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Media Release:

Reflecting 30 years on...

Collie has a long history as a coal mining town with this month marking 30 years since the closure of underground mining in Collie.

This milestone was celebrated and marked with some significant events including:

- A photographic exhibition featuring photos by John Bylund at the Collie Art Gallery;
- The release of the 'Ghosts of the Underground' book, which is a tribute to the amazing work done by the underground miners and includes some of the photos from the exhibition. It is available for purchase at the Coalfields Museum;
- A 30th Anniversary Reunion event on 25 May – a special day to celebrate former employees with a complimentary bus tour of the old underground mine sites, Lake Kepwari, Motorplex and the Premier Coal Lookout.

Commencing in 1950, the Western Collieries operation was one of the three mining companies on the Collie coal fields. First production came from an open cut mine called Collieburn, followed by the development of two underground mines in 1952.

Consolidation of the Collie coal mining industry to two producers in 1960 was the start of a rationalisation that culminated in the purchase of the Company by Wesfarmers in 1989.

Operating both an open cut and underground mine had impacts on productivity and efficiency which the company had to review.

In 1994, the decision was made to consolidate to a single open cut mine. The closure meant that 96 years of continuous underground mining in Collie ceased along with aged and historic generations of work practices, expertise, and culture.

Closing the underground operations was part of positioning the business for the future, building a large scale efficient open cut operation, the Premier Coal Mine.

This change impacted many people, the workers, their families, and the town of Collie.

While underground mining may have ceased in 1994, production increased with the commencement of the Premier Coal mine in 1996, which continues to employ locals and produce today.

Over the years, the ebb and flow of the coal mines has reflected the states demand for coal and coal-fired power, and the workforce has ramped up and down in response.

In the final few weeks of the underground mine, a photographer, John Bylund was invited underground to take photos and capture the final moments.

The 'Ghosts of the Underground' photographic exhibition accurately illustrates underground coal mining operations in Collie and showcases the human side and a glimpse into the tough conditions of underground mining practices and culture.

These amazing photos have been turned into a photographic essay and published in a book, which people can purchase and have in their home to reflect on the past and remember how coal mining is a big part of Collie's history.

Premier Coal Operations Manager, Braedon Gaske, was proud to commemorate the historic milestone.

"We are so pleased to be pausing and looking back into the history of mining in Collie.

The events and exhibition are all part of the 30-year anniversary plans to help celebrate the workers who shaped our town and set Collie up for the long term.

"As an operation, every day we function by best practice in environment and safety with a strong commitment to the Collie community.

"We are also not just a miner, we recognise that land rehabilitation is part of responsible mining, handing land back to the community. With this in mind, we are so happy with the work we did at Lake Kepwari, transforming it from an open cut mine into a popular tourist attraction.

"We are proud to be a strong part of Collie's history and future," said Braedon.

Based near Collie, a town of over 9,000 people, Premier Coal is an important contributor to the local economy providing employment for over 500 people and supporting a wide range of regional industries and community-based activities.

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