Great Dane is TMT's best friend

Vanadium hopeful Technology Metals Australia Ltd (TMT) has received its biggest endorsement to date with Danish export credit agency EKF expressing interest in providing financing support for the Murchison technology metals project (MTMP) in Western Australia.

According to a letter of interest addressed to TMT on January 18, EKF flagged a potential contribution of circa $150 million towards future development of the vanadium-rich project, subject to sufficient Danish economic interest in the MTMP and other terms and conditions.

TMT managing director Ian Prentice told **Paydirt** the company started liaising with EKF in late 2019, about a year after Danish company FLSmidth first emerged as the likely supplier of key equipment for the MTMP, including the all-important roasting kiln section.

Prentice said potential funding support from EKF was recognition for the multitude of work TMT has completed on the project over several years.

"For EKF to come out and provide that letter which we can put out into the public domain is a really big endorsement about where we are on that journey to production," he said. "It then gives other people we're talking to – whether that's customers or suppliers or even financiers – another layer of confidence around our ability to deliver this project."

Prentice added that while TMT always knew the connection between FLSmidth and EKF could open up financing options for the MTMP, it was never the primary reason for engaging with the former.

"First and foremost, we needed to be confident FLSmidth were cost competitive and best-in-class," he said. "We will buy equipment from them because they're the best in the business when it comes to providing equipment for vanadium circuits. They've got the runs on the board, they've got a long history with Largo [Inc, in Brazil] and for us that always has and always will be key."

Formal interest from EKF is the latest positive development for TMT, which ended 2022 on a high after executing a non-binding MoU with Indian steelmaking company Tata Steel Ltd regarding potential offtake of vanadium products. The company also delivered an updated resource of 153.7mt @ 0.8% V2O5 for the MTMP, including a maiden measured resource of 5.9mt @ 1% V2O5 and 11.2% titanium oxide for the Yarrabubba satellite deposit.

TMT and Tata will also investigate downstream collaboration with scope for joint development of ferrovanadium production facilities in Australia and India, as well as a potential investment by the world's 10th largest steelmaker at either company or project level, or both.

Prentice joined a WA Government-led trade mission to India last year and described the experience as an "eye opener".

"We see huge growth in not only Indian steel production capacity but also growth in the steel quality that's going to come out of India, which is going to have a two-fold impact on vanadium consumption – more steel is a straight line to requiring more vanadium," he said.

"The real eye opener for me when I went to India was the renewable energy that is deployed already and is going to be further deployed up to 2030. Some of

The MTMP vanadium resource now totals 153.7mt @ 0.8% V2O5

the stats that were thrown around I haven't verified, but they were talking about having more renewable energy capacity in India by 2030 than Europe would have.

"All the big brand name companies out of India have got these really large renewable energy divisions. Ultimately, they need storage to make all these things work more efficiently, so there's already massive awareness in India around the benefits of vanadium batteries. We haven't progressed into that per se, but that's where we see some really big opportunities."

TMT and its Japanese technology partner LE System Co Ltd continue to assess the production of vanadium electrolyte using vanadium products from the MTMP as part of an ongoing feasibility study for the development of the company's downstream vanadium electrolyte production capacity, including the potential rollout of vanadium redox flow battery (VRFB) long-duration stationary storage into the Australian energy market.

Another major area of focus for TMT in 2023 will be securing environmental approval for the MTMP. Prentice conceded the process has "not gone as quickly as we thought it might have" but remains adamant the company has progressed everything possible within its control.

"I made the comment at last year's Battery Minerals Conference that you don't have a project until you've got the approvals, and that's something which is very much front of mind for us," he said.

"We actually self-referred the project in late 2018, but the world has changed a lot since then in terms of what governments are expecting around emissions reduction, what the community is expecting around your social licence, etc.

"We're working with the EPA to make sure that when we get through that process, we've got a project that will stand up to all queries from all of the different stakeholders. On current reserves, we have a 25-year mine life, so if you add the lead-in time to that, it's a three-decade time commitment.

"If it takes a little bit longer to get there, we're prepared to invest in that time so that once we do get up and running, we've got all of that support for a very long time."

– Michael Washbourne