

## **InterOceanMetal Joint Organization: Achievements and Challenges**

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### **ABSTRACT**

INTEROCEANMETAL Joint Organization (IOM), established in 1987, is an intergovernmental body created to carry out exploration and exploitation of polymetallic nodules in the Pacific's Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone. IOM, certified by the governments of Bulgaria, Cuba, Czech Republic, Poland, Russian Federation, and Slovak Republic, received its Certificate of Registration in 1992; in 1995, IOM was granted the Certificate of Compliance. The paper presents the history of IOM, summarises its achievements, and outlines challenges the Organization is facing in view of obligations required of pioneer investors by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

**KEYWORDS:** Interoceanmetal; polymetallic nodules; deep-sea mining and processing

### **INTRODUCTION**

The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea, adopted in December 1982, opened a possibility for many countries, including those of the Eastern Europe, to enter the stream of international efforts aimed at exploration and exploitation of oceanic seabed resources. Polymetallic nodules, found in several areas of the deep oceanic bottom, were a type of the resource a number of countries and consortia developed a keen interest in. Despite the fact that the economic climate of the present day is not supportive of polymetallic nodule exploitation on the deep seabed, the registered pioneer investors persist in their efforts to improve mining and processing methods and to learn more about the environment of the prospective operations. The group of registered pioneer investors includes Interoceanmetal Joint Organization (IOM).

### **HISTORY OF IOM**

IOM was brought to life in 1987 and began its work, based on an Intergovernmental Agreement between Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Poland, Vietnam,

and the USSR, to carry out exploration of the polymetallic nodules from the deep ocean bottom in order to prepare future exploitation of the resource for the benefit of the member states. IOM has survived changes in the political and economic system that have taken place in the Eastern European countries and is at present certified by the governments of Bulgaria, Cuba, Czech Republic, Poland, Russian Federation, and Slovak Republic. The Organization is governed by the Council consisting of official representatives of the certifying states. The Council meets twice a year and has the power to establish general policies in conformity with the relevant provisions of the Statutes and the Agreement. The Organization is controlled by the Auditory Commission, while the everyday operations are supervised by Director General, an executive organ.

Since its establishment, IOM has been carrying out comprehensive geological, geophysical, and oceanographic studies in its area of interest in order to prepare a sound basis for registration of its claim to an area of nodule deposit. The Organization focused its interest on the Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone, an area most interesting from the economic point of view (Amann, 1992; Lorenc and Kotlinski, 1994). The area contains an estimated 20 billion tonnes of nodules, 5 billion tonnes of which can potentially be mined. The nodules are of a very good quality (grade) and occur at a desirable density (Table 1).

Within 1988-1992, IOM was involved in carrying out geological and geophysical surveys of 540,000 km<sup>2</sup> area in the Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone, as a result of which the IOM application area, located in the eastern part of CCFZ and covering 300,000 km<sup>2</sup> was delineated. A half of this area constitutes the so-called pioneer area (Fig. 1). The other half, comparable in terms of its geological characteristics as well as nodule abundance and grade, was from the beginning intended as a part of the common heritage of mankind and reserved for the United Nations (International Seabed Authority). The results of surveys and studies served as a basis for describing geology of the area, defining distribution of polymetallic nodules, identifying their mineral and chemical composition and physical and mechanical properties, as well as for calculating the magnitude of the resources. The amount and quality of the work proved sufficient for IOM to apply to United Nations for the status of the pioneer investor.