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Nickel Mines Limited (NIC)

Production to double in CY23

Recommendation

Buy (unchanged)

Price

\$1.315

Target (12 months)

\$1.68 (previously \$1.42)

GICS Sector

Materials

Expected Return

Capital growth	27.8%
Dividend yield	3.0%
Total expected return	30.8%

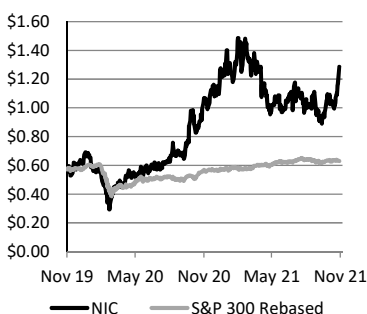
Company Data & Ratios

Enterprise value	\$3,637m
Market cap	\$3,307m
Issued capital	2,515m
Free float	76%
Avg. daily vol. (52wk)	\$13.6m
12 month price range	\$0.885-\$1.54

Price Performance

	(1m)	(3m)	(12m)
Price (A\$)	1.05	1.03	0.95
Absolute (%)	22.4	24.8	34.6
Rel market (%)	22.6	26.5	20.7

Absolute Price



SOURCE: IRESS

Memorandum of Understanding locks in growth

NIC announced it has signed an MoU outlining: 1) the acquisition of a 70% interest in 4 next-generation Rotary Kiln Electric Furnace (RKEF) lines currently under construction within the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP), for consideration of US\$525m (100% valuation US\$750m). The new lines comprise the Oracle Nickel Project (ONI) and are expected to commence commissioning in Q1CY23; 2) Establishment of a “Future Energy” collaboration framework to optimise the transition to renewable energy sources; and 3) the planned participation in future High Pressure Acid Leach (HPAL) nickel projects, utilising NIC’s current and prospective mineral resources across Indonesia, to produce battery grade nickel.

Sector leading earnings growth outlook

This is a multi-faceted agreement that deepens and expands NIC’s partnership with Shanghai Decent Investment (SDI). The primary update is the ONI acquisition. The project replicates the specifications of the next generation RKEF lines of the Angel Nickel Project, with annual nameplate production of 36ktpa Ni in NPI, currently in the advanced stages of construction and in which NIC has an 80% interest. Incorporating the ONI acquisition into our forecasts builds further, aggressive production and earnings growth into NIC’s outlook. We now forecast a tripling of US\$ earnings from CY21 to CY23 on production growth of 2.4x. There is potential upside to our forecasts given the historical outperformance of NIC’s existing RKEF lines vs nameplate.

Investment thesis – Buy, TP\$1.68/sh (from \$1.42/sh)

This MoU follows on news of the ahead-of-schedule progress at the Angel Nickel Project which lifted our forecast CY22 EPS growth from 29% to 60% (Acps basis). The Oracle acquisition now lifts our forecast CY23 EPS growth from 68% to 95%, resulting in an extraordinary growth profile for an industrial style company. NIC is now trading on EV/EBITDA multiples of 6.0x and 3.2x and P/E multiples of 9.9x and 5.1x for CY22 and CY23 respectively. This reinforces NIC as one of our top picks in the sector and we retain our Buy recommendation.

Earnings Forecast

Year ending 31 December	2020a	2021e	2022e	2023e
Sales (US\$m)	523	624	1,028	1,681
EBITDA (US\$m)	194	253	435	831
Attributable NPAT (reported) (US\$m)	111	157	243	473
Attributable NPAT (reported) (A\$m)	160	208	333	648
EPS (adjusted) (Acps)	8.2	8.3	13.2	25.8
EPS growth (%)	62%	0%	60%	95%
PER (x) 1	16.0	15.9	9.9	5.1
FCF Yield (%) 1	-2%	-9%	-2%	29%
EV/EBITDA (x) 1	13.5	10.4	6.0	3.2
Dividend (Acps)	3	4	6	10
Yield (%)	2%	3%	5%	8%
Franking (%)	0%	0%	0%	0%
ROE (%) 1	27%	20%	29%	47%

SOURCE: BELL POTTER SECURITIES ESTIMATES

Changes to our forecasts

In reflecting this update we have made the following changes to our modelled assumptions:

