

Bougainville Copper Limited Opposed Strongly by Landowners at Warden's Hearing

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Subiaco, Western Australia (FSCwire) - The Board of [RTG Mining Inc.](#) (RTG; the Company) (TSX Code: RTG, ASX Code: RTG) is pleased to provide an update on the Warden's Hearing for [Bougainville Copper Ltd.](#) (BCL) held in Panguna yesterday. Despite BCL not having been to Panguna in over 28 years (given landowners had refused to even allow them access), to ensure a full and fair hearing amongst the Special Mining Lease Osikayang Landowners Association members, Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) representatives, including the Warden and BCL, the landowners in a show of good faith allowed BCL access on this special occasion (despite BCL not having followed custom).

At the outset, it is important to acknowledge the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG) representatives on the day being the Warden and Mining Registrar conducted an orderly forum, ensuring both the opposition to BCL and its supporters were given an opportunity to express their views.

BCL has stated it lodged a compliant extension application for Exploration Licence (EL) 1 in July 2016, which legal advice to the SMLOLA states was not validly lodged. Based on this legal advice, the SMLOLA filed an objection to the extension application with the Warden stating it is invalid because it was submitted out of time and was incomplete which means that the EL expired 15 months ago. This was also consistent with statements to the SMLOLA members on several occasions by the ABG confirming they had not received an extension application from BCL, as early as 8 September 2016. Interestingly BCL's position only yesterday changed, within just four days, suggesting now that it was not processed on time, blaming the ABG.

Despite the right to do so, the SMLOLA chose not to stop the Warden's Hearing yesterday as it was keen to give its members the opportunity to speak their mind, given the depth of emotion behind their views. The purpose of the Warden's Hearing was to determine whether the purported extension application by BCL has the necessary support of the SMLOLA members, being the owners of the minerals and customary land within the EL boundary.

SMLOLA's objection is only one of in excess of 100 formal written substantive objections lodged in respect of the Extension Application. Other objections call on the ABG to cancel BCL's EL pursuant to the ABG's own Notice to Show Cause dated 21 July 2016, based on a blatant breach (admitted by BCL) of section 112(1) of the Mining Act because RioTinto transferred more than the statutory maximum 25% shareholding without seeking the ABG's approval. Another objector lodged a Petition with 2,000 supporters expressing opposition to BCL. Another objector points out that BCL's EL was granted without consent or compensation to the customary landowners and therefore constitutes the unfair (and unconstitutional) deprivation of their lawful property. Other objections make the point that BCL was granted a 2 year EL, but was unable to gain landowner consent and access before its expiry on 7 September 2016, having made no progress on the redevelopment during the full 2 year term.

The Warden's Hearing was held yesterday, with a strong majority held message from the SMLOLA members, they will never grant BCL access to their lands and do not support an extension of BCL's previous EL1 or the grant of a new EL to them.

This position was also supported by a Petition, signed and supported by around 2,000 members of the SMLOLA stating 'No to BCL Forever'; which demonstrates the position of many of the landowners.

All those who supported BCL, for the most part, were calling on BCL to compensate them for the past

atrocities which they hold BCL accountable for, which to date BCL have neither accepted nor compensated them.

Update on Recent Media Comments

Following on from the announcement on 5 December 2017 confirming the resolution of the Leadership dispute over the SMLOLA in favour of Mr Philip Miriori, we can now advise that the discontinuance papers have also been lodged with the Court, bringing the dispute to a formal end.

Since that announcement, media publicity has demonstrated a lack of understanding of the new Bougainville Mining Act (Mining Act) introduced in 2015, which is understandable given this is the first time many of the provisions are being applied and considered.

RTG has taken extensive legal advice and wishes to provide its understanding of how the Mining Act applies to the Panguna Mine area and to provide an update on matters related to the previous BCL exploration licence (BCL's EL) over that area and the application for an exploration licence by the joint venture company with the SMLOLA (SMLOLA's ELA) over the same area.

The Mining Act is both new and unique, with significant changes from the PNG Mining Act (which formerly applied to mining on Bougainville). Understandably, all stakeholders, including both the landowners and the ABG are still in the process of working through the implications of the key changes. As a result, it is therefore understandable in this learning process that there may be different interpretations and views expressed prior to determining what is allowed for under the new Mining Act.

