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FISHERIES AND THE BBNJ AGREEMENT

A GUIDE

The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)

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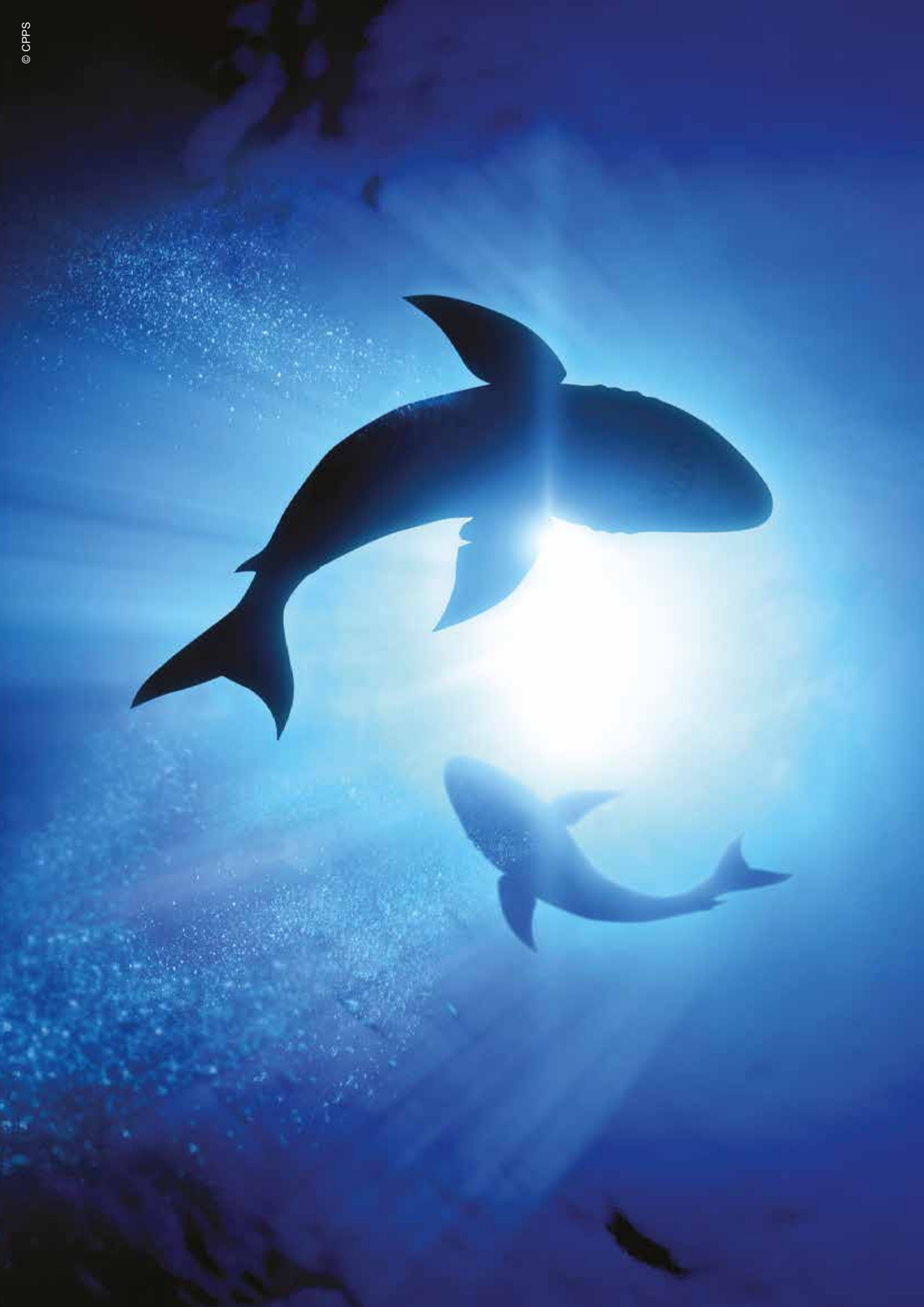
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ABBREVIATIONS

ABMT	area-based management tool
ABNJ	areas beyond national jurisdiction
AquaGRIS	Aquatic Genetic Resources Information System
BBNJ	biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction
CCAMLR	Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBTMT	capacity-building and transfer of marine technology
CHM	Clearing-House Mechanism
COFI	FAO Committee on Fisheries
COP	Conference of the Parties
DSF	deep-sea fisheries
DSI	digital sequence information
EAF	ecosystem approach to fisheries
EBSA	ecologically or biologically significant marine area
EIA	environmental impact assessment
FAIR	findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FIRMS	Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System
ICC	Implementation and Compliance Committee
IFBs	relevant legal instruments and frameworks, and global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies
LDC	least developed countries
MCS	monitoring, control, and surveillance
MGR	marine genetic resource
OECM	other effective area-based conservation measure
PSMA	Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing
RFB	regional fishery body
RFAB	regional fisheries advisory body
RFMO	regional fisheries management organization
RSN	Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network
SEA	strategic environmental assessment
SIDS	small island developing states
SPRFMO	South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
STB	scientific and technical body
TK	traditional knowledge
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
VME	vulnerable marine ecosystem

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) sets up a global framework to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity in ocean areas beyond countries' exclusive economic zones. It will not create fisheries management measures or undermine existing mandates, but it will influence how fisheries operate in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ).

The BBNJ Agreement introduces new processes that will intersect with fisheries governance, often requiring data, knowledge, consultation, and technical input from national, regional and global fisheries bodies. This guide seeks to clarify how fisheries intersect with the evolving framework of the BBNJ Agreement and to show how fisheries expertise can contribute constructively to biodiversity governance in the ABNJ.

FAO supports its Members to align their practices with international commitments, while safeguarding the long-term productivity of fisheries and marine ecosystems. Fisheries bodies have decades of science, management, and compliance experience. Their active participation in the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement will improve coherence, avoid duplication, and build a governance system where biodiversity conservation and sustainable fisheries complement and strengthen each other. This guide provides fisheries managers, agencies and stakeholders with a common reference point and practical next steps to help them engage proactively with the processes of the BBNJ Agreement.

The BBNJ Agreement is an opportunity for fisheries to demonstrate leadership, and to share tools, knowledge and experiences of managing activities in ABNJ.







WHAT IS THE BBNJ AGREEMENT?

The BBNJ Agreement is a landmark global framework that was adopted in 2023 after nearly two decades of negotiations, it represents a major step forward in establishing a science-based, precautionary, and ecosystem-based approach to conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ. The BBNJ Agreement aims to ensure conservation and sustainable use of marine resources in ABNJ by closing key governance gaps across almost two-thirds of the planet's oceans.

As the first cross-sectoral ocean treaty in decades, since the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, the BBNJ Agreement responds to the increasing pressure of human activity in marine waters. The need to develop the BBNJ Agreement originated from a 2004 UN General Assembly resolution (UNGA, 2003) identifying conservation of biodiversity in ABNJ as a critical governance gap. After preparatory discussions and formal negotiations from 2018 to 2023, informed by science and broad stakeholder engagement, the BBNJ Agreement was adopted on 19 June 2023.

The BBNJ Agreement is designed to strengthen cooperation between global, regional and sectoral organizations. It is the third major agreement developed under UNCLOS, alongside the Agreement relating to the Implementation of Part XI of UNCLOS (UN, 1994), which governs mineral exploration and exploitation in the ABNJ deep seabed, and the Fish Stocks Agreement, which covers the conservation and management of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. The BBNJ Agreement also builds on the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which extends to marine areas (CBD, 1992).

