

WCC-2012-Res-079-EN

Protection of the deep ocean ecosystem and biodiversity from the threats of seabed mining

RECALLING the pertinent provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as well as the activities and recommendations implemented for the oceans and seas of the world, in particular by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), and the scientific reports and studies carried out to date;

CONSIDERING the unique, vulnerable character of deep ocean and seabed ecosystems and their importance in terms of biodiversity and genetic heritage, which are likely to suffer a major impact in relation to the future exploitation of mining resources, namely in the seabed ecosystems with polymetallic nodules, the seabed ecosystems with cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts, and hydrothermal ecosystems with sulphide deposits;

NOTING that a number of countries have signed contracts for prospecting and exploration for polymetallic sulphides and polymetallic nodules with the International Seabed Authority which may influence the pace and development of future deep seabed mining;

NOTING ALSO the obligations under the CBD, in particular Articles 1, 3, 4, 8 and 14, related decisions, and referencing Aichi Targets 3, 4, 11, and 19;

RECALLING that Resolution 14.6 *Deep Sea Mining*, adopted by the 14th IUCN General Assembly (Ashkhabad, 1978) “urged all nations engaged in, or considering, deep sea mining activities to: (a) precede commercial mining operations by commissioning a comprehensive ecological survey to determine the impact of such mining activity; designate appropriate areas of the deep seabed as base line reference and resource zones in which no mining will be allowed; designate the size and shape of such area or areas to ensure that their stability will be maintained; (b) establish guidelines for scientific research to ensure minimum disruption of the natural state of such areas”;

NOTING that the 15th IUCN General Assembly (Christchurch, 1981) in Resolution 15.18 *Deep Sea Mining and Establishment of Protected Areas of the Deep Ocean* recommended the establishment of large sanctuaries in the areas where mining is contemplated before licensing to explore and exploit the deep ocean begins;

RECALLING Resolution 16.11 *on Deep Sea Mining and the Establishment of Protected Areas of the Deep Ocean* adopted by the 16th IUCN General Assembly (Madrid, 1984), and Principle 15 of the 1992 *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*;

FURTHER RECALLING Resolution 4.031 adopted by the 4th IUCN World Conservation Congress (Barcelona, 2008) *Achieving conservation of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdictions* which noted with alarm the multiplying threats to marine biodiversity;

AWARE that the first commercial deep sea mining license was issued in Papua New Guinea in January 2012, for a 20-year period;

ALSO AWARE that the Governments of Fiji and Nauru have issued seabed minerals exploration licenses for exploration of areas of the seabed in their respective exclusive economic zones;

FURTHER AWARE that approximately 600,000 km² of the Pacific Ocean are the subject of applications for deep sea mining leases or exploration licenses in the western Pacific,

specifically in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga, as well as in international waters in the eastern Pacific;

RECOGNIZING the importance of the role and the ongoing work of the ISA in accordance with UNCLOS;

ACKNOWLEDGING indigenous peoples' and local communities' collective governance of their traditional territories, areas, and natural resources in some countries;

WELCOMING the adoption of the *IUCN Programme 2013–2016* and current regional and international commitments to conserve the natural environments and protect the livelihoods of communities;

RECOGNIZING the increasing interest in mining the minerals on the deep sea floor and around thermal vents;

FURTHER RECOGNIZING that, while economic benefits may be gained from seabed mining, this activity may also generate significant costs and damage other economic activities including food security and sustainable tourism and other values, often adversely impacting indigenous and local communities, host economies, the future and the environment;

CONCERNED about the potential for significant impacts on marine biodiversity of exploration and any seabed mining operation, when undertaken at depths that have not yet been adequately explored or understood and using processes and machinery that have not been proven adequate for containing environmental impacts;

FURTHER CONCERNED to ensure that areas of exploration do not foreclose the ability to protect key areas of ecological, biological, historic or scientific interest, and that the system of Areas of Particular Environmental Interest are established with full scientific rigour regardless of pre-existing Areas of Exploration; and

REMAINING CONCERNED about the potential impact on the marine environment of future deep seabed mining activities given the current level of knowledge and understanding of deep seabed mining;

The World Conservation Congress, at its session in Jeju, Republic of Korea, 6–15 September 2012:

1. CALLS on the Director General, IUCN Commissions, Members and partners to urgently dedicate efforts, expertise and resources to conducting research to determine the impacts on biodiversity of deep seabed mining activities, especially on deep sea biodiversity in areas where deep sea exploration or mining may be undertaken, or are currently underway, recognizing the value of deep ocean ecosystems as the essential elements of the biodiversity of the ocean floor;
2. URGES all State Members of IUCN, national, regional and global agencies, and all other States, international organizations and stakeholders to facilitate:
 - a. the identification of areas that should be set aside as representative marine protected areas recognizing the importance of ocean biodiversity and ocean ecosystems;
 - b. comprehensive strategic and environmental impact assessments, including environmental, cultural and social impact studies, ensuring stakeholders are

engaged to provide rigour and transparency and allowing for independent review prior to any decision to authorize exploration or seabed mining; and

- c. the adoption of precautionary and ecosystem approaches, including the precautionary principle, to protect the marine environment and apply safeguards such as financial security and trustfunds, prior to any decision to approve exploration or seabed mining, in order to ensure that adverse environmental impacts are avoided;
3. CALLS on all constituent parts of IUCN to cooperate to develop specialist groups and knowledge products on impacts of seabed exploration or mining activities;
4. URGES all States and relevant intergovernmental organizations to work to improve the governance of the seabed beyond national jurisdiction by implementing and, as appropriate, strengthening international and regional instruments to protect the marine environment; and
5. RECOMMENDS that States ensure that indigenous and local people are able to participate effectively in decisions that impact on ocean biodiversity and ocean ecosystems which may affect their rights and interests as custodians over their territories.

State and agency Members of the United States abstained during the vote on this Motion for reasons given in the US General Statement on the IUCN Resolutions Process.