ISBA/32/C/CRP.2
30 October 2026
English only

Thirty-second session
Council session, part I
Kingston, 8-19 March 2027

Draft roadmap setting out milestones for the timely adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. By decision ISBA/31/C/38[1], paragraph 1, the Council of the International Seabed Authority requested the secretariat to draft a road map, for consideration by the Council at the first part of its thirty-second session, setting out milestones for the timely adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation and an updated indicative list of key outstanding issues that require further thematic discussion by the Council, having regard to progress made and the need for prioritization.

2. Under paragraph 2 of that decision, the Council also requested the secretariat to share the draft road map referred to in paragraph 1 of the present decision by 31 October 2026, organize webinars to present it, provide for written comments on it to be submitted to the secretariat by 31 December 2026 and share an updated draft at least one month in advance of the first part of the thirty-second session.

3. The preparation and use of roadmaps to organize and guide the work of the Council on the draft regulations has become an important element of the legislative process. The Council agreed on a roadmap for its work in 2022,[2] which was subsequently revised to guide its work in 2023.[3] In July 2023, the Council endorsed a further roadmap for the continuation of its work during the remainder of the twenty-eighth session and the twenty-ninth session,[4] and in July 2024 endorsed a revised roadmap to guide its work during the thirtieth session.[5] Annexed to this document is a draft roadmap that builds on that practice, while taking into account the current stage of the negotiations and the specific mandate contained in decision ISBA/31/C/38.

4. The draft roadmap annexed to the present document takes into account the progress achieved to date on the different components of the legislative process associated with the draft Regulations on Exploitation of Mineral Resources in the Area (hereinafter the “draft Regulations”), including the Standards and Guidelines and institutional and implementation arrangements that may be necessary to support the effective implementation of the Regulations. It identifies actions, their indicative timing and expected outputs, without prejudging the Council’s decisions on substance or sequencing. The implementation of the roadmap, including the organization and sequencing of work, will also need to take into account the outcome of the intersessional discussions on working methods envisaged in paragraph 4 of decision ISBA/31/C/38, and any working modalities subsequently agreed upon by the Council.

[1] ISBA/31/C/38, Decision of the Council of the International Seabed Authority on the approach to the continuation of the elaboration of rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation and resolution of the remaining key outstanding issues.
[2] See ISBA/26/C/13/Add.1
[3] See ISBA/27/C/21/Add.2
[4] See ISBA/28/C/24
[5] See ISBA/29/C/9/Add.1, Annex III

II. Objective and approach

5. The overall objective of the roadmap is to facilitate progressive convergence on the remaining outstanding issues through a predictable sequence of Council consideration, targeted intersessional work and coordinated development of the draft Regulations, associated Standards and Guidelines, and necessary institutional and implementation arrangements, with a view to the timely adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation. For the purposes of the present draft roadmap, "progressive convergence" refers to the incremental narrowing of outstanding differences and bracketed text, and the increasing alignment of positions, as reflected in successive negotiating texts, facilitator reports and updated indicative lists of key outstanding issues.

6. In preparing the draft roadmap, the secretariat has been mindful of views expressed by delegations that the milestones should not be understood as predetermined deadlines for the conclusion of negotiations. Accordingly, the draft roadmap provides an indicative sequencing of work and identifies stages at which particular matters are expected to be taken up and, where appropriate, outputs that could facilitate further progress. The sequencing is intended to promote continuity and convergence in the negotiations, with each stage building as appropriate on the last, without prejudging the outcome of the Council's consideration of any issue. In the annex, "Indicative period" identifies when an action is expected to be undertaken or considered by the organ concerned; the "Milestones / expected output / next step" column identifies the document, guidance, report or other result that may follow. Where an output must be prepared before a Council meeting, this is expressly indicated. The same qualifications apply to all four annex tables.

7. Against this background, the draft roadmap is organized around three mutually interconnected areas of work:

(a) Adoption of the draft Regulations;

(b) Adoption of the draft Standards and Guidelines; and

(c) Completion of the necessary institutional and implementation arrangements.

