

We expand or die: Santos

By ANTHONY KEANE and SEAN SMITH

OIL and gas companies in Australia must expand overseas to survive in an era of "unprecedented industry consolidation", Santos managing director John Ellice-Flint said yesterday.

However, tax laws were hindering their ability to grow, he said. "The question of surviving and prospering is important because oil and gas independents are becoming an endangered species," Mr Ellice-Flint said. "We have seen the disappearance of many."

He was addressing the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association's annual conference in Adelaide.

He said expansion overseas was crucial for survival and growth but this was not recognised in Australian tax treatment.

Petroleum

"US companies can write off Australian exploration spending against their US income," Mr Ellice-Flint said. "However, Australian companies cannot write off overseas exploration against their Australian income. This disadvantages Australian companies in bidding for overseas exploration acreage."

Another speaker at the APPEA conference, Resources Minister Ian Macfarlane, said the Federal Government was considering several ideas - including tax breaks for share investors - to fuel oil and gas exploration.

He said the Government was exploring the introduction of so-called "flow-through" shares widely used in Canada's junior mining sector.

Mr Macfarlane also flagged changes to the tax treatment of offshore production facilities as early as next month.

The move would alleviate industry complaints that the existing depreciation provisions are a major deterrent to exploration.

Canada's "flow-through" share scheme provides tax breaks for investors in exploration companies, provided the equity is used for exploration.

"It's a process which gives tax relief to the investors while at the same time providing a capital opportunity for the company," Mr Macfarlane said.

"We're keen to look at it and see what sort of opportunities that can be presented."

In addition, the Cabinet was considering amending tax provisions that saddle offshore facilities with an effective 50-year life for the purposes of depreciation.

Aides able to smooth the day but not always allowed

By BEN HOOPER

BUSINESS managers were becoming bogged down with tasks that could easily be delegated to personal assistants, Entree Recruitment manager Nicole Underwood says. PAs were often not utilised fully.

"The Internet, e-mail and direct phone lines make managers more accessible than ever before - and that means spending hours each day dealing with queries that may have otherwise been intercepted by a PA," she said. "The PA of today is more accountable and, if they are trusted and used effectively, they can add real value to a business, rather than in days gone by when they were just assisting the boss, collecting his or her dry cleaning and making coffee."

By encouraging PAs to make a greater contribution, managers would reduce their own workload. "The added benefit is delegating such tasks will give PAs a chance to do more for their employer and ultimately improve their job satisfaction and loyalty to the company."

Adelaide law firm Lynch Meyer chairman David Martin said he had an "excellent rapport" with his PA of the past eight years, Keryn Woods. She was "well known to all of my clients and they are quite used to dealing with her as part of my team".

Today is Office Professionals Day - the day for saying thank you to personal assistants.



TASK DIVISION: Keryn Woods and David Martin sort their office priorities. **Picture:** JO-ANNA ROBINSON

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