

THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY AT A GLANCE



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The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1994 Agreement

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an autonomous international organization that was established in 1982 under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the subsequent Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of UNCLOS (1994 Agreement).

UNCLOS set aside the Area, defined as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, and its mineral resources as the common heritage of humankind (**Figure 1**).

Under UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement, ISA is designated as the organization through which States Parties to UNCLOS organize and control mineral resources-related activities in the Area. ISA has the exclusive mandate to manage the Area and its mineral resources for the benefit of humankind on the basis of the principles set out in UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement.

In pursuance of this exclusive mandate, the responsibilities and associated competences assigned to ISA by UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement include to:

- regulate the conduct of all activities of exploration for and exploitation of deep-sea minerals in the Area, including taking necessary measures to ensure effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from such activities and ensuring the equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits derived from activities in the Area (UNCLOS, Article 145)
- promote and encourage marine scientific research (MSR) concerning the Area and its resources, as well as coordinate and disseminate the results of research and analysis when available, with particular emphasis on research related to the environmental impact of activities in the Area (UNCLOS, Article 143 (2))
- organize the transfer of technology and build the capacity of developing States and technologically less advanced States (UNCLOS, Article 144)
- distribute to States Parties payments or contributions in-kind derived from the exploitation of non-living resources of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles (UNCLOS, Article 82 (4)).

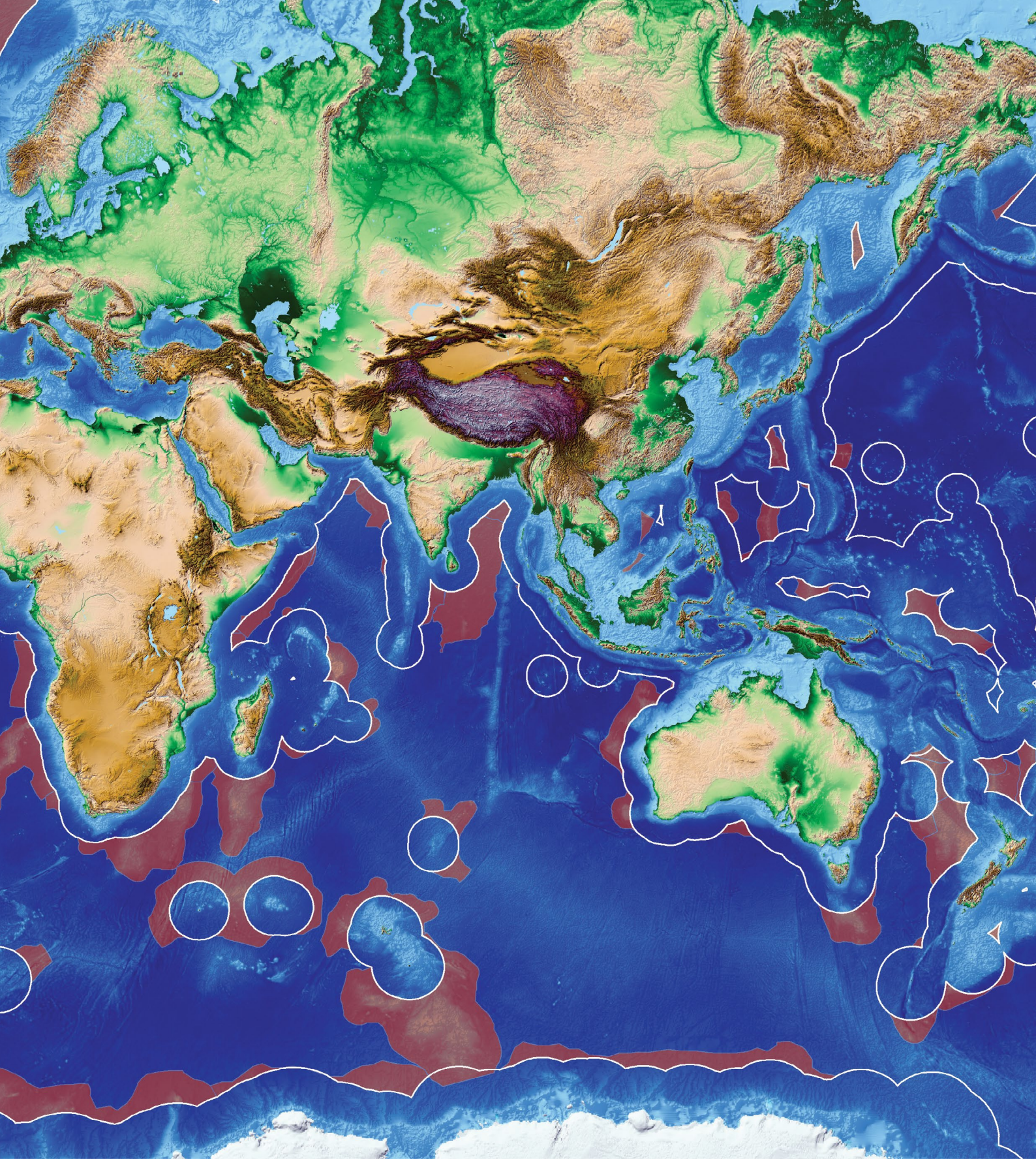
The Area and maritime zones under UNCLOS

