

Choose NC interviews M. François Laforest, Chairman and CEO Engie New Caledonia

Engie has been established in New Caledonia since 1929 through its electricity distribution subsidiary EEC Engie.



__To learn more about the history of Engie in New Caledonia, what were the key stages of its development in NC and the factors of its success?

EEC Engie was behind the electrification of the city of Nouméa in 1929 and then extended the deployment of the “Electricity Fairy” to many urban centres, in the countryside, on Lifou, but also in Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia. Engie is now a major player in Oceania in the production and distribution of energy, particularly renewable energy, and associated services, with more than 2,000 employees working in more than 15 entities.

__What is the current situation of the energy sector in New Caledonia, challenges and opportunities?

The challenges of the energy transition are global and local: if we do not manage to reduce our carbon footprint worldwide very quickly, climate change will directly affect our island, its biodiversity and its lagoon, which are unique in the world and will have direct implications on our populations. We therefore urgently need to decarbonise

our energy and travel and reduce our electricity consumption.

New Caledonia has understood this and launched in 2016 the New Caledonia Energy Transition Scheme. The energy sector has become a very dynamic sector, with an acceleration of renewable energy production projects in particular. From 2023, public electricity distribution should be 100% renewable.

The future opportunities are manifold: we must and can gradually decarbonize our nickel industry; a "green" nickel, produced from an energy mix incorporating a growing share of renewable energy will benefit the territory from an environmental standpoint and will also be a source of differentiation among end customers. Other opportunities exist: in the field of mobility which will move from electric to hydrogen in the near future; and also, in terms of energy efficiency, particularly in the tertiary sector. Green hydrogen produced from renewable energy sources, will offer tremendous opportunities for New Caledonia, which also has natural hydrogen in its subsoil.

__The company EEC Engie today manages the distribution of electrical energy in the municipalities of Nouméa, Mont-Dore, Dumbéa Sud, Bourail, Kaala-Gomen, Koumac, Canala, Thio and Lifou. What are your goals for 2021 and your long-term expansion plans?

Electricity distribution networks will be at the heart of the energy transition. It will be necessary to manage and optimize photovoltaic production installed at our customers' premises, decentralized energy storage (batteries, hydrogen), electric and hydrogen vehicles, while working to reduce consumption and guaranteeing continuity of electrical supply to all our clients. Our subsidiary Engie Pacifique Informatique, with its 30 engineers and technicians, will manage the data with the EEC Engie teams to ensure the operation of these "Smart Grids".

__According to STENC, the penetration rate of renewable energies for public electricity distribution must be 100% by 2025 (target originally planned for 2030 but advanced given changes). What is Engie's green energy strategy? How do you ensure process modernization?

Engie has always led the way in New Caledonia because innovation is at the heart of our values. The first French wind farm was established in New Caledonia with the installation of the Mont Negandi wind turbines by Alizés Energie Engie in 1997. In 2015, EEC Engie offered the first photovoltaic offers for self-consumption in households and installed the first collective photovoltaic unit with individual self-consumption in 2018. Green mobility and carsharing are also a priority at EEC Engie, with a fleet of electric, hybrid and also hydrogen vehicles, a first for New Caledonia.

From next year onwards, Lifou will certainly be the first 100% green island in the Pacific, thanks to its photovoltaic production, its energy storage system and grid management system without a thermal power station.



In the medium term, the energy transition of our nickel will allow the deployment of complementary solutions combining "clean" thermal resources (LNG, hydrogen, green gas) and the production of renewable energy.

Our strategy is to remain one of the benchmark players, combining our Caledonian roots and the support of the ENGIE group.



__Your final message for potential investors interested in New Caledonia? What do you think are the main assets of this region?

New Caledonia has high-quality infrastructure, mineral resources, an industrial fabric unique in the Pacific, varied skills and trades with France of course but also Australia, New Zealand and the Asian continent!

Having succeeded in developing an industrial economy, Caledonians have managed to preserve an exceptional natural environment that provides a good quality of life. Development potentials are significant in multiple sectors (agriculture, tourism, etc.).

We are currently living through a period of transition, the outcome of which will provide the visibility required by any investor, who can only be seduced by the strengths of New Caledonia.