

**High-Level webinar to present the draft ISA Marine Scientific Research Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (17/11/2020 – 2 PM-4PM)**

**Panel 2**

**Advancing scientific knowledge of the deep-sea for the sustainable development of the ocean resources, including understanding biodiversity and ecosystems functions**

*Increased scientific research and better understanding of biodiversity of ecosystems functions are prerequisites to achieving the sustainable development of deep-sea resources and ensuring effective protection of the marine environment*

Thank you Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Participants,

- Thank you for inviting also the European Commission to this high level webinar and giving us the opportunity to contribute to this panel. **The topic of this panel is very important.** It is basically about knowing before doing, and thus preventing harm through activities for which the impact is not known. This is very relevant for the political priorities of the European Commission, notably the European Green Deal.
- Under the **European Green Deal**, we have the ambition to transform the EU in a resource-efficient economy, with no emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050, and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. At the same time, we also aim to conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital and to protect it from environment-related risks and impacts. Achieving this will require more science to develop circular economies and cleaner technologies.
- This is of course directly relevant to the conservation of marine biodiversity and the sustainable use of the marine resources, as required by the our new **Biodiversity Strategy for 2030** which is one of our key initiatives under the European Green Deal. This strategy makes clear that the fight against biodiversity loss must be underpinned by sound science. That is why our future research programme **Horizon Europe** will include a long-term research agenda for biodiversity and also the Specific **Missions** under Horizon Europe, such as on **healthy oceans** will significantly contribute to filling knowledge gaps. Moreover, we will establish a new Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity in cooperation with the European Environmental Agency.
- But already in 2016 we have made better knowledge of the oceans a political priority for our **international ocean governance agenda**.
- I wanted to give you this policy context to show you our commitment for a good science policy interface and before replying to the guiding questions for this panel.
- How has deep sea research advanced our general understanding of the deep-sea environment?
- Deep sea research conducted so far has **certainly advanced our understanding of the deep-sea environment**. We are proud as European Commission that we have contributed to a better knowledge of the deep-sea environment by supporting a number of research projects, such as Midas, Blue Mining, Vamos, Blue Nodules or Robust. If you look through the results of these project they have definitely helped to improve the understanding of the possible environmental impacts of deep-sea mining activities and how to best mitigate these impacts.
- We have also participated in the development of **Regional Environmental Management Plans in the North Atlantic**. Such plans are fundamental tools to safeguard the marine environment/ And they should be in place in the relevant areas before exploitation activities can start.
- However, the main findings of these projects show that our **knowledge** of deep-sea ecosystems, of related organisms, and of their interconnectivity and functions **remains still limited**.

- It is therefore **essential that research continues** to improve the knowledge of these vulnerable ecosystems and of the impacts of mining on them. Therefore, before any contract for exploitation is granted by the ISA, we must ensure that the effects of deep-sea mining on the marine environment have been sufficiently researched, that the risks related to a possible exploitation are understood and that the available technologies and practices will not cause serious harm to the environment.
- Now how can the ISA contribute to the sustainable development of deep-sea resources, ISA has a crucial role to play for promoting and encouraging marine scientific research in the Area, including through coordinating such research and disseminating its results. This is part of its mandate. With the preparation of the draft action plan for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development ISA is living up to its mandate. Let me also say that we are very pleased that ISA is organising a series of excellent virtual scientific workshops during the autumn and winter.
  - [On the question on collaboration on deep sea science.] Let me stress that collaboration is key to overcome our knowledge gaps. As our past Commissioner always said: we know more about the moon than we know about the ocean which covers 70% of the earth surface. Overcoming this knowledge gap cannot be done by one organisation alone, by one country alone or by one scientific discipline alone.
  - On the European Commission side we are committed to continue to invest in ocean research, to raise awareness of the ocean's importance and to develop knowledge and solutions on a range of issues, and this through **collaboration**.
  - For instance, we are interested to work with ISA on the **Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative**. A fantastic initiative that aims at describing and characterising one thousand new species from our oceans.
- Another possible area of cooperation could be the development by ISA of a **robust monitoring and supervising system for activities taking place in the Area**. This would include the development of in situ instruments and tools, connected to the surface and by satellite. We firmly believe that before any exploitation starts it will be key to have such a system fully operational.
- Let me finish by saying **Knowledge and Science** is what we need to understand better the effects and risks of seabed exploitation on the deep-sea ecosystems and whether practices and technologies for the exploitation of deep-sea minerals are safe; and this before we start these activities.
- We welcome therefore the draft action plan by ISA in support of this important United Nations Decade of Ocean Science; I am convinced that its strategic research priorities will allow progress on all fronts.
- We are looking forward to working with ISA on its implementation and to making the UN Decade on Ocean science for Sustainable Development a success.
- Thank you very much for your attention and thanks again, Secretary General, for inviting the European Commission to this important event.