

28 April 2025

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OIA 30003

Personal details removed for proactive release

Thank you for your email of 6 March 2025 in which you request the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (OIA):

1. *"Formal Message: Cook Islands Deep Sea Mining and China CSP (dated 4 February 2025)"*
2. *Formal Message: Cook Islands Seabed Mining Update (dated 2 November 2024)*
3. *Formal Message: Cook Islands: Seabed Mining Update (dated 30 July 2024)*
4. *Formal Message: Cook Islands Seabed Mining Update (dated 2 July 2024)*
5. *Formal Message: Cook Islands Update on Seabed Mining (dated 14 May 2024)"*

On 3 April 2025, the timeframes for responding to your request were extended by an additional 15 working days due to the consultations necessary to make a decision on your request (section 15A(1)(b) of the OIA refers).

Please note that document three above "Formal Message: Cook Islands: Seabed Mining Update (dated 30 July 2024)" is dated 30 January 2024, not 30 July 2024.

Response to your request

Attached are the following documents in scope of your request:

1. Formal Message: Cook Islands Seabed Mining Update, dated 2 November 2024;
2. Formal Message: Cook Islands: Seabed Mining Update, dated 30 January 2024;
3. Formal Message: Cook Islands Seabed Mining Update, dated 2 July 2024; and
4. Formal Message: Cook Islands Update on Seabed Mining, dated 14 May 2024.

Some information is withheld under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 7(b): to prejudice relations between the Governments of New Zealand and the self-governing State of the Cook Islands;

- 7(c)(i): to prejudice the international relations of the Governments of the self-governing State of the Cook Islands;
- 9(2)(b)(ii): to avoid prejudice to the commercial position of another party;
- 9(2)(ba)(ii): to protect the supply of confidential information by a third party; and
- 9(2)(g)(i): to protect the free and frank expression of opinions by departments.

The email titled "Formal Message: Cook Islands Deep Sea Mining and China CSP", dated 4 February 2025, is withheld in full under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
- 7(b): to prejudice relations between the Governments of New Zealand and the self-governing State of the Cook Islands; and
- 7(c)(i): to prejudice the international relations of the Governments of the self-governing State of the Cook Islands.


Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, no public interest in releasing the information has been identified that would override the reasons for withholding it.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Therefore, our response to your request (with your personal information removed) may be published on the Ministry website:

www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses/

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz. You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā



Sarah Corbett
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

RESTRICTED

From: RAROTONGA

Sent: Tuesday, January 30, 2024 4:02 PM

To: DS PDG <DSPDG@mfat.govt.nz>; ENV <DM-ENV@mfat.govt.nz>; LGL <DM-LGL@mfat.govt.nz>; PACPF <PACPF@mfat.govt.nz>

Cc: AMER <DM-AMER@mfat.govt.nz>; ARD <DM-ARD@mfat.govt.nz>; AUS <DM-AUS@mfat.govt.nz>; DS MLG <DM-DSMLG@mfat.govt.nz>; EUR <DM-EUR@mfat.govt.nz>; FM.Conservation Dept (Seemail) <mfatformalmessages@doc.govt.nz>; FM DPMC (FPA) (Seemail) <DPMCFPA@mfat.govt.nz>; FM.Environment Ministry (Seemail) <mfat.cables@mfe.govt.nz>; FM.P/S MFA (Seemail) <PS MFA@mfat.govt.nz>; NAD <DM-NAD@mfat.govt.nz>; ...PACIFIC POSTS <PACIFICPOSTS@mfat.govt.nz>; PACMM <PACMM@mfat.govt.nz>; PACREG <PACREG@mfat.govt.nz>

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS: SEABED MINING UPDATE

FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS: SEABED MINING UPDATE

Rāpopoto – 'Akako'uko'u – Summary

- The Cook Islands continues to view seabed mining as critical for achieving economic self-sufficiency in the future. Work is progressing steadily domestically, s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii)
- s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii), s7(c)(i)
- While there is some grass-roots opposition to seabed mining, this is fairly muted, s9(2)(g)(i), s9(2)(ba)(i)
- Prime Minister Brown is expected to raise the Cook Islands' seabed mining aspirations in his forthcoming meeting with DPM/MFA Peters, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Hohenga – Rave'anga – Action

For information, including ahead of DPM/MFA's visit to Rarotonga, 6-7 February (CKT).

