

Plentiful progress stoushes stigma

by Fraser Palamara

As the chief executive of Guinean gold explorer Polymetals Resources Ltd, Alex Hanly has to fight a negative stigma towards operating in Africa “all the time”. But that attitude hasn’t deterred him or his team from accomplishing what they’ve always set out to do.

“I get it all the time. If it’s not from family and friends, it’s from retail punters,” Hanly told GMJ. “From a West African perspective, I probably get more of, ‘it’s West Africa, everything is the same’. But, for example, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso couldn’t be any further apart from what I’ve talked to people about.”

“It’s definitely a learning process and it’s something I’ll continually educate people on. But there is a stigma, there’s people that don’t like the sovereign risk and that’s completely understandable.”

Polymetals’ projects in Guinea include Alahine and Mansala in the Siguiri Basin, which is renowned for having its gold hidden under laterite cover, often proving an unforgiving landscape for budding geologists.

A year on from Polymetals’ debut to the ASX and Hanly thinks the company has found its footing in Guinea.

“It’s been a big 12 months since we’ve listed,” he said. “We’ve completed close to 13,000-14,000m of RC and aircore drilling, we’ve done about 15,000m of auger drilling and two airborne magnetic surveys. Coupled with ongoing pit sampling and undertaking XRF tests, we’ve have a huge headstart in regard to the amount of data we’ve generated over the past 12 months.

“It has helped us to define our strategy and that strategy was surrounding that Siguiri-style mineralisation and by that, I mean the Siguiri mine operated by AngloGold [Ashanti Ltd] 35km west of us.”

AngloGold’s Siguiri mine commands a 6.38 moz resource and employs more than 3,000 workers, including contractors.

“It’s a bulk tonnage type operation, low strip ratio, high volume and modest grade,” Hanly said. “I think they’re currently milling about 0.8 g/t and the overall resource they’re currently drilling is around the 1.1 g/t range. I think it was good for us to peg expectations around the realities of the region.”

Expectations of grade were beaten earlier this year when Polymetals recorded its best hole yet with 16m @ 3.01 g/t at Alahine. Other successful intercepts included 7m @ 5.78 g/t, 4m @ 10.62 g/t, 4m @ 3.77 g/t and 3m @ 4.14 g/t.

This Phase 3 drilling programme has supported a 1.7km strike of mineralisation at Alahine. Hanly called the campaign a success.

“We’ve been able to continually improve on our results,” he said. “Phase 3 was a success but it has also confirmed the strategy of this modest grade, low-strip ratio, bulk tonnes is real. All we need to do now is continue our methodical approach and systematically drill out in between our line spacings which is 200m apart, quite large gaps.”

Polymetals was also measuring for pathfinder elements – such as silver, arsenic and antimony – using pXRF readings and was planning its next drill programme at the time of print.

“We need to delineate an economic resource within the oxide layer before we start drilling a little bit deeper at this stage,” Hanly explained.

Peers in the Siguiri Basin that have delineated an economic deposit include Predictive Discovery Ltd which estimated a 3.65 moz @ 1.56 g/t maiden resource for its Bankan project.

Hanly believes such success has contributed to an improving view on Guinean exploration.

“I get calls from a lot of smaller investment institutions in and around Melbourne and predominantly Perth,” he said. “They’re interested in the story and have invested in similar projects through the likes of Predictive. They like Guinea as a jurisdiction.”

“I think people like to see progress and in the last 12 months we’ve done nothing short of progress our projects quite aggressively.”

Alex Hanly celebrated the opening of a water bore with locals in Guinea earlier this year

