

NEWS RELEASE

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BHP BILLITON APPROVES ESCONDIDA WATER SUPPLY PROJECT

BHP Billiton today approved an investment of US\$1,972 million (BHP Billiton share) to sustain operations at Escondida in Chile, by constructing a new 2,500 litre per second sea-water desalination facility.

The project will ensure continued water supply to Escondida, as water use increases upon completion of the 152,000 tonne per day OGP1 copper concentrator.

Construction of the new desalination facility will commence in July 2013 and will include the development of two pipelines, four high pressure pump stations, a reservoir at the mine site and high voltage infrastructure to support the system. The new facility will be commissioned in 2017.

BHP Billiton Copper President, Peter Beaven, said: "Securing a sustainable water supply in the Atacama Desert is a major priority for all Chilean copper producers, so the approval of the Escondida Water Supply project is a significant milestone for our business. The new desalination facility will minimise our reliance on the region's aquifers, which will help us to meet our environmental commitments and enable us to achieve our long-term business strategy."

Escondida is located 3,100 meters above sea level, 170km South-East of the City of Antofagasta. It is owned by BHP Billiton (57.5%), Rio Tinto (30.0%), JECO Corporation (10.0%) and JECO 2 Ltd (2.5%). BHP Billiton operates the Escondida mine.

Further information on BHP Billiton can be found at: www.bhpbilliton.com.

NOTE: This release was made outside the hours of operation of the ASX market announcements office.

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