


Lisbon, 10th of April 2025

MRS. LETÍCIA CARVALHO
Secretary-General
International Seabed Authority
Kingston, Jamaica

Re: Application for Observer Status

Dear Secretary-General,



On behalf of Oceano Azul Foundation, I am writing to submit our application for observer status at the International Seabed Authority (ISA), in accordance with article 169 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, rule 82, paragraph 1 (e), of the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority and the guidelines for observer status of non-governmental organizations with the International Seabed Authority.

Oceano Azul Foundation is an organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of the ocean, through a science-based approach. Its main areas of action include ocean conservation, international advocacy, and promotion of blue natural capital. The mission of the Oceano Azul Foundation is to restore and maintain the ocean's health and productivity for the benefit of all life on the planet. The vision of the Foundation is to connect the dots between key ocean issues, such as promoting the ocean-climate nexus and the conservation-economy connection, through the concept of blue natural capital. The Foundation adopts an integrated approach across all its programmes, weaving together concrete action to accelerate change. It applies bottom-up solutions by collaborating with a range of ocean stakeholders, including States, civil society, the scientific community and academia. Oceano Azul Foundation respectfully requests that this application is considered at the next session of the International Seabed Authority Assembly in July 2025.

We look forward to becoming an observer at the Authority and joining the diverse community of States and observers working towards fulfilling the mandate of the Authority, and anticipate contributing our expertise on the Authority's work on the effective protection of the marine environment.

Thank you in advance for your kind consideration.

With warm wishes,

Tiago Pitta e Cunha



Chief Executive Officer
Oceano Azul Foundation

Application for Observer Status at the International Seabed Authority Oceano Azul Foundation

April 10, 2025

A. Information about the Organization

1. Name of organization

Oceano Azul Foundation

2. Address of headquarters

Esplanada D. Carlos I, 1990-005 Lisboa, Portugal

3. Addresses of all branches and/or regional headquarters

N/A

4. Telephone number

+351 218 917 001

5. Fax number

+351 218 917 001

6. Email address

scarvalho@oceanoazulfoundation.org

7. Name, title and contact details of focal point

Sérgio Carvalho, Deputy Director for International Advocacy

Email: scarvalho@oceanoazulfoundation.org

Mobile: +351 939 900 323

Sílvia Ventura, Administration and Board Support Manager

Email: sventura@oceanario.pt

Mobile: +351 936 271 010

8. Background information on the organization

Oceano Azul Foundation, established in 2017, is a mission-driven organization committed to meaningful action for ocean conservation, working from "the ocean's point of view." Its work is guided by scientific knowledge and focuses on restoring and maintaining the ocean's health and productivity for the benefit of life on the planet, for current and future generations.

The Foundation's approach is multi-faceted, employing a "model of change" shaped around four key approaches:

1. **Connecting the dots** between key ocean issues, such as promoting the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus and the conservation-economy connection, through the development of the concept of blue natural capital.

2. **Adopting an integrated approach** across all the Foundation's programmes, weaving together concrete action to accelerate change.
3. **Applying bottom-up solutions** to programmes by developing a decentralized decision-making process that involves grassroots and institutional stakeholders, particularly in what relates the support and promotion of the establishment and implementation of Marine Protected Areas.
4. **Employing a surgical approach**, consolidating efforts, avoiding dispersion, and concentrating activity on key programmes and avenues of action, to achieve lasting transformational, scalable, and replicable change.

Oceano Azul's work encompasses several major programs, including our Conservation Programs focused on promoting and facilitating the implementation of effective and science-based Marine Protected Areas and contributing to the international commitment of protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030; our International Advocacy Programs focused on raising the profile of the ocean within global political agenda and promoting informed and responsible decision-making for ambitious and sustainable ocean governance at an international level and; its Policy Frameworks and Economics Programs which aim to support the transition from the current extractive economic paradigm to a new sustainable, circular, and decarbonizing blue bioeconomy that values blue natural capital.

