
MINUTE 1 OF THE EXPERT PANEL
Project Commencement – Various Actions
Central and Southern Block Mining Project [FTAA-2512-1153]

(14 April 2026)

[1] The Panel was appointed on 27 March to commence work on 7 April 2026 in order to determine the application for the Central and Southern Block Mining Project (the Project) under the Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024 (the Act) made by Tahoroa Ironsands Limited (TIL).

The purpose of this Minute is to confirm the time and details for the initial Project Overview Conference and a site visit and to indicate the Panel’s proposals for various other actions. These actions are in response to the Panel’s viewing of the Panel Convener’s Conference (held on 19 March) and the subsequent Minute 3 of the Panel Convener, together with the Panel’s reading to date of the application materials, and receipt and review of the Applicant’s memorandum (dated 7 April, as appended to this Minute) .

[2] The Panel Convener has determined that there will be a decision time frame under the Act of 60 working days following the receipt of invited comments. The Panel decision will therefore be due on 14 August 2026, subject to the application being suspended for any of the reasons outlined in section 60 of the Act, and to comments on the application being invited on 21 April 2026.

Project Overview Conference

[3] The Project Overview Conference will be held on Thursday 16 April 2026 at 9:30AM, held online.

As set out in the Fast-Track Approvals Act 2024: Panel Conveners' Practice and Procedure Guidance (Guidance Note) the purpose of the Project Overview Conference is to familiarise the Panel with:

- (a) the content of the application for approvals;
- (b) the key points of evidence (technical reports, assessments and other information) provided in support of the application;
- (c) relevant legal tests and legal issues in contention;
- (d) the content and structure of proposed conditions, including management plans and strategic plan, and drafting style;
- (e) other relevant matters.

The Panel will have the opportunity to ask questions about the application at a general or high level. It should be noted that while the Panel will be reasonably familiar with the application documents, they will not have had an opportunity to consider all matters in detail. At this point, the Panel have two technical matters for questions:

- a) The status of the report on existing use rights for Waitomo District Council; and
- b) Current discussions regarding consent conditions between the Applicant and Waikato Regional Council were noted during the Convenor Conference. Have these been advanced further?

The Panel notes the Applicant's intent to be represented by Counsel, TIL's Managing Director and Project Manager, and planning advisor at the Project Overview Conference, and advise that it considers no other participants need to attend (albeit seeking that a representative of Taharoa C do so). Given the preliminary and confined scope and purpose of the Project Overview Conference, and is consistent with our understanding of the practice of other Expert Panels appointed under the Act, we have decided that only the Applicant need attend the Project Overview Conference (but, for the avoidance of doubt, not including representatives of Taharoa C).

[4] We also have in mind our understanding of (and the apparent degree of agreement regarding) the nature and range of issues we will need to determine against the extensive consenting background to the Project, along with the procedural steps required by the Act and which we intend to take to ensure all parties (including those invited to comment) can participate in the substantive process ahead on those issues, as set out below.

[5] In the interests of transparency and to provide potential commenters with the same information as that provided to the Panel, the conference will be recorded and made available on the Fast-Track website following the Conference (as proposed by the Applicant in its 7 April memorandum).

Site Visit

[6] The site visit will be conducted one day during Wednesday 22nd April to Friday 24th April, weather permitting. The applicant has proposed that the Panel conducts part of the site visit by helicopter which will enable both an aerial view of the site and one of the export ships, which will be moored during this period.

[7] The nature of the site visit is such that representatives of the applicant will attend the visit with the Panel. However, communications will be limited to directing the Panel's attention to various features of the site operation and answering questions from the Panel of a clarification nature only.

