National Oceanography Centre, Southampton
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Initiative for International Cooperation in Ridge Crest Studies

INTERRIDGE OFFICE,
NATIONAL OCEANOGRAPHY CENTRE, EUROPEAN WAY
SOUTHAMPTON SO14 3ZH, UK

21st February 2011

To: Jean-Marie Auzende, David Billett, Eusebio Caballero, Miguel Chissano, Laleta Davis-Mattis, Baïdy Diène, Elva Escobar-Briones, Sandor Flores, Kennedy Hamutenya, Said Hussein, Nobuyuki Okamoto, Asif Inam, Emmanuel Kalngui, Woong-Seo Kim, Walter Leitão, Sudhakar Maruthadu, Isikeli Mataitoga, Frida Armas-Pfirter, Andrzej Przybycin, Denis Khramov, Mahmoud Samy, Elena Sciso, Adam Tugio, Christian Reichert and Zhang Haiqi

At the request of the ISA, the InterRidge Office polled members of the international mid-ocean ridge research community to provide details of hydrothermal vent sites that may require protection when considering licence applications for polymetallic sulfide exploration.

The criteria used to identify such sites were: sites of ongoing scientific study, which could be disrupted by exploration activities as defined in the ISA regulations; and sites where exploration activities could pose a risk to the conservation of species, recognising the ISA's responsibilities as a UN body that is also bound by the Convention on Biological Diversity and similar instruments.

Attached is a list of 142 vent sites proposed by members of the InterRidge community for consideration for protection when reviewing exploration licence applications. However, several ecologists working at hydrothermal vents proposed that the entire InterRidge online database of known active vent sites be considered for protection by the ISA, given the currently limited ecological knowledge base from which to predict the impact of exploration activities at specific vent sites.

Furthermore, several respondents suggested that it would be desirable to adopt the principle that all active vent sites, whether currently known or discovered in the future, should be protected until our ecological understanding of these systems is sufficient to ensure responsible management of mineral exploration and exploitation. In addition, it was suggested that mining at active vents - even as part of exploration activities - should be deferred until a full system of conservation plans and environmental oversight is established (as expressed in a *Nature* Commentary by Prof CL Van Dover, attached).

Several members of the international research community also declined to submit details of vent sites for protection without further clarification from the ISA on the details of the

procedures that it will follow to ensure responsible management of exploration activities. Those questions were submitted to the ISA in January 2011 (document attached).

One geologist working at mid-ocean ridges indicated that mining exploration has no impact on their research activities, and highlighted the beneficial relationship that they had established with mining companies in their work.

In conclusion, our polling of InterRidge scientists indicates that several members of the international scientific community working at mid-ocean ridges do not have confidence in the regulations for polymetallic sulfide exploration as described in ISA publications so far, and would like more detail on the actual procedures that will be followed to ensure responsible management of exploration activities and their impact.

We would therefore recommend that the ISA undertakes greater dialogue and engagement with the scientific community to ensure responsible, accountable, and evidence-based management of licensing for the exploration of polymetallic sulfides. The international research community offers a body of expertise that supplements that of the LTC, and we would invite and encourage the ISA to make full use of that resource in its implementation of exploration licensing.

Yours sincerely

Dr Bramley Murton
Chair

Dr Jon Copley
Co-Chair

Accompanying files:

- List of vent sites
- Letter submitted to ISA, January 2011
- Van Dover, C.L. Tighten regulations on deep-sea mining. Nature, 33, Vol 470, 3 February 2011