



## Council

Advance Unedited Version  
29 February 2024

English only

---

### Twenty-ninth session

Council session, part I

Kingston, 18-29 March 2024

Item 7 of the provisional agenda\*

**Status of the contracts for exploration and related matters,  
including information on the periodic reviews of the  
implementation of approved plans of work for exploration**

## **Status of contracts for exploration and related matters, including information on the periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work for exploration**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### **I. Status of contracts for exploration and related matters**

1. Contracts currently pertain to each of the three mineral resources for which the International Seabed Authority has adopted regulations on prospecting and exploration. These are polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides, and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts.
2. As of 31 January 2024, 30 contracts<sup>1</sup> for exploration are in force, of which 19 are for exploration for polymetallic nodules, 7 are for exploration for polymetallic sulphides and 4 are for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts. For each mineral resource, a complete list, containing the name of the contractor, the sponsoring State or States, if applicable, the general location of the exploration areas and the dates of entry into force and date of extension, if applicable, and expiry of each contract, is provided in annex I to the present report.
3. An update regarding the ongoing discussion between the Secretary General and Companhia de Pesquisa de Recursos Minerais S.A. (CPRM) has been prepared for consideration by the Legal and Technical Commission.

---

\* [ISBA/29/C/L.1](#)

<sup>1</sup> The contract with Companhia de Pesquisa de Recursos Minerais S.A. (CPRM) is excluded.

## **II. Periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work for exploration**

4. In accordance with the regulations on exploration and the standard clauses of contracts for exploration<sup>2</sup>, the contractor and the Secretary-General are to undertake jointly a periodic review of the implementation of a plan of work for exploration at intervals of five years. The Secretary-General may request the contractor to submit such additional data and information as may be necessary for the purposes of the review. In the light of the review, the contractor is required to make such adjustments to its plan of work as are necessary and to indicate its programme of activities for the following five-year period, including a revised schedule of expected yearly expenditure. The Secretary-General is to report on the review to the Legal and Technical Commission and the Council. The Secretary-General is to indicate in the report whether any observations transmitted to him by States parties to the Convention concerning the manner in which the contractor has discharged its obligations under the regulations relating to the protection and preservation of the marine environment were taken into account in the review.

5. To implement these provisions, the Secretary-General consults with the Legal and Technical Commission on the content of periodic review reports submitted by contractors (in-session or intersessionally depending on the timing of the reports). The periodic report serves as a checkpoint against which to evaluate the progress of exploration work, submission of data by the contractor and overall consistency of planned activities with the approved plan of work for exploration. Comments and suggestions made by the Commission will then be taken into account in discussions between the Secretary-General and the contractor to make adjustments to the proposed programme of activities as may be necessary. The programme of activities is then incorporated into the contract as a revised schedule.

6. Between February 2023 and February 2024, five periodic review reports were submitted and reviewed, namely the periodic review of the implementation of the plans of work of: (i) China Minmetals Corporation (CMC), (ii) China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA), (iii) Government of Poland, (iv) Government of the Republic of Korea, and (v) Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC), of which the review of (i) – (iv) have been completed whilst (v) will require the input of members of the Commission and is expected to be completed by the end of March 2024.

7. Annex II to the present report provides a breakdown of the status of periodic reviews, including those due in 2024.

## **III. Extensions of contracts for exploration**

8. Progress on the preparation of the extension agreement for the extension of the contract for exploration for polymetallic nodules between the Authority and JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya has been made<sup>3</sup> and the signing is expected to take place in the margins of the first part of the twenty-ninth session.

## **IV. Status of relinquishments**

9. Contractors are required to relinquish parts of the areas allocated for exploration in accordance with the provisions of regulation 27 of the regulations on prospecting and

---

<sup>2</sup> See regulation 28 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic nodules in the Area (ISBA/19/C/17, annex, and ISBA/20/A/9), regulation 30 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area (ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1, annex), regulation 30 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area (ISBA/18/A/11, annex) and standard clause 4.4 of the contracts for exploration.

<sup>3</sup> (ISBA/28/C/3, para15).

exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area<sup>4</sup> and regulation 27 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area<sup>5</sup> in respect of the relinquishment from the original contract area for those resources. The mechanisms for relinquishing the area are guided by recommendations issued by the Commission<sup>6</sup>, which are used by the contractors to prepare their relinquishment reports and maps and by the secretariat to evaluate the contractors' reports. The outcomes of the evaluation are then issued by the secretariat as a conference room paper for the Commission and as a working document for the Council, in which both bodies are requested to take note of the secretariat's conclusions.

10. Through its decision ISBA/27/C/39 of 26 July 2022, the Council granted the request by the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (Ifremer) for deferral of relinquishment of areas under its contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides by one year. Accordingly, the schedule of the first relinquishment of at least 50 per cent of the original contract area allocated was set to 18 November 2023 and the second relinquishment of at least 75 per cent of the original contract area allocated to it to 18 November 2025.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, in October 2023 Ifremer submitted to the Secretary-General a report pertaining to the first relinquishment. A separate note by the secretariat on this matter has been prepared for consideration by the Commission.

