



Address by Honourable Mark Brown, Prime Minister & Minister for Seabed Minerals at the Exploration Licence Granting Ceremony 2022

*Dome, National Auditorium
23 February 2022*

15 islands greetings

I spoke these words. These words of welcome to all of our islands, all of our people sixteen months ago under these very Domes. And I spoke these words of welcome to our people as our first real steps to a journey into our future. I outlined the unprecedented challenges facing our country and the world from the incredible impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and reminded us of the ongoing threat of climate change that is not going away.

I put our trust in our Ocean – our Moana Nui O Kiva, as providing us with a way forward for our survival and our future prosperity. I then initiated and set in motion our seabed minerals exploration licensing process.



Today we take an enormous step in our transformational journey towards a sustainable and thriving future.

Today I am proud to stand before you all, to mark this significant and historic occasion for the Cook Islands.

Today we issue our first ever exploration licences.

It is my pleasure to welcome you all here today, and those joining us through our livestream, to share in this historic occasion.

This has been a long journey for our country, so let us appreciate the significance of today, and what a defining moment it is for our country and our people.

The step we take today opens a new pathway towards a brighter future with untapped potential for our children and our future generations.



We continue to live in unprecedented times, and face multiple challenges as a country and as part of the international community – from the COVID 19 pandemic and its widespread impacts to the real threat of climate change. We must address those challenges of today, while ensuring that we care for the needs of our future generations.

For two years we, along with the rest of world, have endured the impacts of COVID-19 which will continue to be felt for many years to come. It was inevitable that Covid would come to our country, but when it did it would be on our terms. Only when we were prepared, only when we had built up our defences so that we were at our strongest and we are at our strongest as a people to face it.

So we planned, and we prepared, and we made ourselves ready to the extent that today - we are 98% vaccinated.



Thanks to our faith in our God, and the decisive action of the Government and the support of our people, we the Cook Islands have, so far, been spared from the severe health impacts of COVID

However, this pandemic has highlighted our economic vulnerability – our over-reliance on our tourism industry. As our country’s income has fallen in the last 2 years, our national debt has grown as we seek to finance our economic survival and support the livelihoods of our people. Yet, we have still seen some of our people move overseas to help support their households. Today our people are leaving to pick apples in New Zealand. Tomorrow we will have our own apples to pick, and they sit on the floor of our ocean.

If we want our people to stay, if we want to show them that there is a future, here in our country – then come and help us pick our golden apples that have been waiting for the right time to be harvested. This new industry will provide us the opportunity to diversify our economy. A more sustainable economy that can provide a buffer to the impacts of future economic shocks and offers more opportunities for our people’s prosperity.



COVID however is only our most recent challenge, climate change is enduring and has been recognised the world over as the biggest crisis facing our planet, which requires a global response but affects us island nations most acutely – we are the ones most at risk from the actions of larger countries.

Tackling climate change requires a concerted global effort. As a result, there has been a major shift globally towards a low-carbon economy based on renewable energy and technology.

In order to achieve this, the World Bank estimates that more than 3 billion tonnes of minerals and metals will be needed by the year 2050. The demand for cobalt alone is predicted to increase by nearly 500% to meet the growing demand for clean energy. This is not something we can achieve by ourselves, but we, the Cook Islands, can play our part by providing the metals needed for clean energy. By us helping the world, we also help protect ourselves



We are an ocean nation. Our country is 99.99% ocean. It sustains us, it connects us, and it is a part of our identity. It is inevitable that we will turn to our ocean for our protection and our prosperity.

We are blessed to have an estimated 12 billion tonnes of nodules on our seafloor. These nodules contain minerals such as cobalt, nickel, copper, and manganese,

some of which are now considered strategic and critical for the global energy transition to a green economy.

In the book of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 – it tells us: for everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven, a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant and a time to harvest.

We have waited many years for the opportunity to develop our mineral resources, the time is right, the time is now.

However we cannot do this by ourselves. This is where partnerships and collaboration is needed. We need to engage with those that have access to the technology, the capability, and the financial resources to make this happen, but most importantly to work with those that share our values and our vision so that we can prosper together.



That brings me to the reason we are all gathered here today, to witness the signing of the Cook Islands first ever seabed minerals exploration licences.

The decision to grant these licences was done after robust and careful consideration. These are long term partnerships, that we the Cook Islands government were very careful about who we allowed to operate in our waters.

