

Brinsden's backyard in the Pilbara

Ken Brinsden knows a thing or two about the Pilbara, but admits the lithium sector is foreign to him.

Nevertheless, Brinsden was chosen to be the main man at Pilbara Minerals Ltd late last year and will look to guide the emerging lithium player through to production at Pilgangoora in the near future.

"I don't profess to be a lithium expert, I have a lot to learn in that area but what I do know is the Pilbara and what it takes to get mines built there and to be honest it feels a bit like the backyard there for me," Brinsden told **Paydirt**.

"I know it really well and the people involved; key community groups, infrastructure providers and all that sort of thing, so I guess I can help there. Also, being able to create the link between the Pilbara [Minerals] resource in the ground and how people can take advantage of that in downstream markets."

Brinsden remains an executive director at Atlas Iron Ltd, where he was formerly managing director, so his contacts in key markets such as China will bring tremendous value to Pilbara Minerals.

A PFS on Pilgangoora is expected to be completed soon, while the company is continuing to conduct RC and diamond drilling to expand resources and define a mining reserve.

Last month, Pilbara Minerals announced a resource update of 80.2mt @ 1.3% lithium with 1.08mt of contained lithium, including 42.3mt @ 0.02% tantalum for 18.3 mlb contained tantalum.

The company already has the second largest hard rock lithium resource globally – behind Talison Lithium Pty Ltd's Greenbushes – and in time it could potentially have the biggest.

Through infill and step-out drilling, Pilbara Minerals has set an exploration target of 100-110mt @ 1.3-1.5% lithium and



A DFS at Pilgangoora is expected to be released mid-year

200-300 ppm tantalum.

Brinsden said expanding the resource was important, but it would mean little if there wasn't quality in it.

"We have a quality resource and we have that in spades," he said.

"We have a high-grade resource as far as global lithium is concerned and perhaps even more importantly we have already demonstrated some ability to hit the more sophisticated end of the lithium market regards a technical grade end product. That is a very important string to have in your bow. We have more work to do to prove up the orebody but we have made a really good start."

Lithium is definitely flavour of the month and is fast becoming popular with junior explorers down on their luck in more traditional commodities such as base metals.

Interest in lithium stems from a market strained tense by insufficient supply.

Therefore, unlike juniors currently pondering what lithium potential they do have in the ground, Pilbara Minerals is at the advanced stage of assessing how it will impact the supply story in the next few years.

A DFS is expected to be completed mid-year, with permitting, project funding and a decision to mine to follow by the end of 2016.

By then, investors at odds with the lithium space should be up to speed as to why there is so much hype in the market today.

"People have started to work out that the material supply is not there and that is why everyone is now scrambling for supply," Brinsden said.

"The institutional market hasn't had to be exposed to lithium in a big way, but because there is a fundamental shift globally in how we use power and store power and how that affects transport and power supply industries, the scale of the change is huge.

"We have a situation now where investment markets are rapidly trying to catch up to understand that change and it just so happens that lithium is an important link in that chain. It doesn't take long for investment markets to work it out. While there is a bit to learn they are very fast learners. Judging by the number of calls we have been fielding of late, they are going to get up to speed very quickly."

– Mark Andrews



Ken Brinsden



An exploration target of 100-110mt @ 1.3-1.5% lithium and 200-300 ppm tantalum has been set at Pilgangoora