International Seabed Authority ISBA/24/A/INF/2

Assembly

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Consideration of requests for observer status in accordance with rule 82, paragraph 1 (e), of the rules of procedure of the Assembly

Request submitted by the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology for observer status in accordance with rule 82, paragraph 1 (e), of the rules of procedure of the Assembly

Note by the secretariat

1. On 4 June 2018, the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology submitted a letter to the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority, requesting observer status in the Assembly of the Authority. The text of the letter and additional information provided by the applicant are contained in the annex to the present note.

2. In accordance with rule 82, paragraph 1 (e), of the rules of procedure of the Assembly, non-governmental organizations with which the Secretary-General has entered into arrangements in accordance with article 169, paragraph 1, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and other non-governmental organizations invited by the Assembly that have demonstrated their interest in matters under consideration by the Assembly, may participate as observers in the Assembly.

3. Paragraphs 5 and 6 of the same rule further provide that observers referred to in paragraph 1 (e) of that rule may sit at public meetings of the Assembly and, upon the invitation of the President and subject to approval by the Assembly, may make oral statements on questions within the scope of their activities, and that written statements submitted by observers referred to in paragraph 1 (e) of that rule within the scope of their activities that are relevant to the work of the Assembly should be made available by the secretariat in the quantities and in the languages in which the statements are submitted.

* ISBA/24/A/L.1.

Annex

Letter dated 31 May 2018 from the President of the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology addressed to the Secretary-General of the International Seabed Authority

The Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology requests approval by the Assembly of the International Seabed Authority of the present application for observer status under rule 82, paragraph 1 (e), of the rules of procedure of the Assembly.

The main objective of the Agency is to contribute to the advancement of academic research and to the improvement of marine science and technology, through fundamental marine research and development and cooperative activities on academic research related to the ocean for the benefit of peace and human welfare.

The Agency launched a leading centre, the Research and Development Centre for Submarine Resources, on 1 April 2014 to conduct intensive research and development to meet strong needs for resource exploration. The Centre carries out research on the genesis of polymetallic sulphides, cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts and polymetallic nodules, which are widely regarded as considerable potential ore resources, and on a generative system of methane, as a potential clean energy source. In addition, the Marine Technology and Engineering Centre within the Agency, which has long been developing autonomous underwater vehicles, will advance their development and that of remotely operated vehicles for sea floor resource exploration. These efforts are in harmony with the rational development of sea floor mineral resources conducted by the Authority.

Please refer to the enclosure for further background information.

We respectfully request that the Assembly grant observer status to the Agency and we look forward to a long and mutually beneficial partnership.

(*Signed*) Asahiko **Taira**
President

Enclosure

1. Name of organization

Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology

2. Address of office

2-15, Natsushima-cho, Yokosuka-city, Kanagawa, 237-0061
Japan

3. Name, title and address of proposed primary representatives

Asahiko Taira
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4. Aims and purpose of the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology

The main objective of the Agency is to contribute to the advancement of academic research and to the improvement of marine science and technology, through fundamental marine research and development and cooperative activities on ocean-related academic research for the benefit of peace and human welfare.

5. History

The Japan Marine Science and Technology Centre was established in 1971 under the umbrella of the Science and Technology Agency of Japan on the basis of a recommendation of Japanese national and economic organizations to promote marine development. In 2004, the Centre was reorganized as an independent administrative institution, the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology. In 2015, the Agency was relaunched as a national research and development agency.

On 1 April 2014, the Agency launched the Research and Development Centre for Submarine Resources, to conduct intensive research and development to meet strong needs for resource exploration, in cooperation with relevant national and overseas institutions. Since then, the Agency has also begun to collaborate with the International Seabed Authority. The Agency convened a workshop on “EcoDeep”, a project on the ecological aspects of hydrothermal vents and massive sulphide deposits, with the Authority, and published its recommendations as ISA Technical Study No. 18.

