

INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY

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REPORT OF THE LEGAL AND TECHNICAL COMMISSION ON THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION DURING THE FIFTH SESSION

1. During the fifth session of the Authority, the Legal and Technical Commission held six meetings. The Commission elected Mr. Jean-Pierre Lenoble (France) as Chairman and Mr. Arne Bjorlykke (Norway) as its Vice-Chairman. At its first meeting, the Commission began the consideration of recommendations from the workshop to develop guidelines for the assessment of the possible environmental impacts arising from exploration for polymetallic nodules in the Area (ISBA/5/LTC/1).
2. While noting that the workshop's recommendations provided a very useful review of the current state of knowledge of the deep seabed environment, where the richest nodules were to be found, the Commission also pointed to its emphasis on fundamental research, some of which was being requested of potential contractors. The Commission was of the opinion that that was not the objective of the Authority's environmental monitoring programme. It therefore undertook a first reading of the document in order to reformulate the proposed guidelines in a manner to reflect that objective. The results of the first reading of document ISBA/5/LTC/1 are contained in document ISBA/5/LTC/CRP.1. The Commission will continue its consideration of the guidelines at the sixth session of the Authority, in 2000.
3. Another important matter discussed by the the Commission was the purpose of the guidelines. It was reiterated that the guidelines were not to be given the status of regulations, but were to be seen as recommendations that contractors could follow depending upon their own circumstances and in consultation with the Authority.
4. Other matters arising from the workshop included recommendations concerning international cooperation in research on common themes in relation to the protection of the environment from activities in the Area. In this regard, the Commission recommended that for the sixth session, the Secretariat should prepare a study that would, *inter alia*, identify international data repositories that collected environmental data required to monitor the impact of activities in the Area, identify gaps in their data coverage, formulate a plan for the retrieval of appropriate data from such sources and make recommendations for the development of a database for the analysis and synthesis of such data. The Commission also recommended that all registered

pioneer investors should make their environmental data on claim sites available to the Authority for that purpose.

5. The Commission also considered the following reports submitted by the registered pioneer investors:

(a) Periodic reports on the activities of the China Ocean Mineral Resources and Development Association (COMRA) for 1995, 1996 and 1997, respectively (ISBA/4/LTC/R.5, ISBA/4/LTC/R.6 and ISBA/4/LTC/R.7);

(b) Report on the completion of COMRA's obligations on relinquishment (ISBA/5/LTC/R.1);

(c) Periodic report on the activities of the Republic of Korea during 1998 and 1999 (ISBA/5/LTC/R.2);

(d) Report of the Republic of Korea on its training programme (ISBA/5/LTC/R.3);

(e) Periodic report on the activities of the Interoceanmetal Joint Organization for 1998 (ISBA/5/LTC/R.4);

(f) Report on the Republic of Korea's relinquishment of 10 per cent of its allocated area (ISBA/5/LTC/R.5).

6. Those members of the Legal and Technical Commission who had participated in the Authority's workshop on proposed technologies for deep seabed mining of polymetallic nodules, held from 3 to 6 August 1999, expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of the workshop. The workshop had provided a good review of the technological developments in nodule mining and interesting insights into massive sulphide deposits, gas hydrates and oil and gas. Because of the high metal values contained in the massive sulphides, it was noted that, in the next few years, commercial exploitation of these resources was probable.

7. The Commission reiterated its request to the Authority to convene a workshop on minerals other than polymetallic nodules of the Area. It was suggested that such workshop should cover both the technical (geological) and the legal aspects of the development of those resources. The Commission considered that exploration for massive sulphide deposits would require a different framework from the one developed for polymetallic nodules. In that regard, it was suggested that, in addition to the members of the Legal and Technical Commission, experts in mining law should also be invited to attend the workshop. The Commission reminded the Secretariat of the importance of informing the members of the Commission of all such activities well in advance, and of the usefulness of consulting with the members in the preparation and implementation of workshops.

8. The Commission also heard presentations by the Office of Resources and Environmental Monitoring of the Secretariat on its programme of work for the remainder of the year and a presentation on POLYDAT, the Authority's database on polymetallic nodule resources of the Area.
