Hon Shane Jones

Minister for Oceans and Fisheries
Minister for Regional Development
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Hon Chris Bishop
Minister for Infrastructure
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Fast-track Approvals Act substantive application – Taranaki Vanadium-rich Titanomagnetite project, FTAA-2504-1048

Tēnā koe Chris,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Trans-Tasman Resources Limited (TTR) application under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024 for the Taranaki Vanadium-rich Titanomagnetite (VTM) project.

In considering the application for the Taranaki VTM project, I have considered the direct effects of mining in the mining area, the indirect effects in the area where the plume of sediment from the mining is likely to occur, and the impact these effects may have on meeting the purpose of the Fisheries Act (1996); to provide for the utilisation of fisheries resources while ensuring sustainability.

My comments are restricted to alignment with the priorities of the Oceans and Fisheries portfolio. My comments are attached as Annex One.

Nāku noa, nā,

Hon Shane Jones
Minister for Oceans and Fisheries

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Annex One – Oceans and Fisheries comments

Previous engagement with the Ministry for Primary Industries on the VTM application

Fisheries New Zealand (FNZ) has responded to a request (11 June 2025) on Treaty settlements and other obligations (Section 18) report required under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024. FNZ provided feedback on the list of relevant Māori groups, including relevant iwi authorities and Treaty settlement entities, to support the panel once established to assess the application.

Impacts on commercial fishing

The fisheries report supporting the assessment of effects of the proposed mining activity on fisheries (McDiarmid et al., 2024) acknowledges that set netting is the predominant commercial fishing activity in the mining and sediment plume areas. This report notes set-netting activity in the mining and sediment plume areas has increased in recent years, likely due to inshore set-net closures implemented in 2020. Inshore trawling is the next most common fishing method.

The report notes it likely underestimates the number of fishing events from small vessels operating in the area due to the timeframe the report considers (2007-2023). More recent information provided to FNZ through electronic catch and position reporting, implemented in 2019, supports a better understanding of vessel activity and catch within the relevant stock boundaries (Quota Management Areas (QMAs)). Table One below details the estimated value of the top ten fish species caught in the area potentially affected by the mining activity (the mining area and the area impacted by the sediment plume). In 2023-24, 14 commercial vessels fished in the potentially affected area. Although the catch volume is small, from 2019-23 three fishers caught greater than 40 percent of their catch volume in this area.

Table One: Annual average landings for the ten most valuable fish caught within the area potentially affected by the mining activity in the 2019/20 - 2023/24 fishing years.[1]

QMS Species	Estimated annual average landings (kg)	Estimated port value (NZD)	Estimated annual average percentage of quota management area landings
Rig	15,028.30	$80,701.97	20.9
School shark	16,880.60	$65,429.21	7
Snapper	6,674.70	$41,917.12	0.4
Trevally	13,371.00	$28,881.36	1.1
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Gurnard	2,872.90	$10,917.02	1.3
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Blue cod	595.80	$4,766.40	36.9
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Total	**81,681.10**	**$264,437.38**	-

The applicant acknowledges there is likely to be some displacement of fish; the fisheries most likely to be affected are the set-net fisheries for rig, warehou, and school shark. Surf clams may also be affected by the

[1] Catch value is calculated by multiplying the estimated catch (greenweight kilograms) of a fish stock by the appropriate annual port price. Port value in the table is based on the port price from the 2023/24 fishing year only. Port price is declared by industry participants for levy purposes. Port price is an average of what commercial fishers receive across a Quota Management Area, not what the fish is worth at market (which is higher). It does not reflect the income for licensed fish receivers (including wholesalers and/or processors) and retailers.

sediment plume. The applicant seems to assume that, as fish can move away from the effects, fishers will be able to catch the fish outside the mining activity and sediment plume areas. Notwithstanding constraints to 'following the fish', such as QMA boundaries[2] and regulated fisheries closures, there may be environmental and economic implications of this (such as additional fuel and crew costs with fishing further afield) that are not well characterised in the application.

The impacts on fishers may be underrepresented in the applicant's assessment of effects on fisheries. The QMA scale of the assessment means localised impacts on fishers, and the resulting economic implications, may not be adequately recognised. Engagement with these fishers will be important in the pre-commencement phase of the mining activity, should it progress, to signpost any gaps in the understanding of issues, and to establish a process for monitoring/ recording impacts and concerns. This would help develop the platform for ongoing engagement discussed in the application and the identification of potential mitigation measures should they be required and would support their timely implementation.

Impacts on customary fishing

Customary fishing can only be conducted according to regulations made under the Fisheries Act 1996. The regulations in the project area are the Fisheries (Kaimoana Customary Fishing) Regulations 1998 (the Regulations). Customary fishing is limited to areas (rohe) specified in the regulations. Customary fishing cannot necessarily move to follow the fish.

