

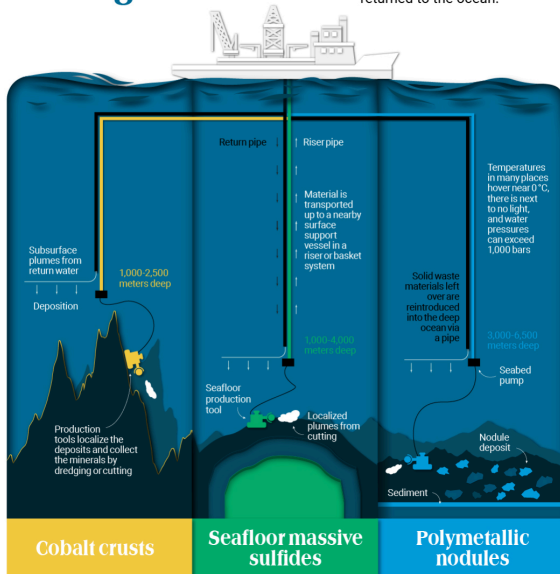
## PROTECTING THE OCEANS: ASEAN-PACIFIC NATIONS CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON DEEP-SEA MINING

**Jennifer Coffin**, Policy Analyst at Ministry of the PM & Cabinet (Samoa); **Frances Satini**, Project Coordinator at Civil Society Forum of Tonga (Tonga); **Grace Tufuga**, Administrative Associate at Samoa Seafarers Maritime Association (Samoa); **Elisa Shafiqah**, Consultant at Kuntum Ilham (Malaysia); **Nguyen Duc Trung**, Researcher at DRAGON-Mekong Institute (Vietnam); **Lavata Nivaga**, Project Officer at Live and Learn Environmental Education (Tuvalu).

Deep-sea mining is the process of retrieving mineral deposits from the deep seabed, 200m below the ocean. Given the unprecedented threats to ocean conservation, DSM showcases economic potential but at the same time disrupting biodiversity and carbon storage.

This policy brief **advocates for a complete moratorium on Deep Sea Mining in the ASEAN and Pacific countries**. It examines the impacts of DSM and provides recommendations to halt its operations to safeguard marine ecosystems and protect the livelihoods of affected communities.

### How does Deep Sea mining work?



### KEY MESSAGES

- **Environmental Risks:** DSM threatens marine biodiversity, climate stability, and carbon storage.
- **Regulatory Gaps:** Inadequate governance and weak enforcement pose risks to ecosystems and communities.
- **Moratorium Needed:** Until robust scientific evidence and regulations exist, DSM should not proceed.
- **Sustainable Alternatives:** Focus on renewable energy, and community-led conservation.

## Understanding Deep-Sea Mining & Governance

The deep sea is one of Earth's least explored and most fragile ecosystems. Over 90% of species in regions remain undescribed, highlighting insufficient scientific knowledge of these habitats.<sup>2</sup>

DSM targets deep seabed that contain minerals like nickel, cobalt, and rare earth elements, resources critical for modern technology and renewable energy transitions. This is governed under UNCLOS (1982) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA), which oversees exploration and licensing in international waters. However, **key governance issues** remain:

### 1. Lack of Binding Regulations

Rules on environmental protections and benefit-sharing are incomplete.

### 2. Weak Oversight

Countries sponsoring DSM operations have limited capacity to monitor deep-sea impacts.

### 3. Limited Scientific Data

Inadequate baseline studies make environmental assessments unreliable.