Importantly, the Foundation works in close collaboration with a wide range of partners, including governments, international organizations, NGOs, scientific institutions, and businesses, leveraging a combined expertise and resources to drive impactful ocean conservation and sustainable development. This is reflected in the strong network of like-minded individuals who serve on the board of directors and board of trustees, bringing extensive experience from diverse sectors, such as academia, policy, business, and science. The Oceanário de Lisboa serves as a key asset, promoting emotional connections with the ocean and inspiring positive behaviors. Its extensive educational programs, combined with the Foundation's overall initiatives, aim to foster a global shift in humanity's relationship with the ocean.

9. Is the organization a member of, affiliated to or otherwise associated with another organization that has been granted observer status with the Authority?

Yes, Oceano Azul Foundation is a member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC) which holds observer status to the ISA. Oceano Azul Foundation is also in the process of application for Membership to the IUCN, which also holds observer status to the ISA. Finally, the Foundation has collaborated, partnered and co-organized events at various ocean fora with several other organizations that holds observer status with the Authority in the past, such as the Pew Charitable Trust, the World Wildlife Fund and the Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative (DOSI).

10. Is the organization affiliated to consultants of the Authority, contractors with the Authority, entities in connection with the law of the sea, the offshore and deep-sea mining industry, research institutes or the mineral marketing and processing industry?

Oceano Azul Foundation is not affiliated to consultants of the Authority, contractors with the Authority, the offshore and deep-sea mining industry, research institutes or the mineral marketing

and processing industry. In relation to “entities in connection with the law of the sea”, Oceano Azul Foundation has collaborated with the United Nations Division on Law of the Sea (UN-DOALOS) on several initiatives - detailed under question 11.

11. Relationships with intergovernmental organizations

From its inception, Oceano Azul Foundation has recognized the crucial role of collaboration with intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) to achieve its mission. These partnerships have provided access to global policy platforms, facilitated the implementation of large-scale initiatives, and supported the Foundation's and global efforts towards strengthening international ocean governance frameworks. Below, an overview of the main activities that Oceano Azul Foundation has developed associated to different intergovernmental organizations.

1. United Nations

The UN represents a central pillar in Oceano Azul's international activities. The Foundation actively engages with numerous UN negotiations, bodies and programs. Bellow an overview:

a. BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction)

- a. The Oceano Azul Foundation has been a strong advocate for a robust BBNJ Treaty, engaging in negotiations and advocating for greater ambition. The Foundation has actively contributed to mobilizing support for the treaty from different countries, including urging government's support to the Treaty and encouraging their participation in high-level treaty discussions and meetings.
- b. In particular, Oceano Azul Foundation in collaboration with the Portuguese Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the High Seas Alliance and UN-DOALOS has organized 6 BBNJ workshops for Delegates over the past 4 years, including 2 workshops focused on the implementation of the treaty in the CPLP (Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries) in collaboration with the government of Cape Verde, Portugal, UN-DOALOS and the Executive Secretariate of the CPLP.
- c. The Foundation participates in all the BBNJ Treaty meetings as well as forthcoming Preparatory Commission meetings taking place at United Nations Headquarters.

b. ISA (International Seabed Authority)

- a. The Foundation engages with the ISA directly on policy positions, participating in negotiations and advocating for responsible, scientific and environmentally sound policies and practices.
- b. With other civil society partners, the Foundation has sponsored a number of capacity-building workshops for government representatives on deep-sea mining.

c. UNOC (United Nations Ocean Conference)

- a. The Foundation has played a significant role in supporting preparations for and participating in the UN Ocean Conferences held so far, including a key role in the Lisbon conference as an official “Umbrella Organization” tasked with mobilizing attendance of key civil society representative. Oceano Azul Foundation has also

been, so far, the only non-governmental donor towards the [UN Ocean Conference trust fund](#), which supports the participation of developing country representatives.

