



Submission on the 'Draft Minerals Strategy for New Zealand to 2040' May 2024

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31 July 2024

This is the submission of Coromandel Watchdog of Hauraki on the Government's proposed Draft Minerals Strategy July 2024.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Coromandel Watchdog of Hauraki is a grass roots, community organisation that has been working to keep industrial gold mining out of the Coromandel Peninsula for more than 40 years.

We would appreciate any further opportunities to discuss our views further, should such an opportunity be available.

1. Introductory comments:

- 1.1. In its introduction, the Draft Minerals Strategy (the Strategy) (pg 2) acknowledges that one of its pillars includes enabling conversations about the pros and cons of minerals production that we rely on for modern life.
- 1.2. We agree that these conversations should be had. They should be had to inform the Strategy that will be the continuation of the current Strategy, which was intended to inform the Government until 2029.
- 1.3. We encourage the Government to initiate this discussion before it advances any further change to how minerals in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 1.4. The Strategy is out of touch, out of date and visionless.
- 1.5. The Strategy is too broad, and too brief.
- 1.6. The Strategy ignores Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and makes little or no provision to empower tangata whenua to participate meaningfully in decisions around Aotearoa New Zealand's mineral resource management.
- 1.7. The Strategy fails to respect ancestral Māori land and only acknowledges land already included in settlements and minerals discussed in settlements .
- 1.8. Only those mentioned above appear to have any status for engagement.

- 1.9. It is set in isolation of the current climate and biodiversity crises; There are no climate considerations discussed or acknowledged in this Strategy, which is inappropriate and irresponsible in contemporary times for any such strategy. There is vague reference to 'protecting the environmental values which is important to NZers,' but that is hardly adequate.
- 1.10. The Strategy completely excludes any consultation other than some with Industry.
- 1.11. We are struck by the contrast with the current Strategy, which seems, although there is much we disagree with, at least forward thinking, and able to acknowledge some generally accepted scientific developments such as climate change and effects of.
- 1.12. The current Strategy has emphasis on the future, it has an inclusive focus and emphasises concepts like responsibility.
- 1.13. This draft Strategy is sector centric, placing the industry and its needs at the centre of the strategy, rather than the needs of NZers or future generations.
- 1.14. The Strategy does not appear to recognise future generations nor any obligation to consider them.

- 1.15. We note that with one exception the Strategy actions are within 3 years, not the 10 the Strategy is set to inform; this despite the current strategy being until 2029.
- 1.16. This Strategy does not build on the current Strategy, if anything it detracts from it.
- 1.17. The Draft Strategy gives no acknowledgement to the toxic legacy left by mining, or the environmental impacts of it.
- 1.18. The Draft Strategy makes reference to 'building public confidence' in mining, but no provision to include public or communities in the decisions.
- 1.19. We note that the legacy elements of minerals and aggregates are very different, and suggest some delineation between the two.
- 1.20. The Strategy fails to address the issue or impacts of the legacy left once mining finishes.

2. The Strategic Pillars

- 2.1. The Strategic Pillars, or '3 Pillars' are not an appropriate 'measure' of the success of the Strategy.
- 2.2. It is entirely unclear what is meant by 'Enhancing prosperity for NZers'.
- 2.3. We note that this does not state for all NZers or make reference to future generations.
- 2.4. There is no comparative assessment against what these mining projects may cost communities/Nation
- 2.5. Timeframe tracking is really only a benefit for Industry, particularly as there is no opportunity for any public participation.

- 2.6. The second 'pillar' is demonstrating the sector's value; it is unclear to whom this must be demonstrated.
- 2.7. The measures for this Pillar appear to have little relation to the Pillar itself.
- 2.8. They would primarily benefit the sector, or possibly a tiny sector of the tech industry if the Govt supports it.
- 2.9. We note the use of the term 'net benefits' in this pillar - the term does not allow for consideration of dis-benefits meaning there is not an accurate overview of the true cost, for example a company being allowed to sacrifice core habitat of an endangered species in return for predator control over an area multiple times the size of that that is destroyed by the activity, creating a net benefit to conservation, but actually at significant cost.
- 2.10. The third Pillar centres on delivering Minerals for a clean energy transition.
- 2.11. This pillar preempts the robust discussions Aotearoa New Zealand need to have about this to plan for the needs of our communities and our future without exploiting either the environment or the people of other nations before a Strategy can be agreed..
- 2.12. Mineral usage in the Aotearoa New Zealand context is what we should consider, not how we can supply the world.

