

Five minutes with...

Greg Peacock, senior partner at The Highland Group's Americas Mining & Metals Practice



Q In October 2012, The Highland Group formally established its first dedicated mining practice in the Americas. Tell us about this new business unit, the areas that it will serve and the capabilities it offers.

The new mining practice rolls together our former practice in the US with the geographical operating structures that we have established in Canada, Mexico, Brazil and the rest of South America.

It's an integrated part of our global mining practice, which has served clients on every continent other than Antarctica over the past 20 years.

Its main capabilities will centre on our four core offerings: operational effectiveness, capital project management, working capital and workplace safety. We are consolidating our capabilities around those offerings.

The first three are our legacy offerings, and with these we are looking to further strengthen our capabilities. Workplace safety is our newest offering – it's less than two years old, so we're still in the building mode there.

The new practice will cover North, Central and South America. The mining industry is a global business, so the Americas practice

often develops relationships with companies based in North America, but the projects we deliver for them are in South America, Europe, Africa, Australia or Asia.

Part of the logic of the new mining practice is to take advantage of those relationships and the capabilities around which we have been building our global practices.

Q What drove Highland to establish the new practice?

There are a lot of good reasons, but the primary driver for us was to add value for our clients. The Americas mining practice facilitates the movement of our talent and experience across the region.

For example, I mentioned that workplace safety is our newest offering. We developed that in Mexico, and we can now take that capability and deliver it across other countries around the world just as effectively.

Q Who would you regard as some of your key clients in this region, and what benefits do you anticipate the new practice will bring to your customers?

We are fortunate to have three of the world's five largest and most

successful mining companies among our clients.

We approach all of our engagements on a mine-by-mine basis – some are large and some are small – but they're all equally important and help to create a base of experience that we can leverage across all of our clients. We've got a very strong foothold and share in the market.

The main benefits for our clients are along the lines of our four core offerings. The mining business is cyclical. Over the past year, there has been a shift in that cycle, and I think that our clients in the mining industry are relatively under-served in terms of their needs in operational effectiveness, capital project management and general cost reduction.

So the strengthening of our Americas mining practice, and the consolidation of talent and the flexibility that come with that, will be a tremendous benefit for our clients as they grapple with the constantly changing mining cycle.

Q You must be excited to be leading the new practice? Tell us a bit about your background and what you hope to bring to the team.

It's really exciting. I'm getting a chance to work with some of the best talent in the consulting market, with deep and valuable experience on global engagements, so that's a lot of fun for me.

My father was a military officer, so our family moved frequently when I was growing up, and I learnt a lot in that environment about discipline and the value of doing what you say you will do.

I went to school in Louisiana, and when I left university I went right into the consulting business 25 years ago.

Over those years, one of the most important things that I have learnt is to recognise talent and those individuals who put their clients' needs first.

My job is to find those leaders and put them into positions to deliver to our clients, and in doing

so bring the best talent in the market to help our clients achieve their business objectives.

Q What are your top three goals for the Americas practice in 2013-14?

My number one goal is to recruit and develop talent for the Americas mining practice. We're only as good as the people that we have working for us.

We have the infrastructure, knowledge and management to facilitate delivery, but at the end of the day, we're a people business, and it is critical that we recruit the talent to keep pace with the growth of our company. Without recruiting and developing that talent, we wouldn't be able to move forward.

The second is to exceed our clients' expectations. We have built a solid reputation for doing this on all of our engagements. Third is for me to lead by example; I want to be out there facing our clients, to understand their needs and make sure that I'm establishing the structure and talent required to deliver results.

Q How many bases does Highland now have globally, and where can we expect to see further developments in the future?

Our primary bases are in the Americas and the Europe, Middle East and Africa region. On both sides of the Atlantic, we are working to strengthen our operational capabilities around specific industries.

There will always be regional and local market capability due to differences in language and cultural requirements. Many of our mining team members are multilingual, but in some cases the need for other languages or dialects prompts us to source some talent locally.

Our top priority when staffing projects is to make sure that we have the right talent and technical expertise at hand, but we also want to overlay that with language and cultural understanding.

We also take geography and logistics into account, because if we can deploy staff within their home country, then there are additional advantages for both our clients and us.