

November 19, 2024

Alkali Metals Limited: Ratings Reaffirmed; Outlook revised to Negative

Summary of rating(s) outstanding

Instrument*	Previous Rated Amount (Rs. crore)	Current Rated Amount (Rs. crore)	Rating Action
Long-term cash credit	18.00	18.00	[ICRA]BB+ (Negative); reaffirmed with change in outlook to Negative from Stable
Long-term term loan	1.50	-	-
Short term non-fund based facilities	7.00	7.00	[ICRA]A4+; reaffirmed
Long term/Short term unallocated	15.50	17.00	[ICRA]BB+ (Negative)/[ICRA]A4+; reaffirmed with change in outlook to Negative from Stable
Total	42.00	42.00	

*Instrument details are provided in Annexure-I

Rationale

The revision in the outlook to Negative from Stable reflects the pressure on Alkali Metals Limited's (AML/the company) financial profile in the near-to-medium term, given the sustained profitability pressure, its impact on debt coverage metrics and reliance on working capital borrowings. AML published H2FY2025 the results on November 9, 2024. The operating profit was impacted in H1 FY2025 due to lower spreads between selling price and raw material cost for sodium derivatives and amino pyridines. Further, the lower sales of the high margin campaign products (fine chemical) also impacted the profitability to an extent.

The reaffirmation of the ratings factors in the company's long track record in manufacturing sodium derivatives for more than three decades and its diverse product portfolio with presence in sodium derivatives, pyridine derivatives, fine chemicals and active pharmaceutical ingredients (API). The ratings also factor in the company's healthy capital structure with a gearing of 0.4 times as on March 31, 2024, and 0.5 times as on September 30, 2024, owing to the moderate debt levels with the debt being primarily working capital in nature.

The ratings are, however, constrained by AML reporting operating loss in H1 FY2025, subdued return indicators with low RoCE over the last few years on account of low capacity utilisation and high working capital intensity owing to the elevated inventory levels. ICRA also notes the company's modest scale of operations with revenues at Rs. 82.9 crore in FY2024 and Rs. 35.1 crore in H1 FY2025. The ratings also factor in the exposure of profitability to foreign exchange fluctuations (as exports account for a significant portion of AML's total sales) and volatility in raw material prices.

Key rating drivers and their description

Credit strengths

Diverse product portfolio with extensive track record in manufacturing sodium derivatives – AML manufactures products across four categories – sodium derivatives, pyridine derivatives, fine chemicals and pharmaceutical APIs. AML has an extensive track record of more than three decades in manufacturing sodium derivatives such as sodium amide, sodium azide, and sodium hydride. The sodium derivatives have been the major products for the company.

Healthy capital structure – The company's capital structure remained healthy with a gearing of 0.4 times as on March 31, 2024, and 0.5 times as on September 30, 2024, owing to the moderate debt levels with the debt being primarily working capital in nature. The coverage indicators remained weak in H1 FY2025 with the company reporting operating loss.

However, as on September 30, 2024, the promoters held 69.6% equity stake in the company, of which around 30.1% was pledged or encumbered, which could weigh on the company's financial flexibility.

Credit challenges

Modest scale of operations – The operating income remained moderate at Rs. 82.9 crore in FY2024 and Rs. 35.1 crore in H1 FY2025. There has been a continuous effort to develop new products and commercialise them on a campaign basis. However, given the low capacity utilisation and no major expected ramp-up, the revenues are likely to be range-bound in the near term.

Moderation in profitability; low return indicators – AML reported operating loss in H1 FY2025. The operating profit was impacted in H1 FY2025 due to lower spreads between the selling price and raw material cost for sodium derivatives and amino pyridines. Further, lower sales of high margin campaign products (fine chemical) also impacted the profitability to an extent. The RoCE continues to be modest with moderation in profitability and low capacity utilisation of its facilities. The Visakhapatnam unit was started in 2011-2012 to manufacture APIs and fine chemicals. However, the capacity utilisation remained significantly low, which has impacted its revenues and profitability.

Working capital-intensive nature of operations – The working capital intensity has been high over the years owing to high inventory requirements. As a result, the sanctioned working capital limit utilisation continues to be elevated. The inventory days are high as AML maintains a buffer inventory to meet sudden export orders along with the long processing time, given the various stages of the manufacturing process. The inventory levels are also high owing to the long lead time for imported raw materials. The company primarily imports sodium metal and pyridine.

