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Sponsors Flood P9 Review



Taking a closer look at outcomes from the JKMRC/AMIRA P9 project in Brisbane recently were Shane Milligan of Hamersley Iron, left, Frank Shi from JKMRC, Chris Mwaba of Pasminco and Peter Mills of Rio Tinto

Minerals sector representatives turned out in force to review one of the world's longest running research projects recently.

The Julius Kruttschnitt Mineral Research Centre's mineral processing (P9) project has grown exponentially since its modest start in 1962 on an abandoned silver mine at suburban Indooroopilly in Brisbane.

Since then the Centre has not only established a world wide reputation as a leader in comminution research, but has become Australia's pre-eminent postgraduate school for research in minerals processing and mining engineering, established in The University

of Queensland.

At the core has been Australian Mineral Industries Research Association (AMIRA) project P9, which recently added flotation to its comprehensive research portfolio, an acknowledged boost to a sponsors list that already reads like the who's who of world mining.

Representatives from RioTinto, EnviroTech, P.T.Freeport Indonesia, Gold Fields of South Africa and a host of Australian operated companies dropped in and stayed on for a first hand view of JKMRC's test work during the review.

AMIRA minerals processing research coordinator, David Stribley said he was delighted with the response to P9, now half way through its current four-year phase as P9L.

"The minerals industry certainly feels that the JKMRC has delivered significant research results over the years," Mr Stribley said.

"For more than 30 years, the JKMRC's P9 project has been the flagship for mineral processing research in Australia, and it keeps on getting bigger and better, delivering significant benefits for the sponsors."

As the project's research 'broker' the Australian Minerals Industry Research Association has watched P9 grow into a dynamic, multi-faceted program which now has a collaborative component with the University of Cape Town.

"An obvious highlight of the review was the synergy that exists between the JKMRC and the University of Cape Town as partners in flotation research," Mr Stribley said.

"I believe there is room for more Australian groups to join the JKMRC and UCT in flotation, now that the benefits from this work are starting to emerge."

He said demonstrated outcomes included the effect of bubble size in kinetics, and industry representatives at the review were clearly excited about it.

"You'll probably see the manufacturers, who are the joint sponsors of the project, implement some of these outcomes in the design of new equipment in the near future."

Mr Stibley also said recent successes in flotation were largely due to a successful 'marriage' between UCT and JKMRC, enhanced by the presence of J-P Franzidis who joined the JK 18 months ago from the Cape Town group.

"In recent times they've made strong advances in flotation engineering, picking up from the seminal work the JKMRC conducted in this

area during the 1970s."

South Africa's mineral processors have also started to take an interest in the work of the JKMRC flotation group, and the next challenge for the group would be to attract the interest of processors in North and South America.

Mr Stribley said there was considerable excitement about the things coming out the the JKMRC.

"They keep coming up with new projects which deliver new processing models and equipment that the industry can't turn away from."

Mr Stribley said it was no use doing the fundamental work without delivering a quantifiable improvement on processes used in the industry.

"The collaborative work between the JKMRC and UCT, for example, could revolutionise flotation equipment worldwide."

He said such work at the JKMRC and the UCT might reverse the trend towards bigger cells being accepted and used more efficiently.

"If you're building bigger cells you're also looking at smaller footprints for buildings and less pieces of equipment to operate. There are also energy efficiencies to be gained.

"I think there's room to improve upon the hydrodynamics in flotation and optimise equipment further."

He said that as the flotation work expanded, potential benefits to industry would also expand.

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