



ISA CONTRIBUTION TO THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON OCEANS AND THE LAW OF THE SEA

15 June 2025

1. This represents the contribution of the International Seabed Authority for the reporting period from September 2024 to August 2025 to the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea, as mandated by United Nations General Assembly resolution 79/144 of 12 December 2024, entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea”.

Twenty-ninth session in 2024 and the ongoing thirtieth session

2. The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority held its twenty-ninth session from 29 July to 2 August 2024. Amara Sowa (Sierra Leone) presided as temporary president and the representatives of Dominican Republic, Nauru and Portugal were elected as Vice-Presidents.

3. The Assembly granted 14 observer status. At an informal meeting, on 29 July, the Secretary-General presented the fifth edition of his Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research to Rengaiyan Periasamy (India). The Secretary-General presented his annual report, submitted in accordance with article 166, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (“the Convention”). The report provided an update on the implementation of the International Seabed Authority’s Action Plan in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and included information on the status of contributions in arrears. On 2 August, the Assembly adopted the extended high-level plan for the Authority for the period 2019–2025. The Assembly decided to defer its consideration of the question of the periodic review under article 154 of the Convention to the thirtieth session. The Assembly received the first report of the interim Director-General of the Enterprise. The Assembly adopted a decision relating to the budget of the Authority for the financial period 2025–2026.¹ The Assembly elected Mrs. Leticia Carvalho (Brazil) for a four year-term from 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2028.² The Assembly elected 18 members of the Council for a four-year term from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2028.³

4. The second part of the twenty-ninth session of the Council of the International Seabed Authority was held from 15 to 26 July 2024. The Council continued to progress with the consideration of the draft regulations on the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area, as a matter of priority with the full participation of other members of the Authority and observers, in line with the road map approved by the Council in July 2023.⁴ The Council finished a first reading of the President’s consolidated text, covering from draft regulations 35 to 107. The President of the Council introduced a revised road map to guide the work of the Council on the draft regulations and on the

¹ ISBA/29/A/11.

² ISBA/29/A/13.

³ ISBA/29/A/14.

⁴ See [ISBA/28/C/24](#) and [ISBA/28/C/25](#).

associated standards and guidelines during the thirtieth session in 2025,⁵ in line with its decision of 21 July 2023⁶ in which the Council reaffirmed its commitment to its legal mandate and to continue the elaboration of rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation, with a view to their adoption during the thirtieth session in 2025.

Thirtieth session of the Authority

5. During this period, the Authority has convened its thirtieth session. The thirtieth session of the Assembly will be held from 21 to 25 July 2025.

6. It will be the turn of the Latin American and Caribbean States to preside over the thirtieth session. The Assembly will also elect vice-presidents for other regional groups and appoint its Credentials Committee. Other provisional agenda items include the consideration of 13 requests for observer status, the election to fill a vacancy in the Finance Committee, the periodic review of the international regime of the Area pursuant to article 154 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the report and recommendation of the Finance Committee and the need for a general policy of the Authority for the protection and preservation of the marine environment: scope and parameters. The President of the Council will deliver an oral statement. Pursuant to article 166, paragraph 4 of the Convention, the Secretary-General will present her report on activities of the Authority. The Interim Director-General of the Enterprise will report on his work to the Assembly. In addition, the Assembly will commemorate its thirtieth anniversary.

7. The thirtieth session of the Council held its first part from 17 to 28 March 2025, and will hold the second part from 7 to 18 July 2025. During its meetings in March 2025, the Council elected Duncan Laki (Uganda) as President of the Council for its thirtieth session and Brazil (Latin American and Caribbean States), France (Western European and other States) and Singapore (Asia-Pacific States) as Vice-Presidents.

8. Pursuant to rule 30, paragraph 3, of the rules of procedure of the Council, the Secretary-General informed the Council of the announcement made on 27 March by The Metals Company that its subsidiary, TMC USA, had initiated the process of applying for commercial recovery permits under the Deep Seabed Hard Mineral Resources Act of the United States of America of 1980. In her address to the Council, the Secretary-General reaffirmed the Authority's exclusive mandate as the sole organization through which States Parties shall, in accordance with Part XI of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, organize and control activities in the Area, in particular in administering its resources. The Secretary-General stressed that any unilateral action would constitute a violation of international law and directly undermine the fundamental principles of multilateralism, the peaceful use of the oceans and the collective governance framework established under the Convention. The Secretary-General underlined that she remained firmly dedicated to the Authority's mandate, ensuring that activities in the Area are conducted for the benefit of all humankind. Taking note of the continued commitment of the Council to advancing negotiations on the draft regulations on exploitation, she reaffirmed the secretariat's full commitment to supporting member States in the critical steps ahead.

9. In expressing their appreciation to the Secretary-General for her statement, delegations reaffirmed their full support for the Authority and the Convention as a cornerstone of the multilateral system. Several delegations underscored that the Convention established that no State, natural person or legal entity may claim sovereignty, exercise sovereign rights or appropriate any part

⁵ [ISBA/29/C/9/Add.1](#), Annex III.

⁶ [ISBA/28/C/24](#).

of the Area or its resources. Delegations also voiced serious concerns and disappointment regarding the decision by TMC USA, recalling the Council's decisions in 2023, in which it had made clear that commercial exploitation should not be carried out in the absence of rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation. In that context, several delegations reaffirmed their commitment to continue to engage in the process in good faith, to create a governance framework that serves the collective interest of humankind against unilateral actions. Some delegations cautioned that delays in the negotiations could complicate the situation even more. Delegations also underlined that the principle of the common heritage of humankind, as provided for in article 136 of the Convention, was not only a rule under public international law, but also a rule of customary international law, a norm that is also binding on States that are not Parties to the Convention that have, through State practice, accepted Part XI of the Convention and the 1994 Agreement as a norm of *jus cogens*, a non-derogable norm under international law.

