



# Assembly

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## **Thirty-first session**

Kingston, 27-31 July 2026

Item 9 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. This report is presented to the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, as per article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea ('the Convention'). It provides an overview of the activities of the Authority during the period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. It highlights the current status of the Convention and its related legal instruments, the activities in the Area, institutional governance and financial stewardship, the status of exploration contracts and the outcomes of the previous session of the Authority. The reporting period also reflects the continued progress in advancing the draft regulations on exploitation in the Area, strengthening institutional preparedness and governance resilience by enhancing strategic partnerships including within the UN system, and supporting marine scientific research and capacity-building initiatives. The report should be read alongside the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the action plan for marine scientific research by the International Seabed Authority, which supports the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (ISBA/31/A/3).

2. During this period, one of the principal goals for the Authority was to work on the draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. Following the Council's request, the Secretary-General published the Further Revised Consolidated Text of the Draft ("FRCT") on 23 December 2025, along with supporting documents, and successfully delivered an indicative list of outstanding issues of the draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources that was endorsed by the members of the Council as the basis for the negotiations of the exploitation regulations during the thirty-first session. During the first part of the session, the Council made significant progress in advancing discussions on the list of outstanding issues through

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\* ISBA/31/A/L.1

the work of the informal working groups and Friends of the President groups, during the first part of the session. These discussions contributed to further clarifying key areas of divergence, refining textual proposals and identifying possible pathways towards consensus on several substantive elements of FRCT.

3. The reporting period also included progress on additional tasks assigned to the Secretary-General and the secretariat by the Council and Member States. This work involved further development of the Economic Planning Commission as outlined in the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. As requested by the Assembly, secretariat prepared a concept note that sets out a framework for the Common Heritage Fund as one of the possible ways to distribute revenues from activities in the Area.

4. Additionally, this reporting period demonstrated a more unified approach within the Authority regarding its various functions, such as regulation, operations, research, environmental protection, compliance, economics, communications, and capacity building. As part of this ongoing development, the secretariat improved its alignment with the United Nations system and built strong institutional partnerships to support better coherence, readiness, accountability, and governance under the Convention. This report reflects a time of significant activity and strategic change for the Authority. Overall, the work done during this period aimed to enhance the Authority's ability to fulfill its responsibilities under the Convention in a complex international setting while promoting cooperation, the rule of law, and the responsible management of the Area and for the benefit of humankind as a whole.

## II. Membership

5. All States Parties to the Convention are *ipso facto* members of the Authority.<sup>1</sup> As of 20 September 2025, Kyrgyzstan acceded to the Convention, followed by Cambodia ratification on 6 February 2026. This brought the total membership to 172 (171 States and the European Union) as of 31 March 2026. This near-universal membership has enhanced the effectiveness of the Part XI regime.

6. By the same date, 155 parties had joined 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'). There are seventeen (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. These members include 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.

7. According to 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 instances of inconsistency between the two, the provisions of the Agreement take precedence. While members of the Authority that are not Parties to the 1994 Agreement can still participate in its work under arrangements based on the Agreement, becoming a Party 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 25 March 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with article 156, paragraph 2, of the Convention.

### **III. The Area**

8. The Convention defines the Area as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. The determination of the exact geographical boundaries of the Area depends on the delineation of national jurisdiction limits, which includes the continental shelf extending beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline of the territorial sea.

9. Pursuant to article 84, paragraph 2, of the Convention, coastal States are required to publicly share charts or lists of geographical coordinates. When these depict the outer limit lines of the continental shelf, they must also deposit a copy of each such chart or list with the Secretary-General of the Authority. As of 31 March 2026, a total of 20 members of the Authority had complied by submitting (deposited) such charts and lists with the Secretary-General. These States are: Australia, Cabo Verde, the Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, 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, Niue, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Senegal, Suriname, Tunisia and Tuvalu.

10. 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. Accurate knowledge of the precise boundary delineation of all areas of the continental shelf up to and beyond 200 nautical miles is crucial for establishing the geographical limits of the Area with certainty. Each year, the secretariat issues out a note verbale reminding States to submit their charts or lists of coordinates. The most recent reminder was sent on 22 January 2026.

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

11. Between April 2025 and March 2026, seven (7) new permanent representatives were appointed and accredited to the Authority by Members with Permanent Missions to the Authority. They are China, France, Jamaica, Malta, Mexico, Philippines and Trinidad and Tobago.

12. Additionally, between April 2025 and March 2026, the governments of four member States appointed permanent representatives to the Authority for the first time, thereby establishing permanent missions to the Authority. On 20 August 2025, H.E. Mr. John Silk was accredited as the first permanent representative of the Marshall Islands to the Authority. On 26 August 2025, H.E. Matete Nena was accredited as the first Permanent Representative of Lesotho to the Authority. On 6 November 2025, H.E. Justice (Retd) Jayantha Chandrasiri Jayasuriya, P.C. was accredited as the first permanent representative of Sri Lanka to the Authority while on 16 March 2026, Ms. Alveta Adderley-Knight was accredited as the first permanent representative of the Bahamas to the Authority.

13. As of 31 March 2026, a total of 46 Members maintain permanent missions to the Authority. These Members are Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, the European Union, Fiji, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Lesotho, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

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

14. 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 2026, with the accessions of Belize (on 13 October 2025), of Chad (on 13 October 2025) and of Ecuador (on 31 July 2025), the total number of Parties to the Protocol has reached 51: Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Austria, Belize, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, Czechia, Denmark, Ecuador, 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.

15. The Secretary-General encourages members of the Authority who have not yet Parties to the Protocol to take the necessary actions to become Parties to the Protocol at their earliest convenience. For that purpose, the secretariat issued a note verbale on 13 January 2026.

## **VI. Institutional leadership, governance and organizational resilience**

16. During the reporting period, the secretariat has focused on building partnerships and launching various initiatives to bolster institutional capacity. These efforts are designed to improve organizational effectiveness and operational readiness, aligning with the Authority's priorities and adapting to its evolving responsibilities under the Convention.

### **A. Strategic institutional strengthening**

17. During the reporting period, the Secretary-General advanced a strategic programme of institutional strengthening and organizational development through the secretariat's Strategic Framework for 2025–2028. The Framework was informed by extensive direct engagement and organization-wide consultations with secretariat personnel aimed at identifying operational challenges, understanding institutional priorities and strengthening institutional cohesion and organizational accountability.

18. Structured around four institutional priorities—governance and mandate delivery, operational excellence and resilience, stakeholder engagement and global partnerships, and people and organizational culture—the Framework established a coherent basis for aligning institutional and operational priorities across the secretariat. The process further strengthened institutional cohesion, accountability, operational resilience and performance management, while enhancing the secretariat's readiness to support the Authority in addressing evolving governance and operational requirements under the Convention.

19. The Secretary-General further advanced institutional readiness, governance coordination and operational resilience through enhanced engagement with the United Nations common system and strategic partners. These efforts contributed to strengthening administrative and financial governance frameworks and enhancing fiduciary controls, risk management, transparency and accountability in alignment with United Nations standards, rules, regulations, policies and practices. They also informed institutional planning and the Secretary-General's proposed budget for the financial period 2027–2028.