6. Structure

The Agency comprises three main sectors: research, development and operations and administration. Within the research sector, two areas have been established: strategic research and development, and basic research. Strategic research and development is aimed at providing solutions to social issues through

activating cross-field research collaboration. Basic research is targeted at the most advanced studies in specific individual areas. Within the development and operations sector, three centres have been established: the Marine Technology and Engineering Centre, which manages the research vessel operation and related engineering development; the Centre for Earth Information Science and Technology, which operates the Earth Simulator supercomputer and maintains the database; and the Centre for Deep-Earth Exploration, which manages the deep-sea drilling vessel, the *Chikyu*, including drilling and coring activities, an analytical laboratory and a core sample repository.

In the strategic research and development area of the research sector, the Research and Development Centre for Submarine Resources has been launched within the Agency to contribute to the utilization of submarine resources through leading-edge exploration and research using our considerable experience and accumulated technology. Specifically, the work of the Centre is aimed at researching the origin of sea-floor hydrothermal deposits, cobalt-rich crust, deep-sea mud rich in rare earth and yttrium (also known as REY-rich mud) and methane hydrate, as well as developing efficient survey techniques and environmental assessment methodologies. The following four major scientific objectives are identified under the research and development structure of the Centre:

- Researching the origin of sea-floor hydrothermal deposits and developing techniques to survey them
- Researching the origin of cobalt-rich crust and REY-rich mud and developing techniques that contribute to the discovery of high-quality ore
- Researching the origin of seabed hydrocarbon resources and developing the continuous carbon energy cycle
- Developing methodologies to assess environmental impacts

7. Recent activities

The Agency carries out its activities according to a midterm plan, which was formulated to meet the medium-term objectives set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan. The third midterm plan has been implemented since April 2014. As part of the midterm plan, the Agency has been conducting goal-oriented research and development projects in line with national and public needs in a cross-sectional manner. These projects include research and development in the fields of submarine resources, marine and global environmental change, seismogenic zones, marine biosciences and engineering, the promotion of comprehensive ocean drilling science and advanced synthetic information science, as well as the construction of a research and development base for opening up ocean frontiers.

Of particular relevance to research and development on submarine resources, the Research and Development Centre for Submarine Resources was launched on 1 April 2014. The Agency, through the Centre, has conducted research on the genesis of submarine hydrothermal deposits and cobalt-rich manganese crusts, which are widely regarded as considerable potential ore resources, and on a generative system of methane, as a potential clean energy source.

In addition, the Agency has been advancing the development of autonomous underwater vehicles and remotely operated vehicles, which can be applied to submarine resource exploration. The Agency has also operated the research vessel *Kaimei* since 2016. The vessel can perform wide-area seabed research on the distribution of submarine resources efficiently and has comprehensive scientific research equipment to elucidate the genesis of mineral and ore deposits.

The Agency, through its research and development on submarine resources, as well as its research-focused facilities, vessels and equipment, has been promoting the comprehensive research and development necessary for the exploration and utilization of the submarine resources that exist within the territorial waters of Japan.

8. Descriptive statement of the extent to which the purposes of the Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology relate to those of the International Seabed Authority, including, in particular, the contributions that can be made to the work of the Authority

The Agency is engaged in the world's most advanced research and technology development, in particular with regard to ocean, earth and life. It launched a leading centre, the Research and Development Centre for Submarine Resources, on 1 April 2014 to conduct intensive research and development corresponding to strong needs for resource exploration. The Centre conducts research on the genesis of polymetallic sulphides, cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts and polymetallic nodules, which are widely regarded as considerable potential ore resources, and on a generative system of methane, a potential clean energy source. In addition, within the Agency, the Marine Technology and Engineering Centre, which has long been developing autonomous underwater vehicles, will advance their development and that of remotely operated vehicles for sea floor resource exploration. These efforts are in harmony with the rational development of sea floor mineral resource development carried out by the Authority.

Researchers at the Agency have participated in workshops held by the Authority and expressed their opinions on the rational development of sea floor mineral resources in workshops covering topics that include taxonomic methods and standardization, the design of impact reference zones and the preservation of reference zones in the Area and the environmental management strategy of the Authority for the Area. In addition, the Agency, in collaboration with the Authority, has convened a workshop on the ecological aspects of hydrothermal vents and massive sulphide deposits and published its recommendations as ISA Technical Study No. 18. The Agency will continue to promote technologies and research on sea floor mineral resources and environmental impact assessment and provide information to the world that contributes to the rational development of the common heritage of mankind.