Pūrongo – Tuatua 'Akakite – Report

We met recently with s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

at the Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA), to seek an update on its progress towards seabed mining.

2 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

3 On the results of the report, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

went on to emphasise that the assessment would “just inform policy rather than permits.”

4 Looking ahead, s7(b)(i), that the Cook Islands would now undertake a Cumulative Impact Assessment, s7(b)(ii) which would examine the effects of climate change, fishing, and other factors in addition to seabed mining on the marine environment. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

5 s7(b)(i), shared that the SBMA was also looking to increase its stakeholder and community engagement, s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(i)

This engagement would take place over 2024/25, and would include the Prime Minister leading a delegation to New Zealand s7(c)(i) to meet with the Cook Islands diaspora. Dates for the visits had yet to be set.

Mixed feelings among partners...

6 When we sought more information on the SBMA’s work with potential international partners, s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(i), s7(c)(i)

7 s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(i), s7(c)(i)

had indicated an interest in potentially participating in the establishment of a Centre of Excellence on Deep Ocean Science. s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii) did not elaborate on who or which organisations were interested, and in what capacity they would be involved. s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(i)

8 s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii), s7(c)(i)

noted that the Cook Islands had been invited to attend the Noumea Platform in March and November 2024, to discuss policy recommendations and the science on seabed mining. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

... But local opposition to seabed mining is muted

9 Separately, we sought the views of s9(2)(ba)(i)

, an environmental NGO based in Rarotonga.

10 s9(2)(ba)(i)

supported a moratorium on seabed mining for at least ten years for research. s7(b)(ii), s7(c)(i) added that: “this research should be independent, not done by mining companies. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(ba)(i)

11 However, s9(2)(ba)(i) ability to engage on this and other issues with the SBMA and the community remained constrained. s9(2)(ba)(i) explained that they would like to do more, “but funding is limited,” and they were “trying to catch up with the Government’s messaging.” s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(ba)(i)

12 On the general views being expressed in the community, s9(2)(ba)(i) responded that many people were “unsure,” or “didn’t know enough,” s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(ba)(i)

s9(2)(ba) felt that "the messaging has been one-sided – everyone is already convinced."

13 s9(2)(ba)(i) raised the fact that the SBMA had created its own Community Advisory Committee, which was meant to provide community perspectives to the government. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(ba)(i)

14 However, s9(2)(ba)(i) noted that opposition parties, including the Cook Islands United Party, were engaging more with s9(2)(ba)(i) felt was a positive step. Both s9(2)(ba)(i) s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Tākupu – Tā Mātou Manako – Comment

15 The Cook Islands Government is in the vanguard for seabed mining, with Prime Minister Brown seeing it as key step in the Cook Islands' "...journey to economic self-sufficiency".

16 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

17 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

18 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(g)(i)

Mutu – Oti –End

Released under the
Official Information Act 1982

RESTRICTED

From: RAROTONGA

Sent: Tuesday, May 14, 2024 1:36 PM

To: DS PDG <DSPDG@mfat.govt.nz>; ENV <DM-ENV@mfat.govt.nz>; LGL <DM-LGL@mfat.govt.nz>; PACPF <PACPF@mfat.govt.nz>

Cc: AMER <DM-AMER@mfat.govt.nz>; ARD <DM-ARD@mfat.govt.nz>; AUS <DM-AUS@mfat.govt.nz>; DS MLG <DM-DSMLG@mfat.govt.nz>; EUR <DM-EUR@mfat.govt.nz>; FM.Conservation Dept (Seemail) <mfatformalmessages@doc.govt.nz>; FM DPMC (FPA) (Seemail) <DPMCFPA@mfat.govt.nz>; FM.Environment Ministry (Seemail) <mfat.cables@mfe.govt.nz>; FM.P/S MFA (Seemail) <PS.MFA@mfat.govt.nz>; NAD <DM-NAD@mfat.govt.nz>; ...PACIFIC POSTS <PACIFICPOSTS@mfat.govt.nz>; PACMM <PACMM@mfat.govt.nz>; PACREG <PACREG@mfat.govt.nz>

