



# AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail [australia@un.int](mailto:australia@un.int)

150 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 [www.australia-unsc.gov.au](http://www.australia-unsc.gov.au)

## **THIRTY-FIRST MEETING OF STATES PARTIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE LAW OF THE SEA (AGENDA ITEM 13: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL)**

23 June 2021

### **Statement by Australia**

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Thank you Mr President,

I would first like to congratulate you and all members of the Bureau on your appointments to lead our Meeting this week. We also thank the Secretary-General for his insightful report.

Mr President,

Australia is an ocean state, sitting at the intersection of the Indian, Southern and Pacific Oceans.

We have responsibility for one of the world's largest maritime jurisdictions.

The oceans play a vital role not only for us, but in the environmental, economic and cultural life of our planet.

Australia's steadfast support for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) reflects our commitment to an international rules-based order, as the basis for international stability, equity and prosperity.

UNCLOS provides the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out.

It underpins international peace and security, and promotes sustainable development and international cooperation.

It is imperative that all States Parties fully comply with UNCLOS, resolve disputes peacefully in accordance with international law, and avoid destabilising actions.

Mr President,

Australia is also deeply committed to the sustainable management of our marine resources.

We support ongoing efforts by the International Seabed Authority (ISA) to progress draft regulations, standards and guidelines for deep-sea mining exploitation of the Area. We underscore the importance of robust regulations to ensure the protection of the marine environment.

We similarly support ongoing efforts by the Intergovernmental Conference, ably led by its President, to develop an implementing agreement under UNCLOS to address the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. We look forward to the fourth session of the Conference as early as possible in 2022.

Mr President,

As a member of the Pacific community, Australia commends the attention that States Parties continue to give to the issue of sea-level rise, including at last week's Open-Ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea.

As we said last week, sea-level rise poses significant development, economic, and environmental challenges, the impacts of which will be felt by all States in one way or another.

Sea-level rise also raises important questions of international law. Australia is strongly of the view that our consideration of such questions should be centred on UNCLOS. We welcome the International Law Commission including consideration of those questions in its program of work.

Mr President,

Australia acknowledges the impact that COVID-19 has had on the ability of bodies established by UNCLOS, and of States Parties, to progress their work – particularly where that work is sensitive or requires technical capabilities only available in some locations.

In light of these unprecedented circumstances, we have supported the decisions made by States Parties to extend by one year, on an exceptional basis, the terms of members of the ISA Legal and Technical Commission and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

We commend the efforts of many of the bodies established by UNCLOS, and of States Parties, to find creative ways to progress their important work during the pandemic. We encourage them to continue to make every effort to maximize their activities, notwithstanding the ongoing challenges.

Mr President,

Australia looks forward to working with all States Parties to address the issues we have raised today, always in a way that affirms the integrity of UNCLOS.

Thank you.