

Submission from the New Zealand Minerals Council to the Expert Panel, Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project

6 April 2026

Introduction

1. The [New Zealand Minerals Council](#) is the industry association representing mining in New Zealand. It is a not-for-profit organisation, funded by members in the minerals and mining sector.
2. Members include mining companies, explorers, researchers, and service providers that support the extractives industry.
3. No AI was used in the writing of this submission, and the minerals council is happy to discuss any aspects with the expert panel. We thank the expert panel for the opportunity to make a submission in support of the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project.
4. This submission will outline the big picture of mining in New Zealand and its valuable contribution to communities and the economy. This is to contextualise the contribution the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project will make as another hard rock gold mine in a region with a rich history of mining.
5. We recognise the panel has a complete application from Santana Minerals and we do not intend to submit on detailed aspects already verified. We will, however, make some references as to how Santana Minerals follows normal mining practices and engagement.
6. It is important to note that the Bendigo-Ophir project is managed by experienced, qualified and well-credentialed experts in all aspects of gold mining. While this is an impressive project with a great contribution to make to country, it is not unprecedented.

Mining in New Zealand

7. To contextualise the contribution the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project will make, it is important to understand mining in New Zealand.
8. Almost every aspect of our modern lives relies on mined minerals or mineral products. Gold, in particular, is used for electronics, telecommunications, and in medical diagnostics, as well as jewellery, and as a store of value. Mining is a key part of the primary production sector in New Zealand. If we do not mine what we have in New Zealand, we lose the opportunity to generate jobs and earn export receipts.
9. In January 2025, the New Zealand Government released [A Minerals Strategy for New Zealand to 2040](#) and [A Critical Minerals List for New Zealand](#).
10. This critical minerals list was the first of its kind for this country and it lists 37 critical minerals, including gold.

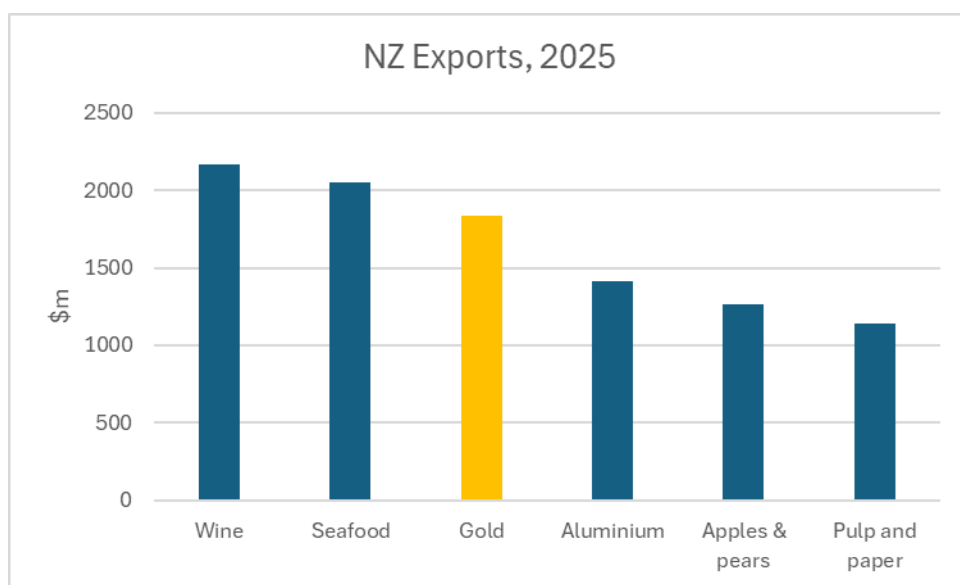
11. The strategy projects an export-led growth pathway for mining towards a goal of doubling annual mineral exports to \$3 billion by 2035. Doubling exports will likely come from a combination of the high value of minerals mined and new production.
12. Given the interest in mining in New Zealand from investors, we believe this goal is not only achievable, but that it can be bettered.
13. The New Zealand Government sees mining as an important contributor to the economy, with potential for growth and as a consequence, about 2,000 more high paying jobs in the next five to 10 years.
14. New Zealand has one of the most regulated mining jurisdictions in the world and that is a good thing. In a world where consumers are increasingly interested in the provenance of their purchases, mining has an impressive story to tell. We have some of the strictest employment and health and safety standards in the world, and some of the most stringent environmental standards.
15. Most human activity has some kind of footprint and in mining, environmental impacts are managed by an effects-based approach. This starts with avoiding impacts where possible, and extends through minimising, remedying, offsetting, and compensation.
16. Mining is temporary. When projects are completed, the land is returned to a restored, or enhanced, state. Often the restoration is undertaken through the life of the mine, transforming areas as they are finished with for mining. Planning for mine closure is part of the permitting process.
17. An example is the remediated OceanaGold Globe Progress mine site near Reefton on the West Coast of the South Island. This has been turned into a public recreation area including 22km of cycling and walking tracks, showcasing recent mining heritage. This is Department of Conservation (DOC) land and has been handed back to DOC as a community asset. You can read DOC's announcement about it [here](#). OceanaGold explains the project [here](#).

