



The second century is a choice



The SAIMM Pyrometallurgy International Conference convened in May 2026 under the theme Foundations for Competitiveness and Sustainability. The theme was chosen because, since 2014, more than 2.2 million tonnes of ferroalloy smelting capacity have been curtailed or closed. By early 2026, only 11 of 66 ferrochrome smelters were operating, while record tonnages of raw chrome ore left our ports — carrying with them the 80% of value that smelting would have captured at home. These facts are where sound engineering begins, and foundations are what must now be rebuilt.

Our community answered. For the first time, pyrometallurgy, furnace tapping, and refractories convened as three symposia in one gathering, under one SAIMM pyrometallurgy banner — a deliberate consolidation carrying a message to industry and government alike: foundations are laid together. One hundred and nine papers from fifteen countries filled the programme. The selection in this special edition shows a discipline that is alert, rigorous, and determined.

The week opened with the PyroFuZA Workshop — the Future of Pyrometallurgy in South Africa — where some fifty senior leaders from industry and government deliberated as equals. Every participant affirmed that this industry is worth saving; the overwhelming majority affirmed that it can be saved. And for the first time, a fifty-year horizon was accepted as meaningful: South Africa as a world leader in high-temperature science and technology. Work on the vision, roadmap, and five-year plan is now in preparation.

A century ago, Hendrik van der Bijl laid the foundations on which our industry grew: power, steel, and patient capital. Those foundations have expired. Our endowment has not. The richest ore bodies on earth still lie in our ground, demand for what we make keeps growing, and our people remain at the global frontier of the discipline. Together they will carry us to the fifty-year vision. What stands between decline and a second century is not thermodynamics. It is choices — made together, and made now.

Read these papers as working drawings for that second century. Then let us restart the engine room of our economy — together.

J. Zietsman

Chair: SAIMM Pyrometallurgy International Conference 2026