

#### **2.1.4. Iron sands update**

Iron sand is a sand containing grains of iron oxides (usually magnetite), typically found along coastal areas; the sand is mined for the iron to be used in the steel industry. WOA I presented a case study of iron sands, which occur off New Zealand at water depths of 20 to 42 m. A mining permit was granted to Trans-Tasman Resources Limited (TTR) in May 2014 for up to 50 million tonnes of ore per year for 20 years, which would be mined over an area of 66 km<sup>2</sup>. As reported in WOA I, the decision-making committee (DMC) of the New Zealand Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in June 2014 did not grant an environmental permit to mine, based on inadequate environmental data. However, an environmental permit to mine up to 50 million tonnes a year of iron sands for 35 years was granted by the DMC in August 2018 based on a revised application. That decision was subsequently appealed by environmental and fishing groups and the New Zealand High Court ruled in August 2018 that no mining would take place and sent it back to the DMC for further consideration based on the Court's criteria concerning correct legal tests for adaptive management. TTR appealed the High Court's ruling to the Court of Appeals, and has now appealed it to the Supreme Court, where the case currently resides.

TTR also holds an exploration permit adjacent to their mining permit and two additional companies have been granted exploration permits for iron sands in New Zealand's maritime zones. Ironsands Offshore Mining Limited (IOM) has an iron sands exploration permit off the coast of New Plymouth, the same general region as the mining permit granted to TTR. This exploration permit occurs within a marine mammal sanctuary with a small overlap over an area where seabed mining is prohibited but exploration activities may be conducted. Pacific Offshore Mining (POM) has an exploration permit for iron-titanium sands (ilmenite) off the Bay of Plenty, east of the North Island. Both IOM and POM are subsidiary companies of CASS Offshore Minerals Limited.