

Supplier takes iron grip

Staff reporter, [14 July 2010](#)



Drilling at BC Iron's Nullagine iron ore project in Western Australia's Pilbara region.

NEW Western Australian iron ore miner BC Iron's search in the first half of this year for geological and mine planning software to meet its needs ended up bypassing regular sector picks. But mining engineer Joel van Anen says the extensive market review produced the outcome the company was looking for. While still only halfway through the implementation phase, van Anen believes MineSight from Mintec best met the needs of the Pilbara miner, which is expected to commence production at its Nullagine project later this year.

"I started with BC Iron in February and one of my first projects was to review the software out there and see if there was a better solution to what we had," van Anen told **HighGrade**.

"Ideally we were looking for the one software package that could do everything we needed, from geology right through to mine planning, and the review indicated the other available packages probably weren't going to be able to meet these needs. It just makes things easier if everyone is using the same bit of software: you don't have the geos using one thing, the mine surveyors using another, and the mining engineers using something else. Just for efficiencies it's better to use the one.

"Scheduling was one area that the MineSight product stood out in that it was going to do exactly what we needed it to do. It's common that companies will end up purchasing separate scheduling software to meet their needs. I'll be doing a lot of the medium-to-long term mine scheduling and mine design work from Perth, and our site engineer will be using it for all the short term design and scheduling work as well."

A Wollongong, New South Wales, born and bred mining engineer who started his career with Rio Tinto before spending 2.5 years with Barrick Gold Corporation in Australia and then joining BC Iron, van Anen said he had no previous experience with MineSight but had worked with a range of other software packages. He'd got a recommendation from a colleague to include it in his review.

While similarities between popular geological and mining planning software products are well documented, van Anen said MineSight had some useful technical features apart from its spread of functionality and advanced scheduling capability, and was price-competitive.

"One [feature] is its LGO [Large Gridded Object] functionality, where you can bring in a large dataset as a gridded object and use it in your planning," he said. "It's good for us because our project is spread over such a large area [and] we can use that LGO function to bring in our

topographical data, which makes it immediately available for anyone to use in their work. And that's something the others didn't seem to have.

"I would also say in terms of training requirements – was it going to be something that was easy to pick up? – MineSight definitely ticked that box. It compares well in that regard with some of the other products out there.

"I like their overall focus on software development. They didn't try to push anything else that we weren't really looking for at the time, and they've provided very good technical support including during the implementation phase.

"And I think, in terms of development and innovation going forward, they've definitely got a good project pipeline to develop the product."

Asked about software support expectations, van Anen said he believed companies like BC Iron were looking for 24-hour support and a "quick response on anything that's going wrong".

Mintec regional business development manager Mark Gabbitus said the BC Iron software sale gave important impetus to the company's push into the WA iron ore market.

"MineSight is being used by consultants in a number of new Mid West iron ore projects for feasibility studies so we are hoping that the BC Iron sale will lead these guys to look at us as well as the usual options," he said.

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