

"Deep sea mining and the EU's Raw Materials Initiative"

Keynote speech by Director-General Lowri Evans

Deep sea mining – Multi-stakeholder conference

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The EU Raw Materials Initiative

Ladies and gentlemen, let me start by stressing how important raw materials are. Secure and sustainable access to raw materials is a critical factor for the competitiveness of the EU economy, contributing to boost jobs and growth. And the increasing digitalisation of our economy increases our dependence on minerals and metals by the day.

We launched the Raw Materials Initiative in 2008 and reinforced it in 2011.

The Raw Materials Initiative is based on three equally important pillars:

- Fair and sustainable supply of raw materials from global markets.
- Fostering sustainable supply within the EU to set up the framework conditions to boost the supply from EU primary sources;
- Boosting resource efficiency and promoting recycling.

Primary resources versus resource efficiency

This third pillar is a major concern to all of us here today.

We should do more to promote resource efficiency. And we're doing it. To cover the demand for raw materials in our global modern society we need to move from a linear to a more circular economy. But we will also continue to need primary raw materials.

Let me elaborate on this.

The idea is that by boosting overall resource efficiency and recycling, the consumption of primary raw materials can be reduced.

Today, the circular use of raw materials in the economy remains relatively low. Recycling input rates for a number of bulk metals, such as iron and copper, stand between 30 and 10 per cent. However, if we look at the recycling rates of some critical raw materials the figure drops to less than 1%.

There is no doubt that more needs to be done, and more will be done.

It is why we have developed the Circular Economy Package, which aims at stimulating the internal market for secondary raw materials and increasing recycling.

We have presented ambitious recycling targets of 65% for municipal waste and 75% for packaging waste in 2030 and measures to increase recycling and phase-out the landfill of recoverable waste.

To tackle the challenge of critical raw materials, the Circular Economy Action Plan includes:

- promoting industry-led voluntary certification of waste treatment facilities;
- development of quality standards for secondary raw materials;
- improving the exchange of information between manufacturers and recyclers on electronic products;
- and sharing of best practice for the recovery of critical raw materials from mining waste and landfills.

BUT – demand for raw materials by far exceeds the amount of materials that can be supplied from recycling, and this will remain the case in the next decades.

Global demand for raw materials will increase as a consequence of growth in developing countries. The United Nations projects world population to reach 8.5 billion by 2030.

Even in a perfect circular economy primary production of raw materials will remain necessary.

Deep sea mining as a potential source of primary supply

As the Commission has set out in the Blue Growth Strategy, deep sea mining is a future option for primary supply for the increasing global economy. There are good arguments for the EU to be positioned in that global picture.

Increasing demand in combination with a scarcity of some materials have triggered renewed attention for the possibilities of exploiting deep sea resources.

Many countries, including Russia, Korea, China, Japan, India, Brazil, and some EU Member States, notably France, Germany, Belgium and the United Kingdom are positioning themselves as global players and have permits for exploration. Both public entities and the private sector are involved.

The International Seabed Authority has issued Regulations on Prospecting and Exploration for Polymetallic Nodules, Polymetallic and Cobalt-Rich Crusts and is developing the legal framework for exploitation. Exploration contracts have been signed with 24 contractors.

The first group of exploration contracts issued by the Authority will come to an end between March 2016 and March 2017, with the expectation that by then some of the contractors involved would be in a position to move to exploitation.

European companies are well positioned to provide high-quality products and services at a global scale.

The EU has some of the highest environmental and social standards and regulations for mining operations, and can have an important role to contribute to the implementation of a robust regulatory framework.

We also need to bear in mind the close link with the work being undertaken in preparation of a new UNCLOS implementing agreement on Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction where the Commission is working closely with the Member States.

Let me add that as of today, it appears likely that the first exploitation may come about on the continental shelves, that come under national jurisdiction.

Raw Materials and Horizon 2020

Let me tell you briefly about how the Horizon2020 programme contributes to the EU strategy to tackle the sustainable and secure supply of raw materials.

With the Horizon2020 programme we fund research and innovation both on technology and non-technology projects for primary and secondary raw materials, covering the entire value chain.

16 countries - 15 EU Member States and Norway - are involved in research projects.

A substantial part of the funded projects is on deep sea mining, covering both environmental and technology topics.

Looking at the future, it is important continue to support research that may contribute to increase the knowledge of the deep sea minerals and of the related environmental systems.

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NGOs have a key role to play in facilitating a dialogue on the environmental implications of deep sea mining. I would like to congratulate you for today's initiative. Please carry on the good work worldwide.

Thank you.