



# Assembly

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Item 8 of the provisional agenda\*\*

**Annual report of the Secretary-General under article 166, paragraph 4, of the Convention**

## **Report of the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority under article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The present report is submitted to the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority pursuant to article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It provides information on the work of the Authority for the period from 1 August 2024 to 31 March 2025. It also provides information on the status of the Convention and related legal instruments, the status of the Area, the status of contributions to the budget of the Authority, the status of contracts for exploration in the Area, a summary of the main outcomes of the previous session of the Authority and other noteworthy information. It should be read in conjunction with the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the action plan for marine scientific research of the International Seabed Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.<sup>1</sup>

### **II. Membership of the Authority**

2. All States Parties to the Convention are ipso facto members of the Authority.<sup>2</sup> As at 31 March 2025, there were 170 Parties to the Convention (169 States and the European Union), and thus there were 170 members of the Authority. The membership has remained unchanged since San Marino became a Party to the Convention on 19 July 2024. As at 31 March 2025, there were 153 Parties to the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the

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\* Reissued for technical reasons on 22 April 2026.

\*\* ISBA/30/A/L.1.

<sup>1</sup> ISBA/30/A/4.

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with article 156, paragraph 2, of the Convention.



Sea of 10 December 1982 (1994 Agreement). This almost universal membership has strengthened the Part XI regime over the past 30 years.

3. There are 17 members of the Authority that became Parties to the Convention before the adoption of the 1994 Agreement and have yet to become Parties to it, namely Bahrain, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Egypt, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Mali, the Marshall Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia and the Sudan.

4. As provided under General Assembly resolution [48/263](#) and the 1994 Agreement, the provisions of the latter and of Part XI of the Convention are to be interpreted and applied together as a single instrument. In the event of any inconsistency between the 1994 Agreement and Part XI of the Convention, the provisions of the Agreement shall prevail. Although members of the Authority that are not Parties to the 1994 Agreement participate in the work of the Authority under arrangements based on the Agreement, becoming a Party to the 1994 Agreement would remove any incongruity that currently exists for those States. The Secretary-General encourages those States to become Parties to the 1994 Agreement at the earliest possible opportunity. The secretariat sent a note verbale to each of those States on 7 March 2025.

### **III. The Area**

5. The Area is defined in the Convention as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. Establishing the exact geographical limits of the Area thus depends on the delineation of the limits of national jurisdiction, including the delineation of the continental shelf extending beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline of the territorial sea.

6. Pursuant to article 84, paragraph 2, of the Convention, coastal States are obliged to give due publicity to charts or lists of geographical coordinates and, in the case of those showing the outer limit lines of the continental shelf, to deposit a copy of each such chart or list with the Secretary-General of the Authority. As at 31 March 2025, 17 members of the Authority had deposited such charts and lists with the Secretary-General, namely Australia, Cabo Verde, the Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, France (with respect to Guadeloupe, French Guiana, the Kerguelen islands, Martinique, New Caledonia, Reunion and the Saint-Paul and Amsterdam islands), Ghana, Ireland, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niue, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Senegal and Tuvalu.

7. The Secretary-General urges all coastal States to deposit the charts or lists of coordinates as soon as possible after the establishment of the outer limit lines of their continental shelf, up to and beyond 200 nautical miles, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Convention. Knowledge of the precise delineation of all areas of the continental shelf up to and beyond 200 nautical miles is critical to allow the establishment of the geographical limits of the Area with certainty. Each year, the secretariat sends out a note verbale requesting the deposit of such charts or lists of coordinates. The last such note was sent out on 29 January 2025.

### **IV. Permanent missions to the Authority**

8. Between June 2024 and March 2025, eight new permanent representatives were appointed and accredited to the Authority by members with permanent missions to the Authority: Cyprus, India, Italy, Mexico, Nauru, Spain, Zimbabwe and European Union.

9. In addition, between June 2024 and March 2025, the Governments of three member States appointed permanent representatives to the Authority for the first time, thereby establishing permanent missions to the Authority. On 21 June 2024, Harold Adlai Agyeman was accredited as the first Permanent Representative of Ghana to the Authority. On 27 June 2024, Hussein Athuman Kattanga was accredited as the first Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the Authority. On 29 July 2024, Filipo Tarakinikini was accredited as the first Permanent Representative of Fiji to the Authority.

10. As at 31 March 2025, a total of 42 members maintained permanent missions to the Authority: Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Fiji, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Panama, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe and European Union.

