



## Council

Distr.: General  
13 April 2026

Original: English

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### Thirty-first session

Council session, part I  
Kingston, 9–20 March 2026

## Statement of the President on the work of the Council of the International Seabed Authority during the first part of the thirty-first session

### I. Opening of the session

1. At the 340th meeting of the Council, on 9 March 2026, the President for the thirtieth session, Duncan Muhumuza Laki (Uganda), opened the first part of the thirty-first session. The Council met from 9 to 19 March. Friday 20 March was an official holiday (Eid al-Fitr) observed by the International Seabed Authority (see [ISBA/ST/IC/2025/8](#)).

### II. Adoption of the agenda

2. At the 340th meeting, the Council took up agenda item 2 and adopted the agenda for its thirty-first session ([ISBA/31/C/1](#)).

### III. Election of the President and Vice-Presidents of the Council

3. At its 340th meeting, the Council took up agenda item 3 and elected by acclamation Mayank Joshi (India) as President of the Council for its thirty-first session.

4. At the same meeting, under agenda item 4, the Council elected Costa Rica (Latin American and Caribbean States), Italy (Western European and other States) and South Africa (African States) as Vice-Presidents.

### IV. Report of the Secretary-General on the credentials of members of the Council

5. At the 352nd meeting, on 18 March, under agenda item 5, the Secretary-General presented the report on credentials. Credentials had been received from 33 members of the Council and notes verbales from 3 members of the Council for the purpose of accreditation.



## V. Status of the contracts for exploration and related matters

6. At the 347th meeting, on 16 March, the Council took up agenda item 7 and considered and took note of a report of the Secretary-General on the status of contracts for exploration and related matters, including information on the periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work for exploration ([ISBA/31/C/3](#)).

## VI. Consideration, with a view to approval, of applications for extension of a contract for exploration

7. At its 352nd meeting, on 18 March, the Council took up agenda item 10 and considered the report and recommendations of the Legal and Technical Commission relating to the following applications for extension of contracts for exploration: Interoceanmetal Joint Organization ([ISBA/31/C/5](#)); JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya ([ISBA/31/C/6](#)); Government of the Republic of Korea ([ISBA/31/C/7](#)); China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association ([ISBA/31/C/8](#)); Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd. ([ISBA/31/C/9](#)); and Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer ([ISBA/31/C/10](#)). At the same meeting, the Council, acting on the recommendations of the Commission, approved all applications for extension of the six contracts listed.<sup>1</sup>

## VII. Draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area

8. At its 340th meeting, on 9 March, the Council took up agenda item 11, on the consideration, with a view to adoption, of the draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. All subsequent discussions on the draft regulations were open to participation by members of the Authority and observers.

9. At the same meeting, pursuant to Council decision [ISBA/30/C/18](#), paragraph 3, the Secretary-General presented the further revised consolidated text of the draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area ([ISBA/31/C/CRP.1/Rev.2](#)) and the associated briefing note.<sup>2</sup>

10. Additionally, at the same meeting, pursuant to Council decision [ISBA/30/C/18](#), paragraph 5, the Secretary-General presented the indicative list of outstanding issues ([ISBA/31/C/CRP.4](#)). During the 340th and the 341st meetings, on 9 March, the Council examined the indicative list of outstanding issues.

11. At the 341st meeting, on 9 March, the Friends of the President group, facilitated by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, discussed the prevention of corruption. Delegations generally agreed with the proposed structure of draft regulation 40. Some delegations stressed the need for a more general policy to cover internal matters of corruption or conflicts of interest within the Authority itself.

12. At the same meeting, the Friends of the President group on the non-compliance notice, suspension and termination of exploitation contract, facilitated by the

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<sup>1</sup> Interoceanmetal Joint Organization ([ISBA/31/C/12](#)); JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya ([ISBA/31/C/13](#)); Government of the Republic of Korea ([ISBA/31/C/14](#)); China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association ([ISBA/31/C/15](#)); Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd. ([ISBA/31/C/16](#)); and Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer ([ISBA/31/C/17](#)).