Further, exports account for majority of the revenue, which makes the profitability vulnerable to forex rate fluctuations. However, the imports provide a natural hedge to the company to some extent. The company does not hedge its net forex exposure and, thus, remains exposed to the forex rate movements for the unhedged portion.

Environmental and Social Risks

AML, being present in the chemical industry, is exposed to the risk of tightening regulations on environment and safety. However, as per the discussion with the entity, AML has been compliant with environmental regulations. The company has five decades of experience in handling extremely hazardous processes and products involving sodium-based compounds and pyridine derivatives.

Further, operating responsibly is an imperative and instances of non-compliance with the environmental, health and safety norms could have an adverse impact on the local community, which could manifest in the form of protests, constraining the ability to operate or expand capacity. AML hasn't experienced/ reported any incident suggestive of safety lapses in its manufacturing facilities over the past several years and its ability to maintain the manufacturing controls would be monitorable.

Liquidity position: Stretched

AML's liquidity position is stretched due to the limited cushion available in the working capital limits and low cash balances. The liquidity position is stretched with high average utilisation of working capital limits at 95% of the sanctioned limits between October 2023 and September 2024 due to the high inventory levels. It has repayment obligations of Rs. 0.7 crore in FY2025 and Rs. 0.3 crore in FY2026, and the estimated cash flows would be sufficient to service the repayment obligations. The liquidity position is expected to remain stretched with high inventory levels, a limited buffer in sanctioned fund-based working capital limits, regular maintenance capex and consistent annual dividend payouts.

Rating sensitivities

Positive factors – A rating upgrade is unlikely in the near term owing to the Negative outlook. However, the outlook could be revised to Stable if there is a sustained improvement in the operating margins, debt coverage metrics.

Negative factors – Pressure on AML’s ratings could arise on inability to improve operational profit, resulting in lower cash accruals. A deterioration in the working capital cycle impacting the company’s liquidity position or a large debt-funded capital expenditure could also be a trigger for a downgrade. A credit metrics that could lead to a downgrade include interest coverage below 2.3 times on a sustained basis.

Analytical approach

Analytical Approach	Comments
Applicable rating methodologies	Corporate Credit Rating Methodology Chemicals
Parent/Group support	Not Applicable
Consolidation/Standalone	The ratings are based on the standalone financials of AML

About the company

Alkali Metals Limited (AML) was set up in 1968 as a joint venture with Andhra Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation Limited (APIDCL). Initially, the company produced sodium metal, but it exited this business in 1989 as rising power costs made manufacturing sodium metal unviable. Subsequently, it diversified into manufacturing derivatives based on sodium metal, picoline and other cyclic compounds. Its products can be classified as sodium derivatives, amino pyridines, fine chemicals and APIs. Its products are sold primarily to pharmaceutical companies for further processing and conversion into bulk drugs.

Key financial indicators

	FY2023	FY2024	H1FY2025*
Operating income	88.2	82.9	35.1
PAT	2.9	1.1	-5.2
OPBDIT/OI	11.0%	9.9%	-5.6%
PAT/OI	3.3%	1.4%	-14.9%
Total outside liabilities/Tangible net worth (times)	1.0	1.1	1.3
Total debt/OPBDIT (times)	2.5	2.8	-5.6
Interest coverage (times)	3.6	3.2	-1.4

Source: Company, ICRA Research; All ratios as per ICRA’s calculations; Amount in Rs. crore PAT: Profit after tax; OPBDIT: Operating profit before depreciation, interest, taxes and amortisation; Amount in Rs crore; *Provisional

Status of non-cooperation with previous CRA: Not applicable

Any other information: None

Rating history for past three years

Instrument	Type	Current rating (FY2025)		Chronology of rating history for the past 3 years			
		Amount rated (Rs. crore)	Date & rating in FY2025 Nov 19, 2024	Date & rating in FY2024	Date & rating in FY2023	Date & rating in FY2022	Date & rating in FY2021
				Dec 5, 2023	Oct 14, 2022	Sep 10, 2021	Nov 26, 2020
1 Cash credit limits	Long-term	18.0	[ICRA]BB+ (Negative)	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)
2 Non-fund based	Short-term	7.0	[ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]A4+
3 Unallocated limits	Long-term/ Short-term	17.0	[ICRA]BB+ (Negative)/ [ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)/ [ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)/ [ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)/ [ICRA]A4+	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)/ [ICRA]A4+
4 Term loan	Long-term	-	-	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)	[ICRA]BB+(Stable)

