

Taking a confident lead with a customer-centric strategy

Taking a lead in our many markets is sometimes only made possible by boldly investing in strategic opportunities.

Over the past two years, Sibelco Australia has implemented an ambitious rationalisation of its lime business in New South Wales, resulting in the construction of a world-class quicklime kiln and a consolidated logistics strategy.

Sibelco acquired the Galong agricultural lime plant in 2012. At the time, the previous owner had been producing around 40,000 metric tons of lime and limestone aggregate per year, and had recently failed in its plans to develop a burnt lime business.

Within just 12 months and without any capital investment, Sibelco increased production at the plant to 175,000 metric tons and started investigating the feasibility of developing a burnt lime operation at the site. By closing lower throughput, high cost kilns within the region, and building an innovative new facility at Galong, the business would be able to maintain existing customer volumes and increase production to satisfy any future market growth.

The Southern Lime Consolidation (SLC) strategy was a three-fold, customer-focused plan; to improve the product, lower the cost of production and provide faster, cheaper delivery.

Three freight providers with specialist shipping expertise were coordinated to integrate inter-site transfers with customer deliveries, while all hydrate production was shifted to a high capacity hydrate plant at Charbon.

A double shaft, parallel flow rectangular Maerz kiln was selected for construction at Galong. With a variable capacity range between 180 and 275 metric tons per day, incorporating an innovative double 'D' shaped shaft design, the kiln can flex production with market demand; while guaranteeing maximum heat transfer. The result is a consistent, high quality, burnt lime product, produced at a very low fuel cost.

Implementation of such an ambitious project is no small challenge and sales, engineering, logistics and operations worked closely together from the outset to ensure a seamless transition. Staffing and training needs were aligned with the construction and commissioning schedule, while an 'Operations Playbook' was developed in anticipation of an unlikely interruption in production post-go live. Meanwhile, a Community Liaison Committee, which had been established following acquisition of the site in 2012, handled local community engagement around the increase in capacity at the site, building on the strong relationships it had developed since the takeover.

The new Galong kiln was commissioned in November 2015. The impact on Sibelco's lime operations as a result of the SLC strategy has been significant – previously, the business had operated 11 lime kilns and six lime hydrator operations; now, just seven kilns and four hydrator operations service the same market at a more competitive cost, while importantly, offering capacity for growth.

The team regularly reviews and amends its operations strategy to ensure the sustainability of the business model, with the customer at its centre.