# Global delegates meet in New York to finalise high seas biodiversity treaty implementation



Delegates from around the world have convened in New York for the inaugural Preparatory Commission session of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty, also known as the High Seas Treaty. The session’s objective is to finalise the implementation rules for this significant international agreement aimed at safeguarding marine biodiversity across the vast areas of the ocean that lie beyond national jurisdiction.

The BBNJ Treaty represents the third implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This treaty focuses on protecting marine biodiversity in the high seas, particularly in areas more than 200 nautical miles from national Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), which together represent nearly 64% of the planet’s oceans.

Key objectives of the treaty include:

* Safeguarding marine biodiversity in the high seas regions.
* Establishing a framework for the equitable sharing of benefits derived from marine genetic resources (MGRs), which have increasing importance in pharmaceutical and biotechnological industries.
* Mandating Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) before undertaking activities that may affect marine ecosystems in these areas.

India is among the signatories of the BBNJ Treaty but has yet to ratify the agreement. This reflects a broader global challenge, as, by April 2025, only 21 countries had ratified the treaty, below the 60 needed for it to enter into force.

The need for the BBNJ Treaty arises from several pressing concerns. Currently, only about 1.44% of the high seas are protected, despite these waters covering two-thirds of the global ocean area. Activities such as deep-sea mining, overfishing, and pollution have continued with limited international regulation, posing serious threats to marine ecosystems. The treaty also addresses the rising commercial utilisation of MGRs and aims to ensure that ocean resources are accessible equitably, particularly to developing countries in the Global South, preventing domination by developed nations.

However, the treaty faces multiple challenges. Aside from low ratification rates, geopolitical tensions, especially in regions like the South China Sea and the Bay of Bengal, have slowed consensus on establishing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Enforcement mechanisms within the treaty are considered weak, with concerns over states’ ability to opt out of obligations, potentially undermining compliance. There is also some overlap and potential conflict with other international frameworks, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), particularly in relation to the governance of marine genetic resources. Furthermore, provisions for capacity building and technology transfer to developing countries lack binding commitments, raising concerns about equitable support. The treaty’s scope does not currently include oil and gas exploration or pollution within national EEZs, which could affect ecological coherence in ocean governance.

Looking ahead, experts and diplomats involved with the treaty have outlined several priorities to ensure its effectiveness:

* Accelerating the ratification process is critical, with a focus on reaching the required number of countries before the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3) scheduled in France.
* Ensuring that scientific and technical bodies involved in decision-making have balanced regional representation and relevant expertise.
* Establishing and operationalising a dedicated funding mechanism, supported by tailored contributions from developed nations.
* Integrating overlapping governance frameworks to bridge management between the high seas and EEZs to better address interconnected marine threats.
* Developing digital monitoring tools and global dashboards to enhance transparency and compliance tracking for Marine Protected Areas and Environmental Impact Assessments.

The BBNJ Treaty is regarded as a transformative framework for ocean conservation at a global scale. However, realising its objectives will depend on sustained political commitments, institutional effectiveness, and an emphasis on equitable implementation among nations of varying capacities. The vast and vital ocean ecosystems, already facing mounting pressures, are the primary beneficiaries of successful stewardship under this treaty.

The Insights IAS publication provided an overview of the treaty’s context, challenges, and prospects, highlighting its significance in international environmental governance.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://highseasalliance.org/prepcom/> - Confirms the Preparatory Commission session dates (14-25 April 2025) and objectives regarding implementation rules for the BBNJ Treaty.
2. <https://www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en> - Verifies the BBNJ Treaty's status as the third UNCLOS implementing agreement and its four focus areas: marine genetic resources, area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, and capacity-building.
3. <https://sdg.iisd.org/events/bbnj-prepcom-i/> - Supports the UN General Assembly's role in operationalizing the treaty post-adoption and references the 2025 Preparatory Commission session.
4. <https://www.oceancare.org/en/stories_and_news/prepcom-high-seas-treaty/> - Corroborates the 21 current ratifications (as of April 2025) and the requirement for 60 ratifications for entry into force.
5. <https://enb.iisd.org/marine-biodiversity-beyond-national-jurisdiction-bbnj-cop-prepcom1> - Confirms the treaty's adoption date (19 June 2023) and historical context of negotiations.
6. <https://highseasalliance.org/prepcom/> - Additional confirmation of the treaty's focus on marine protected areas and environmental impact assessments in high seas governance.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMifEFVX3lxTE5WNzFhWm1yanowSjE2M3Qtd0dqbU04akN1azR5MkVNTXZfZldTTzhLS2d1ZDQ3OXhOS1VuRk45NzdzUVgxNldVNlVUUDFCcnYtamxlZ2h5YnhnWlB2ZFNncnZES0NpV3lZRDFpUldvWVMzSmtJa01PbVI0WUo?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data