



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

# COMMON OCEANS

GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT  
AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN AREAS  
BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

Oceans make up 70 percent of the planet's surface and support the livelihoods for millions of people around the world. Despite their important role, numerous threats such as overfishing, destructive fishing practices, marine pollution and seabed mining are threatening the ability of the oceans to continue providing vital ecosystem services and essential food resources. Despite noteworthy progress in overcoming these threats, there is a clear need to address the remaining obstacles.

## Areas beyond national jurisdiction

The areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) are those areas of the oceans for which no one nation has the specific or sole responsibility for management. These areas are defined as the common oceans, and make up 40 percent of the surface of the planet, comprising 64 percent of the surface of the oceans and nearly 95 percent of their volume.

The ABNJ include the high seas and the seabed beyond the (extended) continental shelf of coastal States. Because these areas are located beyond the EEZs<sup>1</sup>, sustainable management of

fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ are challenging. The ABNJ include some highly complex ecosystems, which are subject to negative impacts from a variety of sectors including shipping, pollution, deep-sea mining and fishing. Addressing such impacts is compounded by problems in coordinating, disseminating and building capacity for best practices and in capitalizing on successful experiences – especially those related to the management of fisheries in ABNJ.

Without urgent action, the benefits of the ABNJ fisheries resources for current and future generations will diminish.

<sup>1</sup> Exclusive economic zone (EEZ) refers to those areas over which a state has special rights over the exploration and use of marine resources, stretching from the seaward edge of the state's territorial sea to 200 nautical miles from its coast.

## Common Oceans ABNJ Program – protecting vulnerable and important ecosystems and species

Seeking to generate a catalytic change, the *Global sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ Program* (Common Oceans ABNJ Program), supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), started its activities in early 2014. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is the coordinating agency, working in close collaboration with two other GEF implementing agencies, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World

Bank, as well as other executing partners, including Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), national governments, the private sector, and NGOs.

Focusing on tuna and deep-sea fisheries, in parallel with the conservation of biodiversity, the five-year Common Oceans ABNJ Program aims to promote efficient and sustainable management of fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation in ABNJ to achieve the global targets agreed the international fora.

## Who benefits from the Common Oceans ABNJ Program?

**F**isheries in ABNJ contribute to employment, nutrition and trade. At the same time, healthy ecosystems are vitally important for sustaining marine biodiversity, ecosystem services and the resources we depend on.

Although the benefits vary greatly among areas, millions of families in both developing and developed countries depend on the income generated by fishing and its associated activities. The Common Oceans ABNJ Program is contributing to ensure their food and livelihoods security by strengthening the long-term management and sustainability of ABNJ fisheries and the ecosystems on which they depend. The Program will also assist coastal States better fulfil their obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS),

particularly regarding the conservation and management of living resources and ecosystems in the high seas, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, especially Aichi Targets 6 & 11. It further promotes the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, several UN General Assembly resolutions and other international instruments. The Program is responding to global calls to address major issues such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and encourage sustainable ecosystem-based practices.

The Common Oceans ABNJ Program also addresses sustainable development aspirations such as those reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 14 on oceans, seas and marine resources of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Strategic Objectives of FAO.

**Fish are a primary source of protein for 17% of the world's population – and for nearly 25% in low-income food deficit countries. Capture fisheries and aquaculture contribute, either directly or indirectly, to over 200 million jobs globally. Fish products are one of the most traded food commodities worldwide.**

## What difference can the Common Oceans ABNJ Program make?

**T**he Common Oceans ABNJ Program offers an opportunity to move further by leveraging resources, knowledge and experience from partners to bring about transformational changes. By making the sustainable use of ABNJ resources a priority, ultimately, the Program will lead to improved global sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ. The approach is to concentrate on short-term milestones as part of a long-term plan to establish strong networks, best management practices and information sharing. The Program aims to:

- move towards implementation of the precautionary approach, the ecosystem approach to fisheries and rights-based management systems
- increase the ability to protect fragile ecosystems
- promote compliance with existing fisheries regulations
- foster international and cross-sectoral coordination and sharing of information

## OBJECTIVE

Achieve sustainable and efficient tuna fisheries management and biodiversity conservation through the systematic application of best practices in fisheries management, including implementation of the precautionary approach, ecosystem approach to fisheries, and combat against IUU fishing.

