

50 U.S.-Based Organizations Call on President Biden to Support a Moratorium or Precautionary Pause on Deep-Sea Mining

July 30, 2024

Dear Mr. President,

The below organizations, and their members and supporters from across the United States (U.S.), urge you to support a moratorium or precautionary pause on deep-sea mining (DSM), domestically and internationally, until and unless:

1. There is sufficient scientific information and knowledge of the deep sea and the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of this new speculative extractive industry, and
2. It can be clearly demonstrated that deep-sea mining can be managed in such a way that ensures the effective protection of the marine environment and prevents the loss of biodiversity.

Furthermore, these organizations call on the U.S. Government to prohibit the sale, import, trading, processing, or sourcing of seabed minerals in the U.S., including through the exclusion of seabed minerals from critical mineral agreements with other countries.

This month, the International Seabed Authority (ISA) is convening to discuss the regulatory framework for deep-sea mining in international waters. The decisions made at these meetings will have far-reaching implications for the future of our ocean. The current regulatory regime and framework are inadequate to address the environmental and social impacts of deep-sea mining¹. It is imperative that global leaders prioritize the precautionary principle in these discussions before we greenlight an industry with impacts the world does not understand and cannot mitigate, let alone monitor and enforce, at the most inaccessible depths of our planet four kilometers below sea level^{2,3}.

To date, 28 countries, including Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Palau, and the United Kingdom⁴, over 800 scientists and marine policy experts⁵, 49 business and financial institutions (including Google, Microsoft, Samsung, Rivian, BMW, Volkswagen, and Renault)⁶, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature⁷, civil-society groups and state representatives from across the U.S.⁸, and Indigenous groups from Hawai'i, the Pacific at large, and the Arctic⁹ support a moratorium, precautionary pause, or ban on deep-sea mining in international waters. Domestically, California¹⁰, Hawai'i¹¹, Oregon¹², Washington State¹³, Guam¹⁴, and American Samoa¹⁵ have prohibited deep-sea mining in their waters altogether. The U.S. must heed these calls and join the group of like-minded countries and States by supporting a moratorium or precautionary pause both domestically and internationally, thereby sending a strong message of continued U.S. leadership and commitment to precaution and responsible environmental stewardship.

Deep-sea mining poses significant threats to the fragile ecosystems of the deep ocean, which are among the least understood and most vulnerable environments on Earth¹⁶. The extraction of minerals from the seabed can cause irreversible damage to these ecosystems, including the destruction of unique habitats, the loss of biodiversity, and the disruption of ecological functions that are critical to the health of our ocean and the services they provide^{17,18}. According to data collected in an expedition by BOEM, NOAA, and

USGS, deep-sea habitats damaged by deep-sea mining trials 40 years ago off the coast of the Southeast U.S. have demonstrated virtually no recovery^{19 20}.

The environmental impacts of deep-sea mining could also seriously impact commercially significant fisheries, such as tuna. The sediment plumes from the incident sites of deep-sea mining that stretch for hundreds of kilometers put tuna fisheries, and the livelihoods, economies, and well-being of those dependent on tuna, at risk²¹. Additionally, the discharge plume from deep-sea mining contains elevated concentrations of toxic metals that could, through bioaccumulation in tuna and other commercially significant species, contaminate the seafood supply²².

Deep-sea mining could release stored methane and threaten the carbon sequestration abilities of the deep sea, one of our planet's most significant carbon sinks^{23 24}. Given its potential to disrupt the ocean's natural carbon sequestration and biodiversity, deep-sea mining cannot be considered a "climate solution." Strong support for a deep-sea mining moratorium or precautionary pause would reinforce the Biden Administration's climate and biodiversity commitments, such as the French-American Roadmap²⁵, the National Strategy for a Sustainable Ocean Economy²⁶, the National Ocean Biodiversity Strategy²⁷, the Ocean Justice Strategy²⁸, and the Ocean Climate Action Plan²⁹.

Proponents of deep-sea mining often argue that deep-sea mining is necessary to meet the growing demand for critical minerals used in renewable energy technologies and other advanced industries. However, recent studies show that battery innovation is already moving beyond the need for the minerals that deep-sea mining could supply (cobalt, copper, manganese, and nickel). Lithium-iron-phosphate (LFP) and sodium-ion batteries are both increasing in use, and neither use cobalt, copper, manganese, or nickel.³⁰ The International Energy Agency's 2024 Report indicated that "over the last five years, LFP has moved from a minor share to the rising star of the battery industry, supplying more than 40% of EV demand globally by capacity in 2023, more than double the share recorded in 2020"³¹. Increasing numbers of automobile makers have moved to LFP batteries, and Tesla's home storage battery has also transitioned to LFP³². Additionally, advancements in recycling and materials science are reducing the need for virgin mineral resources. The argument that deep-sea mining is essential for securing critical minerals is not only misleading but also ignores the potential for innovation and circular economy approaches to meet our mineral needs without sacrificing the health of our ocean.