20. The Secretary-General also strengthened engagement with the host country and key stakeholders in support of the Authority's operational requirements, conference servicing needs and evolving institutional responsibilities.

## **B. Organizational development and institutional capacity**

21. As of 31 March 2026, the secretariat comprised 57 established posts, including 34 Professional and above posts, 2 National Professional Officer posts and 21 General Service posts, representing 24 nationalities. Women accounted for 55 per cent of secretariat personnel.

22. In support of the Framework, the secretariat advanced targeted partnerships and service arrangements with the United Nations common system and other external partners aimed at strengthening operational agility, institutional resilience and access to specialized expertise in support of the Authority's expanding programme requirements, all in support of the Authority's growing programme needs.

23. One significant milestone was the secretariat's conclusion of a service agreement with the United Nations Office of Information and Communications Technology. This partnership paves the way for the implementation of the *Inspira* and *OneHR* platforms, which will strengthen our human resources management through standardized processes for recruitment, classification, reference verification and candidate rostering.

26. In support of our search for specialized expertise and operational surge capacity, the secretariat has further expanded its reach through service agreements and partnerships with the United Nations Volunteers programme, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services. These arrangements support flexible access to technical expertise, non-staff capacity and specialized service delivery mechanisms aligned with the Authority's evolving operational requirements.

27. The Secretary-General is also pleased to report that the secretariat concluded a service agreement with the United Nations System Staff College, marking a significant step towards enhancing our learning culture. This initiative will offer a comprehensive access to the Blue Line learning platform alongside targeted capacity-development initiatives for our senior leadership.

28. In our unwavering commitment to the well-being of our personnel, we have partnered with International SOS to provide 24-hour medical and security assistance, including emergency medical evacuation services, for personnel and delegates during sessions, thereby strengthening institutional duty of care and emergency response arrangements. Together, these efforts reflect our dedication to fostering a dynamic and resilient work environment that can meet the demands of our mission and support our personnel effectively.

## **C. United Nations common system engagement and institutional governance**

29. The secretariat advanced preparatory work toward the eventual planned implementation of an integrated administrative controls system in collaboration with the United Nations secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme. Assessments were undertaken to support institutional planning and operational preparedness associated with the Authority's evolving responsibilities under the Convention.

30. Within the United Nations system, integrated administrative platforms support institutional accountability, financial oversight, risk management and internal

controls. The initiative is intended to strengthen the secretariat's institutional control environment and support its evolving operational requirements under the Convention.

31. The United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) Physical Security Assessment conducted in February 2026 identified areas requiring further strengthening to ensure compliance with United Nations Security Risk Management measures at the Authority's Headquarters and the Jamaica Conference Centre. In light of the anticipated growth in the scale, frequency and visibility of the Authority's operations, additional measures were identified to strengthen security, safety and operational coordination arrangements. These requirements were further informed by the operational and institutional impacts associated with Hurricane Melissa, which affected Jamaica in October 2025. Collectively, these efforts support enhanced coordination with UNDSS and host country authorities and contribute to ensuring appropriate security arrangements for personnel, facilities and participants in the Authority's meetings and activities.

32. The secretariat also engaged with the United Nations Archives and Records Management Section to assess institutional records and information management practices and identify opportunities to strengthen records governance, information management processes and institutional accountability in line with United Nations standards and evolving operational requirements.

33. As a member of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) since 2013, the Authority continued to contribute to and participate in the work of the Commission during the reporting period, including engagement in the hardship classification review process for the Kingston duty station following Hurricane Melissa. The outcome of the survey may inform future classification considerations within the framework of the ICSC mobility and hardship scheme.

34. The Authority continues to apply the common system of salaries, allowances and conditions of service of the United Nations and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. As a participant in the United Nations common system, the Authority continues to utilize common system services and frameworks, including Inspira for recruitment and classification processes.

35. In 2026, the secretariat engaged with the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services to conduct an audit of Information and Communications Technology Management aimed at assessing ICT risks and institutional capabilities and identifying opportunities to strengthen ICT governance, cybersecurity, data protection, operational continuity and third-party service management in alignment with the Authority's evolving operational requirements.

36. Collectively, these assessments, reviews and institutional engagements informed the Secretary-General's proposed budget for the financial period 2027–2028 through an evidence-based identification of governance, operational, security, information management, business continuity and institutional resilience requirements associated with the Authority's evolving responsibilities under the Convention.

#### **D. Host country and stakeholder coordination**

37. As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen collaboration with the host country and key stakeholders, the secretariat initiated the "Building Bridges" initiative aimed at strengthening coordination and addressing operational, legal, infrastructure and security-related matters associated with the Authority's activities. Engagements were undertaken with national authorities, emergency response agencies, conference management stakeholders and private sector service providers in support of operational continuity and effective servicing of the Authority's meetings.

38. In parallel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica convened a multidisciplinary working committee aimed at strengthening coordination among national authorities and key public and private stakeholders in addressing conference management, disaster preparedness, security, safety, emergency response, infrastructure and administrative matters associated with the Authority's evolving institutional requirements and anticipated growth in activities and international participation.

39. This ongoing engagement framework strengthened inter-agency coordination, reinforced dialogue on the implementation of the Headquarters Agreement and supported collaborative approaches toward ensuring an enabling operational environment for the Authority's expanding responsibilities under the Convention.

## **VII. Financial stewardship and sustainability**

40. During the reporting period, the secretariat continued to maintain sound financial management, accountability and oversight arrangements in support of programme delivery, operational continuity and its evolving institutional responsibilities under the Convention. Financial planning and resource management efforts remained focused on supporting the effective implementation of the approved programme of work while strengthening institutional sustainability, operational resilience and the Authority's evolving institutional and operational requirements under the Convention.

### **A. Budget**

41. 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 USD 26,427,000.<sup>2</sup>

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

42. 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.

43. 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, contributing to diversified financing arrangements, the partial offsetting of administrative expenditures and the sustainable financing of institutional operations.

44. As of 31 March 2026, 54 per cent of the value of contributions to the 2026 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 (1998–2025) amounted to USD 1,151,477. 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

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<sup>2</sup> ISBA/29/A/11.

preceding two years. Prior to the thirty-first session, the Secretary-General will communicate to the President of the Assembly the list of members in arrears.

45. As of 31 March 2026, the balance of the working capital fund stood at USD 777,863, against an approved level of USD 825,000.

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

46. 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 of 31 March 2026, the fund has received cumulative contributions amounting to USD 1,730,678 since its establishment. During the reporting period contributions were made by China (USD 20,000), Cyprus (USD 17,500), India (USD 20,000), Ireland (USD 22,692), Mexico (USD 10,000), the United Kingdom (USD 13,028) and Ocean Mineral Singapore PTE Ltd (USD 6,000). As of 31 March 2026, no balance was available in the fund.