## **V. Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Seabed Authority**

11. The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Seabed Authority was adopted by the Assembly on 27 March 1998 and entered into force on 31 May 2003. As at 31 March 2025, the total number of Parties to the Protocol remained at 48: Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, Czechia, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Guyana, India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Lithuania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uruguay. A further 10 States have signed the Protocol but have yet to ratify it: Bahamas (The), Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Kenya, Malta, Namibia, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan.

12. Members of the Authority that are not yet Parties to the Protocol are strongly encouraged to take the steps necessary to become Parties to the Protocol at their earliest convenience. The secretariat sent out a note verbale to that effect on 10 February 2025.

## **VI. Administrative matters**

### **A. Secretariat**

13. The secretariat is one of the principal organs of the Authority. In accordance with article 166 of the Convention, the secretariat comprises a Secretary-General and such staff as the Authority may require. The number of established posts in the secretariat as at 31 March 2025 was 56 (33 Professional, 2 National Professional Officer and 21 General Service posts), held by staff of 21 different nationalities. The Secretary-General is committed to maintaining gender parity across the organization: as at 31 March 2025, 57 per cent of secretariat staff members were women.

14. During the reporting period, the secretariat posted 17 job openings and 6 temporary job openings on the Inspira platform, the website of the Authority and social media platforms, attracting a total of 1,363 applicants. The vacant positions are at various stages of the recruitment and onboarding processes. Ten staff members

separated from the organization at the expiration of their appointments. Twenty-nine international consultants and 50 local individual contractors were hired to support sessions, programmes and operations.

## **B. Participation in the common system of the United Nations**

15. The Authority applies the common system of salaries, allowances and other conditions of service of the United Nations and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. It subscribed to the statute of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), with effect from January 2013.

16. As a participant in the United Nations common system of organizations, the Authority contributes to and participates in the work of ICSC and utilizes common system services and tools, such as Inspira, for the classification of staff positions, recruitment, reference verification, performance management and mandatory training courses. The Authority also contributes to and uses the services of the Department of Safety and Security and the United Nations Appeals Tribunal.

## **VII. Financial matters**

### **A. Budget**

17. At its twenty-ninth session, the Assembly, following the recommendation of the Finance Committee, adopted the budget for the financial period 2025–2026 in the amount of \$26,427,000.<sup>3</sup>

### **B. Status of contributions**

18. In accordance with the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, the administrative expenses of the Authority are to be met by assessed contributions of its members until the Authority has sufficient funds from other sources to meet its administrative expenses. The scale of assessments for this purpose is based on the scale used for the regular budget of the United Nations, adjusted for differences in membership, with a ceiling assessment rate of 22 per cent and a floor assessment rate of 0.01 per cent.

19. Since 2013, the Authority has also applied a system of cost recovery whereby contractors are required to pay an annual overhead charge representing the cost of services provided to them by the Authority. For the financial period 2025–2026, overhead charges are anticipated to account for approximately 18 per cent of the revenues of the Authority.

20. As at 31 March 2025, 57 per cent of the value of contributions to the 2025 budget due from member States and the European Union had been received. As at the same date, outstanding contributions from member States for prior periods (1998–2024) amounted to \$604,854. Notices are sent regularly to member States, reminding them of the arrears. In accordance with article 184 of the Convention and rule 80 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly, a member of the Authority that is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions shall have no vote if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of contributions due from it for the preceding two years. As at 31 March 2025, the following 44 members of the Authority had been in arrears for two years or more: Angola, Bahrain, Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chad, Comoros, Congo, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti,

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<sup>3</sup> ISBA/29/A/11.

Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Iraq, Lebanon, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, North Macedonia, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Timor-Leste, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen and Zambia.

21. As at 31 March 2025, the balance of the working capital fund stood at \$756,808, against an approved level of \$825,000.

### **C. Voluntary trust fund for members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee**

22. The voluntary trust fund to cover the costs of participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee from developing countries was established in 2002. As at 31 March 2025, the total contributions to the fund over its lifetime amounted to \$1,606,837. During the reporting period, contributions were made by China (\$20,000), France (\$42,977), Ireland (\$21,440), Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (\$47,435) and the Philippines (\$28,547). As at the same date, the balance of the fund was \$17,216.

### **D. Voluntary trust fund for members of the Council**

23. At its twenty-third session in 2017, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a voluntary trust fund to support the participation of members of the Council from developing States in the additional meetings of the Council convened to work on the draft regulations for exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, ensuring inclusive participation. During the reporting period, contributions were made by Netherlands (Kingdom of the) (\$31,612) and Portugal (\$10,240). As at 31 March 2025, the total contributions to the fund over its lifetime amounted to \$244,084. As at the same date, the balance of the fund was \$3,071.