10. On 28 March 2025, the delegation of Nauru presented the Council with an "Explanatory non-paper: proposed procedure for consideration and provisional approval of applications for plans of work for exploitation under paragraph 15 (c) of the 1994 Agreement" with the objective of assisting member States in their consideration of a proposed procedure for the consideration and provisional approval of an application for a plan of work for exploitation in the absence of adopted rules, regulations and procedures on the exploitation of mineral resources in the Area. The delegation added that it was working with its contractor, Nauru Ocean Resources Inc. (NORI), to prepare an application for a plan of work for exploitation, intended to be submitted on 27 June 2025. The delegation explained that the document was not intended to be discussed in that meeting, but during the intersessional period.

11. Some delegations emphasized that the next steps must focus on continuing the negotiations on the regulations and developing an Authority's general policy on the protection and preservation of the marine environment. Various delegations expressed concern about the pace of negotiations on the regulations. Some delegations highlighted the legal and practical challenges of assessing an application for a plan of work under the two-year rule, while others maintained that the Convention and the 1994 Agreement set out the applicable procedure. Several delegations highlighted previous Council decisions adopted by consensus, emphasizing that the commercial exploitation of mineral resources in the Area should not be carried out in the absence of the rules, regulations and procedures relating to exploitation.

Consideration of the Draft Exploitation Regulations

12. As provided for in the 1994 Agreement, the Authority has the fundamental competence to develop a robust regulatory framework for both exploration and exploitation. While individual States Parties and observers in some cases, have expressed different positions regarding any possible future exploitation activities in the Area, States Parties have renewed their commitment to pursue the negotiations in good faith, with a view of agreeing on a robust and comprehensive legal framework as mandated by the Convention and the 1994 Agreement and have developed their modalities of work to increase the effective and diligent process of forging consensus-based text.

13. During the reporting period, the priority of the Authority has continued to progress the draft regulations for mineral exploitation in the Area in the utmost transparent manner, mainly through informal settings of the Council, open to participation by members of the Authority and observers.

14. As reported above, during its July meeting in 2024, the Council endorsed a revised road map and agreed that the deadline for submission of national written proposals would be 23 September

2024 while the deadline for the submission of proposals by the intersessional working groups would be 1 November 2024 with the President committing to issue a Revised Consolidated Text by the end of November 2024.

15. On 29 November 2024, the President issued a Revised Consolidated Text which aims to transform ideas and proposals, including 1,292 submissions since February 2024, into a consensus-based document in consistency with the provisions of the Convention and the Agreement. The President highlighted that the primary objective of the revised consolidated text was to facilitate informal discussions within the Council, harmonize and streamline the draft regulations and support the Council in finalizing its work on the draft regulations.

16. During the first part of the thirtieth session, the Council completed the reading from the Preamble to DR 55, with the participation of members of Council, other members of the Authority and observers. The Council also made significant progress during consultations led by some delegations during the intersessional period, thematic discussions on underwater cultural heritage, informal working group discussions on thematic issues (inspection, compliance and enforcement mechanism, equalization measures, rights and interests of coastal States and test and pilot mining) including through consultations before morning meetings and during lunch break meetings. The Council also held high level discussions on the Standards and Guidelines, especially for phase I (ISBA/27/C/3-12), as certain aspects of the Regulations may have experienced significant changes, necessitating substantial revisions to maintain alignment and ensure consistency. Support was expressed to keep updating the schedule or list of standards and guidelines and proposed that it be maintained as a living document, regularly updated in line with the progress of the negotiations on the regulations. The Council endorsed the President's proposed an additional working modality being an informal arrangement of volunteer facilitators designated as "Friends of the President" to collaborate on refining specific texts closed to consensus.

17. During the second part of the thirtieth session of the Council in July 2025, the Council will resume its reading of the President's Revised Consolidated Text, with a view to completing it, as committed in the 2023 Council decision, relying on the intensive intersessional work, intensifying the practice in all working groups and Friends of the President, resorting to informals informals and extended negotiations during the two week meetings. It is also expected that the Council will advance discussions on the main conceptual issues covered in regulations 1 to 55, including a common approach and advancement on the annexes and schedule.

Development of rules and procedures on equitable benefit-sharing

18. The Finance Committee has the primary responsibility to draft appropriate rules and procedures on equitable benefit-sharing. During its meeting in July 2024, on the basis of a report of the Secretary-General on the equitable sharing of financial and other economic benefits derived from activities in the Area pursuant to section 9, paragraph 7 (f), of the annex to the 1994 Agreement, the Committee decided to continue the discussions at a future session, bearing in mind the ongoing discussions on the means of sharing the benefits derived from activities in the Area.

Status of exploration contracts

19. As of 13 June 2025, a total of 30 contracts for exploration are in force: 19 are for polymetallic nodules, 7 for polymetallic sulphides, and 4 for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts. Each contractor is required to submit an annual report to the Secretary-General within 90 days from the end of each calendar year, covering its programme of activities in the exploration area.

