

Statement by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

Item 8. a. Annual Report of the Secretary-General

Item 8. b. Report on the Implementation of the action plan of the International Seabed Authority in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

Assembly of the International Seabed Authority, 26 July 2023

Thank you, Mr. President.

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates and colleagues,

As this is the first time our delegation takes the floor in the Assembly, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) would like to join the chorus in congratulating you Mr. President on your election, in thanking the Government of Jamaica for its warm hospitality, and in thanking the Secretary-General and the staff of the International Seabed Authority Secretariat for their hard work in developing the annual report. IUCN also acknowledges all efforts deployed by delegations in recent weeks.

Our delegation wishes to offer some overall reflections on the proceedings of this Session: whilst cognizant of the progress made, IUCN would like to state its concerns on the following aspects:

First, we note the indicative but arbitrary timeline agreed by the Council last week against which the elaboration of rules, regulations and procedures related to exploitation will be conducted with a view to their adoption during the thirtieth session of the Authority. In this respect, we stress that other elements such as scientific knowledge, capacity building, the improvement of deep-seabed mining governance, are some examples that are even more urgently needed and equally mandates of this body.

Second, we would like to note that it is not just about progressing rules, regulations and procedures for exploitation, but the need to also develop and agree on other important components, such as an equitable mechanism for the sharing of benefits, environmental thresholds, compliance and enforcement policies, as well as the development of essential standards and guidelines.

Third, the need to fully empower the Assembly in considering all options to fulfill the requirements of UNCLOS. On that note, IUCN wishes to underline that the requirement under UNCLOS to protect the marine environment does not strictly demand the completion of the regulatory regime, but rather makes implicit the option of not proceeding if¹ adequate and effective protection cannot be ensured. This aligns with a resolution adopted at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in September 2021, stating that deep seabed mining activities should not commence until and unless the environmental risks of these activities are comprehensively understood and the effective protection of the marine environment can be ensured.

Fourth, and as previously mentioned by IUCN in recent sessions, the importance of transparency and inclusiveness of the negotiations. We are concerned that this remains unchanged, as seen through the number of negotiations closed to observers, and the increased media access restrictions.

Fifth, echoing the concern expressed by many delegations on the unsustainable pace the ISA negotiations have recently been operating under - conducting three meetings per year, presenting financial and capacity difficulties for active engagement and participation for several delegations and observers, and putting additional strain on the ISA Secretariat.

Considering the indicative timeline, member states now have the opportunity to reflect on the most pressing needs ahead of the 30th Session of the Authority. IUCN wishes to bring to the attention the suggestion from Wendy Schmidt of the Schmidt Ocean Institute and Kristina Gjerde, IUCN Senior High Seas adviser, in the Guardian piece² yesterday Tuesday 25 July, to make use of this time to pursue three goals for human and planetary health:

First, to further marine scientific research;

Second, to improve land-based mining practices;

and third: to support innovation to answer our connectivity, mobility and energy needs in more sustainable ways.

¹ [WCC 2020 RES 122 EN.pdf \(iucn.org\)](#)

² [Mining companies are eager to dig up the ocean. That's a dangerous idea | Wendy Schmidt and Kristina Gjerde | The Guardian](#)

Mr President,

As mentioned by several delegations attending Assembly, IUCN wishes to remind of the interlinkages that exist between the ongoing ISA negotiations and the recently adopted third internationally legally binding Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (High Seas Biodiversity Treaty). Such interlinkages which will be key in maintaining ocean and planetary health.

Finally, IUCN wishes to congratulate Rima Browne from the Cook Islands in receiving the Fourth Edition of the Award for Excellence in Deep-Sea Research. IUCN also welcomes Rwanda to the Authority, as well as the organizations which have been granted observer status to the ISA by the Assembly on Monday, in particular those organizations supporting and enhancing the capacity of youth and young professionals, scientists and indigenous people, in an effort to strengthen inclusiveness in the ISA proceedings.

The Union remains committed to continue supporting its Member States, other States and stakeholders during - and in between - the Sessions of the ISA.

With that, we thank you for giving us the floor.