<sup>2</sup> [https://isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Briefing-note-on-the-Further-Revised-Consolidated-Text-of-the-draft-Regulations-on-Exploitation-of-Mineral-resources-in-the-Area\\_v.24022026.pdf](https://isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Briefing-note-on-the-Further-Revised-Consolidated-Text-of-the-draft-Regulations-on-Exploitation-of-Mineral-resources-in-the-Area_v.24022026.pdf).

Kingdom of the Netherlands, held discussions structured around four focus questions. On the first question, concerning general comments on the revised text, a number of delegations expressed support for the revised framework on compliance and enforcement. On the second question, related to draft regulations 103 to 103 quat., delegations emphasized the importance of consistent application of the compliance strategy, with some delegations calling for further consideration of parent company liability. Support was expressed for the principle that enforcement measures should be proportionate to the nature of the non-compliance. Delegations also emphasized the need to clarify the respective roles of the Compliance Committee and the Council and the relationship with the Legal and Technical Commission, particularly with regard to emergency orders. On the last two focus questions, delegations supported the continuation of intersessional work and the inclusion of draft regulations 104 and 105 within the scope of the group, with a view to advancing draft regulations 103 to 103 quat. in a coherent manner.

13. On the morning of 10 March, the Friends of the President group on the Seabed Mining Register (draft regulation 92), facilitated by India, held an informal meeting. The types of information that should be included in such a register were a particular focus of discussion. Delegations also highlighted the need to protect the confidentiality of sensitive information.

14. On the same morning, the Friends of the President group on environmental goals and objectives, facilitated by Germany, held an informal meeting to discuss draft regulation 44 ter. Germany recalled that the text on environmental goals and objectives had originally been included in draft regulation 13 and had been subsequently established as a stand-alone draft regulation to avoid overloading draft regulation 13. Germany further noted that the topic was not new, referencing the recognition by the Legal and Technical Commission in 2019 of the importance of developing environmental goals and objectives to support the development of standards, guidelines and regional environmental management plans. A number of delegations expressed support for retaining the environmental goals and objectives within the draft regulations for the time being, particularly in the absence of a general environmental policy adopted by the Authority. Several delegations suggested that strategic environmental goals should be addressed in a separate instrument applicable to both exploration and exploitation, and that the level of detail in the current text meant that it would be more appropriate in a standard.

15. Additionally, on the same morning, the informal working group on references to regional environmental management plans, facilitated by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, held an informal meeting. Several delegations supported the proposal presented by the facilitator and expressed openness to working on that basis. Delegations also highlighted the crucial role of regional environmental management plans and expressed support for further refinement work to be conducted intersessionally.

16. On the afternoon of 10 March, the Friends of the President group on submarine cable protection, facilitated by Singapore, held an informal meeting. The first part of the discussion focused on the two alternative versions of draft regulation 31. In the original version, the contractor was entrusted with the identification of other relevant activities, whereas the Authority was assigned an active role in that regard in the alternative version. Both approaches received some support. Some delegations suggested merging them by assigning the contractor a central role in identifying other relevant activities in the marine environment with the assistance of the Authority. The second part of the discussion focused on draft regulation 31 bis on reducing the risk of damage to submarine cables and pipelines. Delegations expressed support for the structure of the draft regulation. Some delegations suggested that further details

regarding how to implement the obligations set out therein might be included in a guideline.

17. Additionally, on the same afternoon, the Friends of the President group on the environmental compensation fund (draft regulations 54 to 56), facilitated by Mexico, held an informal meeting. Delegations stressed the need to establish the fund in full compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 (1994 Agreement). Some delegations considered that, as a matter of procedure, the fund should be established by means of a draft decision rather than through the draft regulations. Furthermore, it was suggested that several details had not yet been specified in the text, such as the trustees and beneficiaries of the fund, and that it might not be appropriate to include those details in a standard.

