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Nickel Industries Ltd (NIC)

Oracle financing locked in

Recommendation
Buy (unchanged)
Price
\$1.13
Target (12 months)
\$1.96 (previously \$2.08)

GICS Sector
Materials

Expected Return

Capital growth	73.5%
Dividend yield	4.4%
Total expected return	77.9%

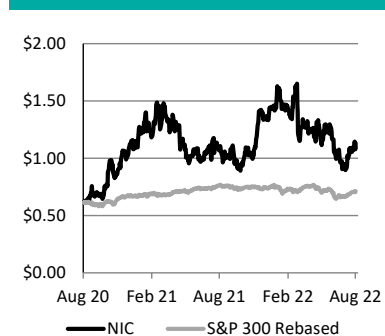
Company Data & Ratios

Enterprise value	\$3,724m
Market cap	\$3,086m
Issued capital	2,731m
Free float	74%
Avg. daily val. (52wk)	\$19.1m
12 month price range	\$0.885-\$1.79

Price Performance

	(1m)	(3m)	(12m)
Price (A\$)	0.96	1.26	1.10
Absolute (%)	18.3	-10.0	3.2
Rel market (%)	12.2	-8.1	9.4

Absolute Price



SOURCE: IRESS

US\$225m issued with 10% coupon

NIC has raised US\$225m via the issue of corporate debt securities to supplement the funding of its acquisition of a 70% equity interest in the Oracle Nickel Project (ONI), a Nickel Pig Iron (NPI) project that is in the advanced stages of construction in the Indonesia Morowali industrial Park (IMIP), in Sulawesi, Indonesia. ONI has nameplate production capacity of 36ktpa nickel in NPI and is on target for commissioning in October 2022, more than three months ahead of its original schedule. NIC has issued US\$225m of Senior Secured Notes at an interest rate of 10.0%, maturing August 2025. NIC's total issued corporate debt is now US\$550m, including US\$325m with a 6.5% coupon, issued in April and September 2021, maturing April 2024.

Strong liquidity buffer and debt service capacity

NIC reported cash at end June 2022 of US\$97.8m. Together with US\$225m proceeds from the debt issue and forecast attributable operational cash flows of +US\$300m to the end of the March 2023 quarter, we believe NIC is has a very strong liquidity buffer (+US\$600m) against the remaining funding requirements for its ONI acquisition. The original payment schedule requires payments of US\$366m to be made between 30 June 2022 and 31 March 2023. While the coupon rate of the latest Note issue is higher, at 10% (compared with 6.5% for the previous issuances), we believe this is fair and reflective of US bond market movements over that period. We believe this method of financing is very well suited to the long-life, industrial-style assets NIC owns. We forecast EBITDA/Interest coverage of 12.4x in CY22 and 13.6x in CY24, indicating NIC can comfortably service this debt.

Investment thesis – Buy, TP\$1.96/sh (from Buy, TP\$2.08/sh)

The higher net debt position is the main change to our sum-of-the-parts valuation, which lowers our target price 6%, to \$1.96/sh. Higher annual interest costs lower our forecast earnings by 4% and 5% for CY23 and CY24 respectively. CY22 earnings are effectively unchanged. We continue to forecast strong earnings growth of 61% in CY22 and 91% in CY23 and retain our Buy rating.

Earnings Forecast

Year ending 31 December	2021a	2022e	2023e	2024e
Sales (US\$m)	646	1,220	1,909	2,099
EBITDA (US\$m)	243	429	744	705
Attributable NPAT (reported) (US\$m)	138	220	425	404
Attributable NPAT (reported) (A\$m)	184	308	615	577
EPS (adjusted) (Acps)	7.3	11.7	22.5	21.1
EPS growth (%)	-11%	61%	91%	-6%
PER (x)	15.5	9.6	5.0	5.4
FCF Yield (%)	-19%	4%	29%	31%
EV/EBITDA (x)	10.9	6.2	3.5	3.7
Dividend (Acps)	4.0	5.0	9.0	9.0
Yield (%)	3.5%	4.4%	8.0%	8.0%
Franking (%)	0%	0%	0%	0%
ROE (%)	18%	24%	38%	31%

