

Your Comment on the Taranaki VTM Project

Please include all the contact details listed below with your comments.

1. Contact Details	
Please ensure that you have authority to comment on the application on behalf of those named on this form.	
Organisation name (if relevant)	Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Mutunga
First name	██████
Last name	████
Postal address	████████████████████
Phone number	██████████
Email (a valid email address enables us to communicate efficiently with you)	██

2. We will email you draft conditions of consent for your comment			
☒	I can receive emails and my email address is correct	☐	I cannot receive emails and my postal address is correct

3. Please select the effects (positive or negative) that your comments address:			
☒	Economic Effects	☐	Sedimentation and Optical Water Quality Effects
☒	Effects on Coastal Processes	☒	Benthic Ecology and Primary Productivity Effects
☐	Fished Species	☐	Seabirds
☒	Marine Mammals	☐	Noise Effects
☐	Human Health Effects of the Marine Discharge Activities	☐	Visual, Seascape and Natural Character Effects
☐	Air Quality Effects	☐	Effects on Existing Interests
☒	Other Considerations (please specify): Climate Change Effects		

Taranaki VTM Fast-Track Application

Environmental Protection Authority

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Via email substantive@fasttrack.govt.nz

29 September 2025

Tēnā koe,

Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Mutunga provides the following comments to the Expert Panel established under Schedule 3 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (FTAA). The Expert Panel is to determine the application submitted for the Taranaki VTM Project [FTAA-2504-1048].

Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Mutunga is:

- the relevant iwi authority and treaty settlement entity for Ngāti Mutunga (Taranaki) under section 53(2)(b) and (c) of the FTAA;
- tāngata whenua of an area subject to Part 9 of the Fisheries Act under section 53(2)(g) of the FTAA; and
- the MIO for Ngāti Mutunga (Taranaki) under sections 4(1)(d) and (e) of the FTAA including for the purposes of the Treaty of Waitangi (Fisheries Claims Act) Settlement Act 1992.

Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Mutunga opposes this project based on the inferior quality of information that has been provided by the applicant. Rather than providing clarity on the potential adverse economic and environmental impacts of the project, this information creates a large amount of uncertainty. Given this uncertainty, it is incumbent on the Expert Panel to adopt a precautionary approach as set out in Policy 3 of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010.

Introduction

1. Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Mutunga (TRONM) is the mandated post settlement governance entity (PSGE) for Ngaati Mutunga Iwi (Taranaki). Negotiations to settle historical breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi began in 1997 with a Heads of Agreement signed between the Crown and Ngāti Mutunga in 1999.
2. The Ngāti Mutunga Claims Settlement Act was passed into law in 2006, with the Crown acknowledging – that the cumulative effect of its breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi (te Tiriti o Waitangi) and its principles has significantly undermined the traditional systems of authority, economic capacity, and the physical, cultural, and spiritual wellbeing of Ngāti Mutunga. The Crown acknowledges that it has failed to protect the rangatiratanga of Ngāti Mutunga in breach of its obligations under Article Two of the Treaty of Waitangi (te Tiriti o Waitangi).

Effects on Existing Interests

Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

3. The development, introduction and passing of the Fast-track Approvals Act (FTAA) is considered a direct assault on the rights and interests of Ngāti Mutunga. Along with other PSGE's, TRONM opposed this Act and its blatant bypassing of the resource management system which has developed since our Treaty settlement. The FTAA is also framed to ignore jurisprudence and legal precedent which has developed over the last 35 years in Aotearoa New Zealand.
4. We note that the same applicant that has had its resource consents quashed by the High Court and the Supreme Court is now applying for multiple approvals under the processes of the FTAA.
5. TRONM reaffirms its support of Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Ruanui, Te Kāhui o Rauru and Te Korowai o Ngāruahine in their opposition to the proposed project as first communicated in May this year by the collective PSGE's of the Taranaki region¹.