Further Actions

[8] As noted above, the Panel has reviewed and considered the matters addressed during the Convenor Conference and subsequent Minute 3 of the Convenor. We note the following matters:

- (a) The Applicant went through what it considered to be the key issues for the application, all of which were related to appeal matters on its RMA resource consent currently before the Environment Court and which are

contained in Appendix G of the current Fast Track application. The Waikato Regional Council agreed that this was a full list of the key issues at this time. The Panel will utilise this list to guide our site visit and view specific parts of the site and surroundings including:

- (b) Areas currently being actively mined (including on-site processing areas and facilities), areas proposed to be mined and areas that are untouched and will remain so;
 - (i) Proposed riparian and other set back areas (including those in contention);
 - (ii) Examples of rehabilitation and the proposed Priority Stabilisation Area on the northern boundary of the Central Block;
 - (iii) Areas potentially subject to flooding behind Lake Taharoa and along Taharoa Road;
 - (iv) Lake Taharoa, and the Mitiwai and Wainui Streams;
 - (v) Areas near natural inland wetlands subject to mining operations and the inland wetlands proposed to be removed;
 - (vi) Wainui Dam, fish pass and water intake structures (if feasible) in the Wainui Dam reservoir and Wainui Stream;
 - (vii) Relevant discharge points eg to the Wainui Stream; and
 - (c) Taharoa Village.
- (d) Several parties noted the complexity of mana whenua engagement and the Treaty settlement framework. Te Nehenehenui considered that to address this complexity there may be a need for face-to-face meetings with the Panel. Parties also supported specialist expertise on cultural matters being available to the Panel. The Panel has accordingly decided that a hui (or equivalent process determined in accordance with tikanga) should be held following the receipt of comments on the application and is minded to appoint a cultural advisor to assist both in arrangements for this hui and for advice on tikanga Māori and Treaty settlements frameworks generally. The Panel will issue additional directions in relation to this appointment and, in turn, the hui in due course, following

input from the parties regarding these steps.

- (e) Several parties also identified the need for specialist hydrology input. The Panel is also minded to engage specialist expertise in this area of technical importance to the application. The Panel will also seek the views of the participants and issue additional directions in relation to this appointment, as above for the proposed cultural advisor.
- (f) The parties who have engaged expert witnesses in technical areas supported the use of expert conferencing to address matters raised in the comments (once filed) and areas of remaining disagreement about the content of proposed conditions of consent. The Panel will schedule expert conferencing for these purposes and any other purpose that might arise as a result of comments received and will likely engage an experienced facilitator for this purpose. Subject to the timeframes of the Fast Track process, the Panel will provide adequate notice of expert conferencing dates and will again issue additional directions in relation to this step in due course.

For completeness, we note that in its 7 April memorandum, the Applicant challenged the need to seek comment from a number of the "other Māori groups" identified in the s18 report as having an interest in the project area (at paragraph 40). While we do not propose to address this issue at the Project Overview Conference (but instead to determine who to seek comment from in accordance with s53 of the Act) the Panel has sought advice through the EPA as to the basis upon which those groups were identified as having relevant interests in the project area.

[9] The parties who attended the Panel Convenor's Conference are granted leave to raise any other matters by way of a short memorandum of no more than 2 pages, prior to the Project Overview Conference. As noted above, we will be seeking the views of participants regarding the appointment of advisors (cultural, hydrologist and conferencing facilitator) before making those appointments, but if the current

parties wish to nominate preferred (suitably qualified and experienced) advisors for the Panel's consideration at this point, that can be included in any memorandum filed as well.

All concerned are encouraged to take a practical, co-operative and efficient approach to ensure that these important procedural steps can help the Panel in its decision-making role.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D Serjeant', written in a cursive style.

Dave Serjeant
Central and Southern Block Mining Project Expert Panel Chair

Before the Expert Panel

Under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024

And

In the matter of an application for approvals by Taharoa Ironsands Limited to continue existing mineral sand extraction, including land preparation works, constructing a water supply reservoir, extracting ironsand material, processing extracted material, and transporting raw and processed material on 911 hectares at Taharoa Road, Taharoa, approximately 8 kilometres south of Kawhia and 45 kilometres northwest of Te Kūiti (**Central and Southern Block Mining Project**)

Memorandum of counsel on behalf of Taharoa Ironsands Limited
to the Expert Panel

Dated 7 April 2026

MinterEllisonRuddWatts.

