

Biodiversity and Climate Impact in International Waters

The International Sea-bed Authority: New Tasks

Background

As we move into the Twenty-First Century, the scientific-technological as well as the economic and political environment in which the International Seabed Authority (ISBA) has to operate have radically changed. The exploration of the deep sea-bed, its geology and the dynamic processes that are shaping it; its genetic, biological and mineral resources and their interaction and the probable origin of life in the depth of the ocean; the impact of sea-bed processes on water column and atmosphere through the exchange of CO² and other gases and its role in climate change — all this is occupying centre stage of contemporary oceanographic attention. The importance of the manganese nodules in this enlarged picture has sharply declined and other resources have come to the fore. Polymetallic sulphides and cobalt crusts are now being actively explored, and technologies for their exploitation are being developed. Genetic resources in international waters, including the sea-bed, are being explored and exploited to the tune of billions of dollars, without heed either to the ISBA or to the Biodiversity Convention. Fibre optic cables are crisscrossing the sea bed generating revenues of about one trillion dollars a year. Methane hydrates, abundant on the sea-bed, may constitute a major source of energy for the next century — or may destabilize the sea floor, causing under-water landslides, breaking cables, and emitting methane, a greenhouse gas ten times as effective as CO².

Clearly, the importance of the International Sea-bed Authority is growing in proportion to the growing importance of the sea-bed to economic development and the conservation of the

biosphere. If the Authority did not exist, one would have to invent it!

The ISBA Secretariat has been requested to prepare a study of these other resources. During the resumed Sixth Session of the Authority (August, 1998), The Delegation of the Russian Federation made an official request that rules and regulations should be prepared for the exploration of polymetallic sulphides and cobalt crusts.. According to Article 162 of the Convention, such rules and regulations must be completed three years after such a request has been made.

Thus a process of change and innovation has been initiated to adapt the Authority to its new functions in a new setting.

During that same August, 1998 session, the International Ocean Institute (IOI) organized a seminar on the most recent geological discoveries on the deep sea-bed; on the genetic resources, and on the economic potential and environmental hazards inherent in the methane hydrates which abound on the deep sea-bed. This year, the IOI will follow up with another seminar, to examine the kind of rules and regulations needed, and, in a broader sense, the institutional implications of the changes that have occurred and are occurring. These implications, probably, are more profound than may be generally assumed. They may affect the *mandate* of the institution. The composition of the Council, providing for the representation of interests of investors, exporters and importers of the minerals contained in manganese nodules may not be meaningful in an institution with different and much broader activities and responsibilities. Like other, more recent institutions, such as those of the Biodiversity and Climate Conventions, the ISBA may need a *Scientific Commission* in addition to its Legal and Technical Commission, to function properly in the new environment. In my Report to the Club of Rome, *The Oceanic Circle* I have tried to envisage what an International Sea-bed Authority for the twenty-first century would have to look like. These profound questions will have to be

faced, rather sooner than later, by the States Parties, whether in official or unofficial session, and, through them, by the General Assembly or whatever mechanism the General Assembly may establish on the basis of the recommendations of the Seventh Session of the CSD.

Proposal.

The IOI is organizing a *leadership seminar* in Jamaica, on the week-end of August 13- 15. This will take the form of a *retreat* in one of the most beautiful spas on the island, the Sans Souci Hotel in Ocho Rios, about two hours by car from Kingston.

Purpose

The *Purpose of the seminar* is to encourage discussion of the new situation in a free and informal setting, in which Delegates need not speak for their Governments, but can express their own opinions and experiment with new ideas. Such informal retreats have proven to most useful during UNCLOS III and have facilitated solutions to some of the thorniest problems.

Project Execution

Participants

Participants will be heads and experts of thirty delegations, accepted on a come-first-serve-first basis. There will be two participants from the International Ocean Institute, and four external experts Mr. Julian Malnic, the CEO of the Nautilus, the company that conducts exploration of sulphides and crusts on the basis of a contract received from the Government of Papua New Guinea; Dr. William Dillon, the head of Th US Geological Survey's Hydrate research project, Dr. Michael Zammit Cutajar, the Executive Secretary of the Climate Convention; and Dr. Salvatore Aricò of the Biodiversity Convention Secretariat — 36

participants in all.

Schedule

Participants will be taken by bus to the San Souci hotel at Ocho Rios on Friday evening, after the end of the Authority's working session. All of Saturday will be devoted to four working sessions; there will be one additional working session on Sunday morning, after which Delegates will have some free time, before being taken back to Kingston late in the afternoon, to be ready for their regular work on Monday morning.

Agenda

Saturday, August 14

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| 09:00 - 10:30 | The protection of biodiversity on and under the deep sea-bed.
Hydrates and climate change |
| 11:00 - 12:30 | Integrating development and environment concerns in deep sea-bed mining |
| 15:00 - 16:30 | Main aspects of rules and regulations for the exploration of resources other than manganese nodules |
| 17:00 - 18:30 | Main aspects of work plan for exploration of minerals other than manganese nodules. |

Sunday, August 15

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| 09:00 - 11:00 | Summary and conclusions |
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Proceedings

The proceedings will consist of the prepared background paper (80 pages) and a summary of the discussions and conclusions (20 pages)

Sponsorship

The Seminar will be co-sponsored by the International Ocean Institute and the Government of Jamaica.