### **E. International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund**

24. The International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund was established on 3 August 2022 by the Assembly at its twenty-seventh session. This multi-donor trust fund is aimed at promoting and encouraging marine scientific research in the Area for the benefit of humankind. It is also aimed at contributing to dedicated capacity development programmes and activities aligned with the priority needs identified by developing member States of the Authority. During the reporting period, contributions to the fund were made by China (\$20,000), France (\$21,402), Ireland (\$154,586) and Monaco (\$20,414).

25. The third and fourth meetings of the Board of the Fund were held in July and November 2024, respectively. The Board approved financial support for the following projects: Women in Blue training opportunities in ocean science; From Surface to Depth: Fostering Deep-Sea Literacy in Mozambique's Early Career Ocean Professionals; Women in Science Expedition; a methodology for adaptive management of deep-sea mining sediment plumes; and the MeioScool project in partnership with the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer for enhancing capacity and knowledge-sharing in meiofauna research.

## **F. Trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the Authority**

26. The Authority receives extrabudgetary funds from member States and other donors to support activities not funded by the approved budget of the Authority. These may be one-off contributions or funds to support multi-year programmes or projects, used in accordance with the terms agreed with the donors, including reporting and audit requirements.

27. In March 2018, the Secretary-General created a multi-donor trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the activities of the Authority. The fund was established pursuant to regulation 5.5 of the Financial Regulations of the Authority and is administered in accordance with the Financial Regulations. Since its creation, the fund has raised \$2,565,178 and had a net balance of \$613,226 as at 31 March 2025. In addition, the European Union contributed \$381,352 to the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative project.

## **VIII. Satya N. Nandan Library**

28. The Satya N. Nandan Library hosts an extensive collection of resources and publications that are pivotal to understanding the legal regime of the Area. It caters to the diverse needs of members, permanent missions and researchers, offering essential support to the secretariat staff. The Library archives and distributes the official documents of the Authority and manages its publications programme. In addition, the Library has established the International Seabed Authority Digital Library (accessible at [www.isa.org.jm/satya-n-nandan-library/](http://www.isa.org.jm/satya-n-nandan-library/)). This repository houses a wealth of documents related to the Convention and publications of the Authority, with over 15,843 full-text files, 2,416 monographs, 5,631 bibliographic records and links to 50 specially curated e-resources. The Library remains committed to optimizing its resources through strategic budget management and engaging in online research, book acquisitions and collaborations with institutional partners. As a member of the United Nations System Electronic Information Acquisition Consortium alongside the Library of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, it streamlines electronic information acquisition, promotes resource management efficiencies and enhances training opportunities.

## **IX. Previous sessions of the Authority**

### **A. Twenty-ninth session**

29. The twenty-ninth session of the Assembly was held in Kingston from 29 July to 2 August 2024. There was no meeting on 1 August owing to the celebration of Emancipation Day in Jamaica, the host country of the Authority. Amara Sowa (Sierra Leone) presided as temporary President. Representatives of the Dominican Republic, Nauru and Portugal and were elected as Vice-Presidents.

30. During the twenty-ninth session, the Assembly considered the annual report of the Secretary-General, submitted in accordance with article 166, paragraph 4, of the Convention. The Assembly approved 14 requests for observer status. It adopted the extended high-level plan for the Authority for the period 2019–2025, in line with the two-year extension of the strategic plan of the Authority to cover the period 2019–2025, which had been decided by the Assembly in July 2024.

31. The Assembly decided to defer to the thirtieth session in July 2025 its consideration of the question of the periodic review of the international regime of the

Area pursuant to article 154 of the Convention. It received with appreciation the first report of the newly recruited interim Director General of the Enterprise. The Assembly adopted a decision relating to the budget of the Authority for the financial period 2025–2026. It decided not to defer to its thirtieth session its consideration of the proposal for a general policy of the Authority for the protection and preservation of the marine environment. The Assembly took note of the statement of the President of the Council during the twenty-ninth session.

32. The Assembly elected Leticia Carvalho (Brazil) as Secretary-General for a four-year term from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2028.

33. The Assembly elected 18 members to fill vacancies on the Council for a four-year term from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2028.

34. The twenty-ninth session of the Council was held in two parts: the first part from 18 to 29 March 2024 and the second part from 15 to 26 July 2024.

35. At the first part of the session, the Council elected Olav Myklebust (Norway) as President of the Council. Representatives of Brazil, India and Uganda were elected as Vice-Presidents.

36. The Council continued its work on the draft regulations as a matter of priority, in keeping with the road map endorsed in November 2022 and the Council decision of July 2023. At the first part of the session, the President of the Council presented the consolidated text of the draft regulations, as well as a suspense document, a proposal compilation and a matrix of environmental standards and guidelines.