20. Between July 2024 and June 2025, six periodic review reports were submitted, namely the periodic review of the implementation of the plans of work of: (a) Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (IFREMER), relating to its contract for exploration of polymetallic sulphides; (b) Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd, relating to its contract for exploration of polymetallic nodules; (c) Ocean Mineral Singapore Pte. Ltd, relating to its contract for exploration of polymetallic nodules; (d) Beijing Pioneer Hi-Tech Development Corporation, relating to its contract for exploration of polymetallic nodules; (e) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, relating to its contract for exploration of cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts; and (f) Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, relating to its contract for exploration of polymetallic sulphides. All these periodic reports are under evaluation, with an anticipated completion date of September 2025.

21. Since 2017, the Secretary-General has been holding annual consultative meetings with contractors. In 2024, the seventh annual consultation took place, from 30 September to 2 October 2024, in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Korea. It was attended by 47 representatives of exploration contractors. The next annual consultation will be held in India between 18 and 20 September 2025.

Development of Regional Environmental Management Plans

22. During the twenty-ninth session, in July 2024, the Legal and Technical Commission issued recommendations for the Council's consideration on the draft revised standardized procedure for the development, establishment and review of regional environmental management plans (ISBA/29/C/10). During the same session, the Commission also adopted its recommendations on technical guidance for the development of regional environmental management plans in support of the standardized procedure and template.

23. During the same session in July 2024, the Council considered the draft revised standardized procedure, as recommended by the Commission in ISBA/29/C/10. In its decision ISBA/29/C/24, the Council invited member States and observers of the Authority to provide comments in writing within 90 days of the adoption of the decision for the Commission's consideration, and requested the Commission to submit the revised documents to the Council before the first part of the thirtieth session.

24. At its meeting in March 2025, the Legal and Technical Commission revised the standardized procedure as contained in ISBA/29/C/10, based on the written comments submitted by nine member States and two observers, including one joint submission made by three member States. The Commission recommended to the Council the consideration and adoption of the revised standardized procedure, while flagging that the document would need to be aligned with the draft regulations once adopted.

25. Regarding the development of regional environmental management plans in priority regions identified by the Council, the Authority convened a scientific workshop in Qingdao, China, from 27 April to 1 May 2025 on the development of a regional environmental management plan for the Area of the Indian Ocean, with a focus on the Mid-Ocean Ridges and Central Indian Ocean Basin. The workshop was held in collaboration with the China Deep Ocean Affairs Administration, the First Institute of Oceanography of the Ministry of Natural Resources of China and the Secretariat of the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Environmental thresholds

26. The Authority appointed experts for the intersessional expert group to develop binding environmental threshold values, to contribute to the determination of what is required to ensure effective protection of the marine environment. During the session in March 2025, the Commission took note of the progress made in the development of environmental threshold values for toxicity, turbidity and settling of resuspended sediments, and underwater noise and light pollution by the subgroups of the intersessional expert group. The finalization of the draft report of that group will remain a priority for the Commission, with a view to releasing a draft for stakeholder consultations at the thirtieth session, following which all comments received will be reviewed by the Commission and reported to the Council.

Operationalization of the Enterprise

27. Critical work continues to be performed towards the operationalization of the Enterprise in line with the step-by-step process envisioned in the 1994 Agreement.

28. The Enterprise is the organ of the Authority entrusted with carrying out activities in the Area directly, including the transporting, processing and marketing of minerals recovered from it on behalf of the members of the Authority, subject to the directives and under the control of the Council. Once fully operational, the Enterprise will play a crucial role in facilitating the participation of developing States in mining in the Area, as it will be able to carry out such activities in the reserved areas. Under the 1994 Agreement, the secretariat, through the interim Director General of the Enterprise, carries out some functions of the Enterprise until the Council decides that the Enterprise should function independently.

29. After his appointment as interim Director General of the Enterprise in January 2025, he has been discharging his mandate in keeping with the provisions of the 1994 Agreement as well as other functions directed by the Council and which fall under the terms of reference of his employment. These include the functions listed under section 2 of the annex to the 1994 Agreement, as well as participation in, inter alia: the meetings of the Council as part of the negotiations of the draft regulations, other meetings of the plenary of the Council and working groups established by that body; informal intersessional working groups; bilateral meetings involving stakeholders, including sponsoring States and contractors, at headquarters and externally; and meetings of the Assembly. The first report was presented to the Council and the Assembly during the twenty-ninth session of the Authority.

30. Based at the headquarters of the Authority, the interim Director General reports administratively to the Secretary-General while being accountable to both the Council and the Assembly. The interim Director General of the Enterprise, based on the relevant provisions in the Convention and the 1994 Agreement, presents his report annually to the Council and the Assembly.

Implementation of the Action Plan of the Authority in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

31. Marine scientific research is one of the core elements upon which the legal regime of the Area lies. The Convention and the Agreement mandate the Authority to promote and encourage the conduct of marine scientific research in the Area, coordinate and disseminate the results when available and carry out marine research concerning the Area. Activities to fulfil the mandate are intertwined with those aimed at delivering the Authority's responsibility under the Convention to take measures to promote and encourage the transfer of scientific knowledge and technology to strengthen the capacity of developing and technologically less developed States, including by setting up appropriate programmes.

32. In terms of investment, the Authority has allocated USD 8.4 million of its regular budget over the past 10 years to programmatic expenditure aimed at promoting marine scientific research in the Area. Member States, United Nations entities and research institutes have provided extrabudgetary contributions in support of this, totalling USD 1.9 million. In 2022, the Authority established the International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund, a multi-donor trust fund to ensure a steady stream of financing for marine scientific research and capacity development (see ISBA/27/A/10). To date, the Fund has financed 14 projects totalling USD 1.26 million, with donations from eight member States.

