DOSI intervention

Item 8 - Annual report of the Secretary-General (ISBA/29/A/2; ISBA/29/A/7; illustrated report) and
Report on the implementation of the action plan of the International Seabed Authority in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development: (ISBA/29/A/5).

Thank you Mr President,

DOSI would like to thank the Secretary-General for this detailed Report, and appreciates the progress made by the Secretariat from 2023 to 2024. Specifically, DOSI appreciates progress made on Strategic direction 4 – promote and encourage marine scientific research in the Area. DOSI particularly welcomes initiatives such as the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative, the 1000 reasons awards and the AREA2030 disclosure of bathymetric data. Advancing scientific knowledge and understanding of the deep-sea ecosystems and functions is essential to support informed decision-making processes, ecosystem-based management, and the application of the precautionary approach. DOSI appreciates the convening of threshold working groups, but notes that their slow progress reflects the difficulties that the existing knowledge gaps pose in defining these thresholds. Also, we welcome the progress made in the context of internalisation of environmental costs, and note that it highlights the many data gaps with regards to the valuation of ecosystem services. In addition, we welcome the technical study on interactions between fishing and mineral resource-related activities, but note the data gaps and specifically the potential effects on catch via mining impacts. Furthermore, DOSI notes the progress made on the development of REMPs, but we would like to warn that the lack of sufficient knowledge jeopardises their design and efficiency. For example, in the case of the CCZ the data made available so far by Contractors is still insufficient to understand ecosystems, their functioning and their services. In addition, similar scientific research efforts have not occurred for existing Areas of Particular Environmental Interests (or APEIs) meaning that the function of APEIs as protected areas for biological communities cannot be verified, resulting in it being impossible to know if they are fit for purpose.

Based on our current scientific understanding of the ocean, deep-seabed mining will result in biodiversity loss and irreversible harm to deep-sea ecosystems, including changes to the functions and services they provide. Scientists have just begun to understand biodiversity, ecosystem function, oceanographic processes and resilience in the areas targeted for deep-sea mining, with many gaps still to be filled. Thus, the international community is currently not in a position to reliably predict the extent and severity of expected impacts from commercial mining, including the plumes, contaminant release and toxicity, noise, vibration and light, how this would affect marine life, and any direct or indirect effects on ecosystem services like genetic resources, climate regulation, commercially important fisheries or other ocean users. Available tools, such as scientific models that can help to predict impact, require baseline data that are not yet adequately available, and small-scale in situ tests to verify these models' accuracies only go so far.

Scientific approaches like these take time, and so does the incorporation of the necessary scientific research to inform best environmental practices.

In short, from a scientific point of view, we know there is much to be harmed and lost in the deep Ocean; what we don't know yet, is how to protect it. We are in the middle of the current UN Decade of Ocean Science, but we are just starting to gather the scientific information required to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment. It will still take the best and collaborative scientific research to reach the UN goals for this decade of ocean science. It is essential that we do not sacrifice meeting these goals, conducting robust and comprehensive science, and adequate protection of the marine environment in the rush to complete the Mining Code

Thank you