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

47. 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, thereby supporting inclusive participation.<sup>3</sup> During the reporting period, contributions were received from Cyprus (USD 17,550), Italy (USD 34,408), Mauritius (USD 1,000), Nauru (USD 3,476), Portugal (USD 11,593), and the United Kingdom (USD 13,028). As of 31 March 2026, cumulative contributions to the fund over its lifetime amounted to USD 338,450, with an available balance of USD 13,909.

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

48. The International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund was established by the Assembly at its twenty-seventh session on 3 August 2022<sup>4</sup> as a multi-donor trust fund aimed at promoting and encouraging marine scientific research in the Area for the benefit of humankind. The Fund also supports 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 received from China (USD 20,000), France (USD 45,704), Greece (USD 23,132), the Philippines (USD 10,000) and Portugal (USD 11,589).

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

49. The Authority receives extrabudgetary contributions from member States and other donors to support activities and initiatives not financed through the approved regular budget of the Authority. Such contributions may support one-time activities or multi-year programmes and projects and are administered in accordance with agreed donor conditions, including applicable reporting and audit requirements.

50. In March 2018, the Secretary-General established a multi-donor trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the activities of the Authority pursuant to regulation 5.5 of the Financial Rules and Regulations of the Authority. Since its establishment, the fund has received cumulative contributions amounting to USD 2,765,398 and had a net balance of USD 833,456 as of 31 March 2026. During the reporting period, contributions to the fund were received from the Republic of Korea (USD 31,137) and the United Kingdom (USD 174,231).

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<sup>3</sup> ISBA/23/A/13.

<sup>4</sup> ISBA/27/A/10 and ISBA/27/FC/3.

## VIII. Satya N. Nandan Library

51. The Satya N. Nandan Library provides a comprehensive collection of resources related to the legal regime of the Area and the work of the Authority, serving various stakeholders such as Authority members, researchers, and students. It supports informed decision-making and institutional memory while managing the archiving and dissemination of official documents. The Library also oversees the Authority's publications programme for transparency and accessibility. To enhance access to information, the Library developed the International Seabed Authority Digital Library, offering online resources, including over 15,843 full-text files and 50 specialized electronic resources. The Library is focused on optimizing services through strategic budget management, expanding both print and digital collections, and collaborating with partners to improve resource sharing. As a member of the United Nations System Electronic Information Acquisition Consortium, it benefits from coordinated electronic resource acquisition and training opportunities for staff.

52. The Library continues to express its appreciation to Member States and other stakeholders for their sustained support through the donation of materials and publications, which contribute significantly to the enrichment and development of its collection.

## IX. Previous sessions of the Authority

### A. Thirtieth session

53. The thirtieth session of the Assembly was held in Kingston from 21 to 25 July 2025, following the closing of the Council session on 21 July 2025. Dwight Gardiner (Antigua and Barbuda) was elected President of the Assembly and representatives of Fiji, Ghana and the Kingdom of the Netherlands were elected Vice-Presidents of the Assembly.

54. During the thirtieth session, the Assembly considered the annual report of the Secretary-General, submitted pursuant to article 166, paragraph 4, of the Convention. The Assembly approved 12 requests for observer status.<sup>5</sup> The Assembly considered the second report of the interim Director General of the Enterprise. The Assembly took note of the statement of the President of the Council during the thirtieth session.

55. The Assembly deferred to the thirty-first session its consideration of the request submitted pursuant to rule 82, paragraph 1 (e), of the rules of procedure of the Assembly by the Seafloor Mineral Developers Association. The Assembly requested the preparation by the secretariat of guidelines for observer status of contractors with the Authority, including a comparison with the rules of procedure of other intergovernmental organizations such as the International Maritime Organization, to assist the Assembly in its consideration in July 2026 of applications for observer status to be submitted by contractors from 2026. The Assembly decided that the amendment of its rules of procedure was unnecessary.

56. During the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Authority, the Assembly proclaimed 1 November as the International Day of the Deep Seabed for observance each year (see below section XVI).

57. The Assembly adopted a decision relating to financial and budgetary matters. As requested by the Assembly, the secretariat has prepared a concept note which sets

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<sup>5</sup> These were received from the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the International Copper Study Group, the International Lead and Zinc Study Group, the International Nickel Study Group, the International Manganese Institute, the Cobalt Institute, the Earth Law Center, Ocean and Us, Kōrero o te 'Ōrau, China Oceanic Development Foundation, World Resources Institute and Oceano Azul Foundation.

out the possible functionalities of the Common Heritage Fund as one of the possible ways for distribution of income from activities in the Area to be shared.

58. The Assembly did not reach consensus on a proposal to initiate an informal intersessional dialogue aimed at advancing discussions on a general policy for the preservation and protection of the marine environment and decided not to defer the question to the thirty-first session. The Assembly did not reach consensus on the proposal for conducting the periodic review under article 154 of the Convention and deferred its consideration of the question to the thirty-first session.

59. The Assembly elected three members of the Finance Committee.

60. The thirtieth session of the Council was held in two parts: the first part from 17 to 28 March 2025 and the second part from 7 to 18 July 2025.

61. At the first part of the session, the Council elected Duncan Muhumuza Laki (Uganda) as President of the Council. Representatives of Brazil, France and Singapore were elected as Vice-Presidents.

62. The Council continued its work on the draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area as a matter of priority, in line with the revised road map, which was endorsed by the Council on 26 July 2024 to guide its work during the thirtieth session, and with the President's briefing note of 28 January 2025.<sup>6</sup> The President presented the revised consolidated text of the draft regulations on exploitation,<sup>7</sup> the revised suspense document<sup>8</sup> and the updated compilation of proposals.<sup>9</sup>

63. During the two parts of the session, the Council conducted the second reading of the consolidated text. Making significant progress towards addressing thematic outstanding issues, the Council carried out crucial work in several intersessional working groups and the creation of the Friends of the President groups as an additional modality of work. The Council held thematic discussions on specific aspects of the draft regulations, with the support of the corresponding facilitators and rapporteurs, and conducted detailed, textual discussions chaired by the President of the Council.

64. The Council conducted a high-level discussion on standards and guidelines associated with the draft regulations, during the first part based on a list prepared by the President, as set out in the revised road map. The Council was reminded that it was anticipated in the draft regulations that standards and guidelines should be developed to support the implementation of the regulations, that the Legal and Technical Commission, as endorsed by the Council, had recommended that an outcome-based approach should be used and that they should be put in place in three phases. Most delegations coincided with the need for the Council to focus primarily on negotiating the regulations on exploitation. During the second part, the President introduced an updated proposal of a list of standard and guidelines. The Council agreed to continue the analysis during the thirty-first session.

