

International Seabed Authority

Press Release



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SEABED COUNCIL HEARS RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO DRAFT REGULATIONS ON SULPHIDES AND COBALT-RICH CRUSTS

A proposal from the Russian Federation to amend the draft regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the international seabed Area was presented today to a Council meeting at the 12th session of the International Seabed Authority in Kingston.

The proposal sought revisions to sections of regulations 1, 12 and 17 of the draft regulations (ISBA/10/C/WP.1/Rev.1) dealing with the highly technical issue of the size of areas for exploration of sulphides and crusts.

The matter of the election of a president and four vice-presidents for the current session was also raised, but was deferred to the Council's next meeting on Thursday, 10 August. Regarding the election of members of the Legal and Technical Commission, the Authority's Secretary-General Satya N. Nandan announced that twenty-five candidates had been nominated to fill the fifteen positions called for in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Russia's proposed amendments

The Russian representative introducing the proposed amendments said that Russian experts studying the geological peculiarities of locations and distance over which seamounts (guyots) were dispersed had concluded that areas where there were no deposits of cobalt-rich crusts should not be included in the declared area for contract application. Russia proposed that Regulation 1, paragraph 3 (a) be amended to describe a "block" as "a rectangular portion of a grid, which shall be no greater than 100 square kilometers." Russia said the essence of its proposed amendment to that regulation was similar in concept to the revisions suggested by consultant James R. Hein in his presentation to Council yesterday.

The basic premise of the draft regulations before Council was that the declared area must consist of contiguous blocks measuring approximately 10 kilometers by 10 kilometers, with borders determined in advance by the Authority. Dr. Hein recommended that contractors be allowed to group blocks into non-contiguous clusters in order to take advantage of the geomorphology of seamount groups.

The proposal by Russia also called for amendments to paragraph 3 (b and f) describing cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts and polymetallic sulphides, respectively, and suggested the addition of a sub-paragraph describing “group of blocks” as “a combination of contiguous blocks located within individual **structures verified for ore content.**”

The proposed amendment to Regulation 12 paragraph 2 called for the exploration area to be defined as “groups of blocks located within particular structures verified for ore content,” rather than contiguous blocks as specified in the draft. The proposed amendment to Regulation 17 (1) would include wording similar to Article 8 of Annex III to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which states that reserved areas “need not be a single continuous area.”

Responding to the proposal, a representative of the Secretariat said it was clear that experts were advocating different approaches for sulphides and crusts with regard to the size of areas. Suggesting an approach to the work of the Council on the draft regulations, the Secretariat official indicated that the second reading would be easier once the issue of the size of mine sites for contract application was solved.

The Council continued its work today under the chairmanship of the representative of Jamaica, Ambassador Raymond Wolfe, who has played the role of president since the beginning of this session. At the Council’s meeting on Monday 7 August, the Eastern European Group, to whom the presidency falls this year, had expressed its wish to defer the opportunity until next year’s session. Based on the system of rotation of the presidency among the regional groups, the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC) was asked to put forward a candidate. However, after consultations, that group today announced that they had decided to retain their right to assume the presidency during the thirteenth session in 2007.

At today’s meeting, after a brief discussion about how to proceed on the matter of electing the Council’s bureau, the Eastern European group indicated through the Secretary General that it was now prepared to nominate a candidate but that the candidate would not take the chair until next Monday, August 13. The Council will therefore elect the president in absentia, as well as the four vice-presidents when it next meets tomorrow afternoon.

At the suggestion of Argentina, the Council observed a minute of silence in honour of the late Honourable Louise Bennett Coverley, “Miss Lou”, one of Jamaica’s foremost cultural icons, whose interment took place this afternoon at National Heroes Park in Kingston.

With regard to the Legal and Technical Commission's elections, the Secretary General urged members to keep certain practical considerations in mind as they cast their votes. He noted that the size of a technical body such as the Commission had some bearing on its efficiency, and that there were also cost implications for the voluntary trust fund. (The fund was established in 2002, following a request by the Assembly to facilitate the participation of members from developing countries in the meetings of the Legal and Technical Commission and the Finance Committee.) The Secretary General further reminded the Council of the Commission's recommendations last year, that with its work becoming increasingly technical and specialized in nature, States parties should nominate experts with the relevant scientific background.

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