



2020–2021 Minerals Yearbook

NEW CALEDONIA [ADVANCE RELEASE]

THE MINERAL INDUSTRY OF NEW CALEDONIA

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Note: In this chapter, information for 2020 is followed by information for 2021.

New Caledonia, an overseas territory of France, is located in the Pacific Ocean, east of Australia. New Caledonia's mineral industry was characterized by nickel-cobalt mining and the production of ferronickel and other nickel metallurgical products. In 2020, New Caledonia ranked fourth in global mined nickel production, accounting for 8.0% of global production. Approximately one-third of the surface area of the New Caledonia's main island, Grande Terre, is covered by peridotites. Supergene alteration of these peridotites, caused by extensive tropical weathering, produced widespread nickel-cobalt laterite deposits. The mining of these deposits remained significant to New Caledonia's economy (Direction de l'Industrie, des Mines et de l'Energie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2009; Marsh and others, 2013, p. 3, 10; Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2021a, p. 10; McRae, 2022).

Minerals in the National Economy

In 2020, the real gross domestic product (GDP) of New Caledonia decreased by 2.6%. The nominal GDP was an estimated \$9.33 billion [988 billion CFP Francs (XPF)].¹ In 2020 (the latest year for which data were available), the nickel mining sector accounted for 6% of New Caledonia's GDP. The total value of New Caledonia's exports was \$1.63 billion in 2020, 93% of which was related to its mineral industry. The value of ferronickel exports accounted for 47% of total exports; nickel ores and concentrates, 27%; nickel hydroxide cake, 11%; nickel oxide, 5.9%; and cobalt carbonate, 1.3%. Of the approximately 86,540 people employed in the country in 2020, 64,898 people were employed in the private sector. Of those employed in the private sector, 11,027 were employed in the manufacturing sector (an increase of 0.7% from the number in 2019), 6,057 were employed in the construction sector (a decrease of 4.7%), and 1,788 were employed in the extractive sector (an increase of 6.2%) (Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2021b, p. 14; 2022a, p. 10, 28, 46; Comptes Économiques Rapides pour l'Outre-Mer, 2022, p. 1; Institut de la Statistique et des Études Économiques Nouvelle-Caledonie, 2022).

Production

In 2020, production of nickel cobalt hydroxide (Ni content) increased by 182% and production of cobalt (recoverable from nickel mining) increased by 29%. Production of oxide sinter (Ni content) decreased by 57%. Data on mineral production are in table 1.

Structure of the Mineral Industry

The Direction de l'Industrie, des Mines et de l'Énergie de la Nouvelle-Calédonie [New Caledonian Department of Industry, Mines and Energy] (DIMENC) is New Caledonia's agency responsible for the development of the energy and mineral industries in New Caledonia. Within the DIMENC, the Le Service des Mines et Carrières [Mines and Quarry Service] regulates mining activities, including exploration, extraction, and environmental protection. The Mining Code of New Caledonia, established in 2009, provides incentives for converting ore to metals within New Caledonia. The Department of Mines and Quarry Service grants exploration permits and concessions. The right to export minerals to foreign metallurgical companies is granted only by decree of the Government following a review by the Mines and Quarry Service. Although the mines and plants in New Caledonia are owned primarily by private international companies, mines that are majority-owned by companies or entities based in New Caledonia include the Goro, the Koniambo, the Tiebaghi, and the Thio Mines (Australia Trade and Investment Commission, 2022; Direction de l'Industrie, des Mines et de l'Energie de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2022a). Table 2 is a list of major mineral industry facilities.

Commodity Review

Metals

Nickel and Cobalt.—New Caledonia's nickel-cobalt laterite deposits were categorized into two main subtypes: a lower saprolite layer composed of weathering silicate minerals, and an overlaying limonite (also known as yellow laterite) layer composed of goethite. In 2020, saprolites accounted for 77.6% of the nickel ore mined in New Caledonia, by gross weight, and limonite accounted for the remaining 22.4%. Limonite production increased significantly—by 37% in 2020 compared with that in 2019—whereas production of saprolite decreased by 5.4% (Marsh and others, 2013, p. 1, 18; Direction de l'Industrie, des Mines et de l'Energie de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2022b).

