

PHILIPPINE STATEMENT ON NAMING OF UNDERSEA FEATURES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

The Philippines recalls that at SCUFN-35 (2022) there were discussions on whether naming proposals for undersea features in the South China Sea (SCS) should be considered in view of the claim of political sensitivity under Rules of Procedure (ROP) 2.10.

Following established procedures and considering its mandate to standardize names of undersea features in international waters, SCUFN proceeded to consider and approve those naming proposals in the SCS. (SCUFN35.1/237b, and SCUFN35.1/167c).

However, at SCUFN-36 (2023), SCUFN by a vote of 7-5 decided “to freeze” the SCS for naming proposals until a joint proposal on the way forward is submitted by all interested parties under ROP 2.10. (SCUFN36/04.6/01)

The Philippines recognizes the important mandate of the IHO-IOC GEBCO to provide the most authoritative publicly-available bathymetry of the ocean. And this mandate is facilitated by the duty of GEBCO’s SCUFN to standardize names of undersea features in international waters, that is, outside the external limits of the territorial sea, for use on GEBCO products, IHO International charts, and regional IBC series.

The Philippines values the significant contributions of GEBCO and SCUFN to the world, particularly in advancing our knowledge of the ocean for present and future generations. Indeed, the Philippines, through its National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA), has recently joined efforts to map the entire ocean floor under the Nippon Foundation-GEBCO Seabed 2030 Project.

The Philippines reaffirms the primacy of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the constitution of the ocean that governs and provides the comprehensive legal framework within which all activities in the ocean and seas must be carried out.

The Philippines is of the view that SCUFN must be allowed to continue with considering the names proposed by all States for undersea features in international waters, including in their legally-settled EEZ or continental shelf within the limits provided under UNCLOS, and approve the same based purely on the technical and scientific merits in line with international rules and standards, and the SCUFN Guidelines for the Standardization of Undersea Feature Names.

Therefore, the Philippines urges SCUFN to urgently lift the freeze of the SCS, and resume with considering and approving naming proposals for undersea features in the international waters in the SCS as this would be in line with the UNCLOS, the mandates of GEBCO and SCUFN, and the interest of the international community as a whole. **(END)**