



Address by Alex Herman, Commissioner of the Seabed Minerals Authority at the Exploration Licence Granting Ceremony 2022

*Dome, National Auditorium
23 February 2022*

Today's signing of Exploration Licences marks a major step towards achieving the vision for our sector – that is to transform the Cook Islands through the sustainable and responsible development of our seabed minerals, for the benefit of our Cook Islands people.

While there is still a long journey ahead of us, we can rightly be proud of what we have achieved so far.



Getting to this point has taken a lot of hard work, dedication, diligence, and patience with the final applications processed comprising 139 files, totaling over 6 and a half thousand pages.

The purpose of our licensing process has been to make sure that those granted an exploration licence have the expertise, capability, finances, and technical resources to properly and lawfully undertake exploration in our waters. And, most importantly to ensure that they are people we want to partner with, that share our vision, and want to work with us to achieve it.

It has been a 16 month process, involving over 200 stakeholders and more than 50 consultations. While we know we can't meet everyone's expectations for the sector we believe that the precautionary approach we have adopted is a key part of the sustainable and responsible development of our seabed mineral resources.

This is why the exploration phase is so important, it will provide us with the information we need to better understand our seabed environment, our mineral resource as well as the potential impacts of harvesting them. With over 60 expedition legs expected over the next 5 years, this knowledge will be essential for informing our future decisions.

For us at the Authority, the key words in our vision is, 'for the benefit of our Cook Islands people'. This, has been our guiding principle throughout this licensing process.

The Cook Islands may be blessed with beautiful white sandy beaches and nodules rich in minerals, but it is our people who our most valuable resource and what makes us unique.

And so during this exploration licensing process we have spoken to our people and we have listened to what they have said. We have heard their aspirations, their dreams and their concerns.



The licensing process has been long, in-depth, resource intensive, robust and at times even arduous but it has all been worthwhile. However, the Authority has not been alone on this journey. We have been well supported by various countries, organisations and people dedicated to helping us realise our vision, some of which I would like to acknowledge now.

Firstly, I would like to thank our Minister, the Honourable Mark Brown, and your Cabinet. Without your steadfast leadership throughout the years and passion to develop our seabed mineral resources and ongoing support, none of this would have been possible.

Probably the only person more passionate about this sector is His Excellency Sir Tom Masters who has been an enthusiastic and steadfast supporter since his exploration days. Sir Tom, we acknowledge your dedication.

I would also like to thank and congratulate our successful applicants. This has been a long process and we know it has required a lot of hard work on your behalf. We appreciate your perseverance and responsiveness to our numerous requests. While we may not have always seen eye to eye we always held a common ground which is the desire to responsibly and sustainably develop the Cook Islands' seabed minerals sector.

To our development partners New Zealand and Australia we thank you for providing the resources needed to help ensure that our decisions were based on good, timely information and we look forward to working with you further on our regulatory processes.



We are also grateful for the input of International organisations, such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, SPC, NIWA, ISA and ABS who assisted us with our processes and were very forthcoming with technical advice when we needed it.

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

The Authority was well supported in its work by our fellow Seabed Minerals bodies. Our Advisory Committee grounded us with respect to the community we serve. Our Selection Panel helped ensure that we had the right expertise on our Licensing Panel, which in turn provided a robust evaluation of the applications and well informed recommendations for the Minister and Cabinet to consider.



The Authority also appreciates the support we received from our Government agencies. You all helped provide important local context and information for our decisions. I acknowledge in particular Crown Law for ensuring our actions were lawful and that our processes adhered to the statutory requirements.

There are also a number of experts and individuals who made major contributions both during this licensing process and the groundwork leading into it. In particular, I would like to acknowledge my predecessor Paul Lynch. Others I would like to mention include: Marino Wichman, Darryl Thorburn, Caroline Tiria, Anna Glassie and Chris Brown.

I also wish to acknowledge everyone involved in putting together this Licence Granting event. As you can see from the screen, it truly takes a village.

Lastly, and certainly not the least – my SBMA team. I thank God for each and every one of you. These are the people who over the last 16 months have showed up day in day out to put in the work. They are:

1. Dede Mingi
2. Derek Johnson
3. Eileen Macquarie
4. Kaitini Herman
5. John Parianos
6. Rima Browne
7. Teara Henderson

And of course, not forgetting our interns: Seth Solomona, Inano Harmon, Taira Henderson-Enoka, and Athina Karika.

What we have achieved together in this short time has been possible because of the contributions each of you have made towards our end goal. I, for one am looking forward to this exciting next chapter in our regulatory development.



Before I finish, I want to end with a short pe'e:

E upoko ariki kotou noku

E tavini au no kotou

E mata kotou no nga kuru pou toru

E mata au no te 'uanga ma te potiki

E taringa akarongo kotou no nga pi'a Atua

E taringa akarongo au no te tinitini

E va'a kotou no nga tini Atua

E va'a au no te matakeinanga

Oro mai, e tama

Oro mai e ma'ine

Ei konei tatou ruru rima ei

For our english speaking friends – this pe'e is a metaphor and it means:

My people, you are my guide, I am your servant. You represent the three Pillars, I represent the people. You are the voices of God, I am the ear of the heavens. You are the voices of God, I am the voice of the tribe. Come, come all. It is here we meet and greet. This, is the metaphor of our roles and unity as a people.

Te Atua Te Aroa, Kia Manuia