



Deep Seabed Mining

Brief for Governments at the International Seabed Authority
• March 2023

Brief for Governments at the 28th Session of the International Seabed Authority

March 16-31, 2023

Introduction

The precautionary approach

Deep seabed mining would pose significant risk to the ocean, including through causing irreversible harm to the marine environments and its ecosystem services, as well as species extinction. The scientific gaps related to the deep sea, including its species and ecosystems, are large and will take many years, if not decades, to fill. Without such knowledge, impacts of deep seabed mining cannot be fully understood.

This lack of scientific knowledge calls for a precautionary approach. Extraction must not go ahead until the environmental, social and economic risks are understood, and all alternatives to deep-sea minerals have been explored.

Deep seabed mining would go against many of the commitments governments have made to each other, e.g., in the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG14 on Oceans and SDG12 on Responsible Production and Consumption, as well as the newly adopted Global Biodiversity Framework and commitments to protect species under CMS.

2023 a pivotal year

The year 2023 is a pivotal year for the deep sea and for the ISA. WWF therefore urges all governments to attend the ISA meetings during 2023 (and 2024), and raise your voices to defend the ocean and its biodiversity and uphold commitments made towards sustainable development. In addition, we urge developed countries to consider to provide financial support, as appropriate, to ensure that all states are able to participate in the important decisions pertaining to the Area, designated under UNCLOS as the *common heritage of humankind*.

WWF policy asks at the March 2023 ISA Council meeting

1. Ensure no licence / plan of work to mine is being approved

No licence/plan of work should be approved, given the lack of scientific knowledge and projected serious impacts upon the ocean. Governments must ensure that their decision-making processes at the Council are not subject to voting structures weighted in favour of granting mining contracts. For example, Council could exercise its powers to issue a directive that the Legal and Technical Commission should refrain from making any recommendations on any pending mining applications.

2. Call for a global moratorium

Due to the lack of science and the high risk to the ocean environment from deep seabed mining, WWF urges countries to join the growing call for a global moratorium on deep seabed mining, and to express this request in the formal ISA meetings of both Council and Assembly. In addition, WWF urges governments to invest in a fully Circular Economy.

3. Ensure that the mining regulations are not adopted

As you cannot manage what you cannot measure, adoption of any regulations for deep seabed mining would be premature before the massive gaps in scientific knowledge have been closed. Hence, WWF urges governments not to finalise or adopt the regulatory framework until such time.

More detail

The value of a healthy ocean

A healthy ocean, where human activities are managed sustainably, is worth a staggering USD24 trillion as an asset, conservatively estimated. The sustainable ocean economy, which excludes deep seabed mining and other extractive industries, yields USD2.5 billion annually in goods and services to humanity. Today, this enormous value is at risk due to years of mismanagement and ocean health decline.

Instead of adding additional stressors further impacting upon ocean health, it is imperative that we work toward ocean protection and restoration, to ensure a healthy ocean that can provide social, economic and cultural benefits for humanity into the future.

Growing concern across the world

Across the world, calls for a moratorium, a precautionary pause, or a ban, are increasing. In 2021, the IUCN Conservation Congress passed a resolution calling for a global moratorium, and since then a number of countries have expressed concerns and joined the call, as have community groups, indigenous leaders, human rights advocates and NGOs, as well as [businesses](#) - many of whom are would-be customers of these minerals.

[The European Investment Bank](#) has excluded deep seabed mining in its policies, and [UNEP Finance Initiative](#) advises that deep seabed mining is not part of the [sustainable blue economy](#) and should be avoided. Banks and fund managers are also increasingly seeing the risks of investing in this destructive industry.

The Circular Economy

The necessary transition to a fossil free economy, the 'Green Transition', does not need minerals from the deep sea. A recent report, [The Future is Circular](#), commissioned by WWF, sets out pathways for how the switch to a fossil free economy can be done with less material footprint, avoiding opening up the deep sea to mining.

The report shows that demand for the studied seven critical minerals can be [reduced by 58 per cent](#) by: technological choices, recycling and circular economy measures. Through product-life extension and materials recovery among others, governments can lead the way towards a "closed-loop" economy that works with nature, not against it.

The circular economy is not a distant vision. It is a US\$4.5 trillion opportunity that is spurring more and more companies across industries to adopt circular principles to reduce costs, increase revenues, and manage risks. It is also increasingly being adopted in national economic plans.

Residual demand can be covered by responsible mining on land following the [Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance \(IRMA\)](#) principles, including the mining of existing mining waste.

We expect to see increasing commitments by companies and governments to switch to a circular minerals economy.

Get in touch!

WWF representatives attending the ISA meeting would welcome meeting with your delegation to discuss further. Please contact us to set up a meeting (see box for detail).

About WWF

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

WWF's vision is a Sustainable Blue Economy, that:

- provides social and economic benefits for current and future generations;
- restores, protects and maintains the diversity, productivity and resilience of marine ecosystems, and;
- is based on clean technologies, renewable energy, and circular material flows.

Our commitment

WWF will work with partners across government, industry, and civil society including indigenous people, coastal communities, women and youth to implement this vision into practice.

WWF is a member of the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC).



Access WWF's Summary and Recommendations for Policy Makers based upon The Future is Circular report here.

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More reports and material:

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