8. A fourth annex table addresses cross-cutting review and next steps. The sequencing of the three areas may overlap, but their outputs and the decisions required at each stage should remain distinguishable.

9. The secretariat will provide the documents and technical support requested by the Council. The Council and its members retain responsibility for determining priorities, considering proposals, deciding whether convergence or consensus has been achieved, and agreeing any revised working modalities.

III. Adoption of the draft Regulations

10. The first annex table addresses consideration of the Advanced Negotiating Text, thematic consideration of the updated indicative list of key outstanding issues, targeted intersessional work and subsequent review. These are connected but distinct steps: the Advanced Negotiating Text is the negotiating text; the list identifies issues requiring priority policy discussion; intersessional groups may develop options or compromise proposals; and the Council's review determines remaining work and next steps.

11. By decision ISBA/31/C/38, paragraph 3, the Council requested the secretariat to provide an Advanced Negotiating Text, which harmonises and streamlines the Further Revised Consolidated Text, and takes into account discussions and outcomes achieved during the thirty-first session as well as subsequent intersessional input. The Council further requested that the Advanced Negotiating Text be uploaded to the website of the International Seabed Authority at least six weeks in advance of the first part of the thirty-second session.

12. In the same decision, paragraph 1, the Council requested the secretariat to provide an updated indicative list of key outstanding issues that require further thematic discussion by the Council, having

regard to progress made and the need for prioritization. To facilitate preparation by delegations, the secretariat should seek to circulate that list sufficiently in advance of the March 2027 meetings.

13. During the first part of the thirty-second session, the Council is expected to consider the Advanced Negotiating Text following a thematic approach, focusing in particular on the key outstanding issues identified in the updated indicative list prepared by the secretariat. The objective is to progressively narrow differences, provide guidance where necessary and identify provisions or issues on which no further substantive discussion is required at that stage, without prejudice to the final consideration of the draft Regulations as a whole.

14. In decision ISBA/31/C/38, the Council called upon member States to participate in an informal working group to discuss updates to working methods so as to enable the Council to focus on the key issues that require further thematic discussion and seek to avoid unnecessary reopening of text or a further line-by-line reading of the draft exploitation regulations. During the first part of the thirty-second session, the Council is expected to consider the outcome of that intersessional work and, as appropriate, agree on working modalities for the efficient conduct of the negotiations. The modalities adopted may affect the detailed sequencing and organization of work under this roadmap.

15. Targeted intersessional work between the first and second parts of the thirty-second session should build upon the progress achieved during the first part. Informal Working Groups and Friends of the President groups should continue their work on matters within their respective mandates, as appropriate, using Council guidance and the updated list to target unresolved questions. Outputs may include facilitator conclusions, issue matrices, revised or compromise text and identification of matters requiring further Council guidance. The Council should review mandates and the need for continuation or closure of individual groups case by case.

16. During the second part of the thirty-second session, the Council is expected to consider an updated version of the Advanced Negotiating Text reflecting progress achieved during the first part and the subsequent intersessional period, together with an updated list of key outstanding issues and reports from facilitators. The Council would continue its consideration of those issues with a view to further stabilizing the text and determining the remaining work required for the adoption of the draft Regulations. Updated texts and substantive proposals should, wherever practicable, be made available sufficiently in advance to allow delegations to be prepared.

IV. Adoption of the draft Standards and Guidelines

17. Section II of the annexed draft roadmap focuses on Standards and Guidelines, with particular emphasis on the Phase 1 instruments necessary to support adoption and effective implementation of the draft Regulations.

18. In accordance with decision ISBA/31/C/34, the Legal and Technical Commission is expected to continue its work on existing Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines associated with the draft Regulations, including the revision and consolidation of existing texts, the identification and development, as appropriate, of additional priority Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines, and the identification of matters requiring guidance from the Council. Outputs from the first part of the thirty-second session of the Commission should be circulated by the secretariat to delegations as early as practicable. The timetable for any further Commission outputs will depend on the Commission’s programme of work and the evolution of the negotiating text.

