



Address by Alex Herman, Commissioner of the Seabed Minerals Authority at the Cook Islands 2020 Exploration Licensing Launch

*Dome, National Auditorium
22 October 2020*

On stepping into the role of Seabed Minerals Commissioner earlier this year, I had an objective of realising Government's goal to deliver an **Exploration licensing process** in 2020. It has been a challenging process, particularly against the backdrop of COVID 19. However, thanks to the dedication and passion from many people, organisations and stakeholders, we are here today, to launch our Exploration licensing process.

The Exploration Licensing Process is the major step towards achieving the **vision** for our seabed minerals sector. The Honourable Prime Minister will talk more about that later.

On this significant occasion for the Cook Islands, I want to share with you some of the Authority's **key focus areas** as well as some personal reflections, as we enter this phase of the Exploration licensing process.



Much has been achieved. Much remains to be done. However, I am confident in the processes that we have set up, and that we have a sound foundation on which to build on the Authority's core role: which is to **administer, manage and regulate** the conduct of seabed minerals activities in our waters.

Our Licensing framework contains a number of **independent checks and balances**, such as our independent Licensing Panel and the separate permitting body for environmental approvals. It also requires that **key environmental principles** are upheld and met. Equally important, it serves the **interest of our communities**, for example through our **Advisory Committee**, who will share and make recommendations to the Authority on community perspectives.



There are 4 keys areas of focus for the Authority that I wish to cover briefly:

The First is **Communication and Engagement with our people**. Serving the interests of our people is a core value for the Authority and Government. Therefore, one area we have focused on, is our **communication and engagement** with the Cook Islands public, particularly through our **website** and **Facebook**. As always, there is room for improvement.

Our goal is to bring our people along on this journey – as we **all have a role to play** in ensuring this is **done right** for our **current and future generations**.

After this launch, the Authority, led by the Prime Minister will be undergoing more **public consultations**, including with our various stakeholder groups. We want to share our vision with our people. We also want to hear the views of our people.

We will also be creating more communications in our Cook Islands Maori language, and engaging more in Maori. I am excited to about what we are doing in this space.

A second key area is that of **capacity development**. As we continue to develop this sector, and the nature and complexity of seabed mineral activities increases, we will need to also develop the necessary skills and experience to manage those activities. There are a whole range of skillsets that we will need to develop within our people. As such, we will be working with **future licence holders** to develop suitable training programmes, as well as with **international and national regulators** through technical assistance programmes.

We are pleased to have already forged partnerships with international organisations like and International Seabed Authority, as well as with our New Zealand and Australian counterparts.

The third key focus area is **Cooperation and Collaboration**. This is key in ensuring our resource is managed sustainably, particularly in this emerging industry. We must work with all of our stakeholders to support **constructive and critical dialogue**, and to **share information and ideas**. There is **no one person** who has all the answers, but working together we can **find solutions**, come up with **innovative ideas**, knowledge and better ways of doing things.

And I can attest that through working with, and listening to feedback from our stakeholders – be it **government, civil society, industry and our public** – your contributions have helped us, the Authority, to make better and more robust decisions.

Fourth and finally **managing data and information**. The management of data and information by the Authority is critical to ensure we manage our resources responsibly

and protect our environment, and will also inform decision-making in our Marae Moana. To that end, we are committed to making environmental data publicly available.



In terms of next steps, we are continuing to develop our legal framework, as well as the standards, guidelines and processes to support its implementation.

I am pleased to share that the Seabed Minerals (Exploration) Regulations and Fees Regulations have been approved by Cabinet, and come into force today. These Regulations will be made available on our website.

We also have Environment regulations - relating to the environmental approvals for seabed minerals activities, and Mining Regulations for future commercial recovery that have been drafted. The National Environment Service and the Authority will issue those draft regulations for public comment soon. We welcome feedback from our all our stakeholders.



Now coming back to the licensing launch – before the Prime Minister officially launches and opens up licensing. I am pleased to publicly release the following documents:

In connection to the **Tender and Licensing Process**:

- **Invitation to Apply**
 - This document sets out the rules for the tender process
- **Application Guideline**
 - This document provides guidance to applicants in preparing their applications

➤ **Fit and Proper Person Guidelines**

- This document provides guidance on the fit and proper person test as set out under our Act

Additionally, I would like to introduce **4 Factsheets**. They cover the following issues:

- **Overview of seabed minerals sector**
- **Who does what**
- **Licensing process**
- **Environmental approval**

These factsheets are aimed at the public, and gives a simple and brief summary on particular issues. We will also be translating these factsheets into Cook Islands Maori.

These documents are all available on our website.



Finally, as Commissioner, I would like to **honour** both our **past** and **present** Ministers for Seabed Minerals. We have been fortunate to have Ministers' who have had the vision to see the potential of this sector, and have given their full support to enable the Authority to do the necessary work required to progress this sector.

Likewise, I would also like to honour the Chair of our Advisory Committee, Bishop Tutai Pere. I believe that through your leadership, we can build **better and stronger engagement** between Government and our people.

As I said earlier – we would not be here without the efforts of many people and organisations. As we like to say “**TEAM work makes the DREAM work**”. So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank those people.

It is not possible to thank everyone, especially when you have a limited time to speak – but I have listed those people on the screen – because I believe they should be acknowledged for their tireless work and contributions.¹

Firstly, my deepest gratitude to my team at the **Seabed Minerals Authority**. And likewise to all of the government officials in the **Seabed Minerals Working Group**. I wish to also acknowledge everyone involved in putting together this **Licensing Launch** – it truly takes a village. There are also others who I would like **specially acknowledge**. This includes people who provided expert advice to the Authority, or assisted us with our communication and engagement – to you all – I say thank you.

Meitaki maata e Kia Manuia

¹ See Acknowledgements.