37. During the first and second parts of the session, the Council conducted the first reading of the consolidated text, made significant progress towards addressing thematic outstanding issues, carried out crucial work in several intersessional working groups, held thematic discussions on specific aspects of the draft regulations, with the support of the Chair of the open-ended working group on the financial terms of contracts, facilitators and rapporteurs, and conducted detailed, textual discussions chaired by the President of the Council on the basis of the consolidated text.

38. During the second part of the session, the Council endorsed a revised road map for the continuation of work on the draft regulations and the associated standards and guidelines at the thirtieth session in 2025.

39. The Council approved the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and took note of: a report on the status of the contracts for exploration and periodic reviews of the implementation of plans of work for exploration; a report on cooperation with the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic; and a report on incidents in the NORI-D contract area in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone. The Council elected a new member to fill a vacancy on the Legal and Technical Commission. It also took note of: the report of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission at its twenty-ninth session; the report on the status of national legislation relating to deep seabed mining and related matters; and the reports on the relinquishment of areas under contracts for exploration with the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, with the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association and with the Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security.

40. Among the agenda items considered at the twenty-ninth session was the approval of the plan of work for exploration for polymetallic sulphides submitted by Earth System Science Organization-Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India. The Council took note of the report of the Legal and Technical Commission relating to an application for approval of a plan of work for exploration for cobalt-

rich ferromanganese crusts by Earth System Science Organization-Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India. It also took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the decision of the Council in 2023 relating to the reports of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission and of the first report of the interim Director General of the Enterprise. It further took note of the report of the Finance Committee and adopted a decision relating to the budget of the Authority for the financial period 2025–2026 and the scale of assessments for contributions to the budget of the Authority for the same financial period. The Council proposed to the Assembly a list of candidates for the election of the Secretary-General.

## **B. First part of the thirtieth session of the Council**

41. During the first part of the thirtieth session, in March 2025, the Council elected Duncan Muhumuza Laki (Uganda) as the President. Representatives of Brazil, France and Singapore were elected as Vice-Presidents.

42. In line with the revised road map, endorsed by the Council on 26 July 2024 (ISBA/29/C/9/Add.1, annex III) to guide its work during the thirtieth session and the President's briefing note of 28 January 2025, the President of the Council presented the revised consolidated text of the draft regulations and the revised suspense document, both released on 29 November 2024, and the updated compilation of proposals, released on 5 December 2024. The President also suggested working modalities for the first part of the thirtieth session.

43. The Council focused its work on the draft exploitation regulations and made substantial progress, reaching draft regulation 55. Separately, working groups met informally during the morning and lunch breaks. A thematic discussion was conducted on an outstanding conceptual topic. The Council engaged in a high-level discussion on standards and guidelines, as foreseen in the revised road map, using a list of standards and guidelines that had been prepared by the secretariat at the request of some delegations.

44. The Council welcomed a proposal presented by the President of an additional modality of work, namely the establishment of a group of friends of the President. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the intersessional work would be continued and that, at the following meeting, in July 2025, work would continue with a view to completing the reading of the revised consolidated text and the discussion on the standards and guidelines.

45. The Council considered an item entitled "Further consideration of actions that the Council may take if an application were to be submitted before the Council has completed the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation", under which a delegation presented an explanatory non-Paper entitled "Proposed procedure for consideration and provisional approval of applications for plans of work for exploitation under paragraph 15 (c) of the 1994 Agreement".

46. The Council approved the deferral of the schedule of the second relinquishment regarding the contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides of the Government of India.

47. The Secretary-General informed the Council about the announcement made on 27 March 2025 by The Metals Company that its subsidiary had initiated the process of applying for commercial recovery permits under the United States of America Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act of 1980. Full support was expressed for the exclusive jurisdiction of the Authority and for the development by the Authority of the regulations on exploitation, in accordance with the Convention and the 1994 Agreement.

## X. Operationalization of the Enterprise

48. Very significant work continues to be undertaken towards the operationalization of the Enterprise in line with the step-by-step process envisioned in the 1994 Agreement.

49. The Enterprise is the organ of the Authority entrusted with carrying out activities in the Area directly, including the transporting, processing and marketing of minerals recovered from it on behalf of the members of the Authority, subject to the directives and under the control of the Council. Once fully operational, the Enterprise will play a crucial role in facilitating the participation of developing States in mining in the Area, as it will be able to carry out such activities in the reserved areas. Under the 1994 Agreement, the secretariat, through the interim Director General of the Enterprise, carries out some functions of the Enterprise until the Council decides that the Enterprise should function independently.

