



***Address by Garth Henderson, Chair of the Seabed Minerals Licensing Panel
at the Exploration Licence Granting Ceremony 2022***

*Dome, National Auditorium
23 February 2022*

Kia Orana,

Good to see the representation here. I must say I follow two strong speakers. Pastor Tevai Matapo showing the religious connection between what we're doing, what we're entitled, and how we should be doing it. The good and excellent overview that Alex presented us, and I must say those two interesting videos are very explanatory.



I'm just going to lay out a few points that were pertinent to the Licensing Panel, and my role as Chairman. Now I'm quite an unusual guy for a Cook Islander. Over the last five years, I have not only been a member of many regional and global committees, but also chairman. So I am quite used to chairing meetings from eight different locations around the world, dealing with fifty percent of the participants having English as a second language.

I have had about five different roles in that space. Coming into this challenge we faced in the licensing panel, I was ideally suited, and it worked relatively well. We had the panel of experts with knowledge and experience across a wide range of fields, and when we

needed additional expertise during the application process, we were able to reach out and get expert opinions to feed into panel decisions.



Prior to the panel convening, I must say we received thousands of pages of information that the Seabed Authority themselves had to work through, filter out, and then access to the panel members themselves, but it was thousands. In fact, in all the work I've done on public procurement or panels like this, this is the most comprehensive information I've received.

And I did see a comment in the newspaper, where one of the applicants described the process as one of the most complex processes that he has had to meet for work of this nature, and I get a sense while I'm not hugely experienced in this sort of work from the applicants side, it certainly looked like it from our side.

All this sort of information and access to expertise made for robust discussion during the evaluation of applications. So it was quite an intense really for us. As several of the assessment criteria were highlighted here, we looked at the proposed exploration activities. You saw some of the-how they are going to conduct the exploration. You saw the seabed scanners, and sort of stuff. So we looked at that sort of activity.



Regarding the applicants financial resources, we're interested in, 'Do these companies have the money?', or 'Do they have access to the money to complete this work once we

reach an agreement?’ So that was an area we dealt with quite deeply. Take their ability, it was their track record and experience prior. Compliance and risk management that was raised in the most recent video up there ‘How do they manage a risk?’ I think even to the extent ‘How do they manage the challenges of COVID-19?’ Over the next five years I expect there are going to be other risks, there’s going to be tropical cyclones, a whole range of things.

Regarding our national interest, we got short-term benefits: we’re going to have employment, professional services, and other things once they set up office. And the other one that was highlighted in the video was the seabed data that we are going to get our hands on, that is costing millions of dollars to obtain, and that would not be obtainable without exploration licences. That’s an important point that doesn’t come out in most of the publications I’ve seen.



On my role as a chair, I’m very honoured to be appointed chair. I think this is a big step forward for us, this is a first time we have seriously considered licences for exploration, and today is a significant milestone. I’m glad to be part of that. I’d like to tell a personal story, it’s a funny story.

Fifty years ago, I was a primary school kid, sitting on the ground at Nikao science school in Nikao, and the first leader Sir Albert Henry came. This was the late 60s’, early 70s’. And he spoke eloquently about an economy based on Seabed Minerals. Fifty years ago, so I laugh, and I wonder what my school teacher would have thought that fifty years later,

I'm standing here talking about my role as the Chairman of the Licensing Panel. I don't think my teacher would believe it, but here I am so very honoured.

As the MFEM Financial Secretary, I am aware of the prospects of what we're doing, the Prime Minister will speak more on this. As we emerge from, or recover from COVID, short term benefits are important, medium and long-term, and the opportunity to diversify the economy, the opportunity to build the infrastructure we need to build in this country.

This can help us realise that, so there are significant benefits from it. I'm proud of the work done by the Panel, I'm confident that the recommendations we made to the Minister were the right ones for our country.



In closing I'd like to thank my colleagues on the panel. I understand they might be watching the live-streaming, thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. I sincerely enjoyed working with you. Especially considering time zones, when we took a break, some would be taking a break for breakfast, others were taking a break for lunch, and others took a break for dinner.

But on time we always signed in, and we got through our work each day. And the irony is every day, I used to start with a prayer, and finish with a prayer. I'm not sure what their religion persuasions were, of each panel member, but nobody was upset. Each day I'd ask, 'Lord look over our shoulders, and make sure we make the right decisions for this

country.’ And I think it worked. I’d like to thank the Authority for their role as secretariat panel, very confident, very professional.



I saw the list of all the other government agencies involved, and I’d like to thank them as well. Despite the challenges that COVID-19 has imposed on us, we’ve still managed to do this business, we’ve still managed to focus our efforts to getting this across the line. So thank you all. Overall I am very pleased with the process we undertook as a panel.

I believed we’ve fulfilled the role as required. With the granting of the exploration licences, I look forward to seeing this sector develop and thrive, as Alex said, for the benefit of our people.

Thank you very much.