What is absolutely clear however is that the Mining Act has expunged the State ownership of mineral rights in Bougainville (which applied under the PNG Mining Act) and conferred ownership of them, not on the ABG but on customary landowners. All minerals are owned by the customary landowners whose land contains the minerals. In the case of the old 1.5bt[1] Copper-Gold Panguna Mine, the SMLOLA members are the customary landowners.

However, the role of the ABG is also important. It is the administrator of the Mining Act and the regulator - an independent umpire that is responsible for issuing mineral exploration licenses and mining leases, in accordance with that Act, in a manner which is both fair and impartial, to assist the landowners to ensure both their interests, and the interests of all Bougainvilleans, are properly protected in the process.

SMLOLA's ELA embodies the very rights conferred on the customary landowners under the new Mining Act, allowing them to take control of their property (being the minerals at the old Panguna Mine) and their destiny (being the conditions on which access is permitted to their land for exploration and mining).

SMLOLA and RTG respect the ABG's role as the independent regulator to fairly and impartially grant and administer exploration licenses. Contrary to recent false allegations published in the media, the SMLOLA plan for the Panguna Mine has been developed over the last 5 years, in full consultation with the ABG. This included full and comprehensive briefings to President Momis (over 20 meetings) and the two previous Mining Ministers of the ABG, to ensure the plan had the ABG's support. Following a suggestion of the ABG, it also included flying a number of ABG Ministers to the Masbate Mine in the Philippines (being the last mine developed by the RTG Management) in late January this year.

The ABG was fully supportive of the SMLOLA plan until a sudden change in March this year, with the appointment of the new Mining Minister who then expressed support for BCL, the previous operator of the Panguna Mine.

The consortium of the customary landowners was only established after 30 years of inactivity at Panguna without resolution or compensation by BCL for any of the major environmental and social damage and human misery resulting from it. SMLOLA's ELA is the only application that has the required support of the customary landowners. SMLOLA has confirmed they remain committed to working co-operatively with the ABG, fully respecting their role in the process, ensuring all Bougainvilleans and the ABG also benefit from the redevelopment.

RTG accepts that, in representing the owners of the land and the minerals contained within it, the SMLOLA executive are charged with the responsibility of seeking to commercialise their mineral ownership interests in a manner that protects the members, a role which RTG can see they take very seriously. This has been a full time job for the executive, which has also required the employment of a team of landowners to assist in negotiations, awareness campaigns and protecting the members's rights. For this Central has ensured these persons have been fairly compensated on arms's length terms in an honest and transparent manner and at normal commercial rates. The ABG were in fact advised of that plan long ago (before the current Mining Minister's appointment, which may explain the confusion) and expressed no concerns.

1 Refer to BCL's JORC 2012 Statement released to ASX on 7 February 2013, available at <http://www.asx.com.au/asxpdf/20130207/pdf/42cx2byq5n5lkg.pdf>. This historical estimate only refers to Indicated Resources. If the SMLOLA proposal is successful, a compliant NI 43-101 report needs to be completed by RTG to upgrade and/ or verify the historical estimate as a current Mineral Resource.

We fully understand that this is the first time that many of these issues are being considered by all stakeholders and the Mining Minister is new to his appointment, without perhaps having the benefit of knowing the many years of work that have been done with former Mining Ministers. Accordingly, if we can help in any manner, we confirm again we are more than willing to assist as required.

As set out in our earlier announcement, RTG's board is pleased to see that the leadership challenge by Mr Daveona, who was being supported by the ABG and BCL, has now been resolved, with Mr Miriori being confirmed as the Chairman of the SMLOLA. The SMLOLA leadership have confirmed they now look forward to working with President Momis and the ABG, as promised, in a collegiate manner to resolve, in the best interests of all Bougainvilleans, any differences of interpretation of the Mining Act and its proper application.

ABOUT RTG MINING INC

[RTG Mining Inc.](#) is a mining and exploration company listed on the main board of the Toronto Stock Exchange and Australian Securities Exchange Limited. RTG is focused on a proposal with a landowner lead consortium to secure an exploration licence at the high tonnage copper-gold Panguna Project in Bougainville PNG and the high grade copper/gold/magnetite Mabilo Project in the Philippines, while also identifying major new projects which will allow the Company to move quickly and safely to production.

RTG has an experienced management team which has to date developed seven mines in five different countries, including being responsible for the development of the Masbate Gold Mine in the Philippines through [CGA Mining Ltd.](#), and has B2Gold as one of its major shareholders in the Company. B2Gold is a member of both the S&P/TSX Global Gold and Global Mining Indices.

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