What we mine

18. In New Zealand primarily we mine:
 - Gold
 - Thermal coal
 - Coking coal
 - Ironsands
 - Limestone
 - Silver
 - Mineral sands
 - Rock and sand (aggregates)
19. There are two gold hard rock mines in production, a gold mine close to production (Endura's Snowy River mine on the West Coast of the South Island), and several smaller alluvial gold mines.
20. Mining can take place on private land, or on Crown Land. Essentially, it must take place where the minerals lie, and it must be economically viable to mine those minerals.
21. Unlike many of the mines in Australia which operate with a fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workforce, New Zealand's mining workforce tends to live within easy travelling distance of the mines they work in. They are part of local communities and that's where they spend their wages. Generally, the mining company will put on bus transport from the nearest population centres for each mine shift.

Economics

22. Mining in New Zealand contributes **\$2.07 billion** to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ([Shamubeel Eaqub](#), economist).
23. Mining is 26.6% of the Waitaki District's GDP ([Infometrics Regional Economic Profile](#)), by far the largest contributor in the district. This district takes in part of Otago and includes [OceanaGold's Macraes Operation](#). Production at Macraes began in 1990, and since then, the mine has produced more than five million ounces of gold over its continuous 35-year operating history. Macraes is mined using both open pit and underground methods, supporting nearly 700 employees.
24. Mining is one of the most productive sectors of the New Zealand economy. **\$458,952** is the value of what is produced per full time equivalent worker, compared with **\$174,045** across the whole economy. (Infometrics Sector Profile 2025, Mining and Exploration).
25. The extractives sector employs **5,870 people** (2024) (MBIE data).
26. 23%, of the mining and exploration workforce is Māori - a is much higher proportion than for Māori in the workforce as a whole (14%). (Infometrics, Māori Sector Profile 2025, Mining and Exploration) The annualised median income of Māori in mining is **\$122,200**, compared with the **\$66,560** Māori earn in all sectors. (Stats New Zealand)
27. Women make up 14.8% of the mining and exploration workforce. (Infometrics Sector Profile 2025, Mining and Exploration)
28. Santana Minerals reports that each job at its mine is expected to generate about \$1 million in GDP annually.
29. Gold and metallurgical coal are our main exports from mining, so they are critical to the Government's goal of doubling the value of our mineral exports to \$3 billion by 2035. Gold exports were **\$1.8 billion** in 2025 (Stats New Zealand) and gold is the number one goods export to Australia.
30. The graph below shows how gold compares with other New Zealand exports. Mining exports in total now exceed wine and seafood.



Royalties, rates and taxes

31. Mining companies make a number of payments to the Government including royalties, as the Crown effectively “owns” the minerals. In 2025, **\$19.6 million** was paid in royalties.

