

# 01

## THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY AT A GLANCE











Photo: ISA



# The International Seabed Authority at a glance



## The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1994 Agreement

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an autonomous international organization, part of the United Nations common system, that was established in 1982 under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the subsequent Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of UNCLOS (1994 Agreement).

UNCLOS set aside the Area - defined as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction - and its mineral resources as the common heritage of humankind.

Under UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement, ISA is designated as the organization through which States Parties to UNCLOS organize and control activities in the Area. Thus, ISA has the exclusive mandate to manage the Area and the minerals it contains for the benefit of humankind on the basis of the principles set out in UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement.

In pursuance of this exclusive mandate, the responsibilities and associated competences assigned

to ISA by UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement include:

- regulate the conduct of all activities of exploration for and exploitation of deep-sea minerals in the Area, including taking necessary measures to ensure effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects which may arise from such activities<sup>1</sup>
- distribute to States Parties payments or in-kind contributions derived from the exploitation of non-living resources of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles<sup>2</sup>
- promote and encourage marine scientific research concerning the Area and its resources, as well as coordinate and disseminate the results of research and analysis when available, with particular emphasis on research related to the environmental impact of activities in the Area<sup>3</sup>
- organize the transfer of technology and build the capacity of developing and technologically less advanced States.<sup>4</sup>

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## The Area and maritime zones under UNCLOS

The Area is defined as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.<sup>5</sup> The establishment of the exact geographic limits of the Area depends on the establishment by States of the outer limits of their national jurisdiction, including the delineation of the continental shelf extending beyond 200 nautical miles from the baseline of the territorial sea (**Figure 1**).

Coastal States must provide charts or lists of geographical coordinates of points indicating the outer limits of national jurisdiction and, in the case of

those indicating the outer limit lines of the continental shelf, deposit a copy of such charts or lists with the ISA Secretary-General.<sup>6</sup>

So far, 12 members of ISA have deposited such charts and lists with the Secretary-General, namely: Australia, Cook Islands, Côte d'Ivoire, France (with respect to Guadeloupe, Guyana, the Kerguelen Islands, Martinique, New Caledonia, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam and La Réunion), Ireland, Mauritius, Mexico, New Zealand, Niue, Pakistan, the Philippines and Tuvalu.

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1 UNCLOS, Art. 145.

