



Paris Workshop

Strengthening the Science and Policy Dialogue: BBNJ Agreement and the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3)

28 and 29 March 2025
Paris, France

Outcome Document

Organizers



Sponsors



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MARCH 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tara Ocean Foundation (Tara) and the Girguis Lab at Harvard University (Girguis Lab) held a workshop from 29 – 30 March 2025 in Paris, a high-level dialogue on the [Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction \(BBNJ\) Agreement](#) (Paris Workshop). The Paris Workshop is a continuation of the series of workshops that Tara and the Girguis Lab have held since 2019, which have focused on dialogue among key delegates globally, leading scientists, research institutions and the private sector. This outcome document provides a summary of the key points from the Paris Workshop where regional group participants from around the world, key countries that support the BBNJ Agreement, leading scientists from research institutions, and the private sector. The Paris Workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule and the participants' spoke in their personal capacity.

OBJECTIVE OF THE PARIS WORKSHOP

The title of the workshop was “Strengthening the Science and Policy Dialogue: BBNJ Agreement and the UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3).” The objective of the Paris Workshop was to build on the topics covered at the *Tara in Nice* workshop held in 2024 and in line with the objectives and strategies for the [BBNJ Agreement's Preparatory Commission](#) (PrepCom) and UNOC3 (as stated in paragraph 21 of the [zero draft](#)).

INTRODUCTION

The participants had very active engagement for two full days. The outcome of the Paris Workshop reflected the statement from the keynote speaker:

The design of the BBNJ regime should incentivize fair, inclusive, transparent, and iterative processes that promote scientifically and technically guided decision-making for improved ocean governance. The Paris Workshop is timely and aims to address the very question of the science/technical policy interface in the BBNJ regime. It is important that we have a diversity of views to inform this debate and I commend the organizers for inviting not only government representatives but also representatives from academia, and industry.

The co-hosts designed the Workshop participants' to reflect on three major topics:

- Scientific and Technical Body (STB) and other bodies
- Benefit sharing and capacity development and transfer of marine technology
- Design, build, and operationalization of the BBNJ Clearing-House Mechanism (CIHM)

The programming allowed the participants to base the CIHM discussion on the substantive matters on the STB, benefit sharing, and capacity development and transfer of marine technology, keeping in mind the adage, “form follows function.”

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

I. Scientific and Technical Body (STB) and other bodies, and benefit sharing, capacity development and transfer of marine technology: scientific community and Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLC) considerations

Key messages and questions from the Paris Workshop:

1. Focus on the text of the BBNJ Agreement in answering implementation questions to ensure that consideration of practicalities do not deter from the intent of the negotiators and to avoid relitigating contentious issues.
2. Focus on the tasks for each session of the PrepCom to give shape to the matters that need to be accomplished.
3. Agree on *what* topics and *how* the first Conference of the Parties (COP) make decision on such matters to achieve an effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. For example, rather than discuss whether the

PARIS WORKSHOP OUTCOME DOCUMENT MARCH 2025

Convention on Biological Diversity's Cali Fund can support the BBNJ Agreement's financial mechanism, the PrepCom could consider how the first COP could agree on a process that allows the COP to explore the relevance of the Cali Fund (and other funds) and a process for the BBNJ COP to enter into an agreement (e.g., MOU, etc.) with the relevant fund(s).