19. During the first part of the thirty-second session, it is suggested that the Council considers the relevant outputs of the Commission and provide, as necessary, guidance concerning the Standards and Guidelines to be developed or finalized as a matter of priority. It is furthermore suggested that particular attention should be given to identifying those Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines necessary to support the effective implementation of the Regulations and to ensure consistency between their provisions and the Advanced Negotiating Text.

20. During the second part of its thirty-second session, the Commission could continue revision of priority Phase 1 instruments in light of Council guidance, written comments and changes to the Advanced Negotiating Text.

21. During the second part of the thirty-second session, it is recommended that the Council considers the Standards and Guidelines advanced by the Commission and assesses the remaining work required for the completion of the Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines necessary to support the adoption and effective implementation of the Regulations.

22. Phase 2 and Phase 3 Standards and Guidelines should also be reflected in the overall planning framework, without suggesting that they must be completed on the same timetable as priority Phase 1 instruments. On the basis of the Commission's updated list and advice, the Council could identify their scope, dependencies and indicative order of development, including which matters may need to be addressed before implementation and which may follow later. No specific dates for their preparation or adoption are proposed at this stage.

V. Completion of the necessary institutional and implementation arrangements

23. The third section of the annexed draft roadmap focuses on potential institutional or implementation arrangements that may be necessary to support effective implementation of the exploitation regime but may be adopted separately from the draft Regulations. The Council may wish to determine whether relevant matters should be addressed by a decision, policy, rules of procedure or another instrument, taking into account legal clarity, coherence and the need to avoid unnecessary additional processes.

24. At the current stage of the negotiations, and without prejudice to any determination by the Council, relevant instruments may include:

(a) draft decision on the establishment of the Compliance Committee;

(b) draft Rules of Procedure of the Compliance Committee;

(c) draft Code of Conduct for Inspectors;

(d) draft General Policy on Whistleblowing.

25. The draft decision on the establishment of the Compliance Committee (a) is currently being negotiated under an informal working group on inspection, compliance and enforcement (ICE),[6] The group is currently working on the draft Rules of Procedure (b); their preparation and readiness for Council consideration should be confirmed through the facilitator's reporting. A draft General Policy on Whistleblowing was prepared by the secretariat for consideration of the Council during the second part of its thirty-first session.[7] A draft Code of Conduct for Inspectors, although referenced in the draft Regulations, has not yet been prepared.

26. The Council could review the status and intended legal form of each instrument during the first part of the thirty-second session, identify the responsible drafting body or facilitator and give any necessary instructions. The secretariat may provide drafting and technical support within its mandate and available resources. Where a new instrument or an expanded drafting mandate is proposed, the Council should determine the necessary authorization, lead responsibility and expected output before work proceeds. In particular, preparation of the Code of Conduct for Inspectors should follow Council guidance on its scope and drafting arrangements.

27. Benefit-sharing may merit separate consideration within the overall mapping of work connected with adoption and implementation of the exploitation regime. Its precise relationship to the draft Regulations, the appropriate legal instrument, the responsible workstream and any sequencing should be determined by the Council. At this stage the roadmap flags the issue for Council consideration and does not propose a substantive outcome or a fixed timetable for negotiations on it.

[6] See ISBA/31/C/CRP.8
[7] See ISBA/31/C/CRP.9

28. The Council should progressively identify and advance necessary institutional and implementation arrangements, taking account of their dependencies on the draft Regulations and Standards and Guidelines. Any expected adoption or completion milestone remains subject to the availability of mature text, adequate opportunity for delegation review and the Council's decision.

VI. Review and next steps towards adoption

29. The present draft roadmap is intended to be a living instrument and should be reviewed in light of progress achieved during the thirty-second session and the intersessional periods. Each stage of the roadmap should, as appropriate, build on the progress and outcomes achieved at the previous stage, with a view to preserving areas of convergence, progressively narrowing outstanding issues and facilitating continuity in the negotiations. The sequencing of work may therefore be adjusted, as appropriate, while maintaining the overall objective of the timely adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation. Any proposed adjustments to the roadmap would be submitted to the Council for its consideration and endorsement, as appropriate, taking into account the progress achieved and the remaining work required.

