

# Nothing better than home-grown expertise

HENRY LAZENBY | FEATURES REPORTER

**T**he recession has left many mining houses wary of spending capital on new projects, leaving consulting engineers primarily working on existing projects that were deferred during that time.

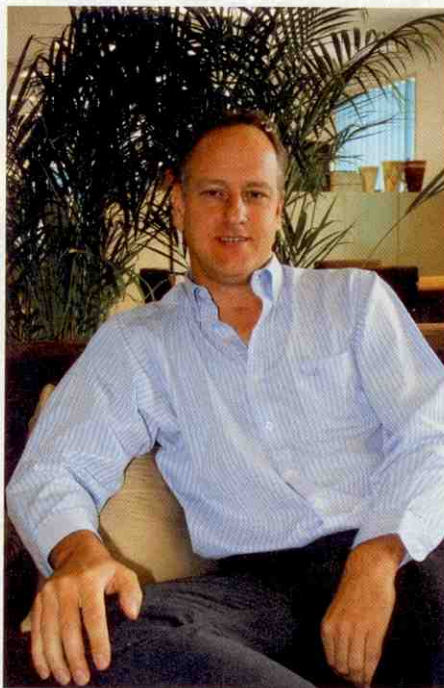
Coal and iron-ore consulting engineer ProMet Engineers Africa MD **Rob Bennett** says that the recession impacted on the business severely. He says that the company, unfortunately, had to resort to downsizing its core staff to cope with the economic strain of the past year. "Our project pipeline went down and anticipated projects were halted in their tracks owing to capital expenditure being deferred or cancelled," he says.

South Africa and Australia were equally hard-hit by the recession. It appears that African junior mining companies held back cash, owing to a pullback in their project development activities while blue-chip companies focused on matching their capital book with the broader changing strategic imperatives.

However, there is light at the end of the tunnel, as ProMet Engineers Africa is engaged in several active projects emanating from the private sector. One of these includes a large South African blue-chip client awarding ProMet a key role in a brownfield study for a coal mine relocation project

Meanwhile, business is looking up, with a marked upswing in the number of enquiries the company receives, with clients slowly returning to existing projects. But, he says, his company is yet to see the full extent of such projects coming through. "There is a lot of talk at present, but the future looks positive."

Bennett believes that the South African consulting engineering industry is not experiencing competitive pressures from similar companies from abroad doing



**ROB BENNETT**

ProMet Engineers Africa is optimistic that projects in the pipeline will go over to the implementation phase

work in Africa. He says there is nothing better than a consulting engineering firm operating on home soil, as it gives it the advantage of local knowledge. He says that the company has, in fact, experienced a sense of cooperation and willingness between local and foreign companies when doing work in Africa.

However, as the market is turning, Bennett says that his company finds it increasingly difficult to secure the services of experienced professional engineers, as South Africans remain highly sought after. Nevertheless, the ProMet group maintains a staff level of

about 60 people.

To add value to ProMet's activities in African countries, a separate entity, ProMet MEi, was created last year. This is the black-economic-empowerment- (BEE-) compliant model of the company for South Africa, and is a business model implemented by ProMet in Botswana and Nigeria. ProMet is satisfied that the partners chosen have been quickly assimilated into the ProMet model and have been able to add value and a technical offering to its clients and are indeed involved in the day-to-day activities and company operations.

Operating from Perth, Australia, and Cape Town, South Africa, ProMet Engineers provides project management, project development and feasibility study work, process plant design, engineering services and metallurgical consultancy services to minerals and metals industry clients.

In Australia, ProMet Engineers has specialist expertise in the agglomeration, pelletising and beneficiation of all types of iron-ores and other fine particulates, and has an intimate knowledge of all aspects of iron-making and steelmaking technologies, as well as the production of ferroalloys.

In Africa, ProMet Engineers' Cape Town team is its centre of excellence in engineering for the industrial and precious minerals industry, including diamonds, coal, gold and other minerals, using heavy-medium separation as the basis of the extraction process.

Apart from ferrous, industrial minerals, coal and chrome projects, the company has expertise in a range of nonferrous process industries, including gold, platinum, copper, lead, zinc, silver, mineral sands, nickel, potash, salt and uranium.

MINING WEEKLY COUPON ON PAGE 82 E190345

A man who hasn't been feeling too well for ages, goes to see his doctor.

After the checkup, the doctor studies the results.

"I'm afraid I have very bad news," the doctor says. "You're dying and don't have much time left."

"That's terrible," the man says. "How much time have I got?"

"Ten," the doctor says sadly.

"Ten what?" the man asks

"Nine . . ."