Société Le Nickel (SLN) of continental France produced 5.4 million metric tons (Mt) of laterite in 2020, which was an increase of 16% compared with that in 2019. Production increased despite strikes at the beginning of the year that affected the operation of SLN facilities. The strikes concerned the restructuring of the work week to increase efficiency. There were supply issues at SLN's Doniambo plant because of the strikes, and although the plant produced 47,800 metric tons (t) of ferronickel, it did not achieve its target-level production for 2020 of 55,000 t (RNZ Pacific, 2020; Eramet S.A., 2021b, p. 58, 65; Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2021a, p. 105).

¹Where necessary, values have been converted from CFP francs (XPF) to U.S. dollars (US\$) at the annual average rates of XPF106.082=US\$1.00 for 2019, XPF105.873=US\$1.00 for 2020, and XPF101.325=US\$1.00 for 2021.

In 2020, Koniambo Nickel SAS (KNS) produced 16,900 t of ferronickel (nickel content) at its Koniambo plant; this was a decrease of 29% compared with the amount produced in 2019 and was because the plant was operating on a single furnace rather than two for the majority of the year. The extended shutdown of one of the furnaces was due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) restrictions imposed during scheduled maintenance of the furnace in March, which extended the furnace restart until October (Glencore plc, 2021, p. 67).

In 2020, Vale New Caledonia SAS (VNC) produced 31,000 t of nickel contained in finished products at its Goro plant, which was a 32% increase compared with production in 2019. VNC also recovered cobalt as a byproduct and produced 2,198 t of cobalt in intermediate products, which was an increase of 29%. The plant was supplied by the Goro Mine, which produced 1.7 Mt of ore at a grade of 1.50% nickel in 2020 compared with 2.5 Mt at a grade of 1.54% nickel in 2019. Throughout the course of the year, the Goro plant gradually ended its production of nickel oxide and cobalt carbonate and moved to producing only nickel hydroxide cake, which was part of a strategic realignment to focus on the automobile battery market. In December, Vale S.A. of Brazil announced that its ownership interest in VNC would be sold to the Prony Resources New Caledonia consortium (PRNC), which was an international consortium with ownership shared between La Société de Participation Minière du Sud Calédonien SAS (30% of holdings), financing companies for PRNC (30%), Trafigura Group (Pvt.) Ltd. of Singapore (19%), PRNC employees (12%), and the local population of New Caledonia (9%). The sale was expected to be made final in the first quarter of 2021 (Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2021a, p. 101; Vale S.A., 2021, p. 63, 64, 69, 264).

The gross weight of laterite exported in 2020 increased by 12% to 8.1 Mt (wet tons). China was the leading destination for New Caledonia's laterite exports, by volume, accounting for 3.4 Mt, which was a 70% increase compared with the amount exported to China in 2019; it was followed by the Republic of Korea, 2.9 Mt (a 6.1% decrease) and Japan, 1.8 Mt (a 16% decrease). The nickel content of ores exported to the Republic of Korea averaged 1.5% in 2020; Japan, 1.4%; and China, 1.2%. All nickel ore and concentrate exports to the Republic of Korea were produced by Nickel Mining Company SAS (NMC) and sold to Société du Nickel de Nouvelle-Calédonie et Corée (SNNC) to produce ferronickel at its Gwangyang plant. SLN accounted for 25% of the nickel ore and concentrate exports to Japan; Societe des Mines de la Tontouta (SMT), 34%; Société Minière Georges Montagnat S.A. (SMGM), 24%; and Maï Kouaoua Mines (MKM), 17%. SLN accounted for 60% of the nickel ore and concentrate exports to China; SMT, 23%; NMC, 12%; SMGM, 3.6%; and MKM, 1.8% (Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2021a, p. 102, 104; Direction de l'Industrie, des Mines et de l'Energie de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2022b).

