



# POLICY POSITION DEEP SEABED MINING

WWF Oceans Practice

## Introduction

The ocean is under pressure from a multitude of stressors (climate change, overfishing, pollution, habitat destruction, acidification, noise, etc.). These stressors degrade ocean health by affecting species, disturbing areas important for biodiversity and ecosystem services and disrupting ecosystem functioning. Today, 66 per cent of the ocean area is experiencing increasing cumulative impacts.<sup>1</sup>

Because of its sheer size, the deep-sea realm constitutes the largest contiguous habitat for species and ecosystem diversity on Earth, and supports many diverse ecosystem processes necessary for the Earth's natural systems to function.<sup>2</sup> The deep sea is also characterized by environmental conditions that make it highly vulnerable to human disturbance. The existing pressures and the fact that the deep sea contains a vast number of unexplored and unstudied ecosystems mean that extreme precaution is necessary at all times.

Instead of adding additional stressors further impacting upon ocean health, it is imperative that we work toward ocean protection and restoration, to ensure a healthy ocean that can provide social, economic and cultural benefits for humanity into the future.

Recent global reports<sup>3</sup> are calling for transformational change in our use of the Earth's resources to reverse destructive and wasteful consumption patterns. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states 'We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path'<sup>4</sup>, and calls for the protection of the ocean and for sustainable consumption and production.

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<sup>1</sup> [Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#) (IPBES, May 2019)

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations First Integrated World Ocean Assessment (2016)

<sup>3</sup> [Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#) (IPBES, May 2019) and the [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Climate Change's report on the Ocean and the Cryosphere](#) (IPCC/SROCC, September 2019)

<sup>4</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

## Our position

A transformational change in how we use ocean and planetary resources is required if the world is to achieve the goals and aspirations, set by the United Nations Agenda 2030, for a better future for all. We need to steer urgently towards a truly sustainable and circular Blue Economy. With this transformation in mind, deep seabed mining should not be permitted.

### **A moratorium<sup>5</sup> on deep seabed mining activities is urgently needed, unless and until:**

- The environmental, social and economic risks are comprehensively understood;
- It can be clearly demonstrated that deep seabed mining can be managed in such a way that ensures the effective protection of the marine environment and prevents loss of biodiversity;
- Where relevant, there is a framework in place to respect the free, prior, informed consent of Indigenous peoples and to ensure consent from potentially affected communities;
- Alternative sources for the responsible production and use of the metals also found in the deep sea have been fully explored and applied, such as reduction of demand for primary metals, a transformation to a resource efficient, closed-loop materials circular economy, and responsible terrestrial mining practices;
- Public consultation mechanisms have been established and there is broad and informed public support for deep seabed mining, and that any deep seabed mining permitted by the International Seabed Authority fulfils the obligation to 'benefit (hu)mankind as a whole' and respects the Common Heritage of Mankind; and
- Member States reform the structure and functioning of the International Seabed Authority to ensure a transparent, accountable, inclusive and environmentally responsible decision-making and regulatory process to achieve the above.

Exploration and extraction of deep seabed minerals will increase the human footprint on unknown and vulnerable ecosystems. Moreover, the commercial benefits of this type of resource exploitation typically are limited to a few companies while the risks and deep impacts are borne by wider society and the planet at large.

There is a need to replace the current linear 'take-make-dispose' industrial model by a circular economy that is based on sustainable ecological design and on the principles of reduce, reuse, recycle, refuse, refurbish and repair. As such, materials are maintained in the economy and resources are shared, while waste and negative impacts are designed out. A sustainable Circular Economy creates positive environmental and society-wide benefits and functions within planetary boundaries, supported by an alternative growth and consumption narrative, where a healthy living ocean provides sustained benefits to humanity.

**WWF's mission** is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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<sup>5</sup> WWF aligns with the Deep Sea Conservation Coalition's position statement on a moratorium, see: <http://www.savethehighseas.org/resources/publications/dscc-position-statement-on-deep-seabed-mining/>

**WWF's vision is a Sustainable Blue Economy, that:**

- provides social and economic benefits for current and future generations;
- restores, protects and maintains the diversity, productivity and resilience of marine ecosystems, and;
- is based on clean technologies, renewable energy, and circular material flows.

**Our commitment**

WWF will work with partners across government, industry, and civil society including coastal communities, women and youth to implement this vision into practice.

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