



**Contribution to the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, as mandated by United Nations General Assembly resolution 77/248 of 30 December 2022, entitled “Oceans and the Law of the Sea**

**16 June 2023**

**Twenty-seventh session in 2022 and the ongoing twenty-eighth session**

1. The twenty-seventh session of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority was held from 1 to 4 August 2022 in Kingston, Jamaica.<sup>1</sup> In 2023, the Assembly meetings for the twenty-eighth session will be held in Kingston from 24-28 July 2023.

2. The twenty-seventh session of the Council was held in three parts, Part I was held from 21 March to April 2022, Part II from 18 to 29 July 2022, and Part III from 31 October to 11 November 2022. The Council it continued to progress with the consideration of the draft regulations on the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, as a matter of priority and in line with the road map endorsed by the Council at its meeting in December 2021.<sup>2</sup>

3. As per the roadmap agreed by Council Members in 2022<sup>3</sup>, Part I of the twenty-eighth session of the Council was held from 16 March 2023 to 31 March 2023. The Council will hold the second part of the 28th session from 10 July-21 July 2023 and Part III is scheduled for 30 October–8 November 2023.

**Status of exploration contracts**

4. As of 16 June 2023, a total of 30 contracts for exploration are in force: 19 are for polymetallic nodules, 7 are for polymetallic sulphides, and 4 are for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts. Each contractor is required to submit an annual report to the Secretary-General within 90 days from the end of each calendar year, covering its programme of activities in the exploration area.

5. The Secretariat completed three periodic reviews for the implementation of approved plans of work for exploration between May and December 2022 for Nauru Ocean Resources Inc, Cook Islands Investment Corporation and Tonga Offshore Mining Ltd. Since 2017, the Secretary-General has been holding annual consultative meetings with contractors to discuss issues of common interest and share best practices in deep-sea exploration. In 2022, the consultative meetings took place in Delft, Netherlands, between 5-7 December 2022, with logistical support from Allseas Group and the Technical University of Delft. It was attended

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<sup>1</sup> See ISB/27/A/15.

<sup>2</sup> See ISBA/27/C/21.

<sup>3</sup> See ISBA/27/C/add.2.

by 64 representatives of exploration contractors. The next consultative meeting is projected to be held in October 2023.

### **Consideration of the Draft Exploitation Regulations**

6. During its twenty-seventh session in 2022, the Council endorsed a roadmap for the twenty-eighth session of the Council.<sup>4</sup> The roadmap will be reviewed at the end of the last Council meeting of 2023 to take stock of advances in the formulation of the regulatory framework for exploitation.

7. In Part I of the twenty-eighth session in 2023, the Council met mainly in an informal setting to further elaborate consensus text and to address pending conceptual questions in its working groups. The Council received oral reports concerning the progress made within each informal working group, including proposed inter-sessional work, from the Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group in respect of the Development and Negotiation of the Financial Terms of a Contract, as well as the facilitators of the various informal working groups of the Council (i.e., on the protection and preservation of the marine environment, inspection, compliance and enforcement and institutional matters).

8. The Finance Committee, which has the primary responsibility to draft appropriate rules and procedures on equitable benefit-sharing, has developed formulae for equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits in the ISA Technical Study 315, following the discussions held during May 2022 and the summary report provided by the Secretary-General on the outcomes of discussions on the matter during the last meetings of the Council and Assembly (ISBA/27/FC/2). The Finance Committee also discussed the elaboration of a draft framework for financial regulations on the treatment of funds received from activities in the Area. To this end, it requested the Secretariat to proceed and prepare draft proposals for the establishment of a seabed sustainability fund, as well as a study on options for the distribution of funds received under UNCLOS, Article 82(4).

### **Development of Regional Environmental Management Plans**

9. During the period under review, progress has been made in relation to the collection of background scientific information in support of the development of the Regional Environmental Management Plans (REMPs) for the Area of the Indian Ocean. The scientific information compiled was discussed at the first REMP workshop for this region, organised in May 2023 in Chennai, India, in collaboration with the Ministry of Earth Sciences and the National Institute of Ocean Technology of India. This event was attended by 32 experts from 15 countries nominated by member States of the Authority, observers, contractors, and academic institutions. The workshop led to identifying parameters for defining an appropriate geographical boundary for the development of the REMP. It enabled the review of the

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<sup>4</sup> See ISBA/27/C/21/Add. 2.