30. In this connection, decision ISBA/31/C/38 calls on member States to actively participate in intersessional work and requests those informal working groups and Friends of the President groups for which facilitators have already been identified to continue their work on the relevant regulations and to identify, where necessary, key outstanding issues requiring further thematic discussion by the Council.

31. To support this approach, the roadmap identifies, for each action, an expected outcome or next step, which may be a circulated text, facilitator report, consolidated list, written comments, Council guidance or decision, or identification of unresolved matters. These are intended to provide direction and continuity between the different stages of work and should not be understood as predetermined negotiating outcomes. Where an issue cannot be concluded at a particular stage, the Council may identify that the expected outcome may consist of narrowing the outstanding differences, identifying matters requiring further consideration or guidance, or determining the appropriate next step towards their resolution.

32. After each part of the thirty-second session, the Council should review progress across the three mutually interconnected areas of work and determine, as appropriate, the further work required. At the end of the first part of the thirty-second session, this assessment would be limited to a focused evaluation of the progress made and of the sequencing of work under the roadmap, as appropriate.

33. Following the second part of the session, this may include focused consideration, at subsequent meetings, of any remaining key outstanding issues, as well as the consolidation of the relevant texts to ensure consistency and coherence. On that basis, the Council should determine the next steps towards the finalization and timely adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation.

34. The indicative planning calendar below brings together key circulation, consultation and Council consideration points. It distinguishes dates established by Council decision from proposed planning arrangements. Additional dates, including written-comment periods on specific Standards and Guidelines, should be determined and communicated by the relevant organ or facilitator in consultation with delegations, as appropriate.

Indicative planning calendar

Timing	Milestone / activity	Status / expected output
By 31 October 2026	Secretariat circulates draft roadmap	Requested by ISBA/31/C/38; draft available to delegations
Following circulation; 20 November 2026 webinar	Presentation and discussion of draft roadmap	Requested consultation; schedule to be confirmed
By 31 December 2026	Written comments on draft roadmap	Requirement in ISBA/31/C/38, paragraph 2
At least six weeks before 8 March 2027	Advanced Negotiating Text uploaded to Authority website	Requirement in ISBA/31/C/38, paragraph 3
Sufficiently before March 2027, date to be confirmed	Updated indicative list of key outstanding issues	Proposed circulation planning point
At least one month before 8 March 2027	Updated draft roadmap shared	Requirement in ISBA/31/C/38, paragraph 2
At least one month before 8 March 2027	Indicative Programme of Work for the first part of the thirty-second session	Requirement in ISBA/31/C/38, paragraph 6
8–19 March 2027	First part of thirty-second Council session	Thematic discussions; initial S&G review; working-methods and institutional guidance
Between March and July 2027	Targeted intersessional work; possible written comments on S&G texts	Scope and deadlines subject to Council decisions and availability of documents
12–23 July 2027	Second part of thirty-second Council session	Updated texts, substantive follow-up, assessment of remaining work
Following July 2027, as determined by Council	Focused outstanding issues and consolidation work	Timing and scope to be decided by Council

Annex

Draft roadmap setting out milestones for the timely adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation

I. Adoption of the draft Regulations			
Organ / lead	**Action and purpose**	**Indicative period**	**Milestones / expected outcome / next step**
Secretariat	Prepare and circulate Advanced Negotiating Text as common negotiating basis	At least six weeks before March 2027 session	Advance Negotiating Text uploaded to website
Secretariat	Update indicative list of key outstanding issues to identify priority policy questions	Before March 2027 meetings	Updated list circulated sufficiently in advance
Council	Consideration of the Advanced Negotiating Text following a thematic approach, focusing on key outstanding issues (see also Table II below: the Legal and Technical Commission's consolidation of Standards and Guidelines during the same period will need to be based on this same Advanced Negotiating Text).	First part of the thirty-second session	Progressive narrowing of differences; provision of guidance where necessary; and identification of provisions or issues on which no further substantive discussion is required at that stage
Council	Consideration of any additional key outstanding issues that may require prioritization or further thematic discussion	First part of the thirty-second session	Prioritized list of any additional issues and referral for follow-up
Council	Consideration of the outcome of the intersessional working group on working methods and agreement, as appropriate, on working modalities for the efficient conduct of negotiations	First part of the thirty-second session	Working modalities agreed, as appropriate
Council / Informal working groups / Friends of the President groups / Member States	Targeted intersessional work on unresolved issues within their respective mandates	Intersessional period between the first and second parts of the thirty-second session	Facilitator reports, matrices or compromise text; matters for Council guidance (see decision ISBA/31/C/38 and paragraph 26 above)
Council	Review continuation or closure of groups individually	As appropriate during thirty-second session	Mandates maintained, revised or closed by Council, as appropriate
Secretariat	Prepare updated Advanced Negotiating Text and revised list of key outstanding issues to reflect developments	In advance of second part, where practicable	Updated negotiating text and list available for delegations
Council	Consideration of an updated version of the Advanced Negotiating Text reflecting progress achieved during the first part of the session and subsequent intersessional work	Second part of the thirty-second session	Further consolidation and stabilization of the negotiating text, taking into account progress achieved and intersessional input

I. Adoption of the draft Regulations			
Organ / lead	**Action and purpose**	**Indicative period**	**Milestones / expected outcome / next step**
Council	Consideration of a revised indicative list of key outstanding issues	Second part of the thirty-second session	A more focused identification of the remaining issues requiring Council consideration
Council	Continuation of thematic consideration of the remaining key outstanding issues contained in the revised indicative list	Second part of the thirty-second session	Further policy guidance and narrowing of differences
Council	Review of the remaining work for the adoption of the draft Regulations	Second part of the thirty-second session	Determination of remaining drafting, policy and consistency tasks and next steps

II. Adoption of the draft Standards and Guidelines			
Organ / lead	**Action and purpose**	**Indicative period**	**Milestones / expected outcome / next step**
Legal and Technical Commission	Revise and consolidate existing Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines, in accordance with decision ISBA/31/C/34 and taking into account the Advanced Negotiating Text	First part of the thirty-second session of the Commission	Revised texts circulated as early as practicable for Council consideration
Legal and Technical Commission	Preparation of an updated list of Standards and Guidelines associated with the draft Regulations on Exploitation, based on the Advanced Negotiating Text	First part of the thirty-second session of the Commission	Updated list identifying dependencies and proposed priorities
Legal and Technical Commission	Preparation of any comment or suggestion on streamlining to achieve coherence between the Standards and Guidelines and the draft Regulations, including the annexes and schedule, in line with paragraph 23 of Council decision ISBA/31/C/34	First part of the thirty-second session of the Commission	Comparative comments / proposals for Council guidance
Legal and Technical Commission	Identification, as appropriate, of matters relating to the Standards and Guidelines on which guidance from the Council may be required, in line with paragraph 24 of Council decision ISBA/31/C/34	First part of the thirty-second session of the Commission	Comparative comments / proposals for Council guidance
Council	Initial consideration of available revised Phase 1 texts and Commission's list	First part of the thirty-second session	Preliminary views, priorities and guidance; not presumed final approval
Council	Consideration of the updated list of Standards and Guidelines	First part of the thirty-second session	Identification of those Standards and Guidelines to be developed or finalized as a matter of priority to support the effective implementation of the Regulations
Council	Consideration of any comment or suggestion on streamlining to achieve coherence between the Standards and Guidelines and the Advanced Negotiating Text, including the annexes and schedule	First part of the thirty-second session	Council endorsement of, or guidance on, proposals to achieve coherence between the Standards and Guidelines and the draft Regulations
Council	Provision, as necessary, of guidance to the Commission on matters requiring direction from the Council	First part of the thirty-second session	Clear guidance enabling the Commission to advance priority Standards and Guidelines during the intersessional period
Legal and Technical Commission	Revision, as appropriate, of the remaining existing Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines	Second part of the thirty-second session of the Commission	Revised texts reflecting developments in the draft Regulations

