

2025 Miami Oceans Debates

A 10-year moratorium on mining in the international seabed should be enacted.

“Deep sea mining is at the heart of an intense international debate. While some states and companies see it as a strategic opportunity for the supply of critical metals, others warn of the ecological risks and advocate for a moratorium.... 2025 could represent a turning point institutionally and strategically for the exploitation of seabeds.” (Lucq, 2025)

In June 2021, the tiny Pacific Island country of Nauru triggered a clause in the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that has a 2-year deadline to finalise the rules on seabed mining by declaring their intent to seek a permit (Lu, 2024). While the regulations on the mining of resources in the international seabed were supposed to be completed in 2023, the process is still ongoing and proving to be time consuming and contentious (Feichtner & Ginzky, 2024).

The International Seabed Authority (ISA), the United Nations-affiliated body tasked with governing the mineral resources of the ocean floor in international waters, is currently meeting – meetings are scheduled to end on March 29, 2025 – to try to come up with final regulations. However, it is unclear if the ISA can adopt regulations by the end of the year (Pickens et al., 2024).

Nauru has announced its plan to apply for an exploitation permit on June 27, 2025 whether final ISA regulations are enacted or not (TMC, 2024; Lucq, 2025). If the regulations are not finished then the ISA must “consider and provisionally approve it on the basis of the provisions and norms of the UNCLOS, the 1994 Implementing Agreement and any provisionally adopted ISA regulations and procedures, as well as the principle of non-discrimination among contractors.” (Willaert & Soote, 2025) Thus, exploitation permits for the international seabed may be issued in the near future even absent international regulations.

Not all agree that the ISA should write regulations for fear that they will be rushed or give legitimacy to any exploration permits (“Deep-Sea Mining Plans Should Not Be Rushed”, 2024). Thus,, several countries have called for either a moratorium or precautionary pause on deep sea mining activities. (Jaeckel et al., 2023). While there is no consensus among those countries about how long the moratorium or pause should

be enacted, there are countries, such as Fiji and Brazil, that have called for a 10-year moratorium (Fiji Government, 2022; Lipton, 2024).

A 10-year moratorium also follows the calls for a moratorium on commercial whaling. In 1972 the United Nations Conference on the Environment proposed an immediate 10-year moratorium on commercial whaling. While that resolution was not legally binding, in 1982, the International Whaling Commission (IWC) adopted a commercial whaling moratorium that was to be reevaluated after a certain time period (Kobyashi, 2006).

For this debate, debaters could choose to argue that international seabed mining would happen after the 10-year moratorium is over. Conversely, it is possible to argue that the temporary ban will become a de facto permanent or long term ban as we have seen with the IWC's commercial whaling ban that continues to be renewed. It is not the intention of this resolution to prescribe whether or not the moratorium would end in 10 years or if it would be renewed; the debaters may argue it out.

The debates should center on the desirability of the moratorium on international seabed mining. The debates should not be about whether a moratorium would ever take place, rather whether one ought to be enacted. Debates could include the feasibility of enforcing a moratorium, just not whether the ISA could enact a moratorium in the status quo (Singh et al, 2025).

The debate is intended to be over an international moratorium, not specific proposals of certain countries or companies. The goal is to assess the risks of allowing mineral exploitation in the seabed as desirable practice in general not to have affirmatives provide specific plans that allow some mining in the international seabed. The goal is to debate whether a 10-year international pause in mining in the international seabed is desirable.

Environmental, economic, and geopolitical issues all come into play for an international moratorium on seabed mining. The environment is a central issue in this debate (Sumaila et al, 2023). Affirmatives will likely argue that the risks and potential environmental damage to the ocean justify a moratorium. Negatives will likely argue that climate change is occurring and extracting the minerals from the seabed is necessary for a successful clean energy transition.

Economic and geopolitical issues also are a component of this debate. Questions over the cost of the technology, mining sponsorships with island nations, and common heritage could be brought up in the debate regarding the economic effects of a

moratorium (Wilde et al., 2023). In addition, terrestrial mining for minerals is occurring now and debaters may explore aspects, such as, potential environmental and economic trade offs, who has access to these minerals, and mining monopolies.

With Nauru intending on pursuing exploitation permits at the end of June, 2025 represents a critical juncture in the debate over whether or not mining in the international seabed would happen and under what, if any, regulations. Thus, the 2025 Miami Oceans Debates is the perfect time to ponder and debate the question: Should a 10-year moratorium on mining in the international seabed be enacted?

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