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Enhancing scientific cooperation in support of regional environmental management planning in the international seabed area

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STATEMENT

by

Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Greetings from Lisbon.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this virtual side event on enhancing scientific cooperation in support of regional environmental management planning in the Area.

The 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference is an opportunity to take stock of our collective achievements in meeting the targets of SDG14 and identify where further efforts should be placed.

I am delighted therefore to be able to share with you today an update on the progress made under the auspices of the ISA towards developing regional environmental management plans.

REMPs establish a framework for environmental management at a regional scale and, as such, are a core element of ISA's efforts to ensure effective protection of the marine environment, in line with its mandate under Article 145 of UNCLOS.

The concept of REMPs originated more than a decade ago in the form of a scientific process to map habitats in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone and design a network of areas that would be protected from future extractive activities. We decided to call these Areas of Particular Environmental Interest, or APEIs.

This was one of the first global attempts to design and implement a large-scale area-based management tool in an area beyond national jurisdiction, in line with international law, supported by effective management measures and adopted by consensus at the global level.

Implementation of the REMP for the CCZ has been a continuous learning process through which we have been able to consolidate and synthesize existing and new scientific information relating to biodiversity and ecosystems.

The most recent review of the CCZ REMP, following an exhaustive international scientific process, culminated in December 2021 with a recommendation by the Legal and Technical Commission to expand the network of APEIs by an additional 350,000 square kilometers. The network now covers almost 2 million square kilometers, which not only makes it the largest protected area in areas beyond national jurisdiction, but also means that more of the CCZ is protected than is currently under exploration.

As deep-sea exploration activities have gradually expanded into other prospective regions of the global ocean, it became imperative for ISA to initiate the development of REMPs in other areas where exploration is taking place.

So, in the past five years, in collaboration with member States, as well as many different partner organizations and scientific projects, ISA has convened seven expert workshops to advance the development of REMPs for the Northern part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the Northwest Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.

The process has been scientific and rigorous. For each region, existing scientific information related to biodiversity and ecosystems has been consolidated and synthesized. At the same time, the process has created the enabling conditions to support the development of new scientific approaches and processes to support the use of cutting-edge area-based management tools, new assessment methodologies for cumulative impacts and innovative management measures.

Building on the results from the expert workshops held for the Northern part of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the Legal and Technical Commission recently released a draft REMP for public consultation. It will consider comments from stakeholders in its meeting in July.

I wish to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to all our partners in this journey. Some of them are present today including the European Commission, the Ministry of Natural Resources of China, the Ministry of Earth Sciences of India, the Ministry of Climate and Environment of Poland, and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation of Australia.

Our appreciation also goes to the many partners and experts from member States, observers, contractors, and the scientific community who participated in the workshops. Your ongoing support and engagement in this process has been and still is essential.

Our event today is an opportunity to shine a light on this collective effort and the concrete impacts it has had already and will have in future to ensure effective protection and conservation of deep-sea biodiversity and ecosystems.

In reaffirming our shared commitment to sustainable development, I call on all of you to join us and be part of this unique endeavour aimed at sound environmental management to safeguard the marine environment from the adverse impacts of activities in the Area.

I thank you all for your participation and ongoing support to the work of ISA.
