

# AFR BOSS | Most Innovative Companies

## Smarter, sharper project delivery



**Sydney engineers Brefni were mobilised to clear more than 250 properties stretching from Campbelltown to the Victorian border which were destroyed in last summer's bushfires.**

As NSW surveyed the bushfire devastation of last summer, the team at Brefni got an unexpected call. Could they mobilise in the Southern Highlands and South Coast to assist in the the state government's clean-up program? The task was to bring together 15 crews of people and plant, all licenced in demolition and asbestos removal.

Brefni, with proven delivery capabilities in the road, rail and renewables sectors, had never faced anything like this. But within two weeks they were on the ground clearing properties.

The challenges were myriad: managing public expectations, accessing hazardous sites in both built-up and remote locations, mobilising work teams in areas destroyed by the fires, and legally disposing highly contaminated materials. Added to this was the onset of COVID-19 and its impact on life as we had known it.

Within a month, the team was in full flight.

"We managed to eventually clear over 250 properties in our area, which stretched from Campbelltown to the Victorian border," says Brefni's general manager of construction, Scott Fraser. "Working closely with our client, we managed to deliver these works on time, within budget and without any environmental or safety incidents."

Brefni managing director Tom Brady says the assignment was both heartbreaking and rewarding. "It actually did the people of our company a lot of good," he reflects. "By moving into, living and working in these communities they got a feeling for what happened to those residents."

"Forging local relationships and engaging with the local supply chain was very satisfying, to be able to help people take the first tentative steps to getting their lives back on track by providing them with a blank canvas on which to rebuild."

The completion of the COVID-compliant operation marked another achievement for Brefni, following major awards in 2017 and 2018 for its Sydney Trains projects.

Founded in 1995, the Sydney company specialises in medium-sized NSW infrastructure projects valued up to \$20 million. At its core is a strong leadership team led by Brady, Fraser and CFO Robert McGill, ably backed by an innovative and enthusiastic collection of project managers, engineers, quantity surveyors, site supervisors, direct delivery staff and head office administration.

Brefni's mantra is "smarter and sharper", believing that its people and delivery methodologies are some of the smartest and sharpest in the industry. "We strive to lead the field in innovation and safety," says Brady.

An example of its approach was the Lambton Road Bridge reconstruction that saved Sydney Trains \$1 million, cut the work's timeframe by 25 per cent and avoided a weekend shutdown of a section of the busy Newcastle-to-Sydney rail line.

The company insists on learning from past experiences, looking continually to improve its project management processes to ensure clients and contractors work as one team, understanding fully the background and key deliverables of every project.

Key to this is its "Lessons Learnt" program, a

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Tom Brady

Brefni-led session for clients, contractors and other stakeholders at the outset of every project.

"The cultural focus on innovation and continual improvement – driven by senior management – and strategic business objectives led to project debriefs and 'Lessons Learnt' sessions being a core element of the delivery process," explains Brady.

"Lessons Learnt" so impressed Sydney Trains, it now holds monthly briefing sessions with Brefni and invited the company to speak to its suppliers.

"We use Lessons Learnt as a methodology to influence the timing and cost of the project. The innovation behind the Lambton Road Bridge [a finalist for 2019 PWI Ken Erickson Innovation Award] was built off the back of that," says Brady. Brefni's upgrade of the Sydney Trains Waterfall

Culvert was named 2017 AIPM National Small Project of the Year. Located in the Royal National Park, the site was within 250 metres of the section of track where the Waterfall Train disaster occurred in 2003. Sydney Trains had identified a risk that a severe weather event could catastrophically damage the rail infrastructure, calling for tenders to provide a solution.

With the need to install 3-metre diameter pipes nine metres below the track, the conventional thinking was to cut the tracks and, by means of open excavation, install large pipes before reinstating the tracks.

But this approach would have shut down the rail service for two weeks, a prospect Sydney Trains desperately wanted to avoid.

Instead, Brefni tunnelled underneath the tracks in a huge, but carefully planned and orchestrated operation.

"It took us a month to bore under those tracks, but we did it with no interruption to trains at all," says Brady. "On completion of the bore, we dismantled the boring machine and excavation plant and winched them back through the newly constructed tunnel."

"This sort of project, delivered in a critical space, has helped develop our reputation as a contractor of choice who can deliver very high-risk projects."

The satisfaction for Brefni is all too apparent. "We are building assets that deliver enormous value and our employees know and take great pride in that," says Brady.

"Infrastructure, at the end of the day, is something you can kick and touch and feel."



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