- Incorporated the acquisition, construction, development and operation of the Oracle Nickel Project into our financial forecasts. Production is scheduled to commence from Q1CY23 and we assume ramp-up to nameplate of 36,000tpa of Ni in NPI by Q4CY23 (100%-basis). This includes the staged consideration payments and shareholder loans as outlined below;

Table 1 - Oracle Nickel staged acquisition schedule

Date	Amount (US\$m)	Cumulative (US\$m)	% ownership
Signing of MoU	10.0	10.0	
Definitive Agreement (By 31 January 2022)	20.0	30.0	
By 31 March 2022	23.0	53.0	10%
By 30 June 2022	106.0	159.0	30%
By 30 September 2022	46.2	205.2	1st shareholder loan
By 31 December 2022	212.0	417.2	70%
By 31 December 2022	46.2	463.4	2nd shareholder loan
By 31 March 2023	61.6	525.0	3rd shareholder loan
Total	525.0		

SOURCE: COMPANY DATA

- Included a risk-adjusted, NPV-based valuation for ONI in our sum-of-the-parts valuation for NIC. We apply a 30% discount to our un-risked NPV to reflect i) the pending finalisation of a binding agreement following the MoU; and ii) the construction stage of the project; and
- Lifted our forecast dividend distributions for CY23 to A10cps (from A8cps). This increases our forecast (unfranked) yield for CY23 to 7.6%.

The net impact of these changes are summarised in the forecast changes table below:

Table 2 - Changes to our CY forecasts

Year end 31 December	Previous			New			Change		
	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23	Dec-21	Dec-22	Dec-23
Prices & currency									
Nickel price (US\$/t)	18,323	18,519	18,629	18,323	18,519	18,629	0%	0%	0%
US\$/A\$	0.75	0.73	0.73	0.75	0.73	0.73	0%	0%	0%
Production & costs									
Ore mined (t)	2,035,486	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,035,486	2,000,000	2,000,000	0%	0%	0%
Nickel in ore (t)	36,062	36,000	36,000	36,062	36,000	36,000	0%	0%	0%
RKEF NPI production (t)	295,081	487,004	604,615	295,081	487,004	789,615	0%	0%	31%
Contained nickel (t)	40,516	62,971	78,646	40,516	62,971	100,846	0%	0%	28%
Contained nickel (t, attributable)	32,413	50,376	62,917	32,413	50,376	78,457	0%	0%	25%
Cash costs (US\$/t Ni)	9,521	9,825	8,723	9,521	9,825	8,674	0%	0%	-1%
Earnings & valuation									
Revenue (consolidated, US\$m)	624	1,028	1,319	624	1,028	1,681	0%	0%	28%
EBITDA (consolidated, US\$m)	253	435	657	253	435	831	0%	0%	27%
EBITDA (attributable, US\$m)	202	347	524	202	347	647	0%	0%	23%
NPAT (reported, attributable, US\$m)	157	243	408	157	243	473	0%	0%	16%
EPS (reported) (Acps)	8.3	13.3	22.2	8.3	13.2	25.8	0%	0%	16%
PER (x)	15.9	9.9	5.9	15.9	9.9	5.1	0.0	0.0	(0.8)
EPS growth (%)	1%	60%	68%	0%	60%	95%	0%	0%	27%
DPS (Acps)	4	6	8	4	6	10	0%	0%	25%
Yield	3.0%	4.6%	6.1%	3.0%	4.6%	7.6%	0%	0%	2%
NPV (A\$/sh)	1.16	1.42	1.86	1.40	1.68	2.14	20%	19%	15%
Price Target (A\$/sh)		1.42			1.68			18%	

SOURCE: COMPANY DATA AND BELL POTTER SECURITIES ESTIMATES

These changes drive material earnings increases for CY23 and further strengthen an already aggressive earnings growth profile. Under our assumptions, NIC will be able to

support its staged acquisition payments and our forecast dividend distributions, though we see the potential for external funding (either debt or equity or a mix of both) to maintain balance sheet strength and flexibility. NIC continues to trade on low valuation metrics with respect to its growth profile, reinforcing it as one of our top picks in the sector.

