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Tschudi copper contract for B&E International in Namibia



Processing specialist B&E International's appointment as the BOO contractor for the crushing, agglomeration and stacking plant for the 17,000 t/y Tschudi copper project in northern Namibia represents a milestone in the company's strategic plan to build on its solid reputation as a contract crushing and mineral processing specialist in order to position itself as a leading engineering project service provider.

This contract, B&E International's first in the copper sector and its first installation on a greenfields mine, is also set to become its biggest engineering contract.

Tschudi will be an open-pit, heap leach, SX-EW project producing 99.99% pure copper cathodes on site. Awarded in the fourth quarter of 2013, the contract involves primary, secondary and tertiary crushing, agglomeration and plant maintenance as well as operation of the heap leach stacking process. The plant will process 2.1 Mt/y of copper ore on a BOO basis at the mine.

It is currently in the design phase and B&E International will shortly initiate the manufacture of ancillary plant equipment. All major capex items have been specified and procurement finalised, with site establishment likely to begin by May 2014. The plant must be fully operational by the end of December 2014.

About three years ago the company took a strategic decision to diversify its mining offering to include EPCM mineral processing plant, explains Ken Basson, director responsible for B&E International's Plant & Engineering Division. "We've amassed a vast pool of intellectual and mechanical resources that enable us to manage entire process solutions for our customers, from conception to commissioning and day-to-day operations, at very favourable rates in comparison to traditional project houses. Our competitive advantage lies in the fact that we've designed and operated plant for our own use for many years and this experience is incorporated into our design philosophy."

B&E International's first turnkey project was successfully completed in 2012 and involved design, manufacture, installation and commissioning of a 600 t/h dry coal processing plant for the African Exploration Mining and Finance Corp's Vlakfontein colliery in Mpumalanga. Basson says the successful delivery of this project is a clear indication of the company's ability to provide a single source service.

A subsequent major project saw the design, build, commissioning and handover of a complete turnkey aggregate processing plant for Raumix Aggregates. Similar smaller contracts have been executed in Namibia and South Africa for customers in the diamond industry over the past two decades.

"We're differentiated in the market by virtue of the fact that we can actually run the plants that we design, taking all the responsibility and risk for their performance," comments Dewald Janse van Rensburg, Managing Director, B&E International. "Our revenue stream is based on a certain level of production per month, so we design with reliability as a critical criterion."

"Another key driver is ease of plant maintenance. The less complex a plant, the more feasible it is to optimise its reliability. Plant reliability and operational efficiency are the cornerstones of our business. This includes the ability to come up with a purpose-built solution that takes into account the characteristics of the specific material to be processed. For instance, at Tschudi the copper ore has a high plasticity index and our design philosophy must take cognisance of this phenomenon in order to ensure that the processing plant operates at the required efficiency.

"The single source approach to mineral processing is becoming a trend in the mining industry, because it benefits clients by cutting through a lot of contractual complexity and ensures optimal efficiencies."