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BBNJ treaty enters into force, strengthening governance of the high seas

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

FAO to support countries in implementing the BBNJ treaty, citing its role in fisheries management, data and capacity building

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations has welcomed the entry into force of a new treaty to protect marine biodiversity in international waters – a step it described as strengthening global ocean governance.

In a statement, FAO said it intends to support implementation of **the BBNJ Agreement** (<https://www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en>) under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, citing its experience in fisheries governance and marine genetic resources.

The BBNJ Agreement entered into force on Jan. 17, 2026, after more than 20 years of negotiations. The legally binding treaty, which has 145 signatories and 81 Parties, is designed to protect and sustainably manage biodiversity in ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction (or ABNJ), often referred to as the high



The BBNJ treaty has entered into force, with FAO supporting countries in implementing the agreement to strengthen global ocean governance. Photo credit: ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano

seas.

The agreement focuses on four main areas: marine genetic resources, tools to manage and protect ocean spaces, environmental impact assessments and support for capacity building and technology transfer. It calls for the coordinated management of activities such as fishing, shipping, mining and scientific research in international waters and sets out rules to ensure that benefits from marine genetic resources – used in products like medicines, supplements and cosmetics – are shared fairly.

“The BBNJ Agreement is an important next step in addressing critical gaps in the governance of areas beyond national jurisdiction,” said Manuel Barange, FAO Assistant Director-General and Director of Fisheries and Aquaculture. “FAO is equipped with the know-how to assist parties and institutions to implement the Agreement, and has expertise, data and systems that will be critical to achieve its goals.”

A promotional banner for the Global Seafood Alliance. On the left is the logo, which consists of a stylized fish head inside a circle, followed by the text "Global Seafood ALLIANCE". To the right of the logo is the slogan "For the love of seafood." in a large, blue, serif font. Below the slogan is a blue button with the text "BECOME A MEMBER" in white, uppercase letters. On the far right of the banner is a photograph of a smiling woman in a white top, holding a large fish.

(<https://www.globalseafood.org/membership/>).



Global fight against IUU fishing reaches a ‘new milestone’ with Port State Measures Agreement

One hundred States endorse FAO Agreement on Port State Measures, marking a new milestone in the global fight against IUU fishing.



Global Seafood Alliance

ABNJ covers about two-thirds of the world’s oceans and nearly half of the planet’s living space. About 11 million tons of aquatic animals are caught each year in these waters, primarily tunas, bonitos, billfishes and elasmobranchs, under a system of international rules and regional fisheries management organizations that vary by region.

Regional fisheries management organizations establish binding measures in many of these areas, including monitoring requirements, catch limits, bycatch rules and closures. Their role in managing fisheries, collecting data and supporting science-based decision-making is expected to be relevant to the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, according to FAO officials.

“Just as healthy and biodiverse ecosystems are the foundations of sustainable fisheries, the institutions designed to govern the latter can contribute greatly to ensuring human use can coexist with and support biodiversity,” Barange said.

Data will be central to implementing the BBNJ Agreement, with FAO pointing to its fisheries statistics, stock assessments and tools such as the Fisheries and Resources Monitoring System as key resources for decision-making.

FAO also highlighted its role in capacity building, citing past work supporting countries on compliance with international fisheries agreements and the use of monitoring tools. Through long-standing collaboration with regional fisheries bodies and initiatives such as the Common Oceans Program, the FAO stated that its data systems, technical expertise and networks are expected to support countries as details of the treaty's implementation are finalized.

"Marine biodiversity underpins sustainable fisheries and global food security," Barange said. "The BBNJ Agreement presents a unique opportunity to enhance global oceans governance and improve outcomes for everyone."

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