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS: UPDATE ON SEABED MINING

FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS: UPDATE ON SEABED MINING

Rāpopoto – 'Akako'uko'u – Summary

- Prime Minister Brown and the Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA) are ramping up their domestic and international engagement on seabed mining, ahead of hosting the Underwater Minerals Conference in September in Rarotonga.
- Over recent weeks, the Cook Islands has been focused on engaging Pacific Island partners and s7(b)(i), s7(b)(i), s7(c)(i) s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
- Domestically, seabed mining legislation may be tabled in Parliament as soon as June/July. With the exploration phase still scheduled to run for another two-three years, this is significantly earlier than expected, and suggests that the Cook Islands could seek to begin mining activities sooner than anticipated.

Hohenga – Rave'anga – Action

For information

Pūrongo – Tuatua 'Akakite – Report

We met recently with s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) at the Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA), to seek an update on the Cook Islands' seabed mining work.

The SBMA is increasing its domestic engagement, with legislation coming soon...

2 Domestically, there continues to be little public commentary on, or opposition to, seabed mining. Despite this, SBMA officials are continuing their community outreach at

pace, which includes meetings with important community leaders such as the House of Ariki and Religious Advisory Council. Prime Minister Brown is likely to travel ^{s7(c)(i), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)} New Zealand in October to undertake outreach with the Cook Islands diaspora.

3 ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)} explained that the SBMA would also be holding a "domestic strategy session on alliances and partnerships," ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(ba)(i)}

4 The outreach is timed to occur ahead of the Cook Islands' hosting of the Underwater Minerals Conference, 5-21 September, ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)}

^{s7(c)(i), s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)}

5 Looking ahead, ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)} shared that the SBMA was also focused on developing mineral harvesting regulations, which ^{s7(b)(ii)} expected would be tabled at Parliament in June or July (Parliament is scheduled to sit 3 – 7 and 10 – 14 June). ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)} did not provide much information on the legislation beyond explaining that it would provide a framework to guide mining companies in their work.

6 We have sought further information from Crown Law, ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)}

And the Cook Islands is also increasing its international engagement...

7 Throughout the meeting, ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)} placed great emphasis on the wide array of ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)} mining-related international engagements recently undertaken by ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ Prime Minister Brown.

8 ^{s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii)} remarked upon the positive reception the Prime Minister and SBMA officials had received at the SAFE Summit; Ocean Decade Conference; Our Oceans Conference; ^{s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii), s7(c)(i)}

^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s7(c)(i)} commented that Prime Minister Brown would also raise seabed mining at the upcoming SIDS4 Meeting.

9 ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s7(c)(i)}

It remains interested in New Zealand's position...

11 Turning to New Zealand, ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)} asked whether there had been any change in New Zealand's position, to which we responded that we continued to respect the rights of states to manage their own stewardship responsibilities, consistent with UNCLOS, within areas of national jurisdiction.

12 ^{s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)}

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Tākupu – Tā Mātou Manako – Comment

14 The Cook Islands continues to push ahead with its seabed mining agenda, with a strong focus on international engagement led by the Prime Minister himself. Domestically it remains unclear exactly how quickly things will move, but it was surprising to hear that the Cook Islands was already seeking to pass mining legislation, particularly with two-three years still remaining in the exploration phase. s9(2)(g)(i)

This could also be the reason for the recent uptick in domestic engagement; s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Mutu – Oti - End

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Official Information Act 1982

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From: RAROTONGA

Sent: Tuesday, July 2, 2024 11:45 AM

To: DS PDG <DSPDG@mfat.govt.nz>; ENV <DM-ENV@mfat.govt.nz>; LGL <DM-LGL@mfat.govt.nz>; PACPF <PACPF@mfat.govt.nz>