11. As of 31 January 2024, Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC) has yet to submit to the Secretary-General a report on its second relinquishment for the area allocated to it under the exploration contract for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts.

12. Annex III to the present note shows the schedule and status of relinquishment of areas under contracts for exploration.

## V. Periodic Review Report Template

13. In 2018, the Legal and Technical Commission created a template to be used by contractors to prepare their periodic reports. The template has been created to allow the contractors to provide more analytical and useful information such as conducting gap analyses and indicating how these gaps would be bridged in the next period. It has been regularly circulated by the secretariat to contractors who are preparing their five-year periodic review reports. However, it has been noticed in the past 2 years that some contractors have reverted to using the annual report format for submitting their five-year reports. The template was not issued as an official document with a symbol.

## VI. Recommendations

14. The Council is invited to take note of the status of the contracts for exploration, the information on the periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work, status of relinquishment, and the progress of extension agreements.

15. The Council is further invited to consider issuing the five-year periodic review report template as an official reporting template for contractors to use in preparing their periodic review reports.

---

<sup>4</sup> ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1, annex.

<sup>5</sup> ISBA/18/A/11, annex.

<sup>6</sup> ISBA/25/LTC/8.

<sup>7</sup> [ISBA/27/C/39](#)

## Annex 1

### Status of approved contracts for exploration

#### A. Contracts for exploration for polymetallic nodules

	<b>Contractors</b>	<b>Date of entry into force</b>	<b>Sponsoring State(s)</b>	<b>General location of the exploration area</b>	<b>Date of expiry</b>
1	Interoceanmetal Joint Organization	29 March 2001 29 March 2016 <sup>8</sup> 29 March 2021 <sup>9</sup>	Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechia, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	28 March 2016 28 March 2021 28 March 2026
2	JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya	29 March 2001 29 March 2016 <sup>1</sup> 29 March 2021 <sup>2</sup>	Russian Federation	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	28 March 2016 28 March 2021 28 March 2026
3	Government of the Republic of Korea	27 April 2001 27 April 2016 <sup>1</sup> 27 April 2021 <sup>2</sup>	NA <sup>10</sup>	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	26 April 2016 26 April 2021 26 April 2026
4	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	22 May 2001 22 May 2016 <sup>1</sup> 22 May 2021 <sup>2</sup>	China	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	21 May 2016 21 May 2021 21 May 2026
5	Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd.	20 June 2001 20 June 2016 <sup>1</sup> 20 June 2021 <sup>2</sup>	Japan	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	19 June 2016 19 June 2021 19 June 2026
6	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	20 June 2001 20 June 2016 <sup>1</sup> 20 June 2021 <sup>2</sup>	France	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	19 June 2016 19 June 2021 19 June 2026
7	Government of India	25 March 2002 25 March 2017 <sup>11</sup> 25 March 2022 <sup>12</sup>	NA	Central Indian Ocean Basin	24 March 2017 24 March 2022 24 March 2027
8	Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	19 July 2006 19 July 2021 <sup>13</sup>	Germany	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	18 July 2021 18 July 2026
9	Nauru Ocean Resources Inc.	22 July 2011	Nauru	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	21 July 2026
10	Tonga Offshore Mining Limited	11 January 2012	Tonga	Clarion-Clipperton	10 January 2027

<sup>8</sup> First five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-second session (2016)

<sup>9</sup> Second five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-sixth session (2021)

<sup>10</sup> NA – Not applicable

<sup>11</sup> First five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-third session (2017)

<sup>12</sup> Second five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-seventh session (2022)

<sup>13</sup> First five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-sixth session (2021)

				Fracture Zone (reserved area)	
11	Global Sea Mineral Resources NV	14 January 2013	Belgium	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	13 January 2028
12	UK Seabed Resources Ltd.	8 February 2013	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	7 February 2028
13	Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd.	19 January 2015	Kiribati	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	18 January 2030
14	Ocean Mineral Singapore Pte. Ltd.	22 January 2015	Singapore	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	21 January 2030
15	UK Seabed Resources Ltd.	29 March 2016	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	28 March 2031
16	Cook Islands Investment Corporation	15 July 2016	Cook Islands	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	14 July 2031
17	China Minmetals Corporation	12 May 2017	China	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	11 May 2032
18	Beijing Pioneer Hi-Tech Development Corporation	18 October 2019	China	Western Pacific Ocean	17 October 2034
19	Blue Minerals Jamaica Ltd	4 April 2021	Jamaica	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	3 April 2036

## B. Contracts for exploration for polymetallic sulphides

	<b>Contractors</b>	<b>Date of entry into force</b>	<b>Sponsoring State(s)</b>	<b>General location of the exploration area</b>	<b>Date of expiry</b>
1	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	18 November 2011	China	South-west Indian Ridge	17 November 2026