The increase in laterite exports was driven by the new export rights granted to domestic mining companies during the year, primarily to SLN, which was authorized to export 3 Mt of laterite ore (for ore with grades less than or equal to 2%) in 2020 and 4 Mt annually from 2021 onwards compared with an authorized export limit of 2 Mt to Japan and China. SLN exported 2.5 Mt in 2020, which was an increase of 55%

compared with the amount exported by the company in 2019. Also in 2020, the Government granted NMC the right to export 800,000 metric tons per year (t/yr) of laterite to Yangzhou Yichuan Nickel Industry Co. Ltd. of China and 300,000 t/yr of laterite to SNNC. The Government also renewed SMGM's authorization to export 575,000 t/yr of laterite to Sumitomo Corp. of Japan (Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2020, p. 106; 2021a, p. 103; Eramet S.A., 2021a, p. 1, 2).

New Caledonia exported 241,829 t of ferronickel (gross weight), which was a decrease of 1.2% compared with these exports in 2019; 11,474 t of nickel oxide (gross weight), a decrease of 45%; and 2,297 t of cobalt carbonate (gross weight), a decrease of 23%. The nickel hydroxide cake exports (gross weight) totaled 98,934 t, which was an increase of 176%. The total nickel content of the exported nickel metallurgical products was 94,831 t. China was the leading destination for New Caledonia's nickel metallurgical exports in terms of the total nickel content of all exported nickel metallurgical products, accounting for 73%; countries within the European Union, 9.2%; and the United States, 2.1% (Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2021a, p. 106; Direction de l'Industrie, des Mines et de l'Energie de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2022b).

MINERAL INDUSTRY HIGHLIGHTS IN 2021

In 2021, the real GDP of New Caledonia increased by 0.1%. The nominal GDP was \$9.75 billion. The total value of New Caledonia's exports was \$1.67 billion. Of this total, 93% was related to the country's mineral industry, including ferronickel exports accounting for 48% of total exports, by value; followed by nickel ores and concentrates, 31%; and nickel hydroxide cake, 13%. Exports of nickel oxide and cobalt carbonate both dropped to zero in 2021 owing to the total suspension of production for these commodities at the Goro plant. The manufacturing sector employed an average of 11,140 people in 2021, which was an increase of 1.0% from the number employed in the sector in 2020; the construction sector employed 5,947 (a decrease of 1.8%), and the extractive sector, 1,868 (an increase of 4.5%). In 2021, the production of nickel oxide sinter (Ni content) decreased by 97%; recoverable cobalt as a byproduct in nickel ore, 50%; and ferronickel (Ni content), 13% (table 1; Institut d'Emission d'Outre-mer, 2022a, p. 11, 45, 46; 2022b, p. 14; Institut de la Statistique et des Études Économiques Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2022).

In 2021, SLN produced 5.4 Mt of laterite, which was the same as in 2020. Production remained stable despite strikes linked to VNC, poor weather, loss of an electric powerplant unit, and the COVID-19 pandemic. SLN's ferronickel (Ni content) production, however, decreased by 18% to about 39,000 t in 2021 because of technical issues with its furnaces and low sold volume. In 2021, KNS produced about 17,000 t of ferronickel (nickel content) at its Koniambo plant, which was an increase of 0.6% compared with that in 2020. Production remained low because of ongoing technical difficulties; these were mainly damage to KNS's powerplant and one of its two furnaces owing to the extended shutdowns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. PRNC produced about 17,000 t of nickel hydroxide cake in 2021, which was a 10% decrease from the amount it produced in 2020.

The decrease was owing to the forced shutdown of its plant during the first 4 months of the year because of an ownership dispute (Eramet S.A., 2022, p. 57; Glencore plc, 2022, p. 65, 79; Institut d’Emission d’Outre-mer, 2022a, p. 45, 103, 105, 107).

The gross weight of laterite exported in 2021 decreased by 1.9% to 7.9 Mt. The Republic of Korea was the leading destination for New Caledonia’s laterite exports, by volume, accounting for 3.2 Mt, which was a 10% increase compared with that in 2020; followed by China, 3.1 Mt, an 8.1% decrease; and Japan, 1.6 Mt, a 9.8% decrease. The nickel content of ores exported to the Republic of Korea averaged 1.4% in 2021; Japan, 1.4%; and China, 1.2%. SLN accounted for 33% of the nickel ore and concentrate exported to Japan; SMT and SMGM, 30% each; and MKM, 6.3%. SLN accounted for 66% of the nickel ore and concentrate exported to China; SMT, 21%; MKM, 5.8%; NMC, 5.4%; and SMGM, 2.0% (Direction de l’Industrie, des Mines et de l’Energie de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2022b; Institut d’Emission d’Outre-mer, 2022a, p. 103, 106).