50. Subsequent to his appointment as interim Director General of the Enterprise in January 2025, Eden Charles has been discharging his mandate in keeping with the provisions of the 1994 Agreement as well as other functions directed by the Council and which fall under the terms of reference of his employment. These include the functions listed under section 2 of the annex to the 1994 Agreement, as well as participation in, inter alia: the meetings of the Council as part of the negotiations of the draft regulations, other meetings of the plenary of the Council and working groups established by that body; informal intersessional working groups; bilateral meetings involving stakeholders, including sponsoring States and contractors, at headquarters and externally; and meetings of the Assembly. Mr. Charles presented his first report to the Council and the Assembly during the twenty-ninth session of the Authority.<sup>4</sup>

51. Based at the headquarters of the Authority, the interim Director General reports administratively to the Secretary-General while being accountable to both the Council and the Assembly. The interim Director General will present his second report to the Council and the Assembly during the thirtieth session of the Authority, in July 2025.

## XI. Prospecting and status of contracts for exploration

52. With reference to prospecting conducted by Argeo Survey AS (Argeo) in April 2023 at the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, pursuant to regulation 4 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area, the Legal and Technical Commission took note of the 2024 annual report submitted by Argeo during the first part of its thirtieth session. All data collected were provided to the Authority. No additional surveys were conducted by Argeo in 2024.

53. As at 31 March 2025, 30 contracts for exploration were in force (19 for polymetallic nodules, 7 for polymetallic sulphides and 4 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts). Each contractor is required to submit an annual report to the Secretary-General by no later than 31 March each year. The report covers its programme of activities under the contract. For the year 2024, 30 annual reports in relation to 30 exploration contracts have been received by the secretariat. In fulfilment of their obligation to provide and fund training programmes, contractors provided 83 new training opportunities during the reporting period.

54. Contractors are also required to submit five-year periodic reports on their activities. Between July 2024 and April 2025, five periodic review reports were submitted by Beijing Pioneer Hi-Tech Development Corporation (contract for

<sup>4</sup> [ISBA/29/A/6-ISBA/29/C/12](#).

exploration of polymetallic nodules), Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (contract for exploration of polymetallic sulphides), Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd. (contract for exploration of polymetallic nodules), Ocean Mineral Singapore Pte. Ltd. (contract for exploration of polymetallic nodules) and Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (contract for exploration of polymetallic sulphides). These periodic reports are under evaluation, with an anticipated completion date of July 2025.

55. During the reporting period, the Compliance Assurance and Regulatory Management Unit of the secretariat conducted two inspections. The first inspection was conducted for Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd. to assess the contractor's activities against its contract for the second five-year period, and to obtain information on how the contractor had addressed the questions and recommendations of the Legal and Technical Commission following the review of its annual reports.

56. The second inspection was carried out for the three contracts of the Government of the Republic of Korea and the main purpose was to assess performance in specific areas, such as annual reporting, responses to the questions and recommendations of the Legal and Technical Commission, technology development, data management and future exploration strategies.

57. At its meeting in March 2025, the Legal and Technical Commission reviewed responses from the eight contractors identified at its previous session as requiring specific attention. It noted that, while some contractors had provided satisfactory responses, for others, further clarification and review was required. To that end, the relevant contractors will be invited, through the secretariat and following the modalities set out in [ISBA/29/LTC/6](#), to a virtual exchange of views with the Commission in May 2025. The objective is to facilitate a detailed exchange of views on ongoing concerns, in line with the modalities, and enhance mutual understanding and expectations regarding the implementation of contracts. The Commission will report to the Council on the outcome of the exchange of views in July 2025.

58. Since 2017, the Secretary-General has held seven annual consultative meetings with contractors to discuss issues of common interest and share best practices in deep-sea exploration. This also provides an opportunity to discuss the role of the Authority in a global context and engage the support and cooperation of contractors in the programmatic work of the Authority.

59. The seventh annual consultation was held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 September to 2 October 2024, in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Korea and the Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology. It was attended by 48 representatives of contractors. Participants discussed the ongoing work of the Council in advancing the draft regulations for exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, the identification and assessment of contractors at risk of non-compliance, and potential collaboration between the Enterprise and contractors and progress made by the Compliance Assurance and Regulatory Management Unit on contract management activities. Discussions were also held on the priorities and challenges of several contractors, data management and enhancing collaboration among contractors, training and environmental initiatives, such as the establishment of a deep-sea biobank.

60. The next annual consultation will be held in Goa, India, from 18 to 20 September 2025 and will be jointly hosted by the secretariat and the Ministry of Earth Sciences of the Government of India.

