



**INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
(of UNESCO)**

**Fifteenth Intergovernmental Session of the IOC Sub-Commission  
for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC-XV)  
Tokyo, Japan, 11-13 March 2025**

Agenda 4.1

**Potential Role of the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) in the  
Implementation 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)**

**Unedited text for further inputs and comments**

## 1. General introduction

1. 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) was adopted on 19 June 2023 by the [Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction](#) convened under the auspices of the United Nations. The BBNJ Agreement becomes the third implementing agreement to the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#) (UNCLOS).

2. The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement is a legally binding treaty that will strengthen the international legal regime for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in the maritime areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Agreement is open for signature by all States and regional economic integration organizations from 20 September 2023 to 20 September 2025, and will enter into force 120 days after the date of deposit of the sixtieth instrument of ratification, approval, acceptance or accession. As of 26 Feb 2025, 17 member states (28%) have deposited their instruments, including 3 countries in the Western Pacific region: Palau, Singapore, and Timor Leste.

3. Under the overall objectives of the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, for the present and in the long-term, through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of the Convention and further international cooperation and coordination, the Agreement addresses four main issues as follows:

- Marine genetic resources, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits;
- Measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas (MPAs);
- Environmental impact assessments; and
- Capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology.

4. The Agreement also addresses a number of “cross-cutting issues”, establishes a funding mechanism and sets up institutional arrangements, including a Conference of the Parties and various subsidiary bodies, a Clearing-House Mechanism, and establish a secretariat (<https://www.un.org/bbnjagreement/e>).

5. IOC WESTPAC considers strategic actions in setting the frameworks for the collaborative efforts among member states to implement BBNJ provisions during the incoming fifteenth intergovernmental session meeting (11 – 13 March, 2025) in Tokyo.

## 2. Role of ocean science in the BBNJ implementation

6. The implementation of BBNJ Agreement relies heavily on ocean science to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). These Areas are vast, largely unexplored, and critically important for global biodiversity, climate regulation, and ecosystem services.

7. Effective BBNJ implementation requires robust scientific knowledge. Ocean science helps identify species, assess biodiversity, and understand ecological interactions, which are crucial for conservation and sustainable use. It also supports the design of area-based management tools (ABMTs), including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), by mapping habitats, assessing species distributions, analysing ecosystem connectivity, and evaluating management effectiveness.

8. In addition, ocean science provides the methodologies and data needed to conduct Enhancing Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs), ensuring that human activities are evaluated for their ecological impacts. It also plays a crucial role in monitoring climate change effects on marine biodiversity, such as ocean warming,

acidification, and shifting species distributions, enabling informed decision-making for adaptive management.

### 3. Potential actions for the Sub-Commission

9. Ocean science is the foundation of effective BBNJ implementation. Strengthening ocean science capacity for BBNJ implementation—particularly in developing regions—will be essential for ensuring that the BBNJ Agreement leads to meaningful protection and sustainable use of marine resources beyond national jurisdiction. Many developing countries lack the scientific infrastructure and expertise needed to engage fully in BBNJ implementation.

10. The IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) is mandated to advance ocean science, foster international cooperation, and apply ocean knowledge to support Member States in achieving the sustainable development of ocean, marine, and coastal resources. It develops, coordinates, and implements a wide range of programmes and initiatives with Member States in the region, providing insights into biodiversity status, ecosystem functions, and the effects of increasing human activities and climate change, and thus informing management, policies, and decision-making.

11. With its well-established various networks of national competent agencies, ocean research institutions and universities, the Sub-Commission is well positioned to support the BBNJ implementation. Building on its marine scientific networks and expertise, international coordination efforts, and capacity-building initiatives, the Sub-Commission shall consider taking the following potential actions, including but not limited to:

- Developing and coordinating joint scientific research on marine biodiversity, ecosystem functions, and human impacts in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- Facilitating regional scientific collaboration and scientific exchange programs among Member States and their research institutions to improve knowledge of deep-sea ecosystems and high-seas biodiversity.
- Organizing training programs and workshops to build the capacity of scientists, policymakers, and institutions in marine research, monitoring, and data management, and **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), and area-based management tools (ABMT)**, including marine protected areas (MPAs)
- Supporting the transfer of marine technology, including ocean observation tools, data management systems, and modelling techniques, to enhance research capabilities in developing countries.

12. Member States are invited to share their insights on the role of the Sub-Commission in the implementation of BBNJ Agreement, and provide actionable suggestions on immediate or potential actions/initiatives the Sub-Commission can take. Moreover, Member States may consider establishing an international task force on BBNJ, with its Terms of Reference to be developed during the session.