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Solicitor acting: Tom Atkins [REDACTED]

Partner responsible: Stephanie de Groot [REDACTED]

MAY IT PLEASE THE PANEL

INTRODUCTION

1. We act for Taharoa Ironsands Limited (**TIL**) in respect of its substantive application under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 (**FTAA**) for the Central and Southern Blocks Mining Project (**Project**).
2. The purpose of this memorandum is to:
 - (a) Propose that a Project Overview Conference, led by TIL, is held to familiarise the Panel with the Project; and
 - (b) Provide additional comments on the parties the Panel must or may invite to comment on the application under section 53 of the FTAA.
3. We expand on these points below.

PROPOSED PROJECT OVERVIEW CONFERENCE

4. TIL's application relates to the continuation of activities on Māori land that have a long history, initially established in the 1970's by the New Zealand Government. The application also has a complex consenting history and is supported by a considerable volume of material.
5. To assist the Panel with its consideration of the application, TIL proposes that a Project Overview Conference (**Conference**), led by TIL's consenting team, is held to familiarise the Panel with the Project and its history.
6. Similar conferences were held in respect of the Sunfield Masterplanned Community Project¹ and the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project.² TIL proposes to adopt a similar approach here, and provide the Panel with an overview of the Project addressing the following topics:
 - (a) Overview of land ownership and relationship between the Māori landowner (The Proprietors of Taharoa C Block Incorporated (**Taharoa C**)), and Mine owner / operator (TIL);

¹ Minute 1 of the Expert Panel – Sunfield Masterplanned Community dated 26 June 2025.

² Minute 1 of the Expert Panel – Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project dated 25 February 2026.

- (b) Background and history relevant to the application;
 - (c) Content of the application for approvals;
 - (d) Key issues in contention;
 - (e) Content and structure of proposed conditions; and
 - (f) Any other relevant matters.
7. The following attendees will be available to attend the Conference on behalf of TIL:
- (a) Wayne Coffey – Managing Director and CEO (TIL);
 - (b) Stephanie de Groot – Counsel (MinterEllisonRuddWatts);
 - (c) Tom Atkins – Counsel (MinterEllisonRuddWatts);
 - (d) Jared Pettersson – Project Manager (Enviser); and
 - (e) Grant Eccles – Lead Planner (Tonkin & Taylor).
8. TIL will also seek that a representative of Taharoa C attends the Conference. TIL will confirm a representative of Taharoa C if the Panel directs that the Conference should occur.
9. TIL is happy to arrange for any other experts from its team to be present at the Conference if it would benefit the Panel's understanding of the Project.
10. Given its factual nature and focus on assisting the Panel, TIL does not consider that any other participants beyond TIL, Taharoa C and TIL's selected advisers would be required to attend the Conference.
11. However, in the interest of fairness to other parties, and consistent with the approach taken by the Panel for the Conference held for the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project, TIL proposes that the Conference is recorded and made available on the Fast-track website. This is to ensure that all potential commenters have access to the information that TIL provides to the Panel.
12. TIL suggests the Conference take place before the Panel undertakes a site visit or invites comments from parties under section 53 of the FTAA. The

Conference will help the Panel familiarise itself with the Project, site, and relevant parties. TIL can also respond to any questions about the site visit during the Conference.

13. TIL is flexible with timing. If the Panel wishes to convene a Conference, TIL suggests that the EPA liaise with TIL's counsel to identify a suitable time.

