



UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE NICE, FRANCE 2025

UNOC3 Conference Side Event

Ocean Futures 2030: addressing the gaps in implementing the BBNJ agreement

12 June, 2025, 12:00 – 13:30, Best Western Plus Hôtel Masséna, Nice

Organized by: Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML, Matt Frost and Thecla Keizer), the University of Bergen (UiB, Lise Øvreås and Sverre Ole Drønen), and the EU Science Diplomacy Alliance

This roundtable side event aimed to explore gaps in the adaptation and implementation of the BBNJ Agreement from a research perspective. It brought together experts in marine science, ocean governance and policy, law and philanthropy and finance, with representation from a wide range of sectors and regions, including Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) and representatives from Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Discussions focused on identifying research and technologies that are “BBNJ-ready,” identifying research and technology as well as opportunities from other sectors that were cross-cutting across the Agreement’s four pillars, evaluating the balance between scientific knowledge and implementation, and prioritizing research—including in light of activities by countries not recognizing the BBNJ Agreement.

Key issues highlighted:

1. Knowledge gaps and challenges in ocean research, issues raised included:

- a) Only 30 % of the ocean floor has been mapped; only 0.001% visualized with much of the southern hemisphere understudied
- b) Three critical challenges for creating high seas MPAs were highlighted: gaps in scientific knowledge and so a high degree of uncertainty under which Marine Protected Areas are being developed, lack of regional capacity, and issues around institutional barriers.
- c) Deep-sea features such as connectivity, organism longevity (intergenerational decision consequences), and heterogeneity present complex management challenges
- d) Incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and the need for equitable global inclusion in ocean science were highlighted as crucial.
- e) A lot of BBNJ and ABNJ relevant data is available already; it is important to look what data is accessible.

2. *Institutional and implementation challenges included*
 - a) The BBNJ's STB must be diverse in gender, region, and expertise, and include traditional/Indigenous perspectives, posing selection and coordination challenges.
 - b) Clearing house mechanism design must ensure data accessibility, integration & usability.
 - c) Compliance and enforcement mechanisms need clear guidelines and effective operation
 - d) Science-policy-society integration is key and capacity sharing is vital
3. *Climate and carbon related points included*
 - a) The BBNJ should also be seen as key to climate action, especially in protecting ocean carbon hotspots and understanding carbon sequestration hotspots when planning MPAs.
 - b) mCDR technologies, their uncertainties and the fragmented state of governance were discussed, particularly concerning the deep sea where new research is becoming available
4. *Funding, Capacity, and Equity Issues highlighted included*
 - a) Persistent lack of sufficient, sustainable funding for marine science—particularly for non-Western, Global South, and interdisciplinary research—was a recurring concern.
 - b) Capacity development needs effective funding
 - c) Barriers to accessing scientific knowledge, including paywalls, disproportionately affect scientists and policymakers in the Global South and Indigenous communities.
 - d) The role of philanthropic organizations and NGOs was recognized
5. *Law, Governance, and Societal Integration focus included*
 - a) Cautions were raised regarding the use of scientific uncertainty to delay action and the influence of sectoral/private interests in data governance.
 - b) Social sciences and stakeholder engagement—including youth, local, coastal, and Indigenous communities—are essential to compliance, legitimacy, and impact. Communication challenges— e.g. jargon, language barriers, lack of translated resources—were cited as ongoing impediments to societal engagement.
 - c) Science diplomacy was recognized as a fundamental skillset in support of advancing BBNJ objectives and fostering effective collaboration.

Recommendations for action:

1. Research should be undertaken now to address gaps – no need to wait until treaty ratification
2. Conversations should be held between funders (public and private) and researchers to explain where investment would achieve early and significant impact (co-design).
3. Ocean Science Diplomacy (OSD) should be recognised as a core element of BBNJ implementation, helping policymakers & researchers operate against a background of geopolitical tension and change. The EU report (February 2025) on creating a framework for European science diplomacy is a good model for developing a global framework for OSD.
4. The need for enhanced visibility and engagement from indigenous peoples and local communities, women, and ECOPs was emphasized.
5. It is important to build and support robust capacity sharing programs, learning from past UNCLOS gaps, and ensure equitable participation and skills development across regions.
6. Climate & carbon-related objectives within the BBNJ implementation, e.g. including ocean carbon hotspots identification & protection, needs to be integrated into the BBNJ agreement.
7. Countries of the global north should commit to a stronger collaboration with the global south on the science for implementing the BBNJ agreement.