COMMON OCEANS – ABNJ

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, referred to as the common oceans, make up 40 percent of the surface of the planet, 62 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, sustainable management of fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation is 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.

1 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

The Global sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ Program (Common Oceans ABNJ Program), supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), is a five-year Program that started its activities in early 2014. With the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as coordinating agency, the Common Oceans ABNJ Program is 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.

The Program consists of four Projects working together to achieve efficient and sustainable management of fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ, and to achieve global targets agreed in the international fora.
Who benefits from the Common Oceans ABNJ Program?

Fisheries 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 food and livelihoods security by strengthening the long-term management and sustainability of ABNJ fisheries and the ecosystems on which they depend. Assistance is provided to Coastal States enabling them to 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. Global calls to address major issues such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing are promoted to encourage sustainable ecosystem-based practices.

The 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.

What difference can the Common Oceans ABNJ Program make?

The 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:

- Promote the implementation of the precautionary approach and the ecosystem approach to fisheries
- Increase capacities to protect fragile ecosystems and the diverse values they provide
- Ensure compliance with existing fisheries regulations towards improved sustainability
- Foster international and cross-sectoral coordination and sharing of information across the broad geographic scales required to manage migratory pelagic fishes
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tive
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, Ghana
and Seychelles, US National
Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration (NOAA), BirdLife
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), Pacific Community
(SPC), Organización del Sector
Pesquero y Acuícola del Istmo
Centroamericano (OSPESCA),
Fiji Tuna Boat Owners Association
(FTBOA), Organización de
Productores Asociados de Grandes
Atuneros Congeladores (OPAGAC)

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
16% 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 the value of the catch of tuna and tuna
like species is estimated to be almost US$18 billion annually.

With the strong demand for tuna, combined with overcapacity of
fishing fleets, the status of tuna stocks will deteriorate if fisheries
management is not improved. Through 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
• Reducing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing
through strengthened and harmonized Monitoring, Control and
Surveillance (MCS)
• Reducing ecosystem impacts from tuna fishing, including effects
on bycatch and associated species

This unique Project draws together a large and diverse group
of stakeholders – from industry to tuna-RFMOs, NGOs and
international organizations – who play important roles in tuna
fisheries. The Project builds 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 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.
Improving management

The Project is supporting the implementation of the precautionary approach through the adoption of harvest strategies for the major stocks at the RFMO level. This is done through two activities: 1) capacity building workshops for officials from tuna-RFMO member countries, an activity led by WWF, to increase the familiarity and confidence with the concepts associated with harvest strategies and the process of their adoption, and 2), led by FAO, the facilitation of dialogues between scientists and managers in each RFMO to review progress of the management strategy evaluation process and support the exchanges that are crucial in the development of harvest strategies. The Project also supports the on-going joint tuna-RFMO discussion of options for operationalizing the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in each of the tuna-RFMOs. This will facilitate a consistent approach to incorporating ecosystem considerations into the conservation and management measures.

Combating IUU fishing

In close collaboration with tuna-RFMOs and other Project partners, support is provided to key processes such as port State controls, catch documentation schemes, and the automation of the Consolidated List of Authorized Vessels (CLAV). Two publications, a legal template to facilitate implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement, and design options for the development of tuna catch documentation schemes, were completed in 2016. Further measures to strengthen MCS procedures include a certification-based training program to strengthen the capacity of enforcement and compliance officers in developing States. The launch of a Tuna Compliance Network as a subnetwork of the International MCS Network has also been supported, with the aim to exchange expertise among compliance officers in tuna-RFRMOs. There are pilot activities currently taking place Ghana and Fiji to evaluate the best way to incorporate electronic monitoring systems (EMS) in MCS operations by coastal States – 14 Ghanaian purse seine vessels have been equipped and a total of 50 Fijian longliners will be equipped with EMS equipment – and two rounds of trainings for land-based observers to review and analyze data captured by the EMS installed on the vessels have been completed already.

