



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

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Pelagic AC
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Subject: Reply to PELAC letter - Opinion paper on deep-sea mining activities

Dear Mr Raakjær,

We thank you for sharing the Pelagic AC Opinion on Deep-sea mining activities. We take note of your concerns about the impacts of deep-sea mining on the marine environment and on human activities, including pelagic fisheries.

When it comes to deep-sea mining, I can assure you that we attach great importance to basing our work on the precautionary principle, the ecosystem approach and the best available science, in line with the EU's commitment to sustainability and our approach in regional fisheries management organisations.

The European Commission is following very closely the ongoing process at the International Seabed authority (ISA) to develop the regulations for exploitation of the mineral resources in the Area (the “mining code”), which would enable contractors to move from exploration to exploitation.

We however consider that, before possibly taking that step, it is important to make sure that the activities of the ISA are consistent with the rights and obligations enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and that a high level of protection of marine environment is ensured, including the need to undertake prior environmental impact assessments and the protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems, in line with the UN General Assembly Resolution 61/105. Ensuring high-level environmental safeguards is a priority and this is why the European Commission has also been an active partner in the context of the development of Regional Environmental Management Plans, identified as ISA priorities for 2019-2023.

Moreover, well aware that the knowledge of deep-sea ecosystems and related organisms remains limited, the European Union has invested more than EUR 40 million in recent

years (under FP7 and H2020) in a number of research projects, such as MIDAS and Blue Nodules, to improve the understanding of the environmental impacts of deep-sea mining activities and how to best mitigate these impacts, and, to develop environmentally friendly technologies. The main findings of these projects show that current understanding of ecosystem functioning, recoverability, connectivity and recruitment in the deep sea is limited and that there is considerable uncertainty about the effects of mining on these processes. Therefore, long-term studies are still needed to gauge the full range of impacts of mining on benthic and deep ocean biodiversity and ecosystem services and their potential for recovery. Consequently, as part of its EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the European Commission proposed that the EU advocate that marine minerals in the international seabed area cannot be exploited before the effects of deep-sea mining on the marine environment, biodiversity and human activities have been sufficiently researched, the risks are understood and the technologies and operational practices are able to demonstrate no serious harm to the environment, in line with the precautionary principle.

We trust that these elements assure you of the European Commission's engagement to the protection of the marine environment and the sustainable use of its resources.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.:

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