32. New Zealand uses a dual royalty system based on two percent of the net sales revenue of the minerals obtained, or 10 percent of the accounting profits. This is paid into the New Zealand Consolidated Fund for general Government spending.
33. More significant than royalties are the taxes paid by mining companies – corporate income tax (28 percent), PAYE, GST, and ACC; fees to access and use Crown land; and fees paid to New Zealand Petroleum and Minerals for permits. Considerable fees are paid for resource consent applications and to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) for fast-track applications.
34. Santana Minerals has estimated \$1.8 billion going back to New Zealanders through the Government over the life of the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project including royalties at approximately \$450 million; corporate tax at approximately \$1.1 billion; and income taxes including PAYE and ACC at approximately \$216 million. They say more than 60 percent of the gross profits will stay in New Zealand through dividends to New Zealand shareholders, taxes, and royalties.
35. Mining companies also pay significant rates to local authorities and whatever other fees such local authorities agree on. They are often among the largest ratepayers in provincial districts.
36. As an example, in Santana Mineral's case, they report they will be paying \$1.25 million per annum to Central Otago District Council, inflation-indexed using the consumers price index (CPI), to fund infrastructure, and environmental and community benefits packages as the council sees fit. This is payable six months after commencement of commercial gold production, with an upfront non-refundable payment of \$250,000. This is in addition to standard rates.

Investment

37. Getting from prospecting to mining is a long and expensive process. Mining in New Zealand is an attractive investment because we have relatively stable government and rules, regulations, and laws that provide suitable safeguards.
38. The level of capital required does not sit in New Zealand which is why most large-scale mines have overseas investors/owners.
39. However, it is incorrect to say that as a consequence of that investment model, all the returns flow offshore.
40. Generally, most of the revenue generated by the mine stays in New Zealand in the form of payments to suppliers, wages, contractors, royalties, taxes, rates and spend on plant and machinery and in some instances, housing for miners. After these expenses, profits, which are a relatively small proportion of gross revenue, are returned to shareholders, many of whom reside in New Zealand.
41. Santana Minerals' total spend in New Zealand since incorporation has been more than \$60 million, \$23.6 million in the past 12 months. The company reports it has 33 full-time staff already working out of Cromwell, with another 30 contractors.
42. Santana Minerals expects that more than 60 percent of its gross profits will stay in New Zealand through dividends to New Zealand shareholders, taxes, and royalties.

Environment

43. Mining does not have to be at the expense of the environment.
44. In fact, mining companies often work with conservation groups and the Department of Conservation to protect and enhance indigenous biodiversity on mine sites.
45. Mining companies employ environmental managers/ecologists to ensure they meet all the rules, regulations, and laws they must abide by through the life of the mining project.

46. The mining sector supports New Zealand's high environmental standards and neither wants nor sees the fast-track legislation as undermining these.
47. Members of the New Zealand Minerals Council – of which Santana Minerals is one – sign up to a [charter](#), the purpose of which is:
- Enable socially and environmentally responsible mining, providing minerals for a sustainable and resilient future and enduring value for all New Zealanders.*
48. The charter also includes reference to the environment:
- New Zealand Minerals Council members aim for a net positive impact on the environment. We recognise that our activities make a mark on the land, and we look for methods and management approaches to realise a net environmental benefit.*
49. Negative perceptions about mining's environmental impacts are often based on mining's past, or mining in jurisdictions where there is little oversight of working and environmental conditions, and are not supported by evidence.
50. Things have changed as society's/the community's standards have risen and with the use of continually improving science and technology, modern exploration and extraction of minerals in New Zealand are undertaken with care and responsibility, bound by many rules, regulations and laws.
51. Miners will continue to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on predator control to protect indigenous biodiversity, run breeding programmes for kiwis, protect wildlife on and around mining sites, spend millions of dollars on planting the right plants where they have previously mined, protect waterways with innovative water management, and generally, quietly go about excellent environmental management of mines.
52. Virtually all industries impact the environment and throughout most of New Zealand, they are in a seismically active region. As a consequence, New Zealand is renowned for its seismic engineering capabilities. The reality of life is that we cannot de-risk everything so there has to be some acceptance of risk within the parameters of all steps being taken to best mitigate or plan for it. Catastrophising the "what ifs" is restrictive to development in this country.
53. Let's also not pretend that mining is the only industry that has an impact on the environment and on freshwater. In fact, mining is possibly the most regulated in that regard and any water that leaves a mine site and enters a waterway must meet appropriate regulations which are monitored by local authorities. If it doesn't, there are consequences, including fines.
54. One of the many environmental safeguards are mine closure plans. You cannot just mine and walk away. Mining companies here spend millions of dollars restoring mine sites close to a pre-mining state and sometimes to become community assets, as the OceanaGold Globe Progress mine rehabilitation example above explains. Those dollars are spent on conservation, predator and pest control, and restoring biodiversity throughout the life of the mine. This is, in fact, one of the many conditions of mining permits.

