Marine Scientific Research and the BBNJ Agreement

(Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction):
Exploring issues for the Caribbean

Importance of Marine Scientific Research

Due to the remoteness and vastness of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) as well as the general lack of knowledge of the ecosystems and species that reside there, ABNJ tend to be generally unappreciated and poorly governed. Marine scientific research is necessary to characterise and quantify the ecological and economical potential of these ecosystems. Without this, it is impossible to accurately assess the value of ecosystems in ABNJ and know how to sufficiently protect them especially when considering trade-offs between industrialisation and loss of ecosystem value.

Relevance of the BBNJ Agreement to Marine Research

The right to undertake marine scientific research within ABNJ belongs to the high seas freedoms listed in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Marine research, whether for scientific or commercial purposes, is necessary to address gaps in our knowledge and understanding of these ecosystems. Generally, most forms of marine research tend to be benign, however some activities have the potential to negatively affect species and ecosystems within ABNJ. Furthermore, marine research also presents an opportunity for capacity building and technology transfer by increasing institutional capacity (e.g. in developing countries or regions) and by advancing knowledge and establishing scientific best practices which benefits the scientific community worldwide.
Priorities for negotiation

There needs to be sufficient collaboration with the research community since under UNCLOS marine scientific research is also a freedom of the high seas. However, there is need to ensure that research will comply with prescribed regulations on environmental protection as, in the absence of a definition, it is not always clear what activities fall within the scope of marine scientific research from a legal point of view.

There is also a need to ensure that species targeted for marine genetic resources do not have negative impacts on food security by disrupting commercial fisheries. Marine scientific research and exploration is also severely limited by the high costs. Developing countries are less able to access and optimise the potential of resources in ABNJ due to lack of technology and knowledge, and there is hope that the BBNJ Agreement can help to address this inequality.

The Way Forward

The BBNJ Agreement can be viewed as a way of focusing attention on scientific best practices and identifying areas of weakness and gaps in knowledge, whilst strengthening the overall global framework for creating an enabling environment for science. It serves as a strategy to strengthen the cooperation and coordination of marine scientific research, technology transfer, and capacity building activities.

Specialised vessels with onboard equipment to collect weather and ocean information such as water temperatures, shape of the seafloor and speed of currents.

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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