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[<<back to News Archive](#)

Mineral industry says happy birthday to P9

Mineral processors from around the globe came together in Brisbane, Australia recently to attend a birthday party with a difference.

The world's longest running mineral processing research project - known in the minerals industry simply as 'P9' - just turned 40.

Operated by the University of Queensland's Julius Kruttschnitt Mineral Research Centre and administered by AMIRA International, P9 has recorded many technical achievements, implementing several important outcomes to industry - recently expanding to Canada through McGill University in Montreal, and South Africa through the University of Cape Town.

University of Queensland Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Trevor Grigg was the first to wish P9 happy birthday, saying that UQ strives for excellence in its research endeavours, valuing highly collaborative research and development with industry.

He said the University valued the opportunities provided by such collaboration for research training, postgraduate research experience, technology transfer and the commercialisation of the intellectual property generated through research.



Celebrating P9's 40th birthday at a VIP event in Brisbane recently, from left, are South Africa's High Commissioner to Australia Mr Zolile Magugu, Queensland Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the Hon. Stephen Robertson MLA, inaugural P9 Project Leader Professor Alban Lynch AO, and University of Queensland Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Trevor Grigg.

"The JKMRC P9 project has all of these attributes which make it a very fitting and essential part of what the University of Queensland is all about."

Rio Tinto Technical Services Development Group General Manager Dr Bruce Kelley said the emerging role for technology in providing competitive advantage, and the industry's move towards greater collaboration through - for example - the Global Mining Initiative and the International Network for Acid Prevention (INAP), augured well for P9 and its future role.

"Industry wants to support research, but it really wants to see something concrete as a result - a run on the board - and P9 has continually been able to achieve that," Dr Kelley said.

"I think that both of these changes will drive toward a new era of brokered research projects, and that JKMRC and AMIRA are well positioned to take advantage of this opportunity."

Inaugural project leader and founding JKMRC Director Professor Alban Lynch said assistance from Mount Isa Mines and a small band of university postgraduate students helped set the project on the right track back in the early 1960s.

"P9 worked because it was the type of project which was right for its time, and the research group involved happened to stumble on the right modus operandi."

Professor Lynch - noted in the minerals industry as the 'father' of P9 - recounted some of the project's milestones, including the introduction of computing into process control, first at Mount Isa Mines and then on to other mining sites around Australia.

With the advent of personal computing in the 1980s, the P9 project was the first to develop a desktop metallurgical simulator for mineral processing operations, leading to top selling software - JKSImMet - and worldwide exposure for the project.

AMIRA International Chief Executive Officer Mr Dick Davies said the AMIRA - JKMRC collaborative model - started by P9 - was robust and had outlasted many other technical initiatives.

He said a trend back towards brokered research projects paved the way forward for P9 and other major AMIRA projects as a platform for internationalisation, particularly in South Africa and Canada, soon to be followed by the USA and South America.

Current P9 project leader Professor J-P Franzidis thanked sponsoring companies, postgraduate students, research staff, AMIRA and the JKMRC for their collective input into the project over the past 40 years. He also thanked the many invited guests who helped celebrate the occasion at Brisbane's Custom's House.

Among the VIPs were South Africa's High Commissioner to Australia Mr Zolile Magugu, Queensland Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the Hon. Stephen Robertson MLA, inaugural P9 Project Leader Professor Alban Lynch AO, University of Queensland Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Trevor Grigg and AMIRA's first CEO, now retired, Dr Jim May.

The project has had five project leaders over its 40 years. Joining Professors Lynch and Franzidis at the event were P9's second, third and fourth project leaders, Professors Don McKee and Tim Napier-Munn and Dr Steve Morrell.

Recently appointed P9 research collaborator in North America, Professor Jim Finch, who is based at McGill University in Montreal, and South African P9 research collaborator Mr Martin Harris, who is based at the University of Cape Town, were also in Brisbane for the birthday celebration.

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