Considered a historic milestone for ocean stewardship, the BBNJ Agreement has various implications for fisheries, offering the opportunity to strengthen conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, on which many fish stocks, associated species and related ecosystems depend on for their long-term survival and resilience. For the fisheries world, the BBNJ Agreement opens pathways to a more integrated and cooperative system of ocean governance, where biodiversity conservation is one of the key contributors to sustainable fisheries in ABNJ. It should be noted that the BBNJ Agreement in itself, is not a fisheries management treaty, nor can it be considered a “High Seas treaty” as it covers not only the high seas (water column in ABNJ), but also the seabed in ABNJ¹.

¹ The scope of the BBNJ Agreement covers both the high seas i.e. the water column in ABNJ, and also the seabed and subsoil in ABNJ, which is known as the “Area” according with the UNCLOS.

In September 2025, the BBNJ Agreement reached the required number of ratifications, triggering its entry into force on 17 January 2026. Interested countries are now assessing their legal and institutional frameworks to ensure the enabling framework is in place and building institutional capacity for effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.

The cooperative and cross-sectoral approaches under the BBNJ Agreement offer the opportunity for fisheries bodies to position themselves as key actors and champions of ocean stewardship, describing their long-standing role in ocean governance, and demonstrating that sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation can advance together.

BOX 1. A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY: “REGIONAL FISHERIES BODIES”, “FISHERIES BODIES” AND BBNJ “RELEVANT INSTRUMENTS, FRAMEWORKS AND BODIES”

In the context of this guide, regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) and regional fisheries advisory bodies (RFABs) are collectively referred to as regional fishery bodies (RFBs).

The term **“fisheries bodies”** is used broadly to encompass the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – including the FAO Committee on Fisheries, COFI – as well as RFBs and national fisheries authorities, reflecting their complementary roles in *fisheries governance* at global, regional, and national levels.

Within the framework of the BBNJ Agreement, global, regional and sub-regional bodies (from fisheries and other sectors) are recognized as “relevant legal instruments and frameworks, and global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies” (IFBs). These IFBs may be consulted, engaged, or coordinated with to ensure that their respective mandates are respected and not undermined.

THE BBNJ AGREEMENT'S FOUR FOCUS AREAS

The BBNJ Agreement structures its operational framework around four interconnected focus areas outlined below, creating a roadmap for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ while providing clear opportunities for fisheries engagement.

AREA-BASED MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Part III of the BBNJ Agreement sets up a process to establish area-based management tools (ABMTs), including marine protected areas, in ABNJ. The process requires ABMTs to be developed within a science-based, participatory framework that aligns with UNCLOS, complements regional and sectoral arrangements, and the identification of ecologically or biologically significant areas (EBSAs) under the CBD. Parties must consult relevant bodies when proposing, reviewing, and designating ABMTs. The BBNJ Agreement also provides a pathway for recognising existing spatial management tools as ABMTs. By fostering cross-sectoral coordination and integrated management, ABMTs can act as practical tools for delivering ecosystem-based fisheries management.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Part IV of the BBNJ Agreement requires environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and strategic environmental assessments (SEAs) for activities in ABNJ that may cause significant adverse effects. These provisions, consistent with the precautionary principle, introduce a structured framework that builds on UNCLOS by addressing cumulative and transboundary impacts, encouraging the use of traditional knowledge, and ensuring public availability of EIA reports through the Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM).

CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRANSFER OF MARINE TECHNOLOGY

Part V underlines the importance of capacity building and transfer of marine technology (CBTMT) in enabling all states, especially developing countries, small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs), to engage in conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. The BBNJ Agreement promotes partnerships between states, international organizations such as FAO and RFMOs, and the private sector to deliver training, equipment, and technical support tailored to national needs. It emphasises scientific cooperation, infrastructure development, and the findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable (FAIR) data principles. These provisions aim to reduce disparities in technology, scientific capacity and participation in monitoring and governance. It will utilise the CHM to match capacity needs with potential donors and technology providers, although detailed criteria and procedures are still to be developed.

MARINE GENETIC RESOURCES

Part II of the BBNJ Agreement creates the first multilateral framework addressing access to marine genetic resources (MGR) in ABNJ, as well as the sharing of benefits from their use, including through digital sequence information. It closes a longstanding gap in ocean governance. Parties must share monetary and non-monetary benefits, enabling fairer access for developing states while promoting open science and transparent data use. Implementation is guided by the Access and Benefit-Sharing Committee and the CHM, which oversee notification and data exchange. The approach aims to stimulate innovation while safeguarding equity, recognising the growing scientific and economic value of marine genetic resources in fields from pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals to ecosystem restoration. Building on the principles of the CBD and Nagoya Protocol, the Agreement extends access, benefit-sharing and traceability rules to marine genetic resources in the international waters, promoting cooperation and ensuring that developing states can participate fully in marine research.

INSTITUTIONAL BODIES

The BBNJ Agreement establishes an institutional structure to support its implementation and oversight. The Conference of the Parties (COP) will act as the main decision-making body, meeting regularly to adopt decisions and establish subsidiary bodies (formal groups that support the COP). It will also review implementation and promote cooperation and coordination with relevant international frameworks and bodies, including RFMOs and FAO.

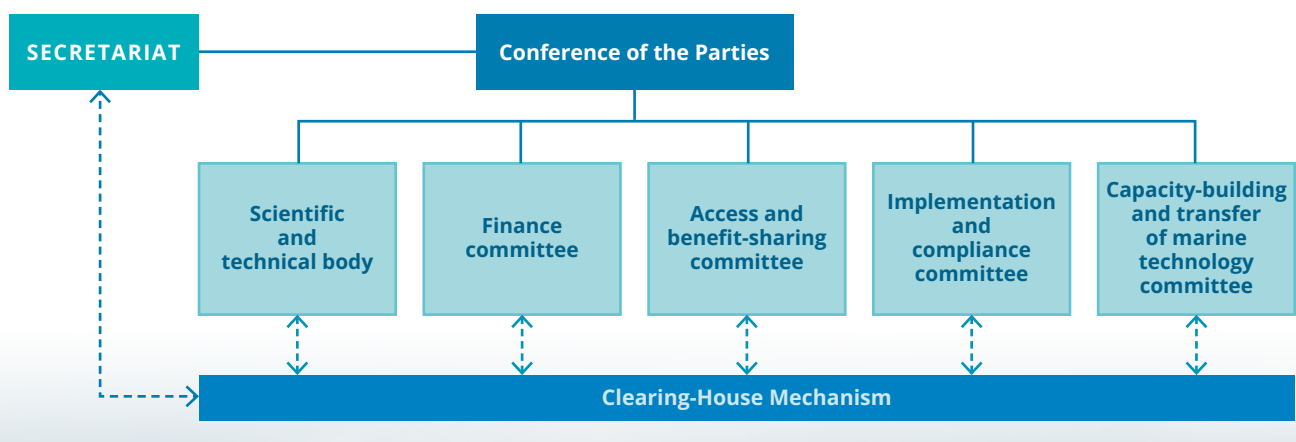
Five subsidiary bodies are to be established under the BBNJ Agreement to support the COP:

- » **Access and benefit-sharing committee** – Provides guidance on access procedures, benefit-sharing modalities, and monitoring practices to support the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilisation of marine genetic resources.
- » **Capacity-building and transfer of marine technology committee** (CBTMT Committee) – Oversees implementation of capacity-building and technology transfer initiatives, ensuring they are effective, country-driven, needs-based, and promote equitable participation of developing states.
- » **Finance committee** – Advises the COP on financial matters, including budget development, funding allocations, and mobilisation of financial resources to support the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement.
- » **Implementation and compliance committee** (ICC) – Supports implementation and promotes compliance by reviewing national reports, identifying challenges, and facilitating non-punitive, cooperative approaches to address implementation gaps.

