

## Te Ipukarea Society comments on Economic Development Strategy 2020

### Objective 5 Greening Our Economy

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We strongly support the advancement of the Solid and Hazardous Wastes Bill 2020 and its incorporation of the advance disposal fee concept, as stated in Action 5.11. This is already overdue and we would like to offer our assistance as support in this process as members of the Cook Islands Solid Waste Committee.

Wetlands Objective: We support the principle behind this objective to increase the area of wetlands as it is a very desirable goal. However this objective does need some clarification. For instance, how are wetlands proposed to be increased, is it by identifying low lying areas not already identified in the 2014 baseline review? Or is it an increase in reconstructed or protected wetlands that is the objective? A measurable objective would also be useful, as would an additional survey of wetlands to determine how development may have impacted on wetlands and to allow a measurable objective to be developed.

Sanitation Action 5.9

We wish to record our preference for a land based solution as the preferred option for a wastewater outfall to address the sanitation issues in the Murienua. (Action 5.9).

#### General comment on references to seabed mining.

While we agree this should be included in the strategy as a possible source of revenue in future, there needs to be care taken in the phrasing used, so that it does not imply that this activity will go ahead. Some of the references to seabed mining imply that exploitation will go ahead after exploration activities. This is not the case because minimum environmental thresholds need to be met and there is in fact a number of unknown.

Comments made below:

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Capitalising on the new economic opportunities, such as seabed minerals harvesting and the telecommunications sector reforms.

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#### Seabed minerals harvesting

The Cook Islands EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) contains as much as 12 billion tonnes of mineral-rich nodules at depths of 5,000 metres. The polymetallic nodules contain cobalt, nickel, copper, manganese, titanium, and valuable rare earth elements. These precious metals are in high demand in the communications and other industries, and for most smart and green technologies.

The seabed minerals sector has the potential to transform the economy, lessen reliance on the tourism industry, advance scientific knowledge of our Marae Moana, and allow the Cook Islands to take responsibility for its own resilience funding in the face of increasing impacts from climate change.

**Commented [T11]:** It is worth noting that the metals also have military applications.

**Commented [T12]:** It also has the potential to cause significant and irreversible harm to our marine environment.

With the Seabed Minerals Act 2019 in place, the Seabed Minerals Authority, along with the Seabed Minerals Working Group, will ensure that the next phase of licensing and exploration survey work will be undertaken in line with best regulatory and environmental practice (Action 2.11).

The Government has also recently appointed the Seabed Minerals Advisory Committee, comprising religious, aronga mana, environmental, private sector, sporting, youth and academic community leaders. The Committee will make recommendations to the Seabed Minerals Authority on seabed minerals policies, and provide a voice for the community.

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At the same time, the Government will review its current seabed minerals financial regime to ensure that we maximise the financial benefits for Cook Islanders from minerals harvesting (Action 2.12).

#### Marine support industry

Development of the seabed minerals resource also provides an opportunity to develop a new Cook Islands marine support industry. Following the exploration stage and identification of commercially and environmentally feasible deposits, the harvesting phase is likely to involve a large, offshore-based vessel or floating platform that handles the remotely operated seafloor harvesting and cargo transfer equipment.

This installation may require smaller locally-based platform supply vessels to ferry essential equipment and personnel necessary to sustain the offshore operation.

In addition, there may be further potential for a Northern Group marine hub to support inter-island shipping services and the offshore tuna fishing fleet.

The Government has commenced the development of a Shipping Roadmap to improve domestic inter-island shipping services (see Objective 1: Improving equity & access for all for more detail).

The Roadmap will also investigate the development of a marine support industry (see Action 1.6).

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The aim will be to strengthen the curriculum where necessary to produce job-ready students, particularly in those sectors, such as telecommunications and seabed minerals, that have not traditionally been areas of economic focus, but will drive growth in the future.

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In this Strategy, the Government will continue to implement the MTFs as its primary macroeconomic management measure (Action 4.1). The Government will also undertake the necessary policy and legislative work required to establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund to manage future revenues expected from seabed minerals harvesting, for use by future generations (Action 4.2)

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overlapping roles in environmental management. They include Infrastructure Cook Islands (building approvals), Te Marae Ora (water quality, sanitation, waste), To Tatou Vai (water conservation and quality) and Ministry of Agriculture (biosecurity). The Ministry of Transport, Marae Moana, Seabed Minerals Authority, Ministry of Marine Resources and Island Governments are all involved in the environmental marine space.

**Commented [T13]:** If you look at the profile of these Committee members on the SBMA website, you will see that they are not aware of their role. They all are more or less saying they are on the committee because they are in a position to influence the public to support DSM. We have raised this issue with the SBMA)

**Commented [T14]:** This statement indicates that mining will go ahead, after the exploration is done. This is contrary to what SBMA has told us, that mining will only go ahead if the environmental impacts can be kept at a pre-determined minimum. That threshold has not been set yet.

**Commented [T15]:** Note that there may be wider implications here. For example this would bring significant social and environmental impacts to the north, which they may not want.

**Commented [T16]:** This sounds like Government is assuming DSM will commence in the near future. Again, this decision has not and should not be made until the environmental, social and economic impacts are much better understood.

**Commented [T157]:** Again, the term expected indicates that mining will go ahead! Despite any environmental impacts.

**Commented [T158]:** No mention of NGOs. Te Ipukarea Society has played a significant role in waste management, and biodiversity conservation in Suwarrow, for example