The slight decrease of ore exports in 2021 was due to the negative effects on mine output caused by poor weather and supply difficulties during the year. Favorable global prices, however, resulted in the export value increasing by 12.6% for nickel ore despite the decrease in export quantity. In 2021, the Government modified previous authorizations for the export of nickel ores and issued new limits. NMC newly obtained authorization to export 1.2 Mt of laterite ore annually to Yichuan Nickel Industry from 2022 onwards. SLN’s new authorization for nickel ore exports (for ores with grades less than or equal to 2%) was increased to 6 million metric tons per year starting in 2022 (Institut d’Emission d’Outre-mer, 2022a, p. 45, 105).

New Caledonia exported 193,459 t of ferronickel (gross weight) in 2021, which was a decrease of 20% compared with that in 2020. The nickel hydroxide cake exports (gross weight) totaled 85,973 t, which was a decrease of 13%. In 2021, the total nickel content of the exported nickel metallurgical products was 68,060 t. China remained the leading destination for nickel metallurgical exports in terms of total nickel content of all exported nickel metallurgical products, accounting for 66%; countries within the European Union, 13%; and the United States, 4.0% (Direction de l’Industrie, des Mines et de l’Energie de Nouvelle-Calédonie, 2022b; Institut d’Emission d’Outre-mer, 2022a, p. 108).

Outlook

Nickel mining and refining are expected to remain central to the New Caledonian economy. The major influencing factors on New Caledonia’s nickel production and exports include nickel prices, development of the electric automobile industry, Indonesian nickel export policy, and the extent of social unrest affecting normal operations in domestic plants. In particular, global nickel consumption from the growing electric automobile industry may affect New Caledonia’s nickel output in the near future. The production and exports of nickel hydroxide cake, which have been steadily increasing in previous years, are also likely to continue increasing and will likely remain a major focus of the Goro plant (Institut d’Emission d’Outre-mer, 2022a, p. 109).

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TABLE 1
NEW CALEDONIA: PRODUCTION OF MINERAL COMMODITIES¹

(Metric tons, gross weight, unless otherwise specified)

Commodity ²	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
METALS					
Cobalt, mine, nickel ore, Co content ^c	21,500	21,600	21,000	20,000	19,000
Of which, recoverable ³	2,780	2,100	1,700	2,200	1,100
Ferroalloys, ferronickel:					
Gross weight	269,961	260,206	247,746	236,421	205,108
Ni content	73,219	82,114	70,654	65,051	56,372
Nickel:					
Mine, ore:					
Gross weight	16,552	16,634	15,336 ^r	15,586	14,855
Ni content	215,382	216,225	208,185 ^r	199,375	186,284
Intermediate, nickel cobalt hydroxide, Ni content	6,525	6,723	6,483	18,253	16,810
Oxide sinter, Ni content	30,875	25,800	17,267	7,404	231
INDUSTRIAL MINERALS					
Cement, hydraulic	104,253	86,343	76,953	73,046	67,966

^cEstimated. ^rRevised.

¹Table includes data available through August 8, 2022. All data are reported unless otherwise noted. Estimated data are rounded to no more than three significant digits.

²In addition to the commodities listed, crushed stone, iron, silica sand, and silica may have been produced, but available information was inadequate to make reliable estimates of output.

³Cobalt contained in the cobalt carbonate and nickel hydroxide produced in New Caledonia.