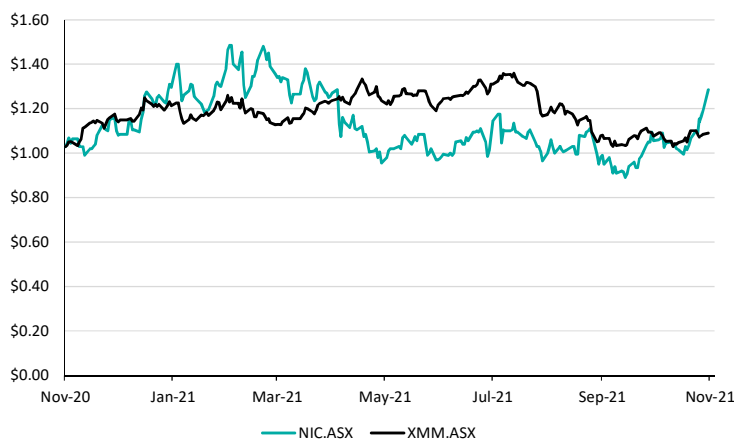
Upcoming catalysts

Upcoming catalysts for NIC include:

- Updates on Nickel Pig Iron (NPI) pricing and the effective Ni payability, which we believe the market will continue to consider as a measure of NIC's nickel price exposure;
- Further updates on the construction of the Angel Nickel project, comprising 4 next-generation rotary-kiln-electric-furnace (RKEF) lines being developed within the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP), in which NIC now holds an 80% interest;
- Further updates on the construction of the Oracle Nickel project, comprising 4 next-generation RKEF lines being developed within the Indonesia Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP). An MoU has been signed and a binding agreement is expected in January 2022 to formalise NIC's staged acquisition of a 70% interest;
- Progress updates for the Hengjaya Mine, where a major production expansion is complete and the sustainability of production of +150kt ore per month and costs of ~US\$20/t are targeted;
- Exploration and development updates on the Siduarsi Nickel-Cobalt project in Papua province, Indonesia, in which NIC has recently acquired a 100% interest;
- The release of NIC's December 2021 quarterly production and cost report, expected in late January 2022; and
- Updates on the ownership levels of the 80%-owned Hengjaya Mine, which is subject to Indonesia's compulsory divestment laws.

NIC vs the ASX Metals and Mining Index

Figure 1 - NIC relative share price performance vs ASX Metals and Mining Index (XMM)



SOURCE: IRESS

Nickel Mines Limited (NIC)

Company description: fully integrated NPI producer

Nickel Mines Limited ('Nickel Mines' or 'NIC') was formed in 2007 and listed on the ASX in 2018. Its operations are focused in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, where it holds an 80% interest four Rotary Kiln Electric Furnace (RKEF) NPI production lines (the two Hengjaya lines and the two Ranger lines) with Shanghai Decent Investments (SDI) a subsidiary of Tsingshan Group, the world's largest stainless steel producer. The RKEF lines are located in an existing, fully integrated stainless steel production facility, the Indonesian Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP).

First production from the Hengjaya Lines was achieved on 31 January 2019 and the Ranger Lines commenced production during the December quarter 2019. Both projects have since achieved steady state production of ~20ktpa contained Ni in NPI, exceeding nameplate production of ~16ktpa each at lower than planned operating costs.

In November 2020 NIC executed a binding agreement to acquire a 70% interest (since increased to 80%) in the Angel Nickel Project comprising four new generation RKEF NPI production lines and a captive 380MW power station. Angel Nickel is currently under construction within the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park ('IWIP') on Halmahera Island in Indonesia.

NIC also holds an 80% interest in Hengjaya Mine ('HM'), a high-grade, long-life nickel laterite deposit, also in Central Sulawesi in close proximity to the IMIP. The HM produces Direct Shipping Ore (DSO), the bulk of which is sold into the IMIP facility for the production of Nickel Pig Iron (NPI), a key input into stainless steel production.

Investment thesis – Buy, TP\$1.68/sh (from \$1.42/sh)

This MoU follows on news of the ahead-of-schedule progress at the Angel Nickel Project which lifted our forecast CY22 EPS growth from 29% to 60% (Acps basis). The Oracle acquisition now lifts our forecast CY23 EPS growth from 68% to 95%, resulting in an extraordinary growth profile for an industrial style company. NIC is now trading on EV/EBITDA multiples of 6.0x and 3.2x and P/E multiples of 9.9x and 5.1x for CY22 and CY23 respectively. This reinforces NIC as one of our top picks in the sector and we retain our Buy recommendation.