The Area is defined as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction (UNCLOS, Article 1(1)). The establishment of the exact geographic limits of the Area depends on the establishment by States of the outer limits of their national jurisdiction, including the delineation of the continental shelf extending beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline of the territorial sea.

Coastal States must provide charts or lists of geographical coordinates of points indicating the outer limits of national

jurisdiction and, in the case of those indicating the outer limit lines of the continental shelf, deposit a copy of such charts or lists with the ISA Secretary-General (UNCLOS, Article 84(2)).

So far, 16 members of ISA have deposited such charts and lists with the Secretary-General, namely: Australia, Cabo Verde, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, France (with respect to Guadeloupe, Guyana, the Kerguelen Islands, Martinique, New Caledonia, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam and Réunion), Ghana, Ireland, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Niue, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Senegal and Tuvalu.

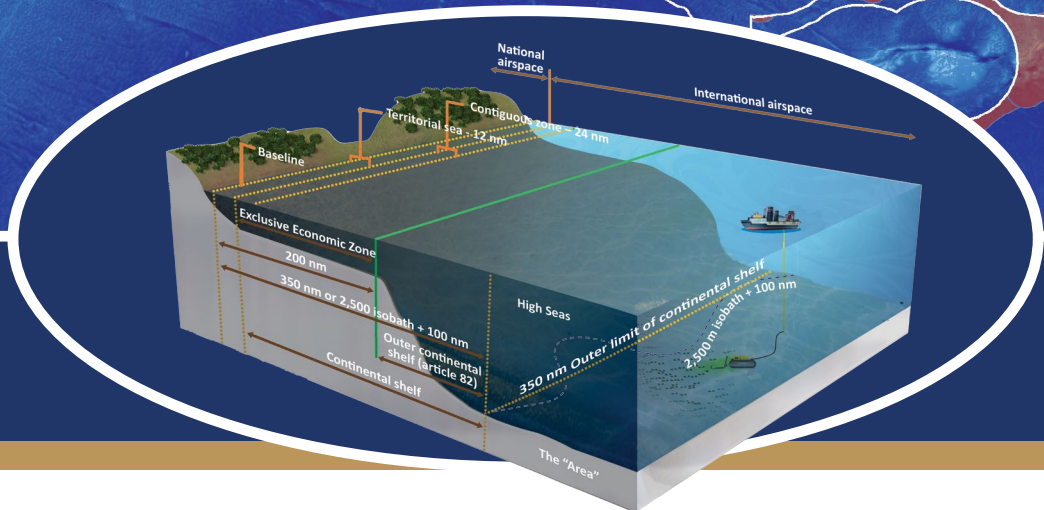


Approximate extent of 200 nm calculated from the baseline. For distance reference only. Does not purport to support any maritime claim, nor the actual limits of any maritime zone.

Figure 1. The Area and maritime zones under UNCLOS



The Area is defined as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.



Strategic Plan and High-Level Action Plan

The Assembly adopted the Strategic Plan of ISA for the period 2019-2023 at its 24th session in July 2018.¹ The plan includes nine strategic directions that aim to guide the work of ISA in the context of global challenges towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Figure 2).

The Assembly adopted the corresponding High-Level Action Plan in July 2019.² It provides an overview of the key priorities and high-level actions needed to achieve the strategic objectives of the organization.

