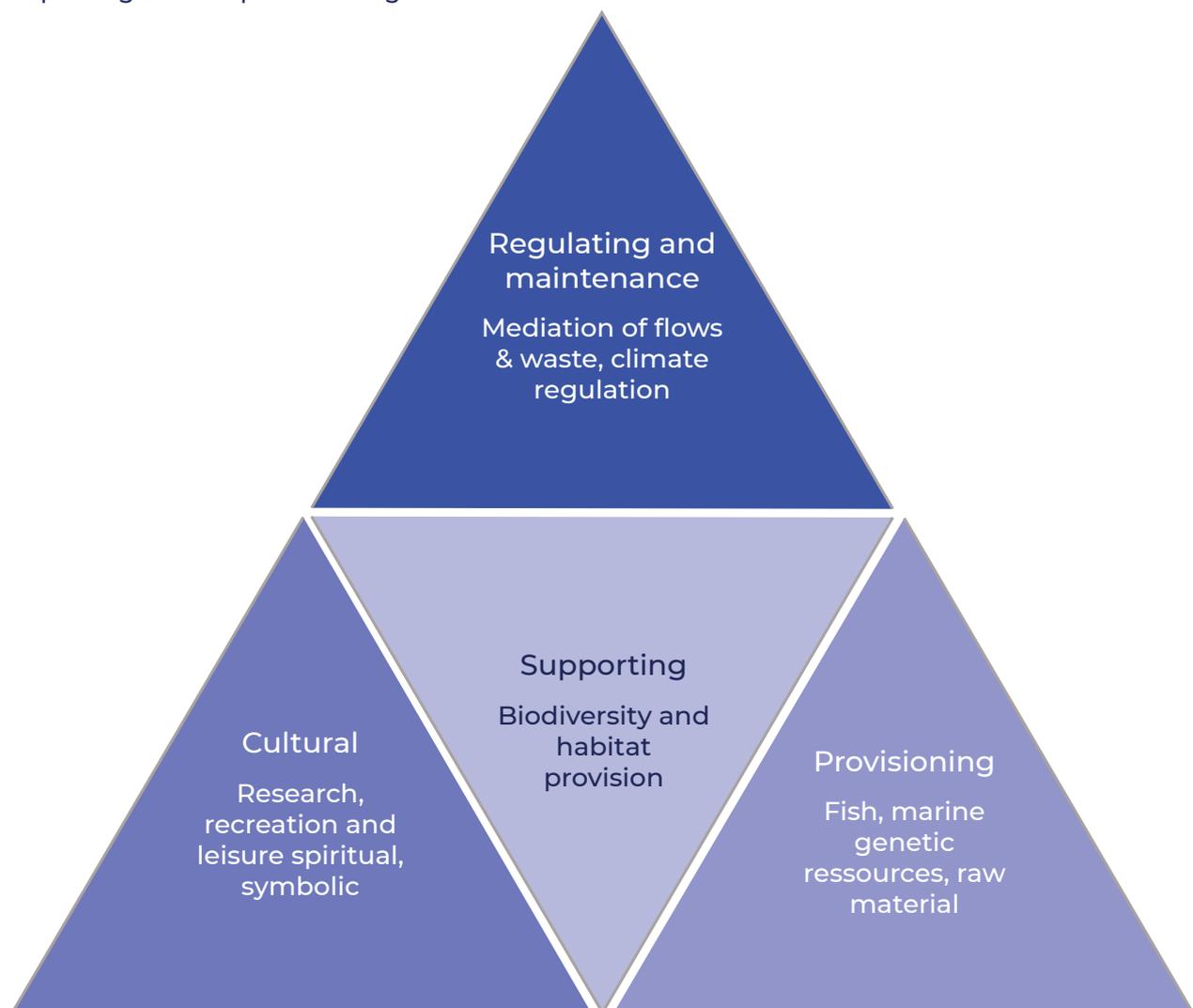


## The Socio-Economic Importance of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction

The ocean plays a key role in sustaining life on Earth and provides vital ecosystem services, such as provisioning, supporting, regulating and cultural services. Home to valuable species, rich and rare marine biodiversity, areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) account for more than 64% of the ocean and almost 50% of the planet's surface. The interest in using ocean space and its resources goes beyond States' exclusive economic zones (EEZ) into ABNJ. The conservation and sustainable use of marine resources bring significant contributions to societies, their economies and welfare of citizens, marked by a strong interdependence between healthy oceans and human well-being.

The primary socio-economic activities taking place in ABNJ include fishing, navigation and transport, laying of submarine cables and maritime security. Emerging activities include bioprospecting and deep-sea mining.

The figure below displays a schematic showing the four categories of ecosystem services provided by ABNJ and the central role of supporting ecosystem services in enabling other services.



## Key Messages

Most countries, particularly in the Global South, have limited capacity to access and explore ABNJ adjacent to their territorial waters or beyond. Socio-economic activities in ABNJ require high investment and operating costs which are often reduced through State subsidies and investments from public universities, research institutes or private industry, as well as reduced social standards for workers.

The exploitation of common resources within ABNJ across all industries is dominated by a limited number of States and companies, concentrating economic benefits with a limited number of actors. The costs of the environmental degradation of ABNJ are 'hidden' as they are distributed across all humans on the planet, but especially those living adjacent to ABNJ and include, e.g., reduced contribution to global climate mitigation, forgone fishing opportunities, loss of jobs, and other losses to livelihoods.

Low wages, non-compliance with labour and safety standards, poor working conditions, and the use of forced labour are among ways some operators use to reduce costs and increase profits of fishing in ABNJ. These human rights abuses are often linked to organized crime, including human trafficking for forced labour, drug and arms trafficking, smuggling fuel, money laundering, corruption and piracy.

Several socio-economic activities are viewed as promising sources of development by some States, particularly in the Global South. But if not well managed, these activities may increase the pressure on ecosystems and could negatively impact local communities, rather than supporting sustainable growth and social inclusion.

Future and long-term benefits of conserving biodiversity are often discounted from market value, and preferences are given to current or short-term economic gains. In the long-term, not considering the environmental impacts of socio-economic activities on habitats and ecosystem services may create costs which may exceed far the short-term economic benefits of unsustainable exploitation and use.

Clear interdependencies exist between socio-economic activities in ABNJ and the Sustainable Development Goals, including but not limited to SDG 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10 (respectively: reduce poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth and reduced inequalities), and the achievement of the environment-related ones, notably SDG 14 "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development".

The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement has the potential to facilitate capacity building, knowledge transfer, research and cooperation, and thereby support a comprehensive understanding of topics related to ABNJ by stakeholders.

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/](http://www.prog-ocean.org/our-work/strong-high-seas/)

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