

Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative (SSKI): Advancing Deep-Sea Biodiversity Knowledge through Global Partnership



Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative (SSKI) Side Event: Advancing Deep-Sea Biodiversity Knowledge through Global Partnership

Opening Remarks by

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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Colleagues, scientists, friends,

Allow me to thank all of you for joining us this afternoon, and to express my appreciation to the partners who have made this event, and the Initiative it celebrates, possible.

Ensuring the sustainable management of the ocean means safeguarding its ecosystems and enabling responsible human activities. This requires robust scientific evidence to inform decision-making, as well as strong

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international cooperation, strategic partnerships, and environmental stewardship.

For the International Seabed Authority, this is an aspiration, but more significantly, it is a mandate. It is unique in human history to require this type of safeguarding before an exploitation activity begins, and we must champion this principle.

This is particularly relevant for the deep sea, where complexity of operations and prohibitive costs have limited knowledge on biodiversity and ecological functioning; of course, limited knowledge in turn presents challenges for both conservation, sustainable use and governance.

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It is in this context that the Authority launched the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative in 2022. SSKI is a multi-donor collaborative platform aimed at enhancing deep-sea biodiversity research, capacity-building and access to knowledge in support of evidence-based regulatory processes.

Science, capacity-building and partnerships run through everything the Authority does. SSKI brings these three elements together in a practical way, strengthening both the knowledge base and the international cooperation needed to protect the marine environment.

Through SSKI, the Authority seeks to foster global collaboration among Member States, scientific institutions, exploration Contractors and

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international organizations to generate, assess and share deep-sea data and knowledge.

This work strengthens the scientific basis for the effective protection of the marine environment in the Area. Its contribution also reaches beyond the Authority.

The global frameworks that shape our shared ocean agenda, including SDG 14, the BBNJ Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, rest on a common conviction: that the ocean must be governed sustainably, and anchored in evidence.

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In the deep sea, this evidence is what SSKI is helping to build.

The first “One Thousand Reasons” call attracted sixty-five applications from twenty-one countries, spanning all five regional groups of the Authority.

Selected projects have described new species from the deep seabed. In one recent example, twenty-four species of amphipods were described from the Clarion-Clipperton Zone. Their findings have been published in open-access journals and made available through the Authority’s DeepData platform and the World Register of Marine Species.

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In this way, the campaign supports our goal of describing at least one thousand new deep-sea species by 2030, while creating opportunities for researchers, particularly those from developing countries, to contribute directly to deep-sea biodiversity assessments.

Excellencies,

None of this would have been possible without our partners.

Allow me therefore to express the appreciation of the Authority to all Member States, institutions and organizations whose contributions have sustained this work, several of whom you will hear from during this event.

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I wish in particular to recognize the institutions that have shaped this Initiative since its launch at the 2022 United Nations Ocean Conference in Lisbon: Argentina, South Africa and the European Commission, the National Marine Biodiversity Institute of Korea, the French institute for marine research and exploration - Ifremer, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ocean Biodiversity Information System of UNESCO- IOC, and the World Register of Marine Species, our partner in the “One Thousand Reasons” campaign.

Allow me a personal word. I came to this Authority as an oceanographer, and science will always be the lens through which I see this Initiative. But it is precisely that lens that tells me SSKI is about far more than science.

Describing a species is patient, painstaking work, and it matters because of what it makes possible: turning evidence into sound policy, and bringing all stakeholders into the process together. This is the real work, ensuring that what we learn about the deep sea actually shapes how we govern and protect it.

Strengthening taxonomy can therefore turn precaution into evidence-based stewardship.

Dear colleagues,

Deep-sea taxonomy, open-access data and capacity-building are essential to effective ocean governance.

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They provide the evidence on which the Authority's decisions, and the effective protection of the marine environment, ultimately depend.

Today is not only about celebrating what has been achieved. It is also about identifying what comes next. And how can we collectively build a lasting legacy that continues to support deep-sea science well beyond 2030.

I hope today's event will help inspire new collaborations among all those committed to advancing knowledge of the deep ocean for the benefit of humankind.

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We also look forward to continuing to work with existing partners and welcoming new ones through financial, technical and scientific cooperation.

I encourage Member States, institutions and all stakeholders to consider how they can contribute to the next phase of this Initiative.

I thank you.