Investing in or otherwise providing money to support the development of deep-sea mining is not only an environmental risk but also a financial one. The technology required for deep-sea mining is still in its infancy, and the costs associated with exploration and extraction are prohibitively high. Moreover, the environmental risks, the absence of agreed-upon royalty rates, environmental levies and insurance obligations, and the potential for legal liability and regulatory backlash make deep-sea mining a highly uncertain and risky investment.³³ Companies and governments that pursue deep-sea mining could find themselves facing significant financial losses and reputational damage. The leading "pureplay" deep-sea mining company has struggled to stay solvent, and has, in fact, sought federal grant money from the United States.³⁴ Instead of supporting a speculative and destructive extractive industry, U.S. investment should be directed toward innovation and circular economy development. Banks, investment firms, manufacturers, and insurance agencies have pledged to avoid deep-sea mining financing and investment and exclude it from insurance and reinsurance policies.³⁵ Deep-sea mining is not compatible with sustainable financing principles or a blue economy, according to increasing financial and trade organizations, including the UNEP Finance Initiative³⁶, The UN Conference on Trade and Development,³⁷ and the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Blue Economy.³⁸

President Biden, it is crucial that the United States join the increasing number of leaders advocating for a moratorium on deep-sea mining until comprehensive scientific research can ensure that it will not cause harm to marine ecosystems. The health of our ocean is inextricably linked to the health of our planet and our future. With the Biden Administration placing particular emphasis on environmental justice and frontline communities, we urge you to listen to the Indigenous³⁹ and youth groups⁴⁰ who have been fervently in opposition to deep-sea mining. We echo the calls of the twelve House Democrats who also urge the Biden Administration to support a moratorium or precautionary pause on deep-sea mining⁴¹.

President Biden, this is an opportunity to add to your legacy of positive policies for our planet. By taking decisive action against deep-sea mining, we can safeguard marine ecosystems, support sustainable economic development, reinforce your administration's efforts to accelerate investments and innovation in renewable technologies and a circular economy, and demonstrate global leadership in environmental stewardship.

Sincerely,

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

1. 350 HAWAII
2. 'A'OLE DEEP-SEA MINING
3. AZUL
4. BLUE CLIMATE INITIATIVE
5. CAROLINA OCEAN ALLIANCE
6. CHILLI
7. CREATION JUSTICE MINISTRIES
8. CULTIVATING LIVES EDUCATIONAL SERVICES, INC
9. DEEP SEA CONSERVATION COALITION (DSCC)
10. EARTHECHO INTERNATIONAL
11. EARTHJUSTICE
12. ENVIRONMENT AMERICA
13. FAR AWAY PROJECTS
14. FINAFINAU
15. FRIENDS OF HANAUMA BAY
16. FRIENDS OF THE MARIANA TRENCH
17. FUTURESWELL
18. GOLDWATER VENTURES
19. GREENLATINOS
20. GREENPEACE USA
21. HEALTHY OCEAN COALITION
22. HIVEMIND
23. INLAND OCEAN COALITION

24. KAO CONSULTING
25. KAUAI CLIMATE ACTION COALITION
26. KUA'AINA ULU 'AUAMO (KUA)
27. LÓPEZ-WAGNER STRATEGIES
28. MAUI NUI MAKAI NETWORK
29. MISSION BLUE
30. MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM
31. MYSTIC AQUARIUM
32. NATIONAL AQUARIUM
33. NATIONAL OCEAN PROTECTION COALITION
34. OCEAN CONSERVANCY
35. OCEAN RESCUE ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL
36. OCEAN RIVER INSTITUTE
37. OCEAN UPRISE
38. OCEANA
39. OCEANIC GLOBAL
40. PATAGONIA
41. SEALEGACY
42. SURFRIDER FOUNDATION
43. SUSTAINABLE OCEAN ALLIANCE (SOA)
44. THE OCEAN FOUNDATION
45. THE OCEAN PROJECT
46. THE OXYGEN PROJECT
47. U.S. PIRG
48. WILD CUMBERLAND
49. WISDOM CIRCLES OCEANIA
50. YOUTH CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE

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