65. The Council decided to follow a thematic approach for the thirty-first session towards resolving the remaining key outstanding matters in the elaboration of rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation. In that regard, the Council requested the secretariat to prepare a further revised consolidated text well in advance of the first meeting of the thirty-first session. In addition, the Council requested the

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<sup>6</sup> See [www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Presidents-Briefing-Note-on-the-Revised-Consolidated-Text-13Mar2025.pdf](http://www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Presidents-Briefing-Note-on-the-Revised-Consolidated-Text-13Mar2025.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> See [www.isa.org.jm/documents/isba-30-c-crp-1](http://www.isa.org.jm/documents/isba-30-c-crp-1)

<sup>8</sup> See [www.isa.org.jm/documents/isba-30-c-crp-2](http://www.isa.org.jm/documents/isba-30-c-crp-2)

<sup>9</sup> See [www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Compilation\\_of\\_Proposals.pdf](http://www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Compilation_of_Proposals.pdf)

secretariat to prepare a draft indicative list of outstanding issues and an indicative programme of work based on the draft indicative list of outstanding issues. Finally, the Council decided to assess, at the end of the thirty-first session, the remaining work, if any, that would be needed prior to the adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures and to establish a road map to that end.

66. The Council 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. The Council elected a member to fill a vacancy on the Legal and Technical Commission. It also took note of the reports of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission during the first and second parts of its twenty-ninth session and of the report on the status of national legislation relating to deep seabed mining and related matters. The Council also took note of the report of the Secretary-General concerning the operationalization of the Economic Planning Commission and adopted a decision on the operationalization of that Commission with a request to the Finance Committee to report on the financial implications of the establishment of that Commission, for consideration by the Council during the second part of its thirty-first session.

67. The Council 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. The Council elected a member to fill a vacancy on the Legal and Technical Commission. It also took note of the reports of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission during the first and second parts of its twenty-ninth session and of the report on the status of national legislation relating to deep seabed mining and related matters. The Council also took note of the report of the Secretary-General concerning the operationalization of the Economic Planning Commission and adopted a decision on the operationalization of that Commission with a request to the Finance Committee to report on the financial implications of the establishment of that Commission, for consideration by the Council during the first part of its thirty-first session.

68. The Council took note of the report of the Chair of the Finance Committee and adopted a decision relating to financial and budgetary matters.

69. The Council adopted two decisions on the deferral of the schedule of relinquishment as requested by the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer and the Government of Poland. In addition, the Council adopted the standardized procedure for the development, establishment and review of regional environmental management plans (REMPs), including the standardized procedure and template and a decision relating to the reports of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission. It also took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the decision of the Council in 2024 relating to the reports of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission and of the report of the interim Director-General of the Enterprise.

## **B. Thirty-first session of the Council**

70. The thirty-first session of the Council is scheduled in two parts: the first part was from 9 to 20 March 2026<sup>10</sup> and the second part will be convened from 13 to 24 July 2026.

71. At the first part of the session, the Council elected Mayank Yoshi (India) as President of the Council. Representatives of Costa Rica, Italy and South Africa were elected as Vice-Presidents.

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<sup>10</sup> Friday, 20 March 2026, was observed by the ISA as an official holiday (Eid al-Fitr, [ISBA/ST/IC/2025/8](#)).

72. The Council 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.

73. During the reporting period, eight applications for extension of approved plans of work for exploration for polymetallic nodules had been received from the following contractors, listed in the order of receipt: the Interoceanmetal Joint Organization, JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya, the Government of the Republic of Korea, China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association, Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd., the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer, the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources of Germany and Nauru Ocean Resources Inc. Acting on the recommendations of the Legal and Technical Commission, the Council approved six applications for the extension for a period of five years of contracts for exploration for polymetallic nodules in the Area, submitted by, respectively, Interoceanmetal Joint Organization, JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya, the Government of the Republic of Korea, Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd., the China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association, and the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer.<sup>11</sup>

74. The Council reviewed the Secretary-General's report on the implications of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea regarding the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (the BBNJ Agreement), deciding to resume discussion on the draft decision in July 2026. The Council also acknowledged the work of the Legal and Technical Commission, including the implementation of decisions regarding contractors at risk of non-compliance.

75. Priority was given to negotiating draft regulations for the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, with open participation from members and observers. The Secretary-General presented the Further Revised Consolidated Text of these draft regulations and an indicative list of outstanding issues for discussion in March 2026. During the session, the Council made significant progress in discussing most of the issues, which led the Council to request an updated list of outstanding issues as the continue to develop during the informal working groups and the intersession period. At the end of the March session, the Council endorsed the preparation of a third revision of the text, incorporating proposals from informal working groups and the Friends of the President. The Council will continue its consideration of the updated list of outstanding issues in part two of the July 2026 session.

76. Finally, the Council endorsed the proposal by the President of the Council to request the Commission to provide recommendations on specific matters relating to the development of Standards and Guidelines in support of the draft Exploitation Regulations.

## **X. Operationalization of the Enterprise**

77. The mandate of the Interim Director-General of the Enterprise falls under the provisions of Section 2, 1 (a)–(h) of the Annex to the 1994 Agreement, as well as other functions provided in the Terms of Reference related to the establishment of the aforesaid position.

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<sup>11</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).

78. In this regard, on-going work continues regarding the implementation of the mandate.

79. During the reporting period, consistent with the mandate, initiatives were undertaken to continue to establish an environment to enable the Enterprise to eventually operate independently of the secretariat whenever the Council takes such a decision in line with either one of the triggers provided under the 1994 Agreement.<sup>12</sup>

80. In the period under review, enhanced effort was made through research and assessment of relevant materials and participation at conferences, meetings, workshops, either in-person or virtually with contractors and other entities on matters related to the mandate of the Enterprise, including on the conclusion of joint venture arrangements with the Enterprise. Accordingly, draft templates and business models were developed and submitted for such undertakings without prejudice to eventual approval of the Council and the Assembly.

81. Following feedback on the second report of the Interim Director-General,<sup>13</sup> from Members of the Council and Assembly, and based on requests from some regional groups, more direct work was carried out on different aspects of the work of the Enterprise. Consequently, on 25 February 2026, a webinar was organised for member States on aspects of the work of the Enterprise where the focus was on the legal mandate of the Enterprise and technology and environmental protection.

82. During the reporting period, the Interim Director-General also participated in the annual Contractors' meeting held in Goa, India in September 2025, in the Underwater Minerals Conference in St Pete Beach, Florida in November 2025, in the Africa Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy's inaugural workshop in February 2026, and will participate in the meetings of the International Nickel, Zinc, Lead and Copper Study Groups in April 2026.

83. The Interim Director-General also participated actively during the first part of the thirty-first session of the Council on the negotiations of the draft exploitation regulations and also presented a joint paper with the United Kingdom on the Treatment of the Enterprise in the said regulations that is based on two alternative definitions of "contractor," submitted by him during the thirtieth session of the Council.

84. Further details on the work done by the Interim Director-General will be provided in his annual report to the Council and Assembly during the second part of the thirty-first session of the Authority.

