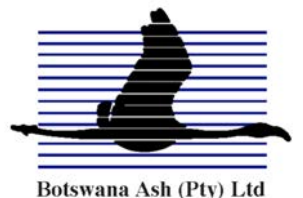


THE MAGAZINE WITH INSIGHT

BUSINESSFOCUS

「**BOTSWANA ASH** AFRICA'S SODIUM SUPPLIER OF CHOICE」





BOTSWANA ASH (PTY) LTD COMMONLY KNOWN AS BOTASH, THE LARGEST PRODUCER OF NATURAL SODIUM PRODUCTS IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN REGION, IS COMMEMORATING 30 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS.

AFRICA'S SODIUM SUPPLIER OF CHOICE

PROJECT MANAGED BY: TREVOR GRETSINGER

Botash, the leading supplier of salt and soda ash in southern Africa, has been at the forefront of its industry for three decades, with its range of sodium products sold across the sub-continent.

Botash's nameplate production capacity for soda ash is 300,000 tonnes per annum and for salt approximately 650,000 tonnes per annum. However, the production of salt currently stands at some 420,000 tonnes

per annum, in line with market demand. Variants of salt offered include chemical grade, food grade, coarse salt and fine salt. On the other hand, soda ash comes in light and dense form.

We are known for reliability and high quality - those are our unique selling points," says the company's Managing Director, Mr Kangangwani Phatshwane, pointing out that the products are used in various industries and sectors of the economy, including industrial and human consumption. These products

go into a range of applications like in the processing of food, paper, manufacture of beverage packaging, building glass, automotive screens, metallurgical sector particularly cobalt and vanadium processing.

He affirms that the company's business model entails developing products that contribute significantly to social needs while at the same time contributing to the sustainable economic development of the country and the continent. >>




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“OUR BUSINESS MODEL ENTAILS DEVELOPING PRODUCTS THAT CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO SOCIAL NEEDS WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CONTRIBUTING TO THE **SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY.**”

THREE DECADES OF OPERATION

Located on the Sua Pan Spit in the north-eastern part of Botswana, the company is owned by the Government of the Republic of Botswana and Chlor Alkali Holdings (Pty) Ltd (CAH), incorporated in the Republic of South Africa, at 50 % shareholding each.

Botash began its operations in April 1991, and over the three decades has become the largest producer of natural sodium products in the region. In the past, all activities of the mine were undertaken at Sua Pan but today Botash has increased its footprint with a fully operational office in South Africa through the presence of Botswana Ash South Africa (Pty) Ltd (Botash SA), a sister company, which deals primarily with the sales and distribution of Botash products in that country.

Throughout its development, the company has overcome several significant challenges including unfair trading by some competitors, which had to be resolved in a 10-year long court case, and a huge flood in 1995 which resulted in the closure of the operation for several months.

The most recent challenge, unsurprisingly, has been the



Soda Ash warehouse. ▾



COVID-19 pandemic, which cut revenues by 50% in April last year. “Now we are more or less back to normal, although the virus has affected our employees both directly and indirectly as a result of travel restrictions,” admits Mr Phatshwane.

“Our focus in 2021 will be to consolidate recovery from COVID-19, to grow our salt business as well as to progress our product development initiatives. We remain positive in our ability to weather the COVID-19 storm, by maintaining the framework developed in 2020, which prioritises the protection of our employees, cash conservation, and revenue lines,” he said. ➤

SUSTAINABLE MINING

Botash is the largest private-sector employer in north-eastern Botswana with a workforce of more than 450 and 200 contractors. The company offers ongoing training opportunities for its staff in a sector where competition for skills is intense.

“When recruiting new staff, we tend to look not only at qualifications but at what the candidates have achieved and how and if that aligns with our business model and values,” says Mr Phatshwane. “We are aware of the value of our employees and invest a lot in staff training and support of their families, including education - we run several facilities from pre-school to secondary schools for the children of our employees.”

Within its CSR policy, Botash also supports governmental schools, the local football team (which has made it to the Premier League, and that from the smallest town in the country) and helps to maintain biodiversity in the area where the company operates, including running a small game park, which serves as a habitat for several endangered species including the rhino.

Botash has taken a proactive stance towards the environment since its very early days and has aligned itself with the ISO 14000 international environmental standard. Examples of its commitment to the natural environment include the power cables from the spit to the wellfield, which it buried underground to prevent interference with the flight path of local flamingos between their feeding and breeding grounds.

Botash also acts to ensure that effluents are carefully contained and impounded so that contaminants do not enter



Stacker and reclaimer machines feeding to the stockpile.

“WE ARE AWARE OF THE VALUE OF OUR EMPLOYEES AND INVEST A LOT IN STAFF TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF THEIR FAMILIES, INCLUDING EDUCATION.”

the underground water system and has a water stewardship programme in place to make sure water is not wasted. All these initiatives sit neatly under the Sustainable Mining Initiative which the company adopted last year.

DRIVING THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY

Botash trades primarily in the Southern African Development

Community (SADC) region i.e., the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana. South Africa is the primary market for industrial products.

Mr Phatshwane explains that as a way of minimizing the risk that comes with depending on a narrow product base, new products and lines of business are under development, to diversify the company's revenue streams. These new products will leverage the business's manufacturing and marketing capabilities while increasing scale and relevance in its chosen markets.

Botash intends to invest in refurbishing the existing plant on the Sua Pan. In addition, the company is developing a

sulphate of potash (a form of fertilizer) manufacturing facility which will be the first of its kind in Africa, a project the company is very excited about, says Mr Phatshwane.

“Our company is now the largest business in north-eastern Botswana, a region with a proud and long history of mining. However, the relative decline of other minerals, including gold and nickel, makes our business stand out.”

“We bring significant value to this part of the country and the entire economy. Our vision is to be a market leader in the production and supply of high-quality natural sodium and related products, continuing to be one of the flagship enterprises of Botswana's growing economy,” he concludes. ☺



Calciner decomposing sodium bicarbonate into soda ash.



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