

Seabed mining approved in New Zealand despite environmentalists' concerns

Valentina Ruiz Leotaud (<http://www.mining.com/author/valenruiz/>) | 4 days ago | 3,036 | 9



The International Seabed Authority, located in Jamaica and created under the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, has already issued 26 exploration licences to governments and companies. (Image courtesy of Nautilus Minerals (<http://www.nautilusminerals.com/irm/content/underwater.aspx?RID=395>))

New Zealand's Environmental Protection Authority **approved** (<http://www.epa.govt.nz/news/epa-media-releases/Pages/TTRL-2017-decision.aspx>) Trans-Tasman Resources' application to mine iron sands from the seabed of South Taranaki Bight, located 22 kilometres to 36 kilometres offshore from Patea.

The approval means that Trans-Tasman is now allowed to recover resources from the country's Exclusive Economic Zone. In detail, the company wants to dig up 50 million tonnes of the seabed a year, for 35 years, to get five million tonnes of iron ore per year. The South Taranaki Bight has reported JORC iron sand mineral resources of 1,698Mt at 11.16% Fe₂O₃ for the Mine Area and adjacent Kupe Blocks at a 3.5% Davis Tube Recovery cutoff and a further 2,137Mt at 9.66% Fe₂O₃ for Stage 2 Block mine areas.

The sand will be processed aboard a purpose-built 345-metre integrated mining vessel, whose construction TTR would start soon. The company expects to begin exporting iron ore from the site to Asia in 2020.

The **decision** (http://www.epa.govt.nz/EEZ/EEZ000011/TTRL_Marine_Consent_Decision_EEZ000011_FINAL_version.pdf) around the proposed offshore mining project, however, comes following months of debates and consultations, and it was not unanimous. Some members of the EPA's Decision-making Committee did not agree in the final deliberations, citing concerns over localised adverse environmental effects.

"The committee's rationale for granting consent is set out in the over 300-page decision document and includes conditions and operating constraints to limit the scale, intensity and duration of the discharge effects of residual material to the seabed, known as sediment plume, as well as impacts on marine mammals," the agency's report reads.

In response, TTR's Executive Chairman, Alan Eggers, sent out a **press release** (https://www.ttrl.co.nz/fileadmin/user_upload/TTR_Media_Statement_DMC_Decision_10Aug17.pdf) stating that his company has undertaken "extensive marine environmental work in the STB" and that he is convinced that a low impact sustainable export industry can function in the area.

But environmentalist groups such as Kiwis Against Seabed Mining do not buy Eggers' idea and are threatening with legal actions.

"We have to take the only responsible route here by appealing this decision, on behalf of the future of our coastal peoples and environment, the blue whales, Maui dolphins and little penguins. We saw at least 13,700 people object to this proposal, and the only logical next step is to challenge that decision on their behalf," said KASM Chairperson, Phil McCabe, in a **statement**

(<http://kasm.org.nz/latest/kasm-stunned-by-seabed-mining-green-light-will-appeal-decision/>).

McCabe also said that his organization cannot believe that government officials gave a go-ahead to what they call an experimental industry. "We have no choice but to lodge an appeal," he added.

Previous to this new development, scientists working with the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research also **voiced their concerns** (<http://www.mining.com/new-zealand-deep-sea-life-needs-better-protection-mining-study-shows/>) over mining operations within New Zealand's EEZ.

According to their studies, unique seafloor communities could be at risk of disappearing if deep-sea mining activities take place in the area.

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John Monhemius • 3 days ago

Why on earth would anyone want to mine a low grade iron ore from the sea bed? One of the commodities the world is not short of is land based high grade iron ore deposits. The New Zealand government must be crazy to allow this project to go ahead.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



John Willoughby Rewha Parkes → John Monhemius • a day ago

New Zealand's most recognizable brand is its ability to show the rest of the modern world how a prestine environment is maintained and keep it check. The New Zealand Government Persons responsible for moving this agenda forward, have overtly betrayed the people of New Zealand, the countries hard bult and won own brand, and decades of hard one battles against foreign big buck domination. Sounds like there is an unspoken story here, a borrowing obligation that is calling in the debt perhaps? as those feisty Kiwis! aint that passive to this type of dominance. Look at them on the rugby field. They abhøre defeat, especially in their own back yard.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Sean Troy → John Monhemius • a day ago

Bizarre decision. Of all the metals you can extract from the sea bed, iron is the last one we need. There's no way this could ever make money.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Isipho Ilanga Pty → John Monhemius • 2 days ago

crazy

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Night Rider → John Monhemius • 2 days ago

I agree. There is something we are missing here, likely nefarious.

^ | v • Reply • Share >

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Extremely likely



Enoch Pax • 11 hours ago

Probably some REE by products, lower mining and milling costs.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Altaf • 2 days ago

I see stark contrast between how they treat two different set of projects.

Adani coal project in Australia. Your mind becomes numb looking at the different ways vested interests are protesting. Even after authorities considered all their concerns and cleared the project, the vested groups are again protesting on same points. Even some so called religious people are protesting. They say Australia is doomed if Adani mines coal. They say global warming will be because of Adani coal used in power plants. They say Great Barrier reef will die if ships transport Adani coal. They say religion is in great danger if Adani creates coal jobs. They say all the future problems in Australia will be on behalf of Adani.

On the other hand, sea bed mining is permitted in NZ.

I mean these are two extreme ends.

I agree with the logic of Garret that as long as the sediment plume can be controlled, it is OK. However such logic and people with logic are missing in Adani case.

^ | v • Reply • Share >



Garret • 2 days ago

Seabed iron sand is the future. In situ iron concentrations may be low but the quality can be improved through cheap gravity and magnetic separation processes. There are two mines which have been successfully mining/dredging land based New Zealand iron sands for the past 30years. TTR has the advantage of no neighbours, no ports, no rail, a mobile processing facility and a system that lends itself to automation. The entire west coast of New Zealand is covered in similar deposits. If TTR can control the sediment plume and manage their social license they will do very well.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



PSad → Garret • 2 days ago

Taharua mine is a small scale local enterprise. They support locals and thrive. TTR is a huge foreign own company that has NO clear benefits to New Zealand, local economy and definitely NOT the environment. They have been caught RED handed lying about the area they propose to mine. They clearly said it is a desert and the plume will have no effect... They have been proven wrong on all counts - with pictures, independent research and people proving there are reefs, whales and dolphins/penguins in the path. If there is an oil spill they have no contingency plan.. And what happens to companies that cannot pay? Bankruptcy - who pays for clean up - TAXPAYERS. The jobs offered are not guaranteed nor any benefits to locals. It will take YEARS before they brake even after investing in the machinery.

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