2 UNCLOS, Art. 82(4).

3 UNCLOS, Art. 143(2).

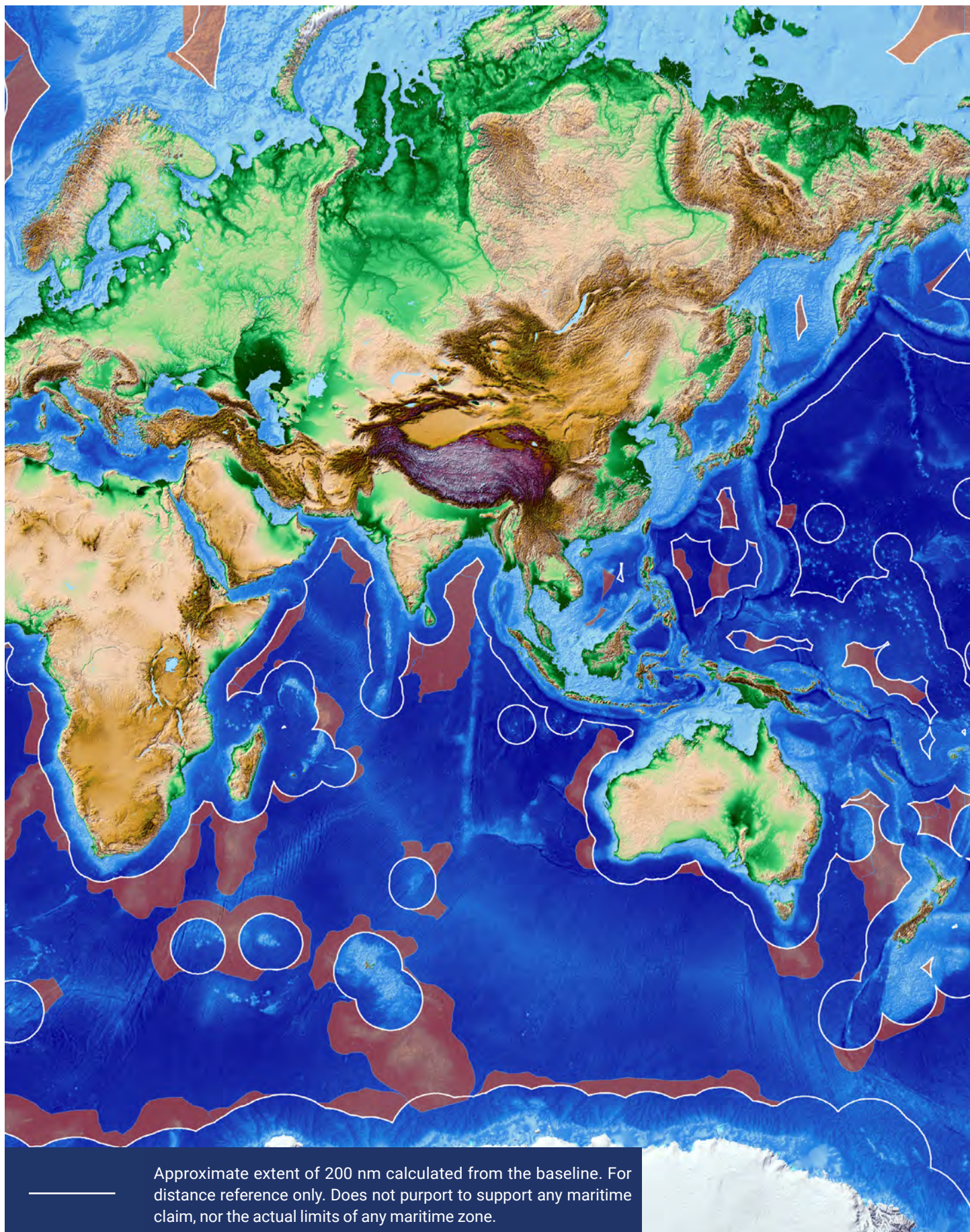
4 UNCLOS, Art. 144.