3. Strategic Actions to 'achieve' Pillars

- 3.1. The Strategic Actions are vague and broad, with little detail.
- 3.2. There was extensive work done around mapping Aotearoa New Zealand's minerals under the Key Govt, and in today's tight fiscal situation, commissioning further expensive mapping hardly seems a priority.
- 3.3. Government needs to justify and clarify its role in this 'mapping' given that the industry itself regularly describes how inaccurate and unclear the results of anything other than drill sampling is.
- 3.4. Mention of pathways etc is for the benefit of the sector, not the country.
- 3.5. Seabed mining has significant environmental impacts and there is no acknowledgement of that in this Strategy.
- 3.6. There is intense international controversy around seabed mining and as Aotearoa New Zealand has the 5th largest EEZ, we should be part of that conversation.
- 3.7. Many countries, particularly in the Pacific, oppose seabed mining as far too destructive of the marine environment.
- 3.8. At this stage, there are too many unknowns to risk compromising our marine spaces for mining.
- 3.9. Discussion of Strategic Minerals must be at a national level, with full inclusion of tangata whenua and the rest of the community also.
- 3.10. Under the proposed Fast track Approvals Bill, it will not be possible to have an 'enduring and efficient regulatory framework'.
- 3.11. Rushed decisions that are not well informed, and that have excluded communities from participating and having a say, will not be enduring.

- 3.12. Protecting Treaty Settlements is not enough. Government must explicitly acknowledge and commit to honouring Te Tiriti o Witangi.
- 3.13. The Draft Strategy has a commitment to leaving the settings relating to Conservation Land as they stand, but only noted for the first year.
- 3.14. There is no indication of if or how these settings might change after that one year which seems an oversight in a 10 year Strategy.
- 3.15. The term 'circular economy' appears, but it is disappointing that it is so brief, with so few priorities.
- 3.16. The strategy to increase the public's trust of the sector is woeful. Shutting communities, individuals, families, experts and interest groups out of the decision making process results in the public having an even greater level of suspicion and distrust of both the Industry and the administration.
- 3.17. The monitoring suggested in relation to that reference community and social monitoring, but no economic, and again, no wider input.
- 3.18. There are likely to be economic impacts on host communities (the Coromandel, for example, relies heavily on our environment. Should mining begin, the damage to visitor and consumer perceptions alone is likely to be severe and to have dire economic consequences for the area).
- 3.19. There is only one action to be within 10 years, others all 3. This raises questions about the Government's commitment to long term planning, to projects and to evaluation timeframes.

4. Strategies Already Underway

- 4.1. The first Strategic Action is Implementing the FTA Bill: this Bill will be terrible for Aotearoa New Zealand and must be abandoned.
- 4.2. This Bill aims to completely obliterate public participation, including for tangata whenua.
- 4.3. It overrides some 12 statutes, including the RMA, the Wildlife Act, Public Works and Conservation Acts. It also overrides territorial covenants and prohibitions, and local government plans.
- 4.4. It will seemingly allow so-called Zombie projects - those that were killed in other decision making forums, including Courts, but would be able to apply again to be resurrected. This is inappropriate as it undermines the integrity of our Judiciary and invites the new decision maker to be lobbied and offered inducements.
- 4.5. There is potential for this to foster corruption in the largely secret decision making process, potentially setting up decision makers to face “moral hazard” is bad policy design.
- 4.6. Producing a Critical Minerals List is a rational thing; most larger countries are, and it is a reasonable thing to plan for, especially in light of potential trade considerations. Our concern is that the inclusion in such a list may be arbitrary, based on false narratives, and may then lead to favouritism and fast tracking.
- 4.7. Many countries priorities relate heavily to their ability to provide for their defence sectors, and/or their own mineral resources in the case of mineral rich nations ,like Australia. Aotearoa New Zealand will never have that kind of capacity.
- 4.8. Any formulation of a Critical Minerals list should be done with the involvement of the wider public of Aotearoa New Zealand.
- 4.9. The permitting process is already permissive.

- 4.10. The permitting process should more closely resemble the consent processes where communities and the public (should) have a say.
- 4.11. There is a definite disconnect between the minerals permitting process and other processes, and that should be clarified, consulted on and improved, with increased transparency and participation.
- 4.12. The Strategy calls for changes to be made to the RMA to make it more enabling. This is a contradiction to the purpose of the RMA which is management. If the role is management it is not appropriate to use it as a vehicle to facilitate mining or any other industry.
- 4.13. The Government has chosen to return the purpose of the Crown Minerals Act to the promotion of mining, which we also strongly object to.
- 4.14. The Government's role in this industry must be to govern, to manage, to regulate and to guide; not to promote, facilitate or enhance. These are predominantly private, foreign owned companies, and do not have Aotearoa New Zealand's interests at heart.
- 4.15. We commented earlier about the 'stocktake' of minerals, There are no costings provided of what this might cost NZers and what benefit they might gain, although there would be clear benefit for industry.
- 4.16. Promoting Aotearoa New Zealand internationally to scale up the industry, speeding up the pace of these developments, is out of step with what most NZers want.

