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

Importance of Migratory Species and Connectivity

Movements of currents as well as migratory animals help to connect all parts of the ocean. More than 800 marine migratory species of fish, seabirds, marine mammals and sea turtles have been identified in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) and many straddle jurisdictional boundaries. Migratory species depend on ocean ecosystems for breeding and foraging as well as the pathways which connect these ecosystems, which may straddle territorial waters and ABNJ. Transportation of larvae via ocean currents also helps to connect marine ecosystems and ensures they remain resilient and productive. Even amongst coral reefs, larvae can be transported beyond Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and into ABNJ, which creates connectivity between ecosystems and links habitats across multiple spatial scales.

Relevance of the BBNJ Agreement to Migratory Species

Migratory species are increasingly being affected by globalisation and the vast spread of human impacts on the ocean. With increased exploration and activity within ABNJ, these species experience more stressors ranging from habitat destruction, direct and indirect mortality, ship strikes, noise and interactions with hazardous materials and other pollutants. Protecting and managing marine migratory and straddling biodiversity requires a thorough understanding of movement patterns, connectivity, ecological roles as well as distribution of fisheries catch of target and bycatch species. A decline in the quality and quantity of habitats used by migratory animals for breeding or nurseries may force species to travel longer distances or find alternative locations, which may put them at increased risk.
Priorities for negotiation

There needs to be sufficient collaboration with the development of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), including in ABNJ, so that networks of MPAs can provide meaningful connections and protection across ecosystems to benefit migratory species like whales or turtles and complement nearshore protection of these species. Furthermore, coastal communities (including indigenous communities) are socio-economically and culturally connected to several migratory species which straddle coastal waters and the high seas. Since these communities are the first to suffer when these species decline or are overexploited due to impacts on food security, ecotourism and cultural identity, there is need to ensure protection of these species.

The Way Forward

The BBNJ Agreement can be viewed as a way of strengthening conservation of migratory species by providing protection for these species across all the ecosystems they use during their lifetimes, including across ABNJ.

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/bbnj/

Get involved! Contact CANARI: info@canari.org

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