61. During the meeting of the Council in March 2025, the Secretary-General held two dialogues, one with contractors, and an inaugural dialogue with sponsoring States. Participants welcomed those initiatives by the Secretary-General. During the

Secretary-General's dialogue with contractors, concerns raised included the slow progress made in the development of the draft regulations, the need to enhance interessional work in that respect, and the need for legal clarification on contentious issues in the draft regulations. Other topics mentioned included support for contractors to engage with cable owners and contractors involved in the installation of submarine cables in the Area, the visibility of the contribution of contractors to deep-sea exploration, scientific research and technology development, and exploration contracts that were due for extension.

62. In the dialogue with sponsoring States, the highlights of the discussions included the pace of the negotiations of the draft regulations, the establishment of a structured information-sharing process between the secretariat and sponsoring States, the need to strengthen the capacity of sponsoring States to effectively fulfil their obligations and the establishment of a dedicated forum for sponsoring States to facilitate the exchange of ideas and address shared concerns.

## **XII. Collaboration with the United Nations, its specialized agencies, funds and programmes and the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention**

63. During the reporting period, the Authority continued its collaboration with the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, advancing joint efforts to enhance technological capacity in support of activities in the Area. As part of that cooperation, a technology needs assessment was undertaken for the United Republic of Tanzania. In addition, the secretariat hosted national experts and research fellows from Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania at the headquarters of the Authority in Kingston. On 5 February 2025, the Secretary-General held a bilateral meeting with the Managing Director of the Technology Bank to explore opportunities for expanding the partnership to additional countries beyond the current areas of focus.

64. The Secretary-General and the secretariat continued to collaborate with the United Nations and its specialized agencies, funds and programmes on matters of mutual interest. The Secretary-General held bilateral meetings with 19 States Parties and engaged with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the President of the General Assembly, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. In addition, the secretariat maintained exchanges with the United Nations Environment Programme, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, FAO and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The Secretary-General also held briefings and consultations with member States, regional and interest-based groups, including the African Group, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, the African Small Island Developing States Group, the Caribbean Community, the Pacific Small Island Developing States Group, and the Chairs of the Least Developed Countries Group and the Landlocked Developing Countries Group. These engagements reinforced the critical role of the Authority within the broader United Nations system and provided a platform to strengthen cooperation in fulfilling the mandate of the Authority, consistent with the Convention and international law.

65. The secretariat also continued to engage actively in the work of UN-Oceans and participated in a series of technical meetings and contributed to the regional workshops organized by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea to promote a better understanding of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the

Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction and prepare for its entry into force.

66. The secretariat actively engaged in the preparatory process of the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development by contributing to concept papers for the various ocean action panels. The secretariat will participate in a side event entitled “UN-Oceans as a mechanism to mobilize multilateral ocean action and amplify collective impacts toward the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14”.

67. The Secretary-General will participate in the first session of the Preparatory Commission for the Entry into Force of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction and the Convening of the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Agreement (4–25 April) and the thirty-fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention (23–27 June 2025). The Secretary-General will also contribute to the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which will be focused on the theme “Capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology: new developments, approaches and challenges”, and the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2025.

68. In the light of their areas of common interest, the Authority and the African Union, which is an observer to the Authority, engaged in exchanges on the formalization of their cooperation. On 29 July 2022, the Council approved the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the African Union, the signature of which is planned during the second half of 2025.

69. On 20 July 2023, the Council approved an agreement of cooperation between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Authority. As global interest in seabed resources grows, the agreement formalizes the collaboration between the two organizations and highlights their shared commitment to promoting decent work by upholding international labour standards and to ensuring that the protection of workers’ occupational safety and health in seabed-related operations remains a priority. It also contributes to the pursuit of a just transition in support of a new social contract for the maritime industry.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly important considering the current development of new technologies that may introduce new workplace hazards and risks that may not yet have been addressed by the existing international rules and standards. On 19 December 2024, during a virtual ceremony, the ILO Director General and the Secretary-General signed the agreement.

70. In the light of their many areas of common interest, the Authority and FAO engaged in exchanges on the possibility of formalizing their cooperation. On 28 March 2024, the Council approved the memorandum of understanding between the two organizations. The Council also requested the Secretary-General to sign it and ensure appropriate coordination with FAO on policy measures under each organization’s respective mandate in areas beyond national jurisdiction, to achieve its objectives. The signature is scheduled to take place at the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

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<sup>5</sup> More details can be found in International Seabed Authority, “Competencies of the International Seabed Authority and the International Labour Organization in the context of activities in the Area”, ISA Technical Study No. 26 (Kingston, 2021). Available at [www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ISA\\_Technical\\_Study\\_26.pdf](http://www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ISA_Technical_Study_26.pdf).

