

# The International Seabed Authority (ISA)

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) was formed on 16th November 1994 as an intergovernmental body under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

This article will talk about the formation and functions of the International Seabed Authority. International organisations are an important part of the UPSC syllabus. It forms a part of international relations and is an important topic for the IAS exam. Candidates can also download the notes PDF at the end of this article.

## What is the ISA?

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) was formed as an initiative for organising, regulating and controlling all the mineral-related activities in the international seabed area that are beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

The ISA held its first inaugural meeting in its host country, Jamaica, on 16 November 1994, the day the Convention came into force. The articles governing the Authority have been made "noting the political and economic changes, including market-oriented approaches, affecting the implementation" of the Convention. The Authority obtained its observer status to the United Nations in October 1996.

A general overview of the ISA is given in the table below:

Overview of International Seabed Authority (ISA)	
Formation	16 November, 1994
Type	Intergovernmental Organisation
Headquarters	Kingston, Jamaica
Purpose	Regulate deep seabed mining and ensure the marine environment is protected from any harmful effects which may arise from mining activities.
Secretary General	Michael W. Lodge
Main Organ	Assembly of the International Seabed Authority

## Who are the governing bodies of ISA?

Headquartered in Kingston, Jamaica, the International Seabed Authority (ISA) has 167 members and the European Union, composed of all parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is controlled and governed by the following bodies:

1. **Assembly of International Seabed Authority:** The supreme authority of ISA is the assembly consisting of all ISA members. This assembly is responsible for establishing general policies and budgets.
2. **Executive Authority:** ISA also elects the executive authority of ISA which is a 36-member council and is responsible for approving contracts with private corporations and government entities. These contracts deal with the exploration and mining in the specified areas of the international seabed.
3. **Secretary-General:** The secretary-general of the ISA is nominated by the council and is elected by the assembly to a four-year term. Michael W. Lodge is the current secretary-general of International Seabed Authority (ISA).

The Finance Committee deals with budget-related matters. There is also a Legal and Technical Commission consisting of 30 members who control the Council and Finance Committee. All members are experts nominated by governments and elected to serve in their individual capacity.

## International Seabed Authority (ISA) Functions

ISA focuses mainly on organising, regulating and controlling all the mineral-related activities in the international seabed area that are beyond the limits of national jurisdiction. Some of the major functions of the International Seabed Authority of India (ISA) are mentioned below:

- Regulation of deep seabed mining.
- Protection of the marine environment from the harmful effects of mining, exploration and exploitation.
- The authority also promotes marine scientific research and conducts training programmes, seminars, conferences and workshops on the scientific and technical aspects.

## What are the activities of the ISA?

The main accomplishment of the ISA, has been the regulations regarding the exploration for polymetallic nodules. The legislation regarding the same was passed in the year 2000. These resources contain varying amounts of manganese, cobalt, copper and nickel. They occur as

potato-sized lumps scattered about on the surface of the ocean floor, mainly in the central Pacific Ocean but with some deposits in the Indian Ocean.

Work began on another set of regulations in 2002, that covered exploration of polymetallic sulfides and cobalt-rich ferromanganese crusts, which are rich sources of such minerals as copper, iron, zinc, silver and gold, as well as cobalt. The sulphides are found around volcanic hot springs, especially in the western Pacific Ocean, while the crusts occur on oceanic ridges and elsewhere at several locations around the world.

The ISA decided in 2006 to prepare separate sets of regulations for sulphides and for crusts, with priority given to sulphides. It devoted most of its sessions in 2007 and 2008 to this task, despite several issues remaining unresolved. Chief among these were the definition and configuration of the area to be allocated to contractors for exploration, the fees to be paid to the Authority and the question of how to deal with any overlapping claims that might arise. Meanwhile, the Legal and Technical Commission reported progress on ferromanganese crusts