» **Scientific and technical body (STB)** – Provides scientific assessments, technical advice, and peer review of relevant submissions, to ensure that COP decisions are informed by best available science and technical understanding.

In addition, the CHM will function as an open-access digital platform to facilitate information exchange, ensuring transparency and linking requests for assistance and capacity building with potential providers.

FIGURE 1. Institutional bodies of the BBNJ Agreement



BOX 2. FISHERIES BODIES AND MECHANISMS AS IFBS

The BBNJ Agreement requires cooperation with relevant legal instruments and frameworks, and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies (IFBs). The BBNJ Agreement does not define the criteria for IFBs. However, it can be inferred that IFBs with a mandate or competence in matters relating to ABNJ should fall within the scope of the BBNJ Agreement. Accordingly, FAO and relevant FAO instruments, frameworks and bodies, as well as regional and subregional fisheries instruments, frameworks and bodies are IFBs for the purposes of the BBNJ Agreement.

There are over fifty RFBs with diverse roles, mandates and memberships, including twenty-two RFMOs. These RFBs develop, implement and are supported by many binding and non-binding measures and instruments for the management and conservation of multijurisdictional fisheries. Additionally, there are also global fisheries bodies, instruments and frameworks such as FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) and its sub-committees, which has 125 members. Under the auspices of FAO, legally binding instruments have been adopted such as the Agreement on Port States Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA) and the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas (Compliance Agreement). Non-binding instruments adopted under FAO include the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas.

By engaging proactively, these IFBs will ensure that the BBNJ Agreement builds on existing fisheries governance, upholds mandates, and contributes to coherent, mutually supportive ocean governance. Engagement should emphasise coordination, consultation, and co-creation to ensure biodiversity measures are complementary to existing fisheries governance.



HOW DOES THE BBNJ AGREEMENT INTERSECT WITH FISHERIES?

Approximately 11 million tonnes are caught by fisheries per year in the ABNJ. The majority (approximately 70 percent) are tunas, bonitos, billfishes and elasmobranchs taken from the epipelagic zone. The largest fisheries occur in the Western Central Pacific, Northeast Atlantic and Southeast Pacific. Approximately 5 percent of the global catch from the ABNJ is not covered by existing RFMO mandates or arrangements, mostly in the southern Atlantic (FAO, 2025a).

The BBNJ Agreement introduces new processes and obligations for states regarding activities in the ABNJ. While it does not create fisheries management measures, it intersects with fisheries in multiple ways. Where conflict, ambiguity or overlapping jurisdictions arise, the BBNJ Agreement makes clear that it does not supersede existing IFBs, however it is silent on how the primacy of the existing IFBs will work in practice ([Box 2](#)).

The processes for implementing the BBNJ Agreement are still under development, including modalities (methods) for EIAs, ABMTs, CBTMT, and institutional coordination. Active engagement by fisheries bodies in shaping these processes can help ensure that emerging procedures are coherent with existing fisheries frameworks, technically accessible, and respectful of sectoral mandates.

Fisheries bodies bring well-established systems of data collection, scientific expertise, and compliance mechanisms that are highly relevant to the BBNJ Agreement. Their stock assessments, management strategy evaluations, spatial management experience, and monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) tools provide established models for evidence-based decision-making in ABNJ. These contributions are not limited to single processes. They underpin how fisheries can support ABMTs, EIAs, CBTMT and institutional cooperation. Sustained engagement from fisheries bodies will be essential, to ensure that their science, practices, and operational realities are consistently reflected as the BBNJ Agreement is implemented.

At the same time, fisheries governance often operates under rules of confidentiality and carefully negotiated access to sensitive data, particularly on catch and vessel activity. Engagement with BBNJ processes needs to enable selective, reciprocal information exchange. CBTMT are cross-cutting enablers and fisheries bodies can act as both providers and beneficiaries, offering training and sharing tools, while also accessing support that strengthens their own institutions. Taken together, these common features frame how fisheries can interact constructively with all aspects of the BBNJ Agreement.

Alongside fisheries bodies, the perspectives of fishers and the fishing industry are crucial to achieving the objectives of the BBNJ Agreement. Their meaningful involvement brings practical knowledge of spatial patterns, trends and impacts, and also ensures that biodiversity measures are effective and reflect operational realities.

This section outlines where intersections between the BBNJ Agreement and fisheries may occur, and how fisheries institutions, particularly RFBs and relevant national authorities can contribute to, and benefit from, the BBNJ Agreement's implementation. Understanding and engaging with these linkages is important to ensure that emerging biodiversity governance under the BBNJ Agreement is coherent with existing fisheries mandates, promotes sustainable use of marine resources, and upholds inclusive participation. It also presents opportunities to strengthen cross-sectoral coordination, enhance environmental outcomes, and improve access to knowledge, technology, and capacity development.

AREA-BASED MANAGEMENT TOOLS

What is an ABMT and how does it intersect with fisheries?

ABMTs are spatially explicit regulatory, or management measures applied within a defined marine area to manage human activities for objectives such as biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource use, conflict mitigation, and cultural preservation. ABMTs operationalise area-based management within governance frameworks and can include marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), such as fisheries closures, protections for vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs), area-based seasonal or gear restrictions, and community-managed areas.

The BBNJ Agreement seeks to facilitate the identification, designation, and effective management of ABMTs, using ABMTs to protect, restore, and maintain marine biodiversity while supporting food security and socioeconomic and cultural values in ABNJ. While ABMTs under the BBNJ Agreement would not be established for fisheries management purposes (as the mandate for fisheries management remains with other frameworks and bodies), they could have implications for fisheries, depending on the measures introduced for the area. In regions where no RFMO or other fisheries body with recognized functional competence exists, the implementation of ABMTs under the BBNJ Agreement may indirectly result in the regulation of fisheries activities to achieve biodiversity outcomes. In such cases, the BBNJ Agreement may play a more prominent role in shaping measures that affect fishing, particularly where no alternative governance framework is in place.

New ABMTs under the BBNJ Agreement may also deliver beneficial side effects for fisheries. Well-designed ABMTs in ABNJ can enhance ecosystem resilience, rebuild stocks, and sustain ecosystem services, aligning conservation with long-term fisheries viability. ABMTs could also serve as a potential entry-point to bringing spatial considerations into fisheries management plans, in accordance with the ecosystem approach to fisheries.

Spatial management approaches (for example area closures) used within fisheries management could also be recognized as ABMTs under the BBNJ Agreement ([Box 3](#)).

Fisheries bodies and the BBNJ Agreement must cooperate to ensure that institutional processes allow adequate time and modalities for input, particularly in areas where proposed ABMTs overlap with RFMO mandates. Fisheries bodies can also offer spatial data, practical experience of enforcement and experience around designing, implementing and management of ABMTs.

Why should fisheries bodies engage in the processes on ABMTs?

Details on the implementation of ABMT provisions under the BBNJ Agreement are still being developed, including the criteria and consultation processes for the establishment of ABMTs. Engagement in BBNJ Agreement ABMT processes lets national fisheries authorities shape ABMT site selection and governance while ensuring stakeholders, including small-scale fishing communities, are duly consulted, safeguarding social and economic values as biodiversity objectives advance under BBNJ.

Ministries can gain access to capacity-building, technology transfer, and data-sharing opportunities under BBNJ, supporting the development of national MCS capabilities. This enables improved oversight of fishing activities in areas adjacent to or beyond national jurisdiction, supporting effective ABMT implementation while strengthening national MCS systems.

