Escondida Professional Recognized in the United Kingdom as an Inspiring Woman

SOLANGE PÉREZ. The Maintenance Manager of BHP's Coloso Port has been selected from among 1,348 nominees in the Women in Mining UK 2024.

El Mercurio de Antofagasta. November 27, 2024.

Women in Mining UK 2024 has released the latest edition of its list of the "100 Global Inspirational Women in Mining," highlighting Solange Pérez Marín, Maintenance Manager at Coloso Port. Now in its sixth year, the event honors women from around the globe whose work has had a significant impact on the mining industry. The initiative also aims to inspire new generations to join the sector.
This year, WIM UK received 1,348 nominations representing 570 individual women from 59 countries. The institution's team worked for over six months to select the finalists, one of whom is Pérez, a professional from Escondida | BHP. The award ceremony is scheduled for this Wednesday.

CAREER PATH

Pérez holds a degree in General Accounting and a professional engineering degree in Management Control from Arturo Prat University. She also holds a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) in Mining from the University of Chile. Throughout her career, she has taken on various leadership and management roles in administration and maintenance.
She joined Escondida in 2016 as an Engineer for External Repairs and Reliability. She later advanced to Superintendent of Contract Administration for Concentrator Plants, Superintendent of Maintenance, and her current position as Maintenance Manager at Coloso Port.
Her career is distinguished by strong leadership, fostering inclusive and diverse work environments, and sharing her expertise with future professionals and young innovators from local universities.

SOLANGE PÉREZ HOLDS A PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERING DEGREE IN MANAGEMENT CONTROL.

Path to Major Mining: Capstone Copper Launches Project to Extend Mantoverde's Lifespan

After investing $870 million in the development project for the mine located in Chile's Atacama Region, the Canadian-owned company celebrated a key milestone in its journey to transition from medium to large-scale copper mining.

Pulso, By Víctor Guillou, reporting from Chañaral

The Canadian mining company Capstone Copper officially launched the Mantoverde Development Project (PDMV) on Tuesday. This initiative will ensure continued operations at the Mantoverde mine in the Atacama Region, following a total investment of $870 million.

The project was financed by several international investment banks, including Société Générale, ING, Natixis, BNP Paribas, Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, and Chilean bank Bci. It will enable sulfide ore extraction in the open-pit mine, which previously only processed oxide minerals. With the construction of a new concentrator plant and the expansion of a desalination facility, this combined production method will not only extend the mine's lifespan by approximately 25 years but will also increase annual copper production from 36,000-40,000 tonnes to around 120,000 tonnes.

Capstone Copper holds a 70% ownership stake in Mantoverde, with its Japanese partner Mitsubishi Materials Corporation owning the remaining 30%. Mantoverde joins Mantos Blancos in the Antofagasta Region as Capstone's key operations in Chile, together accounting for 51% of the company's global copper output.

Capstone also operates Pinto Valley in Arizona, USA, and Cozamin in Zacatecas, Mexico. The company, with a strong focus on copper, aims to become a major player in the supply of this critical mineral for the global energy transition.

"This project is vital because it represents the future potential of the emerging medium-scale mining sector in the country. By leveraging advanced and modern technologies, we have extended the lifespan of a deposit that was nearing its end, boosting its productivity and profitability, which will allow us to continue contributing economically to the region," said John Mackenzie, CEO and director of Capstone Copper.

Mackenzie, who previously led Anglo American's copper business in Chile, was instrumental in the company's entry into the country in 2015 under the name Mantos Copper, which rebranded to Capstone Copper in 2022. Over the past nine years, he has ensured operational continuity at both Mantoverde and Mantos Blancos, with investments exceeding $1 billion.

"A significant achievement is that when we acquired these operations in Chile, the previous government's plan was to shut down Mantoverde by 2019 and Mantos Blancos by 2021. Personally, it's immensely satisfying to have secured employment for this outstanding team for at least another 25 years. I'm confident we will continue to extend the lifespan of both operations," Mackenzie emphasized.

Capstone's objective is to continue growing and eventually compete among the major mining players in Chile.