Cc: AMER <DM-AMER@mfat.govt.nz>; ARD <DM-ARD@mfat.govt.nz>; AUS <DM-AUS@mfat.govt.nz>; DS MLG <DM-DSMLG@mfat.govt.nz>; EUR <DM-EUR@mfat.govt.nz>; FM.Conservation Dept (Seemail) <mfatformalmessages@doc.govt.nz>; FM.DPMC (FPA) (Seemail) <DPMCFPA@mfat.govt.nz>; FM.Environment Ministry (Seemail) <mfat.cables@mfe.govt.nz>; FM.P/S MFA (Seemail) <PS.MFA@mfat.govt.nz>;
s6(a) NAD <DM-

NAD@mfat.govt.nz>; ...PACIFIC POSTS <PACIFICPOSTS@mfat.govt.nz>; PACMM <PACMM@mfat.govt.nz>; PACREG <PACREG@mfat.govt.nz>

Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS SEABED MINING UPDATE

FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS SEABED MINING UPDATE

Rāpopoto – 'Akako'uko'u – Summary

- The Cook Islands Prime Minister remains laser focused on seabed mining as a future way to bolster the economy, and he and his agency, the Seabed Minerals Authority, continue to prioritise international engagement. The Prime Minister is set to lead the Cook Islands' delegation to the International Seabed Authority Assembly in July and will host the annual Underwater Minerals Conference in Rarotonga in September. A PIF talanoa is likely to be held in October.
- The Cook Islands is continuing to monitor New Zealand's approach to seabed mining, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
Following probing on whether our approach to mining in areas beyond national jurisdiction will change, we reconfirmed that our position remains extant – i.e. that this should not be carried out in the absence of a Mining Code that ensures the effective protection of the marine environment, as required by UNCLOS. No new formal requests for assistance, technical or otherwise, have been received. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)
- The Government will begin a month-long domestic consultation process in July on its proposed new seabed mineral extraction/harvesting regulations and is expected to table these in Parliament later this year. The net worth of the seabed minerals has yet to be verified s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Hohenga – Rave'anga – Action

For information

Pūrongo – Tuatua 'Akakite – Report

We met last week with s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

at the request of the Cook Islands

Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA).

The Cook Islands' international engagement continues...

2 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) provided updates on the Cook Islands' recent and upcoming international engagements. Beginning with the SIDS4 Conference in May, s7(b)(i), said seabed mining had been a primary focus for Prime Minister Brown, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) and there had been limited engagement by participants on this topic.

3 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s7(c)(i)

4 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) shared that the Cook Islands had recently contributed data to the 'Seabed 2030' initiative, which is an international project aimed at creating a complete map of the ocean floor. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

5 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) said that SBMA was now looking ahead to the International Seabed Authority meeting in July, as well as its own hosting of the Underwater Minerals Conference in September in Rarotonga. s7(b)(i) said that there would also be a PIF talanoa on the topic in October, and likely in Suva.

Its domestic work continues at pace too...

6 Domestically, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) shared that the Cook Islands was progressing its seabed mineral harvesting regulations. A month-long domestic consultation process would begin in July, and it was hoped that the regulations would be tabled in Parliament as soon as possible later this year.

7 With environmental and financial regulations already in place, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) explained that the harvesting regulations would provide a "framework" for mining companies. They would outline how companies could apply for permits, how harvesting would be managed, and the consequences of not following government processes. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) added that the Cook Islands was "grateful" for the support our Parliamentary Counsel Office had provided so far with the preparation of its seabed mining regulations.

8 On harvesting/extraction, we sought advice on the total worth of the polymetallic nodules in their EEZ. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) shared that, though they had not yet done a pre-feasibility study (a step that is required to go from exploration to harvesting), their estimate was s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

And it continues to watch New Zealand's position closely...

9 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) went on to explain that the Cook Islands was focused on three core areas of cooperation with New Zealand: political support, environmental support, and capacity building/technical cooperation.