5 UNCLOS, Art. 1(1).

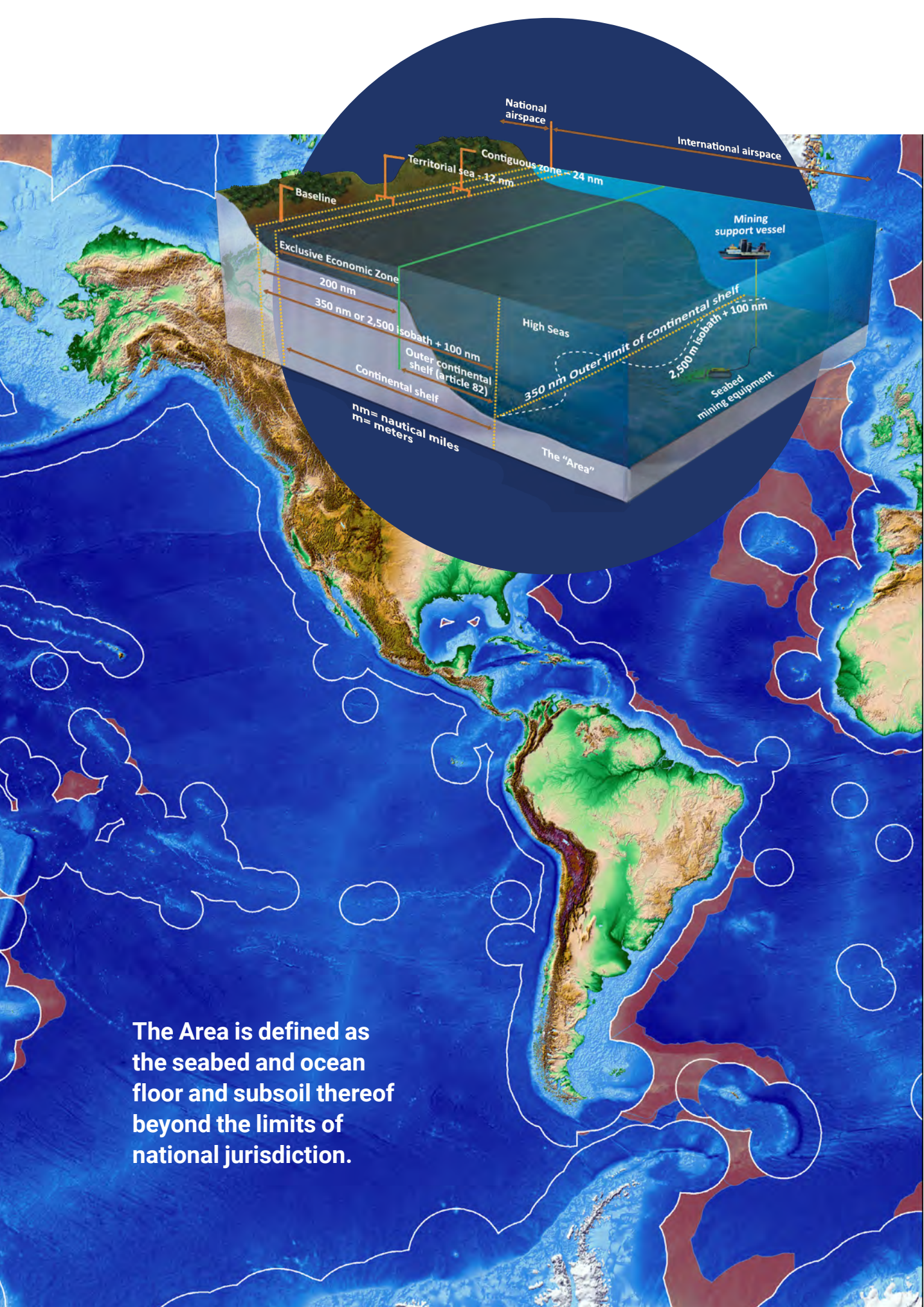
6 UNCLOS, Art. 84(2).



Figure 1. The Area and maritime zones under UNCLOS







**The Area is defined as the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.**

## Strategic Plan and High-Level Action Plan 2019-2023

The Assembly adopted the Strategic Plan of ISA for the period 2019-2023 at its 24th session in July 2018.<sup>7</sup> The plan includes nine strategic directions that aim to guide the work of ISA in the context of global challenges toward achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs (Figure 2).

The Assembly adopted the corresponding High-Level Action Plan in July 2019.<sup>8</sup> It provides an overview of the key priorities and high-level actions needed to achieve the strategic objectives of the organization.

ISA core strategic framework was further reinforced with the adoption of the Action Plan of ISA in support of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (MSR Action Plan, 2020)<sup>9</sup> and the ISA Capacity Development Strategy (2022)<sup>10</sup> to address the priority needs identified by its Members.

Chapter 3 provides an update on the implementation of the Strategic Plan and High-Level Action Plan 2019-2023, including the dedicated activities carried out in line with the ISA MSR Action Plan and the ISA Capacity Development Strategy.

In anticipation of the consideration and adoption of a revised Strategic Plan for the period 2024-2027 by the Assembly at its 28th session, the Secretariat has prepared a draft plan, which was informed by the implementation of the plan for the period 2019-2023 as well as the findings of a review carried out by a consultant and the comments and suggestions received from Members, observers and contractors.

