



BBNJ: A NEW ERA OF OCEAN GOVERNANCE

What is BBNJ?

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) is often referred to as the High Seas Treaty, and is the third implementing agreement to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

All States and regional economic integration organisations were called upon to **sign the Agreement from 20 September 2023 to 20 September 2025** and it came into force on 17 January 2026.

The Treaty covers 4 main areas:

1. **Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs)**, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits.
2. Measures such as **Area-Based Management Tools (ABMTs)**, including **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**.
3. **Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)**.
4. Capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology.

WHAT IS MGR?

“Any material of marine plant, animal, microbial or other origin containing functional units of heredity of actual or potential value.”

BBNJ Treaty Art. 1.8

WHAT IS ABMT?

“A tool, including [MPAs], for a geographically defined area through which one or several sectors or activities are managed with the aim of achieving particular conservation and sustainability.”

BBNJ Treaty Art. 1.1 & 1.9

UNCLOS & BBNJ

UNCLOS establishes the rights and responsibilities of states over the world's ocean maritime zones (territorial sea, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), high seas), marine environmental protection and marine scientific research.

The BBNJ **marked the first ever detailed and legally binding agreement to conserve and sustainably use marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.**

BBNJ & Sri Lanka



20 February 2025 - Sri Lanka signed the BBNJ Agreement.



16 September 2025 - Sri Lanka ratified the BBNJ Agreement.



109th Signatory - Out of the 145 signatories and 92 parties to the Agreement, Sri Lanka was the 58th to ratify the Agreement.

Sri Lanka is a **biodiversity hotspot** located in the Indian ocean, home to endangered marine life such as:



WHALES



RAYs



SHARKs

The ocean is a critical part of the country's economy, with the EEZ being approximately 600,000 km². Therefore, **the BBNJ will act as a crucial protector of Sri Lanka's biodiversity.**

"Invisible political lines of control that we draw on maps mean nothing for the ocean's long-distance travelers. Once these animals swim away from protected areas, they immediately become vulnerable again, so the BBNJ is a very important first step in protecting these highly migratory species."

Dr. Asha de Vos - Marine Biologist
(Mongabay, 2026)

Key Benefits of the BBNJ for Sri Lanka

1. Protects migratory marine species: As a large number of marine species migrate from the high seas to Sri Lankan waters, the BBNJ Agreement provides a mechanism to establish MPAs and protect animals across the migratory range, helping to protect the local biodiversity.

2. Enhances the blue economy: Sri Lanka's fisheries, tourism and other ocean dependent industries rely on a healthy ocean. The BBNJ Agreement supports the sustainable use and conservation of marine biodiversity outside national jurisdiction to protect such domestic industries.

3. Capacity building and technology transfer: The Agreement affords developing nations such as Sri Lanka the opportunity to access marine science training, technical expertise and advanced ocean technologies, strengthening their national capacity in the field of marine research, conservation and good ocean governance.

4. Strengthens Sri Lanka's role as an ocean governance actor: Being a member of the BBNJ Conference of the Parties (COP) allows Sri Lanka to partake in international decision-making regarding the conservation of marine biodiversity, enhancing the nation's position on the international table of ocean governance.

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