Fisheries and the BBNJ Agreement (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction): Exploring issues for the Caribbean

Importance of the Fisheries Sector

Globally, many coastal communities depend on the fishing industry for food and income and this especially important in the Caribbean. Within the CARICOM region, fisheries are important for food security, local livelihoods and employment, and also contribute to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). At least 64,000 people are directly employed in small-scale fisheries and aquaculture with even more (180,000) being involved in other sectors along the value chain such as fish processing, retailing, boat construction and net repairs.

Relevance of the BBNJ Agreement to the Fisheries Sector

While it is highly unlikely that artisanal fishers would journey to international waters, overfishing in these areas can negatively affect nearshore fish stocks since the majority of fish catch globally are of species that straddle both Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and international waters. Fishing effort in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) has more than doubled between 1990 and 2006 and this fishery has outpaced growth in coastal zone catches and value.

ABNJ fisheries have substantial negative environmental impacts on both target and non-target species and there is increasing concern that these fisheries are being supported by unfair labour arrangements and other illegal activities such human, weapons and drug trafficking. Furthermore, ABNJ fisheries have been made exceedingly profitable by receiving an estimated USD 4.2 billion in subsidies annually, driving further unsustainable exploitation. The majority of fishing occurring in ABNJ is managed at the regional level by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). However, there are several portions of the ocean that do not fall under the jurisdiction of a RFMO. Additionally, because of uneven governance of these ABNJ fisheries as well as poor domestic control over vessels there has been an increase in Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.
The Way Forward ➤

The fisheries sector can consider the BBNJ Agreement as a means of strengthening existing fisheries management mechanisms and encouraging conservation and sustainable use of fishery resources.

Priorities for negotiation

Fishing has been identified to be one of the most substantial threats to marine biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ). The BBNJ Agreement should include provisions to foster conservation and sustainable use in fisheries management whilst ensuring they do not undermine existing RFMOs. This can be achieved via increased reporting and accountability procedures, reinforcing the need for an ecosystem approach to fisheries, integrating biodiversity protection into decision making processes and establishing criteria and priorities for biodiversity-focused measures, including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) amongst others.

What happens in international waters affects all of us –
CARICOM stakeholders from government, private sector, communities, civil society, academia and regional agencies have rights, responsibilities and interests in the sustainable use and protection of biodiversity in international waters.

Get more information: https://www.un.org/bnj/
Get involved! Contact CANARI: info@canari.org

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