

An Update on the DOSI BBNJ Working Group's Participation in IGC5

From Jeff Marlow, based on notes taken by Christine Gaebel

The UN's fifth intergovernmental conference on biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (IGC5 of the BBNJ instrument) was held in mid-August, and several members of DOSI were on hand to work with delegates and provide scientific input when needed. IGC5 was the most dynamic and productive meeting yet, as delegates sprinted toward the finish of the treaty-formulating process, narrowly missing a finalized text. Delegations sought creative ways to bridge gaps in their positions on a number of topics, engaging in late-night sessions and closed-door meetings, seeking compromises and trade-offs.

The treaty text, broadly speaking, is divided into four sections. On the topic of Marine Genetic Resources, the biggest point of divergence was around the monetary benefit sharing provisions. While the notion was agreed to in principle, numbers didn't align, and the degree of financial support provided to developing nations remains to be specified. The definition and inclusion of "digital sequence information" was not finalized, and this work will proceed in parallel with efforts at the Convention on Biological Diversity. Regarding environmental impact assessments, the use of an impact-based or activity-based approach was not resolved, and the ways in which provisions under the BBNJ agreement interact with existing EIA modalities remains uncertain. Capacity Building and the Transfer of Marine Technology was considered an essential plank of the treaty, though the degree to which it is an obligatory component of a state's involvement - and whether or not monetary contributions are mandated - is an open question. The Area-Based Management Tools section saw substantial progress, and a compromise to include "sustainable use" within MPA boundaries appears to have been attained, as long as the primary conservation objectives are continually met.

DOSI members participated in inter-delegation informal meetings throughout the two weeks, offering scientifically informed advice as well as input on the practicality of various scenarios from a sea-going perspective. As we await the scheduling of the continuation of IGC5, DOSI will continue to liaise with delegations as they narrow their focus to reach a practical yet ambitious conservation treaty.