SOURCE: BELL POTTER SECURITIES ESTIMATES

Oracle financing locked in

Changes to our forecasts

With this update on the securing of the debt funding component of NIC's US\$525m total consideration for its 70% interest in the Oracle Nickel Project (ONI), we have made the following changes to our modelled assumptions:

- Updated the capital structure for the latest debt issue. NIC's total issued corporate debt now stands at US\$550m, comprising US\$325m with a 6.5% coupon, maturing April 2024 and now US\$225m with a 10% coupon, maturing August 2025; and
- Included the debt proceeds, debt service costs and August 2025 principal repayment in our financial forecasts.

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

Table 1 - Changes to our CY forecasts

Year end 31 December	Previous			New			Change		
	Dec-22	Dec-23	Dec-24	Dec-22	Dec-23	Dec-24	Dec-22	Dec-23	Dec-24
Prices & currency									
Nickel price (US\$/t)	25,974	21,550	20,944	25,974	21,550	20,944	0%	0%	0%
US\$/A\$	0.71	0.69	0.70	0.71	0.69	0.70	0%	0%	0%
Production & costs									
Ore mined (t)	2,583,800	2,400,000	2,400,000	2,583,800	2,400,000	2,400,000	0%	0%	0%
Nickel in ore (t)	45,536	43,200	43,200	45,536	43,200	43,200	0%	0%	0%
RKEF NPI production (t)	498,905	864,615	904,615	498,905	864,615	904,615	0%	0%	0%
Contained nickel (t)	66,901	103,823	114,623	66,901	103,823	114,623	0%	0%	0%
Contained nickel (t, attributable)	53,521	80,538	88,098	53,521	80,538	88,098	0%	0%	0%
Cash costs (US\$/t Ni)	12,877	11,857	12,251	12,877	11,857	12,251	0%	0%	0%
Earnings & valuation									
Revenue (consolidated, US\$m)	1,220	1,909	2,099	1,220	1,909	2,099	0%	0%	0%
EBITDA (consolidated, US\$m)	429	744	705	429	744	705	0%	0%	0%
EBITDA (attributable, US\$m)	341	577	541	341	577	541	0%	0%	0%
NPAT (reported, attributable, US\$m)	223	442	425	220	425	404	-1%	-4%	-5%
EPS (reported) (Acps)	11.9	23.4	22.1	11.7	22.5	21.1	-1%	-4%	-5%
PER (x)	9.5	4.8	5.1	9.6	5.0	5.4	0.1	0.2	0.3
EPS growth (%)	63%	97%	-5%	61%	91%	-6%	-2%	-6%	-1%
DPS (Acps)	5.0	9.0	9.0	5.0	9.0	9.0	0%	0%	0%
Yield	4.4%	8.0%	8.0%	4.4%	8.0%	8.0%	0%	0%	0%
NPV (A\$/sh)	1.78	2.08	2.37	1.66	1.96	2.36	-6%	-6%	0%
Price Target (A\$/sh)		2.08			1.96			-6%	

SOURCE: COMPANY DATA AND BELL POTTER SECURITIES ESTIMATES

The higher net debt position is the main change to our sum-of-the-parts valuation, which is reduced by the increased debt and the cash outflows of debt service. Earnings are reduced by the higher annual interest costs, which we estimate increase from ~US\$21m to ~US\$43m in CY23 and from ~US\$11m to ~US\$33m in CY24. This lowers our forecast earnings by 4% and 5% for CY23 and CY24 respectively. CY22 earnings are effectively unchanged (-1%).