7 ISBA/24/A/10

8 ISBA/25/A/15

9 ISBA/26/A/4

10 ISBA/27/A/11

Figure 2. ISA strategic framework



## Capacity Development Strategy

Five Key Result Areas

- 1 Ensuring that capacity development programmes and activities are meaningful, tangible, efficient, effective and targeted at the needs of developing States as identified by them
- 2 Establishing and furthering strategic partnerships in support of capacity development
- 3 Strengthening institutional capacities through technology transfer and technical assistance
- 4 Advancing women's empowerment and leadership in deep sea-related disciplines through targeted capacity development activities
- 5 Improving deep-sea literacy through better awareness and understanding of the legal regime of the Area and the role and mandate of the Authority

## ISA Strategic Plan + High-Level Action Plan 2019-2023

- 1 Realize the role of ISA in a global context
- 2 Strengthen the regulatory framework for activities
- 3 Protect the marine environment
- 4 Promote and encourage marine scientific research
- 5 Build capacity for developing States
- 6 Ensure fully integrated participation by developing States
- 7 Ensure equitable sharing of financial and other resources
- 8 Improve the organizational performance of ISA
- 9 Commit to transparency





2021  
2030 United Nations Decade  
of Ocean Science  
for Sustainable Development



## MSR Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science

Six strategic research priorities

- 1 Advancing scientific knowledge and understanding of deep-sea ecosystems, including biodiversity and ecosystems functions, in the Area.
- 2 Standardizing and innovating methodologies for deep-sea biodiversity assessment, including taxonomic identification and description, in the Area.
- 3 Facilitating technology development for activities in the Area, including ocean observation and monitoring.
- 4 Enhancing scientific knowledge and understanding of potential impacts of activities in the Area.
- 5 Promoting dissemination, exchange and sharing of scientific data and deep-sea research outputs and increasing deep-sea literacy.
- 6 Strengthening deep-sea scientific capacity of Authority members, in particular developing States.



### 9 strategic directions aligned with the SDGs

14 LIFE BELOW WATER	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION	13 CLIMATE ACTION
4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUALITY	14 LIFE BELOW WATER
4 QUALITY EDUCATION	5 GENDER EQUALITY	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
1 NO POVERTY	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
5 GENDER EQUALITY	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	

Research in the area

Research in the Area

Developing states

Economic benefits

UNCLOS (1982) and the 1994 Agreement



THE LAW OF THE SEA



## Membership

All parties to UNCLOS are automatically Members of ISA. As of June 2023, there were 169 parties to UNCLOS (168 States and the European Union), thus 169 Members of ISA.<sup>11</sup>

Rwanda became a party to UNCLOS on 18 May 2023. On the same date, Rwanda became a party to the 1994 Agreement, bringing to 152 the number of parties to the 1994 Agreement (151 States and the European Union).

Part XI of UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement are to be interpreted and applied together as a single instrument. In the event of any inconsistency between the two, the 1994 Agreement prevails.<sup>12</sup> Seventeen Members of ISA became parties to UNCLOS before the adoption of the 1994 Agreement but have yet to become parties to the Agreement (**Figure 3**). Members of ISA that are not parties to the 1994 Agreement can participate in the work of ISA. However, becoming a party to the 1994 Agreement would remove any potential conflict and Members are strongly encouraged to become parties at the earliest opportunity.

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## Permanent missions

As of June 2023, 34 Members maintain permanent missions to ISA (**Figure 3**). They are Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, France, Gabon, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nauru, Nigeria, Panama, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Spain and Trinidad and Tobago as well as the European Union.

Since July 2022, six new permanent representatives have been accredited by ISA: the Permanent Missions of Bangladesh, Chile, China, Germany, Japan and the Republic of Korea. Additionally, on 20 February 2023, H.E. Mr. Albert Ranganai Chimbindi was accredited as the first permanent representative of Zimbabwe to ISA.

