

Expanding diamond exploration portfolio

Armed with what MD James Campbell terms as the ‘very best’ in modern diamond prospecting techniques, junior diamond explorer Botswana Diamonds continues to expand its portfolio in southern Africa, with a specific focus on ‘highly prospective’ Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. *By Munesu Shoko.*

Diamonds by their very nature are hard to find. To get started, you need three things: ground with potential, skilled explorers and the best technology. AIM and BSE listed junior diamond explorer Botswana Diamonds plc (BOD) has these three fundamentals in place.

In terms of skilled explorers, BOD is led by prominent names who have been there, done that, in the diamond mining industry – MD James Campbell and Chairman John Teeling. In fact, the two were part of a team that discovered the Karowe Diamond mine in Botswana, an operation where the second largest diamond ever was found in 2015, which speaks volumes of their experience and knowledge of the diamond mining industry.

Speaking to Modern Mining, Campbell says BOD deems southern Africa highly prospective, especially Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, where the company currently has a portfolio of tenements in highly prospective areas. In fact, Botswana is the

Drilling on the Maibwe project, Botswana.



James Campbell, MD of Botswana Diamonds.

world’s biggest diamond producer by value, and is a politically stable country with a favourable legislative environment.

Where the modern diamond industry began in the 1880s, unexplored potential remains in South Africa. For a long time, Campbell believes, South Africa has suffered from a lack of exploration effort. With a thorough review of historical records and sound local partners, BOD believes that excellent late stage exploration opportunities still exist.

“BOD views southern Africa to be highly



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prospective, and this includes Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe,” says Campbell. “This region produces a third of the world’s diamonds and is host to mega diamond mines like Orapa and Jwaneng. The Kalahari of Botswana is especially prospective due to the deep sand cover which requires modern diamond prospecting techniques to find the buried kimberlites.”

For Campbell, now is the perfect time to be making investments into new diamond exploration projects. He believes the diamond market is a powerful industry underpinned by a stable US market and an Asian demand potential, which is likely to drive future growth. This is complemented by a future price growth anticipated due to lack of significant new discoveries.

Growing Botswana portfolio

In Botswana, BOD has just expanded its exploration portfolio following the granting of six new Prospecting Licences by the Botswana Government. The new Prospecting Licences, PL017-018 of 2020 and PL066-069 of 2020 – awarded to Sunland Minerals, a wholly-owned subsidiary of BOD – are valid for three years until 31 March 2023. The licences cover an extensive area of 4 319 km² in the Central and Kgalagadi Districts, popularly known as the Kalahari.

Additionally, Sunland has just had its four existing Prospecting Licences PL001-004 of 2017 renewed by the Botswana Government. Covering a total of 1 406 km² in the Kgalagadi District, the licences



James Campbell during a field visit to the Marange concession, Zimbabwe.

have been renewed for a further two years until 31 March 2022.

Airborne and ground magnetic surveys from previous work conducted by Sunland Minerals on these licences have revealed well-defined targets and subsequent soil sampling over the targets identified heavy concentrations of Kimberlitic Indicator Minerals (KIMs) over the targets, particularly Chrome Diopsides, strongly suggesting an



Diamonds from the bulk sampling of the Thorny River project.



Left: Drilling on the Thorny River project, South Africa.



Kimberlite from the Marsfontein project, South Africa.

Top: Bulk sampling on the Marsfontein project, South Africa.

underlying kimberlite source.

Sunland Minerals has undertaken heavy mineral sampling and detailed geophysics in five of BOD's licences in the Kalahari. An analysis of the results has identified eight high-grade targets. Environmental assessment work is being undertaken on three of the targets, a requirement to obtain drilling permits, with current plans

calling for drilling in the second half of 2020.

"BOD is in the process of applying for an Environmental Management Permit to drill high priority targets in these Prospecting Licences," says Campbell. "These high priority targets were developed from detailed ground geophysical surveys followed by sampling for kimberlitic indicators. The targets had abundant kimberlitic indicators on top of high-grade geophysical targets, strongly suggesting a kimberlitic source."

