The Cook Islands opens seabed minerals tender for exploration licences

The Cook Islands are ready to issue exploration licences for seabed minerals in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

An official opening ceremony was held on 10 August 2015 where Cook Islands Minister of Minerals and Natural Resources, Hon. Mark Brown, gave the green light for the legal and technical aspects of the licensing tender process to go live on the Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority website (http://www.seabedmineralsauthority.gov.ck/cook-islands-seabed-minerals-tender-2015).

Mining companies are now invited to submit bids for exploration licenses within a designated area of the Cook Islands’ EEZ.

The Tender offer is governed by the Cook Islands’ robust legislative framework, which includes the Seabed Minerals Act (2009) and the Seabed Minerals Amendment Act and Regulations (2015). The Deep Sea Minerals (DSM) Project provided assistance to the Cook Islands in the development of these important documents, and will train the SBMA Geographical Information Systems (GIS) Officer in November 2015, on GIS and technical information management systems in order to create an interactive online map for the tender application.

The Cook Islands is known for its significant Manganese Nodules potential. Manganese nodules contain cobalt, nickel, copper, manganese, titanium and valuable Rare Earth Elements (REE) that can be reduced to precious metals that are used for most smart and green technologies.

Submissions close on 11 January 2016.
Samoa National Offshore Minerals Committee submits DSM in-country activities work plan

The Samoa National Offshore Minerals Committee (NOMC) has submitted its work plan for the period 14 September-4 December 2015 to the DSM Project.

The NOMC was established in 2012 to facilitate decision making in relation to the implementation of in-country DSM activities.

Planned activities include: reproduction of DSM promotional materials for public display and information sharing; quarterly university and school visitations in Savaii and Upolu; monthly radio panel discussions; television advertisements and broadcasts of the DSM Project’s documentary; monthly newspaper columns and production of a quarterly article of the Samoa Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment newsletter; and public awareness raising programmes.

The DSM Project recommends the establishment of an NOMC in each of its 15 participating Pacific countries, and is able to provide funding of activities based on approved work plans.

Pacific countries discuss financial management options for deep sea minerals development

Representatives from 14 Pacific Island countries, civil society groups, the private sector, finance officials and experts gathered in Nadi, Fiji from 24-27 August 2015 to participate in the DSM Project 7th Regional Training Workshop. Aimed at the “Development of Appropriate DSM Fiscal Regime and Revenue Management Options for the Pacific ACP States”, the regional training workshop was jointly organised by the DSM Project and the International Monetary Fund, through the Pacific Financial Technical Assistance Centre (PFTAC) in Suva.

The workshop was an opportunity for participants to: increase their understanding and knowledge of the key components of DSM fiscal regime and revenue management; improve their capacity to develop and implement appropriate fiscal regime and revenue management options; become familiar with key issues and elements of public financial management for DSM revenue and expenditure management; and provide sound advice, regarding DSM revenue management to decision makers.

It also provided an opportune time for the DSM Project to discuss the Regional DSM Financial Framework in detail with participants to acquire their feedback and comments on the draft before finalising the framework. Key notable aspects of the training involved the use of case study exercises with assistance from experts, group discussions and presentations.
The Pacific Community (SPC) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on 20 July 2015, during the ISA’s 21st annual session in Jamaica.

The MOU expresses the mutual commitments of SPC and ISA in developing regional and national frameworks that support the interests of both organisation’s Pacific member states. This includes their efforts to regulate and manage deep sea mineral activities in ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction; conducting marine scientific research and analysis results; and participating in capacity-building initiatives and sharing seabed resources information.

Established in 1994 under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the ISA is responsible for the development and implementation of global rules, regulations and procedures for the exploration and extraction of seabed mineral resources; as well as the protection of the seafloor environment beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.
Strong Pacific Community presence at ISA 21st Annual session

Delegations from Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu participated in the ISA’s 21st annual session (14-24 July), with assistance from the DSM Project.

A side-event organised by the DSM Project during the annual session witnessed the strong participation of these Pacific delegations in raising awareness of the progress made in the development of their national legislation and DSM policies, mineral potential in their EEZs, and willingness to become sponsoring states in the area.

Participation of Pacific Island governments to the ISA is of critical importance as it allows them to engage in, and influence, decisions taken by the International Seabed Authority, ensuring that decisions align with their national interests, and those of the Pacific region.
In collaboration with the University of Hawai‘i, the DSM Project offered a three-month training opportunity to two Pacific Island nationals, Ms Esetelelita Fulivai from the Geology Division of the Ministry of Lands, Survey, Natural Resources in Tonga, and Ms Alanna Smith from the Te Ipukarea Society in the Cook Islands. Based at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa from late August to mid-December 2015, the internship placement offers training in the techniques for conducting environment baseline studies and biodiversity evaluation of deep sea manganese nodule ecosystems.

The interns work in the laboratory of Dr Craig Smith, an international expert in marine benthic ecology, gaining technical experience in sorting and analysing macrofaunal samples and megafaunal photo surveys taken from the Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone in the East Pacific.