10 On political support, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) shared that the Cook Islands had been watching New Zealand's comments on seabed mining closely, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) particularly regarding the fast-track bill and possible changes to New Zealand's domestic policy on mining.

11 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

We confirmed that our position remains extant – i.e. that mining in areas beyond national jurisdiction should

not be carried out in the absence of a Mining Code that ensures the effective protection of the marine environment, as required by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. We reiterated that, within areas of national jurisdiction, we respect the rights of states to manage their own stewardship responsibilities.

12 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(g)(i)

13 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s9(2)(g)(i)

Tākupu – Tā Mātou Manako – Comment

14 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

17 In line with agreed messaging, we have continued to convey that New Zealand is open to considering any formal requests for assistance. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(g)(i)

18 Given the high priority that Prime Minister Brown attaches to seabed mining, we expect that this will be his focus in any upcoming bilateral with Prime Minister Luxon.

Mutu – Oti - End

From: [RAROTONGA](#)
To: [PACPF](#); [PACREG](#)
Cc: [DS.PDG](#); [ENV](#); [LGL](#); [AMER](#); [ARD](#); [AUS](#); [DS.MLG](#); [EUR](#); [FM.Conservation Dept \(Seemail\)](#); [FM.DPMC \(FPA\)](#) (Seemail); [FM.Environment Ministry \(Seemail\)](#); [FM.P/S MFA \(Seemail\)](#); s6(a) [NAD](#); [...PACIFIC](#) POSTS; [PACMM](#); [DEVECO](#); [DEVPP](#); s6(a) [Cable Exchange DFAI-AUS](#); [DS.IEG](#); s6(a)
Subject: FORMAL MESSAGE: COOK ISLANDS SEABED MINING UPDATE
Date: Saturday, 2 November 2024 3:46:53 pm
Attachments: [Exploring and Mining the Seabed in the Cook Islands Poll.docx](#)

[RESTRICTED]

Rāpopoto – 'Akako'uko'u – Summary

- The steady pace of Cook Islands' domestic and international seabed mining work continues, having recently passed new Minerals Harvesting Regulations, hosted the 52nd International Underwater Minerals Conference, and progressed towards establishing a Centre of Excellence on Deep Ocean Science.
- The Seabed Minerals Authority continues to watch New Zealand policy developments and formal and informal commentary closely, for example on the recent fast-track approvals bill.
- Domestically, the Underwater Minerals Conference provoked some clear and previously unseen anti-mining sentiment in the community, including numerous letters to the editor and a rare public protest. As a consequence, the Authority is increasing its community outreach and Prime Minister Brown will lead diaspora consultations in New Zealand in mid-November.

Hohenga – Rave'anga – Action

s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii)

All others: for information

Pūrongo – Tuatua 'Akakite – Report

We met recently with s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) of the Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA) s7(b)(i) s7(b)(ii) and to seek an update on seabed mining developments.

2 s7(b)(i) s7(b)(ii) reflected on the success of the Underwater Minerals Conference (UMC) hosted in Rarotonga last month. Under the theme of 'Going Deep: Getting the Science Right for Informed Decisions', the conference focused seabed mining development and legal considerations; support technologies; the region's role in seabed minerals development; mining technologies and autonomous systems; and environmental considerations. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) felt the Conference was a success, with 178 paying delegates in attendance s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) also noted that for the first time the Conference had been open to the public (for free) so members of the community could attend easily.

3 When asked whether the Conference had shed any new light on the scientific aspects of seabed mining, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) said that the science was now "completely clear that any environmental changes caused by seabed mining will reset over time" noting that "'destruction' is no longer a word being used by any scientist. We are now talking about 'degree and pace of recovery.'"

4 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) also highlighted the ancillary scientific benefit of the conference with the Cook Islands hosting its first Women in Science Expedition. This saw female scientists from the Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Samoa, and Fiji undertake exploration and scientific research in the Cook Islands' EEZ. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) explained that this was also the first expedition led by a Cook Islands chief scientist. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) expressed appreciation for the help provided by NIWA in processing the data gathered by the expedition.

