



Polish miners an option for Fields

By Blake Wilshaw

IMPORTING Polish miners to fill empty mining jobs will be difficult, but two Dutch businessmen are in Kalgoorlie-Boulder to assess whether the scheme will work.

Language differences, cost and accommodation are barriers to bringing a Polish workforce to the mines, according to Want 2 Work chief executive Bertie van Rooij and manager Cyriel Prins.

The men are on a tour of Perth and the Goldfields to assess the viability of supplying operations, who are struggling with staff shortages, with skilled overseas workers.

If the plan goes ahead, the first Poles could be working at the Super Pit or Barrick Kanowna in 2009.

"We will do our research, go back to Holland and make our basis plan, how we think we have to go forward," Mr van Rooij said.

Want 2 Work already has 500 potential immigrants available.

"I started a company in Holland and we had a shortage of people also," Mr van Rooij said.

"We met some Polish workers; they're very high-skilled people, very motivated to get the job done.

"We'd take care of their visa, transportation, their accommodation. (We would) support them not only in their jobs but also in their private lives."

Mr van Rooij and Mr Prins said the biggest prohibitive factor to the initiative was the language barrier.

"In Poland in the past there were a lot of schools just teaching Polish

and Russian; after the war it was German and now the new generation are quite good with English," Mr van Rooij said.

"We also consider opening a small, private English school in Poland. To ensure if we send them over (to Australia) they won't come back in four weeks. It's very important."

Also, the costs will be high.

"We are willing to invest in the project because we believe in it," Mr Prins said.

"We are convinced it can work. In the beginning we must invest in it; we won't make any profit probably for a year but we think we can get it to work."

The Dutch employment agency is investigating housing options for an imported labour force.

"The accommodation has to be very good. If it's not and we send workers over, we throw away our good name in Poland," Mr van Rooij said.

"We will come back in April and look at accommodation. Now we're looking for the companies we can work with. I think what we're looking at now is the Polish workers come alone and after a few months they bring over their family."

Mr Prins said the worldwide market for skilled Polish workers is strong, with many ex-miners moving to other industries when the country's coal production slowed down.

"Mine engineering, also the trades; electricians, welders, plumbers. We ran an advertisement in a Polish newspaper asking for miners,

in general, and the reaction was overwhelming," he said.

"The next day there were a hundred people in front of our office. They're really enthusiastic. I work with those people and they're asking me everyday; 'when can I go to Australia?'"

Chamber of Minerals and Energy Goldfields regional liaison officer Matthew Payne facilitated the Dutchmen's visit and said sourcing workers from Eastern Europe was the next frontier of alleviating the skills shortage.

"One thing resulting from all the changes in the resource market in last few years is that there's a whole new set of players involved in the market, particularly in terms of labour supply," he said.

"Traditionally, the labour from overseas has come from New Zealand, South Africa, North America."

The CME previously said an extra 40,000 workers will be needed in the State's resources sector by 2015.

"A lot of that will depend on good the local talent is at meeting that, through the schooling system and the WA School of Mines," Mr Payne said.

"But the odds are good there will be a much greater reliance on the overseas market."

Regarding the high cost of sourcing staff from abroad, Mr Payne said it was to be expected.

"In the resources sector, there is no inexpensive labour market, overseas or locally, you are having to pay premium dollars," he said.



Euro force: Cyriel Prins and Bertie van Rooij, from Dutch employment agency Want 2 Work, are aiming to bring Polish mine workers to the Goldfields.