ISA's core strategic framework was further reinforced with the adoption of the Action Plan of ISA in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (MSR Action Plan, 2020)³ and the ISA Capacity development strategy (2022)⁴ to address the priority needs identified by its Members.

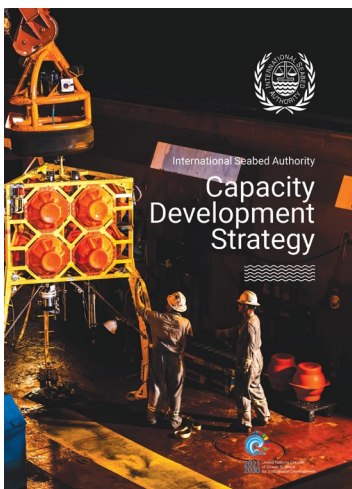
At its 28th session, the Assembly was presented with a draft Strategic Plan for the period 2024-2028, which was informed by the implementation of the plan for the period 2019-2023 as well as the findings of a review carried out by a consultant and the comments and suggestions received from Members, observers and contractors.⁵

Taking into account the requests of some delegations to allow for additional time for consideration of the draft Strategic Plan while ensuring stability in the work of ISA, the Assembly decided to extend the Strategic Plan 2019-2023 by two years and requested the Secretary-General to review the High-Level Action Plan for 2019-2023 with a view to extending it in line with the extension of the Strategic Plan.



Figure 2. ISA's nine strategic directions

1 ISA. 2018. Decision of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority relating to the strategic plan of the Authority for the period 2019-2023 (ISBA/24/A/10).
 2 ISA. 2019. Decision of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority relating to the implementation of the strategic plan for the Authority for the period 2019-2023 (ISBA/25/A/15).
 3 ISA. 2020. Action plan of the International Seabed Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development: Report of the Secretary-General (ISBA/26/A/4).
 4 ISA. 2022. Decision of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority relating to the implementation of a programmatic approach to capacity development (ISBA/27/A/11).
 5 ISA. 2023. Consideration, with a view to adoption, of the draft strategic plan of the International Seabed Authority for the five-year period 2024-2028 Report of the Secretary-General (ISBA/28/A/7).



Action plan for marine scientific research in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science

Six SRPs

- 1 Advancing scientific knowledge and understanding of deep-sea ecosystems, including biodiversity and ecosystems functions, in the Area
- 2 Standardizing and innovating methodologies for deep-sea biodiversity assessment, including taxonomic identification and description, in the Area
- 3 Facilitating technology development for activities in the Area, including ocean observation and monitoring
- 4 Enhancing scientific knowledge and understanding of potential impacts of activities in the Area
- 5 Promoting dissemination, exchange and sharing of scientific data and deep-sea research outputs and increasing deep-sea literacy
- 6 Strengthening deep-sea scientific capacity of ISA Members, in particular developing States



Capacity development strategy

Five key result areas

- 1 Ensuring that capacity development programmes and activities are meaningful, tangible, efficient, effective and targeted at the needs of developing States as identified by them
- 2 Establishing and furthering strategic partnerships in support of capacity development
- 3 Strengthening institutional capacities through technology transfer and technical assistance
- 4 Advancing women's empowerment and leadership in deep sea related disciplines through targeted capacity development activities
- 5 Improving deep-sea literacy through better awareness and understanding of the legal regime of the Area and the role and mandate of the Authority

