



Council

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Status of the environmental management plan for the Clarion-Clipperton Zone

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. During the seventeenth session in 2011, in exercise of its powers under article 165(2)(e) of the Convention, the Legal and Technical Commission adopted and submitted to the Council an environmental management plan for the Clarion-Clipperton Zone (ISBA/17/LTC/7). The plan had been formulated by the Commission over a period of three years, taking into account data and assumptions from workshops in 2007 and 2010 (see ISBA/14/LTC/2 for background). As proposed by the Commission, the plan included the establishment of nine areas of particular environmental interest intended to protect the biodiversity and ecosystem structure and functioning of the Zone from the potential impacts of seabed mining. The Council took note of the recommendations of the Commission and adopted a decision relating to the environmental management plan (ISBA/17/C/19).

2. In its decision, the Council recognized that the recommendations of the Commission were designed to give effect to the precautionary approach, as called for in the Regulations on prospecting and exploration for polymetallic nodules in the Area. The Council also decided that, until the environmental management plan was adopted, any application for a plan of work for exploration or exploitation in one of the proposed areas of particular environmental interest would be given special scrutiny by the Commission against the background of the draft environmental management plan. The Council further called for marine scientific research to be conducted in the areas of particular environmental interest, in accordance with article 143 of the Convention, and for the full and effective dissemination of the results of such research through the Authority. In addition, the Council requested the Secretary-General to take steps to develop programmes for marine scientific research in the Zone for the benefit of developing States and to communicate the decision to other relevant international organizations, including those having an interest in the high seas in the region of the Zone. The Council requested the



Secretary-General of the Authority to convene a further workshop to review again the data and assumptions used in the proposal, determine the scientific validity of the approach and address the availability of data that could be used to assess the plan and develop it in future, noting that the plan was flexible and subject to review. Finally, the Council asked the Commission to further examine its proposals in the light of the results of the workshop and the discussions in the Council and to make a clear proposal to the Council at the eighteenth session.

II. Activities since the seventeenth session

3. Following the seventeenth session, the Secretary-General communicated the Council's decision to all relevant international organizations, including the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Environment Programme.

4. With regard to the workshop requested by the Council to be convened prior to the eighteenth session, it was noted that the environmental management plan adopted by the Commission was based on all of the data available at the time. No additional data sets had become available in the interim, and accordingly there was no benefit in holding another workshop to assess the assumptions underlying the environmental management plan prior to the eighteenth session. In any event, there were no budgetary resources to convene another workshop in the time period proposed.

5. It was noted, however, that contractors had made considerable efforts to collect environmental data in the course of their exploration activities. Many of those data had not been used in the formation of the environmental management plan as they had not been available to the Authority. The Secretary-General therefore decided to convene, in January 2011, an informal meeting of contractors to address the question of the availability of data that could be used to assess the environmental management plan. A summary of this meeting has been provided to the Commission under the symbol ISBA/18/LTC/3.

6. At the meeting contractors provided additional raw data or committed themselves to providing such data as soon as possible, along with all data collected in the future, in a standardized electronic format. The amount of data now available that could be used to review the environmental management plan is much greater than prior to the meeting with contractors and is expected to grow as more contractors fulfil their commitments. The secretariat is reviewing and assimilating the new data provided and will report on them and their potential use in due course. However, it should be noted that further standardization will be required before the data from each contractor can be assimilated and used to evaluate regional biodiversity and species range. On the basis of the recommendations of the contractors, it is proposed, subject to resources being made available in the budget of the Authority, to hold a series of three workshops to standardize the taxonomy of megafauna, macrofauna and meiofauna associated with polymetallic nodule deposits. In this regard, financial resources to support four workshops have been requested for the financial period 2013-2014. It should be noted, however, that this includes workshops on other priority issues for the Authority, including issues associated with the development of an exploitation code.

III. Future steps

7. While the amount of environmental data available to the Authority is now significantly greater than that available at the seventeenth session, there is still much data to be provided by contractors and substantial efforts required to standardize the data into a comprehensive database. Until these activities are complete, it is suggested that it will be difficult for the Commission to come to any different conclusion or recommendation on the environmental management plan. The timing of any further consideration of the plan is thus highly dependent upon resources becoming available to advance the work of data analysis. It may also be noted that, in view of the current meeting arrangements of one meeting per year, and the list of priority issues to be addressed, it is unlikely that the Commission could address the revision of the plan until 2014.

8. As far as the current status of the plan is concerned, the plan was adopted by the Commission in 2011. While the Council did not adopt the plan, it took note of the adoption of the plan by the Commission and also decided that, until a final plan was adopted following further examination by the Commission, any application for approval of a plan of work for exploration in the areas of environmental interest would be examined by the Commission taking into consideration the deliberations on the environmental management plan. It may be noted that none of the current contract areas in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone conflict with the proposed areas of environmental interest.