Participation in BBNJ ABMT discussions allows national authorities to demonstrate how existing fisheries spatial measures contribute to biodiversity outcomes, ensuring that fisheries management measures are recognized within global conservation targets ensuring food security and livelihoods.



BOX 3. SCIENTIFIC PATHWAYS FOR INTEGRATING FISHERIES MEASURES INTO ABMTS

The CBD EBSA process and FAO OECM guidance provide procedural and scientific references for BBNJ ABMT processes.

The EBSA process offers a tested, inclusive, and science-driven approach to identifying ecologically and biologically significant areas, which can support the prioritisation of sites for ABMTs under BBNJ. EBSAs are not management measures, but they provide a scientific foundation that ministries and RFMOs can use to align spatial conservation priorities with sustainable fisheries management. The FAO OECM guidance (FAO, 2022a) offers practical steps to identify and assess fisheries-related area measures that contribute to biodiversity goals while supporting sustainable use.

Together, EBSAs and the FAO OECM framework provide structured, science based pathways to align existing fisheries measures with global conservation targets, without undermining fisheries governance.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

What are EIAs and how do they intersect with fisheries?

EIAs are structured processes to evaluate and manage the potential impacts of large-scale activities on the environment, biodiversity and ecosystems before authorisation. EIA requirements operationalize the precautionary principle, use best-available science, and rely on consultation to address cumulative and transboundary effects. Under the BBNJ Agreement, EIAs are required for new or expanding activities in ABNJ that may cause significant environmental harm, aligning with UNCLOS obligations. They introduce procedures for screening, consultation, and public participation, building on international and regional practice that embed EIAs in marine governance.

Activities are exempted from an EIA under the BBNJ Agreement if an equivalent procedure has been completed under another IFB, such as an RFMO. Although the term EIA is not regularly used by most RFMOs, a number of RFMOs do require formal, risk-based, impact assessments for new or expanding fisheries, or changes to bottom fishing footprints. Other global, regional and national fisheries instruments and guidelines also contain EIA principles and related mechanisms (e.g. risk assessments), and whether these are equivalent will be an important consideration as the standards and guidelines under the BBNJ Agreement are developed and implemented.

EIAs under the BBNJ Agreement are likely to trigger cross-sectoral coordination and require fisheries bodies to provide data and information to EIA processes. The benefit is that it will facilitate consultation with fisheries bodies by other expanding sectors and ensure that impacts of non-fisheries activities on marine ecosystems that support fisheries, such as impacting fishing grounds or migratory routes, are assessed.

Why should fisheries bodies engage in processes on EIAs?

EIA obligations do not extend to the activities mandated to RFBs. The BBNJ Agreement recognizes equivalent processes, providing an opportunity for RFBs to demonstrate the value of their existing monitoring and risk assessment frameworks. However, when standards for EIAs under the BBNJ Agreement are developed, they may influence expectations for how new or expanding fisheries in ABNJ are assessed, particularly in regions without formalised evaluation procedures. There may be increased scrutiny of fisheries environmental impacts and growing expectations that fisheries-related assessments align with emerging standards and cross-sectoral coherence.

Engaging in the development of the BBNJ EIA standards and procedures will enhance the understanding of established systems, reduce duplication, and facilitate coherent governance. Fisheries bodies bring experience with management measures to mitigate potential environmental harm caused by fishing, including bycatch reduction, gear modifications, and spatial closures. Involvement offers an opportunity to showcase sectoral best practices such as the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) exploratory fisheries protocols or South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) cumulative impact assessments. This demonstrates that sustainable fisheries management can complement and enhance marine biodiversity conservation. For developing states, engagement may provide access to capacity-building initiatives, including training, data systems, and institutional support.

Fisheries bodies stand to benefit from engaging in BBNJ EIA processes, which offer improved environmental oversight through the early evaluation of proposed activities and associated risks in ABNJ. Fisheries bodies can support cross-sectoral coordination by engaging with EIAs for activities such as mining, shipping, or cable-laying, to ensure that cumulative effects are considered and fisheries interests are safeguarded. EIAs support evidence-based decision-making by requiring the integration of best available science and enhance transparency with formal consultation mechanisms. Engagement will ensure access to information shared through the CHM, improving transparency and awareness of planned activities in ABNJ.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRANSFER OF MARINE TECHNOLOGY

What is CBTMT and how does it intersect with fisheries?

As one of the four elements of the BBNJ Agreement, the provision for CBTMT aims to support the equitable participation of all states, particularly developing countries, SIDS and LDCs, in the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. It is designed to enhance their ability to contribute meaningfully to BBNJ Agreement implementation by strengthening scientific, technical, and institutional capacity. This includes engagement in ABMT designation, EIA procedures, and other governance processes.

A central objective is to expand access to tools, data, training, and knowledge needed for marine research, monitoring, and decision-making. The BBNJ Agreement underscores that technology transfer must be fair, transparent, and tailored to the specific, self-identified needs of countries, especially SIDS and LDCs, ensuring equity in implementation.

CBTMT operates across sectors, reinforcing coherence in ocean governance and complementing existing obligations under UNCLOS. It plays a vital role in promoting compliance, supporting evidence-informed decisions, and building the infrastructure required for effective marine biodiversity governance. Fisheries bodies are key contributors and beneficiaries, given their technical expertise, data systems, and capacity for regional coordination.

CBTMT intersects with fisheries by:

- » Building institutional and scientific capacity by enabling fisheries bodies to engage effectively in BBNJ processes. This includes training in risk assessment, data collection, monitoring, and decision-support tools consistent with the ecosystem approach to fisheries.
- » Supporting technology transfer for data collection and ecosystem monitoring, by giving fisheries bodies access to tools for observing biodiversity, habitats, and fish stocks.
- » Enabling equitable participation by prioritising the needs of SIDS and LDCs, ensuring developing State fisheries bodies can help shape ABNJ governance and implementation.
- » Facilitating data integration by promoting the sharing and interoperability of fisheries data to inform EIAs, spatial planning, and ABMTs under the BBNJ Agreement.
- » Reinforcing fisheries bodies' roles as both users and providers of marine technology and regional knowledge, recognising them as key actors in the CBTMT framework.

Fisheries bodies can strengthen capacity building under the BBNJ Agreement by offering specialised training in fisheries management, risk assessment, and ecosystem-based monitoring. Fisheries bodies can also help identify and tailor specific capacity needs of SIDS and LDCs, ensuring that support is equitable and responsive to regional priorities.

Why should fisheries bodies engage in CBTMT processes?

Fisheries bodies are recognized as both contributors and beneficiaries of CBTMT. Their participation helps ensure the fair inclusion of fisheries expertise, technologies, and regional coordination mechanisms in capacity-building strategies. Once implemented, these provisions could offer practical support to strengthen institutional capabilities in ecosystem-based management and ocean governance, aligning closely with FAO's guidance on the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) (FAO, 2021) and the Blue Transformation initiative (FAO, 2022b).

It is likely that through these mechanisms, fisheries bodies can also gain improved access to specialised training, tools, expertise, data, and global biodiversity information systems. This facilitates the integration of fisheries-related data into broader environmental assessments and spatial planning processes under the BBNJ regime. Involvement in CBTMT may enhance opportunities for resource mobilisation, including targeted support for developing states through financial assistance, institutional partnerships, and international cooperation. By participating in these initiatives, RFMOs and ministries not only improve their own operational capabilities but also help ensure that fisheries governance evolves in step with emerging legal and scientific frameworks at the global level.