### **XIII. Science and policy interface**

#### **A. Regional environment management plans**

71. During the twenty-ninth session, in July 2024, the Legal and Technical Commission adopted and recommended to the Council for its consideration the draft revised standardized procedure for the development, establishment and review of regional environmental management plans (ISBA/29/C/10). During the same session, the Commission also adopted its recommendations on technical guidance for the development of regional environmental management plans in support of the standardized procedure and template.<sup>6</sup> In July 2024, the Council considered the draft revised standardized procedure, as recommended by the Commission in ISBA/29/C/10. In its decision ISBA/29/C/24, the Council invited member States and observers of the Authority to provide comments in writing within 90 days of the adoption of the decision for the Commission's consideration, and requested the Commission to submit the revised documents to the Council before the first part of the thirtieth session.

72. During its meeting in March 2025, the Legal and Technical Commission revised the standardized procedure as contained in ISBA/29/C/10, based on the written comments submitted by nine member States and two observers, including one joint submission made by three member States. The Commission recommended to the Council the consideration and adoption of the revised standardized procedure, while flagging that the document would need to be aligned with the draft regulations once adopted.

73. Regarding the development of regional environmental management plans in priority regions identified by the Council, the Authority will convene a scientific workshop in Qingdao, China, from 27 April to 1 May 2025 on the development of a regional environmental management plan for the Area of the Indian Ocean, with a focus on the mid-ocean ridges and Central Indian Ocean Basin. The workshop will be held in collaboration with the China Deep Ocean Affairs Administration, the First Institute of Oceanography of the Ministry of Natural Resources of China and the secretariat of the Indian Ocean Rim Association. Financial support was provided to five participants from member States of both the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the Authority, under the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

#### **B. Environmental thresholds**

74. During the session in March 2025, the Commission took note of the progress made in the development of environmental threshold values for toxicity, turbidity and settling of resuspended sediments, and underwater noise and light pollution by the subgroups of the intersessional expert group. The finalization of the draft report of that group will continue to be a priority for the Commission, with a view to releasing a draft for stakeholder consultations at the thirtieth session, following which all comments received will be reviewed by the Commission and reported to the Council.

#### **C. DeepData**

75. The DeepData database continues to serve as the main global online platform for sharing data about the Area. In line with the FAIR principles (findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable), DeepData offers open access to non-confidential exploration data. As at 31 March 2025, an average of 8,000 monthly visitors was

<sup>6</sup> Available at [www.isa.org.jm/documents/isba-29-ltc-8/](http://www.isa.org.jm/documents/isba-29-ltc-8/).

recorded – an increase of more than 40 per cent compared with the average of the year-earlier period ending 31 March 2024. Improving data quality remains a key priority. During the reporting period, the quality of biological records was enhanced through the addition of taxonomic data for 80 newly described species. Public understanding of DeepData was further supported through the development of an interactive dashboard and tutorial videos. Lastly, efforts to broaden access included the integration of oceanographic data from over 800 sampling stations into the Ocean InfoHub, a global data-sharing network hosted by the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange.

## **XIV. Capacity-building and training**

76. Capacity-building and training have been an integral feature of the Authority's activities since its establishment as they are fundamental to ensure the effective participation of developing States in activities carried out in the Area and in the work of the Authority. In line with its mandate under article 144 of the Convention, the Authority is committed to taking measures to acquire technology and scientific knowledge and to promote and encourage their transfer to developing countries. The Authority places strong emphasis on identifying and promoting opportunities for individuals from developing States to receive training in marine science and technology, with particular attention given to the specific needs of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The secretariat implements many programmes and activities, including national expert deployment initiatives and dedicated partnerships, such as the one established with the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries. During the reporting period, 142 experts (35 per cent of whom were women) received training through joint activities.

### **A. Deep Dive**

77. In July 2023, the Authority launched Deep Dive as a flagship initiative under the capacity development strategy, which was adopted by the Assembly during its twenty-seventh session in July 2022.<sup>7</sup> This e-learning platform has been designed to empower member States of the Authority, researchers, academics, policymakers, regulators and the general public with knowledge on the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. Since its launch, Deep Dive has achieved significant milestones, including training over 130 participants from 47 countries, achieving an 80 per cent certification rate, encouraging diverse participation and forming strategic partnerships.

78. On 1 October 2024, the secretariat launched the fifth call for applications to the Deep Dive e-learning programme. The fifth cohort of trainees commenced their programme in February 2025.

