Global Fishing Watch and Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory launch Deep-Sea Mining Watch

The new global transparency tool will empower governments, researchers and civil society to monitor vessels involved in deep-sea mineral exploration

WASHINGTON, D.C., United States — Global Fishing Watch, an international nonprofit organization advancing ocean governance through transparency of human activity at sea, and the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, have unveiled an upgraded open-access portal designed to bring unprecedented transparency to vessels engaged in emerging mineral exploration in the depths of the ocean, the two organizations today announced.

The new and improved Deep-Sea Mining Watch provides a dynamic view of vessel activity linked to seabed mineral exploration, allowing users to monitor the movements of vessels historically, or currently, engaged in mineral-related activities; explore data by region, timeframe and vessel speed; overlay exploration patterns with Global Fishing Watch data, such as fishing effort, to analyze interactions between ocean industries; and visualize International Seabed Authority (ISA) license areas, reserved zones and areas protected from deep-sea mining.

"The deep ocean has long been a black box for human activity," explained Dr. Douglas McCauley, director of the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory. "Deep-Sea Mining Watch provides the first global window into one of the planet's last industrial frontiers. By adapting the same Global Fishing Watch technology that transformed transparency in global fisheries, anyone — from scientists to policymakers to citizens — can see where vessels linked to deep-sea mineral activity are operating, helping bring accountability to a nascent industry."

Built using Global Fishing Watch's unique technology, Deep-Sea Mining Watch gathers data from a vessel's automatic identification system (AIS) — a GPS-like device that large vessels use to broadcast their position, along with key information such as identity, location, speed and course. By cross-referencing vessel tracks with exploration areas and timeframes, the portal can highlight when and where vessels may be engaged in mineral-related activities and provide invaluable insights for stakeholders. The tool currently highlights activity of more than 40 vessels known to engage in deep-sea mineral-related activities while overlaying more than 30 exploration areas in the high seas alongside countries' exclusive economic zones.

"Data is power," Dr. McCauley continued. "And Deep-Sea Mining Watch puts data and power back in people's hands: whether you are a tuna cannery in American Samoa concerned about mining vessels dumping pollution onto your tuna fishing grounds; a data center manager

interested in the risk mining poses to submarine cables; a Native Hawaiian concerned about overlap with canoe voyaging routes; or an environmentalist interested in how noise pollution from mining affects endangered whales."

"Through Deep-Sea Mining Watch, we can now illuminate emerging mining operations thousands of meters below the surface — offering the world a shared, factual view of how we're beginning to explore and exploit the last untouched parts of our planet," he added.

Deep-sea mining: a 'new gold rush'

Deep-sea mining is currently in its infancy. To date, no commercial exploitation licenses have been granted. Nevertheless, deep-sea exploration efforts are already underway. The ISA — the United Nations-mandated body responsible for managing mineral-related activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction — has granted exploration licenses for more than 1.5 million square kilometres of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

"The global race for minerals has set off a modern-day gold rush into the depths of our ocean. Mineral-rich regions of the ocean floor, such as abyssal plains, hydrothermal vents and seamounts, contain cobalt, nickel, copper and manganese, among other minerals," explained Dr. Diva Amon, science advisor at the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory. "However, these ecosystems are also among the most fragile and least understood on Earth. Mining will result in biodiversity loss and habitat loss, and could disrupt important functions such as deep-sea carbon storage, climate regulation and fisheries."

Noting that Deep-Sea Mining Watch was designed for use by a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations such as the ISA, national governments, researchers, journalists, civil society and industry, Dr. Amon voiced hope that the tool would also foster "transparent dialogue about the sustainable management of the deep seabed."

"By making exploration activities visible to all, Deep-Sea Mining Watch supports greater accountability and can help the world understand what's at stake as industry interest in the deep seabed grows," she added.

Making ocean transparency the 'norm'

Against that backdrop, the growing scrutiny over human activity in the global ocean has made transparency, and the tools that seek to achieve it, a central pillar in addressing concerns around oversight, accountability and good ocean governance.

"Transparency is essential to understanding how human activity is expanding into the deep ocean and what impacts it will have on the marine environment. We need to make it the norm when it comes to ocean governance," said Global Fishing Watch chief innovation officer Paul Woods. "By leveraging Global Fishing Watch's unique technology, Deep-Sea Mining Watch can now support informed decision-making and promote accountability in the rapidly developing deep-sea mining sector."

With a long-standing commitment to transparency, Global Fishing Watch's collaboration with the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory on Deep-Sea Mining Watch aligns with the organization's mandate to deliver oversight to all industrial human activity in the global ocean, Mr. Woods continued. Indeed, the organization's open ocean project, slated for completion in 2030, will unveil an enhanced public map revealing the activities of more than a million ocean-going vessels, including the entire global commercial fishing and shipping fleets and hundreds of thousands of smaller fishing vessels, as well as tens of thousands of offshore structures, shining a light on offshore oil drilling and other maritime activities. The goal, Mr. Woods said, is "to revolutionize ocean governance, making transparency and accountability the new normal."

"The ocean seabed beyond national jurisdictions belongs to all humanity under international law, and transparency is how we ensure that this vast resource is managed for the common good," concluded Mr. Woods.

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About Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory

The Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory is a leading center for marine science and innovation based at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The lab researches emerging ocean threats — from plastic pollution to climate change to deep-sea mining — and translates science into solutions for policymakers, industry and society. Its expertise helps highlight the environmental risks and governance challenges of deep-sea mining.

About Global Fishing Watch

Global Fishing Watch is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing ocean governance through increased transparency of human activity at sea. By creating and publicly sharing map visualizations, data and analysis tools, we aim to enable scientific research and transform the way our ocean is managed. We believe human activity at sea should be public knowledge in order to safeguard the global ocean for the common good of all.