

CALL FOR PAPERS

Seabed Mining, Resource Competition, and the Future of the Maritime Domain



The ocean floor has become a new frontier of geopolitical competition, international law, and environmental and resource security as demand for critical minerals intensifies and deep-sea extraction technology advances.

We're looking for sharp, well-argued writing that advances our understanding of this consequential and underexamined issue. Selected pieces will be published on the Center's Substack.

TOPICS

Relevant themes include, among others:

- Resource Competition & Critical Minerals
- International Law & Governance of the Ocean Commons
- Environmental & Ecological Impact
- Indo-Pacific Security & Strategic Implications
- Technology, Innovation & Commercial Development
- Indigenous & Coastal Community Rights

AUTHOR QUALIFICATIONS

We invite essays and firsthand accounts from those on the sharp end of seabed mining and its strategic, legal, environmental, economic, and other dimensions.

Areas of inquiry include, but are not limited to:

Industry

- What does seabed mining stand to offer your organization, and where do you see the greatest threats?
- What has your engagement with the ISA and other regulatory institutions revealed about the barriers to seabed exploration?
- What is your realistic timeline for commercial-scale extraction in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone, and what technical barriers remain?
- What does operating outside the U.S. DSHMRA international framework mean for your license security, liability exposure, and commercial partnerships?
- What domestic processing partnerships are you pursuing, and how dependent are you on foreign refining capacity controlled by China?
- How do announcements by major technology companies supporting a moratorium on seabed minerals in their supply chains affect your commercial viability and investor confidence?

Science & Environment

- How do you assess irreversible biodiversity loss versus recoverable disturbance? What recovery timelines should we assume for commercial-scale operations?
- What can you tell us about how sediment plumes travel and at what distance from the mining site measurable ecological effects cease?
- Some scientists and advocates worry that mining companies collecting their own environmental baseline data represents a fundamental conflict of interest—what independent scientific infrastructure would you propose, and who should fund it?
- In your estimation, how robust is the hypothesis that disruption of deep-sea microbial communities could undermine carbon sequestration at a scale that conflicts with climate goals?

National Governments

- Is your government, department, or ministry prepared to make the 10-to-20-year investment to build domestic processing facilities?
- How does seabed mining factor into your national strategy for reducing critical mineral dependency?
- How are you monitoring potential dual-use activity by foreign actors operating under civilian research and mining licenses?
- What is your government's official position on moratoriums on seabed mining, and is that position consistent with your commitments to Pacific Island partners?
- How do you prevent minerals extracted under domestic law from being refined abroad in Chinese-controlled facilities?
- In your opinion, does President Trump's Executive Order 14285, which directs NOAA to fast-track seabed mining permits under domestic law, place the U.S. in direct conflict with the international framework, and what are the diplomatic consequences?

International Organizations

- In your assessment, has the ISA's failure to finalize its mining code, compounded by The Metals Company's turn to unilateral action, fatally undermined its authority? What structural reforms would you propose to restore confidence in the ISA as a governing body?
- What practical leverage does the ISA have to respond to its Secretary-General's warning that unilateral U.S. action "sets a dangerous precedent that could destabilize the entire system of global ocean governance"?
- How well does the ISA's institutional structure reflect the interests of small island developing states, and what would more equitable representation look like?
- What does it mean for global ocean governance when a major power treats international waters as subject to its domestic law? How, in your estimation, should the international community respond, and what leverage does it have?

ISA, NOAA & Other Regulatory Bodies

- In your assessment, what structural reforms are necessary to restore the ISA’s regulatory authority and guard against a fragmentation of governance into competing national frameworks?
- In your view, can the expedited review process mandated by Executive Order 14285 be reconciled with the level of environmental rigor and due diligence that seabed mining decisions demand?
- What institutional knowledge has NOAA accumulated through four decades of experience administering seabed mining licenses under DSHMRA? How, in your opinion, should that experience inform a licensing regime that is now being asked to move faster and at greater scale?
- Between environmental harm thresholds, EIA processes, monitoring programs, and compensation mechanisms, which is your highest priority, and what do you see as the realistic resolution timeline?

Think Tanks & Academics

- In your own work, where have you found the analytical literature on seabed mining weakest, and what question would you most want funded and answered?
- The strategic benefits of domestic mineral supply arrive within years; the ecological damage may last centuries. How do you weigh the two against each other?
- Having watched this debate develop, what do you think the field has gotten wrong – a consensus view you have come to doubt, or a risk you believe is being underweighted?
- In your assessment, how well does the “China dependency” framing hold up against the data you have worked with on refining capacity and offtake agreements, and where do you think it overstates the case?
- Whose account of the seabed do you find least represented in the policy conversation you take part in, and what would change if it were heard?

Indigenous Communities and Authorities

- How do you protect your community’s long-term interests as both the United States and China compete for access to Pacific EEZs through offers of aid, investment, and security partnerships?
- What would a seabed governance framework look like if your community’s legal traditions, ecological knowledge, and relationships to the sea were treated as foundational rather than supplementary? How do indigenous understandings of ocean stewardship interact with governance frameworks that treat the deep seabed purely as a resource commons?
- Given that Pacific Island peoples have maintained deep, multigenerational relationships with the ecosystems of the CCZ and adjacent Pacific waters, at what stage of the regulatory and permitting process do you believe indigenous communities are or are not afforded meaningful consultation?
- To what extent, if any, do existing frameworks under UNCLOS or DSHMRA incorporate free, prior, and informed consent requirements before authorizing mining operations in waters adjacent to indigenous territories?
- In your assessment, who bears legal and moral accountability should seabed mining result in irreversible biodiversity loss? How should accountability be assigned, and under what legal framework?

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

Advocate for your position using your individualized narrative. Tell us what matters to you as a stakeholder, your experience with the issue(s), and what the evidence shows.

Submissions should be no more than 2,000 words. Please include:

- Author name, title, organization, and preferred contact email
- Manuscript as a Word file (.docx); any citations in Chicago style
- Summary (250 words maximum)
- Short author biography
- Conflicts of interest to disclose (funding, affiliations, or interests relevant to the subject matter), and disclaimers you wish to appear with the piece
- Confirmation that the piece is original and not published elsewhere

HOW TO SUBMIT

EMAIL submissions@thelajollacenter.org

DEADLINE October 31, 2026

Submissions will be reviewed and published on The La Jolla Center for Pacific Strategy's Substack on a rolling basis through the deadline.