18. Also, on the same afternoon, the informal working group on environmental management and monitoring, facilitated by Norway, met in an informal setting. The group focused on streamlining the relevant draft regulations. Council members considered issues such as the frequency with which environmental data from deep-sea mining activities should be submitted. Several delegates supported proposals under which contractors would be required to engage an independent auditor to conduct performance assessments of their environmental management and monitoring plans.

19. In an informal meeting on 11 March, the Council analysed the financial system, hearing a presentation by the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development on the updated fiscal model of the system of payment for the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. Delegations consistently raised three key issues: (a) the specific obligations applicable to the Enterprise, with reference to annex IV to the Convention; (b) the manner in which environmental externalities should be addressed (whether through a separate draft regulation or by means of a subsequent review of the payment system mechanism following the adoption of the draft regulations); and (c) the determination of the operative date triggering certain financial obligations, with proposals focusing in particular on whether that should be linked to the commencement of commercial production or to the commencement of exploitation activities.

20. During the same informal meeting, the informal working group on the equalization measure, facilitated by Australia, held discussions on draft regulation 64 bis. There was broad support for its inclusion and for its application from the commencement of commercial production, although some delegations emphasized the need to maintain the reference to the exemption applicable to the Enterprise consistent with article 10 of annex IV to the Convention.

21. Additionally, during the same informal meeting on 11 March and at the 343rd meeting of the Council on 12 March, the Friends of the President group on the review of the payment mechanism (draft regulations 81 and 82), facilitated by Canada, met. There was broad support for retaining the definition of “system of payments” contained in paragraph 1 alt. of draft regulation 81. However, no consensus was reached regarding the organ that should be responsible for making recommendations to the Council on adjustments to, or the introduction of, a new system of payments.

22. At the 342nd meeting, on 11 March, further discussions were held in relation to the financial regulations. Delegations acknowledged the general consensus on including the mechanism for profit share on the transfer of rights under draft regulation 65. Regarding incentives (draft regulation 63), the Council recognized a continuing divergence of opinions on the scope and limits of incentives, despite

several delegations expressing support for retaining the reference to the Financial Incentives Registry. As to draft regulations 64 ter and quat. on the topic of environmental externalities, some delegations supported their inclusion to ensure consideration of environmental costs; however, several delegations had yet to determine their position, given that further work was needed on the methodology, clarity and potential consolidation of the environmental costs royalties mechanism.

23. At its 343rd meeting, on 12 March, the Council discussed the outstanding issue of monopolization (draft regulations 23 and 107 and schedule). Several delegations expressed support for addressing that issue as part of the process of evaluating an application for a plan of work, while also recognizing that the current definition of monopolization in the schedule remained unresolved. Given the lack of consensus on the topic as a whole, the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago volunteered to lead a Friends of the President group to facilitate the discussion, including by developing agreeable language and a more precise definition.

24. At its 344th meeting, on 12 March, the Council continued its discussions on test mining and pilot mining (draft regulation 48 ter). The co-facilitators of the informal working group – Belgium, China and Germany – reported on intersessional work, noting an ongoing divergence of views that warranted further dialogue. They recalled their joint proposal introducing a two-phased approach, consisting of test mining followed by pilot mining. It was noted that, while exemptions from pilot mining were not considered advisable given its role as the final step before commercial production, there appeared to be a general understanding that some exemptions from test mining could be acceptable, particularly where proven technologies and robust pre-existing data existed. Several delegations noted that exemptions should be available where a contractor had already conducted equivalent testing using the same equipment in similar environmental conditions. On monitoring, the co-facilitators emphasized that both test and pilot mining must be accompanied by monitoring before, during and after each phase. Delegations expressed broad support for the two-phased approach as a means of ensuring robust environmental safeguards, while calling for greater clarity on the definitions, purposes and scales of each phase.

