

# WA miners urged to go Dutch by importing Polish workers

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A Dutch company wants to cash in on the WA mining industry's skills shortage by importing Polish workers.

Van Rooji BV, an employment agency which brings Polish workers to the Netherlands, claims to have hundreds of English-speaking former miners on their books who are ready and willing to work in Australia.

Polish workers have flooded Western Europe since 2004 when the former Eastern Bloc country joined the European Union, giving its citizens the right to work across the continent.

Two representatives from Van Rooji are planning to visit WA in January to canvass support for their plan from mining companies.

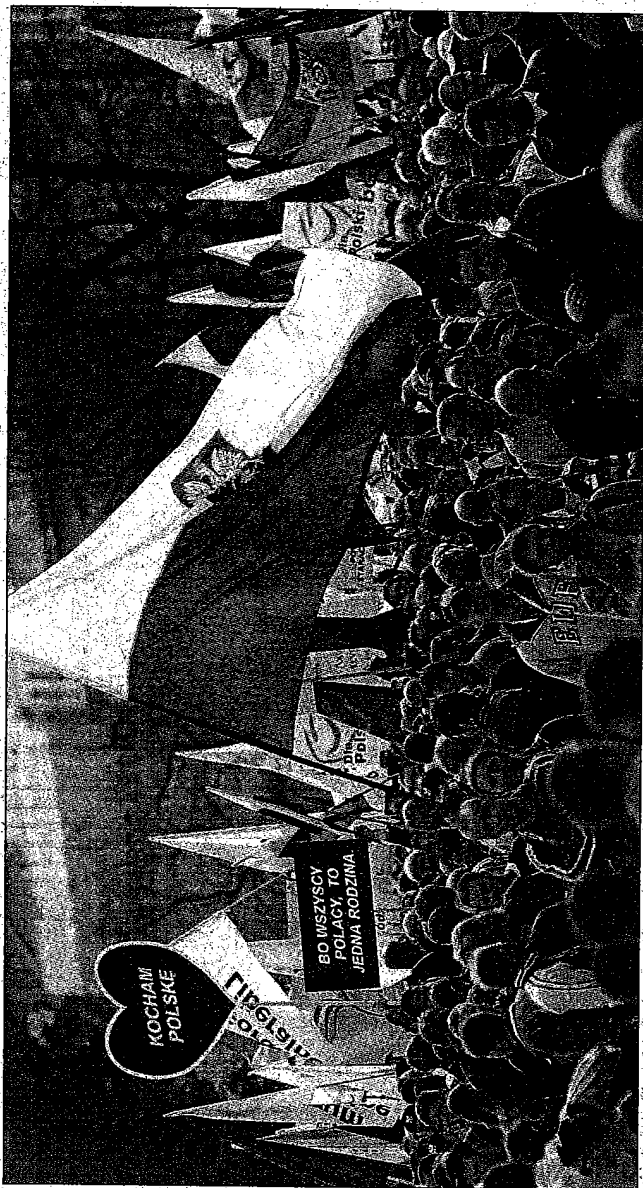
"Polish people have been working in the mines for years," Cytel Prins, of Van Rooji, said.

"But the mining industry is a little down at the moment and that means you have thousands of unemployed ex-mine workers who have the experience of having worked in a mine for several years."

Mr Prins said his company has been talking to several WA mining companies who were interested in the Poles, admitting the biggest problem could be securing the appropriate visas.

"I know it will be a little bit hard to get a visa and that may be our most difficult point, to get the visa, because I'm convinced of the quality of our workers and the willingness of our Polish workers to go to Australia," Mr Prins said.

He said he expected the workers would spend around six months to a year in Australia, have several weeks holiday in Poland, possibly over



Free to travel: Polish workers are trained and available to fill jobs in WA's booming mining sector, a Dutch agency says.

Christmas, and then return. He said it was unlikely Polish workers would wish to stay in Australia, preferring to return to their families in Poland after a few years.

Gary Wood, secretary of the mining and energy division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, said the union did not object to foreign workers on the proviso that the jobs could not first be filled with Australians and that they enjoyed the same working conditions as local workers.

"Clearly (foreign) labour should have no lesser entitlements than permanent residents of Australia," Mr Wood said.

"We need the Government to ensure there is no manipulation of foreign workers and by that I mean you're paid \$50,000 per annum but the employer charges \$30,000 in rent and puts you all in a common room. It needs to be transparent and made sure they enjoy the same rights and conditions as Australians."

Nicole Roocke, acting director of the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, said the uptake of immigrant workers by mining companies had remained relatively low as the industry preferred to look at other solutions to the skills shortage.

"Our view on immigration is that it needs to be considered as one of a

number of different strategies that can be used to address the skill shortage," Ms Roocke said.

"If you look at the uptake of the use of 457 visas (temporary work visas) by the mining industry it's a lot lower extent than a lot of other industries."

Ms Roocke said many mining companies already had worker recruitment policies in place.

These mainly focused on training Australian workers and tapping into under-utilised labour pools, such as female workers.

The majority of overseas workers coming to Australia to work in the mining industry have been from China and the Philippines.