



Kia Orana!

We are pleased to present the Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority's quarterly online newsletter, sharing relevant Seabed Minerals (**SBM**) updates and information.

Who are we?

The Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority (**Authority**) is the key regulator of seabed minerals activities under Cook Islands jurisdiction. The Authority administers the Seabed Minerals Act 2019 (**Act**) on behalf of the Cook Islands Government.



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Welcome from the Prime Minister

It is my pleasure to introduce the Authority's first quarterly e-newsletter as part of ongoing efforts to raise awareness and understanding on the development of our SBM sector.

Reflecting on 2020, we faced unprecedented challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite that, we came together as a country to protect the health and economic well-being of our people. Further, we were able to make significant progress in our SBM sector.

Our ocean is the lifeblood of the Cook Islands. It provides us with a source of food and income, and many other services. We are 0.01% land, and 99.99% ocean, so it is inevitable that we will turn to the ocean for solutions and for our survival.

Now, in order to keep enjoying the support of our ocean, we must continue to manage our marine resources carefully and sustainably. As people of the ocean, we care for the ocean, and we take our role as ocean stewards seriously.

As a country, we have consistently led the way in our marine protection efforts and responsible ocean governance. We were world leaders in the establishment of our Marae Moana, initiated by Kevin Iro and my predecessor Hon. Henry Puna. We also have one of the best-managed fisheries in the Pacific.

Similarly, with our seabed minerals sector we are building a world-leading regime that is science-based and applies best practices, and importantly, is developed for the benefit of our country and welfare of our people.

2021 will be a historic year in our SBM journey. A voyage not across our ocean but rather into the depths of our Marae Moana. After years of preparation, we are finally entering the Exploration phase.

Exploration activities will enable the collection of essential environment data and information to allow my Government, supported by expert advice, to make informed decisions on whether we will permit future harvesting activities.

Exploration activities will lead to: more knowledge and information on our Marae Moana; more training and employment opportunities for our people; and the use of our local businesses to supply connected goods and services.

These are exciting times for our country. Bring on 2021!



Prime Minister Mark Brown
Minister for Seabed Minerals



Licensing Process Update

The Authority received four applications for exploration licenses: two in the tender area, and two in reserved areas. The Authority has completed initial checks on all four applications, and requests for further information were made to the applicants.

Currently, the Authority is undertaking due diligence assessments. We are pleased to share that Australian government agencies are providing advice and guidance on this assessment process. We will only allow responsible operators in our waters, and the due diligence assessment is a key part of that.

Subject to meeting the due diligence criteria, information on the applications will be publicly released and the Authority will invite the public to comment on the applications.

Following this, the Authority will refer the applications to the expert Licensing Panel for evaluation. The Licensing Panel will make recommendations to the Minister on whether to grant any licenses. If the Minister agrees, the Authority will prepare the licence terms. The Minister and Cabinet will review the terms before it decides whether to approve the exploration licenses.

The Authority estimates that the exploration licensing process will be completed by the middle of this year. Subject to the granting of licenses, the Authority together with other Government ministries and agencies, will then shift focus to the observation, monitoring, and compliance programme for companies operating in Cook Islands waters, and analysis of data collected.

To learn more, see our [Licensing Process Factsheet](#), and the video below.



Community Engagement



Government delegates visit to Niua School in Pukapuka, February 2021

A key priority for the Authority is engaging with our people and communities. We recognise that given the complexity of seabed minerals we need to make a greater effort to communicate with our people so that they receive accurate information and have a greater understanding about seabed minerals and the issues involved.

We are building this sector for the benefit of our Cook Islands people, it is only fitting that we involve them in the journey. This will be an ongoing effort throughout the year in both Rarotonga and our Pa Enuu.

A highlight this year has been our increased **Pa Enuu engagement**, reaching our most remote communities. The Authority is also continuing its efforts with our **SBM Advisory Committee**, currently chaired by Bishop Tutai Pere. Committee member, George George, recently joined one of our Pa Enuu trips and was able to share and receive perspectives from the communities consulted. We encourage the public to reach out to the Committee members as community representatives on SBM.

The **Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)** have been giving presentations on the SBM research undertaken to date and the relevant environmental issues involved. The Authority looks forward to supporting the NHT's efforts to give science-based presentations to the public.



Natural Heritage Trust presentation



SBM Advisory Committee with Prime Minister Brown



Attendees at the Marine Spatial Plan Forum on Enuamanu Atiu, December 2020

Regulatory Framework

This month, Parliament unanimously passed an amendment to the Seabed Minerals Act to make clear that only Cook Islands limited companies could apply for a licence.

The Authority and the National Environment Service (**Service**) have released draft Mining and Environmental Regulations respectively. Both agencies are currently reviewing the feedback received.

Looking ahead to the next couple of months, the Authority along with the Service will be developing further Guidelines and Standards for exploration activities. These guidance documents will be based on international standards, including those developed by the International Seabed Authority.

Find out more [here](#).

Returning Cook Islanders join the Authority



Licensing & Compliance Director
Derek Johnson



Licensing & Compliance Officer
Te-Ara Henderson

Te mataora nei matou no tei oki mai teia nga toa a Derek Johnson e Te-Ara Henderson ki te enua nei, i te tauturu e te akamatutu i te au angaanga ta te Runanga Takere Moana e rave nei.

A key priority for the Government is to encourage our Cook Islands people to take up employment opportunities here in the Cook Islands.

We are proud to welcome to the team Cook Islanders Derek Johnson and Te-Ara Henderson. They join as the Licensing and Compliance Director and Licensing and Compliance Officer respectively.

Johnson has spent the last 10 years in New Zealand working for the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (**MBIE**) and ACC as a Senior Policy Advisor. Prior to that, he worked in the Cook Islands at the Office of the Prime Minister (**OPM**) and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (**MFEM**).

Henderson recently completed a Commercial Law and Accounting degree at Victoria University.

Learn more about our staff [here](#).

Capacity Building

International Seabed Authority (ISA) training opportunities

- Find out more about current ISA opportunities [here](#).

We are pleased to share that the following Authority staff will be undertaking upcoming capacity building initiatives

- Rima Browne – awarded data management training programme with the ISA. This will commence when international travel can safely resume.
- Te-Ara Henderson – accepted into the Online Workshop for the Pacific Region on Ocean Governance Capacity.

The Authority will continue to share more training opportunities as they arise.

2020 Highlights

- [Seabed Minerals Amendment Act passed – June 2020](#)
- [Seabed Minerals Exploration Regulations passed – October 2020](#)
- [Seabed Minerals Advisory Committee established – September 2020](#)
- [Seabed Minerals licensing process launched – October 2020](#)
- [Commissioner named a Deep Sea Hero – November 2020](#)
- [Authority receives first ever applications for Exploration Licenses – December 2020](#)
- [Seabed Minerals Working Group expands](#)
- [First tranche of SBM Factsheets developed](#)
- [First tranche of SBM Explainer videos developed](#)
- [Authority Facebook page set up – May 2020](#)
- [Authority welcomes to the team: Alex Herman, Eileen Macquarie and Dede Mingi, along with consultant Chris Brown.](#)

Queries on this release may be directed to Dede Mingi: dede.mingi@cookislands.gov.ck

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