

ISA Assembly 28th Session, Agenda Item 8: Annual Report of the Secretary-General

Statement by Australia

25 July 2023

We join others in welcoming Rwanda's accession to the Convention and the 1994 Implementation Agreement on Part XI and on becoming the latest member of the Authority.

We thank the Secretary-General for the annual report which provides an informative and comprehensive overview of the work of the Authority.

As was noted yesterday, during the discussions on the Finance Committee's report, and as the Secretary-General pointed out in his introductory remarks this morning, heavy demands have been placed on the secretariat, including, not least, the need to service additional meetings of the Council as it continues its elaboration of the detailed Rules, Regulations and Procedures for exploitation.

Nevertheless, there has been a high rate of completion of high-level actions and outputs under the Authority's Strategic Plan 2019-23 and work is continuing on the remaining actions.

We congratulate the Secretary-General, and the hard-working staff of the secretariat, for their collective achievements over this past year.

I do not intend to comment on the many matters covered in the Annual Report, but I would like to highlight the following.

Australia welcomes the continuing efforts by the Authority to extend its network of strategic partnerships with national, regional, international and non-governmental organisations.

Although beyond the reporting period of this annual report, we welcome the Authority pursuing an agreement of cooperation with the International Labour Organisation, which was approved by the Council last week, with the agreement to be signed later this year.

We also welcome the closer cooperation between the Authority and the International Maritime Organisation, including a secondment program.

The agreement with the ILO and closer cooperation with the IMO will enable the Authority to further the obligation to effectively protect human life and safety with respect to activities in the Area, as required by Article 146 of the Convention.

Australia congratulates the Authority on its continued efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

We note the success in promoting gender parity among the secretariat staff, including in senior professional roles, and the institution of 'family friendly' policies.

We welcome the Authority's efforts to promote the participation of women in all aspects of the Authority's work.

We congratulate the secretariat for convening, last September, the inaugural conference on Women in the Law of the Sea, with the support of the Permanent Missions to the United Nations of the Republic of Singapore and Malta. It was an excellent conference and a unique contribution to celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Convention.

We commend the Authority's leadership in promoting gender equality in training opportunities and in deep sea research, in particular, for women from developing States, including the large ocean developing States of the Blue Pacific.

In this regard, Australia extends our warmest congratulations to Ms Rima Browne of the Cook Islands for the Secretary-General's Award for Excellence in Deep Sea Research. As mentioned by the Secretary-General yesterday, Ms Browne's research has many potential applications related to the management and governance of marine resources within the Cook Islands' marine jurisdiction, and beyond. We wish her every success in her continued research.

We also appreciate the progress made by the Authority against the research priorities in the ISA Marine Scientific Research Action Plan in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science, including the Authority's contribution to AREA2030 initiative and the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative.

Mr President,

As we face the prospect that exploitation of the mineral resources of the Area could begin in the near future, we welcome the general consensus in the Council that commercial exploitation should not begin in the absence of the Rules, Regulations and Procedures to govern exploitation.

We welcome the Council's decision last week, with the accompanying roadmap, for the continued elaboration of the Rules, Regulations and Procedures.

As Australia has stated previously, the Exploitation Regulations must have robust provisions on the protection of the marine environment.

Given the lack of scientific knowledge on the potential long-term impacts of deepsea mining in the Area on our oceans, marine ecosystems and biodiversity, strong environmental protections, incorporating the precautionary approach, are necessary if we are to fulfil our obligations in UNCLOS to ensure effective protection of the marine environment.

It is essential that a robust regulatory framework is accompanied by strong institutional arrangements if we are to ensure that, if the mineral resources of the Area are exploited, this is done safely, sustainably and for the benefit of humankind.

In this regard, we support the Secretary-General's ongoing efforts to improve the performance of the secretariat and, in line with the evolutionary approach, planning for the future, so that the Authority will be ready to an effective regulator if exploitation of the Area commences.

We assure you of Australia's continued support for the Authority and its important work.

Thank you.