## **XI. Status of contracts for exploration and related matters**

85. As of 31 March 2026, 31 contracts for exploration were in force (19 for polymetallic nodules, 8 for polymetallic sulphides and 4 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts), including a contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides signed with the Government of India on 15 September 2025.<sup>14</sup>

86. Each contractor is required to submit an annual report to the Secretary-General by 31 March each year, covering its programme of activities under the contract. For the year 2025, 30 annual reports in relation to 30 exploration contracts were received by the secretariat. In relation to the new contract for exploration for polymetallic

<sup>12</sup> See section 2, paragraph 2 of the 1994 Agreement "... upon the approval of a plan of work for exploitation for an entity other than the Enterprise, or upon receipt by the Council of an application for a joint venture operation with the Enterprise, the Council shall take up the issue of the functioning of the Enterprise independently of the Authority."

<sup>13</sup> See ISBA/30/A/5-ISBA/30/C/8.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed list of the contracts is provided in ISBA/31/C/3, annex I.

sulphides, the Government of India will report on the progress of work carried out in 2025 in its 2026 annual report.

87. In fulfilment of their obligation to provide and fund training for personnel from developing member States and the Authority, during the reporting period, 70 new training opportunities were provided by 11 contractors under 19 programmes ranging from theoretical and at-sea training to master's fellowships, engineering and AUV training.<sup>15</sup>

88. During the second part of its thirtieth session, in June and July 2025, in the context of its consideration of the annual reports on activities carried out by contractors in 2023, the Legal and Technical Commission, in line with the agreed procedure, determined that the following contractors required continued attention regarding their performance and alignment with their contractual obligations: (a) UK Seabed Resources Ltd.; (b) Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd.; and (c) Cook Islands Investment Corporation.<sup>16</sup> The Commission also identified other contractors requiring specific attention for the next review cycle, in line with the applicable modalities. During the first part of the thirty-first session, in March 2026, the Commission reviewed responses from the nine contractors identified at its previous session as requiring specific attention. It noted that while some contractors had provided satisfactory responses, other responses required further clarification and review. The Commission will continue its consideration of the matter as part of the review of the annual reports during the second part of its meetings and report to the Council accordingly.<sup>17</sup>

89. Contractors are also required to submit five-year periodic review reports on their activities. During the reporting period, two periodic review reports were submitted by UK Seabed Resources Ltd (UKSR2), and Blue Minerals Jamaica Ltd., which are under evaluation.<sup>18</sup>

90. The eighth annual consultative meeting with contractors was held in Goa, India, from 18-20 September 2025, in collaboration with the Government of India through its Ministry of Earth Sciences and the National Institute of Oceanography. The participants exchanged views on the progress made on the draft exploitation regulations. They also discussed communication between the Commission and contractors, common concerns and challenges faced by contractors and avenues to enhance collaboration among contractors.

91. During the reporting period, the Secretary-General held two dialogues, in the margins of the Council meetings of July 2025 and March 2026 respectively, one with contractors, and one with sponsoring States. During the dialogue, contractors reiterated their concerns on the progress of the development of the exploitation regulations. Other topics included the high-level engagements and communications, REMPs, and the Deep-Sea Biobank.

92. In the dialogue with sponsoring States, discussion focused on progress on the negotiation of the exploitation regulations, enhanced communication with the sponsoring States over the performance of their sponsored contractors, and continued

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<sup>15</sup> For more details on these opportunities, see ISBA/30/LTC/8 and ISBA/31/LTC/5 and <https://isa.org.jm/capacity-development-training-and-technical-assistance/contractor-training-programme/>

<sup>16</sup> Further information is provided in the Report of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission at the second part of its thirtieth session (ISBA/30/C/4/Add.1). Also see ISBA/30/C/2/Add.2.

<sup>17</sup> See ISBA/31/C/4 and ISBA/31/C/4/Add.1.

<sup>18</sup> Further information regarding periodic reviews is contained in ISBA/31/C/3.

support to the work of the Authority, in particular relating to the need of transition from exploration to exploitation.

## **XII. From exploration to exploitation**

93. In line with the request made by the Council in its decision on a thematic approach to the continuation of the elaboration of rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation to resolve remaining key outstanding matters, the secretariat released a Further Revised Consolidated Text of the Draft Regulations on Exploitation of Mineral resources in the Area on 23 December 2025.

94. The Further Revised Consolidated Text collects oral comments received during the thirtieth session, as well as written proposals submitted by Member States, stakeholders, Informal Working Groups and Friends of the President initiatives. It also relies significantly on the work carried out by Informal Working Groups and Friends of the President. Proposals from the Groups have been extensively incorporated, when necessary, with minor adjustments – such as the inclusion of brackets – required in light of the negotiations conducted during the thirtieth session.

95. On 12 February 2026, a revised version of the Further Revised Consolidated Text was published on the website of the Authority, with the aim of incorporating comments received and correcting minor editorial matters contained in the initial version of the document. A second revised version was published on 16 February 2026.

96. As for the previous versions, the Further Revised Consolidated Text is accompanied by the Further Revised Suspense Document, which includes the elements to be relocated from the draft regulations to the Standard and Guidelines and other rules, regulations and procedures of the Authority. For the first time, a clean version of the Text has also been issued, where proposals in mark-up have been accepted and comment boxes deleted. The clean version of the Text is provided with the aim of offering a better overview of how the content might look. In case of any inconsistencies between the two versions of the text, the mark-up version of the Text prevails.

97. As indicated above, the secretariat will prepare a third revision of the Further Revised Consolidated Text for the consideration of the Council in July 2026.

## **XIII. Collaboration with the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations and bodies and international conferences**

98. Activities undertaken in the ocean are closely related which calls for cooperation and coordination among intergovernmental organizations with mandates over activities in the ocean. As emphasized in articles 138 and 169 of the Convention itself, this is a core element for a consistent approach to the protection and preservation of the marine environment and the sustainable development of ocean activities.

99. During the reporting period, the secretariat continued to collaborate with the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations on matters of mutual interest, including through UN-Oceans. This ongoing collaboration provides a platform for ensuring more effective cooperation in fulfilling the mandate of the Authority, consistent with the Convention and international law.

### **A. United Nations**

100. The Authority has a close and productive working relationship with the United Nations, in particular, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs at the United Nations (UN DOALOS). The Authority provided

information on its activities to the thirty-fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention in June 2025.

101. During the reporting period, with respect to the Administration of Justice, to strengthen the Authority's accountability mechanism and further develop strategies to resolve staff disputes informally and, the secretariat engaged in discussions with the Offices of the Ombudsman and the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The purpose of these consultations was to explore ways to reduce litigation costs and strengthen accountability mechanisms. Consultations were also held with the Office of Administration of Justice within the context of reducing the administrative costs related to appeals before the United Nations Appeals Tribunal based on the Special Agreement between the UN and the Authority.

## **B. International Maritime Organization**

102. The secretariat continued to have exchanges with the International Maritime Organization specifically in promoting the safe participation of women at sea in the context of the Global Mentoring Programme S.H.E. – See Her Exceed ('S.H.E. programme', see below section XV).

## **C. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations**

103. A memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), signed on June 11, 2025, has fostered collaboration on matters of mutual interests such as cross-sectoral ocean governance and issues related to the BBNJ Agreement. A workshop funded by the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries project was held in Rome from September 24-26, 2025, focusing on the interactions between deep-sea fisheries and activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction. The event emphasized the importance of the oxygen-minimum zone and its impact on marine biodiversity near seamounts. Discussions included environmental impact assessments, area-based management tools, and the interplay between the Authority's legal regime and fishery regulatory frameworks.