## Protocol on Privileges and Immunities

The Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of ISA was adopted by the Assembly on 27 March 1998 and entered into force on 31 May 2003.

In December 2022, Greece ratified the Protocol, bringing the number of its parties to 48. A further 10 Members have signed it (**Figure 3**). Those Members that have not yet become party to the Protocol are encouraged to do so at the earliest possible opportunity.

A manual of protocol offering general guidance on the norms and practices of protocol and administrative requirements accepted and observed at the headquarters of ISA was released by the ISA Secretariat in June 2022.<sup>13</sup>

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## Observers

ISA collaborates with key stakeholders from governments, the private sector, international and regional organizations, research institutions and academia.

As of June 2023, ISA has granted observer status to 99 entities, including 29 States not Parties to UNCLOS. In addition, 32 United Nations bodies and other intergovernmental organizations and 37 non-governmental organizations also have observer status, enabling them to participate in meetings of the Council and the Assembly and contribute to discussions on matters within the scope of their activities (**Table 1**).

In August 2022, during its 27th session, the Assembly approved five requests for observer status submitted by the Cluster maritime français, the Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense, the Ocean Foundation, Oceans North and the World Organization of Dredging Associations. Bodies that may participate as observers in the Assembly are described in the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly, rule 82, paragraph 1. Additional information can also be found in the guidelines for observer status of non-governmental organizations with ISA adopted by the Assembly in 2019.<sup>14</sup>

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11 UNCLOS, Art. 156(2).

12 1994 Agreement, Art. 2(1).

13 ISA. 2022. [Manual of Protocol](#).

14 [ISBA/25/A/16](#).