Protecting biodiversity

The Project supports the tuna-RFMOs WCPFC and IATTC’s joint efforts to develop integrated and consistent management for sharks in the Pacific. Three Pacific-wide shark assessments are underway: the Pacific bigeye thresher shark and southern hemisphere porbeagle shark assessments will be presented to WCPFC in August 2017 and a new silky shark assessment will be unveiled in 2018. With support from the Project and the EU, a multi-fishery study is now underway to examine survival rates of discarded sharks. WCPFC, together with SPC and representatives from 21 countries and organizations, has also completed an analysis of the largest compilation to date of Pacific sea turtle-longline fishery interactions. An all-new, web-based, global Bycatch Management and Information System (BMIS) was launched by WCPFC and SPC in May 2017. The new BMIS web portal allows users to explore over 1,000 curated references by species group, fishing gear or mitigation technique, and provides pointers to species identification and safe release guides. ISSF and BirdLife International are promoting 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 together with the Project. Additional measures to reduce the incidental intake of bycatch in tuna purse seine fisheries were discussed during a first joint meeting of a tuna-RFMO working group on Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs), in April 2017. 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.
Deep-sea fishing occurs over continental slopes, seamounts, ridge systems and banks on bare, muddy sediments and hard, rocky substrates, mostly at depths between 400 and 1,500 metres, although some specialised vessels may fish as deep as 2,000 metres.

The ecosystems in which these fisheries take place support unique and rare fish. They also include ecologically important 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, to address the impacts of fishing, ensure the sustainability of fisheries and conservation of biodiversity, 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.
Improvements in policy and legal frameworks

The Project has teamed up with legal experts to publish an analysis of the existing policy and legal obligations related to sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ Deep Seas. This work will form the basis of a programme of training and legal assistance to support countries, where necessary, to better integrate their international obligations into national laws and policies. Reduced adverse impacts on VMEs and enhanced conservation of components of EBSAs.

Reducing adverse impacts on VMEs and enhanced conservation and management of components of EBSAs

The Project is collaborating with more than 20 ABNJ partners and stakeholders to strengthen and improve global and regional networking, and to increase understanding on lesser known aspects of the ABNJ, including the major deep water species, the value of ecosystem services, and fishing impacts on biodiversity. The Project also has activities to strengthen monitoring control and surveillance, and the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management. Information tools, such as deep sea species identification guides, manuals on data collection, and at-sea electronic data collection applications are being developed and tested in collaboration with the fishing industry, to improve the information on biodiversity collected from deep seas fisheries.

Together with regional fisheries bodies, efforts have been made to identify best practices in VME implementation and ensuring this information is available to all regional fisheries bodies. FAO published a report on global VME processes and practices, with regions highlighted in individual chapters. Support has also been given to 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

Efforts are made to harness the expertise of the world’s foremost fisheries scientists with the aim to produce keystone references on important deep seas fisheries species. 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, are also supported by the Project and deep seas fisheries stakeholders.

Development and testing methods for area-based planning

The Project is conducting pilot work in the use of area-based planning tools with countries and regional bodies. For the Western Indian Ocean and South East Pacific Ocean, reviews on institutional arrangements and cross-sectoral cooperation have been completed, and datasets on marine biodiversity have been described.
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 sub-projects:

- 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.

A global think tank (GloTT) – providing high level technical advice to regional projects and developing a major technical report on innovations in the governance of highly migratory fisheries.

Innovation Support Facility (ISF) – supporting the regionally executed sub-projects through innovative complementary activities that directly inform fisheries management and business planning at the pilot sites.

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
Progress and achievements

The Caribbean Billfish Project

The Caribbean Billfish Project continues its’ pursuit of the sustainable and more equitable use of iconic billfish species stocks. This Project plans to shortly begin testing business case concepts through practical implementations of novel fishery management mechanisms in selected pilot nations. Pilot nation visits, Fishery Performance Indicator studies and modern research outcomes continue to inform project applications using linked engagements with diverse fishery stakeholders. Members of the Consortium for Billfish Management and Conservation (CBMC) continue to advise project actions using the most recent scientific information available for billfish.

Earlier in 2017 this Project held the 3rd Regional Workshop on Billfish Management and Conservation, which approved objectives of the developing Caribbean Billfish Management and Conservation Plan. Additional recent actions include meetings of the CBMC and the Project Steering Committee to assess progress and guide future activities. Planned upcoming events include a Regional Workshop on Recreational Fisheries Data and Statistics, and an informative side event at the 8th World Recreational Fisheries Conference.