Effects on Coastal Processes, Benthic Ecology and Primary Productivity Effects & Sedimentation and Optical Water Quality Effects

6. We feel it important to note that the voluminous NIWA reports provided in the applicant's substantive application does not include the Environmental risk assessment of discharges of sediment during prospecting and exploration for seabed minerals².

¹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/564845/iwi-must-deal-with-us-whether-they-want-us-or-not-seabed-miners>

² <https://environment.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Files/environment-risk-assessment-discharges-sediment-niwa-report-pdf.pdf>

7. NIWA was engaged by the Ministry for the Environment to undertake this 2015 assessment of the environmental risk of sediment discharges arising during exploration and prospecting for iron sands on the shelf along the west coast of the North Island, phosphorite nodules on the Chatham Rise, and seafloor massive sulphide (SMS) deposits along the Kermadec volcanic arc.
8. The effects taken into account were clogging of respiratory surfaces and feeding structures of marine organisms, shading of photosynthetic organisms, diminished capacity for vision by predators and prey, known toxic effects, noise, avoidance of the discharge area by mobile species, and smothering of organisms on the seafloor.
9. The ecosystem components evaluated were the benthic invertebrate community in the discharge environment, the demersal (bottom-associated) fish and mobile invertebrate (squid, octopus, scallops, large crabs) community, the air-breathing fauna, comprising marine mammals, seabirds and turtles, sensitive benthic environments, as defined in the Permitted Activities Regulations 2013, and the pelagic community, including phytoplankton, zooplankton, fish, and larger invertebrates.
10. The scale of discharges that could potentially arise from the prospecting and exploration phases of seabed mining ranges from 1 t or less to, in the case of iron sands, close to one million tonnes. To indicate where thresholds may occur, whereby the risk of adverse effects to the environment would be minor or less, we assessed discharges of sediment of 1 t, 10 t, 100 t, 1,000 t, 10,000 t, 100,000 t and 1,000,000 t.
11. The discharge of sediment into surface waters, mid-water or near the seabed (defined as in the bottom 5% of the water column) was also evaluated since this will determine the size of the consequent sediment dispersal plume and the thickness and extent of the material deposited on the seafloor. NIWA also assessed the consequences of the discharge being from a single point at one time or from multiple points over the permit period that sum to the same total discharge under consideration.
12. Using this qualitative approach, NIWA assessment indicates that, at the scale of sampling undertaken to-date by mining companies prospecting and exploring for seabed minerals, the consequences are likely to be negligible or minor. However, NIWA also concluded that discharges of sediment during exploration and prospecting for seabed minerals can reach major or severe levels of consequence for the most sensitive marine benthic habitats occurring in each of the seabed mineral areas, depending on the size of the discharge, but that catastrophic consequences were never reached over the scales of discharges considered.
13. Severe consequences indicate extensive impacts, with between 60 and 90 percent of a habitat affected within the area being assessed, causing local extinctions of some species if the impact continues, with a major change to habitat and community structure. Recovery is likely to take one or two decades. Severe consequences for sensitive marine environments were reached at discharge scale of 1,000,000 t on the shelf along the west coast of the North Island.
14. There is also little reference made to the 'Offshore Subtidal rocky reef habitats on Patea Bank' as reported by Morrison et al. in 2022, which provides deeper insights into the assessment of the localised impacts on reef habitats and associated species. This is a critical gap in the application and needs to be addressed.

Marine Mammals

15. We find that the 2015 Cetacean Monitoring Report the applicant has submitted provides little useful information. The deficiencies of the Martin Cawthorn Associates Ltd report include:

- small transect area;
- visual observations from a Cessna 207 at 500 feet;
- short discussion using several assumptions based on cetacean habitat;
- the data collected was from 2011 to 2013.

16. Further insufficient information was contained in the 2015 NIWA report provided by the applicant on Zooplankton and the processes supporting the Greater Western Cook Strait which clearly identifies that the limited data available to the authors is from the 1970's and 1980's.