- b. The Foundation is actively involved in supporting preparations for the third UN Ocean Conference, collaborating with the co-hosts France and Costa Rica, as well as the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA).

d. UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)

- a. **COPs (Conferences of the Parties):** The Foundation actively participates in COPs, emphasizing the critical link between climate change and ocean health, and promoting the inclusion of ocean-related issues in the climate agenda. The Foundation supports the “Friends of Ocean and Climate” – a group of 40 Member States who support more ambitious and robust representation of the ocean within climate negotiations, and hosts meetings and high-level events for this group during COPs.
- b. **SBSTA/Ocean-Climate Change Dialogue:** The Foundation has actively participated in SBSTA (Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice) and other UNFCCC processes dedicated to ocean-climate interactions, driving policy recommendations and influencing the scientific agenda.

e. [UN-Portugal Ocean Fellowship](#)

- a. The UN-Portugal Ocean Fellowship is a partnership between Oceano Azul Foundation, the Portuguese Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Camões Institute for Development, and the UN-DESA. This capacity building program brings together high-level government officials from developing countries to engage on critical ocean issues, providing expertise and guidance on the strategic importance of ocean governance and marine sustainability.

f. CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity)

- a. The Foundation is involved in the CBD process, actively advocating for stronger Target 3 (30x30) implementation within the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

2. European Union

The Foundation actively engages with various EU institutions and programs with a view to shaping ocean policy at the European level and promote the implementation of ambitious ocean-related initiatives. This engagement is reflected through several significant initiatives. One of the main initiatives is the EU Blue Governance, whereby the Foundation seeks to inform and shape high-level EU processes related to ocean governance, advocating for cohesive strategies and policies at both the EU and national levels. This includes developing the Manifesto for a “European Ocean Pact”, which was launched with the aim of promoting a new, cross-cutting, ambitious, and binding European vision and agenda for the ocean. The Foundation also maintains active bilateral relationships with various EU Member States, leveraging these partnerships to advance their priorities and influence policy decisions.

12. List of publications and/or other relevant documentation

Found in <https://www.oceanoazulfoundation.org/who-we-are/official-documents/>

B. Interest in matters under consideration by the Assembly

13. Briefly outline how your organization intends to demonstrate its interest in matters under consideration by the Assembly, including by answering questions 14 to 17 and by providing any other relevant information related to the application for observer status.

Given the common heritage nature of the Area and its mineral resources, and bearing in mind that the Authority is at a crucial stage in terms of the ongoing negotiations, it is important for the Oceano Azul Foundation to actively engage in the process and contribute to matters currently under consideration at the Authority.

Oceano Azul Foundation's interest in matters under consideration by the ISA Assembly aligns with several of the Authority's [voluntary commitments](#), particularly:

- **Capacity-building and training (Voluntary Commitment 1):** Oceano Azul Foundation has a strong track record of promoting capacity-building programs with various partners, including UN entities and agencies.
- **Environmental protection (Voluntary Commitment 3):** The Foundation's focus on ocean conservation and supporting the creation and implementation of MPAs supports the ISA's commitment to environmental protection.
- **Marine scientific research (Voluntary Commitment 4):** Expeditions (detailed in question 14) and contributions to scientific understanding align with the commitment to marine scientific research.
- **Sustainable development (Voluntary Commitment 6):** Oceano Azul Foundation actively promotes a sustainable, circular, and decarbonizing blue bioeconomy, which aligns with the commitment to sustainable development.
- **Partnerships and cooperation (Voluntary Commitment 7):** Oceano Azul Foundation collaborates with governments, UN entities, and other organizations to promote sustainable ocean management and conservation.
- **Public awareness and outreach (Voluntary Commitment 8):** The Foundation engages in high-level advocacy and educational programs to foster a global shift in humanity's relationship with the ocean.

14. Briefly outline whether and how the purposes or activities of the organization relate to the work of the Authority.

Oceano Azul Foundation is an organization dedicated to the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean, based on sound scientific knowledge and good governance. We do so through a comprehensive model of change that includes promoting the implementation of effective ocean conservation tools such as Marine Protected Areas, influencing an ambitious ocean agenda and promoting informed and responsible

decision-making at an international scale, and supporting the transition from the current extractive economic paradigm to a new sustainable, circular, and decarbonizing blue bioeconomy that values blue natural capital. Our mission and activities align closely with the mandate of the International Seabed Authority to regulate activities in the international seabed area and in ensuring the effective protection of the marine environment, for the benefit of humankind.