We continue to forecast strong earnings growth of 61% in CY22 and 91% in CY23, for which NIC is trading on P/E multiples of 9.6x and 5.0x respectively. EBITDA remains on an aggressive growth trajectory from US\$243m in CY21 to US\$744m in CY23. Our NPV-based valuation is lowered 6%, to \$1.96/sh.

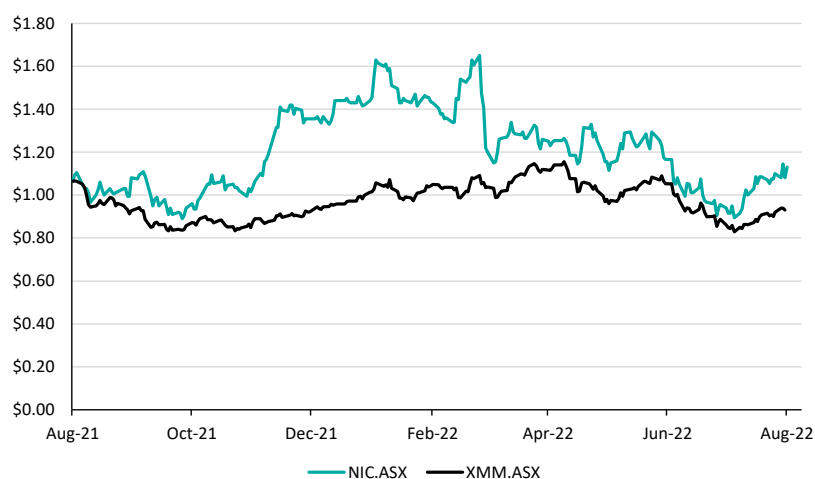
Upcoming catalysts

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 production ramp-up progress of ANI, in which NIC holds an 80% interest. We have accelerated our modelled production ramp-up to reflect ahead-of-schedule progress;
- Further updates on the construction of ONI, comprising 4 next-generation RKEF lines being developed within the IMIP. We have brought forward our ramp-up assumptions, now modelling commissioning and first commercial production and sales in 1QCY23;
- Progress updates for the Hengjaya Mine, where limonite nickel ore sales are increasing and together with saprolite nickel ore sales are driving strong EBITDA growth;
- The release of NIC's 1HCY22 financial statements, expected in late August 2022;
- The release of the September 2022 quarterly production and cost report, expected in late October 2022; and
- Exploration and development updates on the Siduarsi Nickel-Cobalt project in Papua province, Indonesia, in which NIC has recently acquired a 100% interest.

NIC vs the ASX Metals and Mining Index (XMM)

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.

NIC has also executed binding agreements to acquire an 80% interest in the Angel Nickel Project comprising four new generation RKEF NPI production lines currently in production ramp up production within the Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP) on Halmahera Island in Indonesia and a 70% interest in the Oracle Nickel Project, comprising four new generation RKEF NPI production lines currently under construction within the IMIP.

NIC also holds an 80% interest in Hengjaya Mine ('HM'), a high-grade, long-life nickel laterite deposit, in close proximity to the IMIP. The HM produces Direct Shipping Ore (DSO), the bulk of which is sold into the IMIP facility.

Investment thesis – Buy, TP\$1.96/sh (from Buy, TP\$2.08/sh)

The higher net debt position is the main change to our sum-of-the-parts valuation, which lowers our target price 6%, to \$1.96/sh. Higher annual interest costs lower our forecast earnings by 4% and 5% for CY23 and CY24 respectively. CY22 earnings are effectively unchanged. We continue to forecast strong earnings growth of 61% in CY22 and 91% in CY23 and retain our Buy rating.

Valuation: \$1.96/sh

Our 12-month forward NIC valuation incorporates DCF models of its attributable interests in the Hengjaya laterite nickel ore mine, 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 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 \$1.96/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.
- **Geopolitical risks:** Mining companies' assets are subject to geopolitical risks, arising from events in, and outside, the jurisdictions they operate in.
- **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 ~18% holding in NIC equity.

