

Kasm

kiwis against seabed mining

To: Hon Chris Bishop Minister of Infrastructure Parliament buildings
cc: Rt Hon Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister
by email 21 August 2025

Dear Hon Chris Bishop,

We read in yesterday's media that Minister Jones has [asked you to arrange](#) a meeting between him and the Fast-Track panel convenors.

We are extremely concerned at the prospect of such a meeting. It would amount to Ministerial and political interference in the Fast-Track process — a process that is meant to be independent and transparent.

The panel convenor is legislatively bound to follow the timelines set out in the statute. Where a convenor acts outside those timelines, the legislation already provides avenues to address such breaches, and applicants themselves can raise timing issues where they credibly arise. The convenor has acted within the scope of the law, and the criticism from Mr Jones is not about process at all — it is dissatisfaction with the outcome because he did not get the result he wanted.

If Mr Jones insists on pressing for private access to the panel convenors, it is your duty as the responsible Minister to decline. Ministerial engagement is confined to the referral stage of a project. The convenor's duties arise at the substantive application stage—and those duties do **not** involve direct Ministerial interaction.

The Fast-track Approvals Act places **no legal obligation** on convenors to meet with Ministers, especially not a Minister whose party's coalition agreement has a clause around exploiting one of the minerals Trans Tasman Resources wants to mine. Agreeing to such a request would amount to a reviewable process step and would be perceived as favouritism.

The credibility of the Fast-Track regime depends on decisions being made fairly, independently, and without political interference or favour. Indeed this was why the government changed the initial draft of the bill to remove a clause giving final consent decisions to Ministers.

If companies wish to benefit from the Fast Track process, they must file complete, well-prepared applications. The Panel Convenor's criticism of Trans-Tasman Resources was entirely justified: after more than 12 years, the company's application remains full of information gaps, despite being marked as "complete". That failure lies with the applicant, not the convenors.

The convenor's remarks about TTR's "cynical expectation" were directed at the company's claim that any submitters on TTRs application would only provide irrelevant evidence — a position directly contradicted by the findings of New Zealand's three courts, all of which confirmed that the evidence presented by submitters in earlier TTR applications was highly relevant (*Trans-Tasman Resources Limited v Taranaki Conservation Board* [2021] NZSC 127, including marine mammal evidence, seabirds and evidence on the presence of hard rocky reefs such as Project Reef).

The panel convenors — senior legal experts appointed to safeguard the integrity of the process — are entitled to use frank language when assessing applications. Their remarks demonstrate that they are doing their job: applying scrutiny, independence, and candour to a process under intense public attention.

Publicly criticising or pressuring convenors in private meetings undermines that independence, risks politicising decision-making, and could be viewed as bullying. As the responsible Minister, you must uphold the independence of the panel convenors. Allowing political influence risks reducing the Fast-Track process to nothing more than approvals by political favour. Even those who support the regime should want decisions grounded in evidence and complete applications — not decisions determined by which Minister shouts the loudest.

Where meetings with convenors do occur, the details must be fully disclosed to the public. Please confirm that if you agree to such a meeting, that you will place a full record of the conversation on the Fast-Track website, in accordance with the transparency practices adopted by the EPA.

Ngā mihi
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