



WORKSHOP 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

1-5 May, 2023

Chennai, India

Terms of Reference

The International Seabed Authority (ISA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Earth Sciences and the National Institute of Ocean Technology of India, will convene a workshop on the development of a regional environmental management plan (REMP) for the Area of the Indian Ocean, with a focus on the Mid-Ocean Ridges and Central Indian Ocean Basin, during 1-5 May 2023, in Chennai, India.

Background

In line with the mandate of ISA to ensure effective protection for the marine environment from harmful effects which may arise from activities undertaken in the Area, during the 24th session, the Council took note of a strategy for the development of REMPs for key provinces in the Area where exploration activities under contracts were being carried out (ISBA/24/C/3). The Council agreed with priority areas that had been identified on a preliminary basis as the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, the Indian Ocean triple junction ridge and nodule-bearing province, as well as the North-west Pacific and South Atlantic for seamounts (ISBA/24/C/8). At its 25th session in 2019, the Council took note of a report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the REMP strategy (ISBA/25/C/13), including a programme of work to develop these through a series of expert workshops.

As highlighted in the strategy (ISBA/24/C/3), the development and implementation of REMPs in the Area require a collaborative and transparent approach, including the compilation and analysis of available data from multiple sources, the identification of gaps, as well as consultation with recognized experts from the international scientific community, contractors and research organizations. It is also regarded as essential that such processes facilitate participation by developing States. The Council also emphasized that the Secretariat should aim to expand the breadth and depth of its strategic partnerships with relevant organizations and researchers, including exploring opportunities for new strategic partnerships (ISBA/24/C/8).

In this context, the ISA Secretariat has pursued a collaborative effort with the Ministry of Earth Sciences and the National Institute of Ocean Technology of India in facilitating the workshop on the development of a REMP for the Area of the Indian Ocean, with a focus on the Mid-Ocean Ridges and Central Indian Ocean Basin, to discuss the scientific basis for the development of the REMP.

Workshop Objectives

The workshop aims to:

- Define a geographical area for the development of the REMP, drawing upon information on the geology, biogeography and oceanography of the region;
- Review and analyse benthic and pelagic ecosystem data;
- Synthesize environmental data, including patterns of biodiversity, connectivity, community structure; ecosystem function; and ecological proxy variables;
- Describe current exploration activity within contract areas;
- Undertake an assessment of cumulative impacts;
- Provide scientific descriptions of potential areas that should be protected from exploitation in order to achieve the effective protection of the marine environment; and
- Identify potential non-spatial management measures or options.

Existing literature and geo-spatial data related to geological, oceanographical and biological aspects of the marine environment and current human activities in the Indian Ocean (with a focus on the Mid-Ocean Ridges and Central Indian Ocean Basin) will be compiled through background reports to inform workshop discussions.

Expected outputs

A workshop report will be prepared by the designated co-chairs and the ISA Secretariat, building on the workshop discussions. It is envisaged that the results from this workshop will provide scientific inputs to the next REMP workshop for this region, which will focus on potential policy and management measures to be considered in the REMP. Together, the results of these two workshops will be provided as information to the Legal and Technical Commission for their consideration in the drafting of a REMP for the Area of the Indian Ocean.