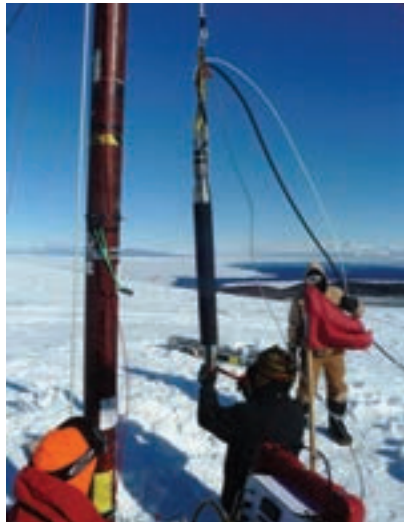


Reaching a global market

Howard Kenworthy explains that being based in Western Australia is no barrier to Inflatable Packers International being a global business

Inflatable Packers International (IPI) has its home in Perth, Western Australia – the most remote capital city in the world – although, in today’s well-connected world and being the country’s closest point to Europe, with direct ‘kangaroo route’ flights, it is nowhere near as remote as it used to be.



IPI Supplies to every continent – even Antarctica

Indeed, Perth is in the same time zone as most of Asia – only four hours’ time difference from Dubai and five to eight hours different from Europe. Singapore, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur are a similar flight time away from Perth as Brisbane is. What is called Western Hemisphere (the Americas) is 12 hours’ time zone away, so that is more of a challenge. However, IPI has been long-established in the US and Chile.

From Perth, IPI exports to every continent in the world. It is the world’s premier inflatable packer specialist with a long-established presence in all the key markets (mining, geotech, oil and gas) for high-pressure inflatable packers.

Research and development and product innovation is the norm for the business. IPI recently appointed Francis Ford as engineering director. He has worked with the packer specialist since 2005, much of the time being on R&D and new product development. Since his appointment, IPI has more than doubled its Perth-based engineering group with the addition of new members in the application, R&D and drafting teams. The Perth team now numbers over 30 people and is still growing. In addition, there are 12 team members elsewhere in the world (Montana, Santiago, Dubai, Houston, Singapore and Sofia).

Clients often benefit from cross-industry experience – cost-effective mining tech replacing high-cost oilfield technology in geothermal and gas sectors, and oilfield level technology being used for high-specification non-oilfield applications.

Since its establishment in 1999, IPI has pushed the ▶

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DuraFRAC is IPI's range of hydraulic fracturing packers



► boundaries of the use of inflatable packers in several ways. Some hydraulic fracture packers are now pressure rated at up to 15,000psi, with many tools working at up to 10,000psi. Applications and standard product options have grown, enabled by a business that started life as a custom-made

packer builder and that still does many custom-made jobs.

Recent investments in the company have included a state-of-the-art CNC machining system and more equipment for elastomer testing, as well as 3-D printing. Very little production is subcontracted.

IPI makes inflatable packers with steel wire reinforcement, similar to that used to reinforce truck tyres, which give its packers the reputation of being the most robust on the market – sometimes run for hundreds of inflate cycles. Compared to conventional oilfield inflatables, IPI packers fully recover on deflation, which enables higher operating pressures, longer life and more comprehensive post manufacturing / pre-operational testing. The varied list of applications shows the many uses of IPI's very versatile inflatable packer technology. Yet more applications are sought.

Appropriately, the company has the slogan 'Made Differently to Perform Better' and a vision 'To be the world's first choice inflatable packer company' – which it seems to be making solid progress towards achieving. ▼

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Howard Kenworthy is group commercial director Inflatable Packers International

Recent deliveries show range of applications

Recent shipments from Perth reflect the diversity of markets and applications. Some of these are one-offs, but often to long-standing clients and many are repeat orders:

- Packers for testing in the Antarctic ice – a version of these special packers had steel studs (like ice tyres) to help grip in the ice. Projects in Antarctica funded by the US and French governments;
- Permeability testing systems for mining projects in central and southern Africa, Chile, Russia, Ireland, PNG and The Philippines;
- Using the versatile STX60 (a mining wireline system capable of multiple types of permeability testing and stress testing to 5,000psi) provided with non-API Blow-Out Preventers (BOP) for geothermal drilling in Vietnam and another 'hot' project elsewhere in Southeast Asia. IPI has supplied BOP (an inward inflating packer) to several Asian clients;
- Hydraulic fracturing systems for South American copper mines – both for block caving and for rockburst mitigation. Pure water hydraulic fracturing significantly reduces potentially fatal seismic effects in deep mines in highly stressed areas – such as in the Andes;

- Hydraulic fracturing systems for geotechnical evaluation in India – both private and government sectors with packers as small as 33mm OD (with another project elsewhere trialling packers with a 17mm OD);
- Geotech evaluation packer systems for a Chinese government institute – exploring for shale hydrocarbon deposits at up to 10,000psi;
- Hydraulic fracturing systems for a geothermal project in Europe;
- Custom-made inward inflating packers for a client's proprietary underground drilling systems;
- Stock shipments of permeability testing systems to Montana, US, where IPI has a rental business into the North American mining and geotech market;
- Stock shipments of DuraFRAC Hydro systems to IPI Montana where IPI is the leading provider of water well frac products for the US market;
- High-pressure packers for US research institutions.

In addition, IPI is supplying an increasing amount of equipment for the oil and gas industry.

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