



File Ref: FTAA-2504-1046

25 August 2025

Emailed to: info@fasttrack.govt.nz

s.53 Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 – Written comments on Waihi North [FTAA-2504-1046]

Thank you for the invitation to provide written comments on the above matter.

Context for comments

1. The Resource Markets branch of MBIE administers the Crown Minerals Act 1991 (the CMA).
2. MBIE is responsible for assessing and making decisions, under delegated authority from the Minister for Resources, on applications for permits to prospect for, explore for and mine Crown-owned minerals.
3. MBIE administers these permits throughout their life cycle, including:
 - a. monitoring compliance with obligations under the CMA, associated regulations and permit conditions
 - b. receiving, compiling and publishing reports and data relating to permit holder's activities, and
 - c. administering and collecting royalties on behalf of the Crown from the extraction and sale of Crown-owned minerals (including gold).
4. The substantive application by Oceana Gold (New Zealand) Limited (Oceana Gold) for its Waihi North project does not include an application for a mining permit as it currently holds the necessary permits under the CMA.¹
5. However, MBIE retains a strong interest in the outcome of the substantive application because Oceana Gold's ability to secure the required consents, approvals and access arrangements is required for it to comply with and give effect to its existing permits.
6. MBIE notes the conditions or restrictions attached to the approvals (if granted) may also directly affect the project's economic outcomes and royalty payments. For this reason, MBIE welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft conditions when they are available.

Significance of mining at Waihi and the Waihi North project

7. The Waihi North project is recognised as a gold mining project of national and regional significance. This is reflected in its inclusion in Schedule 2 of the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024.

¹ Oceana Gold holds two current mining permits, granted under the CMA, that are relevant to the Waihi North project (Mining Permits 41808 and 60541). The work programmes applying to both permits are included in **Appendix 1**.

8. To support the panel's considerations of this project, MBIE considers there are several aspects of the current mining at Waihi and the proposals under the project that speak to the significance of the regional and national benefits:
- a. The Waihi mine is the second largest gold mining operation in New Zealand. Since Oceana Gold acquired it in 2016, the Waihi operation has accounted for, on average, around 25% of New Zealand's annual gold production, and around 23% of all royalties received for the mining of Crown-owned minerals (excluding petroleum).
 - b. The Waihi North project represents an important next phase of mining at Waihi, extending the life of mining operations by 10 years, particularly through the proposed development of the Wharekirauponga underground mine.
 - c. In 2021, MBIE assessed and granted a mining permit for the development of a significant gold-silver resource discovered by Oceana Gold at Wharekirauponga. In 2022, MBIE assessed and granted an extension of the permit area to include an additional corridor of land, enabling the development of a continuous underground connection between the Wharekirauponga resource (beneath the Coromandel Forest Park) and Oceana Gold's existing processing facilities at Waihi.
 - d. Since 2021, the Wharekirauponga gold-silver resource has continued to grow both in scale and geological certainty. Given the size of the resource, its high-grade, the potential economic upside and its proximity to established mine infrastructure, MBIE considers the Wharekirauponga resource to be a world-class mineral deposit.
 - e. At the time of granting, the Wharekirauponga total resource was estimated at [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Since then, further drilling and modelling have increased both the size and confidence level of the resource. As of 31 December 2024, the total classified resource had grown to 3.69 million tonnes, containing 1.77 Moz of gold. Notably, the proportion of the resource classified as 'Indicated' (a higher-confidence category) more than doubled.
 - f. MBIE considers it is reasonable to expect further resource conversion will occur once underground development begins, supported by improved geological understanding and higher-resolution drilling achievable from underground. Similarly, there is a strong likelihood of further extension of resources, and potential to discover new resources.

Proposal for Wharekirauponga development

9. Due to the environmental sensitivity of the surface area, the Wharekirauponga resource has been scoped as an underground mining operation since its first grant. While open pit mining would almost certainly have offered greater economic returns and higher gold recovery, the location of the resource beneath the Coromandel Forest Park made it environmentally untenable.
10. Instead, Oceana Gold proposes to develop the resource using underground declines that surface at the Willows Road property, which lies outside of the Coromandel Forest Park. From there, the declines would extend northward to access the underground resource and southward to establish continuous underground connectivity with the existing processing facility at Waihi.

11. MBIE considers this development option to be both pragmatic and environmentally responsible. It minimises surface impacts as much as possible, particularly in relation to the public conservation estate and the surrounding community. It also requires a substantial upfront financial commitment from Oceana Gold to develop the resource in this way. This option reflects a balance between economic feasibility and minimising environmental impacts.