MARINE GENETIC RESOURCES

What are marine genetic resources and how do they intersect with fisheries?

Marine genetic resources refer to genetic or biological material of marine origin found in ABNJ that holds actual or potential value, particularly for scientific research, conservation, biotechnology, and commercial use. This includes biological samples from fish, invertebrates, microbes, and other marine organisms that may contain useful traits or characteristics. Marine genetic resources are not only material entities, but also digital sequence information (DSI) derived from them. Marine genetic resources from ABNJ are subject to benefit-sharing obligations, capacity-building, and access and use transparency measures.

The provisions in Part II of the BBNJ Agreement relating to marine genetic resources, including access and benefit-sharing, exclude fishing, fishing related activities and fish (or other marine living resources) taken in fisheries, unless such fish or other living marine resources are regulated as utilization under Part II of the BBNJ Agreement. In this specific situation, fisheries research, including data collection in fisheries surveys and ecosystem monitoring, may intersect with considerations on marine genetic resources. Also, fisheries bodies may have a supporting role in advancing scientific standards, data transparency, and equitable sharing of DSI.

The FAO's Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture has underscored the importance of characterising, conserving, and sustainably using aquatic genetic resources. Its work provides important frameworks, such as the Global Action Plan for Aquatic Genetic Resources, which intersect with the objectives of the BBNJ Agreement, particularly regarding access and benefit-sharing, digital sequence information and associated traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. These principles can support the integration of fisheries-relevant genetic data into global biodiversity governance.

The marine genetic resource provisions of the BBNJ Agreement may be relevant to fisheries in different situations, including:

- » When genetic material or DSI from fish or other marine organisms is used in research or development (e.g. selective breeding or bio-discovery), fisheries bodies may be required to implement the benefit-sharing provisions of the BBNJ Agreement. This is especially relevant where the actual or potential use extends beyond fisheries management into broader scientific or commercial applications.
- » The traceability of biological samples and DSI may overlap with fisheries data systems. Alignment with transparency provisions of the BBNJ Agreement may require new coordination protocols and may draw upon tools, such as the FAO's Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System (FIRMS) and the Aquatic Genetic Resources Information System (AquaGRIS) (FAO, 2025b), to clarify origin and governance context.
- » Given that the BBNJ Agreement does not clearly define what constitutes “fishing-related activities,” fisheries research involving genetic materials in ABNJ may face legal ambiguity. Fisheries bodies may need guidance to ensure compliance while maintaining their operational mandates.

Fisheries bodies oversee sampling and biological research that generate genetic data, and they can develop access protocols consistent with national and international standards to ensure traceability in ABNJ research. National laboratories with genomics and monitoring expertise provide technical support for the collection, storage, and analysis of marine genetic resources, particularly for developing countries. Through observer programmes and research licensing, fisheries bodies can also help monitor collection activities to ensure compliance with benefit-sharing and notification requirements under the BBNJ Agreement. In addition, fisheries authorities can promote policy coherence by aligning fisheries policies with broader frameworks governing marine genetic resources, ensuring consistency and clarity across governance systems.

Why should fisheries bodies engage in processes related to marine genetic resources?

Engagement in the development and implementation of BBNJ processes related to marine genetic resources will provide fisheries bodies with the opportunity to shape how access, benefit-sharing, and transparency mechanisms apply to marine organisms of commercial and ecological significance. It may open avenues for collaboration with the scientific community on stock structure and genetic diversity research. Participation in these processes will also allow RFBs and national fisheries ministries to demonstrate their contributions to global biodiversity knowledge systems, reinforcing their role as data providers and stewards of marine resources, and may open up new entry points for resource mobilization. Involvement may also unlock support for capacity-building in genetic sampling, analysis, and data governance, particularly in developing countries.

INSTITUTIONAL AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Implementation of the BBNJ Agreement will be facilitated by the CoP and subsidiary bodies, supported by a number of mechanisms and tools, and will be underpinned by principles of cooperation, recognition and rights. Key bodies, tools and principles relevant to the engagement and participation of fisheries bodies are discussed below.

1 Institutional body: scientific and technical body

The Scientific and Technical Body (STB) is a core advisory mechanism established under the BBNJ Agreement to provide expert, evidence-based advice on science and technology. Its functions include reviewing EIAs, advising on ABMTs, supporting work on marine genetic resources, and informing capacity-building efforts. While not a decision-making body, the STB will play a critical role in shaping how measures are assessed and justified. Its structure and modalities are still under negotiation, but it is expected to be impartial, multidisciplinary, and inclusive.

It is likely that fisheries bodies will be key contributors to the STB. Participation will require early, constructive engagement to ensure that fisheries science and traditional knowledge is visible, credible, and aligned with broader biodiversity goals. It is likely that the intersection of the fisheries bodies with the STB will centre on three functions:

- » data and expertise provision;
- » peer input on and review of measures; and
- » knowledge exchange and coherence.

Engaging with the STB would give fisheries bodies access to interdisciplinary science; such as ecosystem connectivity, cumulative impact assessments, and biodiversity trends, thus enhancing their ability to integrate broader environmental knowledge into stock assessments, spatial planning, and adaptive management.

2 Institutional body: Implementation and Compliance Committee

The Implementation and Compliance Committee (ICC) is an oversight body established under the BBNJ Agreement to promote implementation and monitor compliance with BBNJ Agreement obligations. Its role is to support and guide countries to comply, and will be non-adversarial and non-punitive, to facilitate implementation rather than impose penalties. It will focus on promoting compliance through dialogue, transparency, and support, while recognising capacity constraints.

Much is still in discussion but contributions from fisheries bodies during the development of the rules and procedures for this body will be beneficial, given their experience with tools and challenges of compliance and implementation of management and conservation in ABNJ. Engagement can showcase good practice, clarify responsibilities, prevent duplication, and reinforce the legitimacy of both the BBNJ and fisheries regimes.

3 Implementing tool: Clearing-House Mechanism

The Clearing-House Mechanism (CHM) is a central information-sharing platform to be established under the BBNJ Agreement to support transparency, coordination, and access to data. It will facilitate the exchange of scientific, technical, legal, and policy information related to the focus areas. The CHM will support implementation by improving access to best practices, project notifications, and activity reports. The digital architecture, access protocols, and hosting arrangements for the CHM are still being defined.

A well-functioning CHM should improve access to environmental data, monitoring results, and research relevant to ABNJ. It should enhance transparency by providing visibility into activities like EIAs, ABMT proposals, and marine genetic resource collection. In addition, the CHM should connect capacity-building needs with available support and promote participation in research, particularly for developing states.

For fisheries, this system could be used to improve understanding of where activities happen and how they affect biodiversity. However, fisheries data is often sensitive or confidential, so clear rules and trust are needed before data can be shared. Ministries and RFBs should therefore engage in the development process to shape how data is shared and what safeguards are needed.

4 Implementing tool: monitoring, control and surveillance

The BBNJ Agreement calls for systems to monitor the activities taking place in international waters, how they are being managed, and whether they comply with rules. While the monitoring tools and systems are not explicitly named, the BBNJ Agreement calls for mechanisms to assess compliance, and enable transparency. Fisheries bodies can inform the design and operation of monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) systems, given their substantive experience in the use of MCS tools including vessel monitoring systems, observer programmes, and compliance protocols. Engagement of fisheries bodies in BBNJ processes will ensure that MCS tools adopted for implementation of the BBNJ are practical, interoperable, aligned with established practices, and respects confidentiality and operational realities. Engaging in the design and coordination of MCS systems under BBNJ allows fisheries bodies to influence standards, contribute to risk-based monitoring strategies, and demonstrate leadership in transparency. It also provides an opportunity to integrate biodiversity-focused surveillance with existing fisheries compliance systems, improving efficiency and reinforcing a shared commitment to sustainable use.

