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Nickel Mines Ltd (NIC)

Panic selling creates opportunity

Recommendation

Buy (unchanged)

Price

\$1.405

Target (12 months)

\$1.76 (unchanged)

GICS Sector

Materials

Expected Return

Capital growth	25.3%
Dividend yield	4.3%
Total expected return	29.6%

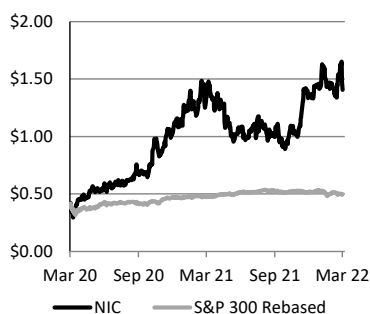
Company Data & Ratios

Enterprise value	\$3,797m
Market cap	\$3,686m
Issued capital	2,623m
Free float	77%
Avg. daily vol. (52wk)	\$14.8m
12 month price range	\$0.885-\$1.79

Price Performance

	(1m)	(3m)	(12m)
Price (A\$)	1.42	1.38	1.31
Absolute (%)	-0.7	2.2	7.7
Rel market (%)	-0.3	4.7	3.1

Absolute Price



SOURCE: IRESS

Nickel market mayhem

NIC entered and subsequently exited a Trading Halt on Wednesday 9 March, following a 23% drop in its share price in morning trade on the ASX. This resulted from speculation around the possible implications for Tsingshan Holding Group (a private company), the world's largest stainless steel producer and parent company of Shanghai Decent Investment (SDI). SDI is NIC's largest shareholder (17.9%) and partner in the Indonesian Morowali Industrial Park (IMIP) and Indonesia Weda Bay Industrial Park (IWIP), where NIC's Nickel Pig Iron (NPI) operations are hosted. According to reports, Tsingshan held a 200kt nickel short position, struck at US\$21,000/t. Following the suspension and cancellation of LME nickel trades for Tuesday 8th March, the mark-to-market valuation of the position, calculated on Monday's cash closing price of US\$48,200/t, was ~US\$7.4 billion. Market concerns related to the solvency of Tsingshan, the status of operations and development at the IWIP and IWIP and the potential forced sale of SDI's shareholding in NIC.

Business as usual for NIC

NIC has stated that production, commissioning and construction activities at the IMIP and IWIP are unaffected by these developments. Tsingshan has provided assurances it will not be selling any shares in NIC, it will continue to purchase all NPI produced by NIC at market prices and, as outlined in the terms for NIC's acquisition of 70% of the Oracle Nickel Project, it will accept NIC shares as part consideration. In the meantime, we believe it is likely Tsingshan (annual revenues US\$56 billion and regarded as the world's lowest cost stainless steel producer) will close out its short position, supported by physical delivery, without compromising its long-term financial viability.

Investment thesis – Buy, TP\$1.76/sh (unchanged)

We make no changes to our forecasts or valuation with this update. The underlying fundamentals of the business are unchanged, other than that we expect upward pressure to be applied to Nickel Pig Iron (NPI) prices. We view NIC's steep price drop as an acquisition opportunity. We continue to forecast aggressive EPS growth of 82% and 85% for FY22 and FY23 and we retain our Buy recommendation.

Earnings Forecast

Year ending 31 December	2021a	2022e	2023e	2024e
Sales (US\$m)	646	1,149	1,681	1,917
EBITDA (US\$m)	243	463	838	914
Attributable NPAT (reported) (US\$m)	138	255	492	534
Attributable NPAT (reported) (A\$m)	184	349	674	732
EPS (adjusted) (Acps)	7.3	13.3	24.6	26.7
EPS growth (%)	-11%	82%	85%	9%
PER (x)	19.3	10.6	5.7	5.3
FCF Yield (%)	-15%	4%	25%	30%
EV/EBITDA (x)	11.4	6.0	3.3	3.0
Dividend (Acps)	4.0	6.0	10.0	11.0
Yield (%)	2.8%	4.3%	7.1%	7.8%
Franking (%)	0%	0%	0%	0%
ROE (%)	18%	28%	42%	38%

SOURCE: BELL POTTER SECURITIES ESTIMATES

Panic selling creates opportunity

Business as usual for NIC

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NIC has stated that production, commissioning and construction activities at the IMIP and IWIP are unaffected by these developments. Tsingshan has provided assurances it will not be selling any shares in NIC, it will continue to purchase all NPI produced by NIC at market prices and, as outlined in the terms for NIC's acquisition of 70% of the Oracle Nickel Project, it will accept NIC shares as part consideration.

In our view this is shaping up as an opportunity to acquire NIC shares at a material discount and when there has been no fundamental change to the outlook for the business, other than further upward pressure likely being applied to the NPI price.