"Chile is the most important country for Capstone Copper, as most of our future investments and growth are focused on the Antofagasta Region with Mantos Blancos and the Atacama Region with Mantoverde, followed by our Santo Domingo project," Mackenzie highlighted at Tuesday's event.

The Santo Domingo project will be Capstone's first greenfield project in Chile. The company's previous successes have involved transforming brownfield sites, turning old, high-cost mines into competitive, long-life operations.

"With a stronger technical team and greater financial capacity, our ability to build the Santo Domingo project in Diego de Almagro is now a reality," Mackenzie stated. "We want to be a key player in developing the next generation of copper mines, producing sustainably for a world where this mineral will be increasingly essential for industries fighting climate change."

Naoki Ono, CEO of Mitsubishi Materials Corporation (MMC), also attended the event and emphasized that the Mantoverde expansion will "significantly contribute to the copper supply chain for many years to come, with copper now recognized as essential for global decarbonization. We are thrilled to be part of this long-term project that will connect Chile with the rest of the world and support global economic growth."

Chile's Mining Minister, Aurora Williams, who was also present at the launch, stressed the importance of expanding existing projects.

“Developing mining operations for over 100 years is only possible because of favorable investment conditions, but also because we have human resources, the development of nearby communities, and solid connectivity infrastructure. These factors make it possible to extend the lifespan of this operation, which already has strong ties to the region,” the minister stated.

SQM Hits Back at Albemarle in Environmental Dispute Over Atacama Salt Flats

After the U.S.-based Albemarle requested that the SEA review both companies' permits due to a significant variation in the aquifer's water table, SQM, linked to the Pampa Group, responded by seeking to dismiss the request. In a filing, SQM noted ongoing sanctions against both companies by the SMA and argued that Albemarle does not qualify as a "directly affected" party to trigger the RCA review process.

Pulso, By Víctor Guillou

The two lithium operators extracting from the Atacama Salt Flats—SQM and Albemarle—are locked in a fierce environmental battle that could even threaten their operations. This clash erupted after Albemarle submitted a request to Chile's Environmental Assessment Service (SEA) on May 30, asking for a review of both companies' permits under Article 25 quinques of the Environmental Basis Law. Albemarle cited a "substantial variation" in the aquifer's water table, a key environmental variable under their 2016 RCA (Environmental Qualification Resolution).

The issue surfaced when water levels at one of the three monitoring points remained below the threshold for three consecutive months, triggering the Early Warning Plan (PAT) outlined in their RCA. This prompted Albemarle to commission a technical report from consultancy Hidromas, which concluded that the aquifer's dynamics were influenced by multiple factors, requiring further investigation. Albemarle claims that brine extraction by both companies contributes to this issue, with SQM's impact being more significant.

"Given that the brine level decreases in the core area are largely attributable to SQM's historical extractions, it is evident that the environmental predictions in RCA 226/2006 have not materialized, warranting a review of SQM's RCA alongside our RCA No. 21/2016," Albemarle argued.

Albemarle also emphasized that "the synchronous decline in the core and aquifer areas, largely driven by SQM's activities, imposes a constant, exclusive burden on us to activate our Early Warning Plan, resulting in significant negative production impacts." The U.S. firm pointed out that SQM's RCA does not require contingency plans because it assumed a "zero impact" scenario, which Albemarle claims is inaccurate.

SQM's Response

On October 2, SQM countered Albemarle's request, filing a motion to declare the RCA review inadmissible. SQM argued that the issue is already being addressed in an Environmental Impact Study (EIA) submitted to the same authority.

SQM highlighted ongoing sanctions against both companies by the Environmental Superintendency (SMA). Albemarle faces proceedings initiated in March 2022 for exceeding its authorized brine extraction limit of 444 liters per second between January 2019 and September 2020 and failing to comply with PAT measures in March 2021. SQM, on the other hand, detailed its own 2016 sanction process involving six violations, ranging from minor to severe. These led to a compliance program approved in June 2023, currently under execution, including the submission of an EIA for its "Extraction Reduction Plan in the Atacama Salt Flats" in January 2022.

