

Journal Comment

Surface Mining September 2014

Two years have passed since the last Surface Mining Conference was held. At that time, optimism prevailed and the spectre of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) had blown away. Commodity prices were cresting a wave created from continued industrial expansion in China, and the mining industry looked set to right its floundering course on a global scale. Explorers and developers on the world's stock exchanges, whether juniors or majors, thrived and impressive joint ventures, mergers, and acquisitions were the order of the day.

In Africa, focus was turned on the resource potential of the eastern seaboard, with the coal sector in particular attracting the voracious appetite of international heavyweights like Brazil's Vale and Anglo-Australian Rio Tinto to engage in large-scale and costly acquisitions of resource assets in Mozambique.

Two years on and the industry has been beset by the legacy of the GFC, with risk-averse investors showing little appetite for projects in the minerals sector and commodity prices flat-lining. In southern Africa our labour environment has done little to create confidence for the international investor, and the regulatory environment has added to the uncertainty regarding security of tenure. Downsizing, rationalization, and sale of 'non-core' businesses have become the order of the day. Things have changed. The good times are gone. A more discerning and informed investor now prowls the halls of the stock exchanges, and those who seek to develop their projects will need to be at the leading edge of technology and innovation with quality, risk-mitigated assets.

More than ever, in order for mining companies to survive in this volatile global economy they will have to be efficient, focused, innovative, well managed, and demonstrate commitment to social and environmental responsibility. In the last decade mining companies have shown willing to develop some or all of these attributes, while governments and informed stakeholders have followed internationally accepted regulations on health and safety, environmental and social responsibility, and corporate governance.

The focus of Surface Mining 2014 was to share developments and best practice in surface mining. How do we mine faster, deeper, steeper, and cheaper while maintaining the highest safety and environmental standards? Industry operators, contractors, and suppliers were invited to share the challenges being faced, new trends being implemented, tools being used, and value-adding systems being applied to unlock potential in the minerals industry.

The objective of the conference was to provide a practical forum to showcase the direction in which the industry is moving in order to unlock current and future mineral potential. Presenters covered a wide spectrum of mining-related issues which showed an increasing impact on the future efficiency of surface mines and would stimulate thought and debate. It was hoped that the event would contribute to keeping surface mining in Africa viable and competitive in the world economy.

The success of the conference depended on financial backing from sponsors, authors of technical papers, referees, presenters, session chairmen, company-sponsored delegates, delegates, the SAIMM Secretariat, the SAIMM as the host organization, and members of the Organizing Committee. A special word of thanks is reserved for our sponsors.

For this edition of the *Journal*, eight papers on topics ranging from geology to strategy and mining technology to positive risk management have been selected to tempt you into accessing the full conference proceedings on the SAIMM website and gaining a better understanding of the surface mining sector.

J. Luckmann