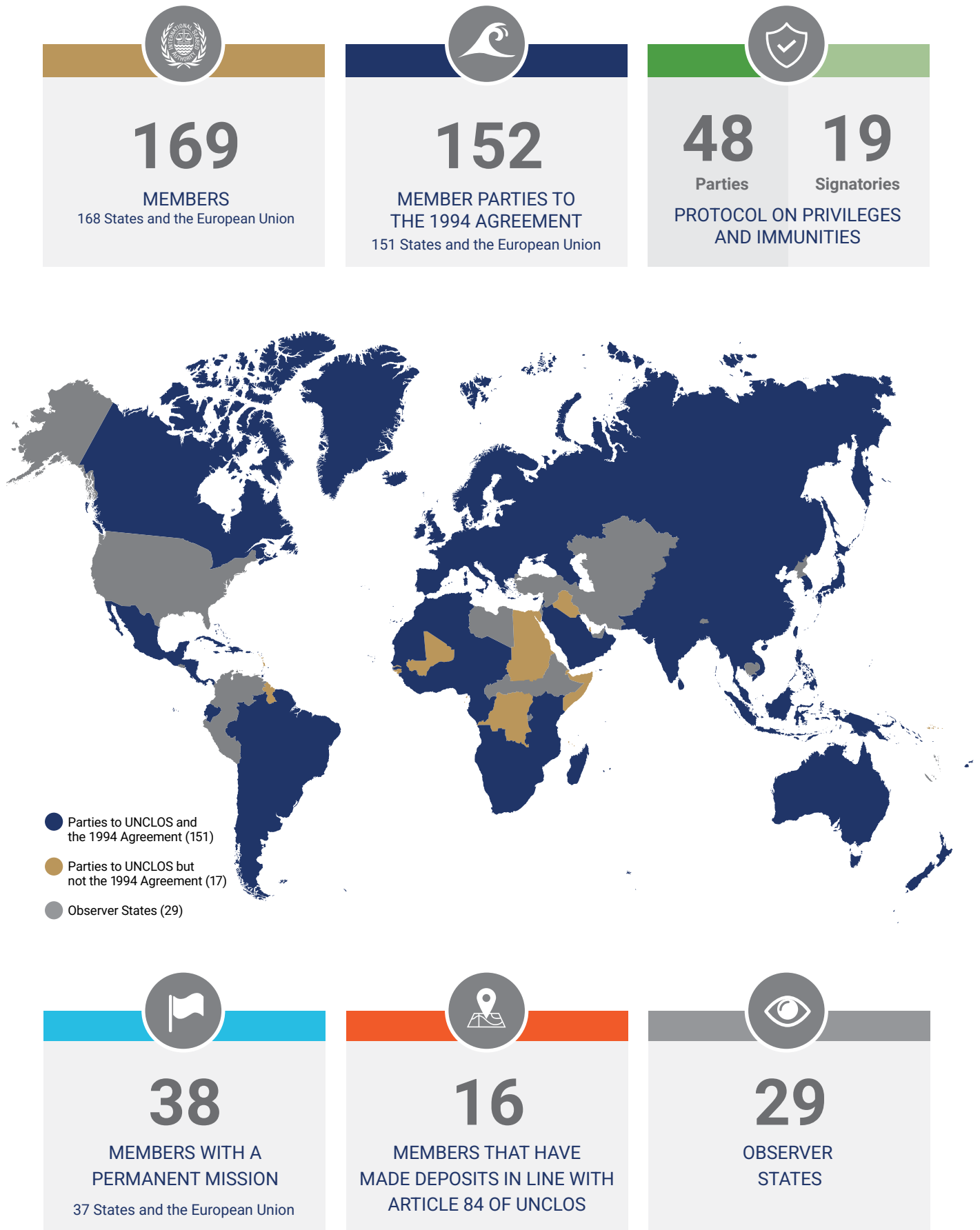


Figure 3. Overview of ISA membership

Member States

				
Albania	●	●		
Algeria	●		●	
Angola	●			
Antigua and Barbuda	●	●	●	
Argentina	●	●	●	
Armenia	●			
Australia	●			●
Austria	●	●		
Azerbaijan	●			
Bahamas	●	●		
Bahrain				
Bangladesh	●		●	
Barbados	●			
Belarus	●			
Belgium	●		●	
Belize	●			
Benin	●			
Bolivia	●			
(Plurinational State of)				
Bosnia and Herzegovina				
Botswana	●			
Brazil	●	●	●	
Brunei Darussalam	●			
Bulgaria	●	●		
Burkina Faso	●	●		
Cabo Verde	●			●
Cameroon	●	●	●	
Canada	●			
Chad	●			
Chile	●	●	●	
China	●		●	
Comoros				
Congo	●			
Cook Islands	●			●
Costa Rica	●		●	
Côte d'Ivoire	●	●		●
Croatia	●	●		
Cuba	●	●	●	
Cyprus	●		●	
Czechia	●	●		
DR Congo				
Denmark	●	●		
Djibouti				
Dominica				
Dominican Republic	●		●	
Ecuador	●			
Egypt		●		
Equatorial Guinea	●			
Estonia	●	●		
Eswatini	●			
Fiji	●			
Finland	●	●		
France*	●	●	●	●
Gabon	●		●	
Gambia				
Georgia	●	●		
Germany	●	●	●	
Ghana	●	●		●
Greece	●	●		
Grenada	●			
Guatemala	●			
Guinea	●	●		
Guinea-Bissau				
Guyana		●		
Haiti	●			
Honduras	●			
Hungary	●			
Iceland	●			
India	●	●	●	
Indonesia	●	●	●	
Iraq		●		
Ireland	●	●		●
Italy	●	●	●	
Jamaica	●	●	●	
Japan	●		●	
Jordan	●	●		
Kenya	●	●		
Kiribati	●			
Kuwait	●			
Lao People's Democratic Republic	●			
Latvia	●			
Lebanon	●			
Lesotho	●			
Liberia	●			
Lithuania	●	●		
Luxembourg	●			
Madagascar	●			
Malawi	●			
Malaysia	●			
Maldives	●			
Mali				
Malta	●	●	●	
Marshall Islands				
Mauritania	●		●	
Mauritius	●	●	●	●
Mexico	●		●	●
Micronesia	●			
Monaco	●			
Mongolia	●			
Montenegro	●			
Morocco	●			
Mozambique	●	●		
Myanmar	●			
Namibia	●	●	●	
Nauru	●		●	
Nepal	●			
Netherlands	●	●		
New Zealand	●			●
Nicaragua	●			
Niger	●			
Nigeria	●	●	●	
Niue	●			●
North Macedonia	●	●		
Norway	●	●		
Oman	●	●		
Pakistan	●	●		●
Palau	●			
Panama	●	●	●	
Papua New Guinea	●			
Paraguay	●			
Philippines	●		●	●
Poland	●	●		●
Portugal	●	●		
Qatar	●			
Republic of Korea	●		●	
Republic of Moldova	●			
Romania	●	●		
Russian Federation	●		●	
Saint Kitts and Nevis				
Saint Lucia				