Table 2 - Financial summary

PROFIT AND LOSS						FINANCIAL RATIOS							
Year ending 31 Dec.	Unit	2020a	2021a	2022e	2023e	2024e	Year ending 31 Dec.	Unit	2020a	2021a	2022e	2023e	2024e
Revenue	US\$m	523.5	645.9	1,219.6	1,908.8	2,098.7	VALUATION						
Expense	US\$m	(329.0)	(402.7)	(790.2)	(1,164.4)	(1,393.5)	Attributable NPAT	US\$m	110.6	137.9	219.9	424.5	403.9
EBITDA	US\$m	194.5	243.2	429.3	744.4	705.1	Attributable NPAT	A\$/m	160.1	183.6	308.2	615.2	577.0
Depreciation	US\$m	(36.8)	(36.0)	(65.3)	(99.3)	(111.2)	Reported EPS	US\$/sh	5.7	5.5	8.4	15.5	14.7
EBIT	US\$m	157.7	207.3	364.0	645.2	593.9	Reported EPS	Ac/sh	8.2	7.3	11.7	22.5	21.1
Net interest expense	US\$m	(4.7)	(12.7)	(27.6)	(42.4)	(31.1)	Adjusted EPS	Ac/sh	8.2	7.3	11.7	22.5	21.1
Unrealised gains (Impairments)	US\$m	-	-	-	-	-	EPS growth	%	62%	-11%	61%	91%	-6%
Other	US\$m	1.6	(13.5)	(29.1)	(19.6)	(17.9)	PER ¹	x	13.8x	15.5x	9.6x	5.0x	5.4x
PBT	US\$m	154.6	181.0	307.4	583.1	544.9	DPS	Ac/sh	3.0	4.0	5.0	9.0	9.0
Tax expense	US\$m	(0.9)	(5.1)	(15.7)	(17.3)	(3.7)	Franking	%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Consolidated profit (loss) for the year	US\$m	153.7	176.0	291.7	565.8	541.2	Yield	%	2.7%	3.5%	4.4%	8.0%	8.0%
Non-Controlling Interest	US\$m	43.1	38.0	71.8	141.3	137.3	FCF/share	Ac/sh	(2.6)	(21.6)	4.9	32.7	34.7
Attributable NPAT (reported)	US\$m	110.6	137.9	219.9	424.5	403.9	FCF yield	%	-2%	-19%	4%	29%	31%
NPAT (underlying)	US\$m	110.6	137.9	219.9	424.5	403.9	P/FCFPS	x	-44.2x	-5.2x	22.9x	3.5x	3.3x
							EV/EBITDA	x	13.6x	10.9x	6.2x	3.5x	3.7x
							EBITDA margin	%	37%	38%	35%	39%	34%
							EBIT margin	%	30%	32%	30%	34%	28%
							Return on assets	%	17%	12%	13%	20%	18%
							Return on equity	%	27%	18%	24%	38%	31%
							LIQUIDITY & LEVERAGE						
							Net debt (cash)	\$m	(306)	190	29	(374)	(826)
							ND / E	%	-33%	18%	2%	-23%	-44%
							ND / (ND + E)	%	-48%	16%	2%	-30%	-80%
							Attr. EBITDA / Interest	x	29.4x	15.7x	12.4x	13.6x	17.4x
							ATTRIBUTABLE DATA - NICKEL MINES LTD						
							Year ending 31 Dec.	Unit	2020a	2021a	2022e	2023e	2024e
							Revenues	US\$m	391.3	578.8	1,086.9	1,591.1	1,678.4
							EBITDA	US\$m	139.7	199.2	341.4	576.8	540.6
							NPAT	US\$m	110.6	137.9	219.9	424.5	403.9
							Net distributable cash flow	US\$m	269.3	(190.4)	353.3	362.7	114.1
							EV/EBITDA	x	18.4	14.1	7.8	4.5	4.8
							PER	x	13.8	15.5	9.6	5.0	5.4
							P/FCF	x	nm	nm	nm	5.9	18.9
							ORE RESERVE AND MINERAL RESOURCE						
							Hengjaya Nickel Mine (HM)				Mdmt	% Ni	t Ni
							Mineral Resources						
							Measured				20,000	1.30%	260,000
							Indicated				109,000	1.30%	1,417,000
