

2 July 2025

Jennifer Caldwell

Associate Panel Convener

Response to Convener's Conference for Taranaki VTM Project Minute

Tēnā koe Jennifer,

Thank you for your invitation to the Convener Conference on 7 July. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important process.

In response to this minute we have laid out our thoughts about the relevant expertise and timing of the panel decision below.

Relevant expertise of the panel

Whanganui District Council's key concerns are around:

1. **Environmental** – particularly the negative impact of the sediment plume, which would impact our district;
2. **Cultural** - particularly the conflict of the proposal with treaty obligations and settlements;
3. **Economic** – specifically the adverse economic impact of the proposal for our district.

We are confident our neighbouring local authorities as well as relevant Iwi authorities have emphasized the expertise necessary to address the first two points in their responses to this minute, and we endorse their recommendations.

Our council would like to emphasize the need for expertise to consider the potential economic disbenefit of the proposal with regards to its conflict with offshore wind farming in the Taranaki Bight.

Whanganui District has been identified as one of the best locations in the world for wind energy and our council is actively pursuing opportunities for renewable energy investment, including offshore wind farming. Our view is that this one project could stand in the way of other projects which would not only provide significant economic benefits for our district (and beyond), but also better align with the Government's strategic objectives around climate, energy, and industrial transformation goals (for example, to double New Zealand's renewable electricity production by 2050).

We also note that the scale and nature of the proposed extraction (along with the resuspension of seabed sediments) could plausibly impact the following ecological and cultural features which each have their own potential economic impact:

- Benthic habitats and associated fish populations, with implications for commercial and recreational fishing;
- Water quality and visual amenity, which may affect coastal tourism and recreation;
- Cultural values associated with the moana (ocean), which hold economic, social and non-market significance for Māori and local communities; and
- Ecosystem services such as nutrient cycling, habitat provision, and biodiversity.

Relevant expertise of the panel which Whanganui District Council would like to emphasize the need for:

Economic analysis: Capability to undertake and interpret cost-benefit assessments, including of broader economic impacts and opportunity cost.

Timing of the panel decision

We share the views of Taranaki Regional Council and South Taranaki District Council that the complex and contentious nature of this application will mean a considerable amount of time is required to reach a decision. Not only is the fast-track process and its underpinning legislation new, but the proposed mining activity is also a world first. There is a very large amount of existing and conflicting expert evidence on this proposal and a significant amount of time will be required to facilitate this evidence into the decision-making process.

We also **strongly recommend** that a hearing process take place. We do not think it is realistic for the panel to resolve highly complex and technical points in dispute between expert scientific witnesses without the evidence (and parties) having the opportunity to question and clarify points with those witnesses. In this regard, holding hearings will contribute to the overall efficiency of the process, as well as help to ensure all relevant matters are thoroughly examined.

Finally, we wish to address the importance of including us as a relevant local authority throughout this process. Not only would our district experience direct environmental effects of the proposal (with regards to sediment plume), but we are also mentioned in the application as an area that would receive economic benefits. We do not believe we should be precluded from any step of this process on the basis that our council has filed a motion opposing the project – our relevance remains, regardless of our position.

Ngā mihi nui,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Langford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Langford – Chief Executive.