Mining was a small but integral part of Fiji’s economy. Unrefined gold exports, which represented the second largest export commodity, typically composed about 6% of Fiji’s export revenues (Emperor Mines Ltd., March 1, 2001, Emperor Mines—Gold mining in Fiji, accessed March 1, 2001, via URL http://www.emperor.com.au/). Fiji’s agrarian economy depended primarily on the sugar industry and a large subsistence sector. The sugar industry, which was the largest contributor to the country’s export earnings, contributed an estimated 8% to 10% of the gross domestic product (GDP). Gold, which was the basis of Fiji’s minerals industry, was produced solely at Emperor Mines Ltd.’s Vatukoula Mine. The Vatukoula Mine, which is often referred to as the “Emperor Mine,” is situated on the northwestern coast approximately 380 kilometers (km) by road from the capital at Suva on the main island of Viti Levu. It accounted for about 3% of the country’s GDP and employed about 2% of the nation’s workforce, or about 1,700 people (Resource Information Unit, 2000, p. 28). Despite an attempted coup in May, the Vatukoula Mine continued to operate under near-normal conditions. Consequently, the event had no significant direct effect on mine production (Emperor Mines Ltd., 2000, p. 6).


In the third quarter of 2000, the processing plant at the Vatukoula Mine maintained its recently improved performance; recovery for the quarter again was higher than that of the previous quarter at 88.10% versus 87.26%. This recovery level was the highest quarterly level ever recorded in the operation’s history (Emperor Mines Ltd., October 2000, September 2000 quarterly report—Overview, accessed February 28, 2001, at URL http://www.emperor.com.au/QuarterlyAnnualReport/quarterOct00/Overview.htm).

Also during the third quarter, no work was done on Emperor Mine’s Tuvatu project feasibility study. The project, which is 50 km south of the Vatukoula Mine and about 15 km inland from the city of Nadi, was suspended until international investor confidence in Fiji improved. Analysis of the geologic data to date indicated a gold resource of 1.6 million metric tons at 8.5 grams per metric ton. The company also indicated that it was still committed to the project (Emperor Mines Ltd., October 2000, September 2000 quarterly report—Overview, accessed February 28, 2001, at URL http://www.emperor.com.au/QuarterlyAnnualReport/quarterOct00/Overview.htm).

On January 5, 2001, Emperor Mines repaid debts that totaled $286,000 to Macquarie Bank of Australia, thus leaving the company debt free. This was achieved by reducing the forward hedge price on gold received from $320 per troy ounce to $311 per troy ounce for the next 6 years (Metal Bulletin, 2000). Polymetallic deposits in Fiji typically have high precious- and base-metal grades. A number of base-metal sulfide deposits, disseminated porphyry copper deposits, epithermal precious-metal deposits, residual bauxite deposits, and manganese and heavy-mineral sands deposits previously had been identified and evaluated. Because none has been shown to have sufficient tonnage to be economically viable, gold and associated silver have been the only metal commodities mined to date.

Fiji’s mineral industry also consisted of a cement plant next to the harbor at Suva and several quarries for the production of crushed gravel and stone, limestone, and coral and river sands. The cement plant has been operated by Fiji Industries Ltd. since it was commissioned in 1961.

References Cited


Resource Information Unit, 2000, Register of Pacific mining 2000: Subiaco, Australia, Resource Information Unit, 144 p.

Major Source of Information

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<tr>
<td>Cement, hydraulic</td>
<td>metric tons</td>
<td>83,500</td>
<td>95,800</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>95,000 e/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gold, mine output, Au content</td>
<td>kilograms</td>
<td>4,452</td>
<td>4,671</td>
<td>3,690</td>
<td>4,428 r/</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silver, mine output, Ag content</td>
<td>do.</td>
<td>1,882</td>
<td>2,594</td>
<td>1,780</td>
<td>2,129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimated.  r/ Revised.*

1/ Table includes data available through August 13, 2001.
2/ In addition to the commodities listed, crushed and dimension stone, sand and gravel, and sand for cement manufacture are produced, but data are insufficient to make reliable estimates of quantities.