



1 November 2023

S23.18

## Submission to the Environment Committee's Inquiry into Seabed Mining

### Introduction

1. The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wāhine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing around 60 affiliated organisations and 200 individual members. Collectively our reach is over 200,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ has 13 branches across the country.
2. NCWNZ's vision is a gender equal New Zealand and research shows we will be better off socially and economically if we are gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right.<sup>1</sup>
3. This submission has been prepared by NCWNZ through the Parliamentary Watch Committee and Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Hub. It draws from several decades of NCWNZ policy<sup>2</sup> and submissions<sup>3</sup> on issues endorsed by the membership.
4. The NCWNZ submission focuses on the environmental impacts of seabed mining, its management and domestic regulatory settings. NCWNZ is committed to supporting the Sustainable Development Goals including SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

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<sup>1</sup> [Resolutions - National Council of Women of New Zealand \(ncwnz.org.nz\)](https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/resolutions)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/submissions>

<sup>3</sup> S21.17, S21.17 Oral Inquiry on the Natural and Built Environments Bill

## Costs and risks of seabed mining in New Zealand, including environmental impacts

In its discussion in regard to the application to mine the Taranaki Bight, Forest and Bird stated that the proposal was to suck up the top 11 metres of sand over 35 years in order to remove 1.75 million tonnes of iron ore<sup>4</sup>. This would completely destroy the coastal ecosystem by destruction of complex food webs, habitat loss and the disruption of natural redistributive processes occasioned by tides, wind and run off from land, which support the coastal ecosystem. There would be massive loss of vertebrate and invertebrate species, creating a wasteland.

Seabed mining is an extractive procedure with significant environmental impacts, both at the time of extraction and in consequence of the activity. Consequences include:

- **noise disturbance.** This would be significant with machinery in continuous operation through daylight hours. For animals that rely on echolocation e.g. Maui dolphins and other cetaceans such as blue whales that are known to use New Zealand's coastal waters, the effect could be catastrophic. Hunting success would be greatly reduced without the sound cues to target prey species, and insufficient food will show in increased deaths. Cetaceans also use echolocation to find a mate and breeding success will diminish, contributing to further decline of endangered species.
- **removal of food sources.** The coastal marine environment is a rich food source for many species, both above and below the surface and these habitats can be considered as linked. Seabirds particularly use these resources. Some species e.g. terns feed only at the surface whereas others such as shags are capable of reaching the sea floor. Breeding season puts extra stress on birds as they try to find the quantities required to feed chicks to fledging. At such times species such as penguins forage in both.<sup>5</sup>
- **sedimentation.** Aquatic species are gill breathers with the disadvantage that the gills can become clogged with fine particles of silt, making breathing difficult and mass death a possibility. This happens in rivers in flood. Bivalves in and on the seafloor are sensitive to sediment loading and can be unable to carry out usual body processes such as feeding and oxygen extraction.

## How seabed mining is managed internationally and in New Zealand

### International oversight

The management of seabed mining is overseen internationally by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), which regulates activities in the international seabed area beyond national jurisdiction. In New Zealand, governing acts such as the Crown Minerals Act 1991, Resource

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<sup>4</sup> [www.forestandbird.org.nz/oceans/seabed-mining](http://www.forestandbird.org.nz/oceans/seabed-mining)

<sup>5</sup> Southey, I.C (2023) *Before the Environment Court: Evidence for Appeal for Te Whanau o Pakiri under section 120 of the Resource Management Act, paragraphs 99, 102, 112*

Management Act 1991, and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and Continental Shelf (Environmental Effects) Act 2012 play a role in governing seabed mining. While these existing frameworks offer some level of protection, it is essential to strengthen them further and explicitly exclude seabed mining activities in New Zealand. This will ensure comprehensive safeguarding of our marine ecosystems for future generations.

### **Current regulation with the EEZ**

Regional Councils are required to develop Coastal Policy statements for the coastlines under their management. These plans refer to the area from High Water Spring tide out 22 kilometres from Low Water<sup>6</sup>. Beyond this point, the limit of the EEZ, it is more difficult to establish and implement a regulatory environment.

The *Coastal Plan for Taranaki* uses section 8.3 Disturbance, deposition and extraction to regulate offshore activities. On p.95 it states “disturbance, drilling, coring and removal of material for the purpose of scientific research or monitoring, is a controlled activity. The only exception raised is for the exploration or appraisal on hydrocarbons, with the implication that these are the only purposes for disturbance of the seabed, and no others are permitted.” Furthermore, on p.97 it reads “...removal of natural material is not for commercial gain” and prohibits motorised excavation machinery.

The Department of Conservation has its own plan (New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement), which dates back to 2010. It is to be hoped that there is alignment between this plan and those developed by Regional Councils.

### **Whether any change to domestic regulatory settings should apply to the coastal marine area, the EEZ, and extended continental shelf, or both**

Ideally, the domestic regulatory settings would apply to the outer limit of the continent of Zealandia but much of this is outside the EEZ. It may not be practical to monitor a sea area of this size, however desirable this may be.

### **Conclusion**

NCWNZ welcomes this inquiry into seabed mining given the significant environmental impacts from and consequences of extraction and looks forward to the next stages of this discussion.

It is imperative that within this ongoing consideration, New Zealand governing acts are strengthened to explicitly exclude seabed mining activities within our coastal jurisdiction to safeguard our marine ecosystems for future generations.

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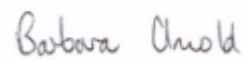
<sup>6</sup> Taranaki Regional Council (2023) *Coastal Plan for Taranaki*, section 1.4.1 Geographical extent

The concept of kaitiaki requires positive steps to conserve natural environments and their inhabitants, and this should take precedence over motives of extraction for human use. One of the fundamental principles of ecology is that everything depends on everything else, and we as a species are not outside and separate from the operation of the rest of the natural world.



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