

# BHP Billiton

BHP

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Special



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BHP Snapshot



## Commodity Behemoth

BHP Billiton (BLT) is the largest diversified resources company in the world, with around 37,000 employees working in more than 100 operations in 25 different countries. BLT produces a range of natural resources and is the world's number 1 or 2 producer of commodities such as aluminium, energy coal and metallurgical coal, copper, manganese, iron ore, uranium, nickel, silver and titanium minerals. BLT also has substantial interests in oil, gas, liquefied natural gas and diamonds.


The company maintains a widely diversified portfolio of high quality assets, where the objective is to provide consistent cash flow and stability in revenues throughout typical resource cycles. In the 2005 financial year, BLT generated turnover of US\$31.8 billion, earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) of US\$9.3 billion, attributable profit of US\$6.5 billion and available cash flow after interest and tax of US\$8.7 billion.

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In our opinion, the resource sector will enjoy above average returns over the next five years, with many commodities now in what we believe to be a super cycle. With China and India (among other nations) industrialising, the world is facing a massive shortage in raw materials for years to come.

The industrialisation of China has played an important role in underwriting the demand for commodities over a number of decades. Growth in China has been instrumental in causing commodity growth to increase from around 2.5 percent during the 1980s to close to 5 percent in the last five years. Chinese growth is anticipated to be sustained annually at more than 8 percent per annum.

With respect to the underlying valuation of BLT, we believe the stock offers compelling value at current levels, trading on an average forecast price earnings multiple of around 12 times which is a considerable discount to the market. This price/earnings multiple is close to a historic low for BLT, despite the strong commodity price outlook. We believe these forecasts face considerable upside risk, with spot prices of many commodities significantly higher than those used in the average estimate. We are of the view that BLT is fundamentally cheap at current levels and justifies a price/earnings ratio of around 15 times, based on the strong commodity price upside.

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In our opinion BLT has sound growth prospects through a diversified portfolio of projects that will drive earnings growth over the next decade. Unlike other large diversified resource companies, BLT is unrivalled in the size and scope of its portfolio, which effectively frees the need to grow through making new acquisitions. One of the rare exceptions was the acquisition of WMC Resources, which consolidated BLT's position in copper whilst expanding its exposure to uranium at a time of record historic prices for both commodities. Typically though, we anticipate BLT's growth over the next decade being provided by organic growth opportunities.

BLT's portfolio is highly leveraged to the commodity cycle, with large exposures to the energy sector, steel, base metals and industrial minerals. In base metals, BLT has in particular large exposures to copper, nickel, manganese, as well as coking coal.

In the past year copper prices (like other commodities) have continued to rise, defying even the most optimistic forecasts. If copper prices and other commodities continue to remain

buoyant, then we anticipate earnings estimates to be sharply upgraded for BLT, which would, in our opinion, lead to a sharp re-rating.

Energy accounted for around one fifth of BLT's earnings for the year to June 2005. Petroleum is not only one of the highest returning divisions for the company (around 40 percent return on net assets in the last financial year), but has excellent growth prospects. While the Petroleum division's earnings declined in the 2005 financial year, production is forecast to grow by around 50 percent over the next five years. This growth will be driven by a number of projects in the Gulf of Mexico and in the North West Shelf. Longer term, opportunities for BLT exist in liquefied natural gas where a number of countries such as the United States will face energy shortages in the future.

As with other commodities, most earnings forecasts for BLT incorporate a predicted oil price which is significantly below the current spot price. We have long been bullish in our outlook for oil, and we believe BLT Petroleum has considerable upside risk as oil price estimates continue to be revised upwards. With respect to forecasting the oil price, we believe upward pressure will likely remain in the market place throughout 2006. (refer to our Outlook on Oil in FAT117).

In terms of relative returns, BLT has significantly underperformed other large cap diversified resource companies such as Rio Tinto over the last year. We believe that in time this underperformance gap will close, especially considering that BLT has superior growth prospects with a robust project pipeline. In addition BLT could benefit considerably over the short to medium term if commodity prices continue to remain high and analysts begin to upgrade forecast earnings.

We believe that BLT will report a solid profit result for the first half of the financial year towards the middle of next month. Comments from BLT over the past six months suggest that

cash flow has been strong and ahead of expectations, which could result in higher than expected dividends to shareholders. ^

Additionally, with the WMC Resources acquisition almost fully digested and gearing levels now falling, we anticipate the company to deploy significant capital management initiatives towards the end of the year. This would most likely involve higher dividend payments to shareholders along with sizable share buy backs.

We believe, BLT offers compelling value at current prices. In addition to an attractive valuation, the company has a solid pipeline of projects that should underpin growth in future years, and a high probability of earnings upgrades eventuating because of persistently high commodity prices. Accordingly, **we recommend BLT for the first time to all Members as buy around 1030p.**

### **Background information**

BHP Billiton was created nearly five years ago through a merger between BHP Limited and Billiton Plc. The merger involved a Dual Listed Company, whereby two different BHP Billiton company structures are maintained in London and Melbourne, with the group headquarters domiciled in Australia. Both companies have identical boards of directors and are run by a unified management team. Shareholders in each company have equivalent economic and voting rights in the BHP Billiton Group as a whole.

The company is organised into a number of business divisions which are aluminium, base metals, carbon steel materials, energy coal, stainless steel materials, petroleum, diamonds and specialty products.

In aluminium, BHP Billiton is the world's fifth largest producer of primary aluminium, with a total operating capacity in excess of one million tonnes of aluminium, approximately 9.5 million tonnes of bauxite and four million tonnes of alumina per annum.

In base metals, the company is one of the world's top producers of copper, silver, lead and uranium, and a leading producer of zinc. The business division provides base metal concentrates to custom smelters and copper cathodes to rod and brass mills and casting plants along with uranium oxide to power utilities. The Escondida mine in Chile is the world's largest source of copper.

In terms of mining, BHP Billiton has six primary base metal operations which are:

BHP Billiton produces major quantities of silver and significant amounts of gold within the base metals concentrates as well as gold and silver bullion at the Olympic Dam operation in South Australia. The Olympic Dam ore body contains a number of minerals and is the world's fourth-largest remaining copper deposit and the largest uranium deposit. Olympic Dam is Australia's largest underground mine. In Northern Queensland, the Cannington mine is one of the largest and lowest cost producers of silver in the world.

BHP Billiton is one of the world's largest producers and marketers of export thermal coal. The company provides steaming coal for use in the electric power generation industry and general industrial concerns such as cement production.

The company has an interest in four principle coal operations:

BHP Billiton is also a leading supplier of core raw materials and services to the international steel industry. Globally, BHP Billiton is ranked number one in the seaborne supply of coking coal and manganese and number three in iron ore.



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