- 4.17. Mining our natural resources is a controversial topic, and one that Aotearoa New Zealand is long overdue to have a conversation about.
- 4.18. This Govt has no mandate to sell off Aotearoa New Zealand minerals for the pittance the Minerals Programmes currently ask in royalties.
- 4.19. The economic growth, or economic gains, from mining do not justify the toxic legacy or the opportunity costs of industrial mining, the environmental damage and degradation or the risks that are associated with what is an inherently destructive industry.
- 4.20. Aotearoa New Zealand is a small country that has a globally unique environment that includes a significant portion of highly biodiverse temperate forests, tussocks and of course the 5th largest EEZ in the world.
- 4.21. We are lucky enough to still have a significant amount of that in at least a modicum of good condition.
- 4.22. Conserving and enhancing that environment is an important contribution that Aotearoa New Zealand can make to the world. The signs of the climate crisis are getting ever more pronounced and there will be higher value for the planet for Aotearoa New Zealand to protect these areas in perpetuity than to sacrifice them for a negligible contribution to the international demand for transition minerals.
- 4.23. Decisions on developments such as gold mining should not be rushed.
- 4.24. Mining is a complex industry, and mining developments are significant. They must be properly interrogated, which can not be adequately done if the process is fast tracked.

- 4.25. The legacy that this industry leaves is toxic wastes and unstable land, tailings and waste rock that last in perpetuity. historically NZers have been left with hefty fees to clean up contaminated sites and we , continue to be left with the responsibility of containment and management of those sites.
- 4.26. The Strategy must acknowledge and consider the above point.
- 4.27. We note that the review cycle proposed is brief, and vague.

5. Opportunities

- 5.1. There is mention of a circular economy but it is too brief.
- 5.2. Aggregate recovery/recycling should be explored along with minerals in a circular economy..
- 5.3. International trends clearly demonstrate that there are extensive opportunities in this recycling space, particularly for precious metals, although the technology is developing fast in this area.
- 5.4. Looking at, for example, mining e-waste could provide just transitions for existing operations of conventional gold mines.
- 5.5. There is a real missed opportunity in excluding community involvement, which is likely to result in less robust decision making.

6. Challenges

- 6.1. Government must consider the implications for our international reputation of lowering environmental standards, rushing decisions and not facilitating public participation.

- 6.2. Consideration must be given to both the immediate and long term implications for trade and reputation in relation to any weakening of environmental regulation which goes against international trends.
- 6.3. Ignoring Te Tiriti o Waitangi will not be widely supported or tolerated.
- 6.4. Public - and private - Conservation Land is highly valued by NZers, and is an integral part of many many businesses and communities.
- 6.5. The destruction of these areas from exploration and mining will be met with comprehensive resistance.
- 6.6. Given the overwhelming response to the Fast track Bill, and the history of opposition to mining sensitive places, Government should be mindful of the types of companies it is attracting, particularly in the minerals sector, where a number of actors have questionable reputations.
- 6.7. The Strategy is largely silent on workforce issues, how the transition out of fossil fuels is to be done and how the transition will be just.
- 6.8. Transitions should consider how to avoid the people, and particularly workers, becoming “stranded assets”. There is ample evidence that most renewable energy, reuse of materials and recycling provide higher rates of employment, and the location of the jobs tends to be within the community rather than in more isolated areas where mine camps are established.

7. Summary comments

- 7.1. The strategy lacks both evidence and analysis. It fails to provide scenarios, or to test the premises on which it is based. It provides absolutely no counter-factual or range to consider.
- 7.2. It assumes that mining is wholly good and that we all support it.
- 7.3. The emphasis on enabling development while ignoring the environment and the communities affected is inappropriate, and out of step with any contemporary thinking (internationally) in governance of natural resources.
- 7.4. Throughout the strategy, including in the actions, there is no mention of enhancing either opportunities for public participation, or ensuring that any planning around minerals is done in stereo with other planning and management instruments and tools.
- 7.5. It fails to consider longer term issues like greenhouse gas emissions, pollution control, climate change and biodiversity loss.
- 7.6. There is little consideration of training and employment and no consideration relating to how to transition workers/communities from mining to other occupations when mining ceases.
- 7.7. The failure to include and uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi is unacceptable.
- 7.8. Net gains in the environmental context seldom contemplates intangibles like time, or ecosystem service contribution and the term should not be used in this context. Net gains have costs, and there must be bottom lines for environmental evaluation.
- 7.9. Aotearoa New Zealand as a country needs to have a discussion and interrogate our nation's mineral needs. The fact that we allow foreign companies to come and dig up our gold to put in other countries' vaults underground

Overall, the Draft Minerals Strategy is inadequate and appears to have been rushed and poorly informed in its drafting. It lacks vision, and is out of step with contemporary planning, particularly in the contexts of participation and environment.

The permissive language reflects the weakness that is inherent in promotion over management, and we urge the Government to be mindful of that.

We are disappointed to see the Government sliding so far and so fast on its ability to manage minerals in Aotearoa New Zealand in a way that is appropriate for our small nation.

Again, thank you for considering our submission.

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