17. Recent research undertaken by Oregon State University indicates that the South Taranaki Bight region is home to a unique, genetically distinct population of Blue Whales. These whales use the area for foraging, nursing, and breeding. The research also identifies that increasing marine heatwaves result in the distribution of krill aggregations further offshore.

Economic Effects

18. The FTAA sets out the requirements for economic analysis:

- a) the criteria for assessing the application. These are that the project would have significant regional or national benefits (section 22(1)(a));
- b) the things the Minister may consider in assessing this, including inter alia, whether the project will deliver significant economic benefits (section 22(2)(iv));
- c) the reasons for declining approvals, which include adverse impacts (section 85(3)(a)) that are sufficiently significant to be out of proportion to the project's regional or national benefits (section 85(3)(b)).

Lack of cost benefit analysis

19. We suggest that the Taranaki VTM application is lacking robust cost benefit analysis, instead relying on an economic impact assessment (EIA) of the Proposed Project³. This NZIER assessment uses a similar methodology to the Delmore Proposed Development using an Input-Output multipliers model to estimate direct and indirect impacts on economic activity, GDP and employment resulting from the Projects operation.

³ [Attachment-2-NZIER-Economic-impact-assessment-of-TTRLs-Taranaki-VTM-project-report Analysis-with-updated-inputs Mar-2025.pdf](#)

20. NZIER was asked by the applicant to estimate the direct and flow-on economic impacts of the Project on:

- the local economy – South Taranaki and Whanganui;
- the regional economy – the Taranaki Region (South Taranaki, New Plymouth, and Stratford) and Whanganui; and
- the New Zealand economy.

21. We note the response of James Stewart, Technical Specialist – Economics, on the now withdrawn Delmore Residential Subdivision Project (Vineway Limited) which was a listed project under Schedule 2 of the FTAA. Mr Stewart was providing a response from the Auckland Council in light of their earlier recommendation to the Expert Panel that it exercise its discretion under section 67 in order to allow the Council adequate time to respond to outstanding material the applicant had provided⁴.

22. The outstanding material included several information gaps that could potentially result in scarce societal resources being use inefficiently. A significant information gap existed in the applicant's use of an economic assessment based the contribution to GDP and employment⁵.

23. Mr Stewart commented that he had previously recommended a cost-benefit analysis from a societal perspective which would demonstrate the resource trade-offs arising from the Proposed Development⁶. The reasoning behind this recommendation was that –

“significant regional or national benefits must be seen in the context of the costs borne by society that are likely to arise of the proposed infrastructure or development project because societal resources are limited.

Economic thinking and analysis are required to systematically weigh up the resource trade-offs arising from the Proposed Development and express the inherent uncertainty via sensitivity testing of any welfare impacts to underlying assumptions.”

24. There are clear differences between the Delmore and Taranaki VTM projects. The criteria for considering fast track applications relating to the Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf (Environmental Effects) Act 2012 is set out in clause six of Schedule 10 of the FTAA.

25. For the purposes of section 81, when considering an application for a marine consent, including conditions in accordance with clause seven, the panel must take into account, giving the greatest weight to paragraph (a), —

- a) The purpose of the FTAA Act 2024 which is to: (s 3) “facilitate the delivery of infrastructure and development projects with significant regional or national benefits”.
- b) Sections 10 and 11 of the EEZ Act/ the purpose sections of the EEZ Act 2012;
- c) Any relevant policy statements issued under the EEZ Act; and

⁴ https://www.fasttrack.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/7865/FTAA-2502-1015-Minute-9-Panel-Minute-exercise-of-section-67-FTAA-14-July.pdf

⁵ [TD Delmore Economics Review](#)

⁶ https://www.fasttrack.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/9110/A2-Economics-Memo-Response.pdf

