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**Status of contracts for exploration and related matters,
including information on the periodic review of the
implementation of approved plans of work for exploration**

Report on the status of contracts for exploration and related matters, including information on the periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work for exploration.

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Status of contracts for exploration and related matters

1. Contracts currently pertain to each of the three mineral resources for which the International Seabed Authority has adopted regulations on prospecting and exploration. These are polymetallic nodules, polymetallic sulphides, and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts.
2. As of 24 January 2025, 30 contracts for exploration are in force, of which 19 are for exploration for polymetallic nodules, 7 are for exploration for polymetallic sulphides and 4 are for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts. For each mineral resource, a complete list, containing the name of the contractor, the sponsoring State or States, if applicable, the general location of the exploration areas and the dates of entry into force and date of extension, if applicable, and expiry of each contract, is provided in annex I to the present report.
3. The application for approval of a plan of work for exploration for polymetallic sulphides submitted by the Government of India was approved by the Council during Part II of the 29th Session. The Government of India provided its feedback on the draft contract in January 2025, and the secretariat is finalising the contract. Appropriate arrangements will be made for the signing of the contract between the Secretary-General and the Government of India.

* ISBA/30/C/L.1

II. Periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work for exploration

4. In accordance with the regulations on exploration and the standard clauses of contracts for exploration¹, the contractor and the Secretary-General are to undertake jointly a periodic review of the implementation of a plan of work for exploration at intervals of five years. The Secretary-General may request the contractor to submit such additional data and information as may be necessary for the purposes of the review. In light of the review, the contractor is required to make such adjustments to its plan of work as are necessary and to indicate its programme of activities for the following five-year period, including a revised schedule of expected yearly expenditure. The Secretary-General is to report on the review to the Commission and the Council. The Secretary-General is to indicate in the report whether any observations transmitted to her by States parties to the Convention concerning the manner in which the contractor has discharged its obligations under the regulations relating to the protection and preservation of the marine environment were taken into account in the review.

5. To implement these provisions, the Secretary-General consults with the Commission on the content of periodic review reports submitted by contractors (in-session or intersessionally depending on the timing of the reports). The periodic report serves as a checkpoint against which to evaluate the progress of exploration work, submission of data by the contractor and overall consistency of planned activities with the approved plan of work for exploration. Comments and suggestions made by the Commission will then be taken into account in discussions between the Secretary-General and the contractor to make adjustments to the proposed programme of activities as may be necessary. The programme of activities is then incorporated into the contract as a revised schedule.

6. The review of the periodic report submitted by Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security (JOGMEC) was completed in 2024. Between February 2024 and January 2025, eight periodic review reports were submitted, namely the periodic review of the implementation of the plans of work of: (i) China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association (COMRA), (ii) Government of the Republic of Korea (ROK), (iii) Global Sea Mineral Resources NV (GSR), (iv) UK Seabed Resources Ltd (UKSR)², (v) Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (Ifremer), (vi) Beijing Pioneer Hi-Tech Development Corporation (BPC), (vii) Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd. (Marawa), and (viii) Ocean Mineral Singapore Pte Ltd (OMS), of which their reviews are expected to be completed by the end of April 2025.

7. Annex II to the present report provides a breakdown of the status of periodic reviews, including those due in 2025.

8. The new five-year periodic report template was finalised by the Commission during Part II of the 29th Session and has been issued as an official document with a symbol.³ In August 2024, the secretariat sent a copy of the new template to all contractors in which they were advised to use the new template to prepare and submit their respective 5-year periodic report.

¹ See regulation 28 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic nodules in the Area (ISBA/19/C/17, annex, and ISBA/20/A/9), regulation 30 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area (ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1, annex), regulation 30 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area (ISBA/18/A/11, annex) and standard clause 4.4 of the contracts for exploration.

² UKSR1 second 5-year periodic report was resubmitted on 11 July 2024.

³ ISBA/29/LTC/7

III. Extensions of contracts for exploration

9. A total of eight polymetallic nodule contracts (i.e. Interoceanmetal Joint Organization, JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya, ROK, COMRA, Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd, Ifremer, Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources, and Nauru Ocean Resources Inc.) and one polymetallic sulphides contract (i.e. COMRA) are due to expire in 2026. The six contractors whose contracts will expire in the first six months of 2026 are expected to submit their respective application for extension of contract in the second half of 2025 in accordance with section 3, paragraph 3.2 of the standard clauses for exploration contract. The expiry dates of these contracts are provided in annex I to the present report.

