

20 June 2022

Mr Michael Lodge
Secretary-General
International Seabed Authority
Kingston, Jamaica

Dear Mr Lodge

Re: New restrictions on observer and state participation at the upcoming International Seabed Authority Council and Assembly meetings.

We are writing to you to protest the proposed arrangements for the July-August 27th Session of the ISA in the strongest possible terms.

In the Information Note, "Information on logistical and procedural aspects for the twenty-seventh session of the Council (Part II) and the Assembly (18 July-5 August 2022)" received on 8 June, and later clarification from the Secretariat, it was stated that the following would apply:

The meetings will be held at the Knutsford Court Hotel. The main meeting room has a maximum capacity of 120 persons and the secondary meeting room (spillover room) has a maximum capacity of 50.

For the Council:

State delegations will be seated in the main meeting room. Priority will be given to seating two representatives for each delegation in the main meeting room. Observers (both IGOs and NGOs) will be seated in the secondary meeting room and priority will be given to seating one person for each delegation.

For the Assembly:

Priority in the main meeting room will be given to seating one representative of each State. Observers to the Assembly (IGOs and NGOs) will be seated in the secondary meeting room and priority will be given to seating one person for each delegation.

There will be no side events.

Upon further inquiry, we have been informed of the following:

Proceedings will be streamed in all official languages of the Authority, via ISA's web TV. Delegates watching online will not be able to make interventions. So there will be no virtual component for delegates to join and intervene remotely. This is indefensible, not only for those who cannot travel due to COVID restrictions, but due to the other restrictions on physical attendance.

We were informed by the Secretariat that "ISA will not be able to seat or otherwise accommodate persons outside of the meeting rooms." So that means in practical terms only the one delegate per NGO and IGO and one or two delegates per State will be able to even access the venue hotel. Other delegates would only be able to watch from their own hotel rooms or similar, meaning that the opportunity for interactions with other delegates is completely removed.

This will also place unacceptable pressure on State delegations. The restriction to one delegate for Assembly and two for Council means States, especially smaller States, will not be able to get access to the support and expertise on-site that they need. According to the information from the Secretariat, additional persons on the delegation will not even be able to enter the Knutsford Hotel at all.

These restrictions on participation are completely unacceptable, particularly in light of the pressure imposed by Nauru's triggering of the two year rule and the unprecedented and growing global concern at the prospect of deep-sea mining. Given the importance of and interest in these particular ISA meetings, representatives of diverse civil society stakeholders from across the globe are planning to attend the meetings. The proposed restrictions make this untenable. Any decisions taken at these meetings will be tainted accordingly.

At this critical moment in international decision-making, the Secretariat should be ensuring effective, accountable, accessible and transparent meetings. The Secretariat should have ensured that the renovations to the ISA Headquarters were delayed. That not being the case, we suggest that the most responsible and inclusive solution would be to move the meetings to a suitable venue large enough to accommodate the interested parties or to postpone the meetings until an appropriate venue becomes available.

In addition, having no option to intervene remotely - particularly in light of both the ongoing COVID-19 restrictions and the new capacity restrictions imposed by the Secretariat - is unacceptable and compounds the lack of transparency.

Sincerely,

1. Deep Sea Conservation Coalition
2. Benioff Ocean Initiative
3. Bloom
4. Blue Marine Foundation
5. Civil Society Forum Tonga
6. Climate Youth Japan
7. Deep Sea Mining Campaign
8. Deutsche Stiftung Meeresschutz
9. Earthworks
10. ecOceánica
11. Environmental Justice Foundation
12. German NGO Forum on Environment and Development
13. Greenpeace
14. Kiwis Against Seabed Mining
15. KYMA sea conservation & research
16. MiningWatch Canada
17. OceanCare
18. Ocean Rebellion
19. Oceans North
20. Ozeanien-Dialog
21. Pacific Asia Resource Center (PARC)
22. Sciaena
23. Sharkproject
24. Sustainable Ocean Alliance
25. TBA21
26. Te Ipukarea Society
27. The Ocean Foundation
28. The Oxygen Project
29. UNISC International
30. Women4Oceans
31. World Youth Parliament for Water