SQM contends that this EIA addresses the same issues raised by Albemarle, rendering the latter's request redundant. SQM further dismissed Albemarle's claim of a "substantial variation" in the aquifer, arguing that Albemarle provided no concrete evidence, only speculative concerns about the aquifer's behavior.

Additionally, SQM questioned Albemarle's standing to initiate the RCA review, criticizing its competitor's motives: "The petitioner explicitly seeks to modify the PAT activation criteria due to 'significant negative production impacts' stemming from frequent activations of this instrument."

A Regional Director Removed

The SEA proceedings began under Ramón Guajardo Perines, former regional director for Antofagasta, who was later dismissed following his controversial decision to terminate Colbún's $1.4 billion Paposo Pumping Plant project.

Before his departure, Guajardo informed the SMA that both SQM and Albemarle were under investigation for violations, requesting a formal SMA assessment of whether there was a direct link between the breaches and the environmental variables in question. This request, submitted on August 29, remains unanswered.
Sources close to Albemarle assert that the company is fulfilling its duty to report hydrological changes, despite the minor two-centimeter difference in water levels. They argue that understanding the aquifer's behavior requires consideration of SQM's role, insisting that the goal is merely to prompt an official ruling. However, they acknowledge the risk that a negative outcome could force both companies to cease operations if their RCAs are revoked.

Targeting 35,000 Tons per Year:

China Expands into Bolivia with Multimillion-Dollar Investment to Produce Lithium from the Uyuni Salt Flats

Yesterday, an agreement was signed between Bolivia's state-owned YLB and the Chinese firm Hong Kong CBC, involving an investment of over $1.03 billion.

MERCURIO DE SANTIAGO
TOMÁS VERGARA P.

In a renewed effort to secure new lithium sources, the Chinese company Hong Kong CBC—affiliated with battery producer CATL—signed a service contract with Bolivia's state-owned Yacimientos de Litio Bolivianos (YLB) to produce lithium carbonate in the Uyuni Salt Flats.

According to the Bolivian government, this partnership will facilitate the final engineering design, construction, and operation of two lithium carbonate plants. One plant will produce 10,000 tons annually using residual brine, while the other will yield 25,000 tons from well brine. Both will employ direct lithium extraction methods.

With this agreement, China's CBC joins the race to develop Bolivia's lithium resources, following Russia's Uranium One Group, which is pursuing an industrial plant in Uyuni with a phased production goal of 14,000 tons of lithium carbonate.

China's decision to invest heavily in Bolivia contrasts with the situation in Chile, where one of the world's leading lithium producers, Chinese company Tianqi, is entangled in legal disputes with SQM, in which it holds over 22% of shares. In Chile, other Chinese companies, such as electric vehicle manufacturer BYD, CATL, and Tsingshan, have expressed interest in various stages of the local lithium value chain.

A New Competitor

Bolivia's Uyuni Salt Flats hold one of the world's largest lithium reserves, although the deposit presents unique challenges.

Juan Carlos Guajardo, executive director of consulting firm Plusmining, points out the geological and climatic peculiarities of the area.

"Compared to Chilean salt flats, Uyuni has higher levels of impurities and more rainfall, which significantly differentiates it. However, in terms of volume, it is undoubtedly a massive lithium brine resource," Guajardo explained.

Regarding timelines, he noted that lithium projects tend to develop faster than copper projects, emphasizing the importance of obtaining permits. "The partnership between the Chinese company and the Bolivian state through YLB could potentially expedite the permitting process," he added.

Juan Ignacio Guzmán, general manager of GEM consulting, agrees on the significance of Uyuni but warns that it will take decades to reach its full potential.

He highlighted direct lithium extraction technology as a major advantage for the Uyuni deposit. "Although it is relatively expensive, this technology allows lithium extraction from complex brines like those in Uyuni, making it feasible for China to exploit this lithium at reasonably low costs."

Surplus

Experts predict that lithium supply will continue to grow throughout this decade.

The agreement signed yesterday between CBC and Bolivian government representatives still requires approval from Bolivia's Parliament.