## **D. Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**

104. In the framework of the 2020 approved Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research in support of United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, the secretariat has actively participated in the Alliance Decade coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IOC-UNESCO). This partnership critically contributes to the implementation of the science needed for the ocean we want.

## **E. United Nations Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries**

105. Within the framework of international cooperation with the United Nations system, the Authority continued to strengthen its partnership with the United Nations Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries through the joint project entitled "*Building and developing capacities of least developed countries in deep-sea-related science, technology and innovation in support of sustainable development of blue emerging economies.*" The project aims at supporting least developed countries in identifying priority technological needs and pathways for innovation relevant to activities in the Area and the broader blue economy.

106. During the reporting period, a Technology Needs Assessment (TNA) was successfully completed for the United Republic of Tanzania, in close cooperation with the Government of Tanzania and the Deep-Sea Fishing Authority acting as the national focal point. The TNA provided a structured and evidence-based assessment

of Tanzania's priority technology gaps and opportunities in ocean science, marine technology and innovation, with a view to strengthening national capacity and facilitating access to appropriate technologies consistent with the Convention and the Authority's mandate. On 24 July 2025, the findings and recommendations of the TNA were presented at a high-level side event.

## **F. International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea**

107. On 23 March 2026, the Secretary-General and the Legal Counsel paid a courtesy visit to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea. This provided an opportunity for an exchange of information on general activities of both institutions between the members of the Tribunal and the delegation of the Authority.

## **G. UN-Oceans**

108. UN-Oceans is a United Nations inter-agency initiative dedicated to enhancing coordination and coherence across United Nations systems and activities focused on our oceans and coastal areas. Its mission is to foster communication among participating organizations by sharing experiences, best practices, tools and methodologies and lessons learned in ocean-related matters.

109. During the reporting period, the secretariat remained actively engaged in UN-Oceans and participated in several meetings, as well as a meeting of principals held on 15 January 2026 to discuss cooperation and coordination in relation to the BBNJ Agreement. Through these efforts, UN-Oceans continues to champion the sustainable management and preservation of our precious marine environments.

## **H. Third United Nations Ocean Conference**

110. In June 2025, the Authority participated in the third United Nations Ocean Conference, hosted by Costa Rica and France and held in Nice, France. The Conference provided a timely and strategic platform to reaffirm the Authority's mandate under the Convention and to highlight its role in science-based and inclusive governance of areas beyond national jurisdiction. Engagements at the highest political level underscored the growing recognition that effective ocean governance, including of the deep seabed, depends on robust multilateral institutions, adherence to international law and strengthened cooperation across mandates.

111. Throughout the Conference, the Authority's work under the Marine Scientific Research Action Plan received heightened visibility, particularly regarding advancing scientific knowledge, data sharing and capacity development for developing States, small island developing States and least developed countries. Interventions highlighted the Authority's role as custodian of environmental protection measures in the Area, including the designation of areas of particular environmental interest, as well as the importance of aligning emerging global processes, including the BBNJ Agreement, in a complementary manner that reinforces the Convention as the legal framework for ocean governance.

112. The Conference also enabled the Authority to strengthen partnerships with Member States, United Nations entities, scientific institutions, civil society and the private sector, with a focus on translating political momentum into concrete action. For example, a Letter of Cooperation with the Danish Hydrological Institute was signed. These engagements underscored the Authority's commitment to transparency, inclusivity and constructive dialogue in their deliberations, towards the development of a strong, science-based regulatory framework that ensures the protection of the marine environment and the equitable and orderly management of the resources of the Area.

## **I. Participation in sessions 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**

113. The BBNJ Agreement, focused on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond national jurisdiction, entered into force on 17 January 2026, after the sixtieth ratification was completed on September 19, 2025. The Authority and the part XI legal regime are recognized as key organization and legal framework in this context. To support future collaboration, the secretariat has actively participated in preparatory commissions and organized events, including workshops and presentations, to engage member States and relevant organizations about the Authority's role in implementing the objectives of the BBNJ Agreement.

## **XIV. Science and policy interface**

### **A. Stewardship of the Area**

114. During the reporting period, the Legal and Technical Commission continued to advance the development of the regional environmental management for the north-west Pacific Ocean, as well as preparation for a workshop to discuss this plan to be held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in May 2026. With a focus on management issues, in line with the standardized procedure for the development, establishment and review of REMPs, the workshop will provide opportunities for experts and representatives of various stakeholder groups to exchange views on the proposed management measures, before the draft plan is finalized and released for a stakeholder consultation.

115. During its meeting in July 2025, the Commission also discussed its planned activities related to the development and review of REMPs in other regions in the next three years, including an indicative timeline for the completion of the regional environmental management plan for the Indian Ocean in 2027.

116. During the reporting period, the Intersessional Expert Group (IEG) for the development of environmental threshold values continued to advance the draft report focusing on toxicity, turbidity and settling of resuspended sediments, and underwater noise and light pollution.

117. The progress made was presented during the Commission's informal dialogue on the margins of the Council meeting in July 2025. A standardized zone-of-impact approach and ecological reference points were proposed as a framework that integrates the potential environmental impact with the level of pressure. This approach builds on existing practices from other industries and provides the science-based path to inform management actions and threshold levels considering environmental, economic and societal values.

118. The Commission co-chairs met in Kingston from 18 to 20 February 2026 and continued to hold meetings and discussions with IEG experts during the intersessional period to finalize the report for formal stakeholder consultation during the thirty-first session.

119. The Commission is expected to consider the report and the outcomes from the stakeholder consultation process in the fourth quarter of 2026 and make its recommendation to the Council during the thirty-second session in 2027.

### **B. Marine scientific research**

120. In discharging the Authority's significant responsibilities related to marine scientific research, the secretariat acts as a catalyst for collaborative research in an

international context. To this end, the 2020 action plan for marine scientific research in support of the United Nation's Decade for Ocean Science for Sustainable Development advances flagship initiatives in areas of global relevance, including cumulative impact, ecosystems and taxonomy, along with the advancement of tools and methodologies in support of that action plan.

121. In this context, the ISA Deep-Sea Biobank initiative was further expanded to enhance access to deep-sea biological samples and associated genetic data, in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Korea in November 2025. A set of standard operating procedures on sampling, processing and sharing of biological samples and genetic data from the Area, building upon existing best practices is being developed with a view to enhancing scientific collaboration and data quality.

122. The Authority's DeepData database continues to serve as a one-stop platform for access to environmental data submitted by contractors. The platform is continuously updated through the upload of additional datasets, while the quality of data submissions is being progressively enhanced through targeted knowledge-exchange activities with contractor data managers and international partners.

