



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

THE COMMON OCEANS
ABNJ DEEP SEAS PROJECT

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION
OF DEEP-SEA LIVING RESOURCES AND ECOSYSTEMS IN THE ABNJ



GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY



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, seabed mining and climate change are threatening the ability of the oceans to continue providing vital ecosystem services and essential food resources. While there is noteworthy progress in overcoming these challenges, there is a clear need to address the remaining obstacles.

Areas beyond national jurisdiction - ABNJ

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 EEZs¹, sustainable management

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.

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.

Did you know that most deep-sea fishing takes place within Exclusive Economic Zones? Still, FAO estimates that the yearly global catch caught by bottom-contact fishing gear in ABNJ is around **150 000 tonnes** (excluding the Mediterranean), comprising up to **50 deep-sea species**, all caught by **11 flag States**.

ABNJ Deep Seas Project - part of the Common Oceans ABNJ Program

Addressing the need to enhance sustainability in the use of deep-sea living resources and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ, is the Common Oceans ABNJ Deep Seas Project, one of the Projects of the Global sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ Program (Common Oceans ABNJ Program), supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The Project, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (UN-FAO) and United Nations Environment (UNEP), brings together a broad range of partners working on 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.



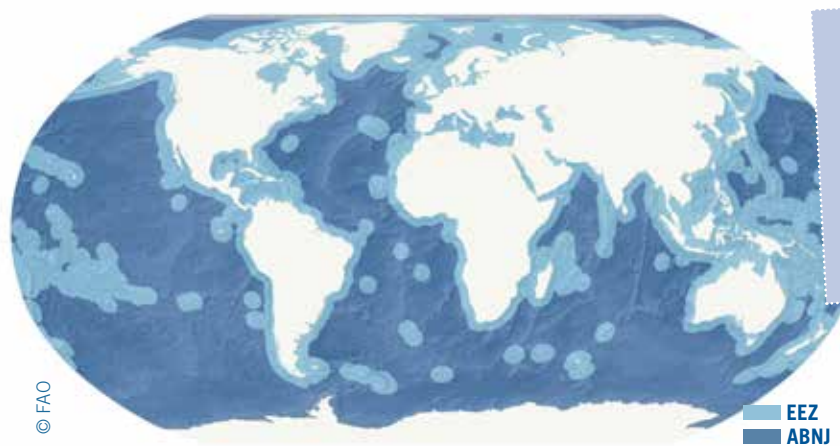
Who benefits from the efforts of the Common Oceans ABNJ Program?

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.



The **Exclusive, Economic Zones (EEZ)** stretches 200 nautical miles from the coastal line, here in light blue.

The **ABNJ** includes both the high seas and the seabed beyond the (extended) continental shelf of coastal States.

Project overview:

OBJECTIVE

To 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

UN Environment , UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur (CPPS), Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Duke University, General Fisheries Commission for 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 (NPFC), Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO), Sealord Group, Seascope Ltd / GOBI Secretariat, South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO), South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (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



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. The ABNJ Deep Seas 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 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

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. Work is ongoing to develop a step-wise guide on these existing policy and legal obligations that will support relevant countries to integrate these obligations into their national frameworks. Regional training is planned for relevant countries to apply this guide. The Project has also produced a study on deep-sea fisheries and catch documentation schemes (CDS), and recommends a framework for the implementation of CDS schemes.



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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.



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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 Project has produced a study on the biology and management of a key commercial deep-seas species (Orange Roughy: *Hoplostethus atlanticus*), which is a collation and synthesis of available information on the biology of the species and current assessment and management methods. Ongoing work under the Project explores the international legal framework for monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS), enforcement and compliance, and how this is applied by deep-sea RFMOs. Training activities are planned for relevant regional country partners to review the effectiveness of existing MCS systems and identify needs to strengthen them. More generally the project supports the implementation of the FAO International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-Sea Fisheries in the High Seas and relevant UNGA Resolutions.



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Development and testing methods for area-based planning

The project is testing tools and approaches for area-based planning with the Regional Seas Conventions. In particular, the project team collaborates with the Nairobi Convention in the Western Indian Ocean and the Comisión Permanente del Pacífico Sur in the South East Pacific, where reviews on institutional arrangements and cross-sectoral cooperation have been completed. The project will publish a review of area-based planning tools that assess the purpose, strengths, weaknesses, and enabling conditions of selected tools used within EEZs and an evaluation of their suitability to deep sea area-based planning in ABNJ. A literature review highlighting the importance of marine connectivity across governance bodies and the benefits of incorporating connectivity science into area-based planning will be published. Two regional metadata inventories for each pilot region are being developed to identify relevant marine datasets of biodiversity importance for area-based planning in ABNJ. Finally, a review is being conducted on area-based planning processes and tools in 4 regions of the world for planning in ABNJ, highlighting key successes, challenges and lessons learnt that are applicable to the two regional pilot regions.

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CA2245EN/1/12.18



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