Eastern Pacific regional Project and the GloTT

The Eastern Pacific Regional Project has completed a baseline assessment of the performance of the Eastern Pacific tuna fisheries using the fishery performance indicator (FPI) methodology that identified performance gaps that the business plan will address. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) continues to convene stakeholders and provides technical support to jointly develop a business case to better manage the mortality of yellowfin and bigeye tunas in the purse seine sector. In coordination with the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), upcoming work includes technical analyses on measures to address fleet overcapacity in the EPO.

Two GloTT events were held in 2016. One event was a Special Session at the 2016 annual meeting of the Institute of Fisheries Economics and Trade (IIFET) that engaged global fisheries experts on innovations in the governance of highly migratory and transboundary fisheries. The second event brought together the full GloTT – representatives from the four regional Projects, World Bank and FAO – to advise on developing business cases in all four Project regions and initiated the development of a major technical publication to be completed in 2018.

Conservation International (CI) and the Innovation Support Facility (ISF)

The ISF led by CI has made significant progress in supporting the OPP regional pilots. First, CI elaborated guidelines for developing financially-compelling business plans for transitioning fisheries towards sustainability. The ISF has also programmed complementary analyses that directly inform fisheries management decisions at the pilot sites, including but not limited to a ‘Review of Governance Structures’, as well as ‘Fishery Performance Indicator Assessments’. CI has also played a technical advisory role in the CBMC and, advising on the development of the ‘Caribbean Billfish Management Plan’.

Additionally, CI has co-hosted a series of workshops to ensure that the latest scientific and technical knowledge informs the OPP business plans. The latter includes a workshop and technical report about the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in ABNJ’s. CI also recently organized an ‘Investing in Fisheries Recovery’ knowledge-exchange with Project partners, impact investors, and academic institutions in order to promote capacity-building and increased inter-regional cooperation.
**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, Nausicaā 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 CAPACITY**

**Strengthening global capacity to effectively manage ABNJ**

This Project, executed by FAO and the Global Ocean Forum, plays a key role in building and improving cross-sectoral dialogue, engaging high-level decision makers, enhancing knowledge management and fostering public outreach to strengthen capacity to effectively manage ABNJ.

Collaborating with the other programme activities and partners, this Project focuses on three areas:
- Global and regional cross-sectoral dialogues, through:
  - Multi-stakeholder Workshops 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 website designed to provide information, data and best practices on related ABNJ issues generated across all these programme Projects.
Cross-sectoral dialogues

As part of Blue Week Grenada 2016, a high-level workshop on Capacity development to improve the management of marine ABNJ: needs, experiences, options, and opportunities was held 18–21 May 2016 in Grenada. Bringing together 55 stakeholders from government, international organizations, civil society and national and regional ocean leaders, participants discussed and exchanged information and perspectives towards a broader understanding of the capacity needs and opportunities in ABNJ. The group also considered capacity development in the context of the global deliberations towards a legally-binding international instrument on BBNJ under UNCLOS. And finally, they explored possible next steps in the way forward to advance capacity development in the ABNJ.

This gathering followed the first workshop on Linking global and regional levels in the management of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction held 17–20 February 2015, at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, where over 100 experts on ecosystem-based management, fisheries, and biodiversity from global and regional levels gathered for a policy dialogue on supporting national, regional, and global processes in enhancing ecosystem approaches to the management of ABNJ in place. 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

Forty-four national and regional leaders from 34 countries around the world participated in two successful sessions of the ABNJ Regional Leaders Program leading to greater understanding of and engagement in ABNJ-related global processes. Held at UNDOALOS during the BBNJ negotiations, the Program involves: 1) an intensive course taught by 27 international experts on all aspects of ABNJ; 2) participation in the UN BBNJ negotiations as accredited participants; 3) visits to the respective UN Permanent Mission offices to help establish linkages between the global level and experts at national and regional levels; and 4) presentation of regional and national perspectives on ABNJ challenges and opportunities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands during the UN negotiations.

Knowledge management and outreach

Please visit our website commonoceans.org for more information: www.fao.org/in-action/commonoceans/