



Legal and Technical Commission

Distr.: General
10 February 2022

Original: English

Twenty-seventh session

Legal and Technical Commission session, part I

Kingston, 14–18 March 2022

Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

**Status of the relinquishment of areas under contracts
for exploration**

Request by the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources to defer relinquishment of part of its contract area

Note by the Secretariat

I. Background

1. The contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides between the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR) and the International Seabed Authority was signed on 6 May 2015.
2. Pursuant to regulation 27 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area, BGR is required to relinquish at least 50 per cent of the original contract area allocated to it by 6 May 2023, being the end of the eighth year from the date of the contract.
3. By a letter dated 15 December 2020 addressed to the Secretary-General, BGR requested a deferment of the schedule of relinquishment of its contract area until the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is officially declared over by the World Health Organization and BGR can resume its exploration work without restrictions.

II. Justification of the contractor for the deferment of relinquishment

4. BGR explained that it had planned annual cruises for the coming years that were necessary to fulfil its programme of activities. Owing to the pandemic, an exploration cruise scheduled from 12 October to 4 December 2020 had been cancelled by the German Research Fleet Coordination Centre. The cruise (INDEX2020) was to concentrate on the exploration of the contractor's clusters Nos. 2 and 3 around the Central Indian Ridge and clusters Nos. 8, 9 and 10 around the South-East Indian Ridge. The planned programme included exploring for and identifying inactive

* ISBA/27/LTC/L.1.



sulphide sites and conducting a detailed survey of oceanographic, sedimentological and biological parameters in the water column and from the ocean floor. It also included documenting the regional and local biodiversity in the aforementioned clusters. BGR added that cruises scheduled for 2021 and 2022 had similar exploration objectives in the remaining clusters, and that cruises planned thereafter were to focus on the detailed investigation of selected hydrothermal fields, including increased efforts for sub-seafloor investigations with geophysical methods and drilling.

5. BGR clarified that, because of the cancellation of cruise INDEX2020, it had not been able to fulfil its programme of activities for 2020. It also noted that the limited availability of suitable vessels or their reduced operational range resulting from pandemic-related restrictions, as well as the reduction of on-board personnel owing to health safety plans, remained a challenge for the fulfilment of its activities.

6. The request by BGR is based on paragraph 6 of regulation 27, which provides that the Council may, at the request of the contractor, and on the recommendation of the Legal and Technical Commission, in exceptional circumstances, defer the schedule of relinquishment, and that such exceptional circumstances must be determined by the Council and must include, inter alia, consideration of prevailing economic circumstances or other unforeseen exceptional circumstances arising in connection with the operational activities of the contractor.

III. Review by the Legal and Technical Commission

7. Pursuant to paragraph 6 of regulation 27, the Secretary-General notified BGR that its request would be placed on the agenda of the following meeting of the Legal and Technical Commission for consideration and recommendation to the Council.

8. The Commission is invited to consider the request by BGR for a deferment of its relinquishment, taking into consideration the justification provided by the contractor and the prevailing situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to make a recommendation to the Council, as provided for in paragraph 6 of regulation 27.