33. Adopted by the Assembly of the Authority in 2020, the action plan on marine scientific research in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development with its six strategic research priorities serves as the global agenda for deep-sea research (see ISBA/26/A/4).

Strategic research priority 1: advancing scientific knowledge and understanding of deep-sea ecosystems, including biodiversity and ecosystem functions, in the Area

34. Under this strategic research priority, the secretariat facilitates activities to develop a robust scientific knowledge base to support decision-making processes.

35. During the reporting period, the secretariat contributed several scientific reports like the World Ocean Assessment, with a focus on benefit-sharing and the socioeconomic benefits derived from exploration in the Area as part of the third Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects, the report of the United Nations Open-Ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea to the General Assembly, highlighting new developments in technology and capacity development. The secretariat co-authored the United Nations report on marine geospatial information management which explained how DeepData provides grounds for decision-making.

36. The secretariat launched an open-source bibliographic repository on the Authority's website that brings together the scientific outputs reported by contractors in their annual reports from the past four years. The repository currently contains 431 peer-reviewed scientific publications and will be updated annually.

Strategic research priority 2: standardizing and innovating methodologies for deep-sea biodiversity assessment, including taxonomic identification and description, in the Area

37. The reporting period marks the third year of the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative, a flagship initiative aimed at catalysing biodiversity research and capacity to support global policy agendas and ensure effective protection of deep-sea ecosystems in the Area. This provides the framework to advance strategic research priority 2 by promoting activities to increase biodiversity knowledge, as well as enhancing the exchange of biological data and taxonomic skills. Two new financial partners, the Governments of Ireland and China, joined the Initiative's founding donors – the European Commission and the Governments of the Republic of Korea and France – while other member States have committed funds for the Initiative's 2025–2026 workplan.

38. In March 2025, the second edition of the "One Thousand Reasons" campaign to accelerate species descriptions and enhance consistency in taxonomic practices was launched, with a voluntary contribution by the Government of Ireland to the Partnership Fund. This edition is specifically designed to support scientists in developing member States. The first edition led to the description of 90 new species and resulted in the publication of over 30 scientific papers. The new taxonomic data are uploaded to the Authority's DeepData database and will also be shared with the Ocean

Biodiversity Information System, with which the secretariat partners to promote broader data accessibility. As of 31 May 2025, the System contains 133 data sets covering the period from 2004 to 2023, with data for 863 species.

39. The secretariat pursued its collaboration with IFREMER to enhance scientific capacity in biodiversity assessment and knowledge. In January 2025, the fellowship of a taxonomist from India was extended so that she could continue her work on describing species and studying ecological adaptation to abyssal plain habitats. A new edition of the MeioScool workshop and fellowship will bring together experts in meiofauna to raise awareness of the role of meiofauna in marine ecosystems, and train students and young researchers from developing countries in the latest methodologies. Those initiatives are funded by voluntary contributions from France to the Partnership Fund.

40. The secretariat participated in the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Cali, Colombia, from 21 October to 1 November 2024. Meetings with the Executive Secretary of the Convention and representatives of other relevant international organizations and stakeholders provided opportunities to promote the Authority's work on increasing deep-sea knowledge and protecting deepsea biodiversity. The secretariat also co-organized a side-event with Argentina, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, the Convention secretariat and the National Marine Biodiversity Institute of Korea to engage other stakeholders and mobilize partners for efforts to advance deep-sea biodiversity knowledge.

41. Considering the scientific advances towards using environmental DNA (eDNA) for deep-sea biodiversity assessments, the secretariat published a policy brief highlighting the role of the Authority in addressing the challenges and opportunities of using eDNA approaches by reinforcing the importance of advancing identification and collaboration between scientists and the private sector to ensure an effective use of eDNA tools for the sustainable development of resources in the Area.

Strategic research priority 3: facilitating technology development for activities in the Area, including ocean observation and monitoring

42. Under this strategic research priority, initiatives are being implemented across five priority domains: ocean observation and communication; monitoring; autonomy, automation and robotics; machine learning and artificial intelligence; and mining, energy and metal processing. The secretariat monitors technology development in these areas, including when led by contractors, through participation in international conferences like the Underwater Mining Conference which was organized by the International Marine Minerals Society, in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, from 15 to 21 September 2024.

43. Building on the success of the workshop on advanced technologies for the priority domains, held in Portugal in April 2024, the secretariat has organized in collaboration with Kobe University and its Kobe Ocean-Bottom Exploration Centre a second workshop on emerging technologies for designing monitoring schemes in the context of potential future activities in Kobe, Japan, from 10 to 12 June 2025. Attended by nearly 100 experts, the workshop examined technological innovations for the assessment of threshold, regional monitoring and capacity development needs.