4. Explore the structure and functioning of the BBNJ's institutional arrangements with a focus on the *decision-making process*:
 - a. On guiding principles, the participants emphasized the essential elements of transparency, autonomy and independence, while maintaining the credibility of the subsidiary body and its members. How would the guiding principles be reflected in the BBNJ COP and the bodies' work?
 - b. How would the nominations and elections be handled to ensure meaningful inclusion?
 - c. Careful consideration is necessary for each of the subsidiary bodies' work and the necessary expertise. In what ways would the BBNJ bodies benefit from collaboration where expertise of one subsidiary body may support another subsidiary body's tasks?
 - d. What is the composition of the BBNJ body (e.g., Bureau, Chair, standing body of experts, external sources, etc.)? Would the COP decide for BBNJ bodies to have external members or external assistance, and what would be the process to do so? What considerations are necessary for choosing IPLC experts when there is not a single organization that unites the IPLC?
 - e. What processes are necessary for an effective structure of the BBNJ bodies?
 - f. What are the working methods of the BBNJ bodies (e.g. working online, outputs for the COP, etc.)? Should the bodies themselves or the COP determine their detailed working methods? Depending on the tasks, not all bodies will work in the same way. Who will lead in ensuring that the working methods are properly implemented? How would the members of a BBNJ body resolve lack of consensus in providing recommendations to the COP?
 - g. What are the terms of the committee members (i.e. years)? Would there be benefits in having overlapping terms to ensure that institutional memory would not be lost?
 - h. Explore how the subsidiary bodies interact within the BBNJ Agreement (e.g., STB and access and benefit sharing committee, Finance Committee or a governing body for the fund, etc.) and with external bodies (e.g., Food and Agriculture Organization, World Intellectual Property Organization, Convention on Biological Diversity, etc.). How do we ensure that BBNJ COP and its bodies do not become silos and benefit from synergies while respecting confidentiality?
5. How would the BBNJ Agreement ensure coherence with the Parties' or soon to be Parties' national systems? An example is processes on traditional knowledge in the BBNJ Agreement. Also consider that the BBNJ Agreement presents opportunities for synergies with other multilateral agreements so that it does not operate in a silo.
6. Explore the BBNJ Agreement's processes to ensure adequate and sustainable funding. Where will the funding come from? How much money is needed (i.e., scale of the money)? Who are the potential donors and recipients and for what purpose will the money be used (i.e., needs assessment)? Fundraising initiatives have already started with philanthropies on ad hoc basis, and there are various ways to raise funds (e.g., toll system, corporate blue bonds, endowment, etc.). What process is effective in conducting outreach to donors (e.g., Secretariat to raise funds, a fundraising governing body, use the Clearing-House Mechanism for matchmaking, etc.)? Consider the circularity of the BBNJ economy and priorities (i.e., avoid funds going back to developed countries only).
7. On models and precedents from other multilateral agreements: not all models are good or bad in their entirety. There is an opportunity to be creative. To that end, consider how certain elements of other multilateral agreements could be adapted into the BBNJ Agreement may create an entirely new model.

PARIS WORKSHOP OUTCOME DOCUMENT
MARCH 2025

8. Future proof the BBNJ institutional arrangements. The BBNJ Agreement does not have to be bound on today's science. We need to be flexible and not lock in elements that could evolve (e.g., technology).
9. We need to move forward without the mandate to get everything done at the first COP. Prioritizing the critical elements for the BBNJ Agreement's institutional arrangements to effectively function from entry into force and setting up processes to allow for the first COP to make timely decisions would lead to effective use of the PrepCom sessions.

II. Design, build, and operationalization of the BBNJ Clearing-House Mechanism

Key messages and questions from the Paris Workshop:

1. When considering the design of the BBNJ Clearing-House Mechanism (CIHM), understand the needs of the wide range of users that will access and provide data/information. It will be important to create a "value statement" for the CIHM so that the use of the platform becomes desirable. Some of the key considerations are:
 - a. How do we separate what the user expects from the CIHM and what the Parties expect the CIHM to do? The process will be an iterative exercise to align possibly different expectations.
 - b. Consider the overall IT foundation and systems or infrastructure that would be needed to support all the functions associated with implementing the BBNJ Agreement.
 - c. How will the CIHM enable interoperability? What new effort is required and where can we leverage what already exists? Increasingly, scientists may search in a specific database, but they provide data elsewhere. The benefit of the CIHM would be, if designed well, the relevant external databases will be better identified and easier to navigate due to the linking identifier (i.e., BBNJ Batch ID). Interoperability will increase discoverability and would lead to fostering scientific research. Processes to develop, implement, and enforce standards and protocols are essential.
 - d. On scalability and accessibility, the IT designer would need to determine how users would be accessing the CIHM. Further, through consultations with the users, the IT designer would need to know the databases the CIHM needs to align with to ensure that the standards and protocols are properly implemented to secure integrity of the data/information.
 - e. From an IT design perspective, some of the questions that will need to be addressed may include:
 - i. how the CIHM would enable collaboration
 - ii., what specific models and local systems need to be considered,
 - iii. what technical capacity development initiatives are needed for a wide range of users to effectively use the CIHM, and
 - iv. what we need to do now so that the CIHM can be "AI ready" and evolve with advancing technology. If and how large language models may be incorporated to the CIHM is also a question that could be addressed.
2. In terms of interoperability, the CIHM will need to enter into some type of agreements with the linking databases. The process of negotiating the terms and conditions of such agreement is likely to be time consuming. It will be important to take such consideration into account in the timeline to design, build and operationalize the CIHM.
3. There is no agreed upon definition of "open access," as the meaning varies depending on the provider. In the CIHM context, it will be important to define what open access means.
4. The use of CIHM is not a requirement, but an option for information associated with traditional knowledge. An ad hoc working group may consider how best to ensure that the rights of the traditional knowledge holders are protected in case CIHM is used. The PrepCom may agree on the process to create such a working group and the mandate for its work so that the CIHM's design could reflect the needs of IPLC.

PARIS WORKSHOP OUTCOME DOCUMENT MARCH 2025

5. Small island developing States have local databases that sit in the regions and interoperability is an important factor. Internet connectivity (intermittent or lack thereof) and how to use/manage big data are concerns that will need to be addressed in the design and functions of the CIHM.
6. Based on experience with other existing CIHMs, including in the design a capability of an automatic “push and pull” would allow for a robust system, rather than to rely on users to manually provide data/information and to manually search data/information.
7. If there is to be an experimental design and pilot of the CIHM, there are various avenues to do so, including the options below:
 - a. Should the PrepCom decide to proceed with a pilot phase of the CIHM, it could request the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations (DOALOS) to undertake the necessary activities. The required budget for such activities to start in 2026 could be addressed in the context of the resolution on the BBNJ Agreement under the dedicated sub-item of the agenda item on oceans and the law of the sea of the General Assembly.
 - b. There could be an independent effort outside of the PrepCom to design and conduct a pilot phase. This approach would require financial and resource commitments by donors outside of the PrepCom setting, but the process to design, build, and conduct pilot studies may be shorter and potentially more robust than going through the budgeting process through the UN.
8. The participants agreed that the PrepCom would benefit from establishing a working group of experts on CIHM. It is imperative that the PrepCom at its first session decide on the process to establish such working group and the mandate for the group so that the work could commence as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION AND THE NEXT STEPS

As evident in the [documents issued by the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat's notes](#), the Co-Chairs' guiding questions, and the key discussion points above, there are wide ranging and complex topics for the PrepCom to explore and decide. Without a disciplined approach to discussions at the PrepCom and conducting intersessional work, it will be difficult to make meaningful progress to ensure that the BBNJ Agreement will be effectively implemented.

Providing support to ensure early ratification and entry into force will require concerted effort. There are certain funds available through the Global Environment Facility (with improved application/approval process) and funds and/or initiatives that are made available through the European Union, [DOALOS](#) and other organizations. Additional funding, in-kind donations, and capacity development initiatives will support early entry into force. Further, as the participants made clear, the goal should not be to reach 60 Parties, but for universal participation in the BBNJ Agreement. At the time of the Paris Workshop, there were [121 signatories and 21 Parties](#). Most of the Parties are from developing countries. UNOC3 is a critical platform that will push towards universal ratification.

To maintain the strong engagement from the Paris Workshop, Tara, the Girguis Lab, High Seas Alliance, and Permanent Mission of Monaco to the United Nations will host an evening reception on April 16, 2025. An invitation is attached. Further, at UNOC3, Tara and the Girguis Lab will host a side event and additional information will follow. Finally, Tara and the Girguis Lab would like to thank the co-sponsors of the Paris Workshop for their generous contributions. We look forward to hosting workshops in the future and sincerely welcome collaboration.

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