

The role of research and capacity-building in the United Nations BBNJ negotiations

Side Event at Our Ocean 2019 (Oslo) by

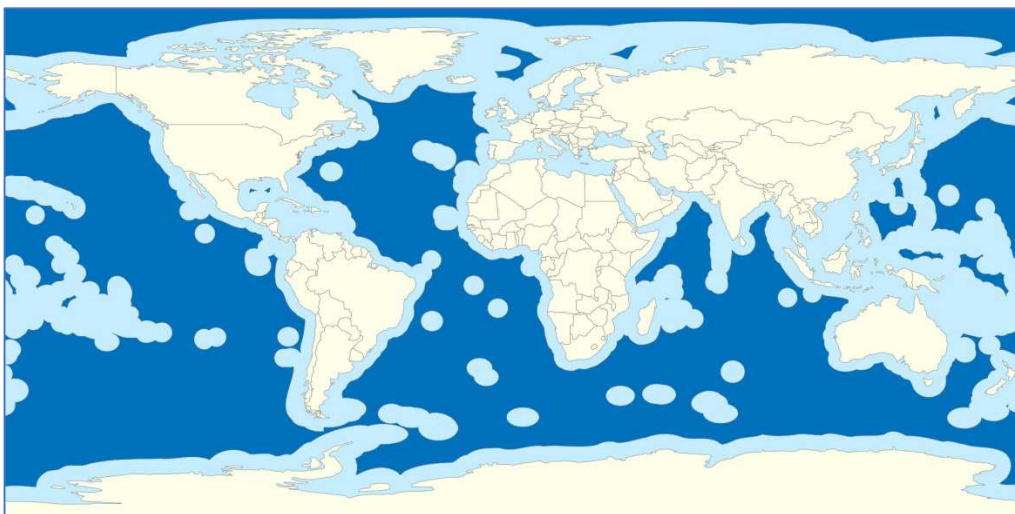
University of Bergen, Norway
Permanent Mission of Palau to the United Nations
Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)

Contact person: Professor Edvard Hviding / edvard.hviding@uib.no

The ocean supplies vital ecosystem services to a burgeoning world population. Globally, the ocean is exposed to multiple stressors, but retains potential for supplying more food, energy, transportation, and crucial genetic resources. Controversies and conflicts of interest are abundant, as exemplified by the discrepant views of a freedom of the high seas and the preservation of a common heritage of humankind.

The “constitution” for the ocean, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), remains the comprehensive framework for global legal ocean governance, while the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) add direction and create impetus for the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean. While SDG 14 “Life Below Water” is of direct relevance, the SDGs on the whole are all closely interlinked and many are relevant for ocean governance. We need only mention SDG 13 “Climate Action” to illustrate this.

From 2018, a major event in the history of UNCLOS is the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) to negotiate a legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biological diversity in areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ). The IGC-BBNJ follows years of preparatory work and will continue negotiations until 2020 when the international legally binding instrument (ILBI) is envisaged to be complete. The IGC-BBNJ comes at a time of increased focus on environmental, economic and social sustainability of the planet as a whole, facing stark realities of climate crisis and biodiversity loss. The world’s High Seas – those parts of the ocean that are not managed under national jurisdictions as 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) represent potential resource wealth both for adjacent maritime and coastal states and as common heritage of humankind, as well as urgent gaps in scientific knowledge.



200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones and High Seas beyond national jurisdiction (Source: UN)

Contestations over the High Seas are diverse globally, and demonstrate the need for the ILBI under UNCLOS that the IGC-BBNJ is developing. The IGC has proceeded from a basic focus on four areas of particular attention, each of which is being developed through plenary debates among UN member states and a wide range of stakeholders including NGOs:

- measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas
- capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology
- environmental impact assessments
- marine genetic resources including questions on the sharing of benefits

While the ongoing BBNJ negotiations clearly represent a wide range of complex legal challenges, this Side Event proposed here takes a different perspective and focuses on the multiple, significant roles of ocean science in its widest sense. With partners and speakers from the scientific community and the United Nations system, we want to explore and exemplify current scientific challenges for global ocean governance of BBNJ, as well as to account for the increased involvement of research in the ongoing IGC and the place of science in the ILBI.

Speakers at the side event are committed to developing this specific science-policy nexus for BBNJ. While the four focal areas of the IGC listed above signify multiple ways in which science and technology are relevant, the specific area of *capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology* is key to making explicit the range of research challenges for future governance of the world's High Seas under UNCLOS and the ILBI for BBNJ. The University of Bergen's partners in co-hosting this side event – the Permanent Mission of Palau to the United Nations and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission – are well positioned to cover the range of questions addressed.

The opening speaker will be Ambassador **Ngedikes Olai Uludong**, Palau's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, who has a key role at the BBNJ negotiations as Facilitator of the IGC's working group on capacity building and transfer of marine technology. Dr. **Yimnang Golbuu**, CEO of the Palau International Coral Reef Center, will represent Palau's prominent national and global scientific voice in ocean science and governance.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), through the UN Decade of Ocean Science, has a significant role in building capacity, facilitating sharing of data and transfer of marine technology, as well as in forging a science-policy nexus and contributing globally to building capacity and providing a scientific basis for BBNJ governance. The University of Bergen is Norway's leading ocean-oriented university, and has taken several roles of leadership in UN- and ocean-focused science advice. The IOC and the University of Bergen will be represented by Research Director and Professor **Peter Haugan** of Norway's Institute of Marine Research and Professor and ocean anthropologist **Edvard Hviding**.

The side event aspires to provide an arena for exchange of science and policy ideas directly relevant to the IGC-BBNJ. There will also be discussion on how a BBNJ ILBI can contribute to the 2030 Agenda, including how science can be used to underpin this particular development. The target group for the side event is all parties with stakes in the science-policy nexus (diplomacy, politics, research, industry, etc.), but the event also aims generate broader public support for informed decision-making on the outcomes of the BBNJ negotiations.