25. At the same meeting, the informal working group on underwater cultural heritage, co-facilitated by Brazil, Greece and the Federated States of Micronesia, met. Delegations considered the alternative text proposed by the working group for draft regulation 35 and expressed support for proceeding on that basis. It was also suggested that the group should continue to work during the intersessional period to further consider issues that required additional discussion, such as references to cultural rights and interests, the proposed establishment of an advisory group of experts and the reference to venerated sites in the draft regulations.

26. At the 345th meeting, on 13 March, and during an informal meeting on the afternoon of 17 March, the informal working group on the inspection, compliance and enforcement mechanism, facilitated by Norway, held discussions structured around two focus areas. On the first focus area, there was broad support among delegations for establishing the Compliance Committee through a Council decision, with a strong majority favouring adoption prior to, or at least simultaneously with, the adoption of the exploitation regulations. On the second focus area, concerning draft regulation 95 bis, delegations offered views on five outstanding issues: (a) the scope of the Committee's mandate, with many supporting coverage of both exploration and exploitation activities; (b) the placement of powers and functions, with most favouring a complementary approach between the Council decision and the draft regulations; (c) the interface with the Legal and Technical Commission, with delegations stressing the need to avoid overlapping mandates; (d) emergency orders, with delegations divided between those supporting the Committee's authority to act

provisionally and those cautioning that that fell within the mandate of the Commission under the Convention; and (e) Chief Inspector accountability, with a majority supporting the Chief Inspector reporting to the Compliance Committee.

27. In addition to the informal working group on the inspection, compliance and enforcement mechanism, the Council held discussions on the overarching inspection mechanism at its 346th meeting, on 13 March, and at an informal meeting in the afternoon of 16 March, focusing on draft regulations 96 and 97. There was broad support for retaining the core structure of the mechanism and for clarifying the roles and procedures associated with inspections. However, delegations expressed differing views regarding the appointment and accountability of the Chief Inspector. On the execution of inspections, many delegations supported the inclusion of both announced and unannounced inspections, with a certain degree of flexibility to allow for inspections to be conducted on-site, remotely or virtually. In respect of the nomination of inspectors, there was broad support for a mechanism by which States Parties could nominate inspectors, without the possibility of self-nomination. Overall, delegations noted the need for alignment between those draft regulations and draft regulations relating to the compliance and enforcement mechanisms.

28. On the morning of 17 March, the informal working group on closure plans, facilitated by Fiji, held an informal meeting on four guiding questions and draft regulations 59 to 61. Many delegations supported the recommencement of the group's work and the recent revision of the draft regulations. Several delegations supported and underlined the necessity of closely aligning that group's work with the work of the informal working group on environmental management and monitoring.

29. At the 349th meeting, on 17 March, the informal working group on the rights and interests of coastal States, co-facilitated by Portugal and Singapore, conducted the discussion of that outstanding issue. The co-facilitators proposed six guiding questions for consideration by the Council: (a) Who should be consulted? Several delegations expressed support for the language "potentially affected coastal States", while others preferred "adjacent coastal States"; (b) When should consultations take place? Most delegations suggested that they should take place before the applicant submitted a plan of work for exploitation; (c) Who should initiate the consultations? Most delegations agreed that consultations should be carried out with the assistance of the secretariat; (d) What matters should be covered by consultations? Delegations expressed support for the list currently provided in draft regulation 93 bis; (e) Where should consultation rules be placed within the regulatory framework? Most delegations agreed that the right to consultation should be included in the draft regulations, but expressed openness to including details in the standards; and (f) What is the position of delegations on newly proposed draft regulation 4 bis ("without prejudice")? Most delegations supported the wording proposed, although some of them considered that it should be more cross-cutting and should not affect consultation exclusively.

30. At the same meeting, the Friends of the President group on the modification of a plan of work by a contractor (draft regulation 57), facilitated by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, met. Most delegations expressed support for the proposal submitted by the group and provided suggestions aimed at refining the drafting and improving the clarity of the text.