Importantly, Oceano Azul Foundation focuses on the conservation of marine ecosystems and biodiversity. We work to ensure the sustainable use of ocean resources to support a resilient oceanic system that is able to support human life on earth and mitigate climate change. Oceano Azul Foundation has contributed to the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around Portugal, such as in Algarve, Madeira, and most recently Azores. The Blue Azores Program has protected 30% of the Azorean Sea through legally adopted MPAs. Developed in partnership with the Azorean Regional Government and the Waitt Institute, the Blue Azores project is now entering its implementation phase, with reinforced financial commitments from all partners. The Foundation's conservation work is in line with the ISA's goal of ensuring the sustainable management of the Area - as the protection of the fauna and flora of the seabed, along with the overall sustainable management of deep-sea ecosystems and resources, is vital to safeguarding the delicate balance of the ocean ecosystem which enables life on the planet. In this context, the Foundation can contribute and inform the ongoing work of the Authority with respect to the development of regional environmental management plans as well as any other environmental policies, strategies and measures that the Authority may develop in future.

To support and inform its conservation efforts, the Foundation has also undertaken several expeditions to seldom-researched areas of the ocean, such as the Selvagens Islands, the Azores (having discovered and informed the full protection of the [LUSO Hydrothermal Field](#)) and along the Portuguese Atlantic coast, including in Cascais, Mafra, Sintra and Gorringe Underwater Mount. These research programs are in alignment with the ISA's emphasis on scientific research to understand the functioning of deep-sea ecosystems and the potential impacts of seabed mining. Both institutions aim to foster collaboration between scientific and regulatory communities to sustainably manage ocean resources.

In parallel, Oceano Azul Foundation supports research and innovative solutions for ocean protection. Through the Blue Bio Value ideation and acceleration program, the Foundation supports the development of startups in the blue biotechnology sector which offer sustainable services or products contributing to a healthier use of ocean bioresources, answering market needs through sustainable alternatives. Additionally, the Foundation places a key priority in facilitating and convening governments and civil society on critical ocean issues. Through our Capacity Building for Governments programs, the Foundation supports international efforts towards a more equitable, sustainable and ambitious ocean governance. It provides expertise and guidance on the strategic importance of ocean governance and marine sustainability aiming to foster a collaborative environment where governments and civil society can work together. This role is crucial in ensuring that urgent ocean protection measures are prioritized at the governmental level and that nations are equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to implement effective ocean governance.

Overall, Oceano Azul Foundation's work is closely aligned with the aim of the ISA to understand and responsibly manage the use of deep-sea mineral resources and preserve deep-sea ecosystems for the benefit of humankind as a whole, while ensuring coherence with other conservation and sustainable use efforts in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

15. Briefly outline whether and how your organization intends to contribute to the work of the Authority, for example by providing specialized information, advice or expertise, or by identifying or helping to procure the services of experts or consultants.

Oceano Azul Foundation has developed and is in the process of supporting and strengthening expertise on topics related to seabed mining, particularly regarding the conservation of deep-sea ecosystems and the economic aspects of mining. The Foundation looks forward to collaborating and sharing any and all relevant findings, in so that they pertain and relate to the activities of the Authority, to inform discussions and support decision-making, as well as to assist with capacity building efforts in collaboration with member states and the Secretariat. Additionally, Oceano Azul's board and team have developed relevant expertise on the topic of seabed mining and have participated and contributed to the work of the ISA. In this context, the Foundation is well placed to provide specialized information, advice and expertise to support the Authority and its Member States in their decision-making processes. The Foundation is also interested in contributing to the ongoing negotiations on the Mining Code, and is well positioned to make some meaningful contribution to the work of the Authority from a technical perspective.

16. Briefly outline whether and how your organization has the expertise and the capacity to contribute, within its field of competence, to the work of the Authority, in particular in connection with the law of the sea, the protection of the marine environment, the offshore and deep-sea mining industry, technology, minerals processing and marketing, activities in the Area and marine scientific research in the Area.

