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THE TOWN THAT SAVED ITSELF - WHYALLA



Introduced by business reporter Alan Kohler

When the owner of the Whyalla steelworks went into administration two years ago, crippled by \$4 billion worth of debt, the future of the entire town was at risk.

Known as the place ‘where the outback meets the sea,’ Whyalla is a one company town where the steelworks is the only large employer.

“If the steelworks sneezes, Whyalla catches a cold. Two years ago, the steelworks got a coronary.” Stephen Stanley, cartoonist, Whyalla News.

With 3000 jobs on the line administrator Mark Mentha flew to South Australia to face the most challenging job of his career.



If Mentha could find someone to turn the ageing steelworks around, the town might be saved. If not, a community of 20,000 people would be left in the lurch.

“Our worst fear would be if the town was shut down... it’d be the end of life as I know it.” Larisa Waters, engineer and fourth generation steelworker

Mentha pitched a controversial plan for the entire workforce to take a 10 percent pay cut in the hope it would make the business attractive to buyers. Desperate to save their town and their livelihoods, workers agreed.

“I can throw my hands in the air and sulk... or I can throw myself at it with everything I’ve got.” Stuart Monroe, union representative and steelworker

Twelve months later, when British steel billionaire Sanjeev Gupta bought the company he paid tribute to the workforce.

“It was an amazing sacrifice, and it gave me confidence that if I bought this business, I would have a great force behind me to turn it round,” he told **Australian Story**. *“I would say that Whyalla is a town that saved itself.”*

The program features exclusive behind-the-scenes access with Sanjeev Gupta as he takes over the reins of the ailing steelworks and moves his young family from the UK to a grand mansion in Sydney. And in his first in-depth interview in Australia, he explains why he’s so attracted to the country and why he thinks manufacturing needs to draw on renewable energy to move forward.

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