<sup>5</sup> ISA. 2022. Technical Study 31: Equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits from deep-seabed mining. Available at: <https://www.isa.org.jm/publications/technical-study-31-equitable-sharing-of-financial-and-other-economic-benefits-from-deep-seabed-mining>.

environmental and geological/geophysical data as well as the scientific knowledge available for the Indian Ocean. The regional environmental assessment will be completed based on the feedback and further input received during the workshop. In February 2024, the Secretariat plans to organise a workshop to continue developing a REMP for the Area of the Northwest Pacific Ocean, in collaboration with Japan, building on the results of previous workshops for the region held in 2018 and 2020.

### **Implementation and Review of the Strategic Plan 2019-2023**

10. The Strategic Plan of ISA for the period 2019-2023 was developed in consultation with ISA Members and other relevant stakeholders and adopted by the Assembly at its 24th session in July 2018. The Plan included nine strategic directions, which have guided the work of ISA since 2019. Actions necessary to achieve the objectives of the Strategic Plan and corresponding expected outputs were defined in the High-Level Action Plan adopted by the Assembly at its 25th session in July 2019.

11. During the 28th Session, reports on the implementation of such Strategic Plan and of the High-Level Action Plan, for the five-year period 2019–2023, their outcomes and with their corresponding indicators were presented to the Council and the Assembly.

12. In anticipation of the consideration and adoption of a revised Strategic Plan for the period 2024-2027 by the Assembly at its 28th session, the Secretariat has prepared a draft plan, which was informed by the implementation of the plan for the period 2019- 2023 as well as the findings of a review carried out by a consultant and the comments and suggestions received from Members, observers and contractors.

### **Implementation of the Action Plan of the Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development <sup>6</sup>**

13. The Authority has continued to work collaboratively with IOC-UNESCO in the planning and implementation of the United Nations Decade. As part of this process, the secretariat has continued to provide input through its participation in the Decade Advisory Board, the Ocean Decade Alliance, the monitoring, and evaluation working group and the communications working group.<sup>7</sup> The importance of the United Nations Decade is also highlighted in the context of the strategic plan<sup>8</sup> and the high-level action plan<sup>9</sup> of the Authority for the period 2019–2023.

14. Contributing to the objectives of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 is one of the aims also of the ISA MSR Action Plan

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<sup>6</sup> ISBA/28/A/8

<sup>7</sup> See ISBA/27/A/4.

<sup>8</sup> See ISBA/24/A/10, annex.

<sup>9</sup> See ISBA/25/A/15, annex II.

adopted by Member States in 2020 through a series of strategic research priorities (ISBA/26/A/17). The Plan has been championed by Argentina since 2021.

15. Significant progress was achieved in implementing the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative (SSKI) 9, launched in 2022 at the UN Ocean Conference. The project is designed to improve the generation, standardization, and sharing of deep-sea biodiversity data and expertise, particularly in deep-sea taxonomy, to effectively manage activities in the Area and global processes for sustainable ocean governance. SSKI aims to deliver ambitious targets to advance deep-sea biodiversity knowledge, including describing at least 1,000 new deep-sea species by 2030 and increasing scientific capacity in developing countries for deep-sea biodiversity assessments. A multiannual project document was developed for the period 2023-2030, based on the outcomes of the SSKI Inception Workshop convened in December 2022 by the Secretariat, in collaboration with the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF), the National Marine Biodiversity Institute of Korea (MABIK), and the European Commission in Seocheon, Korea.

16. SSKI's efforts are expected to contribute to the implementation of the international legally binding instrument under the Convention for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). SSKI will also effectively support the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), adopted in December 2022. The Secretariat and the CBD Secretariat co-organized a side-event during CBD COP-15, demonstrating the importance of SSKI activities in advancing deep-sea biodiversity research, capacity, and data for the successful implementation of GBF. The Secretariat will continue to collaborate with the CBD Secretariat and respective members to maximize the synergies between the implementation of the Authority's Action Plan on marine scientific research and CBD's GBF.