## PARTNERS

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT) and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Governments of Fiji and Ghana, US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Bird Life International, International Seafood Sustainability Foundation (ISSF), International Seafood Sustainability Association (ISSA), Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), Organización del Sector Pesquero y Acuícola del Istmo Centroamericano (OSPESCA), Fiji Tuna Boat Owners Association (FTBOA)

## FINANCING

US\$ 30 million in GEF grants leveraged by over US\$150 million in co-financing from the partners and FAO

## Sustainable management of tuna fisheries and biodiversity conservation in ABNJ

Highly migratory tuna species account for about 20% of the value of all marine capture fisheries and the management of this resource is the direct responsibility of five tuna RFMOs. Over 85 countries engage in tuna fisheries and value of the catch of the most important tuna species is estimated to be over US\$10 billion annually.

With the strong demand for tuna, combined with overcapacity of fishing fleets, the status of tuna stocks could deteriorate if fisheries management is not improved. With collective action and partnering by all stakeholders at global, national and regional levels – especially tuna-RFMOs, their member countries and the tuna industry – ABNJ fisheries and ecosystems will be able to contribute effectively to the socioeconomic development, and food and livelihoods security of the millions of people depending on these fisheries.

The ABNJ Tuna project implemented by FAO focuses on three areas:

- Supporting implementation of sustainable and efficient fisheries management and fishing practices
- Reducing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing through strengthened and harmonized Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS)
- Reducing ecosystem impacts from tuna fishing, including bycatch and associated species

This unique project draws together a large and diverse group of stakeholders – from consumers and industry to tuna-RFMOs, NGOs and international organizations – who play important roles in tuna fisheries. They will build on existing collaborations to facilitate optimal use of scarce capacity and resources in order to achieve the global goals for sustainable fishing and biodiversity conservation. Most of the actions of the Project aim at benefitting all tuna-RFMOs and their member countries, while some actions serve as pilot activities with a view to future upscaling, or address urgent localized problems.

# Progress and achievements

## Improving management

The project is supporting the full implementation of the precautionary approach at the RFMO level. Capacity building workshops for officials from tuna-RFMO member countries, organized by WWF, are helping increase the familiarity and confidence with the process of management strategy evaluation, while the ABNJ Tuna project also supports dialogue between scientists and managers that are crucial in the development of harvest strategies. The project is promoting and supporting the preparation of long-term plans for operationalizing the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in each of the tuna-RFMOs, and encouraging consideration of the impacts of fishing activities.



## Combatting IUU fishing

In close collaboration with the tuna-RFMOs and other project partners, key processes such as port State controls, catch documentation schemes, and the automation of the Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV) have been supported by the project.

Pilot activities in Ghana and Fiji evaluate the best way to incorporate electronic monitoring systems in monitoring control and surveillance operations by coastal States.

The project is developing a certification-based training program to build capacity of enforcement and compliance officers in developing coastal States. Mechanisms for the exchange of experiences and information from enforcement and monitoring personnel in tuna-RFMO member States are being created.

The project is currently developing initiatives for knowledge sharing, such as best practices in monitoring control and surveillance in tuna fisheries that will be distributed to all tuna-RFMO member States.

The ABNJ Tuna project is also supporting the development of integrated MCS in the Pacific Ocean.



## Protecting biodiversity

The project is supporting a pilot collaboration between WCPFC and IATTC to develop integrated and consistent management plans for sharks for the whole Pacific, seeking to develop sustainable and sound fisheries for these species.

In collaboration with ISSF and BirdLife International, the project is supporting the development and dissemination of mitigation techniques for bycatch of small tunas and sharks by tuna purse-seiners and incidental seabird mortality in tuna longline fleets.

Another activity, led by WWF, aims to fill data gaps in the extensive and poorly understood gillnet fisheries in the northern part of the Indian Ocean, and to promote alternative fishing practices that are less harmful to the environment.

In partnership with WCPFC and SPC, the project is supporting the further development of the global *Bycatch Management and Information System*, and workshops to jointly assess mitigation effectiveness.