123. Two workshop reports concerning technical aspects were finalized during the reporting period. The first one provides an overview of emerging monitoring technologies, drawing on the outcomes of an expert workshop held in Kobe, Japan, in June 2025. The second report reflects the state of the art in science for the Indian Ocean to support the further development of its REMP. Additionally, a knowledge product on the status of environmental baselines highlights their importance for impact assessment and a technical highlight focuses on the occurrence, geological characteristics of rare earth elements in seabed sediments as a potential resource. As a next step, a roadmap is being developed to inform the further implementation of the action plan for the coming five years, building on knowledge priorities identified in the regulatory context and by the scientific community.

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

124. During the reporting period, the secretariat continued to implement the Authority's Capacity Development Strategy adopted by the Assembly in 2022.<sup>19</sup>

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

125. As of 31 March 2026, 74 Member States had nominated National Focal Points for Capacity-Development. These were established following the Assembly's decision relating to the implementation of a programmatic approach to capacity development,<sup>20</sup> which invited Member States to designate representatives to liaise with the secretariat on matters related to capacity development. The secretariat continues to encourage additional nominations, as focal points play a key role in supporting technical needs assessments, raising awareness of the work of the Authority, and facilitating effective information sharing.

126. During the reporting period, the secretariat continued to collaborate with national focal points to disseminate training and capacity-building opportunities through relevant national platforms and networks, ensuring broad outreach across Member States of the Authority. National focal points further supported the secretariat in identifying potential partners and institutions within their respective countries to advance capacity development initiatives. They support the implementation of

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<sup>19</sup> ISBA/27/A/11.

<sup>20</sup> ISBA/26/A/18.

national and regional programmes and serve as the point of contact between the secretariat and Member States of the Authority in capacity-building matters.

127. In August 2026, the secretariat will organize a virtual meeting with national focal points, aimed at reviewing progress in implementing the Authority's Capacity Development Strategy and unpacking upcoming opportunities within the Capacity Development Programme.

## **B. Deep Dive**

128. The Deep Dive programme successfully delivered comprehensive online training on deep –sea governance, marine resources, scientific research, environmental protection, and extraction technologies through its five core modules. Featuring expert-led lessons with videos, presentations, reading materials, quizzes, and specialized electives, the platform equipped participants with essential knowledge on the Part XI legal regime and the work of the Authority. As of 31 March 2026, 276 participants have been certified, comprising 158 males and 118 females from 178 countries, including Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs). All regional groups were represented, with 123 certified from the African Group, 79 certified from the Asia-Pacific Group, 7 from the Eastern European Group, 28 from GRULAC, and 25 from WEOG.

## **C. The ISA Capacity Development Alumni Network (iCAN)**

129. The ISA Capacity Development Alumni Network (iCAN), established in line with the Authority's Capacity Development Strategy,<sup>21</sup> aims to monitor the mid and long-term impact of training provided and enables the secretariat to draw on the expertise of former trainees as mentors, experts, or consultants.

130. In October 2025, in a bid to foster continuous learning and networking in the deep seabed related areas, the secretariat hosted the second learning-series 'iCAN Meets'. This aims to update former beneficiaries of ISA capacity building programmes on the latest initiatives and progress of activities related to the Area while fostering deeper engagement across the network. This interactive learning session focused on DeepData and on exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources of Germany's contract area. The secretariat also reserved five dedicated places for iCAN members in each cohort of the ISA Deep Dive e-Learning Programme. The secretariat further leveraged the expertise of iCAN members across a range of platforms, including by allocating presentation slots for iCAN members in workshops, technical programmes, and capacity development activities. In parallel, the secretariat actively disseminated relevant capacity development opportunities to iCAN members, thereby expanding information-sharing networks and reinforcing alumni engagement.

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

131. The secretariat participated in the in-person Global Ocean Governance Workshop in Rome, Italy, from 16 to 18 June 2025. The workshop was co-financed by the World Bank's Ocean Governance Capacity Building Programme funded by PROBLUE, FAO's Deep Fisheries Project of the GEF-funded Common Oceans Programme, and the Norway-funded EAF Nansen Programme.

132. With a focus on strengthening capacity for sustainable ocean governance, the workshop co-hosted by the World Bank and the FAO offered an opportunity to deepen collaboration and integrate international legal instruments on the ocean. This was delivered in partnership with the FAO, the UN DOALOS, the World Bank, the

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<sup>21</sup> ISBA/27/A/5.

Melbourne University Law School and the University of Nantes. The workshop gathered 48 outstanding alumni of the Ocean Governance Capacity Building Training Programme's previous regional online trainings. Participants were legal experts, government officials and professionals from across the world who shared experiences and discussed best practices and innovative solutions to common challenges in ocean governance, sustainable fisheries, activities in the Area and blue economy. The workshop promoted peer-to-peer learning with dedicated breakout sessions and case study presentations and built on UNOC 3 and participated in enhancing legal capacity in support of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water).

## **E. Women's empowerment**

133. Several flagship initiatives show the continued importance of women's empowerment in the discharge by the Authority of its significant responsibilities related to marine scientific research and capacity-building.

134. In December 2025, the Secretary-General was onboarded as a member to International Gender Champions, an esteemed network for gender equality with over 300 champions around the globe. As part of her membership, the Secretary-General prioritizes building bridges across genders and geographies. She committed to increasing the visibility and active participation of women experts from developing countries and to prioritizing gender balance in the selection of qualified candidates for all capacity building initiatives of the Authority.

135. During the reporting period, the first phase of the Authority's flagship initiative for advancing women's participation in deep-sea-related affairs, the S.H.E. Programme was concluded successfully with the support of the Government of France. In December 2025, the secretariat and the Government of France co-hosted a high-level webinar entitled "Celebrating Women in Deep-Sea Science and Technological Innovation: Creating Lasting Impact through Knowledge Transfer," which drew more than 160 participants from over 35 countries.<sup>22</sup> The pilot cohort delivered two S.H.E. knowledge outputs, a synthesis of marine scientific research and an analysis of barriers for women to participate in exploration at sea. The latter informed the development of the "S.H.E. Gender Charter practical guidelines to promote the safe participation of women in at seas activities". The second phase of S.H.E will encompass a community of practice on cumulative impacts as well as a "S.H.E Law in the Sea" (SHELAW) to enhance the participation of female policy makers of developing countries in deep-seabed governance.

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

136. During the reporting period, the ISA-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre supported the implementation of the Women in Blue Training in ocean science organized in partnership with the Italian National Research Council to celebrate the Authority's thirtieth anniversary, with support from the ISA Partnership fund. The training consisted of a winter school in Marine Geology – Deep Sea Frontiers and a research cruise onboard *Gaia Blu* in August 2025.

137. The 2026 workplan of the centre has been designed to strengthen national and regional capacities in marine spatial planning for the development and implementation of REMPs. A training workshop is scheduled for September 2026.

<sup>22</sup> For further details, see ISBA/31/A/3.

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

138. The ISA–China Joint Training and Research Steering Committee met on 8 December 2025 and updated its membership. In line with its mandate to facilitate marine scientific research while building capacity, the Committee approved funding for a research consortium to advance biological data collection in the Northwest Pacific and launched an additional call for joint research focused on data development. Capacity-building being core to the Centre’s activities, a fourth training workshop on cumulative impact assessment will be held in Sanya, China, from 27 May to 5 June 2026.

