



Area Based Management  
Tools in Marine Areas Beyond  
National Jurisdiction:

# COOPERATION WITH AND AMONG IFBs TO ENABLE EARLY ACTION UNDER THE BBNJ AGREEMENT

Key messages of the IUCN High Seas  
Workshop on Area-based Management  
Tools in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction,  
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One of the objectives and, at the same time, a key factor in the successful implementation of the BBNJ Agreement is to reinforce cooperation and coordination with and among other relevant legal instruments, frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies (IFBs).

A 3-day expert workshop, hosted at the IUCN Headquarters in January 2026 with the support of the French Biodiversity Agency (OFB, Office Français de la Biodiversité), focused on how this cooperation and coordination could be strengthened in the context of Part III of the Agreement on area-based management tools (ABMTs). The workshop put a spotlight on a series of practical examples of existing cooperation mechanisms amongst IFBs and consultation efforts within IFBs as part of ongoing biodiversity conservation initiatives.

Workshop participants held fruitful exchanges during the plenary group discussions and breakout group sessions to explore avenues for cooperation between the BBNJ Agreement and IFBs, including potential opportunities and limitations. An attempt of capturing the key considerations to inform how cooperation with and among IFBs could be set up and reinforced is presented in this document.

Relevant stakeholders, including IFBs, may be involved during two main phases of the ABMT process: 1) during the development of an ABMT proposal 2) and as part of the required consultation process ahead of the COP decision on the establishment of the ABMT.

Early collaboration and cooperation are key to facilitate the consultation process.

In preparation for discussions at PrepCom 3, taking place from 23 March until 2 April 2026, the BBNJ PrepCom Co-Chairs drafted a COP decision concerning arrangements to enhance cooperation with relevant IFBs, which represents an important step towards the operationalisation of the BBNJ Agreement. The draft decision provides general guidance to the Parties, invites IFBs to cooperate with the institutions established under the Agreement, and encourages them to participate as observers in the meetings of the COP and the subsidiary bodies. The Co-Chairs also prepared an aid to discussions and negotiations focusing on the terms of reference (ToRs) and rules of procedure of the Scientific and Technical Body (STB), which need to be agreed upon at COP1.

## Overarching considerations from the January 2026 IUCN-convened workshop:

- The journey towards the successful implementation of ABMTs under the BBNJ Agreement is a **marathon**: the overarching objective of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in marine areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) should be kept in mind along the way.
- Developing a good understanding of both the BBNJ and IFB processes by all stakeholders and rights holders is a necessary condition to develop and maintain **trust**, which is an essential value and key ingredient of success.
- The development of ABMTs proposals under the BBNJ Agreement is a **country-driven process** that would benefit from having a group of States Parties behind each proposal rather than simply relying on a single champion country.
- The genuine inclusion of IFBs **at an early stage** will maximize the chances of successful adoption of ABMT proposals by the BBNJ COP.
- BBNJ processes should build on and will benefit from **lessons learned** from IFBs work.
- Cooperation is a two-way street that should lead to mutual benefits and aim for **reciprocity**. One potential benefit of this collaboration for international fisheries bodies relates to the ecosystem-based approach to management.
- There are **many different IFBs with a variety of mandates, statuses and scopes** (e.g. regulatory body, global and regional bodies, binding and non-binding instruments, umbrella body for several bodies and processes, etc.) and they all face similar challenges (e.g. boundaries of mandates, cooperation and coordination, capacity and resources). Collaboration processes on ABMTs with and among IFBs will need to adapt.
- **Compatibility of timelines** will need to be considered in all aspects of collaboration with and among IFBs.
- The BBNJ Agreement provides a space for dialogue among IFBs and could play the role of a **catalyst** in the global ocean governance framework.

## State level considerations

Effective collaboration will mostly depend on how mandates, decision cycles, and evidence standards connect across bodies. This requires early engagement with IFBs, inter-ministerial alignment on COP positions, and consistent national positions from State Parties across relevant IFBs.

