



Deep sea mining

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The aim of this workshop was to provide perspectives and information on deep sea mining of polymetallic nodules in the Clarion Clipperton Fracture Zone, to encourage the Belgian policy makers to develop a deep sea mining policy for Belgium.

It's important to involve all concerned parties in this debate and exchange of knowledge: The government, the science community, the industry and civil society as a whole.

Conclusions:

1. The legal framework, which is provided by government, consists of 3 pillars:

UNCLOS contains the international policy, ISA elaborates the basic rules, regulations and procedures, and the sponsoring states provide national policy.

ISA is currently developing regulation for exploitation and environment. In this process the vision and position of Belgium is very important. ISA needs to ensure open and transparent processes.

As a sponsoring state Belgium has the obligation to ensure that contractors sponsored by Belgium will comply with the terms of the contract and the obligations set out in the Convention and related instruments. Furthermore the

sponsoring state has the obligation to take some specific actions: evaluate environmental impact assessments, apply precautionary approach and best environmental practices, etc.

A basic legal framework is in place, but the sponsoring State may apply environmental laws and regulations which are more stringent than those in the rules adopted by the Authority. This applies for an unambiguous and identifiable Belgian policy.

2. The science community has recently focussed on a number of subjects concerning environmental impacts & risks of Deep-Sea Mining:

What are the possible impacts of this activity?

What is the global perspective on the natural resources?

What is the environmental base line?

How can we minimize disturbance, maximize restoration and preserve biodiversity?

In a first phase the scientific projects worked on the identification of potential impacts and the development of strategic recommendations. In the second phase, the future projects will focus on the further reduction of knowledge gaps, and design and test management & monitoring concepts.

We already have the technology to perform detailed studies and monitoring deep-sea mining activities. The whole debat provided an opportunity to enlarge the knowledge on the deep sea, but truly quantitative analyses still need to be further developed and tested. The goal is a transparent, independent scientific assessment of deep-sea mining operations which can be fed into improved legislation.

We have to accept that if deep sea mining starts, an impact will occur; clear thresholds need to be established, beyond which the ecosystem is not able to fulfill its role anymore.

3. The industry:

In order to meet the increasing demand for metal resources, a choice has to be made between the increase of exploitation on land, increase recycling programs and opening up alternatives in deep sea. Given the increasing scarcity on land and the insufficient amount of recycled material, the last option will become unavoidable.

The involved responsible companies will use the best available techniques to limit the impact of the activity to a strict minimum.

With the development of innovative techniques and positive impulses to scientific knowledge, the mining industry makes an important contribution to society.

4. Civil society represented by NGO's, puts some fundamental questions on the table:

What are the current and future needs of our society and what are we willing to sacrifice for that?

Are recycling and limitation of consumption alternatives for the metals, that will become scarce in a few decades?

Is our current knowledge level high enough to make accurate predictions on the impact?

In answer to these important questions and taking in account the precautionary principle, the European Parliament calls for an international moratorium on deep sea mining in the exclusive economic areas of the member state, and a stop to funding of deep sea mining research.

Based on all these important and at first sight not always reconcilable contributions and discussions the experts from the involved federal public services

will develop possible strategies and options for the national policy makers. This should result in a transparent and well-considered position of the Belgian government in this global debate.