Traditionally, Taranaki iwi have fished far from shore for shark and rig and closer to shore for important shellfish fisheries. A number of Māori reserves were established at Ohawe and near Pātea as access to these fisheries. More recently, Taranaki iwi have used the Regulations to establish a rohe moana that overlays the project area to a significant degree and which may be affected by the sediment plume.

Closer to shore, reefs and shallow areas are also of customary importance for a range of species and their habitat. As part of some Treaty settlements in South Taranaki, the Crown has agreed to prohibit commercial fishing for some of these fisheries which are sensitive to sedimentation, including pupu, rori, anemones, and sea cucumbers.

Because iwi may only exercise customary rights in their own rohe, their rights may be significantly affected by changes in the location, abundance, and habitat of their important fisheries. I note that iwi have been provided an opportunity to comment on this application; further engagement could lead to the development of monitoring and mitigation measures, should the application be approved.

Impacts on recreational fishing interests

In recent consultation with FNZ on the catch settings for fisheries in the Taranaki area, concerns were raised by local fishers, including recreational interests, about the impacts of the proposed mining activity on fishing. I understand some recreational fishing organisations have been provided the opportunity to comment on the application; their input will be important for understanding their concerns and considering potential options to mitigate them.

Habitat of particular significance for fisheries management

As Minister for Oceans and Fisheries, I am required to take into account that habitat of particular significance for fisheries management is protected when making fisheries management decisions.[3] The Taranaki VTM application and supporting documents state, "*the project area and area potentially affected by the sediment plume are not identified as being important spawning areas or juvenile nurseries for any fish species*" (section 5.6 of Appendix 3).

[2] This QMA for fishing rig and school shark is the smallest in New Zealand and provides fishers with limited flexibility for shifting fishing effort.
[3] Section 9 (c) of the Fisheries Act 1996.

The applicant's assessment of effects does not consider impacts on nursery habitat for blue cod[4] identified in the South Taranaki Bight, which has been discussed in recent reviews of the catch settings for a number of fisheries.[5] The full extent of the nursery habitats at the Pātea Shoals (Rolling Grounds), which includes seaweed and sponges on subtidal rocky reefs, is unknown. As blue cod is declining in this area, maintaining the function of this nursery habitat is particularly important for supporting the stock.
This habitat is within the zone identified in the application as impacted by the effects of the sediment plume. The applicant has not considered whether the level of sedimentation (and reduced light penetration) over these habitats is likely to constitute material harm. I recommend the applicant assess and monitor these effects on seaweed and sponges that may contribute to the habitat function as a nursery.

Verifying the assessment of no material harm

I anticipate the applicant will seek to confirm its assessment that there will be no material harm should this activity go ahead. I also expect the applicant will undertake monitoring to verify its assessment and, should any impacts be identified, work with relevant agencies to identify options to mitigate those impacts.

Monitoring and validation of the assessment of no effect on fishing

Should the application be approved, I recommend the applicant engages further with tangata whenua and fisheries stakeholders in the pre-commencement phase. This would support development of appropriate monitoring and reporting to validate the applicant's assessment that there is no effect on the abundance or health of the commercial, customary or recreational fisheries in the South Taranaki Bight. I recommend this includes input from representative fisheries organisations and iwi to support identification of potential operating conditions for mining activities, including monitoring, remediation, and mitigation of effects, if appropriate.

Monitoring and validation of the assessment of no effect on fish habitat

Should the application be approved, I recommend work to verify that there would be no material harm to the nursery habitat in this area and to the species utilising the habitat.

The implications of these effects would be informed by a better understanding of the extent of this habitat. Reports[6] included in the Taranaki VTM application note, "*the number and possible extent of mudstone and hard rock outcrops within this region has been underestimated*". Should this application be approved, I recommend pre-commencement surveying to determine the extent of the nursery habitat, and during- and post-operation monitoring to support verification that there are no adverse effects on the nursery function provided by this habitat.

Should this application be approved, my officials, including subject matter experts familiar with the nursery function of the area, will be able to inform the design of the monitoring plan to support inclusion of these nursery habitats and the identification of potential options to mitigate impacts.

[4] Morrison, M., Seaward, K., Bodie, C., Madden, B., Evans, O., Smale, P., Pratt, K., Boyd, B., Richardson, J., Guy, R., McElroy, T., Williams, S., Pallentin, A., and Mackay, K. (2022). Offshore subtidal rocky reef habitats on Pātea Bank, South Taranaki. Prepared for Taranaki Regional Council. 211 p.
[5] https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/62844-Review-of-sustainability-measures-for-snapper-SNA-8-for-202425-Discussion-document/
https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/62826-Review-of-sustainability-measures-for-snapper-SNA-2-rig-SPO-2-and-John-dory-JDO-2-for-202425-Discussion-document/
https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/70074-Review-of-sustainability-measures-for-blue-cod-BCO-8-for-2025.26
[6] Anderson, T. J., MacDiarmid, A., Steward, R. (2013) updated 2015. Benthic habitats, macrobenthos and surficial sediments of the nearshore South Taranaki Bight. Prepared for Trans-Tasman Resources Ltd. 46 p.