



**P-SIDS Regional Training and Capacity Building Workshop**

*“Deep seabed environmental management and monitoring”*

**Organized by ISA and UNDESA and co-Sponsored by the Cook Islands**

Virtual Event

**26 July 2021**

**OPENING STATEMENT**

By H.E. Michael W. Lodge,  
Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

.....  
Kia Orana Prime Minister and thank you for those inspiring words.

On behalf of ISA, allow me to welcome you all to our fourth workshop under the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth, a project jointly conceived by ISA and UNDESA at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference. I am delighted to be joined in this opening segment by my good friend and colleague Mr Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General of DESA.

Let me also thank you, Prime Minister, and the Government of the Cook Islands for hosting this workshop. I am sure I speak for everyone if I say that we would have loved to have been able to be in Rarotonga today. Nevertheless, it is a great pleasure to be able to organize this workshop in partnership with the Cook Islands and I trust that we will find another opportunity to cross the oceans and meet again soon.

Ever since the adoption of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in 1982, the large ocean States of the Pacific have identified the potential of deep-sea minerals, both within national jurisdictions and in the international seabed area, to contribute to the development of the blue economy. Scientific studies since the 1980s confirmed the presence of rich mineral deposits throughout Cook Islands and Micronesia.

It is hardly surprising therefore that there has always been a close relationship between the International Seabed Authority and the Pacific Island States.

The first Secretary-General of the Authority, Satya Nandan, who sadly passed away in 2020, was from Fiji, which was the first country to ratify the Law of the Sea Convention in 1982. Fiji has been a member of the ISA Council since 1996 and a Fijian expert has served on the Legal and Technical Commission since 1997.

In more recent years, Tonga was elected to the Council and a Tongan expert was elected to the Legal and Technical Commission, giving the Pacific two seats out of 30 on the Commission.

Nauru made history in 2011 by helping to advance the request for the first ever advisory opinion of the Seabed Disputes Chamber of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

And since then, four Pacific Island States – Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga – have decided to sponsor seabed exploration contracts, using the rights and privileges granted to them by the Convention.

To support regional engagement in the ISA, both of the major regional organizations – SPC and SPREP – have been granted observer status at ISA and I would like to specifically acknowledge the excellent cooperation we have enjoyed with SPC and in particular the Geoscience and Energy Programme, in relation to ISA's capacity building initiatives.

Let me also acknowledge the presence today of Forum Secretary-General Henry Puna and PIDF Secretary-General Solo Mara. The current situation has made it impossible for me to meet you, but I look forward to enjoying a fruitful cooperation with your organizations, as I did with your predecessors.

The close relationship between ISA and the Pacific Island States led naturally to the development of the Abyssal Initiative, a project entirely conceived and implemented to respond to the specific needs of the Pacific SIDS sponsoring States.

The project has two main objectives. First, to ensure that the targeted countries are in a position to comply with their national and international obligations as sponsoring States and, second to help them ensure that the necessary governance structures and mechanisms, including environmental management and monitoring, are in place.

I am delighted that Norway, through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), has agreed to support our joint initiative. The objectives of this project are fully in line with Norway's commitment to effective environmental protection and sustainable production of ocean resources and I am sure we will hear more about this from State Secretary Jens Frolich Holte during this opening session. I thank Norway for your support.

This week's workshop focuses on the critical topic of environmental management and builds on the progress made during the previous workshops held in Nuku'alofa in February 2019, and Nauru and Kiribati, in August 2019.

For ISA, the commitment to environmental protection lies at the heart of our responsibilities. The development of the mineral resources of the deep seabed is only possible within a precautionary framework that places environmental protection front and centre. That is why ISA's environmental requirements for exploration contractors are more rigorous than for any other activity in the ocean beyond national jurisdiction. No other ocean industry has been regulated to this extent before it even begins and on a global scale.

Over the next four days we will unpack precisely what this means, the implications for ISA, sponsoring States and contractors, and how, collectively, we can ensure that the best available scientific evidence is shared and utilized to support sound decision-making.

Of course, there are those who oppose any form of deep sea mining anywhere. This is an overly simplistic approach that is neither based on good science nor on international law. In fact, it directly undermines the unique governance system that States have worked together for more than 40 years to put in place. That is why I welcome the recent commitment by G20 Environment Ministers to support the development by ISA of international regulations in line with the precautionary approach that result in the effective protection of the marine environment.

It is vital that the Pacific Island States remain fully engaged in this important process. You are the resource holders. You have the opportunity to help shape the international regime in a way that provides real benefits to the Pacific while at the same time safeguarding the marine environment for present and future generations.

Before I conclude I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the memory of Christina Pomee, from Tonga, a dear friend of ISA who sadly passed away recently.

Most recently, Christina was Country Manager for Tonga Offshore Mining Limited. She was also a key participant in the Abyssal Initiative and helped to organize the Nuku'alofa workshop. Many of us, however, will know her as a passionate marine scientist who had participated in multiple offshore expeditions and helped to train Pacific Island scientists. Most of all, she was an inspirational leader in a field dominated by men and an outstanding ambassador for the Pacific far beyond the Kingdom of Tonga.

The news of her death came as a shock for me and all my colleagues in the Authority and beyond. Her strength and resilience as well as her commitment to the advancement of Pacific Island science will not be forgotten.

\*\*\*