



2024 Ocean Decade Conference

Side event | Leveraging knowledge, innovation and empowerment in deep-sea research in support of the stewardship of the Area for the benefit of humankind

Barcelona, Spain

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STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

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Honourable Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Mr. Mark Brown,

President of the National Marine Biodiversity Institute of Korea, Mr. Wan-hyun Choi,

Legal Adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship, of Argentina, Rosa Delia Gomez Duran,

Secretary to the Maritime Affairs Unit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, Real Admiral Khurshed Alam,

Distinguished guests,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to discuss how “Leveraging knowledge, innovation, and empowerment in deep-sea research supports the stewardship of the Area for the benefit of humankind”.

I regret that I cannot attend in person owing to pressing engagements in Jamaica, but I wish to emphasize that I will follow closely the outcomes of your discussion, which is key to taking stock of the progress made by the Authority in discharging its mandate over marine scientific research in the Area.

Let me recognize the leadership role played by our co-organizers, Argentina, Bangladesh, and the Cook Islands.

All of them are first-hour signatories of the Global Call to Action aimed at accelerating sustainable development through deep-sea science and innovation, which was launched last year on the margins of the SDGs Summit in New York. I am happy to report that, since then, it has gathered many more signatories and supporters and I look forward to more to come.

I am equally grateful to count on two long-standing partners, the National Marine Biodiversity Institute of Korea, MABIK, and the UK National Oceanography Centre for the organization of this event.

Colleagues,

ISA is tasked by UNCLOS and the 1994 Agreement with the unique mandate to act as custodian and steward of 54% of the seafloor of the world's oceans. To deliver against such ambitious responsibility, ISA has been empowered to ensure the protection of the marine environment, using the best available science to support informed decision-making and to balance resource development with conservation.

The modern era of deep-sea exploration began in the 1950s. Since then, our collective understanding of earth sciences has improved dramatically. This includes better understanding of geological processes, the formation and distribution of marine minerals, ocean circulation, ocean chemistry and of course, knowledge of the deep ocean environment and biodiversity.

A revolution in ocean technology over the past twenty years has led to an exponential growth in knowledge base. Some areas of the deep ocean floor, such as the Clarion Clipperton Zone, have been studied continuously for more than 40 years, making them amongst the most-studied areas of seafloor on the planet.

The problem is that this knowledge is unevenly distributed. Some parts of the seafloor have been little studied, including the zones of some developing countries.

And even more importantly, capacity and knowledge are unevenly distributed – some will say inequitably. Deep-sea science is costly and relies on advanced technology. It is out of reach of the majority of developing countries.

And that is why ISA has a very important mandate to first make sure that the scientific knowledge of the deep ocean floor is made available through ISA to everyone, and second, to support developing countries by building capacity.

ISA acts as a global repository for deep-sea data, which thereby becomes accessible to the entire global scientific community. Over the past 40 years, a huge body of information has been generated. More than 10 terabytes of data are currently managed by ISA in its DeepData database. These data represent a considerable asset for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Capacity development includes training programmes, international scientific programmes, and international cooperation between developed and developing countries. The world-class training opportunities and projects developed by ISA over the past 20 years have so far empowered more than 1000 individuals in high-technology and scientific skills.

Of course, there is still a lot to be accomplished. It is precisely for this reason that the ISA Assembly spearheaded the global deep-sea research agenda through its Action Plan for Marine Scientific Research, which was adopted in 2020 by all its 168 Member States.

The Action Plan recognises six strategic research priorities which are crucial to the objectives of the Ocean Decade. These include large scale global actions, such as the Sustainable Seabed Knowledge Initiative, which involve scientific challenges that are too big for one country to solve alone, as well as scaling up the ambition of current scientific data collection efforts.

Since the Action Plan was adopted ISA contract holders reported 27 new scientific cruises across all ocean basins. In this same period the scientific outputs generated, based on the environmental studies conducted, resulted in 374 peer-reviewed scientific publications, 22 theses, and 66 conference contributions.

With a view to taking stock of the progress made so far, I have recently commissioned a comprehensive report on the implementation of the Action Plan and its contribution to the scientific objectives of the UN Ocean Decade. The report is being developed in collaboration with the National Oceanography Centre and with the assistance of a group of 15 internationally renowned experts.

Today, with the support of our outstanding panellists, I look forward to mobilizing all interested stakeholders to identify and support future actions in support of deep-sea research.

I also wish to invite other members of ISA and competent organizations to join the Global Call for Action for greater investment in science and technology, for integrated and targeted actions, and for deep-sea literacy.

I wish you all a successful event and I thank all the speakers and participants for your contributions.

Thank you.
