

The Post

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PHOTO: BRUCE MACKAY/THE POST



## Jones dismisses mining fears

Resources minister downplays concerns about mining applications in the Wellington hills

**ENVIRONMENT**  
**Andrea Vance**

Resources Minister Shane Jones has downplayed concerns about a cluster of new mining applications in the hills above Wellington, describing them as “hobby fossicking” rather than the beginning of large-scale extraction.

*The Post* revealed at the weekend that several prospecting permits have been lodged in the Long Gully area, behind the Zealandia sanctuary and Brooklyn. At least one applicant has already been granted a permit, with the Wellington City Council investigating allegations of illegal earthworks and sluicing on the site.

But Jones, who wants to double mining exports to \$3 billion by 2035, said residents should not expect a commercial gold mine

to spring up at the city's edge.

Last week, outgoing city mayor Tory Whanau was quoted criticising the granting of the permit as “short-sighted” and evidence that the Government was prioritising business interests over the environment.

“If only mayor Tory had shown this level of outrage for the wastewater system of Wellington, and not some random family fossicking around in some obscure, unknown creek,” Jones said.

“All of this is years away from any major mining operation. I remember when [former minister] Gerry Brownlee suggested they might start mining on Great Barrier [island], and that got blown totally out of proportion. I'd just say to the Wellington City Council: settle kettle.”

Jones pointed to the “hobby mining”

category created under the Crown Minerals regime, which allows families and individuals to pan for gold or prospect on a small scale. “It's a great way for families and young people to get back in touch with nature. When you see that nature represents some value, like gold, you start to pay more attention to the environment you live in,” he said.

Although the current applications were filed as commercial permits, Jones suggested that could simply reflect professional advice. “If they're going to spend several thousand dollars, they might have been told this is the most commercially efficient way to do it,” he said.

The flurry of interest was sparked after a family at Long Gully Station reportedly found gold in a stream and lodged an application, prompting others to follow.

Applications cover gold and other metallic minerals, but any significant mining activity would still face years of further permitting, consultation and consenting.

However, critics and neighbours fear even small-scale mining could threaten sensitive landscapes near Zealandia, Long Gully Bush, a 100-hectare reserve adjacent to the ecosanctuary and the largest area of protected private land in Wellington city, and the city's water catchments.

The council confirmed last week it had begun an investigation into alleged illegal works.

Jones said he would not comment on ongoing enforcement matters but indicated he saw little cause for alarm.

“I don't think it's going to lead to anything that shows major injurious implications for the Wellington region,” he said.

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