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Te Korowai o Ngāruahine acknowledges Expert Panel appointments for Taranaki
VTM Fast-Track application

Calls for robust tikanga engagement and protection of Ngāruahine rights

Te Korowai o Ngāruahine Trust (Te Korowai) acknowledges the announcement by the Associate Panel Convener, confirming the Expert Panel appointed to assess the Taranaki VTM application under the Fast-track Approvals Act 2024.

The five-member Expert Panel includes expertise in law, planning, consents, marine science, economics, and Te Ao Māori. Te Korowai notes the inclusion of Māori development expertise and the provision for the Expert Panel to engage additional specialist advisers, including those with expertise in tikanga and mātauranga Māori.

While the announcement confirms a longer timeframe of 130 working days to allow for complex technical and cultural matters, Te Korowai remains concerned at the applicant's ongoing lack of direct, constructive engagement with hapū, iwi, and Treaty Settlement entities in South Taranaki, namely Ngāti Ruanui and Ngāa Rauru who have been leading the charge for over a decade. The Convener's own statement reflects that hapū and iwi concerns have been "unheard and unresolved" through previous processes, despite the Supreme Court in 2021, finding that tikanga, and the effects on hapū and iwi values, must be meaningfully considered.

Te Aorangi Dillon, Tumu Whakarae of Te Korowai o Ngāruahine Trust, says:

"This process must not repeat the procedural shortcomings that have occurred recently and enabled this Fast Track application to progress to this stage. The Supreme Court was clear—tikanga is not a procedural afterthought; it is integral to decision-making. We welcome the timeframes and engagement methods outlined today, as well as the cross section of expertise within the panel, but we will continue to advocate to ensure that our people's voices and rights are not ignored."

John Hooker, Chairperson of Ōkahu-Inuawai me ētehi atu hapū adds:

"Our moana and its life force are central to Ngāruahine identity. Any process that fails to genuinely engage with hapū and iwi, or respect tikanga, risks undermining not only the environment but also the relationships and obligations we hold as the tangata tiaki and community members. We will continue to hold this process to account."

Te Korowai will continue to advocate for:

- Honest engagement with hapū and iwi;
- Rigorous scrutiny of environmental, cultural, and economic claims made in support of the application; and
- Decisions that protect the long-term health and mauri of our takutai moana, fisheries, and taonga species.

The Panel is due to begin work on 25 August 2025, with a decision scheduled for 18 March 2026. Ngāruahine will actively participate in the process to ensure that the rights, responsibilities, and aspirations of hapū are protected for current and future generations.

ENDS

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