5 Implementing tools: financial mechanism

A financial mechanism will be established to provide adequate, accessible, additional and predictable financial resources. The mechanism will assist developing states parties in implementing the BBNJ Agreement. The mechanism is still being developed but the BBNJ Agreement indicates that various funds and instruments will contribute with the aim of capacity-building projects, implementation, public consultation and programmes by Indigenous Peoples and local communities as holders of traditional knowledge.

6 Implementation principles: cooperation and recognition of traditional knowledge and rights of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and adjacent coastal states

In the BBNJ Agreement, cooperation is a core principle and duty. It requires states to work together, including through IFBs, continuously, sharing knowledge, aligning actions, and building trust across sectors. For fisheries, this entails two main elements. One, that parties to the BBNJ Agreement must consult with existing IFBs where decision-making processes affect them. Another, that IFBs should stay actively engaged, contributing experience, science, and tools to biodiversity discussions. Cooperation is not a single consultation, but a sustained responsibility to contribute to shaping decisions and supporting effective and coordinated implementation.

Likewise, the BBNJ Agreement underscores the importance of traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the context of marine biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. The recognition of traditional knowledge and the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is fundamental to equitable and inclusive governance under the BBNJ Agreement. Traditional knowledge is a key complement to science and is integrated across the provisions of the BBNJ Agreement, and parties must ensure that traditional knowledge associated with marine genetic resources is only accessed with the consent or approval and involvement of the relevant Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

The BBNJ Agreement grants adjacent coastal States a clear procedural role in decisions that may affect their waters or interests. This includes the right to be notified and consulted during EIAs, and to have their views taken into account in the designation of ABMTs. These provisions reflect the principle of due regard for coastal States' rights, jurisdiction, and the ecological connectivity between areas within and beyond national jurisdiction.



PATHS FORWARD

Although the BBNJ Agreement comes into effect in early 2026, many procedural and institutional elements require further development by the Preparatory Commission and the COP. For example, questions persist around thresholds for EIAs, the design and implementation of ABMTs, and the modalities (operating methods) for CBTMT and marine genetic resource benefit-sharing. There is also ambiguity with how principles like ‘not undermining’ will be interpreted and how institutional roles will be delegated and coordinated. Developing the implementation details, such as processes, thresholds, systems, rules and modalities will take several years.

To influence the development, fisheries bodies should engage to shape elements such as the STB and CHM, and to safeguard mandates under existing frameworks. Addressing these challenges through inclusive and transparent processes is essential for ensuring that the BBNJ Agreement complements sustainable fisheries governance.

The following areas offer practical routes for engagement for fisheries bodies:

1. Representation and observer roles

Limited fisheries expertise has been present in the BBNJ negotiations. Few national delegations have members from national fisheries ministries or delegates with experience and knowledge of fisheries. Their absence risks overlooking important mandates, data, and operational realities. Where possible, national delegations to the COP should include fisheries officials, or at a minimum delegation preparations and briefings should include consultation with fisheries agencies. At the regional level, fisheries bodies should be meaningfully consulted on relevant COP proposals. FAO can support these efforts through coordination, guidance, and creating enabling conditions.

Fisheries bodies bring valuable governance experience regarding the management of activities in the ABNJ, and their engagement in the STB and COP would enhance alignment with established fisheries frameworks and reduce the likelihood of undermining existing mandates. Observer status in these bodies should be substantive, and processes should ensure fisheries experts and data providers can provide input to decisions.



2. Cooperation and institutional interoperability

Under Article 8, cooperation is legally required from signatories. Where states are parties to both the BBNJ Agreement and to relevant fisheries bodies, states are expected to promote coherence and mutual supportiveness between the two regimes. This includes advancing the implementation of BBNJ-agreed measures within the decision-making frameworks of fisheries bodies, where compatible with their mandates.

Institutional linkages, such as liaison roles, joint workshops, or shared working groups, can foster effective cross-sectoral collaboration. FAO, COFI and the Regional Fishery Body Secretariats' Network (RSN), as well as initiatives and projects promoting global partnerships such as the Common Oceans Program, can connect global biodiversity and fisheries governance to avoid fragmentation and improve coordination and implementation.

Maintaining coherence between the BBNJ Agreement and existing fisheries frameworks requires recognising the mandate of fisheries bodies to adopt fisheries measures within their competence, while also ensuring that such measures contribute meaningfully to the BBNJ Agreement's biodiversity objectives.

3. Consultation and collaborative engagement

Fisheries bodies use structured consultation methods, such as committees, advisory bodies, peer review and stakeholder engagement, and these offer good practices for collaborative engagements with multi-stakeholders, serving as practical models for the BBNJ Agreement.

During the preparatory phase of the BBNJ Agreement, different RFBs have taken a range of approaches to engagement in the BBNJ processes, from regular higher-level secretariat engagement in the BBNJ negotiations, to the passing of formal recommendations within their own governance processes promoting the objectives of the BBNJ Agreement.

Consultation is required under a number of different parts of the BBNJ Agreement, including the arrangements for the COP, ABMTs and EIAs, and contributes to transparency, equity, inclusiveness and informed decision-making.

Fisheries bodies bring valuable socio-economic perspectives, insights on food security, and experience in working directly with fishers and the fishing sector, which will benefit BBNJ outcomes. As such, their contributions should be integrated through structured, transparent processes.

Consultation protocols should be consistent with legal mandates and operational roles of fisheries bodies. Mechanisms like the STB should enable mutual recognition and shared standards, ensuring consultation is not just procedural but meaningful and impactful. There should also be structured opportunities for the fishing industry, and other sectors, to contribute their knowledge and concerns, so that BBNJ measures are both legitimate, pragmatic and operationally achievable.

4. Fisheries data, science, and knowledge systems

Fisheries data and knowledge systems are central to evidence-based ocean governance and integrating these into the BBNJ Agreement processes will improve transparency, rigour, and efficiency. Fisheries bodies can offer ecological, catch, and effort data, along with experience in stock assessments and spatial planning. Examples from across fisheries bodies demonstrate the value of these contributions to high seas biodiversity governance. A key example being FAO's FIRMS.

Fisheries data are often subject to confidentiality rules set by national law, FAO standards, and RFMO agreements. These protect sensitive commercial and personal information and sharing depends on agreed protocols and trust. Any use for BBNJ purposes must respect these arrangements and build on existing agreements to ensure secure and legitimate application.

Efforts should be made to ensure that systems established under the BBNJ are interoperable with fisheries systems, use shared data formats and standards supporting by FAO and RFBs, and data contributions are used transparently and equitably. Collaboration mechanisms such as the CHM should facilitate selective, reciprocal data sharing while safeguarding confidentiality. The implementation of relevant processes and systems should also be supported by joint capacity-building initiatives.

5. Alignment of standards, thresholds, and best practices

Fisheries bodies have experience with ecosystem-based and precautionary standards relevant to the ABNJ, and their application in processes including VMEs, OECMs, risk assessments, and management strategy evaluation. Fisheries bodies are collaborating in the development of good practice for monitoring, evaluation and evidence informed decision making. This applied expertise should inform the development of BBNJ thresholds for ABMTs, EIAs, CHM and benefit-sharing.

The BBNJ Agreement permits recognition of equivalent measures. Shared standards and consistent procedures for mutual recognition will avoid duplication and support coherent governance, particularly for developing states reliant on existing frameworks.