31. At its 350th meeting, on 17 March, and at its 352nd meeting, on 18 March, the Council considered the annexes to the draft regulations. Many delegations welcomed the resumption of the reading of the annexes. Several delegations highlighted the need for harmonization between the draft regulations and the annexes. The President suggested that the secretariat would revise the annexes ahead of the second part of the thirty-first session of the Council, based on the input provided during the first part

and written submissions that the delegations would provide during the intersessional period. On 17 March, the Council managed to conduct a reading of annexes I and II. There seemed to be broad support for the structure of the annexes and specific suggestions for refinement were provided.

32. At the 351st meeting, on 18 March, the President of the Council conducted negotiations on two conceptual topics. The first conceptual topic related to conditions for beginning exploitation in the Area (draft regulation 2, para. 3). Some delegations suggested that paragraph 3 would be better placed in a general policy of the Authority or in a draft decision of the Council. Others supported its inclusion within the draft regulations. A number of textual proposals were submitted, which will be considered by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as the proponent of this version of the paragraph, in order to provide revised language. The second conceptual topic related to the definitions of “incident” and “notifiable event” in the schedule. It was highlighted that they were separate events that needed to be treated differently. Germany offered to provide a streamlined version of the definitions during the intersessional period.

33. At its 352nd meeting, on 18 March, the Council took up two additional outstanding issues, the first of which related to the treatment of the Enterprise (draft regulation 19 and schedule). Delegations acknowledged the detailed paper presented by the interim Director General of the Enterprise and by the United Kingdom. Delegations seemed to agree with the approach proposed in the paper, and in particular with the first alternative proposed for the definition of “contractor” in the schedule, which will therefore inform future work on the matter. The second additional outstanding issue related to parent company liability (draft regulations 23, para. 5 (d), and 24, annex XI and schedule). Delegations supported the proposal submitted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands to include a parent company liability statement in the draft regulations. Some delegations expressed concern as regards the particular situations of State-owned companies and of the Enterprise. It was also suggested that a parent company liability statement should be considered a precondition for the approval of a plan of work, and that the consequences of a failure to comply with such a statement should be further coordinated with draft regulation 103.

34. At its 353rd meeting, on 19 March, the Council conducted negotiations on two outstanding issues, the first of which related to resources covered by the draft regulations. Several delegations expressed support for maintaining a general approach in the draft regulations, consistent with the role of the draft regulations as a general framework, while the provisions set out in standards and guidelines should be more precise and therefore resource-specific. Most delegations supporting that position suggested that priority should be given to the development of standards and guidelines on polymetallic nodules. Other delegations suggested that the draft regulations should apply solely to polymetallic nodules. The second outstanding issue related to confidential information and procedures to ensure confidentiality (draft regulations 89 to 91). Delegations appeared to agree on the general structure of those draft regulations, despite some suggestions to restructure parts of them. The comments received were mainly focused on refining the language.

35. Due to time constraints, the Council did not discuss the two remaining outstanding issues: review of the draft regulations and whistle-blowing procedures. At the request of the facilitator, the discussion on effective control was deferred to the second part of the session.

#### *Development of standards and guidelines*

36. Regarding standards and guidelines, the Council is reminded to take the following into consideration: (a) the note by the secretariat of 2018 on the content and development of standards and guidelines for activities in the Area under the

Authority's regulatory framework (ISBA/25/C/3); (b) the relevant decision of the Council of 2019 (ISBA/25/C/37, paras. 3–5); (c) the recommendations made in 2019 by the Legal and Technical Commission regarding the development of standards and guidelines on the implementation of the draft regulations, on the basis of the report on the workshop held in Pretoria from 13 to 15 May 2019<sup>3</sup> and ISBA/25/C/19/Add.1 (sect. IV.A and annex); (d) the report of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission at the first part of its twenty-sixth session (ISBA/26/C/12), in particular the section on the development of standards and guidelines, and subsequent addenda thereto (ISBA/26/C/12/Add.1 and ISBA/26/C/12/Add.2); (e) the relevant decision of the Council of 2021 (ISBA/26/C/57); and (f) the report of 2022 of the Chair of the Commission summarizing stakeholder feedback on the phase 1 draft standards and guidelines (ISBA/27/C/2).