Oceano Azul Foundation has significant expertise in the protection of the marine environment, particularly through its Conservation and International Advocacy and Policy work. The Foundation's expertise spans several key areas, including the development and implementation of conservation programs, international ocean policy and governance, government relationships and partnerships, and capacity-building at the international level. In the realm of marine conservation, the Foundation has promoted and facilitated the implementation of effective and science-based Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Notably, the Blue Azores Program, which has protected 30% of the Azorean Sea through legally adopted MPAs, and the Marine Natural Park of Algarve Reef – Pedra do Valado, the first MPA to be classified in mainland Portugal in the 21st century. These efforts align with the International Seabed Authority's (ISA) goal of ensuring the sustainable management of the Area and protecting the fauna and flora of the seabed.

The Foundation's International Advocacy and Policy work includes high-level advocacy, in line with the available scientific evidence, towards applying the precautionary principle, ecosystems approach, and intergenerational equity in relation to deep-sea mining in the Area. Furthermore, Oceano Azul Foundation has actively participated in the ongoing negotiation process within the ISA via partner delegations. The Foundation's efforts include organizing workshops and meetings to foster greater alignment among Member States and providing scientific and legal discussions to support informed decision-making.

Additionally, Oceano Azul counts on two leading deep sea science and policy experts on its Board and team which have been and will continue to be key collaborators not only for the Foundation but also within the scope of work of the ISA. In this context, [Dr. Diva Amon](#) and [Pradeep Singh](#) are leading experts in their

fields and have over 100 publications combined, all published independently, and not in association or collaboration with Oceano Azul Foundation. Their publications can be found as follows:

- <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=XVddC2YAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao>
- <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Pradeep-Singh-41>.

Both experts have been constructively contributing to the work of the Authority in recent years, including at the regular sessions of the Authority as well as at side events held in conjunction of the annual sessions of the Authority. Their important contributions have been recognized by the Authority and its member states on numerous occasions.

17. Briefly outline whether and how your organization intends to contribute to the capacity-building programs and initiatives of the Authority (e.g., Secretary-General's award, voluntary commitments of the Authority).

Oceano Azul Foundation strongly intends to contribute to the initiatives of the Authority, including supporting and providing expertise to the voluntary commitments of the Authority, but also by continuing to actively engage with the Authority, participating in negotiations and advocating for responsible, scientific, and environmentally sound policies and practices. Oceano Azul Foundation has a strong track record of promoting capacity-building programs with various partners, including UN entities and agencies. One of the key capacity-building programs is the UN-Portugal Ocean Fellowship, which includes a dedicated "[Substantive Component 3](#). Managing and harnessing the potential of the continental shelf", and is presented in question 11 and question 14 more broadly. Over the past two years, the Foundation has held two workshops for UN representatives with civil society partners on deep sea mining, and will continue similar support through workshops, and briefings and technical materials and special events.

Additionally, the Foundation has developed close bilateral collaboration with SIDS and the CPLP Member States, which positions it well to contribute to the [ISA's Voluntary Commitment 7](#) and its efforts to support the capacity of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), and SIDS. The Foundation's capacity-building efforts also include organizing workshops and meetings to support the ratification and implementation of the BBNJ Treaty. Simultaneously, through the internationalization of the Blue Bio Value program, Oceano Azul has contributed to the acceleration of startups from all continents. These initiatives demonstrate the Foundation's commitment to empowering and collaborating with nations to support knowledge-sharing and effective implementation of ocean governance, and can serve to exemplify Oceano Azul's commitment towards an equitable governance of the ocean, its ecosystem and the biodiversity and resources that reside in it.

Oceano Azul Foundation has been actively involved in high-level bilateral and multilateral advocacy efforts, including collaborations with several Member States, to promote sustainable ocean management and conservation. Overall, Oceano Azul Foundation's expertise and capacity in marine conservation and science, international advocacy, blue biotechnology and capacity-building make it a valuable partner for the ISA efforts towards fulfilling its mandate of sustainable management and protection of the marine environment under Article 145 of UNCLOS.