- d) Sections 59, 60, 61(1)(b) and (c) and (2) to (5), s62(1A) and (2), 63 and 64 to 67.
26. For the purposes of subclause (1)(d), the panel must take into account that section 62(1A) of the EEZ Act would normally require an application to be declined but must not treat that provision as requiring the panel to decline the approval the panel is considering. This will require the Expert Panel to apply two different Acts and then weigh the results of both to come to a final decision, giving greater weight to the FTAA.
27. We are concerned that key inputs and assumptions for the EIA were based on TTRL planned employment and expenditure for the Project's operational activities and capital expenditure involved in the Project's setup. These have formed the inputs for regional I-O multipliers analysis to estimate economic impacts.
28. Export earnings, royalties, and taxes have been estimated together under one heading in the EIA. These estimates are based on data and projections provided by TTRL. The Project will be dependent on commodity prices for iron ore and vanadium pentoxide (V_2O_5) estimating US\$90 per metric ton for iron ore and US\$5.45 per pound for V_2O_5 .
29. We note that vanadium is not a listed mineral which the Crown may extract royalties under the Crown Minerals Act 1991. It is highly likely TTRL will only pay royalties on the iron ore they extract. Further refinement of V_2O_5 will occur once the iron sands have reached their offshore destination where the higher value product will be extracted to benefit TTRL's parent Australian company – Manuka Resources.

Climate Change Effects

Ngāti Mutunga Iwi Environmental Management Plan

30. Part 1 of the Ngāti Mutunga Iwi Environmental Management Plan (IEMP) 2019, identifies the concerns of Ngāti Mutunga regarding climate change⁷:

"Ngāti Mutunga acknowledges that concerted effort on behalf of all people is needed to minimise and manage the effects of climate change. We support the protection of cultural, spiritual, and environmental values while providing for the wise use and development of resources. It is our role as kaitiaki to ensure that the world we pass on to our mokopuna is in good condition."

31. Issues identified with climate change are:
- climate change may have an adverse effect on mahinga kai, particularly seafood, and make it harder for us to live from the land.
 - we do not have a good understanding of how climate change and policy responses may affect Māori - climate change and policy responses to the issue may increase existing disparities for Māori.
 - science relating to climate change needs to include the Māori world view.
32. The IEMP identifies the following policies regarding climate change:
- encourage and support the involvement of Māori people and mātauranga (traditional Māori knowledge) in research on issues related to climate change.

⁷ [Pages-from-Ngati-Mutunga-Iwi-Environmental-Management-Plan-Part-1.pdf](#)

- require consideration of the effects of climate change policy on all aspects of Māori communities, including economic, health, housing and governance and ensure that existing problems are not made worse.
- encourage the adoption of alternative energy sources provided they do not have an adverse effect on indigenous biodiversity or cultural values.
- oppose any activities that involve the extraction or use of fossil fuels.

33. Part 2 of the IEMP states that Ngāti Mutunga considers that the coastal environment includes:

- a. the Coastal Marine Area as defined in the Resource Management Act 1991. This includes the foreshore, seabed and coastal water, and the air space above the water extending from mean high water springs to the limits of the territorial sea – 12 nautical miles from the mean high water springs;
- b. the Exclusive Economic Zone – which runs from mean low water springs to 200 nautical miles offshore; and
- c. landward features that are normally within 1km of mean high water springs;
- d. tidal reaches of the Urenui, Onaero, Mimitangiatua, Waitoetoe rivers and the Waiau Stream (as at spring high tides).

Land use has a strong impact on coastal processes, so neither the coast nor the land should be considered in isolation.

34. In regards to Coastal Mining and Extraction Activities⁸, the Ngāti Mutunga IEMP identifies the following:

"The west coast of the north island contains areas of mineral rich black sand – both on beaches and on the seabed. It may be possible to collect this sand and process it to extract minerals such as iron. The Crown has granted several prospecting permits which allow companies to assess whether it would be possible to extract enough iron or other minerals from the sand from the seabed to make a profit. Exploration is still underway, and no applications for resource consent have been approved for mines or sand extraction businesses, however Ngāti Mutunga are concerned about the effects any future mining or sand extraction may have.