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines				
Samoa	●			
Sao Tome and Principe				
Saudi Arabia	●	●		
Senegal	●	●		●
Serbia	●			
Seychelles	●			
Sierra Leone	●		●	
Singapore	●			
Slovakia	●	●		
Slovenia	●	●		
Solomon Islands	●			
Somalia				
South Africa	●		●	
Spain	●	●	●	
Sri Lanka	●			
Sudan		●		
Suriname	●			
Sweden	●			
Switzerland	●			
State of Palestine	●			
Thailand	●			
Timor-Leste	●			
Togo	●	●		
Tonga	●			
Trinidad and Tobago	●	●	●	
Tunisia	●			
Tuvalu	●			●
Uganda	●			
Ukraine	●			
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	●	●		
Tanzania	●			
Uruguay	●	●		
Vanuatu	●			
Viet Nam	●			
Yemen	●			
Zambia	●			
Zimbabwe	●		●	

* France: charts deposited with respect to Guadeloupe, Guyana, the Kerguelen Islands, Martinique, New Caledonia, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam and Réunion

Membership

All parties to UNCLOS are automatically Members of ISA (UNCLOS, Article 156(2)). As of April 2024, there are 169 parties to UNCLOS (168 States and the European Union).

Part XI of UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement are to be interpreted and applied together as a single instrument. In the event of any inconsistency between the two, the 1994 Agreement prevails (1994 Agreement, Article 2(1)). Seventeen Members of ISA became parties to UNCLOS before the adoption of the 1994 Agreement but have yet to become parties to the Agreement (Figure 3). Members of ISA that are not parties to the 1994 Agreement can participate in the work of ISA. However, becoming a party to the 1994 Agreement would remove any potential conflict and Members are strongly encouraged to become parties at the earliest opportunity.

Permanent missions

As of June 2024, 38 Members maintain permanent missions to ISA (Figure 3). They are Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, France, Gabon, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, Zimbabwe, as well as the European Union.

Since June 2023, six new permanent representatives have been accredited to ISA, namely Burkina Faso, India, Indonesia, Mauritania, Philippines and Sierra Leone.

