

SE Business  
HD **That's mine for \$10, says ex-Tinkler exec**  
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EXCLUSIVE FORMER Nathan Tinkler lieutenant Hamish Collins is looking to capitalise on his old boss's demise, having grabbed a north Queensland Tinkler **copper**-zinc project for next to nothing from administrators and, with the backing of former Tinkler creditors and Queensland's wealthy Millner family, is working to have a mine plan in place next year.

Mr Collins was chief executive of the Tinkler-controlled listed **coal company** Aston Resources, which housed the Maules Creek **coal** project and which was taken over in 2012 by Whitehaven **Coal**.

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But a lesser-known part of the old Tinkler empire, **copper** interests near Mt Isa owned by the privately held Aston Metals, has again drawn in Mr Collins.

Through Aeon Metals — the Sydney-based junior he now runs — he has bought Aston's Walford Creek **copper** project from the administrator for just \$10.

The catch is that former Tinkler creditor Orchard Capital — now OCP Holdings — has taken a 16 per cent **stake** in Aeon.

And if Aeon has not paid back \$20 **million** of what was \$25m of debt owed in the next three years, OCP gets the project.

"We think the market will turn in that time," Mr Collins said in Melbourne yesterday. "This (Walford Creek) is probably the best **copper**-zinc project in Australia, in terms of size and quality." Aeon, in which the Millner-controlled Washington H Soul Pattinson has an 8 per cent **stake**, leveraged Mr Collins' knowledge of Walford Creek to strike a deal with OCP, the senior secured creditor, to continue proving up the project. The **acquisition** was finalised in June.

As happened with many of Mr Tinkler's employees and business partners, Mr Collins fell out with the former tycoon as the empire crumbled under its huge debt.

Mr Collins sued Whitehaven for \$188m over Maules Creek and the pair settled for an undisclosed sum last year.

Shares in Aeon, which also has **copper** projects near Gladstone, doubled after the **acquisition**, pushing the junior's market value to \$80m. But the rally was not sustained in the past month, when continued negative market sentiment brought the shares back down to where they traded before the **acquisition**. If all goes to plan, and using \$8m from a recent raising, Aeon hopes to continue drilling that will prove up a resource at the prospect and support a pre-feasibility study by the end of next year.

Walford Creek, sold to Aston (as Mr Collins searched for **copper** assets for Mr Tinkler) by Tom Eadie's **Copper** Strike, is a Western **Mining** discovery near the soon to be closed Century zinc mine. Century is run by the Melbourne-based, **Hong Kong**-listed, **Chinese**-controlled MMG Resources. Development of the project using Century infrastructure would appear a logical move, though Mr Collins says so far there have been no discussions between Aeon and MMG.

**CO**      astrnz : Aston Resources Limited | ausq : Aeon Metals Limited | whcmpl : Whitehaven Coal Limited

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