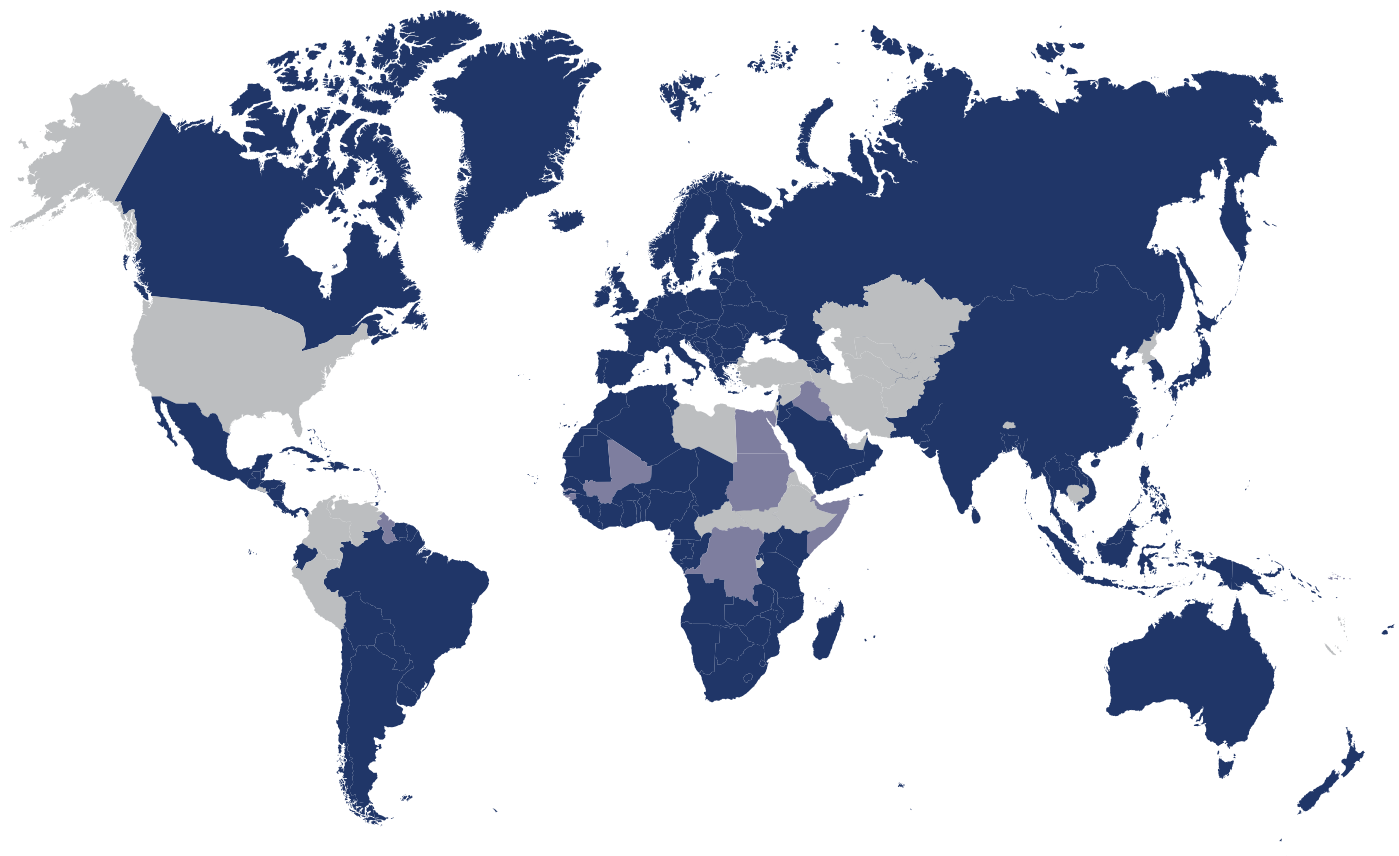
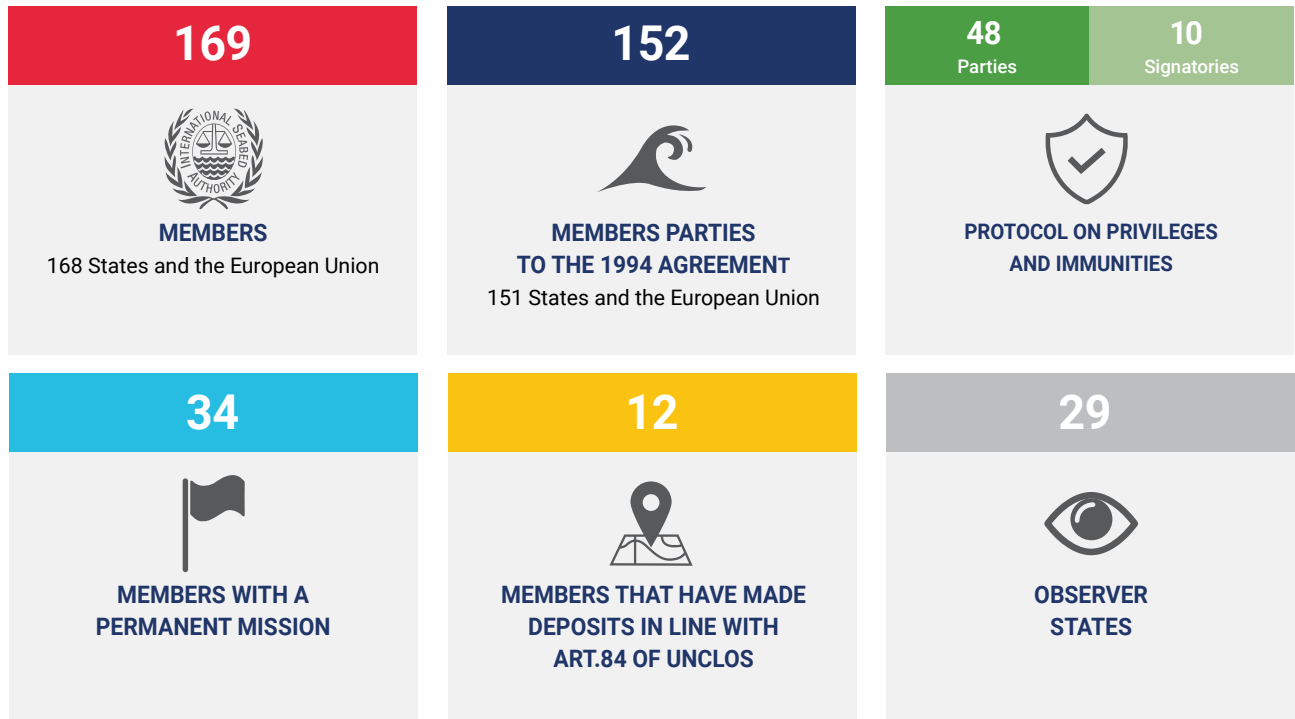