Strategic research priority 4: enhancing scientific knowledge and understanding of potential impacts of activities in the Area

44. This strategic priority is fundamental for the Authority to discharge its responsibilities to take necessary measures with respect to activities in the Area to ensure effective protection for the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from such activities. To this end, during the reporting period, the secretariat issued a policy brief on plastic in the deep sea, stressing the growing body of scientific studies on this topic over time and the need to establish a baseline, in particular in the light of ongoing negotiations on the international legally binding instrument on plastics pollution. The secretariat also published two fact-checks. The first is a summary of the Authority's technical study on the potential interactions between fishing and mineral resource-related activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction. It highlights limited overlap between fishing and potential deep-sea mining areas, though further study is needed on indirect impacts. The second fact-check presents factors involved in the complex interplay of potential deep-sea mining with global carbon cycle processes. It indicates that while global impacts on the carbon cycle are unlikely due to the small footprint of potential exploitation compared with the vastness of the ocean, local effects may occur, underscoring the need for a strong environmental baseline and monitoring. Scientific understanding of sediment plumes has made substantial progress. Scientific cruises – conducted through a joint effort between two contractors, the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources of Germany and Global Sea Mineral Resources, and scientists from the MiningImpact consortium – funded by the Joint Programming Initiative for Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans obtained quantitative data for the modelling of mining-related impacts. For example, it was shown that the height of the plume did not rise above the collector vehicle. Recognizing the importance of these and related findings, the Partnership Fund Board approved a project valued at \$100,000 to develop a methodology for the adaptive management of sediment plumes from deep-sea mining activities.

Strategic research priority 5: promoting dissemination, exchange and sharing of scientific data and deep-sea research outputs and increasing deep-sea literacy

45. Scientific data are the cornerstone of research and the foundation for environmental baseline studies. The Authority's global online repository, the DeepData database, is instrumental in fulfilling its mandate of sharing scientific data. All non-confidential data from exploration in the Area are made publicly available, following findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable principles. Since its launch in 2019, DeepData has amassed over 14 terabytes of structured and unstructured data collected in the Area. The DeepData website has had approximately 19 million hits from over 321,000 visitors, who downloaded approximately 600 gigabytes of data from the database. To support public understanding of the repository, a data visualization tool and communication products have been developed. The DeepData dashboard interface enables users to answer data related queries. To enhance the accessibility of information, oceanographic data from 800 DeepData sampling stations were integrated into the Ocean Data and Information System, a global network of interconnected data platforms coordinated by the International Oceanographic Data and Information Exchange of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IODE-IOC). To advance deep-sea literacy, the Partnership Fund supports a pilot project (USD 20,000) in Mozambique for early-career ocean professionals and another project for the development of a data visualization platform for activities in the Area (USD 125,000).

Strategic research priority 6: strengthening deep-sea scientific capacity of Authority members, in particular developing States

46. Capacity-development initiatives have been at the core of the Authority's activities since its establishment in 1994. In line with its mandate to foster international cooperation on marine scientific research for the benefit of developing member States, the secretariat facilitates a range of training programmes guided by the Authority's capacity development strategy (ISBA/27/A/5). During

the reporting period, as part of the contractors' training programme, in line with their legal obligations, twelve of the Authority's exploration contractors offered 80 new training opportunities pursuant to 18 contracts for exploration. More than a third involved at-sea on-board training, while the others included fellowships (including master's programmes), internships, seminars, autonomous underwater vehicle training, expert deployments, engineering training and other theoretical and practical courses. Of the 80 placements, 45 will be implemented by the end of this reporting cycle. Of this, 49 per cent were women and 22 per cent were awarded to candidates from the least developed countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Cumulatively, with these 80 placements, the total number of training opportunities offered since 1994 has surpassed 500.

47. Two deployments of national experts to the secretariat were supported by the Authority's joint project framework with the Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries, established in 2022 to strengthen the capacities of the least developed countries in emerging blue economic sectors. A geologist from Nepal analysed sediment characteristics within the Clarion–Clipperton Zone, while a marine scientist from the United Republic of Tanzania advanced sediment plume modelling.

48. To advance women's empowerment, the Authority advanced three initiatives under its Women in Deep-Sea Research project. First, the pilot of the global mentoring programme See Her Exceed, consisting of 16 mentors and mentees, will be completed in July 2025. The programme will deliver guidelines aimed at encouraging the greater participation of women in offshore deep-sea research cruises. It will also deliver an analysis of the scientific output reported in exploration activities. To further mobilize resources and partners, the secretariat promoted the programme through a dedicated communication booth during the twenty-ninth session of the Authority. In addition, the Secretary-General, together with France, organized a side event during the thirtieth session of the Council in March 2025 to call upon member States to support the initiative and ensure its long-term outcomes. Second, the Women in Blue initiative was organized by the National Research Council of Italy. A winter school on marine geology and deep-sea frontiers was organized from 27 to 31 January 2025, co-funded through the Partnership Fund (USD 98,000). It provided training in marine geology, including at-sea experience, for 10 women from 10 countries. Nearly all contractors pledged to allocate half of their training opportunities to qualified women, where appropriate.

49. The next steps to support the implementation of the action plan will expand flagship initiatives and partnerships as well as capacity development activities and resource mobilization. The Secretariat will explore the broader marine science landscape to identify emerging topics of relevance, with the aim of advancing scientific knowledge in support of regulatory development under the Authority.

Capacity development and training programme

50. Capacity-building and training have been an essential component of the Authority's activities since its establishment as they are fundamental to ensure the effective participation of developing States in activities carried out in the Area and in the work of the Authority. In discharging its responsibilities under article 144 of the Convention, the Authority is committed to taking measures to acquire technology and scientific knowledge and to promote and encourage their transfer to developing countries. The Authority places strong emphasis on identifying and promoting opportunities for individuals from developing States to receive training in marine science and technology, with particular attention given to the specific needs of the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. The secretariat implements many programmes and activities, including national expert deployment initiatives and dedicated

partnerships, such as the one established with the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries. During the reporting period, 142 experts (35 per cent of whom were women) received training through joint activities.