Complexity level of the rated instruments

Instrument	Complexity Indicator
Cash credit	Simple
Non-fund based facilities	Very Simple
Unallocated	Not Applicable

The Complexity Indicator refers to the ease with which the returns associated with the rated instrument could be estimated. It does not indicate the risk related to the timely payments on the instrument, which is rather indicated by the instrument's credit rating. It also does not indicate the complexity associated with analysing an entity's financial, business, industry risks or complexity related to the structural, transactional or legal aspects. Details on the complexity levels of the instruments are available on ICRA's website: [Click Here](#)

Annexure I: Instrument details

ISIN	Instrument Name	Date of Issuance	Coupon Rate	Maturity	Amount Rated (Rs. crore)	Current Rating and Outlook
NA	Cash credit	NA	NA	NA	18.0	[ICRA]BB+(Negative)
NA	Non fund-based limits	NA	NA	NA	7.0	[ICRA]A4+
NA	Unallocated limits	NA	NA	NA	17.0	[ICRA]BB+(Negative)/[ICRA]A4+

Source: Company

[Please click here to view details of lender-wise facilities rated by ICRA](#)

Annexure II: List of entities considered for consolidated analysis

Not applicable

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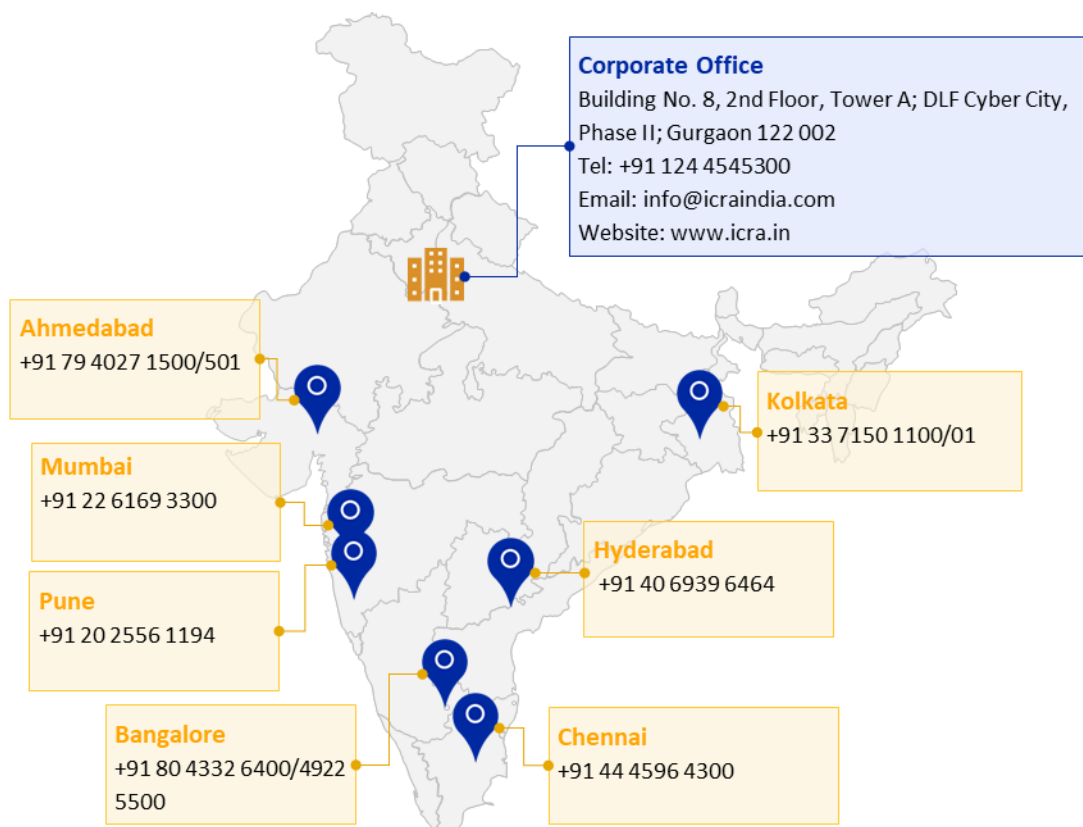


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