INVITATION TO COMMENT

14. TIL wishes to make some comments, additional to those set out in its application, in respect of the Panel's invitation to parties to comment on the application under section 53 of the FTAA.
15. The first relates to the landowner, Taharoa C:
 - (a) The Panel is required to invite Taharoa C (as landowner) to provide comments on the application under section 53(2)(h) of the FTAA. MfE has also identified Taharoa C as a group with a relevant interest under section 18(2)(k) of the FTAA.
 - (b) In Appendix D, X and KK to the application, TIL provided Taharoa C's written approval for the Project to be carried out on Māori land in accordance with section 43(1)(c) of the FTAA.
 - (c) Taharoa C and its numerous shareholders (over 2000 Ngāti Mahuta hapū members) will be directly affected by the Panel's decision. It is important to both TIL and Taharoa C that Taharoa C is given the opportunity to comment on the Application. Therefore, for the avoidance of any doubt, TIL submits that there is nothing in the FTAA which directly or indirectly indicates that the above approvals negate the requirement under section 53(2)(h) for the Panel to invite comments from Taharoa C.
16. The second relates to some of the parties that MfE has identified as having an interest in the Project:
 - (a) MfE's section 18 report identifies a range of Māori groups as having relevant interests "in the project area" (under section 18(2)(k).
 - (b) No explanation has been provided by MfE to confirm why each of these groups is considered to have an interest in the Project area.

- (c) TIL identified a number of the groups in its application as having an interest in the Project including:
- (i) parties that TIL was required to consult with in respect of its substantive application under section 29(1)(a) of the FTAA;
 - (ii) parties that otherwise may be asked to comment on the Project under section 53 of the FTAA, including submitters on its RMA application in respect of the Central and Southern Blocks.
- (d) However, TIL does not consider that the following groups, all of which are landowners (see **Appendix A** for a location map), have an interest in the Project area:
- (i) Taharoa A1B1B2 Trust;
 - (ii) Taharoa A2A1 Trust;
 - (iii) Arohaki Trust;
 - (iv) Owners of Old Land Claim 400;
 - (v) Owners of Taharoa A1B1A;
 - (vi) Taharoa A1C13 Trust;
 - (vii) Taharoa Tukua Ahu Whenua Trust;
 - (viii) Taharoa A8 Trust and the Piwa Tohi Awhina Māori Reservation Trust (the owners of the underlying land where Aruka Marae is situated); and
 - (ix) Taharoa A7J5B Trust.
- (e) This is because:
- (i) as shown in Appendix A, the relevant land is not located in proximity to the Mine. (We note that Taharoa A1C13 Trust and Taharoa Tukua Ahu Whenua Trust is located in proximity to the Northern Block of the Mine but not the Central and Southern Blocks which are the focus of the Project);

- (ii) their interests as landowners do not appear to be affected by the Project; and
 - (iii) TIL is otherwise unaware of any interest held by the landowners in the Project – under section 18 or otherwise.
- (f) Further, these parties' interests as tangata whenua, are represented by other iwi groups in respect of the application such as Te Kooraha, Maketu, and Aruka Marae and Te Ruunanga.
17. On this basis and as it currently stands, TIL does not consider that these groups should be invited to comment on the application under section 53(4)³ of the FTAA.
18. We note that this issue was addressed at a high level in TIL's memorandum of counsel dated 18 March 2026 filed ahead of the Panel Convenor Conference, but it was not discussed at the Conference.

CONCLUSION

19. TIL respectfully requests that the Panel:
- (a) direct that a Conference occurs before a site visit is undertaken and the issue of invitations to comment under section 53 of the FTAA; and
 - (b) take into account TIL's additional comments on persons invited to comment on TIL's application under section 53.