Changes to our forecasts

We have made no changes to our forecasts or valuation with this update, as summarised in the 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)	19,456	18,629	18,739	19,456	18,629	18,739	0%	0%	0%
US\$/A\$	0.73	0.73	0.73	0.73	0.73	0.73	0%	0%	0%
Production & costs									
Ore mined (t)	2,400,000	2,400,000	2,400,000	2,400,000	2,400,000	2,400,000	0%	0%	0%
Nickel in ore (t)	43,200	43,200	43,200	43,200	43,200	43,200	0%	0%	0%
RKEF NPI production (t)	517,008	789,615	904,615	517,008	789,615	904,615	0%	0%	0%
Contained nickel (t)	66,771	100,846	114,646	66,771	100,846	114,646	0%	0%	0%
Contained nickel (t, attributable)	53,417	78,457	88,117	53,417	78,457	88,117	0%	0%	0%
Cash costs (US\$/t Ni)	10,700	8,674	8,858	10,700	8,674	8,858	0%	0%	0%
Earnings & valuation									
Revenue (consolidated, US\$m)	1,149	1,681	1,917	1,149	1,681	1,917	0%	0%	0%
EBITDA (consolidated, US\$m)	463	838	914	463	838	914	0%	0%	0%
EBITDA (attributable, US\$m)	368	651	701	368	651	701	0%	0%	0%
NPAT (reported, attributable, US\$m)	255	492	534	255	492	534	0%	0%	0%
EPS (reported) (Acps)	13.3	24.6	26.7	13.3	24.6	26.7	0%	0%	0%
PER (x)	10.6	5.7	5.3	10.6	5.7	5.3	-	-	-
EPS growth (%)	82%	85%	9%	82%	85%	9%	0%	0%	0%
DPS (Acps)	6.0	10.0	11.0	6.0	10.0	11.0	0%	0%	0%
Yield	4.3%	7.1%	7.8%	4.3%	7.1%	7.8%	0%	0%	0%
NPV (A\$/sh)	1.76	2.16	2.66	1.76	2.16	2.66	0%	0%	0%
Price Target (A\$/sh)		1.76			1.76			0%	

SOURCE: COMPANY DATA AND BELL POTTER SECURITIES ESTIMATES

We have retained our dividend and earnings forecasts. We continue to forecast aggressive EPS growth of 82% and 85% for FY22 and FY23, on what we view as conservative production forecasts. Our NPV-based valuation is unchanged at \$1.76/sh.

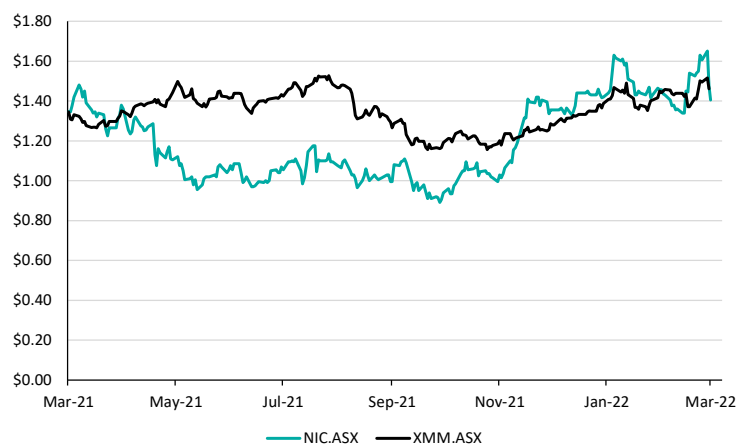
Upcoming catalysts

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 anticipate full production in the December quarter 2022;
- Further updates on the construction of ONI, comprising 4 next-generation RKEF lines being developed within the IMIP. Commissioning is to commence in 1QCY23;
- Progress updates for the Hengjaya Mine, where a major production expansion is complete. We will be looking for costs to track lower, towards ~US\$20/t and for the first commercial limonite nickel ore sales in 1QCY22;
- The release of the March 2022 quarterly production and cost report, expected in late April 2022;
- Exploration and development updates on the Siduarsa Nickel-Cobalt project in Papua province, Indonesia, in which NIC has recently acquired a 100% interest; 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.

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\$1.76/sh (unchanged)

We make no changes to our forecasts or valuation with this update. The underlying fundamentals of the business are unchanged, other than that we expect upward pressure to be applied to Nickel Pig Iron (NPI) prices. We view NIC's steep price drop as an acquisition opportunity. We continue to forecast aggressive EPS growth of 82% and 85% for FY22 and FY23 and we retain our Buy recommendation.

Valuation: \$1.76/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 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 \$1.76/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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