Environmental protection is a core focus in developing this sector. As such, the licensing process we developed set high expectations for any potential contractors wishing to operate in our waters, with environmental sustainability at the forefront.

The applicants for exploration licences have been through a rigorous licensing process over the last sixteen months. Not all have met our standards, but three were successful and I congratulate them on their efforts and their commitment. In this regard it gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the granting of exploration licences to:

- CIC Ltd
- CIIC Seabed Resources Ltd
- Moana Minerals

These 3 companies will conduct exploration work programmes that will open up a whole new world for us.



The exploratory research will shine a light on our seafloor and allow us as Cook Islanders to gain knowledge and a better understanding of our seafloor and our ocean, and this will be invaluable in building our own knowledge of our deep-sea environment. This is our ocean and we want to know everything there is to know

about it. We want to lead the world as a center of excellence in the understanding of our ocean.

The seabed industry will see the creation of work and training opportunities for Cook Islanders. Including support services and logistics opportunities during the initial stages of exploration. There will be careers opportunities for geologists, marine engineers, crew for research vessels and many more. There will be types of jobs that have not yet being created that will provide opportunities for our kids in generations to come.

Our Cook Islands vision is to work with our licence holders to create a sustainable and responsible sector that is mutually beneficial and in harmony with our environmental, social and cultural values.



This will require careful management and as people of the ocean we take its management seriously. The protection of our environment is paramount to our people. In this respect – strong environmental management and regulation is a core focus in the development of the seabed minerals sector.

To achieve this we are building a seabed minerals industry based on best principles and practices, supported by a robust legal framework.

We will continue to proceed using the precautionary approach, taking actions based on the best available science, to manage our seabed minerals resources and the protection of our biodiversity.

We have also benefitted from the assistance of technical experts both locally and overseas, which you have already heard the Commissioner speak to. I acknowledge our civil society and industry for their valuable contributions to strengthen our licensing process.

I'd also like to thank and acknowledge our close partners Australia and New Zealand for their support during this licensing process, including working with our officials to share knowledge and processes.

It is through the contributions of these individuals, these organisations, and collaborative partnerships that we have developed such a strong, robust process.



I teia atinganga nei, te roka nei au I te aka Meitaki I to tatou iti tangata katoatoa. I teia au mataiti topa, kua teretere ana matou ki to tatou Pa Enuā. I te kave, I te kura, I te karere, I te pati ia kotou, ia turuturu mai. Noo teia takaianga mua tatou I rave nei. Kua ariki mai kotou, I teia patianga.

Pera katoa ki te tuanga toru – I tatou I matou, I tango tatou basireia, te tua o Te Evangeria, ta tatou akanoanga tuketuke, I rotou to tatou basireia. To tatou Ui Ariki,

to kotou matakainanga. To tatou Kavamani, Kavamani metua pera katoa, to tatou Kavamani Enuā, to kotou turuturu anga I teia takaianga I tatou takai nei I teia ra.

Kua kite tatou I te meitaki, te no nei kite te takere to tatou moana, na roto ta kotou arikianga te akamata nei tatou, I te kimi te ravenga, ki roka mai, te au Meitaki.

No reira ariki mai, I teia reo akameitakianga.



Whilst it is my honour and privilege today as the Minister to sign these exploration licences on behalf of the Crown – I need to acknowledge that this baton has been passed on from our Forefathers – the likes of Sir Albert Henry, Sir Geoffrey Henry, Dr. Sir Terepai Maoate and others.

I acknowledge these visionaries of the past, whom despite the criticisms and all the barriers put in front of them, believed in our ocean wealth and kept the flame burning. And I also acknowledge our QR and a strong supporter of our minerals programme and himself a voyager on previous exploration voyages, my predecessor Sir Tom Marsters.

This reminds me of a quote from the great scientist Sir Isaac Newtown – “If I see further today, it’s because I am standing on the shoulders of giants”.



So one day too, I will pass this baton, on to another to carry forward our vision – which is to see our seabed minerals resources developed responsibly and sustainably for the benefit of our country and our people.

But at the end of the day, let us not forget the good Lord who placed these treasures in our ocean. And I'd like to repeat the verse that Pastor Bobby gave us this morning from the book of Isaiah chapter 60 verse 5: "Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come."

Kia Orana tatou katoatoa, e Kia Manuia.