

Ironsands explorer granted second Taranaki prospecting permit

Eamon Rood - Fri, 31 Jul 2015



Pan New Zealand Resources has been granted a new permit in onshore Taranaki as it continues to scope the region for onshore ironsands deposits.

Minerals Prospecting Permit (MPP) 56675 covers 402 square kilometres in south Taranaki. It starts 10 kilometres south of Opunake and stretches nearly 100 kilometres along the coast to north-west of Whanganui.

New Zealand Petroleum & Minerals (NZP&M) granted the permit in early June for two years. It covers 19 commodity types in addition to iron and ironsands, including titanium, tungsten, tantalum, zinc, rutile, aluminium, nickel, and rare earth elements; as well as gold, silver, and platinum group metals.

Second permit in the region

A relative newcomer to the exploration game, privately held Pan New Zealand first entered the Taranaki region in 2013 after securing an 873 square kilometre prospecting permit (MPP 55210) in north Taranaki.

MPP 55210 starts north-east of New Plymouth and Inglewood and stretches to the area just south of Mokau and covers the same commodity types as the southern permit.

It is due to expire on 11 November this year and the company's Wellington based director, Trevor Mok, would not confirm whether the company is planning to apply for an extension or to let it lapse.

He says the project is still in its early stages even with the acquisition of a second permit and the company is currently contacting various stakeholders in the region. There is no set timeframe for when the company intends to shift to an exploration phase, though Mok says it is considering other operations.

"We are looking at various things," he says, but added it would not be appropriate to disclose any details at this time.

He confirmed that two exploration consultancies - Wellington based Kenex and Dunedin-based RSC Mining & Mineral Exploration - are continuing to work with the company on progressing its work programme.

Proven ground

The new permit encompasses the area around the small town of Waverley where commercial mining operations ran for 16 years through the 1970s to the late 1980s driven by strong demand from Japan, which was undergoing rapid growth and re-industrialisation at the time.

From 1971 to 1981 over 15.7 million tonnes of iron concentrate was exported to Japan for use in steel manufacturing. A 1997 report on the area by GNS Science's Tony Christie and Bob Braithwaite estimates 92 million tonnes of raw material was left un-mined, containing an estimated 24 million tonnes of concentration and 10 million tonnes of tailings.

Speaking to the area's rich resource, three other companies are looking to set up ironsands operations in Taranaki.

Auckland-based Ironsands Offshore Mining has applied for a 950 square kilometre exploration permit on the seabed north-west of New Plymouth (MEP 55709.01). It also has a subsequent permit pending to an expired prospecting permit (MPP 51536) that curves curving around the west, north-west, and south-western edges of the Taranaki coastline.

Trans-Tasman Resources holds an active mining permit and an active exploration permit in offshore South Taranaki, near Pan New Zealand's new prospect. It also has a prospecting permit under evaluation (MPP 57136.01) and a pending extension for its Continental Shelf license.

Perth-based Hodges Resources also recently acquired an exploration permit (MEP 51498) from Rio Tinto in the area offshore of Pan New Zealand's northern prospecting permit.