Water treatment

55. Examples of New Zealand mining's international excellence in environmental management, specifically water management, can be found on many mine sites and here are examples of two water treatment options developed here.

56. OceanaGold's passive water treatment option employed in its Globe Progress mine closure was the subject of a [research presentation](#) at the 2022 International Mine Water Association conference. This [video](#) explains how it works.
57. A low-tech water management system employed at a number of mines recycles discarded mussel shells for the passive treatment of acid mine drainage (AMD) using an up-flow mussel shell reactor. This was detailed in a [research presentation](#) at the 2022 International Mine Water Association conference. This [video](#) explains how it works.

Processes

58. The primary law governing mining is the Crown Minerals Act.
59. As per this act, miners must obtain permits from New Zealand Petroleum & Minerals, which sits within the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment. There are different permits, with different sets of conditions, for the three phases of mining, that is, prospecting, exploration, and minerals mining (outlined below, 76).

Community engagement

60. There is a long time between getting the first permit and setting up a mine. Responsible mining companies start engaging with the communities around their potential mine early in the process (prospecting/ exploration).
61. Part of this will be regulated, but mostly it is to ensure miners understand the views / perspectives of the communities and communities understand the opportunities and potential issues that will come with development in their area.
62. In New Zealand, we also have obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi. Mining companies understand the importance of engaging with relevant iwi and hapū.
63. Mines bring high paying jobs and significant opportunities to their local communities. As employers of mostly local people, mining companies are invested in the community and often make significant and ongoing contributions to community assets and projects.

Santana Minerals' engagement

64. It is incorrect for project detractors to say that Santana Minerals has not engaged with the community or answered questions.
65. People not liking the answers to the questions is very different to accusations of a lack of willingness to explain the project. And some people simply won't engage – none so deaf as those who do not want to hear.
66. Santana Minerals began engaging with the community about the Bendigo-Ophir project in June 2024. Since then, the company has (as of March 2026, and ongoing activities):
- Held more than 70 community drop-in sessions across Central Otago at Cromwell, Tarras, Ophir, Luggate, Alexandra, and Lake Hawea. These are weekly and ongoing and involve project experts, detailed illustrative posters, and take-home fact sheets.
 - Given more than 50 presentations to community and business groups.
 - Interacted regularly with the closest affected residents, supported by a dedicated project manager.

- Established a Community Liaison Group (September 2025) with quarterly meetings. Members are a cross-section of local representatives from business, community groups, and local residents.
- Attended regional events since September 2024 including: Alexandra Blossom Festival, Wanaka A&P Show, Wheels at Wanaka, Central Otago A&P Show, Business after 5 events (with Business South, Wanaka and Queenstown business chambers).
- Since October 2023, community updates on Radio Central, starting monthly and moving to weekly in August 2025.
- Launched the Santana Minerals Facebook page in October 2025 for community updates (5,200 followers).
- Engaged with mainstream media.

Santana Minerals investment in the community

67. Since 2024, the company has invested \$84,500 in communities across the region. It is important to note that at this stage, the business is only spending money, not making money.
- Santana Minerals is the Principal Sponsor of the 49th World Gold Panning Championships, to be held in Cromwell from 25 September to 3 October 2026. With 350+ competitors plus support teams and spectators, thousands of people are expected to attend this event which brings international visitors and global media attention to the region.
 - Principal sponsor of the Central Otago Football League.
 - Scholarships for Cromwell College and Dunstan High School.
 - Investment in the Omakau Community Hub, and local schools, clubs, and charity events.
68. The company has a formal sponsorship and donation programme, with criteria, that runs throughout the life of the mine.