Table 1. List of ISA observers as at June 2023

States (29)	Bodies of the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations (32)	Non-governmental organizations (37)
Afghanistan	United Nations	Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea
Andorra	United Nations Environment Programme	African Minerals Development Centre
Bhutan	United Nations Development Programme	Center for Oceans Law and Policy, University of Virginia School of Law
Burundi	International Labour Organization	Center for Polar and Deep Ocean Development, Shanghai Jiao Tong University
Cambodia	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Cluster maritime français
Central African Republic	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	Committee for Mineral Reserves International Reporting Standards
Colombia	World Health Organization	Conservation International
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	World Bank	Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative
El Salvador	International Monetary Fund	Deep Sea Conservation Coalition
Eritrea	International Civil Aviation Organization	Durham University's Centre for Borders Research
Ethiopia	Universal Postal Union	Earthworks
Holy See	International Telecommunication Union	Fish Reef Project
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	World Meteorological Organization	Greenpeace International
Israel	International Maritime Organization	Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies
Kazakhstan	World Intellectual Property Organization	Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense
Kyrgyzstan	International Fund for Agricultural Development	International Association of Drilling Contractors
Libya	United Nations Industrial Development Organization	International Cable Protection Committee
Liechtenstein	International Atomic Energy Agency	International Dialogue on Underwater Munitions
Peru	Commonwealth	International Marine Minerals Society
San Marino	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission	International Ocean Institute
South Sudan	Inter-American Development Bank	International Policy Laboratory of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Syrian Arab Republic	International Hydrographic Organization	InterRidge
Tajikistan	International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund	Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology
Turkey	Interoceanmetal Joint Organization	Law of the Sea Institute
Turkmenistan	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources	Mining Standards International
United Arab Emirates	OSPAR Commission	OceanCare
United States of America	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries	Ocean North
Uzbekistan	Permanent Commission for the South Pacific	Ocean Society of India
Venezuela	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity	RESOLVE
	The Pacific Community	Sargasso Sea Commission
	World Trade Organization	Sasakawa Peace Foundation
	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme	The Ocean Foundation
		The Pew Charitable Trusts
		Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary
		World Ocean Council
		World Organization of Dredging Associations
		World Wildlife Fund International



Figure 3. Overview of ISA membership



- Parties to UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement (151)
- Parties to UNCLOS but not the 1994 Agreement (17)
- Observer States (29)



## Member States

ISA Members parties to the 1994 Agreement, Members that are parties or signatories to the Protocol on Privileges and Immunities of ISA, Members that have deposited their charts under Art.84 and Members with permanent missions at ISA.

