

Press Release: Deputy Prime Minister's Office, Cook Islands, 23 July 2010

The Hon. Robert Wigmore, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister responsible for seabed mining activities has today announced concrete steps aimed at progressing seabed mining in the Cook Islands.

“The Government is totally committed to the development of our rich seabed mineral resources for the benefit of the present and future generations of Cook Islanders,” stressed the Deputy Prime Minister. “To do that we must ensure that in the pioneering field of seabed mining we have in place sound developmental policies to guide seabed mining activities and regulations in force that will enable us to control and protect the wealth that belongs to the people of the Cook Islands as well as our marine environment before any exploratory or other mining activities begin. It must be the Government and people of the Cook Islands that have control over seabed mining, not outside interests.”

With that in mind, Cabinet has approved the establishment of a task force of senior officials from key Government agencies and Private Sector representation to recommend an overall seabed mining policy and a timetable and roadmap setting out essential steps that should be followed to enable seabed mining activities to begin, including the bringing into force of the Seabed Minerals Act passed by Parliament in 2009. That Act provides for the appointment of a Seabed Minerals Commissioner and the establishment of the Seabed Mining Authority and an Advisory Board.

The task force will be assisted and advised by independent professional experts in the field from the Commonwealth Secretariat and other organisations such as the Pacific Islands Applied Geosciences Commission (SOPAC) and take into account detailed seabed mining regulations enacted by other governments such as the United States before seabed mining commenced in their waters.

“The wealth on the seabed belongs to all Cook Islanders and decisions on how to exploit seabed minerals must be taken responsibly and as per provisions contained in the Seabed Minerals Act,” said Mr Wigmore.