II. Adoption of the draft Standards and Guidelines			
Organ / lead	**Action and purpose**	**Indicative period**	**Milestones / expected outcome / next step**
Legal and Technical Commission	Development, as appropriate, of additional Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines requested by the Council	Second part of the thirty-second session of the Commission	Additional texts reflecting Council guidance
Council	Consideration, as appropriate, of the revised Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines advanced by the Commission	Second part of the thirty-second session	Further advancement and, where appropriate, finalization of existing Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines necessary to support implementation of the draft Regulations
Council	Consideration, as appropriate, of additional Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines prepared by the Commission	Second part of the thirty-second session	Development of additional Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines necessary to support implementation of the draft Regulations
Council, informed by Commission	Consider indicative sequencing of Phase 2 and Phase 3 Standards and Guidelines	During thirty-second session, as appropriate	Priorities and dependencies identified; subsequent timetable for Council determination
Council	Review of the remaining work on Phase 1 Standards and Guidelines and discussion, as appropriate, of the updated list of Standards and Guidelines, with a view to identifying Standards and Guidelines that the Legal and Technical Commission would develop as a matter of priority	Second part of the thirty-second session	Identification of remaining work and determination of the next steps towards completion of the Standards and Guidelines necessary to support adoption and effective implementation of the Regulations

III. Completion of the institutional and implementation arrangements			
Organ / lead	**Action and purpose**	**Indicative period**	**Milestones / expected outcome / next step**
Council / facilitator	Consideration of the draft decision on the establishment of the Compliance Committee	First part of the thirty-second session	Advancement of the draft decision and identification of any remaining issues
ICE informal working group / facilitator	Continue preparation of draft Compliance Committee Rules of Procedure	Before and during first part, as appropriate	Draft and status report; circulation date to be confirmed
Council	Consideration, as appropriate, of the draft Rules of Procedure of the Compliance Committee	First part of the thirty-second session	Advancement of the draft Rules of Procedure and identification of any further work required
Secretariat	Prepare and circulate revised draft General Policy on Whistleblowing	Before Council consideration; date to be confirmed	Revised draft based on the input received during the second part of the thirty-first session.
Council	Consideration of the revised draft General Policy on Whistleblowing.	First part of the thirty-second session	Adoption of the draft policy and identification of any necessary remaining issues requiring consideration
Council	Identification of any additional institutional or implementation arrangements considered necessary for the adoption and effective implementation of the Regulations, including whether benefit-sharing requires a distinct workstream or instrument	First part of the thirty-second session	Determination of scope, lead, legal form and any subsequent sequencing
Council	Consideration of a draft Code of Conduct for Inspectors	Second part of the thirty-second session	Identification of any necessary revisions and next steps towards completion with the support of the secretariat, as appropriate
Council	Review of the remaining work required for completion and adoption of the necessary institutional and implementation arrangements	Second part of the thirty-second session	Identification of remaining work and determination of the next steps towards completion and adoption

IV. Review and next steps towards adoption			
Organ	**Action and purpose**	**Indicative period**	**Milestones / expected outcome / next step**
Council	Focused evaluation of progress across three workstreams	End of first part of thirty-second session	Priorities and proposed adjustments identified; endorsement as appropriate
Council	Overall review of progress across the three mutually interconnected areas of work and outstanding work	Second part of the thirty-second session	Identification of remaining substantive drafting, consistency and implementation matters requiring completion
Council	Determination of the next steps towards the finalization and timely adoption of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation	Second part of the thirty-second session	Agreement, as appropriate, on the further work and sequencing necessary to move towards adoption
Council / relevant organs	Focused follow-up and consolidation of relevant texts	Following meetings, as Council determines	Further resolution and alignment of texts; proposals for Council consideration