

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT NEEDS FOR EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION OF DEEP SEABED MINERALS

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- Honourable Minister Timoci Natuva, Minister of Works and Public Utilities here in Fiji
- His Excellency Dr Nii Odunton, Secretary General of the International Seabed Authority
- Distinguished guests representing Pacific Island countries and countries from around the world academia, regional and international intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations
- Colleagues and staff from the Fiji Government, ISA and SOPAC

I would like to warmly welcome you all to this International Workshop on Environmental Management Needs for the Exploration and Exploitation of Deep Sea Minerals that is hosted by the Fiji Government and jointly organized by the ISA and the SOPAC

At the outset may I present the apologies on behalf of the Director General of the SPC, Dr Jimmie Rodgers who is unable to be with us. But let me assure you all he is very keen to support work surrounding this workshop as a clear indication of the SPC's commitment to its island member countries and territories.

A special welcome goes to His Excellency the Secretary General of the ISA, Nii Odunton and his staff who are here with us today. Secretary-General I am aware you were present here in Fiji to attend the 2003 ISA Workshop on the Development of a Geological Model of the Polymetallic Nodule Resources of the Clarion Clipperton Fracture Zone. I believe your presence here today in this workshop signifies the ISA's commitment to supporting Pacific Island Countries in their endeavor to fully participate in the exploration and exploitation of seabed mineral resources in the Area, in addition to their aspirations to realize the benefits of developing seabed minerals that occur within their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).

Please allow me to say a few remarks on recent developments relating to deep sea minerals and in doing so I must thank the Secretary-General of the ISA who together with Ambassador Peter Thompson, Fiji's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and the current Chair of the ISA Assembly, drove the initiative to convene the workshop in this part of the world. This workshop has particular significance to the region for a number of reasons.

1. 2011 is the first year in which the EU funded SPC Deep Sea Minerals Project is being implemented in fifteen Pacific ACP States and it is vital that the SPC as the implementing agency establish the necessary linkages with regional and international players of this new and emerging industry
2. The issuance of a mining lease to Nautilus Minerals in Papua New Guinea in January this year is a milestone achievement and has set the pace for the first deep sea mining in the world to be realized in our region
3. Following the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea advisory opinion in February, the ISA Council in July of this year approved plans of work for exploration in the International Seabed Area (The Area) to two companies that are being sponsored by two developing countries more specifically Pacific Island Countries. Nauru Ocean Resources Incorporation (NORI) is sponsored by Nauru. Tonga Offshore mining Limited (TOML) is supported by Tonga.
4. I am sure we will hear during this workshop other Pacific island countries have expressed their interest in submitting applications to the ISA for exploration licenses in the reserved areas of the CCFZ.
5. The recent interest in rare earth elements (REEs) at the global level, and Japan's recent announcement of REE deposit discoveries on the Pacific Ocean seabed has certainly raised eyebrows in the region and Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) are keen to know more about the REEs potential that may occur within their respective national jurisdiction
6. Whilst this emerging industry is surely to commence in the region in the near future there remain many unknowns associated with deep sea minerals. These were discussed and a proactive way forward for the region was determined as the outcome of the High Level Inaugural Meeting for the Deep Sea Minerals Project convened here in Nadi back in early June.
7. Whilst there have not been adequate studies to determine the potential impacts of deep sea mining on the ocean floor and ecosystem, scientists have begun describing what the impacts might be to help regulators and the public better understand the potential impacts of this new industrial activity on the ocean.

As the region prepares itself to venture into this new industry, I would propose that we move forward with great caution to ensure that we do the right things that protect the interests of our people and future generations. In the June DSM Project workshop, the application of the precautionary approach concept in offshore mineral development came out very strongly and was agreed to as a sensible guiding principle to this new industry. With that in mind, we need to ask what a precautionary principle really means. I am sure this concept will be a topic of discussion in this workshop not only in defining the precautionary approach concept but also how we are going to make it happen within and beyond the national jurisdiction.

There are various relevant references in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in this regard and I urge that they be brought to the fore during this workshop. One in particular comes to mind, and I quote:

States shall, directly or through competent international organizations ... provide appropriate assistance, especially to developing States concerning the preparation of environmental assessments

It strikes me that the workshop is itself a great example of States doing just this.

With those remarks, I would like to once again welcome you all to this Workshop.

Thank You