

DECLARATION BY FRANCE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY

On 7 November 2022, at COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, the President of the French Republic declared that France supports the banning of any deep seabed mining and that it would defend this position in the international forums. This strong and overt position has raised a lot of interest and many questions from our international partners, in particular within the forum of the International Seabed Authority.

France's commitment is simply the reflection of the sentiment of urgency and major concern that we are all experiencing faced with the need to protect the ocean, and with it humanity. This commitment is evidently based on science, which reminds us of the essential role of the marine ecosystem in the stabilization of the climate and the protection of biodiversity.

As the effects of climate change become increasingly threatening and the erosion of biodiversity continues to accelerate, today it does not seem reasonable to hastily launch a new project, that of deep seabed mining, the environmental impacts of which are not yet known and may be significant for such ancient ecosystems which have a very delicate equilibrium. This concern was already expressed by President Macron last June in Lisbon, on the sidelines of the United Nations Ocean Conference.

Currently, given the absence of scientific knowledge, we cannot today guarantee that mining mineral resources in the Area would not cause irreversible damage to the seabed and its biodiversity. That is why France, which has the second-largest exclusive economic zone, calls on its partners to make the same commitment to preserve this highly valuable marine ecosystem. Our precautionary principle must translate into tangible action, for the benefit of all humankind.

At the same time, exploration to improve our scientific knowledge of the deep seabed must not only continue, but grow, particularly in a framework of international cooperation among researchers around the world. The deep seabed must be what space was during the Cold War: a new frontier for cooperation and multilateralism.

In that respect, France wants to further contribute to this cause by continuing the training activities undertaken and by facilitating the dissemination of the data collected under exploration contracts. This is to make use of and share the information and scientific knowledge acquired in the interest of all.

Lastly, our position is aligned with France's continued desire to address global matters that are of interest to all entirely transparently, proactively and in the framework of effective multilateralism.

From the outset, France has been and continues to be a fervent supporter of the Authority, the single mission of which has, to this day, enabled the common heritage of mankind that is the Area and its deep seabed to be protected. By issuing exploration contracts, the ISA has usefully contributed to the acquisition of fundamental knowledge to tackle these challenges.

When the ISA was created by the Montego Bay Convention, almost 30 years ago now, the challenges that we face today, the urgency of climate action and the collapse of biodiversity and its ecosystem services, were not the same, however.

Our collective work must fully incorporate these challenges today. We must therefore allocate the time needed, which will be much more than initially envisaged, without any industrial or financial pressure, and without letting this work be guided by concerns other than those that are the fruit of knowledge and the need to protect marine ecosystems. As environmental imbalances challenge the living conditions of humankind, it would be dangerous to act with haste, endangering these ecosystems that could be sources of solutions and resilience in the future.

As of now, we are therefore joining all the States that are truly concerned by the protection of this common heritage that is the marine environment and its biodiversity, and who have recently expressed in various ways their concerns over deep seabed mining. In this forum, we are of course open to constructive dialogue with all of your governments and the ISA so that we can make inclusive progress on the knowledge of the seabed for the good of humankind.

KINGSTON, 10 NOVEMBER 2022