



Address by Alex Herman, Commissioner of the Seabed Minerals Authority at Ensuring the stewardship of seabed mineral resources and the protection of the marine environment of the Area for the benefit of humankind United Nations Ocean Conference Side Event

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Excellency's, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Kia Orana and warm pacific greetings to you all from the Cook Islands on behalf of our Prime Minister, Honourable Mark Brown.

In the Cook Islands, our ocean makes up 99.99% of our country. We truly are an Ocean state.

As people of the ocean – we care for our Marae Moana. We take our role and responsibilities as Ocean Stewards very seriously.

When we speak of “stewardship” – it is through the lens of centuries of Mana Tiaki, of upholding our environmental, social, cultural and traditional values.

We all recognise the enormous potential of our ocean's natural resources to meet our sustainable development goals, but **only if** our ocean is restored and maintained to be healthy and productive.

In order to do that – we must act collectively through our shared values of stewardship.



Strategic partnerships are at the heart of the work the International Seabed Authority does.

The partnerships that the Authority has built over the years are vast – spanning national, sub-regional, regional and international actors. I commend the Authority for this – it is no easy feat, and has contributed towards not only SDG14, but also links into 11 other SDGs in advancing the 2030 Agenda.

One strategic partnership example I wish to speak to is the Abyssal Initiative for Blue Growth supported by the Authority, UN DESA, Norway, SPC, SPREP and the Pacific Islands Forum to name a few. This initiative was aimed at strengthening the capacities of the Pacific Sponsoring States – the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, and included workshops on:

- The Role and Responsibilities of Sponsoring States;
- Marine Scientific Research, and
- Deep Seabed Environmental Management and Monitoring



The Abyssal Initiative is a success story for capacity building that is purposefully aligned to the **actual** needs of States – and that is, in large part due to the strategic partners involved. We look forward to Phase Two of this critical project.

To give a national example – the Cook Islands is presently engaged in a programme to explore the potential of our seabed mineral resources. As with others, the global COVID Pandemic has showed us that in order to meet our development aspirations, we must diversify our economy away from our sole dependence on tourism.

We recently completed a 16-month long robust and transparent exploration licensing process, where we issued 3 exploration licences to companies who understand and accept our Cook Islands values and aspirations for our Marae Moana.

I wish to reiterate that the Cook Islands has made it clear we are only allowing exploration activities, and the onus remains on the licence holders to demonstrate to us that they can conduct their commercial activities without causing serious harm to the marine environment.

Again, critical to the success of our exploration licensing process were the strategic partners we brought on board who shared their technical expertise to enable us to assess the technical, environmental, legal, financial and social considerations involved in the application process. These partners included the Authority, the Commonwealth Secretariat, SPC, Australia, New Zealand, NIWA, and the American Bureau of Shipping.



Looking then at how we can leverage strategic partnerships to support the ISA's unique mandate – our humble view is that we need to continue to evolve and build upon the successes of existing strategic partnerships and also explore new strategic arrangements.

This requires collective action at multiple levels, bringing together all our stakeholders – our member States, governments, international and regional organisations, academic institutions, civil society, industry and our public.

Everyone agrees we need an integrated whole of society approach – and it is our hope that this 2nd United Nations Conference will give us the impetus to maintain progress on this, including through strategic partnerships.



Capacity building projects like the Abyssal Initiative can and should be scaled up – we can share our lessons learned with other SIDS, LDCs and LLDCs to collectively lift our capabilities.

There are so many untapped possibilities – and that is the exciting part.

This may even include unlikely strategic alliances and partners – such as those who, despite sharing the same overarching values – might have different positions.

In this regard, I point to the Pacific as a guide on the way forward. Our Pacific leaders have long held a commitment to working together to protect our Pacific ocean in a manner that resonates with our unique vulnerabilities, our cultures and traditions, and our social, economic and environmental landscape.



As part of the Blue Pacific Continent, the Cook Islands understands and appreciates the power of Talanoa, and the sharing of, and respect, for divergent views. Talanoa is a nuanced and powerful space to listen, and to be heard.



Indeed, Talanoa values helped shape UNCLOS and the adoption of the SDG14, and can be a powerful force for positive global change, helping to build upon and to create new innovative strategic partnerships.

It is difficult work. But the example of the Pacific uniting as one ocean people, moving forward as a collective, has proven time and again that we can resolve the most complex issues, through open and frank discussions, and always with respect and sound appreciation of our differences – achieving positive outcomes which benefit us all.

To that end – we look to the Authority and member states to lead the way and together with our stakeholders and strategic partners, to take action for the sustainability of our ocean for the betterment of humankind.

Meitaki maata e Kia Manuia