5 On the legislative side, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) confirmed that Parliament's Executive Committee recently approved Minerals Harvesting Regulations. The intention was that these will

provide the legal framework under which mining companies will be able to operate in the future, should they be given approval.

The Cook Islands is still watching New Zealand closely...

6 Turning to New Zealand developments, s7(b)(i), once again raised the recent fast-track approvals bill, echoing s7(b)(ii), previous message that the SBMA was watching New Zealand's on and offshore mining policies closely, s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) also commented that examples from New Zealand, such as -
s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), demonstrated the importance of due diligence and strict adherence to government approval processes. In terms of outreach, s7(b)(ii), noted that Prime Minister Brown would be travelling to New Zealand for diaspora consultations from 15 – 25 November, covering Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin, and Tokoroa. s7(c)(i)
was planning to undertake outreach to the Northern Group in mid-February 2025.

7 s7(b)(i), in turn highlighted the importance of the assistance New Zealand had provided and could provide to the Cook Islands. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s9(2)(g)(i)

8 Following the UMC, members of the community in Rarotonga held a protest calling for a moratorium on deep sea mining. "Protect our ocean" was the protesters' key message, with one commenting, "the argument is that we need more time and wisdom to extract minerals safely, or not. The other argument is who ultimately benefits from seabed mining. Us or the companies that mine it? Is money more important or is the life in our ocean more important?"

9 There was also an influx of letters to the editor expressing anti-mining sentiments. Some expressed frustration at the SBMA's lack of public consultation, saying that the Government appeared to have already decided to go ahead with seabed mining, and wondering whether "our Prime Minister is being pressured by outsiders holding purse strings to make rushed, premature decisions." Another said "we have deep sea mining companies funding our community initiatives and cultural programmes, becoming 'one of us'. This is a classic example of neo-colonialism." The Clerk of Parliament also came under fire when, in response to a question on Radio Cook Islands about the community protesting against deep sea mining, he said "I can guarantee you that it will be the Crown that will win a fight like that. There's no two ways about it and I'm just stating the facts."

10 We raised these events with the SBMA officials and sought their views on the public's seemingly growing anti-mining sentiment, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

11 We also raised a recent poll that claimed 66 percent of Cook Islanders opposed deep sea mining. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

We sought further information from the Cook Islands Centre of Research, which administered the poll. They explained that it was based on an Ipsos survey undertaken in Europe, which was then "refined and adapted for the Cook Islands context" and conducted in Cook Islands Māori as well as English. The Centre used Survey Monkey to run the poll, which blocked an IP address if the user tried to respond more than once. A copy of the survey questions is attached to this message.

12 In a separate, later meeting with s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) SBMA's s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) we noted Prime Minister Brown and the Authority's enthusiasm for their work, and confidence in the benefits of seabed mining. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

13 s7(b)(ii), s7(b)(iii)

felt that greater outreach to the community would also be required. s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(g)(i) the SBMA's recent presentation at a Deep Ocean Symposium on 31 October (run and organised by a local environmental NGO and the Cook Islands Centre of Research). Having presented on the Women in Science Expedition held in the margins of the UMC, a member of the community asked SBMA officials about scientific findings on the environmental impacts of seabed mining, and how the Authority took these into account in making decisions about mining. The SBMA official did not answer, and instead said "we have presented on the Women in Science Expedition. Please only ask us about the Expedition."

And the financial benefits to the Cook Islands remain unclear...

14 The SMBA estimates the value of the polymetallic nodules as s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii). However, a more accurate estimate will not be possible until the pre-feasibility study (a step that is required to go from exploration to harvesting) is complete.

15 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Questions have also been raised about mining's effect on tourism, with some respondents to a recent study by Griffith University in Australia expressing a preference not to travel to countries that engage in seabed mining.

16 Although mining has been a key driver for discussions about establishing a sovereign wealth fund, s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Pacific Centre of Excellence on Deep Ocean Science

17 In our separate meeting with s7(b)(i), we discussed s7(b)(ii), s work in managing the Pacific Centre of Excellence on Deep Ocean Science (PCEDUS).