### **H. Africa Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy**

139. Pursuant to the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC), the Africa Academy for Deep Sea Diplomacy (ADSEA) training programme was implemented with the support of the ISA Partnership Fund. The programme was designed to strengthen the capacity of early-to mid-career professionals from African States, with particular emphasis on diplomats, government officials and policy makers engaged in ocean, legal, environmental and marine affairs. The call for application attracted 205 applications from 39 African countries, demonstrating significant interest in the programme across the continent. 26 participants (13 females and 13 males) from 16 African countries representing 5 subregions in Africa including LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS participated.

140. The programme was delivered in two phases. The online phase, conducted from 23 September to 1 December 2025, consisted of a dedicated Deep Dive module tailored to the needs of participants. The second phase was the inaugural in-person workshop, hosted by IRIC in Yaoundé, Cameroon from 9 to 13 February 2026. This provided intensive and practice-oriented training. The curriculum offered comprehensive exposure to the functions, work and processes of the Authority and included simulations of negotiations and drafting of legal and policy texts. Through these activities, ADSEA contributed to enhancing Africa’s effective participation in the Part XI legal regime.

### **I. Advancing Caribbean blue economy through the Centre for Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy**

141. Following the November 2024 workshop in St John’s, Antigua and Barbuda, on “Advancing the Caribbean Blue Economy through Deep-Sea Research”. This led to the development of the CaribISA Roadmap (2025–2030) to strengthen marine scientific research in support of blue economy policies. On 18 September 2025, the secretariat convened a meeting with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda to define strategic and tactical priorities. The meeting identified several key priorities, including the establishment of a Joint Training and Research Centre in partnership with the University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus and the Centre of Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy; the development of regional curricula tailored for the CARICOM region; the facilitation of National Expert Deployment Programmes; and the organization of a regional workshop. This coordinated approach positions CARICOM States to enhance their participation in marine scientific research in the Area and to leverage scientific knowledge in support of sustainable blue economy development.

### **J. The ISA Partnership Fund**

142. Established by the Assembly at its twenty-seventh session as a multi-donor trust fund, the ISA Partnership Fund continued to serve as a key instrument for advancing marine scientific research and capacity development in accordance with

the mandate of the Authority and the priorities identified by developing member States. Since its inception, the Fund has mobilized a total income of approximately USD 2.21 million. Of this amount, USD 1.29 million has been allocated to projects approved by the board, with approximately USD 920,000 of the remaining available allocated for 2026 projects. All supported activities were aligned with the Marine Scientific Research Action Plan and the Capacity Development Strategy of the Authority. The meeting further recognized the importance of the “Advancing Caribbean blue economy through the Centre for Excellence for Oceanography and the Blue Economy” project implemented with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, highlighting the importance of following up on the outcomes of the 2024 workshop, as mentioned in the above section.

143. On 3 December 2025, the fifth meeting of ISA Partnership Fund Board approved three proposals for the next funding cycle. These focused on: (i) integrated capacity development on science related to the development and implementation of REMPs; (ii) digital transformation of the Authority’s web platforms to support marine scientific research and capacity-building activities; and (iii) Pacific small island developing States initiative on the deep seabed sustainable blue growth. These initiatives are intended to scale up the impact of the Fund for developing States, including LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS, and to promote gender balance in marine scientific research.

## **XVI. First celebration of ISA Deep Seabed Day**

144. The International Day of the Deep Seabed was first celebrated on 1 November 2025, marking a significant milestone for global awareness of the Area's mineral resources as common heritage. The initiative was proposed by Fiji, Jamaica, Malta, and Singapore in June 2025 and adopted by the Assembly on 23 July 2025, choosing the date to honour Ambassador Pardo's speech at the UN in 1967.

145. A comprehensive campaign was launched less than a month after the proclamation, resulting in a significant increase in visibility and engagement on ISA's digital platforms. The campaign included various promotional materials and stories to enhance public interest and understanding of the Authority's work. The inaugural observance involved participation from several Member States, notably a major event in India, emphasizing the importance of innovation and responsible exploration. The UN General Assembly noted with appreciation the proclamation by the Assembly of 1 November as the International Day of the Deep Seabed. Planning for the second celebration on 1 November 2026 is currently underway, with discussions involving the Champion Member States.

## **XVII. Outreach and external activities**

146. During the reporting period, the secretariat initiated a comprehensive digital transformation programme to improve its web presence, user experience and data infrastructure. The Authority's website is the primary interface through which Members, Contractors, the scientific community, civil society and the public access regulatory, scientific and capacity-building information. An internal assessment established that the current platform presents structural limitations in navigation, data interoperability and user engagement. To address these limitations and to provide the technical foundation for the subsequent integration of ISA's data platforms, including DeepData, the secretariat developed a Digital Transformation Roadmap and is undertaking a website redesign and platform rebuild. .

147. In December 2025, in her first address to the UN General Assembly, the Secretary-General outlined the Authority's priorities and called for the completion of a strong, enforceable regulatory framework for activities in the Area. In November 2025, the Authority co-convened with the Global Chair of the Landlocked Developing

Countries Group a high-level seminar in New York on the rights and opportunities of Landlocked Developing Countries under the Convention. In December 2025, the Secretariat was also represented at the seventh session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi.

148. The Secretary-General undertook official missions to Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Germany, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The Secretary-General participated on a panel hosted by the Geneva Environment Network, met with IUCN Director General and was received by Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, who is also the Chair of the International Gender Champions Global Board, following her induction into the network in December 2025.

149. On 20 July 2025, in the margins of the thirtieth session of the Assembly, the inaugural Deep-Sea Dialogues, co-organized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Dona Bertarelli Philanthropy and the Oceano Azul Foundation, gathered scientists, legal and economic experts, policymakers and civil society in a neutral, inclusive and non-negotiation setting to consider science, economics, and governance. Summaries were presented to the Assembly on 23 July 2025 as part of the celebrations.

150. During the reporting period, there was a substantial and sustained expansion of the Authority's presence in international media and recorded a sustained significant growth of the Authority's digital communications platforms. The website attracted an average of 34,000 visits per month. Among the highest-performing content across platforms was the promotion of the Contractors' Training Programme fellowships. On the occasion of the first International Day of the Deep Seabed, stories from nine former trainees were featured across ISA's digital channel

## **XVIII. Conclusion**

151. The reporting period marked an important phase in the institutional evolution of the Authority and in the continued discharge of its responsibilities under the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. The secretariat strengthened alignment with the United Nations common system and strategic institutional partnerships to enhance institutional readiness and governance resilience.

152. Across its regulatory, institutional, scientific, operational, economic, capacity-development and strategic communications functions, the Authority continued to strengthen its preparedness as work advanced towards the possible adoption of the draft regulations on exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. Looking ahead, the Secretary-General remains committed to ensuring that the Authority continues to discharge its mandate effectively.