

## Reflections on the Resumed Fifth Session of the Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty

By Alumita Talei Sekinairai

The resumed fifth session of the 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 (BBNJ) convened for two weeks at the UN Headquarters in New York. Member states, Non Government Organisations and Intergovernmental Organisations globally congregate for the common human interest of mankind. Inauspiciously, participants were effectively discussing the same treaty version as last year, with some text proposals submitted by States during the last IGC5 session and the informal contribution prepared by the Chair, Ms Rena Lee with the proposed amendments to selected articles of the finalised draft treaty to facilitate the discussion.

The BBNJ treaty has been under development for the past 20 years. I first learned about BBNJ when I did my Masters Program at the World Maritime University in 2021, during our negotiation exercise in school as part of our learning curriculum towards Ocean Governance.



Image: BBNJ Negotiations Exercise at the World Maritime University in Malmo, Sweden. (L-R Alumita Sekinairai, Dr Kahlil Hassanali )

Being part of this Ocean Voices program with the Nippon Foundation - University of Edinburgh and SPC/PCCOS, I was fortunate to join the resumed fifth session of BBNJ IGC5 as a Fiji delegation funded by Deep-Ocean Stewardship Initiative(DOSI) negotiating on the interests within Pacific Small Island Developing States within Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ). My first experience within this BBNJ negotiation was overwhelming in trying to close texts with

countries continuously being reminded by Madam President Rena Lee to "be flexible at all times".

The process was too intense, with almost 48 hours of non-stop work with various delegations on the final voyage in trying to bring the ship to shore. This shows the dedication and hard work of countries trying to sustain, manage, and protect our marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

My voice within this BBNJ negotiations was to see that our Indigenous People and local communities were involved with the use of Traditional Knowledge in the BBNJ treaty. Some countries question the use of traditional knowledge on the high seas, as they do not understand that our Indigenous people from decades ago have been using traditional navigation to move from one country to another and have preserved knowledge about the ocean on the high seas.



Image: Ocean Voices Fellows at the BBNJ Negotiations in the UN Headquarters at New York. (L-R Alumita Sekinairai, Sheena Talma, Gemma Nelson, Vanessa Lopes)

Within two weeks of negotiations, Traditional Knowledge from Indigenous People and local communities was included in the Scientific & Technical Body (STB), Indigenous People being capitalized and being reflected in almost all aspects of the BBNJ treaty.

Finally, our canoe has voyaged a long journey where, in this BBNJ treaty, the Pacific Small Islands Developing States (PSIDS) have voiced their interest and been recognized as the most significant voice supported by other countries within this canoe of the BBNJ negotiation.