18 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

19 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(b)(ii)

20 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(b)(ii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(b)(ii)

21 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

22 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(b)(ii)

Tākupu – Tā Mātou Manako – Comment

23 The SBMA is understandably pleased with their recent progress from both an outreach and regulatory perspective. Hosting the Underwater Minerals Conference continued the country's string of robust international engagements on mining at both the political and technical levels. The approval of the Minerals Harvesting Regulations provides a clear legal framework for mining companies "if/when" the time comes

24 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), s9(2)(g)(i)

25 However, it is interesting that the UMC stimulated newly visible and vocal anti-mining sentiment within the Cook Islands community. It remains to be seen whether this sentiment will grow or dissipate as outreach efforts by government continue within the Cook Islands and amongst diaspora communities.

26 Ultimately, any prospect for actual seabed mining in the Cook Islands EEZ is likely still about two – five (or more) years away. This timeframe relates to the slower than expected pace of exploration efforts and has been publicly acknowledged by both Prime Minister Brown and the SBMA as well as the licensed exploration companies.

Mutu – Oti - End

Exploring and Mining the Seabed in the Cook Islands

Kia Orana. Thank you for your interest in this poll.

This poll is asking residents of the Cook Islands about their knowledge and support for 1) deep seabed mining exploration and 2) deep seabed industrial scale mining in the Cook Islands. The poll will take around 5 minutes.

You can stop taking part at any time, if you do so your data will be removed. Responses to this survey will be completely confidential, and your identity will remain anonymous.

The results of the poll will be made available to the public in a written report, as well as released in the Cook Islands News.

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The Cook Islands contains minerals that lie at the bottom of the ocean within our Exclusive Economic Zone. If harvested, these minerals can be used to make renewable energy infrastructure, such as turbines, cars and other electronic devices.

At the same time, the deep sea is the last untouched ecosystem on our planet, about which we still know very little. Marine scientists warn that industrial scale deep-seabed mining could disrupt biodiversity at the bottom of our oceans and have far-reaching harmful effects.

Currently, the Cook Islands is in an 'exploration phase'. The Government has permitted three companies to research whether these minerals and metals could be mined economically. If so, they may be awarded a license allowing them to begin mining the seabed in the Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone.

So there are arguments for and against deep-seabed mining exploration and full scale commercial seabed mining

1. Are you a Cook Islands resident?
YES/NO

2. What is your gender?
Male/female/other

3. How old are you?

-

4. Do you support deep sea mining exploration?
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer

5. Do you support deep sea mining?
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer

Arguments for deep seabed mining (5 statements). Are these convincing?

6. Deep-seabed mining is necessary for the energy transition, so that we can move away from fossil fuels to combat climate change
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer
7. Deep-sea mining is necessary to meet the demand for electrical electronic appliances
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer
8. Deep-seabed mining will make the Cook Islands less dependent on other countries
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer
9. Allowing deep-seabed mining is important for the Cook Islands economy
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer
10. Allowing deep seabed mining will make the Cook Islands less dependent on tourism
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer

Arguments for deep seabed mining (5 statements). Are these convincing?

11. Deep-seabed mining disrupts the habitat of animal species in the deep sea, and others that live elsewhere in the sea, such as whales, sharks, tuna and turtles through noise, light and dust suspended sediment.
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer
12. Deep-seabed mining contributes to depleting the Earth's natural resources and destroying ecosystems.
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer
13. We still know too little about life in the deep sea. Deep-sea mining could cause us to lose species forever
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer

14. The oceans provide a buffer against climate change. They absorb heat and store CO2 in the seabed. Deep-sea mining could disrupt this and worsen climate change
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer

15. Deep-seabed mining is not necessary because in the near future fewer deep sea minerals are will be needed for batteries because of technological innovation and recycling
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer

16. The deep ocean holds cultural and spiritual significance for Cook Islanders
Yes/No/I don't know/Prefer not to answer

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Thank you for your participation in this poll.

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