IV. Status of relinquishments

10. Contractors are required to relinquish parts of the areas allocated for exploration in accordance with the provisions of regulation of the regulations 27 on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area⁴ and regulation 27 of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts in the Area⁵ in respect of the relinquishment from the original contract area for those resources. The mechanisms for relinquishing the area are guided by recommendations issued by the Commission⁶, which are used by the contractors to prepare their relinquishment reports and maps and by the secretariat to evaluate the contractors' reports. The outcomes of the evaluation are then issued by the secretariat as a conference room paper for the Commission and as a working document for the Council, in which both bodies are requested to take note of the secretariat's conclusions.

11. On 18 June 2024, Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (Ifremer) submitted a request to the Secretary-General for the second deferral of its second relinquishment of areas under its contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides by another year.⁷ A separate note by the secretariat on this matter has been prepared for consideration by the Commission.

12. Similarly, on 28 November 2024, the Government of India submitted a request to the Secretary-General for deferral of its second relinquishment of areas under its contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides by two years. A separate note by the secretariat on this matter has been prepared for consideration by the Commission.

13. Annex III to the present note shows the schedule and status of relinquishment of areas under contracts for exploration.

V. Recommendation

14. The Council is invited to take note of the status of the contracts for exploration including the progress made in preparation for the signing of the ISA-Government of India PMS contract, the information on the periodic review of the implementation of approved plans of work, the status of relinquishment, the update of extension agreements, and the use of the new five-year periodic report template by contractors.

⁴ ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1, annex.

⁵ ISBA/18/A/11, annex.

⁶ ISBA/25/LTC/8.

⁷ Ifremer's request for the first deferral of its second relinquishment was approved by Council during Part II of the 27th Session, ISBA/27/C/39.

Annex I

Status of approved contracts for exploration

A. Contracts for exploration for polymetallic nodules

	Contractors	Date of entry into force	Sponsoring State(s)	General location of the exploration area	Date of expiry
1	Interoceanmetal Joint Organization	29 March 2001 29 March 2016 ⁸ 29 March 2021 ⁹	Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechia, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	28 March 2016 28 March 2021 28 March 2026
2	JSC Yuzhmorgeologiya	29 March 2001 29 March 2016 ¹ 29 March 2021 ²	Russian Federation	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	28 March 2016 28 March 2021 28 March 2026
3	Government of the Republic of Korea	27 April 2001 27 April 2016 ¹ 27 April 2021 ²	NA ¹⁰	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	26 April 2016 26 April 2021 26 April 2026
4	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	22 May 2001 22 May 2016 ¹ 22 May 2021 ²	China	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	21 May 2016 21 May 2021 21 May 2026
5	Deep Ocean Resources Development Co. Ltd.	20 June 2001 20 June 2016 ¹ 20 June 2021 ²	Japan	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	19 June 2016 19 June 2021 19 June 2026
6	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	20 June 2001 20 June 2016 ¹ 20 June 2021 ²	France	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	19 June 2016 19 June 2021 19 June 2026
7	Government of India	25 March 2002 25 March 2017 ¹¹ 25 March 2022 ¹²	NA	Central Indian Ocean Basin	24 March 2017 24 March 2022 24 March 2027
8	Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	19 July 2006 19 July 2021 ¹³	Germany	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	18 July 2021 18 July 2026
9	Nauru Ocean Resources Inc.	22 July 2011	Nauru	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	21 July 2026
10	Tonga Offshore Mining Limited	11 January 2012	Tonga	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	10 January 2027
11	Global Sea Mineral Resources NV	14 January 2013	Belgium	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	13 January 2028
12	UK Seabed Resources Ltd.	8 February 2013	United Kingdom of Great Britain	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	7 February 2028

⁸ First five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-second session (2016)

⁹ Second five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-sixth session (2021)

¹⁰ NA – Not applicable

¹¹ First five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-third session (2017)

¹² Second five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-seventh session (2022)

¹³ First five-year extension of contract granted at the twenty-sixth session (2021)

			and Northern Ireland		
13	Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd.	19 January 2015	Kiribati	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	18 January 2030
14	Ocean Mineral Singapore Pte. Ltd.	22 January 2015	Singapore	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	21 January 2030
15	UK Seabed Resources Ltd.	29 March 2016	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone	28 March 2031
16	Cook Islands Investment Corporation	15 July 2016	Cook Islands	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	14 July 2031
17	China Minmetals Corporation	12 May 2017	China	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	11 May 2032
18	Beijing Pioneer Hi- Tech Development Corporation	18 October 2019	China	Western Pacific Ocean	17 October 2034
19	Blue Minerals Jamaica Ltd	4 April 2021	Jamaica	Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone (reserved area)	3 April 2036

