



Queens Representative (Sir Tom Marsters) Speech

Good afternoon everyone,

First of all, I just want to congratulate all those who have been involved in this exciting journey, those of the past up to those involved today. I congratulate the Prime Minister, Mark Brown who is also the Minister responsible for our Seabed Minerals programme, Commissioner Alex Herman and staff of the Seabed Minerals Unit and of course not to forget, the members of the Advisory Committee, headed by Bishop Pere. All good people and all playing a very important and pivotal role, in this most important programme. I also want to extend my heartiest congratulations and commendation to the former and very first Commissioner, Paul Lynch who did a lot of the ground work and others who gave their time and assistance to pave the way for us to be here today.

I salute those visionaries of the past, the likes of Sir Albert Henry, (Papa Arapati), Sir Geoffrey Henry, Sir Dr Terepai Maoate and others, whom despite criticisms and all the barriers put in front of them, kept the flame burning. Therefore, for me this day brings joy and it is indeed a great honour for me to address this most auspicious gathering. Although I have so much to reflect upon, I promise that for today my address will be very brief.

The term Manganese nodules, was an alien phrase to us here in the Cook Islands up until about 50 years ago. It was in 1974 when the Russians asked to conduct research into our deep sea oceans. I was attached to that expedition which was headed by a Professor Bischoff on the Research vessel the MV Vityaz. For a very long time after that, I kind of got worried because whenever I mentioned the Professor's name no one seemed to recognise the name, not until most recently.

My last role as Minister responsible and with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat, engaged in 2013 the services of Professor David Cronan of the Imperial College of London, a globally and highly respected oceanographer and geologist, to collect all the data and all the reports written and prepared on our resources and to revise these, update them, the distribution, abundance, composition and resource potential of the manganese nodules in our EEZ, (Exclusive Economic Zone). This exercise began in February 2013, well and truly into the next year of 2014.

It was during this time that Cronan shared that some years earlier than the 1974 survey, that as a young scientist himself, he had accompanied the Professor Emeritus Bischoff on a reconnaissance trip through our waters. So that answered the question that Professor Bischoff had indeed been in our waters as early and before 1974. Obviously the Professor had picked up samples and knew there was something here that needed further investigation. So for 46 years now, we have known about this huge economic wealth that is waiting to be harvested. I can still visualise the scene in the Cabinet room the day the Professor made his final presentation after all the surveys of the Southern sounds, the Manikhiki plateau and all of that. In his presentation to Papa Arapati and his Cabinet Ministers and senior officials. He said something like this- I quote, *"You are sitting on a gold mine Prime Minister, your country can be one of the wealthiest in the world literally"*, he said; *"it's only a matter of time;"*

Of course time as he explained, meant technology in the main, to be able to harvest these nodules economically. I believe that the technology is around now. We are at the doorstep of the time he was talking about. These sentiments were further echoed in a letter to Dr Sir Terepai Maoate, which he showed me in 2009 from another leading figure on deep sea minerals, Dr Jan Markussen of Norway. Dr Markussen is still alive.

I must say that the programme had a very checkered and at times uncertain path, with several changes of government and leadership it did lose momentum at times, but in 2009 the Seabed Minerals Bill finally saw passage in Parliament. November 26th 2009 was when the Royal Assent was received. History will also show that, whilst it was one of the longest bills, over 300 sections to enter Parliament, it was one of the very few that received unanimous support. Dr Terepai Maoate, headed that programme at the time whilst I was in the Opposition. That paper received unanimous support from the whole 24 members of Parliament of the house.

Last year in 2019, the new Seabed Minerals Bill/Act was passed. Key changes to the Act included greater linkages with the Marae Moana Act 2017 and the emphasis of best environmental practices and standards.

We have come a long way since 1974. Our legal instruments have been completed, and our financial instruments have been completed with the assistance of IMF with the work done by Mr Emery conducted a few years ago.

I will leave it at that. There is so many other things to reflect on.

That is a brief snapshot into our history and I am so pleased that the team today are dedicated, that the team today has vision. What we need now is the support, like the support that the whole 24 members of Parliament gave to the Bill. The support of the whole country is now needed to paddle us forward.

I liked the verse given by our Orometua this morning. I am sorry our English speaking friends, If only you knew what he was saying, it was very significant and very fitting of why we are here this morning.

My best wishes to Alex and her team. Good Luck, I know your Minister is right behind you.

God Bless, Kia orana.