Fast-track law and mining

69. Given the small number of mining projects within the fast-track process, compared to the total number of projects, mining has attracted disproportionate and unfounded opposition.
70. It is frustrating that opponents try to make a case that mining projects do not deserve to be on the fast-track. There are no grounds whatsoever to discriminate mining from other development projects.
71. The fast-track law is ideal for the large-scale, complex nature of mining projects which span rules, regulations and laws across central and local government jurisdictions. It provides a one stop shop without bypassing the environment.
72. In an economy constrained by low productivity, mining is the sector with the highest productivity. This translates into high wages which are spent in local communities.
73. As outlined above, it is hyperbole to talk about all the money leaving the country. What does cause investment and people to leave the country is when there are no jobs, poor policy settings, and a weak economy.
74. Mining is capital-intensive and it takes a long time to get through the myriads of processes and regulations to physically start mining and get a return on that very large investment. While it is appropriate there are checks and balances, it should not take 10 years and cost millions of dollars to reach this stage, as time delays can turn off investors.

75. Because mining has to abide by so many rules, regulations and laws, the gold in the fast-track law is the one-stop-shop approach to considering the project holistically.
76. Allowing the suite of approvals under different legislation to be considered in one place (a one-stop shop), is the main benefit of the act for anyone working on projects with significant regional or national benefits.
77. It brings approvals and condition setting under the following acts into one place, which is more efficient and timelier. Importantly for mining, it also removes different levels of subjectivity, productivity, resourcing, and willingness to engage with mining across the various departments that implement these acts:
- Resource Management Act
 - Crown Minerals Act
 - Conservation Act
 - Reserves Act
 - Wildlife Act
 - National Parks Act
 - Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act
 - Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf (Environmental Effects) Act
78. Many issues are caused by the Wildlife Act 1953 which is outdated and not fit for purpose when it comes to modern, large-scale development.
79. New Zealand Minerals Council submitted on the [Fast-track Approvals Bill](#) (as Straterra, before name change to New Zealand Minerals Council) and the [Fast-track Approvals Amendment Bill](#).

Opposition to mining

80. As a wealthy, Western democracy, New Zealand has opponents to mining. Opposition largely comes from two corners – ideology (will never support mining) and uncertainty through lack of knowledge. This uncertainty is usually in relation to specific projects and those in the community get bombarded with views and don't know who to believe.
81. Lack of knowledge can be dealt with via trusted communication and engagement by mining companies and the mining industry as a whole. Engagement practices are outlined above.
82. The New Zealand Minerals Council operates at the big picture, industry-wide level with engagement with decision makers and the public through speeches, all forms of media, meetings, and attending conferences and events. The organisation tends not to get too involved in individual projects, but given the interest in the fast-track process, CEO Josie Vidal has commented to media on the Bendigo-Ophir project, including in the following media:

RNZ, The Detail: [A gold mine, an Australian mining giant, and a community divided](#)

Otago Daily Times: [Mining in our backyard governed by strict rules](#) In this article she says:

“There is talk of wanting to retain Otago as a vast untouched area. That is at no risk from a couple of mines.

“I lived in the Netherlands, which is roughly the same size as Otago. I was one of about 18 million people. Otago, in the 2025 census, had 253,900 people. Mines in New Zealand are but a pinprick on the total land area.

“I have spent time in Otago and visited the mines there, including the Santana mine site. You will struggle to notice it from most vantage points.”

Conclusion

83. In conclusion, the New Zealand Minerals Council advocates that New Zealand has minerals, and we should be able to mine them to meet global demand. This is done within strict employment and health and safety laws and stringent environmental regulations which we support.
84. We contend, that like many things, New Zealand does this better than most.
85. Mining is a burgeoning industry in New Zealand with investment interest and potential for modest growth – there won't be a mine on every corner. That growth should be welcomed in a country struggling with low productivity, anaemic economic growth, and high unemployment.
86. The Bendigo-Ophir gold mine is expected to be a great contributor to the regional and national economies, as outlined in Santana Minerals' application.
87. Mining gold in New Zealand stacks up in regional and national benefits, as outlined above.
88. Genuine concerns about the mine can be dealt with through community engagement and education. All contentions made by opponents should have the facts, evidence and science interrogated in how they relate to this specific project, rather than say, mining in countries without sound regulations.