



Council

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Agenda item 14

Report of the Chair of the Legal and Technical Commission on the work of the Commission at its thirtieth session

Decision of the Council of the International Seabed Authority on the deferral of the schedule of relinquishment upon request by the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer

The Council of the International Seabed Authority,

Recalling that, on 18 November 2014, the Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer (Ifremer) entered into a contract for exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge with the Authority,

Recalling also regulation 27, paragraph 2, of the regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides in the Area,¹ which refers to the schedule of relinquishments of the area allocated to contractors,

Noting that, according to the schedule, Ifremer was required to relinquish at least 50 per cent of the original area allocated to it by 18 November 2022, being the end of the eighth year from the date of the contract, and at least 75 per cent of the original area allocated to it by 18 November 2024, being the end of the tenth year from the date of the contract,

Noting also that, by a letter dated 10 May 2022 addressed to the Secretary-General, the contractor requested a one-year deferment of the relinquishment schedule to 18 November 2023 for the first relinquishment and 18 November 2025 for the second relinquishment; that, at its twenty-seventh session, the Council, acting on the recommendation of the Legal and Technical Commission, approved the request to defer the relinquishment schedule by one year; and that, by that decision, the first relinquishment of 50 per cent of the contract area would have been due on 18 November 2023 and the second and final relinquishment of 75 per cent of the contract area on 18 November 2025,

¹ ISBA/16/A/12/Rev.1, annex.



Noting further that, by a letter dated 18 June 2024 addressed to the Secretary-General, the contractor requested a further deferment of the schedule of the second and final relinquishment by one year, from 18 November 2025 to 18 November 2026,

Recognizing that the contractor has cited the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and its residual impacts on the scheduling of its exploration cruises, the maintenance regime of its research vessel and the completion and operational commissioning of its autonomous underwater vehicle, inter alia, as exceptional circumstances justifying the deferment,²

Recalling that, pursuant to regulation 27, paragraph 6, of the regulations, the Council may, at the request of the contractor and on the recommendation of the Commission, in exceptional circumstances, defer the schedule of relinquishment, and that such exceptional circumstances shall include, inter alia, consideration of prevailing economic circumstances or other unforeseen exceptional circumstances arising in connection with the operational activities of the contractor,

Considering that the Commission has found that the reasons presented by Ifremer qualify as “unforeseen exceptional circumstances arising in connection with the operational activities of the contractor” and has recommended deferring the schedule of the second relinquishment by one year to 18 November 2026,

Acting upon the recommendation of the Commission,

1. *Determines* that the reasons presented by Ifremer qualify as “unforeseen exceptional circumstances arising in connection with the operational activities of the contractor”;
2. *Defers* the schedule of the second relinquishment to 18 November 2026, as recommended by the Legal and Technical Commission;
3. *Requests* the Secretary-General to communicate the present decision to Ifremer.

*335th meeting
14 July 2025*

² ISBA/30/LTC/2, paras. 5-8.