



Chemeca2026
Innovate. Integrate. Impact.

28 – 30 September 2026
Melbourne, Australia



*Chemeca 2026 and Hazards Australasia
28 – 30 September, Melbourne, Australia*

Women Working in Remote, Male Dominated Environments: Reflections from the Early 2000s

Lisa Hein

GPA

Lisa.hein@gpaeng.com.au

ABSTRACT

This presentation reflects on my lived experiences as a young engineer working in Moomba, a remote gas plant in outback South Australia, during the early 2000s. At the time, the workforce comprised approximately 250 people, with only a handful of women on site. The environment was physically harsh—temperatures often exceeding 45°C—and culturally even harsher, shaped by strong trade based hierarchies, entrenched social groups, minimal communication infrastructure, and a “survival of the fittest” ethos.

As a field and plant engineer working a two weeks on, two weeks off roster, I entered the workplace naïve to the dynamics of gender, power, and isolation that would shape my experience. Proving my technical competence became essential not only for career progression but for basic acceptance. Hands on responsibilities—shutdown leadership, vessel entry, commissioning, troubleshooting, and emergency response—eventually helped build credibility and forge strong relationships. Yet the path to gaining that respect was far from straightforward.

Daily life included persistent microaggressions, subtle exclusion, and at times overtly hostile behaviours that were considered “normal” in the culture of the era. Pornography displayed openly in the workplace, gendered assumptions, inappropriate comments, and questions about legitimacy or capability were frequent, and reporting mechanisms were unclear or ineffective. The challenge extended beyond professional performance: social navigation, boundary setting, and discerning genuine friendships from ulterior motives were constant, emotionally taxing tasks. Many issues were compounded by loneliness, long shifts, and an absence of formal support structures.

Despite this, what enabled survival and eventual success were a combination of work ethic, genuine curiosity, visible technical value, and the support of key allies. Spending time on shift, learning from trades personnel, and demonstrating practical capability (including, quite literally, learning to weld) fostered inclusion and respect. Over time, strong relationships formed through shared challenges softened the environment and created space for mutual trust.

Reflecting two decades later, research now clearly supports what many women experience: that power dynamics, not attraction, underpin most workplace harassment; that reporting is rare; and that retaliation is common. My experiences highlight the importance of representation, leadership accountability, bias education, structured check ins, and the

presence of a critical mass of women.

This reflection aims to illuminate the realities of remote, male dominated work in the early 2000s and to spark discussion on how far we have come—and how far we still need to go—to ensure inclusive, safe, and equitable workplaces for all.

KEY WORDS

Diversity, Women in remote environments, sexual harrassment, leadership, equality

BIOGRAPHY

Lisa is a chemical engineer with over 25 years of experience in top-tier oil and gas companies and as a principal risk consultant at GPA. She has extensive expertise in operations engineering, engineering management, reliability, maintenance, and process safety consulting. Throughout her career, Lisa has experienced and learned from major incidents, been involved in recovery efforts, experienced the introduction of MHF legislation, and led the preparation, audit, and licensing of two safety cases. Recently, she has facilitated safety in design studies for future fuels projects involving new and novel technologies.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Please indicate which conference program your abstract relates to:

Hazards Australasia

Chemeca