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**The UNEP Shelf Programme
Coastal States securing their rights to the seabed**

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The UNEP Shelf Programme

Coastal States securing their rights to the seabed

Origins

The Law of the Sea is a collection of international rules and principles developed by States to regulate maritime space, uses and activities. These rules are reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

UNCLOS secures coastal States the right to an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 200 nautical miles. Article 76 of UNCLOS also allows for States to identify the outer limits of their continental shelf where they extend beyond this zone. The UN deadline for early signatories to UNCLOS is 2009. Once submissions are approved, States will be allowed to manage the natural resources of the seabed, as well as below the seabed, up to these outer limits.

Why extend the continental shelf?

While the continental margin possesses both living and non-living resources, it is at present the potential for finding non-living resources that is the main stimulus for governments to properly determine these outer limits according to Article 76 provisions.

Although some States might earn more revenue from harvesting sedentary species such as crabs and oysters from the seabed than from mining, in global terms the value of hydrocarbons and minerals far exceeds the value of sedentary species. It is important to mention that sovereign fishing rights are limited to the EEZ. Future advances in extraction methods are expected to put many of the seabed resources, now inaccessible, within reach. Also, there might be resources (living and non-living) out there that may seem not important now but that might become very valuable in the future. All these marine resources are not endless and need to be managed in an effective and sustainable manner.

What is the UNEP Shelf Programme?

The UNEP Shelf Programme is coordinated by GRID-Arendal in Norway and was established in response to a resolution from the 57th UN General Assembly. This resolution calls upon the United Nations Environment Programme, working within the Global Resource Information Database (GRID) system to serve the needs of coastal States, and in particular developing States and small island developing States, in their compliance with article 76 of the Convention.

The UNEP Shelf Programme is designed to:

- (i) store, handle and facilitate geo-scientific marine research data to support Article 76 submissions;
- (ii) assist in the processing and interpretation of the data;
- (iii) provide in-country Article 76 task forces with access to training and workshops;
- (iv) support the technical and legal foundations of a submission;
- (v) promote the establishment of national/regional/central databanks at the completion of the project;
- (vi) build long-term capacity in information technology as applied to marine science data management and compliance with UNCLOS;
- (vii) raise awareness of the submission process.



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(continued)

The Six Phases

The UNEP Shelf Programme follows six work phases based on the technical steps that make up the Article 76 submission process, namely:

- scanning
- desktop
- data acquisition
- data interpretation
- submission and
- follow-up.

How you can best use our services

The data required for delineating the outer limits of the continental shelf can be extremely expensive to collect. Developing states and SIDS have limited resources with respect to the acquisition of new data required to complete a submission. The UNEP Shelf Programme has therefore developed the One-Stop Data Shop (OSDS) to provide states preparing a submission with easy access to existing marine geo-scientific research data.

Agreements with participating institutions allow for distribution of data to states on a request basis. The OSDS collects digital data (eg, multi-beam bathymetry and seismic data) and provides a service for the handling of analogue data, including seismic reflection and refraction datasets. Metadata and navigational tracklines from international marine surveys are freely available for interpretation and project planning. The OSDS has enabled the UNEP Shelf Programme to complete a first pass scanning study of all relevant coastal states to determine which states are likely to be most interested in pursuing the submission process.

At the request of a client state, the UNEP Shelf Programme provides information and advice on:

- all aspects of marine geophysical data;
- the associated tendering process to secure the gathering of data necessary to complete the submission;
- identifying funding opportunities.