## OBJECTIVE

Achieve efficiency and sustainability in the use of deep-sea living resources and improve biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ through the systematic application of an ecosystem approach

## PARTNERS

United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur (CPPS), Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic (CCAMLR), Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Duke University, Global Council of the Mediterranean (GFCM), GRID-Arendal, International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Nairobi Convention, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPPFC), Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), Sealord Group, Seascope Ltd / GOBI Secretariat, South East Atlantic Fisheries Organization (SEAFO), South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO), Southern Indian Ocean Deep-sea Fishers Association (SIODFA), Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA)

## FINANCING

US\$8.4 million in GEF grants leveraged with US\$80 million in co-financing

## Sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation of deep-sea living resources and ecosystems in ABNJ

**D**eep-sea fishing in the high seas occurs in waters beyond national jurisdiction on continental slopes or isolated oceanic topographic structures such as seamounts, ridge systems and banks.

The ecosystems in which these fisheries take place support unique and rare fish. They also include fragile biogenic habitats, habitats with structural complexity that may be vulnerable to bottom fishing impacts, and habitats important for biological processes. The potential negative impacts of fishing on these deep seas habitats has become an issue of international concern.

In response, concerted efforts by many organizations, such as the regional fisheries management organizations responsible for the management of fish stocks in ABNJ, have been undertaken. This project seeks to build on such efforts, make use of best practices and address other key issues necessary for the global sustainable use and conservation of these deep-sea resources.

The ABNJ Deep Seas project, led by FAO and UNEP, brings together a broad range of partners working on deep-sea fisheries and conservation issues in the ABNJ globally. The partnership includes the regional fisheries bodies responsible for the management of deep-sea fisheries, Regional Seas Programmes, fishing industry partners and international organizations.

The ABNJ Deep Seas project is focusing on four areas:

- Improving implementation of existing policy and legal frameworks
- Reducing adverse impacts on Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) and enhanced conservation and management of components of Ecologically and Biologically Significant Areas (EBSAs)
- Improving planning and adaptive management for deep-sea fisheries in ABNJ
- Developing and testing methods for area-based planning

The successful implementation of this project will represent a significant step towards the sustainable use of deep sea fish stocks as well as protection of associated bycatch species, ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity in ABNJ.



# Progress and achievements

## Improvements in policy and legal frameworks

- working with legal experts to analyse existing policy and legal frameworks for sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ Deep Seas, in particular the relevant UNGA resolutions and the *International guidelines for the management of deep-sea fisheries in the high seas* and develop practical tools to improve their implementation.

## Reduced adverse impacts on VMEs and enhanced conservation of components of EBSAs

- improving understanding on lesser known aspects of the ABNJ including decent work in deep seas fisheries, fisheries value chain analysis, the value of ecosystem services, and fishing impacts on biodiversity
- collaborating with more than 20 ABNJ partners and stakeholders to strengthen global and regional networking
- working with FAO and the fishing industry to develop information tools such deep sea species identification guides, manuals on data collection, and at-sea electronic data collection applications to improve the biodiversity information collected from deep seas fisheries
- working with regional fisheries bodies to identifying best practices in VME implementation and ensuring this information is available to all regional fisheries bodies
- supporting science and data partners to improve sharing of EBSA related information, promote data sharing, and the appropriate application of EBSA criteria

## Improved planning and adaptive management

- harnessing the expertise of the world's foremost fisheries scientists to produce keystone references on important deep seas fisheries species
- working with all deep seas fisheries stakeholders to support the implementation of the *International guidelines for the management of deep-sea fisheries in the high seas*, relevant UNGA Resolutions, and with the application of an ecosystem approach

## Development and testing methods for area-based planning

- piloting the use of area-based planning tools for deep-sea ecosystems in new areas such as the Western Indian Ocean, and the Southeast Pacific, in collaboration with countries and regional bodies in these region



## OBJECTIVE

Catalyze investment into selected transformational public-private partnerships that mainstream the sustainable management of highly migratory stocks spanning areas within and beyond national jurisdictions

## PARTNERS

Conservation International (CI); World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC)

## FINANCING

US\$10 million in GEF grants leveraged with US\$40 million in co-financing

## Ocean partnerships for sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation – models for innovation and reform

This project, under World Bank coordination, aims to support pilot public and private sector investment in better managed fisheries based on migratory stocks that straddle developing countries' coastal jurisdictions (EEZs) and ABNJ. More specifically, it will identify and help develop four pilot investments with high potential to deliver enhanced economic, social and environmental benefits from living marine resources. Such benefits will be achieved through reforms in the ways fisheries are managed.