National focal points for capacity development

51. The Secretary-General convened the fourth annual meeting of the national focal points for capacity development on 16 October 2024. The meeting provided an opportunity to review progress in the implementation of the capacity development strategy adopted in 2022 and to discuss current and planned capacity development activities. In October and November 2024, during the sixth and seventh virtual certificate award ceremonies for trainees of the contractors' training programmes, the secretariat delivered certificates to a total of 62 beneficiaries from developing States, of whom 28 were women. The cohort included participants from the landlocked developing countries, least developed countries and small island developing States.

International Seabed Authority Capacity Development Alumni Network (iCAN)

52. During the reporting period, the secretariat organized the first general meeting of the International Seabed Authority Capacity Development Alumni Network (iCAN). The event served as a platform for engagement with former beneficiaries and facilitated linkages with International Seabed Authority partners and stakeholders. The secretariat also launched a second call for applications to the Network in November 2024, resulting in additional memberships.

International Seabed Authority-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre

53. The recently established ISA-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre offered its first training course on environmental impact assessments for activities in the Area was from 14 to 26 September 2024. The course was implemented by the secretariat with funding from the Partnership Fund and the Government of Greece. The training course brought together 18 national experts from 12 member States.

International Seabed Authority-China Joint Training and Research Centre

54. Following its establishment in 2020 by a memorandum of understanding between the Authority and China, the International Seabed Authority-China Joint Training and Research Centre in Qingdao, China, hosted a workshop on advancing marine spatial planning in areas beyond national jurisdiction for sustainable deep-sea stewardship with an emphasis on best practices and key insights from the REMP process. The workshop which was convened from 23 to 27 April 2025 focused on the scientific and technical needs related to REMPs of developing States, members of the Authority.

Deep Dive

55. In July 2023, the Authority launched DeepDive, an e-learning platform which has the objective of enhancing the capacity of government officials and practitioners from States Parties, young graduates, personnel of partner institutions, and other stakeholders. The platform is uniquely devoted to dealing with legal, technical and scientific aspects of the regime established by the Convention and the 1994 Agreement. As of 31 May 2025, 123 students have been awarded the DeepDive certificate.

Secretary-General's Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research

56. At an informal meeting, on 29 July 2024, the Secretary-General presented the fifth edition of the Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research to Rengaiyan Periasamy, a deep-sea benthic biologist

from India, in recognition of his pioneering research, including the discovery and description of 12 new benthic species from the Mid-Indian Ocean Ridge System. In presenting the award, the Secretary-General expressed his gratitude to the Government of Monaco for its contribution in support of the Award since its inception and welcomed the contribution from Loke CCZ, which had offered a berth on an exploration cruise in 2026. In addition, Mr. Periasamy received training on the tools and methodologies used in the development of regional environmental management plans organized by the International Seabed Authority-China Joint Training and Research Centre from 23 to 26 April 2025 and participated in the workshop on the development of a regional environmental management plan for the Area of the Indian Ocean.

57. The nomination deadline for the sixth edition of the Secretary-General's Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research, originally set for 11 April 2025, has been postponed as the Authority undergoes a transition in leadership. This period provides an opportunity to enhance and refine the Award to ensure that it continues to reflect the evolving priorities of deep-sea scientific research and international collaboration. The Authority remains deeply committed to recognizing and supporting outstanding contributions by early-career researchers, in particular those from developing States, in advancing scientific knowledge of the deep-sea environment and promoting sustainable practices.

PROBLUE Ocean Governance Capacity-Building Programme

58. The World Bank, with the support of PROBLUE, and in partnership with the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations, FAO, the International Seabed Authority, the Melbourne Law School, and the Centre for Maritime and Oceanic Law at the University of Nantes, has developed a set of tools and region-specific training to increase knowledge about ocean governance, treaties and their implementation in national legal frameworks. As a partner of the PROBLUE Ocean Governance Capacity-Building Programme, the secretariat participated in the fifth workshop, focused on the Asian region, which was delivered virtually in February 2025. The workshop was attended by 79 participants from 22 countries.

59. From 16 to 18 June 2025, the Authority will participate with other partners of the PROBLUE programme in an in-person workshop at the FAO headquarters in Roma for participants who have successfully completed the online workshops.

Women's empowerment

60. Since 2017, the Authority has implemented several initiatives in support of its commitment to advancing the empowerment of women and their leadership in non-traditional and emerging sectors, such as deep-sea-related disciplines, like technology, engineering, taxonomy and the blue economy. This is realized by means of establishing and expanding strategic partnerships with members, contractors and intergovernmental and regional organizations, including the scientific community and academia.

61. The Secretariat launched the initiative "Women in Blue: training opportunities in ocean science" organized in partnership with the Italian National Research Council (CNR) within the framework of the ISA-Egypt Joint Training and Research Centre as part of the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Authority. With funding from the ISA Partnership Fund and the CNR, the training consisted of a winter school in "Marine Geology – Deep Sea Frontiers" for ten women and was held from 27 to 31 January 2025 in Bologna, Italy at the seat of the Institute for Marine Science of the CNR.

62. As part of the Women in Deep-Sea Research project, six women scientists from the pilot cohort of the ISA's *See Her Exceed* global mentoring programme will present two collective knowledge outputs—alongside the achievements from their individual journeys—during the next session of the Assembly in July 2025. To mark the conclusion of their mentoring journey, the Secretary-General will present graduation certificates to the six mentees from Kenya, Nigeria, Morocco, South Africa and Tunisia.

