

New Caledonia, a land of Nickel - Research and innovation acting for the sustainable development

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New Caledonia, a French overseas territory, is located in the southwest of the Pacific Ocean, less than 2,000 km from both the Australian and New Zealand coasts. This small archipelago (18,575 km²) presents the third largest nickel deposit in the world and, according to recent estimates, would have more than 25% of the world's nickel resources and about 40% of the world's oxidized mineral resources, together with the presence of cobalt, chromium and manganese. The mining areas, spread over the whole 'Grande Terre' (mainland), comprise about 250,000 hectares of scattered concessions shared by French and international world scale mining and metallurgic companies and a few other local small-scale miners.

To face the challenges of a "better way of mining", fit the new regulatory requirements and improve mining social acceptability, the mining sector stakeholders decided to create a dedicated resource agency devoted to applied research and technology development in New Caledonia's mining industry. Created in 2007, this unique public and private organisation jointly involves all New Caledonian's mining companies, political and administrative stakeholders and various scientific research bodies.

Research has focused on three identified areas (technology and mineral resources, natural environment and social issues) to fill on-going gaps in fundamental knowledge, offer and adapt new technology that is relevant to the industry, develop methodology aids, manage knowledge transfer and upgrade practices on the ground. If action of CNRT has effectively added value to New Caledonian research, at the same time it permanently keeps in touch with industry. The fact that CNRT takes up social challenges, funds innovative projects and caters to its membership concerns, makes it more than a research-funding facility. While it does endeavour to develop fundamental and applied research projects, it also strives to provide technical and economic solutions and foster knowledge-transfer to mining companies and other businesses and professionals in the industry. New Caledonia has become something of a "laboratory" for studying the complex interactions between mines and society, a now essential component for consideration.