2	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	29 October 2012	NA	Mid-Atlantic Ridge	28 October 2027
3	Government of the Republic of Korea	24 June 2014	NA	Central Indian Ocean	23 June 2029
4	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	18 November 2014	France	Mid-Atlantic Ridge	17 November 2029
5	Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	6 May 2015	Germany	Central Indian Ridge and South-east Indian Ridge	5 May 2030
6	Government of India	26 September 2016	NA	Indian Ocean Ridge	25 September 2031
7	Government of Poland	12 February 2018	NA	Mid-Atlantic Ridge	11 February 2033

### C. Contracts for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts

	<b>Contractors</b>	<b>Date of entry into force</b>	<b>Sponsoring State(s)</b>	<b>General location of the exploration area</b>	<b>Date of expiry</b>
1	Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security	27 January 2014	Japan	Western Pacific Ocean	26 January 2029
2	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	29 April 2014	China	Western Pacific Ocean	28 April 2029
3	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	10 March 2015	NA	Magellan Mountains in the Pacific Ocean	9 March 2030
4	Government of the Republic of Korea	27 March 2018	NA	East of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific Ocean	26 March 2033

## Annex II

### Breakdown of the status of periodic reviews

#### A. Periodic reviews either completed or in progress.

	<b>Contractors</b>	<b>Type of resource</b>	<b>Expiration of 5-year period<sup>14</sup></b>	<b>Status</b>
1	China Minmetals Corporation	Polymetallic Nodules	11 May 2022	Completed
2	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	Polymetallic sulphides	17 November 2021	Completed
3	Government of the Republic of Korea	Cobalt-rich crusts	26 March 2023	Completed
4	Government of Poland	Polymetallic sulphides	11 February 2023	Completed
5	Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security	Cobalt-rich crusts	26 January 2024	In progress

#### B. Periodic reviews due in 2024

	<b>Contractors</b>	<b>Type of resource</b>	<b>Expiration of 5-year period<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Status</b>
1	Global Sea Mineral Resources NV	Polymetallic Nodules	13 January 2023	Report due by 31 March 2024 <sup>15</sup>
2	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	Cobalt-rich crusts	28 April 2024	Report due by 28 January 2024
3	Government of the Republic of Korea	Polymetallic sulphides	23 June 2024	Report due by 23 March 2024
4	Beijing Pioneer Hi-Tech Development Corporation	Polymetallic Nodules	17 October 2024	Report due by 17 July 2024

<sup>14</sup> Not later than 90 days prior to the expiration of each five-year period from the date on which the contract enters into force, the contractor and the Secretary-General shall jointly undertake a review of the implementation of the plan of work for exploration under the contract (sect. 4.4 of the standard clauses for exploration contract (ISBA/19/C/17, annex IV, ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1, annex 4, and ISBA/18/A/11, annex IV))

<sup>15</sup> Refer to paragraph 11 of ISBA/25/C/9, Status of contracts for exploration and related matters, including information on the periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work for exploration.

5	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	Polymetallic sulphides	17 November 2024	Report due by 17 August 2024
6	Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd.	Polymetallic Nodules	18 January 2025	Report due by 18 October 2024
7	Ocean Mineral Singapore Pte. Ltd.	Polymetallic Nodules	21 January 2025	Report due by 21 October 2024
8	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	Cobalt-rich crusts	9 March 2025	Report due by 9 December 2024

---



## Annex III

### Schedule and status of relinquishments of areas under contracts for exploration

#### A. Contracts for exploration for polymetallic sulphides

<b>Contractors</b>	<b>1st relinquishment 50% of original contract area – in year 8</b>	<b>2nd relinquishment 75% of original contract area –</b>
1 Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	Completed	Completed <sup>16</sup>
2 Government of the Republic of Korea	Completed	Deferred to 31 December 2026 <sup>17</sup>
3 Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	Completed	Deferred to 18 November 2025 <sup>18</sup>
4 Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	Deferred to 6 May 2024 <sup>19</sup>	Deferred to 6 May 2026 <sup>4</sup>
5 Government of India	25 September 2024	25 September 2026
6 Government of Poland	11 February 2026	11 February 2028

<sup>16</sup> Council decision [ISBA/28/C/7](#).

<sup>17</sup> Council decision [ISBA/28/C/4](#).

<sup>18</sup> Council decision [ISBA/27/C/39](#).

<sup>19</sup> Council decision [ISBA/27/C/19](#).

#### B. Contracts for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts

<b>Contractors</b>	<b>1st relinquishment 50% of original contract area – in year 8</b>	<b>2nd relinquishment 75% of original contract area –</b>
1 Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security	Completed	27 January 2024 <sup>5</sup>
2 China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	Completed	28 April 2024
3 Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	Completed <sup>6</sup>	09 March 2025
4 Government of the Republic of Korea	26 March 2026	26 March 2028

<sup>5</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> relinquishment report has yet to be submitted by JOGMEC.

<sup>6</sup> Council decision [ISBA/28/C/19](#).