17. In November 2022, the Authority and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea signed a letter of cooperation to further strengthen their collaboration on advancing deep-sea research, scientific capacity, and sustainable development of seabed minerals, reaffirming Korea's active engagement and support in promoting marine scientific research in the Area. The Secretariat is currently preparing for the organisation of a workshop in October 2023 in Vietnam on enhancing biological data sharing to advance deep-sea taxonomy. This workshop will be the fourth edition of the annual workshop series on deep-sea taxonomic standardisation convened since 2020, in collaboration with MOF and MABIK. It will focus on best practices for deep-sea taxonomic research to generate FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) data and enhance capacity in sharing deep-sea biological data.

18. Building on the results of the experts' scoping meeting on advancing technology to support sustainable mining of mineral resources in the Area held in 2021, the Secretariat commissioned a desktop review on the current scientific and industrial developments, including the identification of critical gaps. The review found that new autonomous technologies enable faster mineral resource identification and environmental assessments at a

larger scale. It also concluded that technology transfer from other industries should be further explored, for example, to design more efficient mineral resource assessment models. When comparing the technologies of mining systems and operations, most candidate technological systems have been developed and tested for polymetallic manganese nodules, while very limited trials have been carried out yet for polymetallic sulphides and ferromanganese crusts. Finally, it was recommended that state-of-the-art theoretical models developed in academic frameworks need to inform the industry to advance their applications. These key findings will inform an upcoming workshop in 2023 on technological developments for responsible mining and environmental protection and monitoring.

19. The Secretariat has joined the Advisory board of the project “Technology-based impact assessment tool for sustainable, transparent deep sea mining exploration and exploitation” (TRIDENT10) launched in January 2023. The initiative is led by INESC TEC (Portugal), with a consortium of 22 European scientific partners and financially supported by the EU Commission. This project aims at developing remote and automated monitoring systems for deep-sea mining. It will support the development of reliable and cost-effective systems for environmental impact monitoring of activities in the Area, which will also support strategic research priority 4.

20. The Secretariat has undertaken collaborative activities with various partners to improve the quality of DeepData’s environmental data to increase the data's utility further. The quality of the taxonomic data has been significantly improved following the review of more than 60,000 biological records across all regions where exploration activities are taking place. Furthermore, a review and synthesis of more than 11,000 biological records for the Indian Ocean have been undertaken, resulting in increased quality of biological data in DeepData to inform the ongoing REMP process. The existing partnership with WoRMS adds an additional quality control mechanism by developing new automated procedures for taxon-match queries and scientific reviews by WoRMS editors.

### **Capacity development and training programme**

21. The second training workshop of the ISA-China Joint Training and Research Centre (JTRC) will take place in October 2023. The training will target the participation of developing countries (especially LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS). The participants will be invited to enroll for a two-week in-person training in Qingdao, Shandong Province, China that consists of thematic and operational lectures linked to the Authority's mandates and field trips.

22. On 24 May 2023, the secretariat held a webinar under its “Deep DiplomaSea” series organized for the personnel of permanent missions to the Authority and the United Nations. 57 participants were selected among others to join the webinar.

23. The secretariat, in cooperation with Institut Français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (IFREMER) and with the financial support of the Government of France, established in 2021 a deep-sea taxonomy postdoctoral fellowship for candidates from developing States

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<sup>10</sup> <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101091959>

members of the Authority. After a thorough selection process, the project selected Dr Ranju Radhakrishnan from India, who joined Ifremer in September 2022. The 18-month fellowship focuses on developing and testing new methods and technologies for deep-sea species identification. The research will continue for one more year, and the results will be presented at SSKI events and other international scientific conferences. Three manuscripts are being prepared for submission to scientific peer-reviewed journals, including new species descriptions.

24. The internship programme of the Authority funded by the National Oceanography Centre of the United Kingdom was finalised. A junior woman scientist joined the secretariat for four months to advance the image library for species recognition. More than 30,000 image records were catalogued, but the lack of associated metadata currently limits their use and sharing. A second candidate advanced the quality of the biodiversity data in the Indian Ocean in preparation for the REMP workshop, as well as the data available from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge and Northwest Pacific regions, including a total of 18,520 biological records that will be added to DeepData and OBIS.

