



**MILA**  
**RESOURCES**

**NEIL  
HUTCHISON**

CTO OF MILA RESOURCES



**BY KARL WEST**

Neil Hutchison knows every rock and boulder in the Kathleen Valley, a gold-rich mining region in Western Australia.

As well as the geological 'lay of the land', the chief technical officer of Mila Resources, the London-listed gold miner, is also acutely aware of the personal sensitivities that surround long-held tribal rights over that land.

Hutchison's experience of mining in that region and his contacts and relationships with Aboriginal leaders made him the ideal candidate when Mila Resources sought out an executive to help unlock the potential of its Kathleen Valley gold asset.

"I've been involved with Kathleen Valley vendors and the previous owner since 2014. I previously worked at Cosmos Nickel project next door, so I know every rock of that area," he said.

Mila's Kathleen Valley asset is a start up project, but one that has huge potential. It is situated to the north of the hugely successful Bellevue Goldmine and there are other major gold mines in that area, which is part of the Norseman-Wiluna greenstone belt that hosts several world-class mines owned by a number of premier Australian gold companies including Northern Star and St Barbara.

The Kathleen Valley gold project has been discovered next door and on strike to recent discoveries by Australian-listed, Bellevue Gold, a company that has made substantial discoveries in the region particularly with the Deacon and Viago extensions of the historic Bellevue mine located 7km south of the Project. In June 2020, Bellevue made a discovery at its Government Well prospect, which is on the western boundary of the Mila project.

"It is very rich in gold. Being next to Bellevue it was a no-brainer for us to explore that area," he said.

Previous owners of Mila's prospect area have been unable to dig for gold because of native title to parts of the land, at the fringes, held by Aboriginal tribes.

Hutchison explained he has plenty of experience of dealing with native leaders from his years of working in Kathleen Valley, which is situated between Leinster and Leonora - two well known northern goldfield towns in Western Australia. It's about a 1,000 kilometre drive from Perth.

As a result, he has come to understand and appreciate the sensitivities around tribal title to land, while also knowing that there is usually a way to strike a deal to suit the interests of all parties.

In this case, Mila only needs to drill in one small 'postage stamp' in the middle of its land. Hutchison explained the company's plan and agreed with native leaders to leave the protected bits of land untouched.

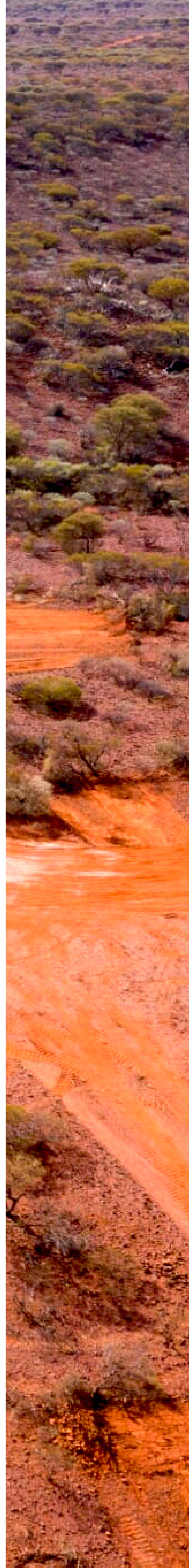
"Once they recognised that we couldn't touch that [protected land] they allowed it to go to grant [license]," he said.

Hutchison last month hailed the first drilling results at the project as 'the most consistent and best overall gold intersections I've seen in my 30-year career'. He said the results 'look similar to the Bellevue [mine] mineralisation to the south'.

"My mission is to get it up to 250,000 ounce range. I know the region and the potential - it gives us the confidence to think that we can build this into something that can be economic," Hutchison said.

The geologist also hinted that other, bigger, gold mining companies may start to take notice of the work that Mila is doing in Kathleen Valley.

"Whether someone takes that on and buys it off us ... that's an option," he said. "The reality of getting to 500,000 ounces is quite achievable for a project of that size. There's a lot of blue sky potential."





Neil Hutchison assaying drill core on site

Hutchison went to Mila as a result of a reverse takeover of the business in 2020 by New Generation Minerals (NGM), the private company that owned the Kathleen Valley asset.

