

**A Seabed Scramble:
Overlapping Outer Continental Shelf Entitlements, their Resource Potential and their
Resolution**

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Abstract

Early 2009 saw a flurry of submissions of information on proposed outer continental shelf limits to the relevant specialist body, the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). It is evident that many of these submissions overlap with one another where neighbouring States are located on shared continental margins, thereby giving rise to multiple ‘new’ outer continental shelf boundaries and, it would appear, potential outer continental shelf boundary disputes.

This paper provides a global overview of ‘outer’ continental shelf full submissions and submissions of preliminary information through a series of full colour graphic compilations. Areas of overlapping outer continental shelf entitlements and potential conflicts are then highlighted with particular reference to the potential seabed hydrocarbons potential of the areas concerned. As development of the resources of the outer continental shelf is likely to be constrained by jurisdictional complexities, the paper concludes with some considerations concerning developing State practice in the delimitation and governance of outer continental shelf areas.

In this context it is worth emphasising that the Commission is a scientific rather than legal body that lacks the mandate to resolve sovereignty and maritime disputes such as overlapping claims to outer continental shelf areas. Moreover, the Commission’s recommendations are specifically without prejudice to the delimitation of maritime boundaries. Fundamentally, the Commission is concerned with determining the outer limit of the continental shelf, rather than dividing areas of outer continental shelf between neighbouring States. Ultimately, therefore, it remains up to the submitting states themselves to address and resolve any overlaps between submissions and maritime disputes arising from these overlaps.