



Charting future horizons: harnessing advanced technologies for the protection and sustainable use of the international seabed area

Porto, Portugal

3 April 2024

STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Michael W. Lodge

Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

.....
Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this expert scoping workshop entitled ‘Charting Future Horizons: Harnessing Advanced Technologies for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the International Seabed Area’, organised in collaboration with the Institute for Systems and Computer Engineering, Technology and Science (INESC TEC).

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Ms. Maria Luís Mendes, Legal Advisor of the Ministry of Foreign Offices of Portugal, Prof. José Manuel Mendonça, Chairman of INESC TEC, and Prof. Maria João Viamonte, President of the Superior Institute of Engineering of Porto at the Porto Polytechnic Institute, for their excellent and enthusiastic support in organising this workshop.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to all participants joining the workshop in-person and online.

In 2021, the ISA Assembly adopted an Action Plan to support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

The Action Plan identifies six strategic research priorities, one of them being specifically focused on facilitating technology development for activities carried out in the Area.

This is a recognition that technological innovation is key to ensuring reliable, low-impact, transparent, and cost-effective systems for monitoring of exploration and future exploitation activities.

Technology innovation is also central to the fulfilment by the Authority of its responsibility as a global regulator, including in ensuring an evidence-based approach to decision-making.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) assigns the Authority with the unique mandate to organise and control mineral-resource related activities in the Area for the benefit of humankind as a whole. In so doing, the Authority is mandated to ensure the effective protection of the marine environment from harmful effects that may arise from deep-seabed-related activities. The Authority also has the duty to design and implement mechanisms to promote and encourage the transfer of technology to developing States.

Unfolding the concept of technology innovation in the context of the work of ISA today leads us to consider five specific areas, namely: (i) ocean observation and communication; (ii) monitoring, (iii) autonomy, automation, and robotics; (iv) machine learning and artificial intelligence; and (v) mining, energy, and processing.

Aligned with the principles of UNCLOS, ISA's efforts to facilitate the development and transfer of deep-sea technology will add significant value by increasing our knowledge of the deep ocean and helping us to ensure sustainable and equitable use of seabed resources in the Area, the common heritage of humankind.

As background to this workshop, and in order to inform the current discussions taking place at various levels in the Authority, the Secretariat initiated a study to assess current and available technologies involved in these five specific areas as well as what could be identified as best industry practices. Our objective in the coming days is to seek further inputs into this study before releasing a report later this year.

I also express the hope that one of the outcomes of your discussions in the upcoming days will be the identification of synergies we could develop through strategic partnerships to facilitate technological development and relevant capacity development efforts.

I trust that your collective engagement will help us design and implement tangible actions towards advancing sound and innovative deep-sea technology for the sustainable management of the Area and its resources.

Thank you.