In the main, the project will be mostly regionally executed through the following subprojects:

- Bay of Bengal region – small-scale tuna longline fisheries
- Western Central Pacific Ocean – tuna fisheries prosecuted mainly by distant-water fishing nations under the Parties to Nauru Agreement's Vessel Day Scheme
- West/Central Atlantic and Caribbean – recreational and commercial small-scale fisheries targeting billfish
- Eastern Pacific Ocean – increasing the sustainability of the skipjack tuna purse seine fisheries

In addition, a global think tank will support inter-regional coordination, outreach and collaboration, with a global innovation grant facility supporting a range of innovative activities.



## Progress and achievements

**T**he project has been effective since early 2015, with some of its pilots already demonstrating impressive progress. The Caribbean Billfish project, under the lead of FAO/WECAFC, is the most advanced. A series of studies investigated socio-economic, scientific and legal aspects of billfish management in the Caribbean. The recently established multi-partner Consortium for Billfish Management and Conservation will promote stakeholder participation and provide advice for improved billfish management. Business plans and actions towards sustainable management and conservation of billfish will be piloted in Grenada and the Dominican Republic.



## OBJECTIVE

Promote effective global and regional coordination on ABNJ issues, including exchange of information by:

- strengthening and broadening cross-sectoral dialogue and policy coordination in ABNJ
- increasing decision-makers' capability to participate in processes for management and coordination of ABNJ activities
- broadening public understanding of the ecosystem threats to ABNJ

## PARTNERS

Global Ocean Forum (co-executing agency), French Marine Protected Areas Agency, Korea Institute of Science and Technology (KIOST), Institute for International Relations and Sustainable Development (IDDRI), International Ocean Institute, Nausicaä Centre National de la Mer (France), Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), World Ocean Network, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, UNESCO Natural Sciences, Vietnam National University, SeaOrbiter, Deep Sea Conservation Coalition (DSCC), Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), International Maritime Organization (IMO), UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, University of Delaware, World Ocean Network

## FINANCING

US\$1.09 million in GEF grants leveraged with US\$4.6 million in co-financing

## Strengthening global capacity to effectively manage ABNJ

**T**his project, executed by FAO and the Global Ocean Forum, plays a key role in building and improving cross-sectoral dialogue, engagement of high-level decision-makers, public outreach and knowledge management to strengthen capacity to effectively manage ABNJ.

Building on the efforts of the other projects and partners, this project focuses on three areas:

- Global and regional cross-sectoral dialogues, through:
  - Multi-stakeholder workshop to establish linkages for improved information-sharing and understanding on ABNJ across sectors and between global and regional levels.
  - High-level information sessions and events held at major relevant meetings to raise the awareness of decision makers on ABNJ issues, solicit their input on key ABNJ issues related to fisheries and biodiversity conservation and encourage their involvement in future ABNJ policy discussions at various levels.
- Capacity development, through:
  - Communities of practice in key ABNJ issue-areas, made up of expert practitioners from academia, governments, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies and industry with relevant experience and knowledge in ABNJ issues to share and exchange information.
  - ABNJ Regional Leaders Program supporting the participation of regional leaders from developing countries in global ABNJ processes.
- Knowledge management and outreach, through:
  - Public outreach network partnering with journalists and media specialists to improve and expand efforts to raise awareness on important ABNJ issues.
  - The *Common Oceans* web portal designed to provide information, data and best practices on related ABNJ issues generated across all these program projects.





## Progress and achievements

### Cross-sectoral dialogues

**T**he first workshop on *Linking global and regional levels in the management of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction* was held on 17-20 February 2015, at FAO, Rome, Italy, and convened over 100 experts on ecosystem-based management, fisheries, and biodiversity from global and regional levels for an open and constructive policy dialogue for supporting national, regional, and global processes in enhancing ecosystem approaches to the management of ABNJ in place. The second workshop on *Capacity development to improve the management of marine ABNJ: needs, experiences, options, and opportunities* is scheduled to be held on 18-21 May 2016 in Grenada. A high-level event at the 9th meeting of the *Ad hoc open-ended informal working group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction* was conducted on 21 January 2015, which drew around 50 participants including 22 high-level government officials.

### Capacity development

**A** total of 48 leaders from all regions of the world participated in two successful sessions of the ABNJ Regional Leaders Program with support from the project and additional funding sources.

Two communities of practice on fisheries, biodiversity, and climate change and on multi-sector area-based planning are up and running and are beginning to interact extensively to produce joint analysis of ABNJ issues.

### Knowledge management and outreach

**P**lease visit our website [commonoceans.org](http://commonoceans.org) for more information.



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