25. In addition, the secretariat is currently developing an e-learning platform titled “Deep Dive” that will support the development of capacities and skills of young professionals and experts in the work of the Authority. This will be the first and only e-learning platform exclusively devised to address all elements of the legal regime in Part XI of the Convention and the Agreement implementing Part XI of the Convention. An entire module is dedicated to discussing the legal regime as well as the technical and scientific aspects pertaining to the conduct of marine scientific research.

26. The Africa Deep Seabed Resources (ADSR) project was implemented in cooperation with the African Union and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and has enabled mid-career African experts to advance some of the Authority’s core activities using the DeepData database. Between 2018 and 2022, ten selected African experts carried out research within the Secretariat. The themes ranged from fundamental topics such as the characterization of water masses distribution, to applied research for example the assessment of the geothermal energy in the Area, as well as technological advancement such as the development of an inspection tool to support the supervision of deep seabed mining activities.

27. Continued progress has been made to advance women’s empowerment and leadership in deep-sea research, particularly women scientists from LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, through the Women in Deep-Sea Research (WIDSR) project. Since its launch, over 100 women have benefited from various WIDSR training initiatives, including the contractors’ training programme. A pilot mentoring programme has been launched in June 2023, through which worldwide recognized scientists have agreed to serve as mentors for ten young female researchers from developing States to assist in elevating their professional development over a 12-month programme.

28. In August 2022, the Assembly decided to establish the ISA Partnership Fund (ISAPF) as a new trust fund. The objectives to ISAPF are to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the Area for the benefit of humankind as a whole, provide qualified

scientists and technical personnel from developing States with opportunities to participate in international marine scientific research programmes, contribute to the implementation of the ISA MSR Action Plan, contribute to the design, development and implementation of dedicated capacity development programmes and activities aligned with the priority needs identified by developing States members of ISA and enhance ISA's contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the SDGs. The first meeting of the ISAPF board was held on 1 June 2023. A series of grants and calls for contributions was released to support the implementation of strategic research priorities of the ISA MSR Action Plan and the key result areas of the Capacity development strategy.

### **The 1994 Agreement**

29. In accordance with article 156, paragraph 2, of the Convention, all States Parties are, ipso facto, members of the Authority. As of 16 June 2023, there were 169 parties to the Convention (168 States and the European Union), thus 169 members of the Authority. Rwanda became a party to the Convention on 18 May 2023. On the same date, Rwanda also became a party to the 1994 Agreement, which means that there are now 152 parties to the 1994 Agreement. There are 17 members of the Authority that became parties to the Convention before the adoption of the 1994 Agreement and that have yet to become parties to the Agreement. These are Bahrain, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Egypt, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Mali, Marshall Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia and Sudan.

### **The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Seabed Authority**

30. The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the Authority was adopted by the Assembly on 27 March 1998 and entered into force on 31 March 2003. Greece acceded to the Protocol on 12 December 2022. This brings the total number of parties to the protocol to 48. Members of the Authority that are not yet parties are strongly encouraged to take the necessary steps to become parties to the Protocol at their earliest convenience. The secretariat circulated a note verbale to that effect on 30 January 2023.

### **Implementation of article 84, paragraph 2 of the Convention**

31. Pursuant to article 84, paragraph 2, of the Convention, coastal States are obliged to give due publicity to charts or lists of geographical coordinates and, in the case of those showing the outer limit lines of the continental shelf, to deposit a copy of each such chart or list with the Secretary General of the Authority. As of 16 June 2023, 12 members of the Authority have deposited such charts and lists with the Secretary-General, namely, Australia, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, France (with respect to Guadeloupe, Guyana, the Kerguelen islands, Martinique, New Caledonia, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam and La Réunion), Ireland, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Niue, Pakistan, the Philippines and Tuvalu. The Secretary-General urges all coastal States to deposit such charts or lists of coordinates as soon as possible after the establishment of the outer limit lines of their continental shelf, up to and beyond 200 nautical miles, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention.