### 4. Gaps in National Frameworks

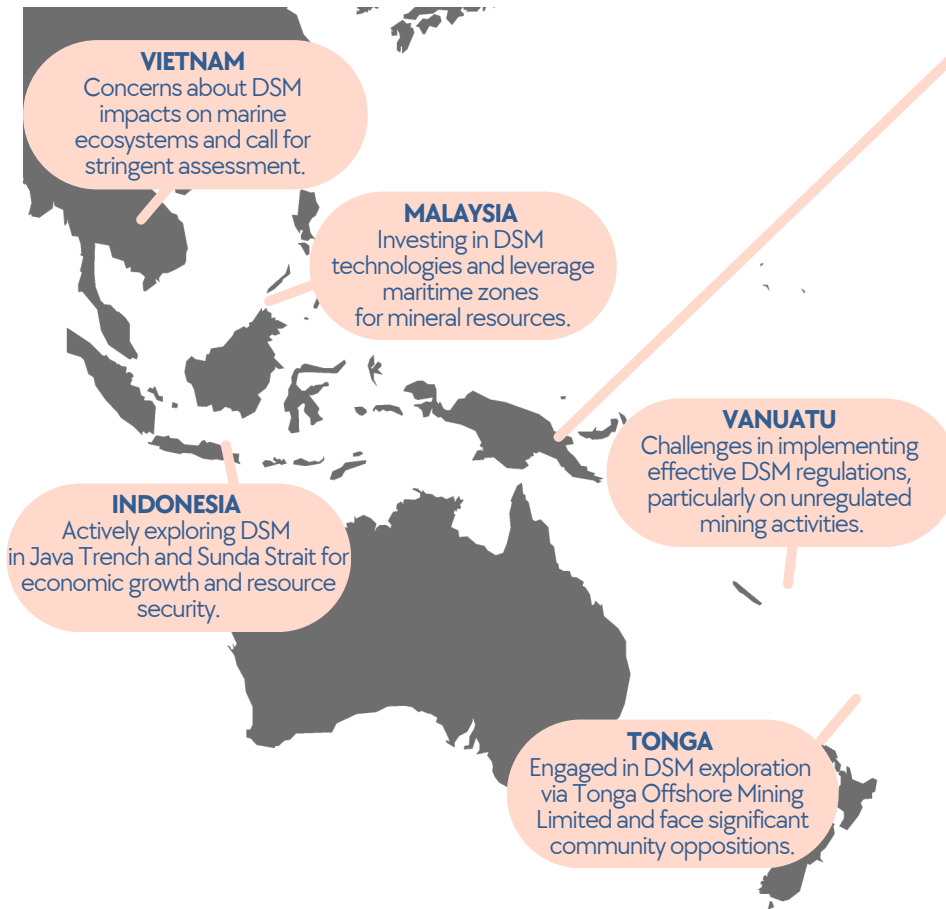
ASEAN & Pacific nations have no unified DSM regulations, increasing risks of uncoordinated exploitation.

1. UCN. (2022). Deep Sea Mining Issue Brief (Policy Brief). <https://iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/deep-sea-mining>

2. Ashford, O., Baines, J., Barbanell, M., & Wang, K. (2024). What We Know About Deep-Sea Mining and What We Don't. World Resources Institute. Retrieved from World Resources Institute.

# How are ASEAN-Pacific Nations Pursuing DSM?

**ASEAN** countries are in the **early exploration phase**, while **Pacific Island** nations are **split between pursuing DSM and advocating for a moratorium**.



## CASE STUDY: THE FAILURE OF SOLWARA 1 (PAPUA NEW GUINEA)



Papua New Guinea's Solwara 1 project, once a flagship for deep-sea mining, **collapsed** due to financial instability, environmental risks, and strong local opposition.<sup>3</sup> Promised economic benefits never materialized, while communities feared irreversible harm to marine ecosystems. PNG's experience underscores the **high risks and uncertain gains** of DSM, serving as a **cautionary tale** for other nations.

## Recurring Policy Gaps and Issues



### Legislation & Policies

- **Weak or nonexistent** DSM regulations and policies in ASEAN and Pacific countries.



### Stakeholder Engagement

- **Exclusion** of local communities in DSM decisions.
- **Corporate-driven.**
- Local communities are **not fully informed** about DSM activities, their potential benefits, and the risks involved.



### Marine Environment Impact Assessment

- **Insufficient** baseline data on deep-sea ecosystems.



### Monitoring & Enforcement

- **Lack of capacity** to monitor DSM activities.
- **Weak enforcement** of existing regulations.

With over 1.5 million km<sup>2</sup> of ocean floor already licensed for exploration worldwide, ASEAN and Pacific leaders **must** decide whether to proactively ban DSM or risk unregulated commercial activities with irreversible consequences.

3. Cannon, J. (2023). Pacific alliance adopts moratorium on deep-sea mining, halting resurgent PNG project. Mongabay.

# Hidden Dangers of Deep-Sea Mining

## Environmental Risks

- **Habitat Destruction:** Mining equipment tears up deep-sea ecosystems that take millennia to recover.
- **Sediment Plumes:** Smothers marine life, contaminates food chains.
- **Carbon Release:** Disrupts ocean carbon storage, worsening climate change.

## Economic Risks

- **High Investment, Uncertain Returns:** Mining tech is expensive, with no guaranteed profits.
- **Legal Liabilities:** States could be held financially responsible for environmental damage.
- **Market Volatility:** Demand for rare minerals fluctuates, risking economic instability.

## Social Risks

- **Threatens Fisheries:** Pollution disrupts fish stocks, affecting coastal economies.
- **Cultural Impact:** ASEAN-Pacific communities depend on the ocean for traditions and identity.
- **No Community Consent:** DSM is driven by corporations, not local needs.

## Security Implications

- **Foreign Control of Resources:** DSM relies on external investors and tech.
- **Data & Sovereignty Issues:** Mining companies monopolize seabed data.
- **Limited Oversight:** Weak monitoring increases risk of illegal exploitation.