Protocol on privileges and immunities

The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of ISA was adopted by the Assembly on 27 March 1998 and entered into force on 31 March 2003.⁶

As of 2 April 2024, the number of parties to the Protocol remains at 48. A further 10 Members have signed it (Figure 3). Those Members who have not yet become parties to the Protocol are encouraged to do so at the earliest possible opportunity.

A manual of protocol offering general guidance on the norms and practices of protocol and administrative requirements accepted and observed at the headquarters of ISA was released by the ISA Secretariat in June 2022.

Observers

ISA collaborates with key stakeholders from governments, the private sector, international and regional organizations, research institutions and academia.

As of June 2024, ISA has granted observer status to 106 entities, including 29 States non-parties to UNCLOS. In addition, 32 UN bodies and other intergovernmental organizations and 45 non-governmental organizations also have observer status, enabling them to participate in meetings of the Council and the Assembly and contribute to discussions on matters within the scope of their activities (Table 1).

In August 2023, during its 28th session, the Assembly considered and approved eight requests for observer status submitted by the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation, Te Ipukarea Society, Norwegian Forum for Marine Minerals, Arayara International Institute, Minderoo Foundation, Sustainable Ocean Alliance, International Council on Mining and Metals and Environmental Justice Foundation Charitable Trust.⁷

Bodies that may participate as observers in the Assembly are described in the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, rule 82, paragraph 1. Additional information can also be found in the guidelines for observer status of non-governmental organizations with ISA adopted by the Assembly in 2019.⁸

⁶ ISA. 2022. Manual of protocol. Available at: https://www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ISA_Manual_of_Protocol_June_2022.pdf.

⁷ ISA. 2023. Statement by the President on the work of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority at its twenty-eighth session (ISBA/28/A/18).

⁸ ISA. 2019. Decision of the Assembly on the guidelines for observer status of non-governmental organizations with the International Seabed Authority (ISBA/25/A/16).

Table 1. List of ISA observers as of June 2024

States (29)	Bodies of the UN System and other intergovernmental organizations (32)	Non-governmental organizations (45)
Afghanistan	Commonwealth	Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea
Andorra	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	African Minerals Development Centre
Bhutan	Inter-American Development Bank	Arayara International Institute
Burundi	International Atomic Energy Agency	Center for Oceans Law and Policy, University of Virginia School of Law
Cambodia	International Civil Aviation Organization	Center for Polar and Deep Ocean Development, Shanghai Jiao Tong University
Central African Republic	International Fund for Agricultural Development	China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation
Colombia	International Hydrographic Organization	Cluster maritime français
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	International Labour Organization	Committee for Mineral Reserves International Reporting Standards
El Salvador	International Maritime Organization	Conservation International
Eritrea	International Monetary Fund	Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative
Ethiopia	International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund	Deep Sea Conservation Coalition
Holy See	International Telecommunication Union	Durham University's Centre for Borders Research
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources	Earthworks
Israel	Interoceanmetal Joint Organization	Environmental Justice Foundation Charitable Trust
Kazakhstan	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO	Fish Reef Project
Kyrgyzstan	OSPAR Commission	Greenpeace International
Libya	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries	Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies
Liechtenstein	Permanent Commission for the South Pacific	InterRidge
Peru	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity	Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense
San Marino	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme	International Association of Drilling Contractors
South Sudan	The Pacific Community	International Cable Protection Committee
Syrian Arab Republic	United Nations	International Council on Mining and Metals
Tajikistan	United Nations Development Programme	International Dialogue on Underwater Munitions
Turkey	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	International Marine Minerals Society
Turkmenistan	United Nations Environment Programme	International Ocean Institute
United Arab Emirates	United Nations Industrial Development Organization	International Policy Laboratory of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology
United States of America	Universal Postal Union	Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology
Uzbekistan	World Bank	Law of the Sea Institute
Venezuela	World Health Organization	Minderoo Foundation
	World Intellectual Property Organization	Mining Standards International
	World Meteorological Organization	Norwegian Forum for Marine Minerals
	World Trade Organization	OceanCare
		Ocean North
		Ocean Society of India
		RESOLVE
		Sargasso Sea Commission
		Sasakawa Peace Foundation
		Sustainable Ocean Alliance
		Te Ipukarea Society
		The Ocean Foundation
		The Pew Charitable Trusts
		Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary
		World Ocean Council
		World Organization of Dredging Associations
		World Wildlife Fund International