

Noumea, Friday, 12 March 2010  
At: 9.30 am

## **Successful second campaign to commission the 1<sup>st</sup> line of autoclaves for the Grand Sud plant**

Following the satisfactory results of the first performance test carried out on the first line of autoclaves and production of the first intermediate nickel from nickel, on an industrial scale, on 15 February last, the Grand Sud plant launched its second campaign to commission autoclaves dedicated to nickel and cobalt production.

**This second campaign was successfully completed on 8 March 2010, at around 12 noon. The two objectives set were achieved:**

1. **Validation of the skill of the operators and set up drivers in the leaching sector** was accomplished by the end of the first 5 days, in terms of which they were 100 % operational, 24 hours a day, the leaching circuits, linked with the PCS (Process control system) and the process engineers. The ground operators were supervised by experienced operators and engineers 24 hours a day.
2. **Production of a sufficient quantity of nickel solution to supply the refinery's 1st commissioning campaign.**

At the same time, equipment endurance tests were convincing over a total time of approximately 200 hours, with a period of 100 hours in continuous operation (a success for commissioning). The equipment proved its ruggedness. Likewise, the daily validation of the process's operating parameters reinforced knowledge of their interactions and opened up prospects for improving operational stability.

In accordance with the protocol, the first line of autoclaves is going to go into a stop and system safeguard phase, so that the teams carry out the inspections and technical adjustments needed to aim for an optimised production stability. At the end of the next 21 days, the 3<sup>rd</sup> campaign will be able to resume over a projected 35 day period.

The 360 tonnes of nickel contained in the solution produced, during the 2<sup>nd</sup> leaching campaign, enable planning the refinery's start up, around 18 March next, for a projected 8 day period.

For Peter Poppinga, Executive Vice President of the Asia Pacific region and CEO of Vale Inco Nouvelle-Calédonie *"With this 2<sup>nd</sup> campaign 100% operated by our local teams and the satisfactory results obtained, the build-up of the Grand Sud plant is emerging more clearly. We are happy with the autoclave's performance. The few adjustments that remain to be done on the peripheral equipment are of no great significance. Commissioning the refinery is the next key stage, to envisage production of the end product, towards the end of March. Still an effort but the end is in reach!"*

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