

**30th SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY
ASSEMBLY
June 2025**

**AGENDA ITEM 16
Need for a general policy of the Authority for the protection and preservation
of the marine environment: scope and parameters**

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Why do we need a GP for the protection of the marine environment?

- The concept or an idea of a policy is not new in the work of the ISA, in 2017 at [workshop held in 2017](#) the need for the Authority to establish a policy on environmental management began to be analysed. The ISA currently lacks an overarching general environmental policy which would contribute towards the effective protection of the marine environment and the implementation of article 145 of the Convention across all organs and all activities, present and future.
- Since ISA establishment in 1996, the environmental context has greatly changed (SDGs, Paris Agreement, Kunming-Montreal Protocol, BBNJ, scientific knowledge, innovation). This highlights the need to work on an overarching framework / umbrella to implement the environmental dimension across all the ISA activities.
- There is a need to ensure coherence of the ISA work with global frameworks and considering today's environmental challenges, supports coordination with other relevant processes.
- A General Policy would achieve the following:
 - Provides a general framework for the operationalization of UNLCOS environmental obligations (e.g. Art. 145, Art.192, Art. 162 §2 (o) ¹), ensuring consistency between UNCLOS and ISA RRP's including in regards to standards and guidelines, incl. environmental thresholds,
 - Provides a cohesive and robust framework for decision making, a holistic approach, non-duplicative approach, regulatory certainty and long-term focus
 - Gives guidance from Assembly to the different organs on interpretation of environmental obligations under UNCLOS and how to operationalize them in regulations
- Many ISA Member States have repeatedly expressed environmental concerns and the need for an effective protection of the environment.
- A General Policy would send a strong political signal of reaffirming commitment to UNCLOS, in particular environmental obligations in light of the risk of unilateral action.

¹ Council “(x) disapprove areas for exploitation by contractors or the Enterprise in cases where substantial evidence indicates the risk of serious harm to the marine environment;”

- There is a need to guide marine scientific research (ISA legal mandate), with the aim of protecting and preserving the marine environment in the Area and increasing and sharing scientific knowledge and understanding of deep-sea and open ocean ecosystems.
- During the negotiations of the regulations, regulation 44 as the basis for the general policy received a much support.

2. What would be the objectives of a General Policy?

- Set strategic directions to environmental work across all ISA organs (Assembly, Council, Secretariat, LTC, Finance Committee, and the Enterprise).
- Set high-level environmental objectives.
- Guide the development of ISA environmental “instruments” (RRPs, REMPS, environmental standards for exploration and exploitation, environmental thresholds).
- Operationalise responsibilities and obligations of Member States and the ISA with respect to the protection and preservation of the marine environment under UNCLOS.
- Discuss the multiple environmental treaties and agreements that ISA member States have committed to since the ISA was established, including: BBNJ, commitments adopted through the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20); the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, in particular SDG 12 and 14; target 14.2; paragraph 16 of Decision 15/24 on marine and coastal biological diversity adopted by the 15th Conference of Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

3. What would be the key elements?

- Relevance of and coordination with environmental frameworks (SDG, CBD, Paris Agreement, Kuning-Montreal Protocol, BBNJ), without undermining ISA mandate.
- List and operationalise key principles (precautionary principle, the common heritage of humankind, polluter pays principles, etc.)
- Set ISA environmental goals or objectives (drawing from DR44, DR2).
- Set research/scientific agenda (e.g. environmental externalities).
- Set a timeline for environmental measures, including minimum data requirements, stakeholder engagement strategy etc.
- Establish ISA’s cooperation with other organisations

4. Relation between the General Policy with the ISA Organs and the RRP.

- GP ENV would apply across the ISA organs and activities.
- Council expressed broad support to 44ter as basis for a GP ENV. However, GP ENV is complementary to the RRP, in particular draft reg. 44ter and exploration regulations.
- Exploitation Regs. should be consistent with GP ENV.
- Council could feed in the development of the GP ENV.
- The LTC would take the GP as part of the information and background that it uses for its work.

5. Outcomes of the Agenda Item:

- In view of the above, an agreement that a general policy for the protection and preservation of the marine environment is to be developed and adopted with an indicative timeline for the end of next ISA session (31st Session).
- A mandate that this work will be conducted in collaboration with the Council.
- Set up an intersessional informal dialogue to develop a general policy for the environment with a view of presenting the outcomes of the dialogue to the next session of the Assembly.