37. The Legal and Technical Commission has recommended that standards be adopted by the Council, be applied provisionally pending approval by the Assembly and be legally binding on member States, contractors and the Authority. Guidelines are recommendatory in nature and may be issued by either the Commission or the Secretary-General. Guidelines will be submitted to the Council, which may require their amendment or withdrawal.

38. The Legal and Technical Commission has further recommended, and the Council has endorsed, an outcome-based approach to regulations for the development of standards and guidelines, in particular in connection with environmental regulations, drawing on existing best practices in regulatory frameworks for other industries, such as the offshore oil and gas industry. An outcome-based approach provides for rigorous and contractually binding outcomes, while affording flexibility in relation to the processes used to achieve those outcomes. The Commission has highlighted the importance of reviewing standards and guidelines periodically, in the light of developments in knowledge and improved technology.

39. The Legal and Technical Commission has also recommended the adoption of the following three-phased approach to the development of standards and guidelines:

(a) Phase 1: Completion by the time of the adoption of the draft regulations. This phase includes standards and guidelines that would be required to guide the initial consideration and development of an application for a plan of work for exploitation;

(b) Phase 2: Completion prior to the receipt of the first application for a plan of work for exploitation;

(c) Phase 3: Completion by the time of commencement of commercial mining activities.

40. A proposal has been put forward regarding the placement and hierarchy of the respective standards and guidelines.<sup>4</sup>

41. At its 354th meeting, on 19 March, under item 11, the Council considered the way forward for the second part of the session, including the development of standards and guidelines. Divergent views were expressed, with some delegations favouring the decoupling of standards and guidelines from the draft regulations, while others emphasized their interrelated nature and the need for parallel development. The Council acknowledged the important role of the Legal and Technical Commission in advancing that work and welcomed its continued efforts to update and consolidate the list of standards and guidelines, particularly those envisaged for phase 1.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/pretoria\\_workshop\\_report-final.pdf](http://www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/pretoria_workshop_report-final.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> [www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Annex-I\\_-\\_placement-hierarchy-criteria-.pdf](http://www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Annex-I_-_placement-hierarchy-criteria-.pdf).

42. At the end of the discussion, the Council endorsed the proposal by the President to request the Legal and Technical Commission to:

- (a) Consider the current list of standards and guidelines;
- (b) Prepare an updated and consolidated version, including by merging specific standards and guidelines, where appropriate;
- (c) Revise the list of standards and guidelines that should be ready by the time of the adoption of the draft regulations;
- (d) Identify those standards and guidelines that have already been prepared and that may require revision in the light of the current state of negotiations;
- (e) Develop a timeline or road map and recommendations on the development of standards and guidelines by the Commission to be provided before the Council meetings in July 2026.

*Review of progress on the draft regulations*

43. At the 354th meeting, on 19 March, the President noted the considerable advancement of negotiations on the text, and stressed the need to ensure that all the hard work that had been put into those negotiations during the first part of the session – to the extent possible – was reflected in an updated version of the further revised consolidated text following the first part. In this regard, the Council endorsed the proposal of the President that the third revision of the further revised consolidated text would include:

- (a) Textual proposals received from the intersessional working groups and the Friends of the President groups, building on advances made during the first part of the thirty-first session and during the intersessional period between March and July 2026;
- (b) Clear indications wherever updates had been made since the second revision of the further revised consolidated text;
- (c) Revised annexes.