“Early this year [2021] we officially met with Arthur Darivas (CEO of NGM) and Dr Patrick Kennedy (COO of NGM) and Mark Stephenson and Lee Daniels (executive directors of Mila Resources).

“I’m a consulting geologist and run my own firm. One of my clients was New Generation Minerals, so that was the link. NGM went to the UK to do a listing, but then Covid hit. They found themselves a shell company (Mila) and moved the Kathleen Valley asset into it. Putting it into a listed shell was a cleaner process.”

As a result of that process, Mila owns a 30% stake in the Kathleen Valley project, but can earn up to 80% if it hits certain targets.

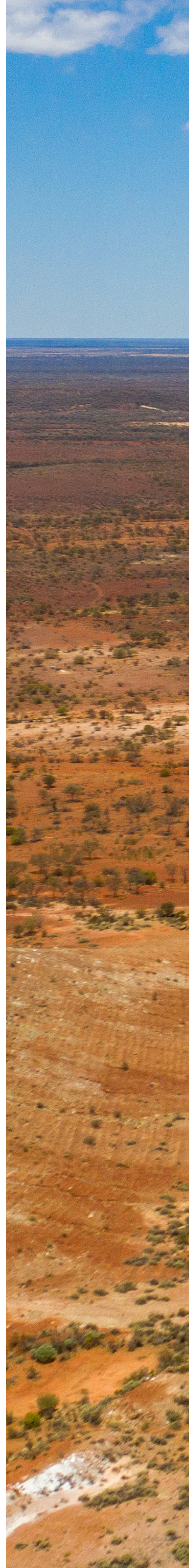
Hutchison is involved at a good time for gold mining, with the gold price holding at record high levels, mainly due to the global economic uncertainties brought by Covid. Gold is historically seen as a safe haven asset in tough times.

“It’s been holding strong for some time now, which is unprecedented. Gold usually has strong cycles, but it has been strong for some time,” Hutchison noted.

The geologist and company executive believes his career as a minerals exploration guru has been a continuation of the interests that fed and nurtured his childhood.

“I grew up in the country in New South Wales and went to the Scouts and just love the outdoor life. I’m the eldest of four kids - I have two brothers and a sister. We started off in Sydney and then we moved to the outback in New South Wales. It was a world of exploration with horses, rifles, camping gear and swimming in creeks.

“Now I get paid to do that. The exploring and the thrill of the chase. It’s one big adventure,” he said.





Neil Hutchison conducting geological survey work

At school, Hutchison was an academic student, he recalled.

“But I was bored. We had a small school, so I had the same teacher for three years. I wanted to be a cabinet maker and my teacher pushed me towards university to do earth sciences, which was my best subject.”

It turned out to be a smart move. Hutchison graduated with First Class Honours in Geology from the University of Southern Queensland and is a member of the Australian Institute of Geoscientists (AIG).

He still loves the job and occasionally yearns to ditch the shirt and tie and get back out in the field.

“I still think it’s the thrill of the chase, the rush you get when you get a success,” he said. “I still do enjoy my field work. I sometimes say to my wife ‘I need to get the red dust into my veins’.”

It’s a passion that has served him well. Hutchison has enjoyed almost 30 years in the industry, including stints as exploration superintendent at the Cosmos Nickel Project with Jubilee Mines and as part of the team that discovered the Alec Mairs, Prospero and Tapinos deposits which led to the A\$3.1bn takeover of Jubilee Mines by Xstrata in 2007.

He is also a non-executive director of Australian-listed Kairos Minerals, a company with a gold project in Western Australia, and nickel company Estrella Resources Limited.

For the past four years, he has led his own consultancy, Geolithic Geological Services, working for multiple small cap mining clients.

Outside work, Hutchison tries to incorporate his love of the great outdoors into family life.

“I’ve got two boys - 19 and 14 years old. We live in coastal Perth and I’ve been here for 25 years. I still go camping - in fact, we bought a block of land during lockdown where we go camping.”

There’s probably not a rock or boulder on that land that Hutchison hasn’t pored over in minute detail.

Favourite Book - Whilst I often don't have time to read books I enjoy reading magazines and internet news.

Favourite Film - Spiderman. Action movies.

Favourite Music - Hard rock.

### About the journalist

Karl West is a Business Journalist and was previously a Senior Business Correspondent for The Sunday Times and City News Editor of The Daily Mail.