“It is quite an opportunity to be here as I have learned a lot from Dr Smith’s professional team, mostly about animals in the deep sea. I am also taking part in the course. It is amazing to learn how organisms survive at the bottom of the sea with little light and energy compared to shallow waters. The skills I am learning, techniques used to collect samples and sorting of animals, could be applied to other environments too. I cannot wait to apply what I have experienced here when I go back to my home country,” Ms Fulivai said.

“We had a complete hands-on approach, sorting macrofaunal assemblages from two different deep sea habitats. The macrofauna we have come across to date includes polychaete worms, tanaid, and isopod crustaceans and bivalve molluscs amongst a number of other species, which are unique to the deep sea. The sorting of deep sea samples and identifying them, will enable us to gain a better understanding of deep sea diversity and potential environmental impacts of human activities. Being able to see what actually is living at these varied depths along with their influences has been fascinating. The sorting of macrofauna is a rather labour intensive task, taking up a lot of time as we have to make sure we don’t miss any animals from the debris. I’m enjoying my working days within the lab and it is always exciting to see a new animal that I haven’t come across,” Ms Smith said.

Aside from sorting macrofauna within the lab, the two interns have started a Deep-Sea Biology course at the university where they will gain a better academic overview of the biology and ecology of deep-sea organisms and communities. Topics to be learnt in this course include benthic-pelagic coupling, depth zonation, energetics, diversity, adaptations, hydrothermal vents, seamounts, abyssal plains, deep-sea resource extraction and global climate change.
CSO Perspectives

As part of its role to engage all stakeholders in the DSM discussion in the Pacific region, the DSM Project acknowledges the importance of engaging Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in these discussions. Since its inaugural consultation workshop held in Nadi, Fiji in June 2011, the DSM Project has been inviting and supporting CSO representatives to attend consultation workshops and meetings including awareness and stakeholder consultation programmes, as well as during the last seven regional DSM training workshops.

To further CSO participation in the DSM dialog, the DSM Project provides this space for CSOs to share their perspectives. The first of CSO perspectives was provided by Ms Teina Mackenzie, from the Te Ipukarea Society in the Cook Islands in the 8th Issue. Contributions will not be edited.

CSO contributions should be sent to the DSM Project Manager, Mr Akuila Tawake at akuilat@spc.int
Internship Programme

As part of its capacity-building initiative, the DSM Project has established successful internship programmes for recent graduates. The aim of this scheme is to build a sustainable source of in-country expertise, as the interns are encouraged to return to their country to work with national authorities involved in deep sea minerals activities. This scheme provides a two-month internship position with the DSM Project at SPC’s Geoscience Division (GSD) in Suva. The Project also offers an intensive two-week placement to Pacific-ACP government law officers. Government officials receive tailored training; for example, DSM specific country legislation being drafted that may need assistance. They also receive guidance in relevant general practice work for their country.

The internship vacancies are available on a rolling basis and preference is given to applicants from our 15 member countries. For more information on the internships or to apply, please visit the website: http://gsd.spc.int/dsm/index.php/get-involved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internship</th>
<th>Number of Participants to Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal Internships</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Government Attachments</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIS Internships</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISA Legal Internships</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geology Internships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Internships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Internships</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment Government Attachment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications Internships</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Government officials

Name: Mr Asterio Takashi
Country: Tuvalu
Trainee Duration: 1 July 2015-28 August 2015

Background: Asterio is a Crown Counsel with the Attorney General’s Office in Tuvalu. He was first involved with the DSM Project in 2014 as a legal intern as part of his Professional Diploma in Legal Practice placement while studying at the University of the South Pacific. He worked on Tuvalu’s National Deep Sea Minerals Policy and Draft Seabed Minerals Regulations during his placement as a Government Official with the DSM Project in July 2015.

Name: Cardinia Funganitao
Nationality: Tonga
Trainee Duration: 25 August-4 September 2015

Background: Cardinia graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Law and Geography from the University of the South Pacific and is currently the Assistant Geologist for the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources Division in Tonga. She spent two weeks with the DSM Project, undertaking training on the environmental management of deep sea minerals. Her task included producing a report, summarizing all publications and data on deep sea minerals marine scientific research (MSR) and exploration in Tonga’s EEZ, to date. This information can be used to assist Tonga to characterize their deep sea environment and inform MSR, Exploration Licensing and future marine management.
New resources

New video: Former DSM Project’s interns share experiences

http://gsd.spc.int/dsm/index.php/2-videos/64-former-dsm-projects-interns-share-internship-experiences

This short video features former legal interns of the DSM Project, sharing their experience and skills acquired during their time with the Project.

Since 2012, the DSM Project has trained 27 legal personnel from 13 of the Project’s 15 Pacific-ACP participating states, both government lawyers and law graduates. The DSM Project is committed to building the capacity of Pacific Island nationals in the emerging sector of deep sea minerals in its 15 Pacific Island participating countries (the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu).

This is a fun video that will make you want to come to Fiji to experience the cream buns!!

Get Involved

DSM Project Internships
The DSM Project offers internships in Law, Environment, Communication and Geology. For more information on the internships visit the website: http://gsd.spc.int/dsm/

DSM Project LinkedIn Group
The DSM Project has set up a LinkedIn Group Page: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Deep-Sea-Minerals-Project-6646605

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