Valuation: \$1.68/sh

Our 12-month forward NIC valuation incorporates DCF models of its attributable interests in the Hengjaya laterite nickel ore mine (HM), an 80% interest in the two Hengjaya Nickel RKEF lines and an 80% interest in the two Ranger Nickel RKEF lines.

We have constructed a discounted cash flow (DCF) model for NIC's attributable interest in these RKEF lines that are in production at Tsingshan's IMIP facility and a DCF calculation for NIC's current 80% interest (declining to 49% in 2028) in the Hengjaya laterite nickel ore mine.

We also include a risk-adjusted, NPV-based valuation for NIC's 80% interest in the Angel Nickel Industry (ANI) project, its prospective 70% interest in the Oracle Nickel Project (ONI) and a notional value for other exploration and development projects, an estimate of corporate overhead costs and NIC's last reported net cash position. Our valuation is calculated on a fully diluted basis. Following the latest update, our valuation stands at \$1.68/sh.

Risks

Key risks to our investment case include (but are not limited to):

- **Funding and capital management risks:** Funding and capital management risks can include access to debt and equity finance, maintaining covenants on debt finance, managing dividend payments and managing debt repayments. Exploration and development companies with no sales revenues are reliant on access to equity markets and debt financing to fund the advancement and development of their projects.
- **Operating and development risks:** Mining companies' assets are subject to risks associated with their operation and development. Risks for each company can be heightened depending on method of operation (e.g. underground versus open pit mining) or whether it is a single mine company. Development of mining assets may be subject to receiving permits, approvals timelines or weather events, causing delays to commissioning and commercial production.
- **COVID-19 risks:** Mining companies' rely on freedom of movement of workforces, functioning transport routes, reliable logistics services including road, rail, aviation and ports in order to maintain operations and get their products to market. They also rely on liquid, functioning markets to sell their products. Measures being put in place to combat the COVID-19 pandemic are posing risks to these conditions.
- **Operating and capital cost fluctuations:** The cost and availability of exploration, development and mining inputs can fluctuate widely and cause significant differences between planned and actual operating and capital costs. Key operating costs are linked to energy and labour costs as well as access to, and availability of, technical skills, operating equipment and consumables.
- **Commodity price and exchange rate fluctuations:** The future earnings and valuations of exploration, development and producing Resources companies are subject to fluctuations in underlying commodity prices and foreign currency exchange rates.
- **Resource growth and mine life extensions:** The viability of future operations and the earnings forecasts and valuations reliant upon them may depend upon resource and reserve growth to extend mine lives, which is in turn dependent upon exploration success, of which there are no guarantees.
- **Regulatory changes risks:** Changes to the regulation of infrastructure and taxation (among other things) can impact the earnings and valuation of mining companies. NIC's assets are located in Sulawesi, Indonesia, which has in the past implemented regulatory changes related to mining project ownership, fiscal terms and mineral export requirements.
- **Sovereign risks:** Mining companies' assets are subject to the sovereign risks of the jurisdiction within which they are operating. NIC's assets are in Indonesia, a G20 country with one of the largest economies in SE Asia. Its sovereign debt is rated investment grade by the major ratings agencies.
- **Corporate/M&A risks:** Risks associated with M&A activity including differences between the entity's and the market's perception of value associated with completed transactions. NIC is the junior partner co-investing in production assets with a large, privately owned Chinese company. The strength and cohesiveness of this relationship over the long term has the potential to both add and reduce value to the partnership. One of the key mitigating factors in this respect has been the investment of a combined US\$50m by SDI and Wanlu Investments (US\$26m and US\$24m respectively) into NIC equity.

Recommendation structure

Buy: Expect >15% total return on a 12 month view. For stocks regarded as 'Speculative' a return of >30% is expected.

Hold: Expect total return between -5% and 15% on a 12 month view

Sell: Expect <-5% total return on a 12 month view

Speculative Investments are either start-up enterprises with nil or only prospective operations or recently commenced operations with only forecast cash flows, or companies that have commenced operations or have been in operation for some time but have only forecast cash flows and/or a stressed balance sheet.

Such investments may carry an exceptionally high level of capital risk and volatility of returns.

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