Conclusion

12. Oceana Gold already holds the mining permits that are required for its Waihi North project. MBIE will maintain regulatory oversight throughout the life of those permits, including monitoring Oceana Gold's compliance with permit conditions and work programme obligations, including eventual resource extraction and payment of royalties to the Crown.
13. MBIE therefore has a direct interest in the outcome of the substantive application. Oceana Gold's ability to secure the required consents, approvals, and access arrangements is fundamental to the continued operation of New Zealand's second largest gold mine and the eventual transition of mining activities from Waihi to the new Wharekirauponga mine.
14. MBIE considers the resources at Waihi and Wharekirauponga have considerable economic significance to New Zealand.
15. MBIE acknowledges that other agencies and experts will contribute to the panel's consideration of environmental, conservation and heritage matters to be weighed in its decision-making and setting of conditions.
16. If the panel proposes to grant the approvals, MBIE considers care should be taken to ensure the conditions of the approvals appropriately balance the management of environmental and conservation effects with the project's potential to deliver significant economic benefits without undue constraints.

Nāku noa, nā



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Appendix 1 – Work programmes applying to Oceana Gold’s mining permits

Work Programme for MP 41808 (Favona)

1. The permit holder shall, to the satisfaction of the chief executive, carry out the following work programme:
 - a) stripping of overburden using earthmoving machinery and explosives as appropriate;
 - b) progressive open pit mining using earthmoving machinery and explosives as appropriate;
 - c) underground mining as appropriate;
 - d) ore and waste rock handling using dump trucks and/or conveyors and/or other methods as appropriate; and
 - e) progressive exploration and resource definition.

Work Programme for MP 60541 (Wharekirauponga)

1. Within 48 months of the commencement date of the permit, the permit holder shall (to the satisfaction of the chief executive):
 - a. Undertake a programme of resource definition drilling to further delineate the extent of the resource;
 - b. If feasible, commence constructing one or more declines or underground drives to enable further WKP resource definition drilling;
 - c. Update the geological and resource models; and
 - d. Provide the chief executive with a report detailing all work completed during this stage of the work programme, with submission of digital data including QA/QC information and data sufficient to demonstrate levels of accuracy and precision.
2. Within 84 months of the commencement date of the permit, the permit holder shall (to the satisfaction of the chief executive):
 - a. Complete a mine pre-feasibility study, including, but not limited to, assessment and identification of a decline route or routes to the WKP classified resource;
 - b. Conduct suitable sterilisation of any selected decline route where appropriate or, otherwise demonstrate that any incidental ore discovery along the route will not be sterilised;
 - c. Provide the chief executive with; a map of the area of the permit the permit holder considers is required to be retained to develop the mine, reasons why the area should be retained and any supporting technical information:
 - i. The chief executive will consider the map, reasons and information and will, within 20 working days, either approve or decline to approve the area to be retained;

- ii. If the chief executive does not approve the area to be retained the chief executive must notify the permit holder, provide reasons for his or her decision and invite the permit holder to submit a map with a revised area, and any additional supporting information within 20 working days of the date of the notice;
 - iii. If the permit holder does not submit a map with a revised area and additional information or if the revised area is not approved by the chief executive within 20 working days of receipt, the chief executive will notify the permit holder, provide reasons for his or her decision and give the permit holder the opportunity to provide any additional information relevant to the decision as it sees fit within 20 working days of the date of the notice;
 - iv. The chief executive will then consider the information provided under ii) - iii), determine the area required to be retained to develop the mine and notify the permit holder of his or her decision and the reasons for it; and
 - v. Within 5 working days of approval or determination, the Permit Holder must apply under section 40 of the Act to surrender the area of the permit other than the area that has been approved or determined by the chief executive as being required to develop the mine.
- 3. Within 96 months of the commencement date of the permit, the permit holder shall (to the satisfaction of the chief executive):
 - a. Construct one or more declines to the WKP resource;
 - b. Complete a mine feasibility study;
 - c. Complete an Ore Reserve estimate as defined under a recognised resource classification code as per Schedule 1 of the Minerals Programme for Minerals (Excluding Petroleum) 2013;
 - d. Provide the chief executive with a report detailing all work completed during this stage of the work programme, including QA/QC information and data sufficient to demonstrate levels of accuracy and precision to be submitted to the chief executive in accordance with the regulations; and
 - e. Provide the Minister with a forward-looking work programme for approval by the Minister. The forward-looking programme shall include construction of mine infrastructure necessary to enable production of first ore, a commencement date of commercial mining and a minimum annual production rate that factors in:
 - i. i) The estimated Ore Reserves;
 - ii. ii) The production schedule proposed in the mine feasibility study;
 - iii. iii) The mining method to be used; and
 - iv. iv) The need to follow industry best practice.
- 4. The permit holder shall, to the satisfaction of the chief executive, carry out the following work programme:
 - a. In conjunction with annual reporting required under relevant regulations, unless already provided for, provide the chief executive with a plan in digital format of all

mine workings and planned development, and the timing of the development in line with the guidelines on Completing and Submitting Plans on Mines or Tunnels (2017) or any varied guidelines that may subsequently be issued; and

- b. Notify the chief executive of any other deposits beyond the current WKP resource.