### **B. Secretary-General's Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research**

79. At an informal meeting, on 29 July 2024, the Secretary-General presented the fifth edition of the Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research to Rengaiyan Periasamy, a deep-sea benthic biologist from India, in recognition of his pioneering research, including the discovery and description of 12 new benthic species from the Mid-Indian Ocean Ridge System. In presenting the award, the Secretary-General expressed his gratitude to the Government of Monaco for its contribution in support of the Award since its inception and welcomed the contribution from Loke CCZ,

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<sup>7</sup> ISBA/27/A/11.

which had offered a berth on an exploration cruise in 2026. In addition, Mr. Periasamy will receive training on the tools and methodologies used in the development of regional environmental management plans organized by the International Seabed Authority-China Joint Training and Research Centre from 23 to 26 April 2025 and will participate in the workshop on the development of a regional environmental management plan for the Area of the Indian Ocean.

80. The nomination deadline for the sixth edition of the Secretary-General's Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research, originally set for 11 April 2025, has been postponed as the Authority undergoes a transition in leadership. This period provides an opportunity to enhance and refine the Award to ensure that it continues to reflect the evolving priorities of deep-sea scientific research and international collaboration. The Authority remains deeply committed to recognizing and supporting outstanding contributions by early-career researchers, in particular those from developing States, in advancing scientific knowledge of the deep-sea environment and promoting sustainable practices.

### **C. PROBLUE Ocean Governance Capacity-Building Programme**

81. The World Bank, with the support of PROBLUE, and in partnership with the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations, FAO, the International Seabed Authority, the Melbourne Law School, and the Centre for Maritime and Oceanic Law at the University of Nantes, has developed a set of tools and region-specific training to increase knowledge about ocean governance, treaties and their implementation in national legal frameworks. As a partner of the PROBLUE Ocean Governance Capacity-Building Programme, the secretariat participated in the fifth workshop, focused on the Asian region, which was delivered virtually in February 2025. The workshop was attended by 79 participants from 22 countries.

### **D. Women's empowerment**

82. Since 2017, the Authority has implemented a series of initiatives to support its commitment to advancing the empowerment of women and their leadership in non-traditional and emerging sectors, such as deep-sea-related disciplines, including technology, engineering, taxonomy and the blue economy. This is achieved by developing and furthering strategic partnerships with members, contractors and relevant intergovernmental and regional organizations, including the scientific community and academia. As part of the Women in Deep-Sea Research project, the women scientists in the pilot cohort of the See Her Exceed global mentoring programme are scheduled to deliver two knowledge outputs to conclude their participation in the programme in July 2025.

### **E. International Seabed Authority-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre**

83. Following the establishment of the International Seabed Authority-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre, the first training course on environmental impact assessments for activities in the Area was held from 14 to 26 September 2024. The course was implemented by the secretariat with funding from the International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund and a grant from the Government of Greece. The training course brought together 18 national experts from 12 member States.

## **F. International Seabed Authority-China Joint Training and Research Centre**

84. The International Seabed Authority-China Joint Training and Research Centre in Qingdao, China, was established by a memorandum of understanding between the Authority and China. From 23 to 27 April 2025, the Centre will host a workshop on advancing marine spatial planning in areas beyond national jurisdiction for sustainable deep-sea stewardship.

## **G. National focal points for capacity development**

85. The Secretary-General convened the fourth annual meeting of the national focal points for capacity development on 16 October 2024. The meeting provided an opportunity to review progress in the implementation of the capacity development strategy adopted in 2022 and to discuss current and planned capacity development activities. In October and November 2024, the secretariat hosted the sixth and seventh virtual certificate award ceremonies for trainees of the contractors' training programmes. A total of 62 beneficiaries from developing States received certificates, of whom 28 were women. The cohort included participants from the landlocked developing countries, least developed countries and small island developing States.

## **H. International Seabed Authority Capacity Development Alumni Network**

86. During the reporting period, the secretariat organized the first general meeting of the International Seabed Authority Capacity Development Alumni Network. The event served as a platform for engagement with former beneficiaries and facilitated linkages with International Seabed Authority partners and stakeholders. The secretariat also launched a second call for applications to the Network in November 2024, resulting in additional memberships.

## **I. Expert workshop in Antigua and Barbuda**

87. In November 2024, the secretariat, in partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy of the University of the West Indies, hosted an expert workshop in Antigua and Barbuda. The workshop, which brought together representatives of 11 Caribbean Community big ocean States, was aimed at identifying priority capacity development needs to strengthen regional participation in marine scientific research and deep-sea exploration in the Area.