

First session of intergovernmental negotiations for biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction: highlighting deep-ocean stewardship issues at the United Nations

Harriet Harden-Davies, 30 November 2018

After more than a decade of preparatory discussions, the first session of intergovernmental negotiations for the development of a new international legally-binding instrument for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ agreement) under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea was held 4 – 17 September 2018, at the United Nations headquarters in New York. These negotiations mark a historic turning point in international efforts to address the myriad and rising threats to life in the two thirds of the ocean that lie in ABNJ. The Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative has taken several steps to facilitate science-policy engagement, collaborating widely through the BBNJ Working Group and other DOSI working groups and partner organisations.

Two policy briefs were published and shared widely: a brief on [deep-sea fundamentals](#) highlighted the important ecosystem services provided by BBNJ and the need for precautionary and ecosystem-based approaches to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity; and brief emphasising the importance of [strategic environmental assessments](#) also summarised the challenges posed by knowledge gaps. The DOSI delegation to the BBNJ negotiations included: Harriet Harden-Davies (University of Wollongong); Jeff Marlow (Harvard University); Paul Snelgrove (Memorial University) and Porter Hoagland (WoodsHole Oceanographic Institute).

DOSI, in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO, held a side-event on 12 September entitled “Satellites to seafloor: options for technology transfer to enable a science-based approach for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction”. The presenters (Ariel Troisi, IOC; Jeff Marlow, Harvard University; Paul Snelgrove, Memorial University; Harriet Harden-Davies, University of Wollongong; and Rose Lesley Kautoke, Government of the Kingdom of Tonga) highlighted the role of international cooperation in deep-ocean science to investigate BBNJ and opportunities to drive technology transfer and build capacity to enable a science-based approach to conservation and sustainable use. Telepresence enabled the delegates to stream live to the deck of the RV *Falkor*, demonstrating the potential to scale-up participation and international cooperation in deep-sea research. More than 60 delegates attended.



In addition, DOSI co-organised and/or contributed to 4 other events during the negotiations. DOSI collaborated with the Governments of Jamaica and Norway, IUCN and the International Council on Environmental Law in a side-event on 6 September at the UN, and an all-day workshop on 8 September at New York University on “Marine genetic resources of areas beyond national jurisdiction: key considerations on access and benefit sharing”. DOSI contributed scientific perspectives on issues relating to marine genetic resources and suggestions for the role of scientific and technological capacity building in forming the basis of a solution. DOSI also collaborated with Pew Charitable Trusts and the Pacific Small Island Developing States to discuss “Options for a scientific body under a new BBNJ instrument” in a side-event on 7 September at the UN. We highlighted the importance of addressing gaps in scientific knowledge and of transparent, clear, credible and comprehensive scientific advice to policy. Further, DOSI participated in an event with Ocean Care discussing perspectives on integrating management of ocean noise with the element for marine genetic resources, on 10 September 2018 at the UN.

While some [progress](#) was made at this first round of negotiations, some delegations lamented that these were more akin to preparatory discussions than negotiations and several issues remain to be resolved. Three more sessions of the Intergovernmental Conference are scheduled between now and 2020, the second conference will be held 25 March – 5 April 2019 at the UN in New York. A document to facilitate text-based negotiations is expected from the President of the conference in early 2019. Science will continue to be crucial to inform the process and DOSI stands ready to continue to facilitate science-policy engagement in the coming months and years.

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Further Information

IISD reporting services (for independent reporting of the intergovernmental conference: <http://enb.iisd.org/oceans/bbnj/igc1/>)

UN papersmart (for interventions): <http://papersmart.unmeetings.org/ga/bbnj-intergovernmental-conference/first-session/programme>

Official UN website for the BBNJ negotiations: <https://www.un.org/bbnj/content/first-substantive-session>

Statement by the President of the conference at the closing of the first session. *UN Intergovernmental conference on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction First session New York, 4–17 September 2018*. 20 September 2018. A/CONF.232/2018/7

<http://undocs.org/en/A/CONF.232/2018/7>