6. Compliance and transparency

Fisheries bodies have been implementing, reviewing and refining compliance tools for decades, and remain the only bodies with the mandate and mechanisms to implement binding fisheries management measures in the ABNJ. Their decades of experience with compliance tools offers practical lessons that can inform the development and application of measures in areas relevant to fisheries and area-based management.

Transparency must respect confidentiality. Fisheries bodies use techniques like aggregated reporting and controlled data access to balance openness with trust. These practices can inform CHM design and peer learning.

7. Emerging activities and adaptive governance

The BBNJ Agreement addresses new and expanding uses, such as offshore aquaculture, marine genetic resource access, and novel fisheries (that are not under the mandate of existing bodies). It would be beneficial for fisheries bodies to actively participate in assessment processes, where new or shifting uses are under consideration through the BBNJ Agreement. Their involvement can ensure that the ecological dynamics of existing fisheries and related ecosystems are adequately captured. Moreover, fisheries data and expertise, especially on migratory species, stock status, and habitat use, can provide essential baselines and thresholds for evaluating proposed activities.

As regulatory landscapes evolve, fisheries governance will also need to adapt by updating mandates, aligning monitoring systems, and contributing to global sustainability standards. FAO, fisheries bodies, and the STB can facilitate cross-sectoral learning and consistent policy development.

Additional path: from risk management to strategic alignment

Paths 1 to 7 above are grounded in the assumption that gradual, adaptive change within existing fisheries bodies offers the most pragmatic route to cooperation. This incremental approach reflects current realities but risks framing engagement with the BBNJ Agreement as something to be cautiously managed, rather than an opportunity for progress and cooperation with a landmark global framework. As the BBNJ Agreement marks a significant step in global ocean governance, it offers a chance to realign fisheries with broader goals of sustainability, biodiversity conservation, and equity across the ocean economy.

Rather than framing fisheries as a carve-out, the BBNJ Agreement provides opportunities to strengthen fisheries as key partners in ocean conservation, noting the inherent relationship between that and the sustainable management and use of fisheries resources. Fisheries bodies can demonstrate leadership by voluntarily aligning with best-practice principles from other sectors, contributing to a coherent governance landscape that values ecological integrity and social equity.

In addition to the paths discussed above, strategic alignment could include, for example:

- » Engagement in the BBNJ Agreement's institutional architecture, especially the STB and the ICC which provides a structured space for fisheries bodies to engage.
- » Fisheries bodies piloting collaborative assessments of EIA and ABMT effectiveness, thereby enhancing their legitimacy and contributing to a culture of transparency and continuous improvement.

- » While confidentiality concerns around fisheries data and information are institutionalised, they should not limit proactive engagement with the CHM. Fisheries bodies could lead by example, publishing aggregated biodiversity-relevant data and protocols, and developing interoperable systems that support cumulative impact analysis. This would build public trust, facilitate cross-sectoral cooperation, and elevate the role of fisheries in biodiversity science and governance.
- » In support of the social transformation ambitions outlined in FAO's Blue Transformation roadmap, capacity building under the BBNJ Agreement could move beyond technical assistance to the fostering of institutional change. With sufficient resourcing, fisheries bodies could lead initiatives that build cross-sectoral literacy, integrate Indigenous and local knowledge systems, and embed ecosystem-based approaches across governance levels.
- » Fisheries bodies can demonstrate added value by linking spatial and impact management tools to ecosystem restoration targets.

The BBNJ Agreement is not just about process, it is a framework to conserve ocean health, the foundation of sustainable fisheries. Through strategic alignment and participatory co-design of key BBNJ processes, fisheries bodies can help shape ocean governance that delivers on both sustainable use and ecological regeneration.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND NEXT STEPS

This guide clarifies how the BBNJ Agreement intersects with the processes and responsibilities of fisheries bodies. Although the BBNJ Agreement does not establish fisheries management measures, it introduces new obligations and opportunities that will affect national, regional and global fisheries bodies. It identifies key areas where fisheries bodies can contribute to, engage with, and benefit from the evolving BBNJ framework. The interpretation and operationalisation of the BBNJ Agreement's provisions are still evolving, and this guide reflects the current state of knowledge on how implementation may proceed.

Cooperation between parties, as well as strengthening, enhancing and promoting cooperation with and among IFBs is a central principle of the BBNJ Agreement. Parties must coordinate with bodies recognized as having functional competence (i.e. IFBs), ensuring existing mandates are respected. This opens opportunities for fisheries bodies to shape the development of new cross-sectoral approaches, especially in spatial planning, risk assessment, and data systems. Traditional knowledge and the interests of adjacent coastal states are also embedded into decision-making, reinforcing inclusive governance.

The BBNJ Agreement's inclusion of "sustainable use" aligns with fisheries' roles in food security and national development. By engaging with the BBNJ Agreement, fisheries can support FAO blue transformation, global biodiversity targets (e.g. Global Biodiversity Framework Targets 9 & 10) and reinforce their role as stewards of marine ecosystems. The BBNJ Agreement offers fisheries bodies a structured opportunity to move beyond incremental adaptation by engaging as full partners in ocean governance, aligning their practices with biodiversity and equity goals, embracing transparency, contributing to ecosystem restoration, and leading institutional transformation through cross-sectoral cooperation.

There are already several specific processes where fisheries bodies can engage. The CHM, at least in some form, will need to be established shortly after the BBNJ Agreement coming into effect. Fisheries bodies engagement in the development of this mechanism will help ensure that the CHM and monitoring systems are interoperable, secure, and respectful of existing practices. The development of ABMT proposals is also expected to commence soon after the BBNJ Agreement comes into force. For the development of ABMT proposals, fisheries bodies can contribute scientific input and implementation experience to ensure spatial tools are evidence-based and practical. When EIAs are triggered, they can share data, assess procedural equivalence, and participate in consultations on activities that may affect stocks or ecosystems. With respect to

capacity building and technology transfer, fisheries actors can help set priorities, deliver training, and access tools to advance ecosystem-based management. Although marine genetic resources related benefit-sharing excludes fishing per se, fisheries bodies can still support traceability and policy coherence.

As the BBNJ Agreement comes into effect and the COP starts meeting, the establishment of the subsidiary bodies will shortly follow. Engagement in the STB will allow fisheries science to inform biodiversity decisions, particularly on stock connectivity and cumulative pressures. Involvement in the ICC offers a channel to shape fair and operationally realistic compliance mechanisms.

To aid future engagement, the guide sets out seven interlinked pathways. These include observer roles at the COP, institutional cooperation with BBNJ Agreement processes, structured consultation where fisheries may be impacted, integration of data into the CHM, alignment of standards, constructive compliance practices, and proactive participation in the design of MCS systems. These routes aim to ensure that fisheries bodies are not passive recipients but active contributors to implementation.

Fisheries voices have been limited in BBNJ discussions to date, despite the relevance of the BBNJ Agreement to fisheries and oceans governance. Active engagement helps to ensure that fisheries perspectives are reflected and to create a system that operates effectively with existing practices and objectives.

The BBNJ Agreement presents a timely opportunity to align biodiversity and fisheries goals. Active and sustained involvement from the fisheries sector will be important to building a coherent and mutually reinforcing system of ocean governance. This also invites a shift in perspective from viewing engagement primarily as a safeguard against institutional risk, to recognising the potential for fisheries to shape and benefit from emerging opportunities.