The 1994 Agreement

63. In accordance with article 156, paragraph 2, of the Convention, all States Parties are, ipso facto, members of the Authority. As of 13 June 2025, there are 170 parties to the Convention (169 States and the European Union), and thus there were 170 members of the Authority. The membership has remained unchanged since San Marino became a Party to the Convention on 19 July 2024. As at 13 June 2025, there were 153 parties to 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). This almost universal membership has strengthened the Part XI regime over the past 30 years. There are 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, namely 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.

64. As provided under 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 the event of any inconsistency between the 1994 Agreement and Part XI of the Convention, the provisions of the Agreement shall prevail. Although members of the Authority that are not Parties to the 1994 Agreement participate in the work of the Authority under arrangements based on the Agreement, becoming a Party to the 1994 Agreement 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 7 March 2025.

Permanent missions to the Authority

65. Between 1 June 2024 and 31 May 2025, nine (9) new permanent representatives were appointed and accredited to the Authority by Members with Permanent Missions to the Authority. They are Cyprus, India, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Nauru, Spain, Zimbabwe and the European Union.

66. As of 31 May 2025, a total of 42 Members maintains permanent missions to the Authority. These Members are Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Fiji, France, Gabon, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zimbabwe and the European Union.

The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Seabed Authority

67. 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. The total number of parties to the Protocol remains at 48. Members of the Authority that are not yet parties

to the Protocol have been strongly encouraged to take the steps necessary to become parties at their earliest convenience. The Secretariat sent out a note verbale to that effect on 10 February 2025.

Implementation of article 84, paragraph 2 of the Convention

68. In accordance with article 84, paragraph 2, of the Convention, coastal States are under an obligation to give due publicity to charts or lists of geographical coordinates and, in the case of those showing the outer limit lines of the continental shelf, to deposit a copy of each such chart or list with the Secretary-General of the Authority. 17 members of the Authority had deposited such charts and lists with the Secretary-General, namely Australia, Cabo Verde, the Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, 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, Nicaragua, Niue, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Senegal and Tuvalu.

69. The Secretariat urges all coastal States to deposit those charts or lists of coordinates. Knowledge of the precise delineation is essential to allow the establishment of the geographical limits of the Area with certainty. Each year, the Secretariat sends out a note verbale requesting the deposit of such charts or lists of coordinates. The last such note was sent out on 29 January 2025.

Budget and status of contributions

70. 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.

71. 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.

72. As of 31 May 2025, 64 per cent of the value of contributions to the 2025 budget due from States and the European Union had been received. Outstanding contributions from member States for prior periods (1998–2024) amounted to USD 599,656.

73. As of 31 May 2025, the balance of the working capital fund stood at USD 760,186, against an approved level of USD 825,000.

Status of the funds

74. The establishment of the Voluntary Trust Fund for the participation of members of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee from developing countries dates to 2002. As of 31 May 2025, the total contributions to the fund over its lifetime amounted to USD 1,642,571. During the reporting period, contributions were made by the Netherlands (USD 15,790), United Kingdom (USD 12,715), Ireland (USD 22,692) and France (USD 21,575). As of the same date, the balance of the fund was USD 52,950.

75. Regarding the voluntary trust fund to support the participation of members of the Council of the Authority from developing States in the meetings of the Council, during the reporting period, contributions were made by the Netherlands (USD 31,612), Portugal (USD 10,240), United Kingdom (USD 12,757) and the President of the Council, Duncan Laki Muhumuza (USD \$555). As of 31 May

2025, the total contributions to the fund over its lifetime amounted to USD 257,396. As of the same date, the balance of the fund was USD 15,794.

76. Regarding the trust fund for extrabudgetary support for the Authority, since its creation, the fund has raised USD 2,480,803 and had a net balance of USD 452,928 as of 31 May 2025. This amount includes contributions by the European Union totalling USD 381,352 to the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative project.

77. A key milestone has been achieved with the establishment in 2022 of the International Seabed Authority Partnership Fund. It has received contributions from 2022 to 2025 by China, France, Greece, Mexico, Monaco, Russian Federation and Spain. The Fund has allocated more than USD 1,253,850 for 14 different projects.

Collaboration with the United Nations, its specialized agencies, funds and programmes and the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention

78. During the reporting period, the Secretary-General and the secretariat continued to collaborate with the United Nations, its specialised agencies, funds and programmes on matters of mutual interest as this remains a constant priority area for the implementation of the mandate of the Authority.

79. The Secretary-General held bilateral meetings with 19 States Parties and engaged with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Office of Legal Affairs, the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office of the President of the General Assembly, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa, and the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. In addition, the secretariat continued its exchanges with the United Nations Environment Programme, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, FAO and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The Secretary-General also held briefings and consultations with member States, regional and interest-based groups, including the African Group, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, the African Small Island Developing States Group, the Caribbean Community, the Pacific Small Island Developing States Group, and the Chairs of the Least Developed Countries Group and the Landlocked Developing Countries Group. These exchanges stressed the critical role of the Authority within the broader United Nations system and provided a platform to strengthen cooperation in fulfilling the mandate of the Authority, consistent with the Convention and international law.

80. The secretariat was also engaged actively in the work of UN-Oceans and participated in a series of technical meetings and contributed to the regional workshops organized by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea to promote a better understanding of the BBNJ Agreement and prepare for its entry into force.

81. The secretariat was involved in the preparatory process of the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (UNOC 3) by contributing to concept papers for the various ocean action panels. At UNOC 3, the secretariat participated in a side event entitled “UN-Oceans as a mechanism to mobilize multilateral ocean action and amplify collective impacts toward the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14” with the view to accelerating global actions for enhanced deep-sea research and capacity development in support of Sustainable Development Goal 14.

