



## Legal and Technical Commission

Distr.: General  
22 May 2026

Original: English

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### Thirty-first session

Legal and Technical Commission, part II

Kingston, 29 June–10 July 2026

Agenda item 10

**Relinquishment of areas under contracts for exploration for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts**

### **Relinquishment of one-third of the area allocated to the Government of the Republic of Korea under the contract for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts signed with the International Seabed Authority**

Note by the secretariat

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The contract for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts between the Government of the Republic of Korea and the International Seabed Authority was signed on 27 March 2018. The area under the contract covers 3,000 km<sup>2</sup> (see table).
2. Pursuant to the schedule for fulfilling relinquishment obligations under regulation 27 (1) of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area ([ISBA/18/A/11](#), annex), (a) by the end of the eighth year from the date of the contract, the contractor shall have relinquished at least one third of the original area allocated to it; and (b) by the end of the tenth year from the date of the contract, the contractor shall have relinquished at least two thirds of the original area allocated to it.
3. Accordingly, the Republic of Korea was required to relinquish at least one third of its allocated area by 26 March 2026 (i.e. the end of the eight year). On 26 March 2026, the Republic of Korea submitted, cartographic material that included shapefiles of relinquished and remaining cells, an overview map showing the remaining exploration areas, a list of relinquished cells and maps of the relinquished areas.
4. The recommendations for the guidance of contractors on the relinquishment of areas under exploration contracts for polymetallic sulphides or cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts issued by the Legal and Technical Commission at the twenty-fifth session of the Authority ([ISBA/25/LTC/8](#)), provide guidance on the modalities for relinquishment.



5. In particular, the recommendations specify that in order to provide certainty and efficiency in managing areas under contract, relinquishment will be achieved by subdividing the initial blocks in the contracts into cells of equal size. As a general rule, these cells will have dimensions of 1 km x 1 km. Where it is not possible to subdivide the blocks by applying this general rule owing to the particulars of an individual contract, its principles will be applied in a pragmatic manner to achieve an equivalent outcome (para. 8 of the recommendations). For blocks with sides that are an integer number of kilometres, for example, 10 km x 10 km or 4 km x 5 km, the general rule can be applied (para. 11 of the recommendations). Blocks with sides that are not an integer number of kilometres should be subdivided in such a manner that the dimensions of the cell sides are approximately 1.12 km x 1.12 km (para. 12 of the recommendations).

6. The recommendations further provide that the recording of the relinquished cells will be achieved through a system of block and cell indexation, whereby blocks will retain their block number under the initial contract and cells will have an index number composed of the block number to which they are a part and a number assigned by their order commencing in the top left-hand corner and proceeding right (para. 9 of the recommendations).

## II. Technical analysis

7. The Republic of Korea has assigned index numbers to the cells in the blocks, numbered from 1 to 1,000, identified the cells to be relinquished corresponding to the required percentage of the contract area and submitted a list of coordinates of the relinquished cells (see table), as well as a map showing nine clusters of the relinquished area.

8. The relinquished area consists of 1 km x 1 km cells within 150 original blocks varying from 4 to 156 in each cluster. The lowest number of cells (42) was relinquished in KC-3 cluster, and the most in KC-5 cluster (198). A total of 1,000 cells were relinquished from 150 blocks within nine clusters, as detailed in the table

Table  
**Original and relinquished cells per cluster in the area under contract**

<i>Cluster index</i>	<i>Original contract area</i>		<i>No. of relinquished cells</i>	<i>No. of remaining cells in the exploration area</i>
	<i>No. of blocks</i>	<i>No. of cells</i>		
KC-1	18	360	81	279
KC-2	18	360	106	254
KC-3	7	140	42	98
KC-4	20	400	154	246
KC-5	21	420	198	222
KC-6	17	340	110	230
KC-7	17	340	93	247
KC-8	21	420	148	272
KC-9	11	220	68	152
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>3 000</b>	<b>1 000</b>	<b>2 000</b>

9. All maps plotted and list of geographical coordinates of the corners of the cells, including ESRI shapefiles for the first relinquishment provided were based on the World Geodetic System 1984 data, Universal Transverse Mercator Projection (UTM Zone56N).

10. The geographical coordinates of cells relinquished by the Republic of Korea were verified with the standard vertexes of the Authority-referenced cells by calculating difference of geographical coordinates, which were observed to be negligible (less than 8 m).

### III. Recommendations

11. Based on the maps and geographical coordinates provided by the Republic of Korea,<sup>1</sup> verification of the cells geometry and index numbers plotted and verified by the Secretariat, the modalities for relinquishment of the Republic of Korea of one third of its allocated area was observed to be in line with the recommendations of the Legal and Technical Commission.

12. In accordance with regulation 27 (4) of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area, relinquished areas shall revert to the Area.

13. The Commission is invited to:

(a) Take note of this information;

(b) Further note that the contractor has fulfilled the first part of the schedule of relinquishment obligations pursuant to regulation 27 (1) of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area.

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<sup>1</sup> Maps are available here: <https://isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Relinquishment-Map-of-one-third-of-the-original-area.pdf>.