NEXT STEPS

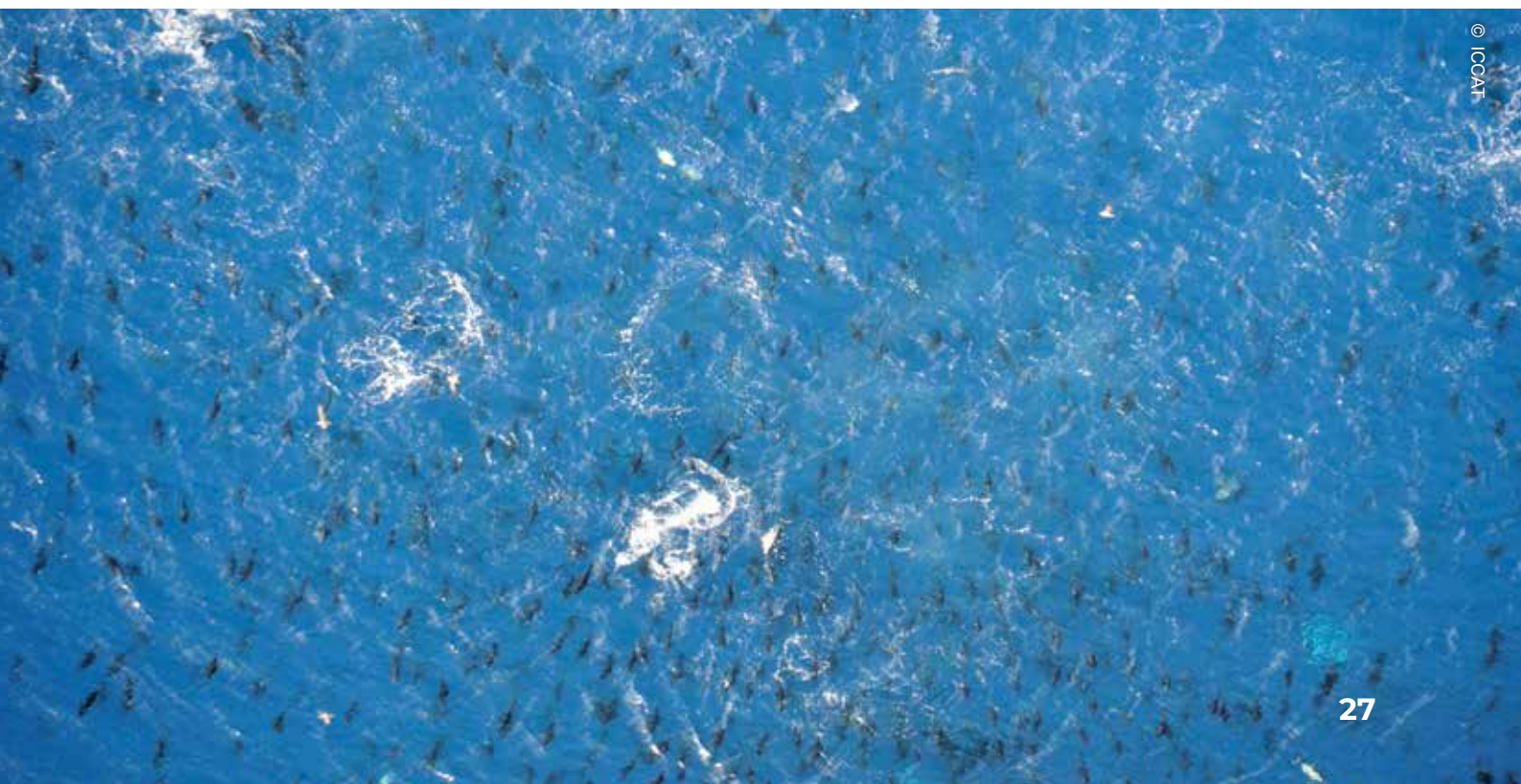
Fisheries bodies looking to enhance their engagement in the BBNJ Agreement and proactively shape the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement can consider a range of next steps, including:

- 1. Establish clear internal strategies for engagement:** Prioritise where and how to engage, based on mandate, capacity, and strategic value. As further implementation details are developed, map intersection with BBNJ provisions, identify gaps and define clear positions on key issues, thus balancing ambition with realistic institutional bandwidth.
- 2. Secure observer and expert participation in BBNJ bodies:** Fisheries bodies should seek observer roles and targeted expert participation in the COP, STB, ICC, and other BBNJ bodies to influence processes early and efficiently. Where direct involvement is not feasible, coordinate regionally or through representative mechanisms, such as FAO.
- 3. Integrate fisheries expertise into emerging BBNJ procedures:** Collaborate with BBNJ processes to ensure fisheries science and management approaches inform standards and methodologies for ABMTs, EIAs, and cumulative impact assessments, building on existing tools and experiences. Integration should also include knowledge and perspectives from fishers and the fishing industry.
- 4. Strengthen institutional readiness and proactively shape coordination mechanisms:** Fisheries bodies should collaborate with other institutions to define practical expectations for coordination, data sharing, and consultation. Build mechanisms that account for institutional diversity and capacity limitations, focusing on what is essential and feasible.
- 5. Engage in capacity building as both users and providers:** Fisheries bodies should help shape and benefit from BBNJ capacity-building activities. Support should prioritise ecosystem monitoring, biodiversity assessment, and institutional development—especially for small and developing states.
- 6. Build awareness and develop collective communication strategies:** Pool resources across fisheries bodies to prepare shared messages, guidance, and engagement strategies. FAO and RFBs bodies should continue to raise awareness of BBNJ implications among national fisheries bodies, and externally highlight the contribution of fisheries to biodiversity, while managing expectations relative to institutional capacity. Communication strategies should actively involve fishing industry and fisher organizations, so that their voices are heard in shaping narratives about governance and measures.
- 7. Engage in regional coordination and governance innovation:** Leverage existing regional cooperation platforms to reduce duplication and share engagement burdens. Both RSN and the CBD Sustainable Ocean Initiative should further foster cross-sectoral partnerships that align fisheries and biodiversity objectives in the ABNJ. Regional coordination should create channels for fishers and industry representatives to contribute.

- 8. Support policy coherence:** Contribute to national and regional efforts to align legal and institutional frameworks with BBNJ commitments, to ensure fisheries perspectives are integrated. Fisheries bodies should encourage and engage in improved coordination across relevant agencies at the national level to inform contributions to BBNJ processes, as well as to develop national governance arrangements for BBNJ implementation.
- 9. Review existing measures:** Fisheries bodies have existing spatial management and impact assessment measures and experience; however, claims of adequacy must be tested. Across the fisheries bodies, engagement with BBNJ mechanisms should include willingness to review fisheries tools against agreed standards for ABMTs, EIAs, and risk-based approaches. Consideration can also be given to proposing existing fisheries spatial management measures as potential ABMTs under the BBNJ, which could enable complementary management of other sectors operating in those areas.
- 10. Demonstrate progress through measurable outcomes:** Engagement in BBNJ must go beyond process. Fisheries bodies should track and communicate how their actions contribute to biodiversity conservation, impact reduction, and the restoration and resilience of marine ecosystems. This can be synthesised and reported to COFI and other relevant forums.

This guide serves as a bridge between fisheries and the BBNJ Agreement, identifying opportunities for collaboration and outlining practical enablers.

Fisheries bodies have decades of experience in science-informed decision making, management, compliance, data, science and information sharing in areas beyond national jurisdiction. This experience can be shared to speed up implementation of the BBNJ Agreement and make the processes and bodies pragmatic and effective. FAO encourages fisheries bodies to engage proactively in the BBNJ Agreement to contribute to, and benefit from, a more integrated and cooperative system of ocean governance.



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FAO has produced this guide to support fisheries bodies to engage proactively with the processes of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), and to capitalize on the opportunity to demonstrate leadership in the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ).



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