							Inferred				56,000	1.30%	728,000
							Total				185,000	1.30%	2,405,000
							ASSUMPTIONS - Prices						
							Year ending 31 Dec. (avg)	Unit	2020a	2021a	2022e	2023e	2024e
							Nickel	US\$/lb	\$6.25	\$8.37	\$11.78	\$9.78	\$9.50
							Nickel	US\$/t	\$13,775	\$18,460	\$25,974	\$21,550	\$20,944
							Currency						
							AUD:USD		0.69	0.75	0.71	0.69	0.70
							ASSUMPTIONS - Production & costs						
							Year ending 31 Dec.	Unit	2020a	2021a	2022e	2023e	2024e
							Hengjaya Mine						
							Ore mined	wmt	795,650	2,169,972	2,583,800	2,400,000	2,400,000
							Ore grade	% Ni	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%	1.8%
							Nickel in ore	t Ni	14,479	38,165	45,536	43,200	43,200
							Nickel in ore (attributable)	t Ni	11,583	30,532	36,429	34,560	34,560
							RKEF (IMIP)						
							NPI production	t	295,897	298,352	498,905	864,615	904,615
							Contained nickel	t Ni	43,622	40,411	66,901	103,823	114,623
							Contained nickel (attributable)	t Ni	30,619	32,329	53,521	80,538	88,098
							Costs						
							Cash costs	US\$/t Ni	\$7,330	\$10,106	\$12,877	\$11,857	\$12,251
							All-in-Costs (AIC)	US\$/t Ni	\$7,414	\$10,225	\$12,966	\$11,969	\$12,356
							VALUATION						
							Ordinary shares (m)						2,731.3
							Options in the money (m)						-
							Total shares diluted (m)						2,731.3
							Valuation		CY22		CY23		CY24
							Sum-of-the-parts	A\$m	AS/sh	A\$m	AS/sh	A\$m	AS/sh
							IMIP RKEF (NPV12)	2,158.1	0.79	2,192.3	0.80	2,199.2	0.81
							IWIP RKEF (NPV12)	2,173.6	0.80	2,290.1	0.84	2,290.5	0.84
							ONI RKEF (NPV12)	691.7	0.25	1,345.2	0.49	1,450.5	0.53
							Hengjaya Mine (NPV12)	143.8	0.05	161.7	0.06	130.8	0.05
							Other exploration	120.0	0.04	120.0	0.04	120.0	0.04
							Corporate overheads	(105.3)	(0.04)	(110.9)	(0.04)	(111.5)	(0.04)
							Subtotal (EV)	5,182.0	1.90	5,998.3	2.20	6,079.5	2.23
							Net cash (debt)	(637.7)	(0.23)	(637.7)	(0.23)	374.1	0.14
							Total (undiluted)	4,544.3	1.66	5,360.7	1.96	6,453.6	2.36
							Dilutive effect of options						
							Add cash from options						
							Total (diluted)	4,544.3	1.66	5,360.7	1.96	6,453.6	2.36
							MAJOR SHAREHOLDERS						
							Shareholder	%					m
							Shanghai Decent (SDI)		21.2%				577.8
							Tanito Group (PT Karunia)		12.8%				350.6
							BlackRock Investment Management		6.3%				171.7
							Directors and Management		5.0%				137.9
							Shanghai Wanlu		4.4%				121.3

SOURCE: BELL POTTER SECURITIES ESTIMATES

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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