- Align positions across government entities to build a coherent national position across different IFBs.
- Build coalitions of willing States where possible.
- Engage IFBs early about ABMT proposals that depend on specific IFB measures, plan for annual and multi-annual cycles – with the aim to co-design and co-develop ABMT proposals.
- IFBs' mandates, processes and timelines should be understood and respected to allow for effective dialogue procedures to be put in place.
- Consultation is different from collaboration – transparency and clarity on the objectives of the consultation are key.
- Task forces, joint programmes, and workshops are different ways to engage IFBs in the ABMT process.

## Considerations relevant for IFB secretariats and their members

Recognizing the diversity of the IFBs' mandates, statuses, capacities and scopes, their interaction with the BBNJ Agreement will vary. Nonetheless, steps can be taken to support the early implementation of the Agreement and facilitate engagement. Building off existing scientific processes, compliance tools and established measures in relevant IFBs can also foster early engagement.

- Encourage IFBs to start developing procedures to handle ABMT proposals in the context of the BBNJ Agreement and to build on existing work.
- Start to map IFBs' functions against modalities of the ABMT pillar (notably the tasks of the STB), to identify roles, data availability, and information-sharing mechanisms.
- Start to inform and engage IFBs' Parties or members on the topic of ABMTs in BBNJ.
- Use practical cooperation models (workplans, targeted dialogues) and support early sharing of institutional norms (cycles, entry points, thresholds, etc.) – make cooperation and consultation a habit, rather than a requirement.
- Identify what information can already be shared, notably begin to think about data access rules, privacy constraints, and anticipate pathways to communicate with the Clearing House Mechanism (CHM).
- Explore areas of collaboration with existing frameworks notably IOC-UNESCO regarding ocean science and data in support of decision-making, including data coordination efforts such as the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) and the Ocean Biodiversity Information System (OBIS), as well as the establishment of e-learning courses and other educational materials.
- Leverage lessons-learned and build on existing frameworks and processes, notably from fisheries

bodies, on aspects of rules and regulation for data sharing, monitoring and compliance, capacity building, etc.

- Begin to identify potential overlapping of geographical mandates of different IFBs for known potential ABMT sites.
- Recognize that the capacity of IFB secretariats is a challenge and that slow responses to collaboration and consultation requests can be due to institutional processes and capacity, rather than reluctance to cooperate.

## Considerations for a well-resourced process

Effective collaboration and engagement with and among IFBs will require time, capacity and trust from BBNJ State Parties, IFB secretariats and their members, and from other key stakeholders and rights holders. Funders (such as investment funds, philanthropies, public sectors, etc.) can play a key role to ensure that all relevant actors have the necessary capacity to meaningfully engage and foster the enabling conditions for effective collaboration.

- Recognize that engaging in the BBNJ context will create additional burdens for IFB secretariats with limited resources and that States may need to strengthen capacity of IFB secretariats where constraints are mainly structural.
- Keep in mind that funding should cover the ABMT process, including proposal development, consultation, science, management planning, monitoring, control and surveillance, and data-sharing systems..
- Where and when needed, support neutral convenings with IFBs as well as initiatives that allow space for meaningful engagement and consultation.

## Considerations for fostering alignment and maintaining momentum

Efforts from the BBNJ community at large will be essential to support the implementation of Part III of the Agreement. Partnerships, initiatives and coalitions will be key to maintaining momentum and political traction. They can notably serve as communities of practice, bridge-builders and can help foster dialogue among BBNJ State Parties, IFBs secretariats and their members, and other key stakeholders on practical elements such as timelines, evidence thresholds, monitoring and compliance.

- Provide short, targeted products, such as decision-maker briefs, templates, checklists, aligned with BBNJ processes and timelines (e.g. ahead of COPs or other subsidiary body meetings).
- Facilitate engagement with IFBs to ensure the scope and objectives of consultations are clear and to avoid duplication.
- Support established State-led coalitions such as (but not limited to) the BBNJ First Movers, and the BBNJ High Ambition Coalition – notably by providing them with secretariat functions.
- Ensure the equitable participation of all relevant stakeholders, including the private sector in ABMT processes.



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