TABLE 2
NEW CALEDONIA: STRUCTURE OF THE MINERAL INDUSTRY IN 2021

(Metric tons unless otherwise specified)

Commodity	Major operating companies and major equity owners	Location of main facilities	Annual capacity
Cement	Tokuyama Nouvelle Calédonie S.A. (Tokuyama Corp., 75.6%, and others, 24.4%)	Grinding plant in Noumea, Province Nord	180,000
Cobalt, in ore and concentrate, Co content	Prony Resources New Caledonia consortium (PRNC) [La Compagnie financière de Prony, 30%; Société de Participation Minière du Sud Calédonien SAS, 30%; Trafigura Group (Pvt.) Ltd., 19%; Prony Resources employees, 12%; local population, 9%]	Goro Mine and plant, 58 kilometers east of Noumea in Province Sud	4,500 ^e
Do.	Société Le Nickel (SLN) [Eramet S.A., 56%; Société Territoriale Calédonienne de Participation Industrielle (STCPI), 34%; Nissin Steel Co., 10%]	Boualoudjelima, Etoile du Nord, Poro Bonini, Poro Francaise, and Poum Mines in Province Nord, and Dothio and Opou Mines in Province Sud ¹	NA
Do.	do.	Kouaoua, Nepoui-Kopeto, and Tiebaghi Mines in Province Nord, and Thio Mine in Province Sud	3,000 ^e
Nickel:			
Ore and concentrate, Ni content	Koniambô Nickel SAS (KNS) [Société Minière du Sud Pacifique (SMSP), 51%, and Glencore plc., 49%]	Koniambô Mine in Province Nord	36,000 ^e
Do.	Maï Kouaoua Mines (MKM) (JinPei Group, 49%)	Graziella and N'Go-Ada Mines in Province Sud	30,000 ^e
Do.	Nickel Mining Co. SAS (NMC) [Société Minière du Sud Pacifique (SMSP), 51%, and POSCO, 49%]	Nakety, Ouaco and Kouaoua Mines in Province Nord, and Boakaine and Poya Mines in Province Sud ²	31,000 ^e
Do.	Prony Resources New Caledonia consortium (PRNC) [La Compagnie financière de Prony, 30%; Société de Participation Minière du Sud Calédonien SAS, 30%; Trafigura Group (Pvt.) Ltd., 19%; Prony Resources employees, 12%; local population, 9%]	Goro Mine and plant, 58 kilometers east of Noumea in Province Sud	65,000 ^e
Do.	Société des Mines de la Tontouta (SMT)	Bogota, Cap Bocage, Kaala, and Nakety Mines in Province Nord	15,000 ^e
Do.	Société Le Nickel (SLN) [Eramet S.A., 56%; Société Territoriale Calédonienne de Participation Industrielle (STCPI), 34%; Nissin Steel Co., 10%]	Boualoudjelima, Etoile du Nord, Poro Bonini, Poro Francaise, and Poum Mines in Province Nord, and Dothio and Opou Mines in Province Sud ¹	50,000 ^e
Do.	do.	Kouaoua, Nepoui-Kopeto, and Tiebaghi Mines in Province Nord, and Thio Mine in Province Sud	87,000 ^e
Do.	Société Minière Georges Montagnat S.A. (SMGM)	Tontouta Mine in Province Sud	6,000 ^e
Products:			
Ferronickel, Ni content	Koniambô Nickel SAS (KNS) [Société Minière du Sud Pacifique (SMSP), 51%, and Glencore plc., 49%]	Koniambô plant in Province Nord	60,000
Do.	Société Le Nickel (SLN) [Eramet S.A., 56%; Société Territoriale Calédonienne de Participation Industrielle (STCPI), 34%; Nissin Steel Co., 10%]	Doniambo plant in Noumea, Province Sud	60,000 ^e
Nickel hydroxide cake, Ni content	Prony Resources New Caledonia consortium (PRNC) [La Compagnie financière de Prony, 30%; Société de Participation Minière du Sud Calédonien SAS, 30%; Trafigura Group (Pvt.) Ltd., 19%; Prony Resources employees, 12%; local population, 9%]	Goro Mine and plant, 58 kilometers east of Noumea in Province Sud	40,000
Nickel oxide, Ni content	do.	Goro Mine and plant, 58 kilometers east of Noumea in Province Sud ³	60,000

^eEstimated. Do., do. Ditto. NA Not available.

¹Operated through contractors on the behalf of Société Le Nickel (SLN).

²Production of nickel matte was suspended at the Doniambo plant in 2016.

³Nickel oxide production at the Goro plant was shut down by mid-2020.