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Media Release

EDS notes Chatham Rock Phosphate decision

EDS notes with approval that the Environmental Protection Authority has today refused consent for Chatham Rock Phosphate's application for consent to mine phosphate nodules on the Chatham Rise. EDS had earlier presented submissions expressing concern about the environmental effects of the application.

"There was strong opposition to this application through the submission and hearing process," said EDS Chairman Gary Taylor.

"Opponents included Ngai Tahu, fishing interests and environmental groups.

"The decision-making committee has found that mining would cause significant and permanent adverse effects on the existing benthic environment on the Chatham Rise, in particular to rare and protected stony corals.

"The decision-making committee also considered whether an adaptive management approach would enable the mining operation to be undertaken.

"However, it found that the destructive effects of extraction, coupled with the potentially significant impact of the sediment deposition on the surrounding marine environment, could not be mitigated by conditions or an adaptive management regime.

"When a decision-making committee is left with a lack of certainty about the adverse effects of a proposal on the environment it is required to favour caution and environmental protection.

"What the refusal of this application and the earlier one by Trans Tasman Resources (for sand mining off the west coast of the North Island) demonstrates is a clear need for a planning framework for our exclusive economic zone. It is a big ask to expect an applicant for a single project to provide all the baseline information required in the absence of any strategic planning guidance as to what kind of activities are acceptable and where.

"A system of marine spatial planning, based on good quality science, is needed to resolve potential conflict between potential users of the marine environment. In this case, for example, the mining was over a benthic protection area, set aside under different legislation.

"Finally we acknowledge that Chatham Rock Phosphate principals have put an enormous amount of effort into this project and to give credit where it is due, the level of interaction and consultation with us has been exemplary. We understand that they will be disappointed but this is the right outcome," Mr Taylor concluded.

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