44. It was stressed that the text would not be another further revised consolidated text, but simply an implementation of what had been achieved during the first part of the session and in the intersessional period ending in July 2026.

45. The President invites the facilitators of the groups to deliver their textual proposals to the secretariat, through the Council email system, no later than 15 June 2026. The President requests the secretariat to compile the textual proposals submitted by the groups in order to issue the third revision of the further revised consolidated text by 19 June 2026, which will form the basis for discussions during the second part of the thirty-first session of the Council.

*Agreement on necessary intersessional work*

46. During the same meetings, the President stated that intersessional work was a decisive element for the success of the process in relation to the advancement of the further revised consolidated text. The President complimented the facilitators and delegations for their intersessional work and strongly encouraged all facilitators and delegations to make full use of the intersessional period ahead of the Council meeting in July 2026. The President highlighted that the progress that could be made between sessions, through dialogue, the exchange of written proposals and informal consultations, was invaluable.

47. In that regard, the Council endorsed the request of the President to all facilitators of informal working groups and Friends of the President groups that their textual proposals take into account:

- (a) The negotiations held during the first part of the thirty-first session;
- (b) Any written submissions received thereafter;
- (c) An indication of whether the issue was still to be considered an outstanding issue.

48. The President also requested the secretariat to:

- (a) Distribute a list of the informal working groups and Friends of the President groups;
- (b) Upload a live calendar to the Authority's website with all online meetings and associated documents.

49. Furthermore, the Council endorsed the request by the President to the secretariat to prepare and circulate an updated list of outstanding issues ahead of the second part of the thirty-first session, reflecting:

- (a) Progress achieved;
- (b) Areas requiring further consideration;
- (c) A priority section identifying cross-cutting and thematic issues that require political guidance from the Council.

## **VIII. Report of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission at the first part of its thirty-first session**

50. At the 347th and 348th meetings, on 16 March, during the consideration of agenda item 13, the President introduced the report of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission at the first part of its thirty-first session ([ISBA/31/C/4](#)).

51. Delegations congratulated Sissel Eriksen (Norway) on her election as Chair and Edwin Egede (Nigeria) on his election as Vice-Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission. Delegations also expressed appreciation to the former Chair, Erasmo Lara Cabrera, for his leadership and contributions. Participants commended the Commission for its extensive work during the session and acknowledged the high level of participation of its members.

52. Participants expressed appreciation for the breadth and technical quality of the Commission's work, including its contributions to the development of the regulatory framework for exploitation activities, environmental management tools and standards and guidelines. Several delegations highlighted the importance of the work of the Commission on regional environmental management plans, which are considered key tools for the protection of the marine environment, noting progress made in the development of plans for different regions. Several delegations also welcomed the progress made by the Group of Experts on environmental thresholds, which they requested to proceed expeditiously, and emphasized that future public consultation processes should be conducted in an open, transparent and inclusive manner. The work of expert groups and the advancement of technical inputs to support a robust and science-based regulatory framework were also welcomed. The importance of

timely access to environmental baseline data collected by contractors and the strengthening of the scientific basis for decision-making were also highlighted.

53. Several delegations emphasized the importance of training and capacity-building programmes. While noting progress, including improvements in relation to the gender balance of training opportunities, some delegations underscored the need to enhance equitable geographical distribution, particularly for developing countries and underrepresented regions. Several delegations praised the Women in Deep-Sea Research initiative and the See Her Exceed mentorship programme. A sponsoring State announced upcoming training programmes. The importance of strengthening outreach, transparency and access to training opportunities, as well as promoting broader participation among scientists and institutions from developing States, was highlighted.

54. A number of delegations commented on the Commission's consideration of applications for extension of contracts for exploration. In this regard, emphasis was placed on the need for consistency, objectivity and non-discrimination in the application of the criteria set out in Council decision [ISBA/21/C/19](#). Several delegations stressed that extensions should be granted only where contractors had fulfilled their obligations and demonstrated good faith efforts to advance their programmes of activities. A group of States recalled that relinquishment provisions remained an important mechanism for ensuring equitable access to seabed resources and encouraged continued monitoring of their implementation. The group noted that relinquished areas should be managed in a manner that facilitated their potential future allocation to developing States.