## DSM is Reckless; A Precautionary Approach Needed

DSM is a **high-risk, poorly understood industry** that threatens ocean stability, climate resilience, and coastal livelihoods. Over 90% of species in the deep sea remain undiscovered, yet DSM could **irreversibly destroy fragile ecosystems** before their role is even understood. No proven restoration methods exist, making **habitat loss permanent**.

Beyond ecological damage, DSM **serves corporate and geopolitical interests** rather than local livelihoods. It undermines fisheries, food security, and sovereignty, exposing ASEAN-Pacific nations to economic and legal risks. Under UNCLOS, **sponsoring states bear responsibility for environmental harm caused by contractors, a liability small economies cannot afford**.

With too many unknowns and no accountability, a moratorium for DSM must be done until:

- Scientific evidence proves DSM's long-term impacts are manageable.
- Regulatory safeguards ensure enforcement and liability.
- ASEAN-Pacific communities have decision-making power.

Without these protections, **DSM remains a reckless gamble**. ASEAN and Pacific nations must lead the moratorium movement—stopping deep-sea mining before irreversible harm begins.

# Seize the Policy Window for Deep-Sea Mining Moratorium Call

## OCEAN GOVERNANCE & LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

**UNCLOS** (1982): Mandates marine protection (Article 192) and defines the deep seabed as the "Common Heritage of Mankind", requiring equitable benefit-sharing. DSM **lacks** sufficient environmental safeguards, **violating** these principles.

**ISA**: **Fails** to regulate DSM effectively, with incomplete exploitation rules, **weak** oversight, and no clear liability framework, making enforcement **nearly impossible**.

## CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY COMMITMENTS

**Paris Agreement** (2015): DSM **disrupts** ocean carbon storage, releasing CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, accelerating climate change.

**Kunming-Montreal Framework** (2022): DSM **contradicts** Target 3, which commits nations to protecting 30% of marine areas by 2030.

**Convention on Biological Diversity**: DSM **threatens** undiscovered species and genetic resources, **violating** global commitments to biodiversity protection.

## PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLES & GLOBAL MOMENTUM

**Rio Declaration** (1992): Principle 15 mandates caution when scientific **uncertainty** exists. DSM lacks comprehensive risk assessments, making exploitation irresponsible.

✓ There is **growing global opposition** of DSM with European Parliament, IUCN, and Pacific nations already advocate for a moratorium. ASEAN-Pacific leaders must act now to solidify regional resistance and set a global precedent.

## Materializing the Deep-Sea Mining Moratorium Action

### Immediate (0-3 Months)

- Form a **regional alliance** of Asia Pacific governments, indigenous groups, NGOs, and scientists; **issue a unified call for a precautionary pause** on deep-sea mining using the "common heritage" principle.
- Circulate briefings** to policymakers and submit position papers to the International Seabed Authority (ISA) **urging closure of loopholes** like the "two-year rule."

### Medium Term (3-12 Months)

- Launch funded baseline studies in key mining zones** (e.g., the Clarion-Clipperton Zone) and **establish independent monitoring bodies** for transparent, real-time environmental data.
- Develop and advocate for draft national policies** that block new mining licenses until full, science-based environmental safeguards are in place.
- Hold stakeholder dialogues** ensuring affected communities provide **free, prior, and informed consent**.

### Long Term (12+ Months)

- Collaborate with ISA members to complete comprehensive, binding exploitation regulations** by 2025.
- Redirect investments toward sustainable alternatives** (e.g., recycling, renewable energy) and support blue economy initiatives.
- Establish periodic international reviews and public reporting mechanisms** to adapt policies as new data emerge.

## Time Is Ticking; Resources Is Depleting; Moratorium Now!

**Deep-sea mining is an irreversible assault** on marine ecosystems, global climate stability, and the livelihoods of coastal communities. The uncertain benefits do not justify the overwhelming risks, from biodiversity collapse and carbon release to economic and security vulnerabilities.

**ASEAN-Pacific states can lead the global movement for a moratorium, setting a precedent for responsible ocean stewardship.** We urge all stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, scientists, and local communities, to join forces and advocate for a moratorium on deep-sea mining.

The message is clear: **Until the full consequences of DSM are understood and safeguarded, DSM must not proceed.** The ocean is not a commodity; it is a lifeline for millions and a legacy for future generations, one that must be protected, not plundered.

5. Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. (2024, November 13). Governments and parliamentarians - Deep Sea Conservation Coalition. <https://deep-sea-conservation.org/solutions/no-deep-sea-mining/momentum-for-a-moratorium/governments-and-parliamentarians/>

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