



EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

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**Conceptual note for the Workshop
"For a better understanding of the place of fishing and Marine Protected Areas
in the BBNJ agreement and its implementation in the ATLAFCO region".
Casablanca (Morocco), May 18 and 19, 2026**

1. General context of the workshop:

The first comprehensive multilateral framework dealing with biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) entered into force on 17 January 2026.

Under the overall objective of ensuring the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, in the immediate and long term, through the effective implementation of the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the Convention) and the strengthening of international cooperation and coordination, the BBNJ Agreement focuses on four main elements:

- a) marine genetic resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits;
- b) measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas;
- c) environmental impact assessments;
- d) capacity building and the transfer of marine technologies.

It also addresses a number of so-called cross-cutting issues, including the establishment of a financing mechanism and an institutional framework for its implementation.

The Agreement constitutes the first binding international legal framework dedicated to the protection of biodiversity in the high seas. It aims to fill the gaps in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to ensure the sustainable management of this area, which covers two-thirds of the ocean.

While the African negotiating group played a crucial role in drafting the final text, it still needs to be ratified by numerous African states. It should be noted that, to date, only 10 ATLAFCO Member States have ratified it.

2. Marine Fisheries in the BBNJ Agreement

The BBNJ agreement does not create fisheries management measures or undermine existing mandates, but it will influence how fisheries operate in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). It will introduce new processes that will intersect with fisheries governance, often requiring data, knowledge, consultation, and technical input from national, regional and global fisheries bodies

This treaty is considered a historic turning point for fisheries management and ocean protection. Its entry into force is a first step towards achieving the United Nations' 2022 target of sustainably protecting 30% of marine and terrestrial ecosystems by 2030.



To this end, the Agreement obliges States to carry out environmental impact assessments for new activities planned on the high seas, which may indirectly influence future fishing areas.

Although Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs) already exist, the BBNJ Treaty helps to fill governance gaps by regulating fishing activities (*including fishing practices*) in protected areas, in order to prevent overexploitation of stocks.

Thus, RFMOs retain their mandate to regulate fish stocks. This Treaty mandates **cooperation** between the future secretariat of the BBNJ and these organizations to ensure coherent management of the marine ecosystem.

In light of the above, ATLAFCO is organizing a capacity-building workshop for the implementation of the BBNJ treaty on May 18 and 19, 2026 in Casablanca, under the theme **"For a better understanding of the place of fisheries and MPAs in the BBNJ agreement and its implementation in the ATLAFCO region"**.

The organization of this workshop is fully in line with the implementation of the ATLAFCO Strategy 2025–2027, in particular the strengthening of the voice of Member States in international bodies and also responds to the guidelines of the ATLAFCO Ministers' Declaration which calls on all Member States to adhere to the relevant international legal instruments, in particular the BBNJ Agreement.

3. Workshop objectives

- **General objective:** To support Member States in their appropriation of the issues related to the BBNJ Agreement and its implications for the governance of fisheries and marine protected areas on the high seas.
- **Specific objectives:**
 - Improve understanding of the key provisions of the BBNJ Agreement
 - Analyze the implications for fisheries governance and marine protected areas in the high seas
 - Identify the challenges and opportunities for the states in the region
 - Promote regional coordination and common positions
 - Reconciling the imperatives of biodiversity conservation with the principle of sustainable use of fisheries resources.

4. Main Themes

The workshop will be structured around complementary sessions, designed to offer a thorough understanding of the BBNJ Agreement and facilitate its operational appropriation by the ATLAFCO Member States.

- Legal, institutional and normative framework
- Tools for the conservation and management of marine biodiversity
- Access to resources, equity and capacity building for Member States
- Regional issues, ocean governance and implementation of the Agreement at the national level



- Challenges and opportunities for the COMHAFAT region
- Active participation in the BBNJ Agreement processes

5. Beneficiaries and participants:

- Focal points in Member States (central directors of maritime fisheries or senior officials responsible for implementing relevant international instruments at the national level)
- Regional Fisheries Management Organizations
- Resource persons (UN experts, FAO experts, national experts...)
- African Network of Fisheries Research Institutes and Marine Sciences (RAFISMER)

6. Expected results

- Better understanding of the issues surrounding the BBNJ Agreement
- Understanding its impact on fishing, marine protected areas and interactions with RFMOs
- Capacity building for adhesion and implementation
- Strengthening intersectoral dialogue (fisheries, environment, research)
- Active and effective participation in the BBNJ (COP) process

7. Logistics

The workshop will be held in Casablanca. The venue will be announced later. Airfare (economy class) and accommodation (hotel) **for each representative of a Member State, as well as for invited experts/panelists, will be covered by ATLAFCO .**

Each participant will also receive accommodation expenses from the Executive Secretariat according to the scale in force within international organizations.

For information regarding logistics, practical matters and institutional requirements (visas, etc.), please contact the ATLAFCO Secretariat at the following address :

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