DATED this 7th day of April 2026

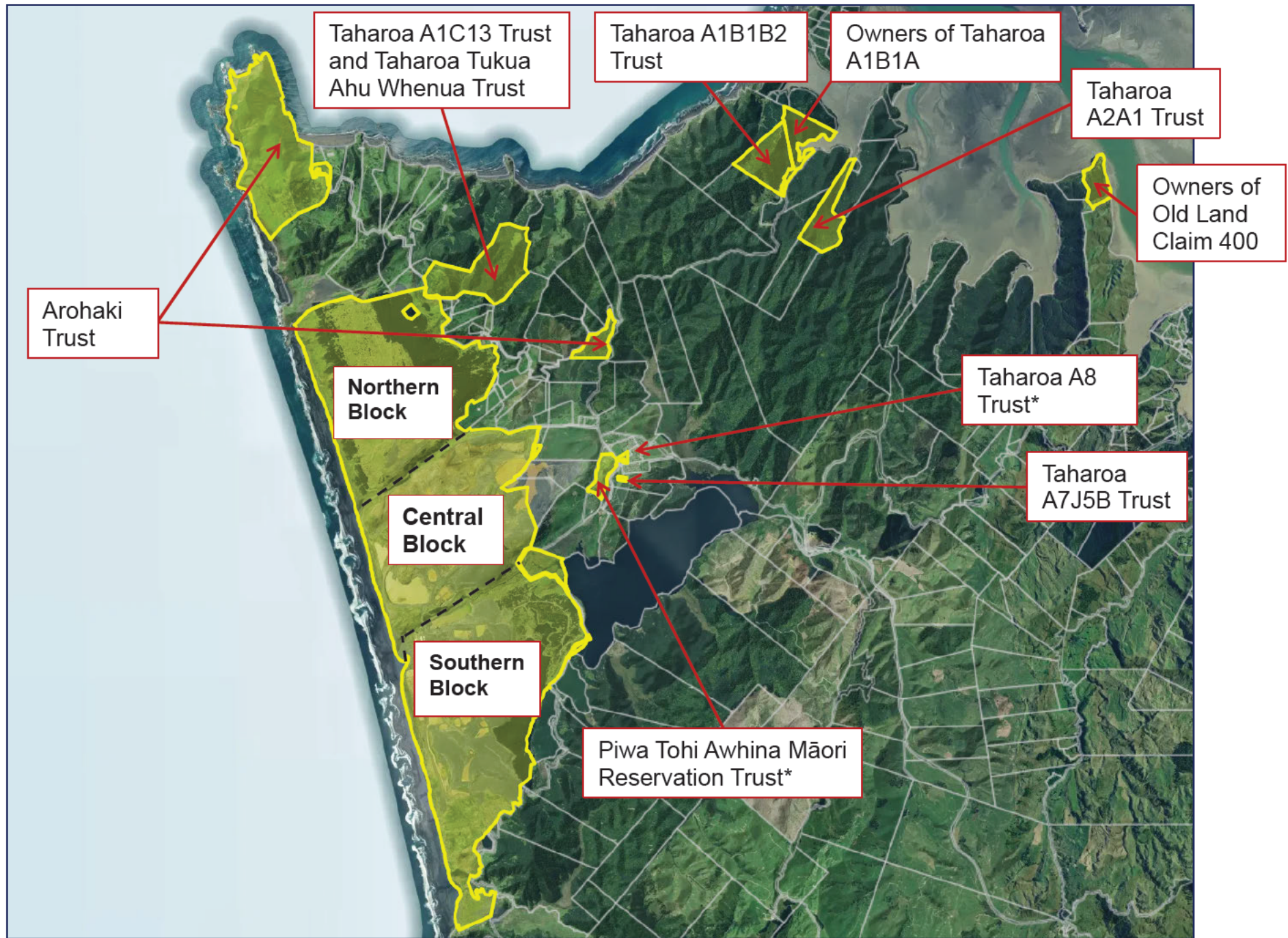


Stephanie de Groot / Tom Atkins
Counsel for Taharoa Ironsands Limited

³ Note that it is the Act as in force on the first commencement date which applies to TIL's application (see cl 7, Part 2, Schedule 1 of the FTAA).

Appendix A – Location Map

Groups identified by the Ministry for the Environment with relevant interests under section 18(2)(k)



*Note that the Taharoa A8 Trust and the Piwa Tohi Awhina Māori Reservation Trust are considered not relevant on the basis that they are already represented by the Aruka Marae.