Mining and extraction activities may damage the sea floor and harm species living in the area. Removal of sand or other materials from the sea floor may also interfere with natural coastal processes and have unforeseen effects on the coast, including increased erosion and changes to beach formation."

35. A key objective of Ngāti Mutunga is to oppose the development of these resources if any adverse environmental effects are likely to occur. Accompanying IEMP policies on Coastal Mining and Extraction Activities include:

- promote a precautionary approach toward all proposals for mining or resource extraction in the coastal area.

⁸ [Pages-from-Ngati-Mutunga-Iwi-Environmental-Management-Plan-Part-2.pdf](#)

- oppose the issuing of any prospecting permits and the establishment of commercial mining or extraction activities.
- require that the highest environmental standards are applied to any consent application involving mining or extraction activities within coastal waters.

The role of marine sediments in climate change impacts

36. Marine sediments play a vital role in regulating climate change by accumulating and burying carbon on timescales of thousands to millions of years and are one of the largest repositories of organic carbon on earth⁹. Advisory opinion of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea has found that Aotearoa New Zealand has obligations under international law to:

- reduce the impacts of climate change on marine areas;
- apply an ecosystem approach to marine law and policy; and
- reduce pollution and support the restoration of the ocean.

37. The ability of marine sediments to regulate climate on shorter timescales is less certain. Anthropogenic activities such as dredging and anchoring, seabed mining, and bottom trawling have the potential to release sedimentary organic carbon back into overlying seawater¹⁰. There is a risk that this carbon is remineralised into CO₂ and consequently offsets the oceans absorption efficiency for taking up atmospheric CO₂.

Request for further information

38. Given the concerns identified by TRONM, we request the applicant provide the following information:

- updated plume modelling, notably in regard to the worst-case modelling and wave periods – noting a request was made for further modelling by the Decision Making Committee in 2023;
- updated marine mammal evidence, including relevant marine mammal observations set out in the 2023 evidence of Dr Leigh Torres and Dr Slooten;
- establish and provide a report on how much organic carbon will be released and remineralised into CO₂ by the action of disturbing marine sediment in the South Taranaki Bight;
- updated economic evidence including cost benefit analysis on –
 - economic effects on other industries in the area;
 - economic effects on industries excluded by the project; and
 - economic effects of damage to the environment.

⁹ https://www.itlos.org/fileadmin/itlos/documents/cases/31/Advisory_Opinion/C31_Adv_Op_21.05.2024_orig.pdf

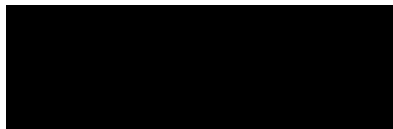
¹⁰ <https://pce.parliament.nz/media/cdoodc0l/niwa-organic-carbon-stocks-and-potential-vulnerability-in-marine-sediments-around-aotearoa-new-zealand.pdf>

Summary

Significant regional and national benefits are not well-defined concepts within the FTAA. There is now an abundance of new, peer reviewed information available on resident Blue Whale populations and climate change impacts. This recent information casts a long shadow of uncertainty over the applicant's substantive application. As has long been asserted by Southern Taranaki Iwi, communities and non-governmental environmental groups, the economic and environmental evidence does not provide the necessary clarity around the impacts of the proposed Project.

It is therefore not possible to meet the purpose of the FTAA and facilitate the delivery of an infrastructure or development project with significant regional or national benefits. We suggest the existing application lacks sufficient information to allow the Expert Panel to make a decision under section 81 of the FTAA as both the adverse impacts and regional or national benefits remain undefined.

Nāku ra,



Pouwhakahaere / Chief Executive Officer

Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Mutunga