Albania	●	●						
Algeria	●		●					
Angola	●							
Antigua and Barbuda	●	●	●					
Argentina	●	●	●					
Armenia	●							
Australia	●	●		●				
Austria	●							
Azerbaijan	●							
Bahamas	●	●						
Bahrain	●							
Bangladesh	●		●					
Barbados	●							
Belarus	●							
Belgium	●		●					
Belize	●							
Benin	●							
Bolivia	●							
(Plurinational State of)								
Bosnia and Herzegovina	●							
Botswana	●							
Brazil	●	●	●					
Brunei Darussalam	●							
Bulgaria	●	●						
Burkina Faso	●	●						
Cabo Verde	●							
Cameroon	●	●	●					
Canada	●							
Chad	●							
Chile	●	●	●					
China	●		●					
Comoros	●							
Congo	●			●				
Cook Islands	●							
Costa Rica	●		●					
Côte d'Ivoire	●	●		●				
Croatia	●	●						
Cuba	●	●	●					
Cyprus	●		●					
Czech Republic	●	●						
DR Congo	●							
Denmark	●	●						
Djibouti	●							
Dominica	●							
Dominican Republic	●		●					
Ecuador	●							
Egypt		●						
Equatorial Guinea	●							
Estonia	●	●						
Eswatini	●							
Fiji	●							
Finland	●							
France *	●	●	●	●				
Gabon	●		●					
Gambia	●							
Georgia	●	●						
Germany	●	●	●					
Ghana	●	●						
Greece	●	●						
Grenada	●							
Guatemala	●							
Guinea	●	●						
Guinea-Bissau	●							
Guyana		●						
Haiti	●							
Honduras	●							
Hungary	●							
Iceland	●							
India	●	●	●					
Indonesia	●	●						
Iraq		●						
Ireland	●	●	●	●				
Italy	●	●	●	●				
Jamaica	●	●	●					
Japan	●		●					
Jordan	●	●						
Kenya	●	●						
Kiribati	●							
Kuwait	●							
Lao PDR	●							
Latvia	●							
Lebanon	●							
Lesotho	●							
Liberia	●							
Lithuania	●	●						
Luxembourg	●							
Madagascar	●							
Malawi	●							
Malaysia	●							
Maldives	●							
Mali	●							
Malta	●	●	●					
Marshall Islands	●							
Mauritania	●							
Mauritius	●	●	●	●				
Mexico	●		●	●				
Micronesia	●							
Monaco	●							
Mongolia	●							
Montenegro	●							
Morocco	●							
Mozambique	●	●						
Myanmar	●							
Namibia	●	●	●					
Nauru	●		●					
Nepal	●							
Netherlands	●	●						
New Zealand	●			●				
Nicaragua	●							
Niger	●							
Nigeria	●	●	●					
Niue	●			●				
North Macedonia	●	●						
Norway	●	●						
Oman	●	●						
Pakistan	●	●		●				
Palau	●							
Panama	●	●	●					
Papua New Guinea	●							
Paraguay	●							
Philippines	●		●	●				
Poland	●	●						
Portugal	●	●						
Qatar	●							
Republic of Korea	●		●					
Republic of Moldova	●							
Romania	●	●						
Russian Federation	●		●					
Rwanda	●							
Saint Kitts and Nevis								
Saint Lucia								
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines								
Samoa	●							
Sao Tome and Principe								
Saudi Arabia	●	●						
Senegal	●	●						
Serbia	●							
Seychelles	●							
Sierra Leone	●							
Singapore	●							
Slovakia	●	●						
Slovenia	●	●						
Solomon Islands	●							
Somalia								
South Africa	●		●					
Spain	●	●	●					
Sri Lanka	●							
Sudan		●						
Suriname	●							
Sweden	●							
Switzerland	●							
State of Palestine	●							
Thailand	●							
Timor-Leste	●							
Togo	●	●						
Tonga	●							
Trinidad and Tobago	●	●	●					
Tunisia	●							
Tuvalu	●			●				
Uganda	●							
Ukraine	●							
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	●	●						
Tanzania	●							
Uruguay	●	●						
Vanuatu	●							
Viet Nam	●							
Yemen	●							
Zambia	●							
Zimbabwe	●							

\* France: with respect to Guadeloupe, Guyana, the Kerguelen Islands, Martinique, New Caledonia, Saint-Paul et Amsterdam and La Réunion