



Address by the Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister and Minister for Seabed Minerals at the Anuanua Moana vessel ceremony

*Avatiu Wharf, Rarotonga
2 March 2023*

Kia Orana tatou katoatoa [welcome to dignitaries in attendance]

It's a really important day today. When I drove in I saw two ships. There was one out of the harbor which represents the prosperity of our country today and this one parked over here that represents the future prosperity of our country. As I'm sitting over here watching these lighters coming aboard with people loaded onto them every single one of those is bringing dollars into the country. I recall when our tourism industry started it was 50 years ago with the opening of international airport and I can speak with some Authority of historical matters that occurred 50 years ago because I just recently turned 60. So, I was there.

I recall when our tourism industry started our journey shifting from an agriculture-based industry to a tourism industry. Very few hotels started and very few rental houses and tour operators that took us to where we are today. We are one of the premier destinations in the Pacific for holidays. Even though our numbers are very small for our country they're very valuable. Others like Fiji receive up to a million tourists a year, Hawaii is close to 10 million a year. The region alone generates millions and millions of tourists. Our maximum pre-covid numbers were 175 thousand tourists so it is a small fraction of the regional let

alone the global tourism industry which has been growing very quickly over the past decade and has led to many countries increasing their prosperity. In our tourism industry those small numbers represent a huge amount of revenue for our country.

We shifted from a country that earned millions of dollars in agricultural exports in the 50s and 60s to a country that today earns hundreds of millions of dollars from tourism and the future potential that I mentioned of our minerals program could again transform the prosperity of our country.



The product that we have in tourism was developed over time and is today led by Cook Islanders. When I look at the numbers that come through, about 35 percent of visitors that come into this country stay in Airbnb houses owned by Cook Islanders. So the growth and prosperity of our tourism industry hasn't just spawned big international hotels. It has gone right down to the grassroots of everyday people. Where everyday people who have a house have turned into an Airbnb. Made it into a nice place that people can stay in and they've prospered and shared.

Compared to our resident population, 170 thousand is ten times our resident population. If Fiji had the same sort of ratio they'd be getting 9 million tourist a year instead of a million. If New Zealand had the same ratio they'd be getting 24 million tourists a year instead of 6 million. So, we as a country have developed the tourism product that is now benefiting our people directly but it took time to get to where we are. It took some investment. It took some wise decision making and it took a good understanding to develop. That's what I think we could do with our minerals industry.



Over the last 10 years we have been preparing our laws, our regulatory authorities and agencies, and most importantly – we have been bringing our people along on this journey – towards building a sustainable and responsible seabed sector for the benefit of our Cook Islands people.

One year ago, we celebrated the Cook Islands granting its first ever seabed minerals exploration licences.

Today, brings us on another step on our journey of knowledge and understanding our deep ocean.

Today, I have the great pleasure of welcoming to our shores Moana Mineral's Research and Scientific Vessel – Te Anuanua Moana. What a great name, Ocean Rainbow beautiful.

Today's ceremony marks the culmination of a year of hard work and planning by the Moana Minerals team and the beginning of their exploration work programme in Cook Islands waters.

As they embark on their journey of knowledge, we should not underestimate the broader value of ocean exploration.

Ocean exploration gives us a sense of human progress and discovery. It provides the experience and knowledge necessary for us to become stewards of the ocean and its resources and sets a course for future generations to navigate.

Although our Licence Holders have already begun work in our waters, the arrival of Anuanua Moana marks a milestone in the exploration of our ocean.

This is the first time such a capable vessel will be based here, and it promises to support a new era of seabed exploration for the Cook Islands

With a carrying capacity of 1,485 tonnes and measuring 61 metres in length and 16 metres across the beam, the Anuanua Moana is the largest vessel to arrive in the Cook Islands under an exploration licence.

It is also one of the most well-equipped exploration vessels to visit our waters. On board, it has a scientific laboratory and a suite of exploration equipment including various sampling systems and surveying tools which will be used to map the seafloor and collect water and sediment samples.

It will also carry a full complement of scientists and technical experts who will analyse the data and samples collected.

She will carry out research on the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of the seafloor and the ocean environment.

This will reveal to us, in greater detail, the features of our deep ocean – its landscapes and deep-sea life rarely seen, and the promise of prosperity.

As people of the ocean – we care for our Marae Moana and we take our role as ocean stewards very seriously. Our ocean connects us, it sustains us, and supports us all and there's one phrase Kaumaiti used, he said: we will protect it, we will harvest it.

We understand the vital importance of our ocean to our security, our prosperity, and indeed to our very survival.

Exploration is the key to unlocking our oceans talents responsibly and sustainably.

This wealth of knowledge will help us to achieve our Marae Moana goals and guide us in the important decisions we will need to make in the future about our seabed minerals sector.

These decisions will take account of the potential impact on the environment, the benefits for the people of the Cook Islands, and the important contribution our minerals can make to enable the global green transition towards a low carbon society to help combat climate change.



The Anuanua Moana is very much a Cook Islands vessel and one that we can all be proud of.

It has a Cook Island's name. It flies the Cook Islands flag. It is operated by a Cook Islands registered company. It is managed by a local Cook Island's business. It will be based here in the Cook Islands, and ultimately, if it is successful in its mission, it will benefit the people of the Cook Islands.

It is rare for an exploration vessel of this kind to be based in the South Pacific, let alone in the Cook Islands.

It is a testament to the investment Moana Minerals is making into our country and demonstrates the confidence they have in our government and regulatory regime to support them to be successful in their endeavours.

As Anuanua Moana begins its journey of discovery I ask the Good Lord, to let your blessing be upon this ship and its crew, may your strength pilot them, may your power preserve them, and may your hand protect them.

Amen.

Kia manuia and Kia Orana