Analysis by the Center for Public Studies (CEP) Warns of Institutional Weaknesses:

Growing Concerns Over the Real Authority of the New Office in Charge of "permitting"

According to the CEP, limited jurisdiction and weak coordination capabilities hinder the law's objectives.

MERCURIO DE SANTIAGO
By JOAQUÍN AGUILERA R.

Business associations, experts, and lawmakers have raised significant concerns about the effectiveness of the new entity responsible for implementing reforms to the sectoral permitting system currently under discussion in the Senate. The main issue revolves around whether this new office will have the capacity to achieve the legal objectives set out by the law.

The institutional design of the Sectoral Authorizations and Investment Office, a new entity proposed under the law promoted by the Ministry of Economy, was the focus of an analysis by Tomás de la Maza, a researcher at the Center for Public Studies (CEP). De la Maza concluded that under the current proposal, the office will "struggle" to fulfill its assigned functions due to the limited jurisdiction outlined in the draft legislation.

The oversight of the "permitting" process has become a contentious issue in Congress. The Executive had to abandon its initial proposal of creating a decentralized public service, opting instead for an office under the Ministry of Economy.

Jurisdiction and Influence

The new office will be tasked with coordinating and cooperating with various organizations involved in the permitting process, monitoring procedures, classifying permits by risk, compiling a list of priority projects, and following up on their progress.

However, the CEP's analysis highlights that the office's limited jurisdiction presents a significant challenge. It will not have authority over permits processed through the Environmental Impact Assessment System (SEIA) or specific administrative actions such as tax procedures, municipal permits, and administrative concessions.

De la Maza warned: "By excluding environmental permits and introducing a long list of exclusions, the law itself disintegrates the system it aims to create. This complicates the process for those seeking permits and hampers the office's ability to streamline and improve permit management within increasingly narrow limits."

Additionally, the CEP report emphasizes the limited powers of this entity, restricting its influence. Although the proposal grants it authority to issue guiding resolutions, disseminate reports, participate in process evaluations, and propose regulatory improvements, De la Maza notes that it lacks the power to enforce its evaluations, incentivize improvements, or sanction non-compliance. He argues that this weakens its coordinating role: "Since the office is housed within the Ministry of Economy and its powers are particularly weak, it will always depend on other agencies to manage the system effectively or implement its proposals."

Recommendations

To enhance the office's effectiveness, the CEP suggests a narrower mandate focusing solely on permit management, standardizing procedures, and administering priority projects. This would prevent the overlap of supervisory functions, particularly with the Public Policy Quality Agency currently under discussion in Congress.

The report also recommends a design closer to the central government, allowing the office to implement its recommendations or provide financial support. De la Maza compares the situation with international models, noting that "in countries like Australia, Canada, and the United States, these institutions are central government entities supported by the political and legal backing of the Prime Minister or President."

Another key aspect, according to the CEP, is the prioritization of projects. The report suggests reducing political influence, such as that exerted by the Committee of Undersecretaries included in the proposal. The office should determine which projects qualify as prioritized based on clear criteria, rather than political objectives like energy transition, productivity, or employment.

Economy Commission Seeks to Strengthen the Office

The proposed framework law on sectoral permits was submitted to the Senate's Economy Commission in early October. Since then, the commission has hosted various hearings with experts and major business organizations, including CPC, Sofofa, the Chilean Chamber of Construction, and Sonami.

Rojo Edwards (formerly of the Republican Party), president of the commission, announced plans to organize two seminars in early December to gather insights and formulate conclusions for the January discussions. He emphasized the need to strengthen the office, improve its authority over permits, and streamline project prioritization: “We must undoubtedly give the office greater strength and capacity, and the prioritization system should enable both the office and the Committee of Undersecretaries, as well as investments in general, to advance as quickly as possible.”

“By excluding environmental autorizations and introducing a long list of exclusions, the law itself disintegrates the system it aims to create.”
— Tomás de la Maza, CEP Researcher

Economy Minister Nicolás Grau has requested that the Senate conclude the project’s legislative process by January.