

ISA WORKSHOP ON THE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE AREA OF THE NORTHERN MID-ATLANTIC RIDGE

25-29 November 2019

Évora, Portugal

Terms of Reference

The International Seabed Authority (ISA), in collaboration with the Atlantic REMP Project (funded by European Union) and the Government of Portugal, will convene the First Workshop on Regional Environmental Management Plan (REMP) for the Area of the Northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge (MAR), at the University of Évora, Évora, Portugal, from 25-29 November 2019.

Background

The objective of REMPs is to provide the relevant organs of the ISA, as well as contractors and their sponsoring States, with a proactive management tool to support informed decision making that balances resource development with conservation (ISBA/24/C/3). In line with the mandate of ISA to ensure effective protection for the marine environment from harmful effects which may arise from activities undertaken in the Area, the Council took note of a preliminary strategy for the development of REMPs for the Area (ISBA/24/C/3) for key provinces where exploration activities under contracts were being carried out, identifying the Mid Atlantic Ridge (MAR) as one of priority areas.

As highlighted in this preliminary strategy, the development and implementation of REMPs in the Area require a collaborative and transparent approach, including the compilation and analysis of available data from multiple sources, as well as a consultation with recognized experts from the international scientific community, contractors and relevant international organizations. Likewise, it is essential that such processes facilitate full participation by developing States. The Council also emphasized that the secretariat should aim to expand the breadth and depth of its strategic partnerships with relevant organizations and researchers, including exploring opportunities for new strategic partnerships.

It is in such a context that the European Commission decided to providing funding to the Atlantic REMP project in 2018 with a view of providing scientific and technical support to the ISA in its work for developing a draft REMP for the Area of the northern Mid-Atlantic Ridge (nMAR). The project is being implemented by a partnership of scientific organisations and led by Seascope Consultants, based in UK, in close collaboration with the ISA secretariat.

The proposed workshop also builds on the results of the workshop organised in Szczecin, Poland, in June 2018, which addressed the design of regional environmental management plans for polymetallic sulphides in mid-ocean ridges.

Workshop Objectives

The workshop aims to: (i) review and analyze seafloor and water column ecosystem data from the northern mid-Atlantic ridge (MAR), (ii) synthesize environmental data, faunal distribution, faunal dispersal capabilities and distances, genetic connectivity, patterns of biodiversity, community structure, ecosystem function, and ecological proxy variables along and across the northern MAR, (iii) review current exploration activity within contract areas and distribution of resources (polymetallic sulphides) along the northern MAR, (iv) describe potential areas that could be vulnerable to exploitation of mineral resources in the Area and would require enhanced management measures, and (v) describe potential areas in the Area that could be reserved from exploitation in order to achieve effective protection of the marine environment, including through the designation of areas of particular environmental interests (APEIs).

Expected outputs

A workshop report will be prepared by the designated co-chairs and the ISA Secretariat. The results of this first workshop will provide scientific inputs to the second workshop on the regional environmental plan for Area of the northern MAR to be held in St. Petersburg, Russia, in June 2020, which will focus on identifying specific management measures for developing draft elements for inclusion in the REMP. The results of these two workshops will then be made available as information to the Legal and Technical Commission in 2020.