

Dr. Beth Orcutt, Ph.D.
Senior Research Scientist
Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences
60 Bigelow Drive | PO Box 380
East Boothbay, ME, 04544, USA
+01-(207) 315-2567, ext. 312
borcutt@bigelow.org

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RE: Comment on exploration contracts for deep-sea sulfide mineral mining

Secretary General
International Seabed Authority

Dear Mr. Lodge,

We, the undersigned representatives of diverse scientific disciplines from across the globe, are writing to express our concern over the recent approval of application for an exploration contract for massive sulfide mineral exploration along the Mid-Atlantic Ridge (specifically, application ISBA/23/LTC/3). This exploration area includes the Lost City, TAG, and Broken Spur hydrothermal vents and their surrounding deposits that have been the focus of decades-long, high-priority, international research. For example, in 2015, an International Ocean Discovery Program research expedition occurred at Lost City, and another team will be returning to this site in less than a year to study the highly unique “extreme” life forms existing at these hydrothermal systems, which serve as archetypes for the search for life on other planets. These areas have been identified by several intergovernmental organizations – such as the Convention of Biological Diversity and the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature – as places with outstanding biological, ecological, and geological significance that should be conserved. *We are therefore deeply concerned that the Polish application was recently approved by ISA Council, based on the recommendation of the Legal and Technical Commission, to explore these areas for sulfide mineral mining without consideration of the recommendations of these international organizations or the broad scientific significance of these areas.*

We strongly encourage ISA to consider the input of these international organizations and relevant scientific societies when evaluating future requests for deep-sea mineral exploration. Moreover, we also request that such input be a requirement for assessing any future exploitation contract requests. These unique hydrothermal vent sites are irreplaceable, and their vulnerability to nearby exploration, let alone seabed mining, is entirely unknown. Precaution is needed to protect these precious ecosystems from being damaged forever. We would welcome the chance to discuss this matter with you further.

Sincerely,



Dr. Beth N. Orcutt, Ph.D.



Co-signed by:

Wolfgang Bach, Ph.D., Professor, University of Bremen, **Germany**
Thibaut Barreyre, Ph.D., Researcher, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Keir Becker, Ph.D., Professor, University of Miami, **USA**
William Brazelton, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Utah, **USA**
Mathilde Cannat, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, Institute de Physique du Globe de Paris, **France**
Peter Countway, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, **USA**
Javier Escartin, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, Institute de Physique du Globe de Paris, **France**
Steven D'Hondt, Ph.D., Professor, University of Rhode Island, **USA**
David Diego Castro, Ph.D., Researcher, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Kristina Dunkel, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Oslo, **Norway**
David Emerson, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, **USA**
Andrew Fisher, Ph.D., Professor, University of California Santa Cruz, **USA**
Charles Fisher, Ph.D., Distinguished Senior Scholar of Biology, Penn State University, **USA**
Gretchen Früh-Green, Ph.D., Professor, ETH Zürich, **Switzerland**
Peter R. Girguis, Ph.D., Professor, Harvard University, **USA**
Brian Glazer, Ph.D., Professor, University of Hawai'i, **USA**
Bjarte Hannisdal, Ph.D., Researcher, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Michelle Harris, Ph.D., Lecturer, University of Plymouth, **UK**
Emilio Herrero-Bervera, Ph.D., Professor, University of Hawai'i, **USA**
Julie A. Huber, Ph.D., Associate Scientist, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, **USA**
Barbara John, Ph.D., Professor, University of Wyoming, **USA**
Sven Le Moine Bauer, Ph.D., Researcher, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Steffen Leth Jørgensen, Ph.D., Researcher, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Samantha B. Joye, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor, University of Georgia, **USA**
Susan Lang, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of South Carolina, **USA**
Marvin Lilley, Ph.D., Research Professor, University of Washington, **USA**
Hai-Quan Liu, Ph.D., Chinese Academy of Sciences, **China**
Karen Lloyd, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Tennessee Knoxville, **USA**
Andrew McCaig, Ph.D., Professor, Leeds University, **UK**
Bénédicte Menez, Ph.D., Professor, Institute de Physique du Globe de Paris, **France**
Pål Tore Mørkved, Senior Engineer, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Antony Morris, Ph.D., Professor, Plymouth University, **UK**
Yuki Morono, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, JAMSTEC, **Japan**
Shahzad Motamedi, M.S., University of Utah, **USA**
Victoria Orphan, Ph.D., Professor, Caltech, **USA**
Michael Rappé, Ph.D., Research Professor, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, **USA**
Amila Ratnayake, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Uva Wellasa University, **Sri Lanka**
Brandi Kiel Reese, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, **USA**
Eoghan Reeves, Ph.D., Associate Professor, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Desiree Roerdink, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Bergen, **Norway**
Stéphane Roumejon, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Researcher, ETZ Zürich, **Switzerland**
Ramunas Stepanauskas, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, **USA**
Andreas Teske, Ph.D., Professor, University of North Carolina, **USA**
Katrina Twing, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Utah, **USA**
Heinrich Villinger, Ph.D., Professor, University of Bremen, **Germany**
Dominique Weis, Ph.D., Professor, University of British Columbia, **Canada**
Geoff Wheat, Ph.D., Research Professor, University of Alaska Fairbanks, **USA**
Morgan Williams, M.S., Australia National University, **Australia**
Rui Zhao, M.S., University of Bergen, **Norway**

