



Legal and Technical Commission

Distr.: General
22 May 2026

Original: English

Thirty-first session

Legal and Technical Commission, part II

Kingston, 29 June–10 July 2026

Agenda item 10

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

Relinquishment of 75 per cent of the area allocated to the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources under the contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides signed with the International Seabed Authority

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides between the Federal Institute for Geoscience and Natural Resources (BGR) and the International Seabed Authority was signed on 6 May 2015. The area under the contract covers 10,000 km² (see table).
2. Pursuant to the schedule for fulfilling relinquishment obligations in regulation 27 (2) of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area ([ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1](#), annex), by the end of the eighth year from the date of the contract, the contractor shall have relinquished at least 50 per cent of the original area allocated to it; and by the end of the tenth year, at least 75 per cent of the original area.
3. In accordance with the regulations, the contractor was required to relinquish at least 50 per cent of its allocated area by 6 May 2023 (i.e. the end of the eighth year). In this regard, it is recalled that on 15 December 2020 and 18 March 2022, BGR had requested to defer its scheduled relinquishment due to the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on its operational activities (see [ISBA/27/LTC/4](#)), whereupon the Council, acting upon the recommendation by the Commission, decided to defer the schedule of the relinquishments by one year, to 6 May 2024 and 6 May 2026, respectively (see [ISBA/27/C/19](#)).



4. By a letter dated 16 April 2024, the contractor submitted to the Secretary-General a report on the relinquishment of 50 per cent of the original area allocated to it under the exploration contract for polymetallic sulphides, including a list of relinquished cells and maps of the relinquished areas. The Council, acting on the recommendation of the Legal and Technical Commission, took note that BGR had fulfilled the first part of the schedule of relinquishment obligations pursuant to regulation 27 (1). The relinquished area reverted to the Area.

5. Pursuant to regulation 27 (1) and the decision of the Council on the deferral, BGR was required to relinquish at least 75 per cent of the original area allocated to it by 6 May 2026 (i.e. the end of the tenth year). On 6 May 2026, the contractor submitted to the Secretary-General cartographic material that included shapefiles of relinquished and remaining cells and an overview map with remaining exploration areas, a list of relinquished cells and maps of the relinquished areas.

6. 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.

7. In particular, the recommendations specify that for certainty and efficiency in managing areas under contract, relinquishment will be achieved by subdividing the initial blocks in the exploration 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 (ISBA/25/LTC/8, 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 (ibid., para. 11). 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 km (ibid., para. 12).

8. 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 of which they are a part and a number assigned by their order commencing in the top left-hand corner and proceeding right (ibid., para. 9).

II. Technical analysis

9. The contractor has provided maps plotted based on the World Geodetic System 84 (WGS 84), indexed the number of cells in the blocks starting from 1 to 5,000, identified the individual cells for the percentage of the contract area to be relinquished, and delivered a list of coordinates and shapefiles of relinquished cells and a map of the relinquished area to the Authority.

10. The relinquished area consists of 1 km x 1 km cells within 50 blocks varying from 0–900 in each cluster. A total of 2,500 cells were relinquished from 50 blocks within nine clusters, as detailed in the table.

Original and relinquished cells per cluster in the area under contract

<i>Cluster index</i>	<i>No. of blocks in the current contract area</i>	<i>No. of cells in the current contract area</i>	<i>No. of relinquished cells</i>	<i>No. of remaining cells in the exploration area</i>
1	9	900	272	628
2	11	1 100	355	745
3	2	200	158	42
4	5	500	260	240
5	3	300	267	33
6	9	900	436	464
7	2	200	200	0
8	4	400	267	133
9	5	500	285	215
Total	50	5 000	2 500	2 500

11. All maps have been plotted using WGS 84 datum and geographic coordinate system (GCS) WGS 84 as spatial reference.

12. The contractor correctly identified individual cells to return to the Authority on the basis of the percentage of the contract areas to be relinquished.

13. The geographical coordinates of cells relinquished by BGR were verified with the standard vertices of the cells by the secretariat by calculating the differences between geographical coordinates, which were observed to be negligible (less than 10m).

III. Recommendations

14. Based on the maps generated with the same projections as the maps provided by BGR,¹ verification of the cells' geometry and the index numbers plotted and verified by the secretariat, the relinquishment of 75 per cent of the original area allocated to BGR was made in line with the recommendations of the Legal and Technical Commission.

15. In accordance with regulation 27 (4), relinquished areas shall revert to the Area.

16. The Commission is invited to:

(a) Take note of this information;

(b) Further note that BGR has fulfilled the second part of the schedule of relinquishment obligations pursuant to regulation 27 (2) of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area.

¹ Available at <https://isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Relinquishment-map-BGR-.pdf>.