55. The importance of periodic reviews of plans of work as a tool for effective oversight and accountability was also underscored, as was the need to continue to enhance transparency in relation to the outcomes of those periodic reviews. Some delegations stressed that the evaluation of the activities of contractors must remain rigorous, science-based, transparent and aligned with the precautionary approach.

56. Several delegations welcomed the intersessional work that the Commission would conduct regarding the development of standards and guidelines on the draft regulations and stressed the importance of its reviewing and mapping work to support the timely completion of standards and guidelines according to the three-phased outcome-oriented approach and phase 1 in particular. Some delegations emphasized that the Council should provide the required guidance to the Commission regarding the development of standards and guidelines and the potential selection of experts for that task, which was to be conducted in a transparent manner.

57. At its 348th meeting, the Council took note of the report of the Chair of the Commission on the work of the Commission at the first part of its thirty-first session.

*Preliminary considerations on Council decision [ISBA/30/C/19](#)*

58. At its 348th meeting, on 16 March, under agenda item 13, the Council considered and took note of the report of the Legal and Technical Commission on the implementation of the Council's decision relating to a request for additional information from contractors at risk of non-compliance with their contractual obligations ([ISBA/31/C/4/Add.1](#)).

59. Delegations urged all contractors to fulfil their contractual obligations and conduct activities within the multilateral framework. Some delegations raised issues relating to the obligations of sponsoring States and the identification of potential cases of non-compliance. Some delegations urged contractors to provide prompt and satisfactory responses to requests for information.

60. Delegations underscored the importance of transparency in the methodology applied by the Commission, including with regard to the identification of contractors requiring additional attention. Some delegations welcomed the rigour of the work of the Commission. Clarifications were sought concerning the criteria used, the evidentiary basis for such determinations and the distinction between different categories of contractors referenced in the report. Some delegations also emphasized the need for greater clarity regarding the process followed by the Commission, including whether the contractors concerned had been consulted prior to being identified, and how additional information requested by the Commission would be reflected in the assessment of contractors' performance.

61. Several delegations reaffirmed their commitment to fulfilling their obligations under the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, including in their capacity as sponsoring States. In that context, they highlighted the establishment of national regulatory frameworks to ensure effective control over sponsored contractors and compliance with the rules, regulations and procedures of the Authority. The importance of transparency in contractor ownership structures and in any changes affecting control or financial status was also noted.

## **IX. Operationalization of the Economic Planning Commission**

62. At its 348th meeting, on 16 March, the Council considered and took note of the report of the Secretary-General on election mechanisms of the members of the Economic Planning Commission ([ISBA/31/C/11](#)).

63. At the same meeting, the Council considered the draft decision of the Council on the election mechanisms of the members of the Economic Planning Commission, annexed to the report of the Secretary-General ([ISBA/31/C/11](#), annex). As some delegations suggested amendments to the text, the President invited delegations to send proposals for inclusion in a revised draft decision to be circulated by the secretariat. Consideration of the draft decision will continue during the second part of the thirty-first session of the Council.

## **X. Engagement and cooperation with bodies and processes under 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**

64. At its 348th meeting, on 16 March, and its 350th meeting, on 17 March, under agenda item 19, the Council considered and took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the potential implications and opportunities for the work of the Authority of the operation 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 ([ISBA/31/C/2/Rev.1](#)).

65. At the same meetings, the Council considered the draft decision of the Council on engagement with bodies and processes under the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, annexed to the report of the Secretary-General ([ISBA/31/C/2/Rev.1](#), annex). At the 350th meeting, on 17 March, the debate on the draft decision was adjourned until the second part of the thirty-first session of the Council.