

Journal Comment

The SAIMM biannual platinum conference was first convened in 2004 and has run regularly through to 2014. During this period the industry has moved through a number of challenges – from the global financial crisis to metal pricing spikes and troughs, labour unrest in the form of a crippling five-month strike in South Africa in the first half of 2014, and now sustained oversupply in the face of reduced demand associated with the slow recovery of the European markets and the cooling of the Chinese economy.

Despite this eleven-year rollercoaster journey it is still clear that platinum group metals (PGMs) are definitely the metals for the future. Aside from the obvious investment value of platinum and the other PGMs they are an essential part of modern life and can be found in a multitude of applications from autocatalysts to cardiac pacemakers, fertilizer production to food preservation, and fuels cells to jewellery. In fact, it is hard to find areas in which the PGMs have not improved the quality of life as we have come to accept it.

The PGMs are crucial to the energy and transportation sectors in establishing environmentally friendly technology, and the long-term outlook for PGM demand is positive. Evolving energy-efficient transport solutions, tightening

emission regulations, fundamental industrial applications, and sustained demand from the jewellery and investment sectors all indicate continued demand for these metals. Even at the current reduced global economic growth rates, rapidly urbanizing populations will inevitably require even greater quantities of PGMs. Increased recycling efficiency (the ‘urban mine’) will meet a portion of this demand, but demand for freshly mined PGMs will continue to grow, albeit at a slower rate than in previous decades.

Within this milieu of opportunity and challenge, the 6th International Platinum Conference: ‘Platinum – Metal for the Future’ held in October 2014 highlighted the market, technical, and social challenges faced by the industry while showcasing the depth of talent in the sector and evolving solutions to the many challenges.

For this edition of the *Journal*, seven papers on topics ranging from geosciences to strategy and mining technology to pyrometallurgy have been selected to tempt you into accessing the full conference proceedings on the SAIMM website and gain a better understanding of the industry that produces the ‘metal for the future’

G.L. Smith