## **Budget and status of contributions**

32. In accordance with the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, the administrative expenses of the Authority are to be met by assessed contributions of its members until the Authority has sufficient funds from other sources to meet those expenses. The scale of assessments is based upon the scale used for the regular budget of the United Nations, adjusted for differences in membership. As of 16 June 2023, 68 percent of the value of contributions to the 2023 budget due from Member States and the European Union had been received. Contributions outstanding from member States for prior periods (1998–2022) amounted to \$757,586 as of 16 June 2023. Notices are sent on a regular basis to member States, reminding them of the arrears. As of 16 June 2023, 47 States are in arrears of contributions for more than two years or more. Notices on the arrears are sent on a regular basis to the Member States concerned.

33. As of 16 June 2023, the balance of the working capital fund stood at \$717,541 against an approved level of \$750,000.

## **Status of the funds**

34. The Partnership Fund was established in line with the decision of the Assembly during the twenty-seventh session in 2022 as a multi-donor trust fund<sup>11</sup>. The main objective of the fund is to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the Area for the benefit of humankind. Total contributions as of 16 June 2023 is \$604,644 and no expenditures from the Fund have been made to date.

35. The Voluntary Trust Fund for the participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee from developing countries was established in 2002. As of 16 June 2023, the total contributions to the Fund over its lifetime amounted to \$1,383,780. During the reporting period, contributions were made by China (\$40,000), Norway (\$9,775), United Kingdom (\$10,000) and \$18,000 from contractors. As of 16 June 2023, the balance of the Fund was \$40,004.

36. With regard to the voluntary trust fund to support the participation of members of the Council of the Authority from developing States in the meetings of the Council, as of 16 June 2023, the total contributions to the Fund over its lifetime amounted to \$145,202. During the reporting period, contributions were made by the United Kingdom (\$10,000) and \$25,500 from contractors. As of 16 June 2023, the balance of the Fund was \$548.

37. With regard to the voluntary trust fund for the purpose of providing the requisite funds related to the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Enterprise, as of 16 June 2023, the balance of the fund was \$3,528.

38. With regard to the trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the Authority, Since its creation, the fund raised \$2,495,376 and has a net balance of \$627,199 as of 16 June 2023. Since March 2022, contributions have been made by the National Marine Biodiversity Institute

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<sup>11</sup> See ISBA/27/A/10 and ISBA/27/FC/3



of Korea (\$125,809), Monaco (\$21,468), the European Union-SSKI Project \$208,024 and \$123,000 towards the Deep-Dive initiative.

## **Relationship with the United Nations and other relevant international organizations and bodies**

### *United Nations*

39. On 9 December 2022, the Secretary-General made a statement to the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly under agenda item 72 (a) Oceans and the Law of the Sea.<sup>12</sup> Statements were also made by the Secretary-General in the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5) High-level Thematic Round Table 1<sup>13</sup> and 2<sup>14</sup>.

40. During the thirty-second Meeting of States parties to the Convention, on 13 June 2022, the Secretary-General provided information on the activities carried out by the Authority since the last Meeting of States Parties.<sup>15</sup>

### *African Union*

41. In the twenty-seventh session, the Council approved the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the African Union.

### *Indian Ocean Rim Association*

42. Following the signature of the MoU with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in March 2022<sup>16</sup>, the Secretariat engaged in a joint project for strengthening deep-sea science and technology in the Indian Ocean region (SDIOR) to build and develop institutional, organisational and individual capacities of members of both organisations, particularly LDCs and SIDS.

43. Finally, an updated and completed account of the activities of the Authority can be found in the Illustrated Secretary-General Annual Report 2022-2023 “*Just and Equitable Management of the Common Heritage of Humankind.*”

End

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<sup>12</sup> The written statement is available at [SG Statement 77th Session of UNGA.pdf \(isa.org.im\)](#).

<sup>13</sup> The written statement is available at [SG Statement 5th UN Conference on LDCs high-level thematic round table 1.pdf \(isa.org.im\)](#).

<sup>14</sup> The written statement is available at [SG Statement 5th UN Conference on LDCs.pdf \(isa.org.im\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> The written statement is available at [https://isa.org.im/files/documents/EN/SG-Stats/Statement\\_ISA\\_SPLOS32.pdf](https://isa.org.im/files/documents/EN/SG-Stats/Statement_ISA_SPLOS32.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> See [ISBA/26/C/13/Add.1](#)