

Will ensure faster road for new mining projects to get started: "Very important that it goes faster than it has done"



WANTS TO GET TO THE FINISH LINE FASTER: Minister of Trade and Industry Jan Christian Vestre (Labor) believes that the development of mineral projects in Norway is taking too long today. The public affairs officer in Norge Mineraler agrees. Photo: Ingunn Walderhaug

The Government will ensure earlier clarifications in the planning of new mining projects. Erik Joa of Norge Mineraler believes it is an important initiative, and that the processes today take far too long. On Christmas Eve, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries announced that a fast track for mineral activities will be launched in Norway.

During 2022, the Ministry, headed by Minister of Trade and Industry Jan Christian Vestre (Labour), has been working on a new mineral strategy. The strategy is the first step in the preparation of a new mineral law. The government's proposal for the new

law was put out for consultation last autumn, and it caused reactions. Mayor Jonas Andersen Sayed (KrF) believed that the new law could lead to municipalities being "[totally overrun](#)" in the establishment of new mining operations.

But Minister of Trade and Industry Vestre believes that there are good reasons to intensify the focus on mineral extraction and mapping in Norway.

"The development of mineral projects takes too long. Minerals are crucial for the green shift. There is a need for critical raw materials, therefore it is important to stimulate the development of such projects. We are now launching a fast track for critical raw materials," says Minister of Trade and Industry Jan Christian Vestre in a press release from the Ministry.

Prioritization and coordination

The fast track is based on five measures:

1. The Directorate for Mineral Management (DMF) will prioritise the processing of applications under the Minerals Act for critical raw materials.
2. DMF will establish a scheme for national coordination of critical mineral projects, based on voluntary participation from the municipality and the developer.
3. DMF will develop an advisory tool for mineral activity, in order to identify and deal with particularly demanding or conflictive issues in mineral projects at an early stage.
4. The Geological Survey of Norway (NGU) will prioritise mapping in areas that may have deposits of critical minerals.
5. NGU shall prioritize making available and facilitating data from areas with investigations of critical minerals.

"Of course, we will still have thorough processes related to mineral activities in this country, but it is necessary to streamline the processes. That's why fast track becomes important. I am also pleased that we have already received a lot of good input from both the industry and other stakeholders in the ongoing mineral strategy work and follow-up of the consultation on the new mineral law," says Vestre.

Among other things, he was in Eigersund in October to get input from Eigersund's mayor Odd Stangeland (Ap), Sokndals Andersen Sayed and the business association.



INVESTING BIG: The government's focus on mineral policy and mapping of mineral deposits has been too small, according to Minister of Trade and Industry Jan Christian Vestre (Ap). Here he is meeting with the mayors Jonas Andersen Sayed and Odd Stangeland in Egersund in October. Photo: Ingunn Walderhaug

Positive, Norge Mineraler believes

At Norge Mineraler`s office at Langholmen in Egersund, the launch of the so-called fast track has been well received.

"This is positive because it helps to align and coordinate all the different permit processes. The situation today is that there are three parallel paths with permits that must be granted. This is the basis for the mineral law committee that was appointed to investigate and present proposals for new mineral law – where an important proposal is to coordinate these processes better," says Public Affairs Officer Erik Joa.

The three parallel paths he is referring to are the zoning and area plans that the project owners must get through with the municipalities, the permits related to environmental issues that must go through with the Environment Agency and the County Governor, and all the technical and detail-oriented permits that must be approved by the DMF.

Moreover, large parts of the assessments in the various applications are the same but cannot be shared between the agencies. Better coordination will prevent double or triple work, Joa points out.

"This is both about the use of resources in the public and in the private sector," he says.

– Important that it goes faster

The most important aspect of the launch of the fast track is to provide greater predictability, he emphasizes.

"If there are conflicts or challenges, you might as well get clarification early on the table. This does not mean that things should not be properly investigated, or that local democracy should be overruled, but that the processes will be more coordinated and that there will be greater predictability.

- And that it's faster?

"It's very important that it goes faster than it has, because experience shows that in several cases it have taken 10-15 years, these processes. Everyone understands that it doesn't work. It will be hopeless to explore and develop new mineral projects if we are not getting clarification on what can be done or not until after 15 years. It's not good for the society, as it is now. For the local people and those affected, it is also important to get clarifications instead of living in uncertainty for 10-15 years, Joa points out.

He refers to the planned mining project by the Førdefjord.

"It was left in a drawer at the Norwegian Environment Agency for several years," he points out.

However, Joa emphasizes that they cannot see that the strategy will require less of the applicant.

"It will be done at least as thoroughly as before but go faster and become more predictable.

No direct impact yet

For now, however, the government's strategy or the upcoming new minerals law will not directly affect Norge Mineraler and Norge Mining's plans.

"A new mineral law will perhaps take two years to complete in parliament, perhaps even longer. That doesn't change the progress of Norge Mineraler. We have to investigate and do the work on the projects anyway. We have stated in information meetings and elsewhere that our goal is to start the planning process with the municipality at the end of the year. Then we'll have to see if we can achieve that, but that's our goal.