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By Helen Maunga, Deputy Clerk, Parliament of the Cook Islands

ORIENTATION FOR SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE ON BILLS

Seabed Minerals Bill 2019 explained to the Committee

The new Parliamentary Special Select Committee on Bills met on Wednesday 23rd January 2019 at the Parliament Chamber for an orientation program conducted by the Clerk of Parliament Tangata Vainerere. The purpose of the orientation programme is to prepare the Committee Members for their responsibilities as prescribed in their 'terms of reference'. The TOR according to the Clerk is being examined to foster the Committee's understanding of their role. "Understanding the TOR is a key starting point for the Committee," said the Clerk, "as it helps speed up their work and also enables constructive reviews."



L-R Tangata Vainerere, Clerk of Parliament; MP Vaitoti Tupa, Deputy Chairman of the Bills Committee; Paul Lynch, Commissioner of the Seabed Minerals Authority.

In the absence of the Committee Chairman Hon. Tingika Elikana who was unable to attend the orientation due to illness, MP for Matavera, Vaitoti Tupa was unanimously elected as Deputy Chairman by the attending Members; MP for Mauke, Tai Tura, MP for Are-Nikau, Tereapii Maki-Kavana, MP for Titikaveka, Selina Napa

and MP for Amuri-Ureia, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Terepai Maoate.

A presentation by the Seabed Minerals Authority Commissioner Paul Lynch drew the full attention of the Committee especially the 5-year 'exploration' period expected to commence as soon as the Seabed Minerals Bill 2019 is passed by Parliament. The presentation focused on the global benefits of the 'ocean wealth' mineral known as cobalt which is found some 5,000 meters at ocean beds densely spread between Aitutaki and Penrhyn. "Much work is necessary around the 'exploration' which expects to attract potential investors from overseas to be screened to ensure that legal requirements are met," said Lynch.

The Bill outlined the expected role of the Seabed Minerals Authority to ensure compliance and consistency with international rules and principles that is stable with an effective and efficient regulatory framework that promotes transparent, informed, co-operative and consultative decision making. The Bill also seeks to maximize the benefits of seabed mineral activities for the present and future generations of Cook Islanders.

The Seabed Minerals Bill 2019 when it becomes law will replace the Seabed Minerals Act 2009.

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