Elsewhere, the Maibwe joint venture, in which BOD holds 15%, has been subject to significant delays due largely to the liquidation of the main partner, BCL, a state-owned copper producer. A new liquidator has been appointed and proposals are circulating, which would eventually lead to the resumption of work on four of the 10 licenses where drilling discovered a kimberlite with abundant microdiamonds.

"Last year a new liquidator was appointed, and we have been working closely with the liquidator to progress this important project," says Campbell. "We made two offers to buy out the majority partner in

Maibwe and are yet to receive any formal response. We, however, hope that we will receive feedback soon from the current liquidator. We are very keen to progress this project due to the exceptional microdiamond counts in one of the kimberlites drilled."

Commenting on the impact of Botswana's lockdown, which was in effect at the time of writing, Campbell says diamond exploration tends to be done in campaigns with drilling in the Kalahari targeting the winter months, so the necessary lockdown in Botswana would not have too much of an effect on BOD's projects.

South African ventures

Giving an update on South Africa, Campbell says drilling on the Marsfontein intersected kimberlite. The concession is contiguous to the former Marsfontein mine. A significant bulk sample of the kimberlitic ground has been recovered and sent for analysis.

"Following the successful drilling of kimberlite on the Marsfontein project, a large bulk sample was taken. This is safely kept at the mining contractor's yard, and will be processed once the lockdown is lifted in South Africa," says Campbell.

Elsewhere, exploration continues on BOD's Thorny River, which is adjacent to Marsfontein. Drilling in early 2020 did not intersect kimberlite. The site locations were selected using the latest, state-of-the-art technology. The data is being analysed and the techniques recalibrated to select the next tranche of drill sites. The targets are kimberlite pipes covered by a dolerite layer.

BOD also holds prospective ground in Palmietget, Mooikloof and the Free State. The ground contains diamondiferous kimberlite pipes. Given the ongoing focus on the Marsfontein and Thorny River

concessions, limited work is being undertaken here at present.

Zimbabwean update

BOD has for years been interested in the diamond potential of Zimbabwe. Significant early stage work has been undertaken to identify opportunities.

The prolific Marange diamond field is a target. BOD has a joint venture agreement with Vast Resources on a specific concession in the Marange field. The award of the licence has been imminent for a while now. The award of the licence will pave the way for rapid exploration, which will include trial mining.

Apart from Marange, BOD has continued to examine other brownfield kimberlite opportunities.

“We have been advised by Vast Resources that it had received formal communication that all internal processes leading to the conclusion of the Chiadzwa Community Joint Venture were expected to be finalised during March, and the company’s announcement of 23 March confirmed this expectation,” says Campbell.

Following the 23 March 200 announcement, Campbell says the Zimbabwe Government then declared a 21-day lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, commencing 30 March 2020.

Consequently, the finalisation process could not be completed in March, but is expected to be complete shortly after things return to normal.

Commenting on Zimbabwe, Campbell says the country is a highly prospective destination for diamonds, not only because it lies in the highly prospective southern African region, but also because very little modern diamond exploration activity has taken place there. “This is now changing under the new leadership of Zimbabwe, which is gradually opening the country up for business,” concludes Campbell. ■

Key takeaways

- ❑ BOD deems southern Africa highly prospective, especially Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe, where the junior diamond explore currently has a portfolio of tenements in highly prospective areas
- ❑ In Botswana, BOD has just expanded its exploration portfolio following the granting of six new Prospecting Licences by the Botswana Government
- ❑ Drilling on the Marsfontein project in South Africa intersected kimberlite. The concession is contiguous to the former Marsfontein mine. A significant bulk sample of the kimberlitic ground has been recovered and sent for analysis
- ❑ BOD has for years been interested in the diamond potential of Zimbabwe. Significant early stage work has been undertaken to identify opportunities. ■



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