and see the sky a slightly darker shade of blue, or we have a blast of rain, we will think of you Bob.

Tier 1 resources are hard to find, always prized and never forgotten.

Thank you, Bob, from a deeply grateful minerals industry, and farewell.

Vale Bob Harrison.

Lucy McClean
Director, AMEC (Association for Mining and Exploration Companies)
(with support from Doug Brewster, Russell Meares, Wendy Corbett)

APPENDIX 1 – OTHER WORDS

From SMEDG- Russell Meares

It is with great sadness that we share with you the news that legendary Sydney tenement agent and SMEDG supporter Bob Harrison has passed away aged 73. Bob was the son of Jack Harrison, himself a legendary senior geologist in the Geological Survey of NSW. Bob went to North Sydney Boys High School, and after graduating in mining engineering, Bob started his career working in the Mining Titles Branch at the old Department of Mineral Resources in the late 1960's. This launched his +50 year career in tenement management, mainly operating through his own consultancy firm – formerly AMTS Pty Ltd, and more recently MTS Pty Ltd.

Bob will be remembered for his vast knowledge of the ever-changing world of government mining legislation, regulations and policies; his always dedicated service to his clients; his strong advocacy to politicians and bureaucrats on behalf of all NSW explorers (often characterized by emails typed in multi-colours and 14 point fonts to stress a point!); the high level of respect which he enjoyed from both Industry and government; and his sometimes gruff but forever charming manner.

We will all miss Bob's abundant enthusiasm, his passion for every challenge in his life, and his unique style of friendship.

SMEDG will circulate the arrangements for Bob's funeral when they are announced.

We would also like to take this opportunity to pass on our sincerest condolences to Bob's family and friends on his passing.

The following tribute to Bob was written by his good friend, geologist *Doug Brewster*...

I am crestfallen to announce my deeply respected friend and industry colleague, the Indefatigable mining title master Robert (Bob) Harrison has died – he was 73 years old. He is survived by his wife Wendy, first wife Suzie, and daughters Jasmine and Brie. He will be acutely missed by many.

Physically strong, he was a skier and a fine sportsman in his youth, winning Blues for both Rugby and Water Polo at North Sydney Boys High School. A Baliphile, he was a peculiar mix of contemporary pursuits and traditional mores. Bob was unique, with over 50 years in NSW and national mining title consulting, he was the most experienced, knowledgeable and competent practitioner of his ilk in Australia. In short, a true legend.

His long service to the mining industry, as an unsalaried independent consultant for hire, is immeasurable. Close to irreplaceable, Bob worked to the end and the shockwaves of his death to the NSW mining industry, especially mineral exploration, will be long-felt. A tireless and authoritative practitioner gone. His forthright pro-bono advocacy for practical mining title administration reform, and clear, fair mineral exploration land access regulations is vast. Ultimately, the mere listing of his countless independent professional contributions to our industry is a feeble measure of a mighty character.

To know Bob was to get a real-world flavour of the fearless, world-weary, frank and stoically honourable hardboiled fictional characters of the inter-war pulp magazines. The closest thing to the fantasy portraits of the likes of Philip Marlow I can imagine meeting. As Marlowe said in the *Big Sleep*: "You don't know what I have to go through or over or under to do your job for you. I do it my way". Bob was a lionhearted expert in exemplar. Fierce, blunt, direct, endlessly

hardworking, unswervingly committed and intolerant of fools or the ambivalent. He demanded the upmost standards of logic, knowledge and competence from both government bureaucrats and clients alike. His high standards didn't discriminate and he was very fond of telling his clients I am the *insultant*, not a consultant. He projected an overwhelming force of "get it right, don't waste my time or get lost". Irascible for the reluctant, but an invigorating and rewarding challenge for the willing.

Distinctly an old Sydney salt; he was reminiscent of the rustic, direct, practical and staunch men I knew as a small child. Indeed, when thinking about Bob now, I am reminded of a famous quote regarding the Sydney business icon Kerry Packer – "He was not just frightening but was frighteningly smart". Despite his outwardly fearsome and terse demeanour, if you were committed, then you would find no firmer, passionate, generous and sure supporter. He would do anything for you; there was nobody better to have in your corner during the struggles of both business and life. Although I am saddened by his death, he would have been the first to say get over it and press ahead. So he's still in mine, and all our corners.

I am profoundly honoured and privileged to have known Bob. An example of fierce expertise and assuredness most can only wish to achieve. The mining industry has lost a giant in his field and I do not think we will see his like again. His unprecedented contribution as an independent specialist and a good, honest man is to be wholeheartedly celebrated. Some future recognition by an institutional memorial reward would be fitting. Our industry should rise to acknowledge its loyal foot-soldiers. His steadfast example can be aspired to but unlikely matched. I was lucky to be its witness. We now live in different and less forthright times.

Garry Lowder:

"It was Bob Harrison who put me on to the gold potential of the Tooloom area in the first place, and it was his father (Jack Harrison) that was my boss when I first went to work in the Geological Survey in 1965 - actually, he hired me as a cadet geologist in my Honours year in 1964. [Note: Garry went on to become Director-General of the Department of Mineral Resources]. A death like Bob's really marks the passing of the generations, something of which I am very much aware."

Lindsay Gilligan:

"Bob's Dad was Jack Harrison, a most senior geologist in the Geological Survey, who recruited me and many other trainee geologist back in the 60's. During my career at the Geological Survey, Bob had a wonderful approach to me and other Departmental people. We will all remember Bob fondly."

Russell Meares:

"One of my most endearing memories of Bob was the trademark tactics which he used in regular meetings with representatives of the 'Mines Department' to discuss their proposed new legislative or policy initiatives. He would sit back quietly and let the discussions flow until it had reached a point at which he could see major flaws in their proposal, and the time had come to call them out. He would say with an undertone of his trademark cutting cynicism
"Are you serious ? Can't you see that won't work because that clause is the complete opposite to what you are saying in Clause 15 (b) !"