

Regional Ocean Governance

Ocean areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) represent nearly half of the Earth's surface and host a substantial portion of global biodiversity. Maintaining a healthy and productive ocean, including ABNJ, is crucial for human wellbeing, yet combined pressures caused by intensifying human activities, undermine the health and resilience of marine ecosystems and species.

Regional ocean governance refers to the legal, institutional and policy framework established to manage human activities and work towards the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources at the regional level.

The development of regional initiatives to protect the marine environment has long been a cornerstone of international environmental policies, providing an appropriate scale to implement an ecosystem approach to conservation and management and facilitating political consensus among those sharing similar history, culture, and interests.

In this regard, efforts at the regional level play a crucial role in delivering ocean sustainability by providing for cooperation and coordination by States across territorial and sectoral boundaries. Regional efforts also offer lessons learned, platforms for scientific data and knowledge exchange, mechanisms for convening States and stakeholders and coordinating regional approaches and measures for management.

Main mechanisms for regional ocean governance are:



Regional Seas Programmes (RSPs): More than 143 countries participate in 18 RSPs across the globe. Most RSPs are underpinned by regional framework conventions and specific protocols, and function through Action Plans that serve as the basis for regional cooperation. RSPs mainly focus on pollution and measures to conserve marine living resources.

Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs): RFBs are a mechanism through which States or organisations that are party to an international fishery agreement or arrangement cooperate to manage one or more fisheries. RFBs that hold a management mandate to adopt fisheries conservation and management measures that are legally binding on their members are known as **Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO)**.



Large marine Ecosystems (LMEs): LMEs are vast marine areas (approximately 200,000 square kilometres or greater) adjacent to continents in coastal waters where primary productivity is generally higher than in open marine areas. LME mechanisms aim to implement an ecosystem approach by collating and developing knowledge of human activities and their impacts and developing appropriate governance strategies.

Other regional initiatives: Many complementary regional initiatives have been undertaken outside of the governance structures by political and economic organisations and ad hoc groups bringing together a range of actors. Such initiatives have originated among countries and jurisdictions with shared resources, concerns, and contexts, and therefore have tended to address challenges to their coastal and marine environment from integrated, ecosystem-based, and people-focused perspectives.



Regional ocean governance of ABNJ - selected initiatives



Regional and sectoral organisations can support the achievement of global conservation goals and targets by developing, implementing, and enforcing regionally or sectoral-based agreements in alignment with global targets. Through regional ocean governance the specificity of the region, its challenges and needs, can be considered, and go beyond global standards.

Strengthened collaboration and cooperation between global, regional, and sectoral organisations will be necessary to enhance ocean governance and to underpin actions for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in ABNJ.

The **STRONG High Seas** project, coordinated by the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) and implemented together with six partners based in Europe, South America, and Africa, and its regional partners the Secretariat of the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific (CPPS) and the Abidjan Convention Secretariat, is a five-year project that aims to strengthen regional ocean governance for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

For more information visit: www.prog-ocean.org/our-work/strong-high-seas/

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