82. A letter of cooperation will be signed with the Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation to strengthen collaboration, focusing on cumulative impact assessments.

83. On 28 April 2025, as part of the Authority's efforts to advance global deep-sea science and research capacity a letter of cooperation with the Minister of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea was signed, formalizing the partnership for the implementation of the Deep-sea Biobank. During UNOC 3, on 11 June 2025, the secretariat and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea, launched the Authority's Deep-sea Biobank Initiative, aimed at facilitating global access to deep-sea biological samples and genetic data from the Area for the benefit of all humankind.

84. To raise awareness of the added value of the Authority's work through the collective implementation of the action plan, the Secretary-General engaged in 44 meetings and discussions from 5 to 15 February 2025, including 30 high-level engagements with key stakeholders from the United Nations and member States of the Authority. These meetings fostered dialogues on the importance of science in deep-sea governance. In addition, support for the call for action on deep-sea science, technology and innovation, launched on the margins of the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, held in New York in 2023, has grown. This support creates political momentum to invest more in deep-sea science and technology development and align research agendas with the global deep-sea agenda. The call has now been endorsed by 16 member States, three scientific institutions and seven contractors.

85. In addition, the secretariat participated in the advisory committees of five research and technology projects or initiatives with the objective to support the Authority's role in promoting science and identify synergies with existing initiatives to avoid overlap. Two of the projects are funded by the European Union: TRIDENT, which focuses on impact assessment tools for sustainable exploration and exploitation; and DeepRest, which addresses the restoration of ecosystems affected by deep-sea mining. As part of other initiatives, the secretariat is engaged in the Decade action entitled "Digital deep-sea typical habitats", aimed at enhancing understanding of deep-sea habitats, in the SMARTEX project on deep-sea ecosystem resilience to experimental impacts, funded by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and in the Deep Ocean Observing Strategy, which supports ocean monitoring efforts. Lastly, starting in June 2025, the secretariat has joined the board of a project on the ecological aspects of deep-sea mining under the Joint Programming Initiative for Healthy and Productive Seas and Oceans.

86. The Secretary-General participated in the first session 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 (BBNJ Agreement) to prepare for the entry into force of, and to prepare for the Convening of the First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Agreement (4–25 April), at the conclusion of which the Commission will cease to exist. On this occasion, the Authority expressed support for States to formulate procedural rules to implement relevant provisions of the BBNJ Agreement.

87. The BBNJ Agreement is designed to enhance cooperation with and promote cooperation among relevant legal instruments and frameworks and global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies in a way that does not undermine them and promotes coherence and coordination. The Authority attaches high importance to the future operation of the BBNJ Agreement, particularly its interactions with the BBNJ Agreement and its mechanisms. This is the subject of a study which was

commissioned to inform discussions about preparing for entry into force of the BBNJ Agreement. This resulted in an Authority's publication entitled "A review of the contribution of ISA to the objectives of the 2023 Agreement under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction".⁷

88. In addition, the Secretariat will participate in the thirty-fifth Meeting of States Parties to the Convention (23–27 June 2025). The Secretary-General will also contribute to the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which will be focused on the theme "Capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology: new developments, approaches and challenges", and the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2025.

Memorandum of Understanding between the Authority and the African Union

89. Considering their numerous areas of common interest, the Authority and the African Union, which is an observer to the Authority, engaged in exchanges on the formalization of their cooperation. On 29 July 2022, the Council approved the memorandum of understanding between the Authority and the African Union, the signature of which is planned during the second half of 2025.

Agreement of cooperation between the International Labour Organization and the Authority

90. On 20 July 2023, the Council approved an agreement of cooperation between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Authority. As global interest in seabed resources grows, the agreement formalizes the collaboration between the two organizations and highlights their shared commitment to promoting decent work by upholding international labour standards and to ensuring that the protection of workers' occupational safety and health in seabed-related operations remains a priority. It also contributes to the pursuit of a just transition in support of a new social contract for the maritime industry.⁸ This is particularly important considering the current development of new technologies that may introduce new workplace hazards and risks that may not yet have been addressed by the existing international rules and standards. On 19 December 2024, during a virtual ceremony, the ILO Director General and the Secretary-General signed the agreement.

Memorandum of Understanding between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Authority

91. In the light of their many areas of common interest, the Authority and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) engaged in exchanges on the possibility of formalizing their cooperation. On 28 March 2024, the Council approved the memorandum of understanding between the two organizations. The Council also requested the Secretary-General to sign it and ensure appropriate coordination with FAO on policy measures under each organization's respective mandate in areas beyond national jurisdiction, to achieve its objectives. The memorandum was signed on 11 June 2025, during UNOC 3.

Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries

92. During the reporting period, the Authority continued its collaboration with the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries, advancing joint efforts to enhance technological capacity in

⁷ https://www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/The_contribution_of_ISA_to_the_BBNJ_objectives.pdf

⁸ More details can be found in International Seabed Authority, "Competencies of the International Seabed Authority and the International Labour Organization in the context of activities in the Area", ISA Technical Study No. 26 (Kingston, 2021). Available at: www.isa.org.jm/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/ISA_Technical_Study_26.pdf.

support of activities in the Area. As part of that cooperation, a technology needs assessment was undertaken for the United Republic of Tanzania. In addition, the secretariat hosted national experts and research fellows from Nepal and the United Republic of Tanzania (see above). On 5 February 2025, the Secretary-General held consultations with the Managing Director of the Technology Bank to consider opportunities for developing the partnership to additional countries beyond the current areas of focus.