B. Contracts for exploration for polymetallic sulphides

	Contractors	Date of entry into force	Sponsoring State(s)	General location of the exploration area	Date of expiry
1	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	18 November 2011	China	South-west Indian Ridge	17 November 2026
2	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	29 October 2012	NA	Mid-Atlantic Ridge	28 October 2027
3	Government of the Republic of Korea	24 June 2014	NA	Central Indian Ocean	23 June 2029
4	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	18 November 2014	France	Mid-Atlantic Ridge	17 November 2029
5	Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	6 May 2015	Germany	Central Indian Ridge and South-east Indian Ridge	5 May 2030
6	Government of India	26 September 2016	NA	Indian Ocean Ridge	25 September 2031

7	Government of Poland	12 February 2018	NA	Mid-Atlantic Ridge	11 February 2033
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C. Contracts for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts

	Contractors	Date of entry into force	Sponsoring State(s)	General location of the exploration area	Date of expiry
1	Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security	27 January 2014	Japan	Western Pacific Ocean	26 January 2029
2	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	29 April 2014	China	Western Pacific Ocean	28 April 2029
3	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	10 March 2015	NA	Magellan Mountains in the Pacific Ocean	9 March 2030
4	Government of the Republic of Korea	27 March 2018	NA	East of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific Ocean	26 March 2033

Annex II

Breakdown of the status of periodic reviews

A. Periodic reviews either completed or in progress.

	Contractors	Type of resource	Expiration of 5-year period ¹⁴	Status
IN PROGRESS				
1	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	Cobalt-rich crusts	29 January 2024	In progress
2	Government of the Republic of Korea	Polymetallic sulphides	25 March 2024	In progress
3	Global Sea Mineral Resources NV	Polymetallic nodules	31 March 2024	In progress
4	UK Seabed Resources Ltd 1.	Polymetallic nodules	7 November 2022	In progress
5	Beijing Pioneer Hi-Tech Development Corporation	Polymetallic nodules	19 July 2024	In progress
6	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	Polymetallic sulphides	19 August 2024	In progress
7	Marawa Research and Exploration Ltd.	Polymetallic nodules	20 October 2024	In progress
8	Ocean Mineral Singapore Pte. Ltd.	Polymetallic nodules	23 October 2024	In progress
COMPLETED				
9.	Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security	Cobalt-rich crusts	26 October 2023	Completed

¹⁴ Not later than 90 days prior to the expiration of each five-year period from the date on which the contract enters into force, the contractor and the Secretary-General shall jointly undertake a review of the implementation of the plan of work for exploration under the contract (sect. 4.4 of the standard clauses for exploration contract (ISBA/19/C/17, annex IV; ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1, annex 4, and ISBA/18/A/11, annex IV))

B. Periodic reviews due in 2025

	Contractors	Type of resource	Expiration of 5-year period¹	Status
1	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	Cobalt-rich crusts	9 March 2025	Report due by 9 December 2024
2	Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	Polymetallic sulphides	6 May 2025	Report due by 4 February 2025
3	UK Seabed Resources Ltd 2.	Polymetallic nodules	29 March 2026	Report due by 28 December 2025
4	Interoceanmetal Joint Organization	Polymetallic nodules	29 March 2026	Report due by 28 December 2025
5	JSC Yuzhmoregeologiya	Polymetallic nodules	29 March 2026	Report due by 28 December 2025

Annex III

Schedule and status of relinquishments of areas under contracts for exploration

A. Contracts for exploration for polymetallic sulphides

	Contractors	1st relinquishment 50% of original contract area – in year 8	2nd relinquishment 75% of original contract area – in year 10
1	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	Completed	Completed
2	Government of the Republic of Korea	Completed	Deferred to 31 December 2026 ¹⁵
3	Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer	Completed	Deferred to 18 November 2025 ¹⁶
4	Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources	Completed	Deferred to 6 May 2026 ¹⁷
5	Government of India	30 September 2026 ¹⁸	25 September 2026
6	Government of Poland	11 February 2026	11 February 2028

B. Contracts for exploration for cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts

	Contractors	1st relinquishment 50% of original contract area – in year 8	2nd relinquishment 75% of original contract area –
1	Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security	Completed	Completed
2	China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association	Completed	Completed
3	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation	Completed	9 March 2025
4	Government of the Republic of Korea	26 March 2026	26 March 2028

¹⁵ Council decision [ISBA/28/C/8](#).

¹⁶ Council decision [ISBA/27/C/39](#).

¹⁷ Council decision [ISBA/27/C/19](#).

¹⁸ Council decision [ISBA/28/C/22](#).