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SUMMARY REPORT

HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE “NAVIGATING THE RFMO-BBNJ INTERFACE – DIALOGUE ON COOPERATION AND COHERENCE”

TUESDAY 2 JUNE 2026

The high-level conference “*Navigating the RFMO-BBNJ interface – Dialogue on Cooperation and Coherence*”, organised by the European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD), in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and with the support of the Chair of the European Parliament’s Committee on Fisheries (PECH), outlined key opportunities for greater cooperation between Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) and the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement to improve the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity. It was held at a key moment between the third session of the BBNJ Preparatory Commission in March 2026 and the first Conference of the Parties (COP1) – planned to take place from 11 to 22 January 2027. It brought together the EU’s Commissioner for Fisheries and Oceans Costas Kadis, the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), Members of the European Parliament, the United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UN DOALOS), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), several RFMOs, national governments, the scientific community, civil society and the fishing industry.

The opening remarks emphasised continuity between the BBNJ Agreement and existing ocean governance frameworks, highlighting the importance of practical cooperation, complementarity and coherent implementation across institutions and policy communities. Javier Garat (EESC) stressed that **implementation should build upon existing organisations**, particularly RFMOs and FAO, and should not undermine their mandates or functions. He highlighted the contribution of existing fisheries management measures to biodiversity objectives and underlined the importance of coordinated institutional support and cooperation mechanisms. Despina Symons (EBCD) emphasised that the focus has now **shifted from negotiation to implementation** and highlighted the **need to translate legal commitments into practical action**. She stressed the importance of clarifying how the principle of non-undermining will operate in practice, and highlighted that the cooperation and collaboration with existing RFMOs will be crucial and critical for effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. She called for stronger dialogue between fisheries and biodiversity communities to support coherent implementation. Commissioner Costas Kadiis underlined that **RFMOs remain central pillars of sustainable fisheries governance** beyond national jurisdiction and stressed that BBNJ tools should reinforce. He highlighted **the importance of science, data, capacity-building and alignment between processes**, while emphasising the need to safeguard both biodiversity and sustainable livelihoods. MEP Carmen Crespo Díaz stressed that implementation must be balanced, realistic and built on trust, recognising the conservation achievements already delivered by RFMOs while ensuring that future measures are informed by socioeconomic considerations and developed through genuine stakeholder engagement.

The keynote interventions provided important context on the objectives, scope and practical implications of the BBNJ Agreement for fisheries governance. Charlotte Salpin (UN DOALOS) outlined the Agreement's institutional architecture and core elements, including marine genetic resources, area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, and capacity-building and technology transfer. She highlighted that **fisheries fall within the broader scope of the Agreement** and emphasised that implementation must promote coherence and coordination while respecting existing international frameworks and bodies. She also outlined the role of relevant organisations in future BBNJ processes and highlighted the work underway through the Preparatory Commission ahead of COP1. Vera Agostini (FAO) stressed that **biodiversity conservation and sustainable fisheries are inherently interconnected and mutually reinforcing objectives**. She highlighted the long-standing contribution of RFMOs and other fisheries bodies to ocean governance, noting that these organisations already cover the vast majority of fishing activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction and have developed extensive conservation, scientific and management measures over time. Both keynote interventions underscored that **successful implementation of the BBNJ Agreement will depend on effective cooperation** between institutions, alignment of standards and procedures, and the ability to build on existing expertise, governance structures and operational experience. Discussions following the presentations **reinforced the view that implementation should evolve through consultation, coordination and gradual alignment** rather than through the creation of parallel governance arrangements, while also recognising the importance of addressing differences in membership, mandates and decision-making processes across relevant organisations.

Session 1 (Biodiversity outcomes and recognition) highlighted that **RFMOs already deliver significant biodiversity outcomes** through science-based fisheries management, ecosystem approaches, monitoring programmes and binding conservation measures, many of which directly contribute to broader international biodiversity objectives. Participants noted that these contributions are often **insufficiently recognised in global biodiversity discussions** despite their relevance for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Discussions therefore focused on the need **to improve visibility and understanding of existing RFMO measures** within the BBNJ framework. There was **broad support for developing a stocktake or inventory of existing RFMO conservation tools**, area-based measures and governance processes to provide a clearer baseline for future cooperation. Participants also **stressed the importance of establishing structured engagement mechanisms**, clarifying institutional roles and responsibilities, ensuring realistic implementation timelines, and strengthening coordination among national authorities to support coherent decision-making across fisheries and biodiversity processes.

Session 2 (Supporting Effective Cooperation) focused on the practical dimensions of cooperation between RFMOs, BBNJ institutions and governments. Participants stressed that the implementation phase presents an **opportunity to build stronger links between existing governance systems rather than creating new parallel structures**. Discussions recognised that RFMOs already possess extensive experience, operational capacity, scientific expertise and implementation tools that can support effective delivery of BBNJ objectives. At the same time, participants identified a number of challenges, including fragmented governance structures, institutional silos, differing mandates and limited coordination across policy sectors. Strong emphasis was placed on the need for **early and continuous engagement, transparent consultation processes, better integration of fisheries expertise within biodiversity discussions and stronger coordination within governments**. Capacity-building, particularly for developing countries, was also highlighted as a critical component for ensuring equitable and effective participation in future implementation processes. Participants emphasised that cooperation will require both formal arrangements and regular practical exchanges to build confidence, improve understanding and align actions across institutions.

Session 3 (Data, science and technical expertise) underlined that effective implementation of the BBNJ Agreement will depend heavily on the use of existing scientific knowledge, technical expertise and data systems. **Participants recognised that RFMOs are among the principal providers of fisheries and ecosystem information** in areas beyond national jurisdiction and already manage extensive datasets relating to stock status, fishing activity, bycatch and ecosystem interactions. Discussions focused on how these existing resources can support BBNJ implementation while avoiding duplication of effort and the creation of parallel reporting or data-management systems. Participants highlighted **challenges related to data accessibility, interoperability, confidentiality and governance**, stressing that approaches differ between organisations and that decisions on data sharing ultimately rest with States.

There was also significant discussion on **the need to better define data requirements, identify existing gaps and clarify the purposes** for which information will be used. In addition, participants emphasised the importance of incorporating a broader range of knowledge sources, including scientific, operational and experiential knowledge, while recognising that ambitious conservation targets must be accompanied by effective monitoring, evaluation and management measures capable of delivering measurable outcomes.

Session 4 (Strengthening Trust for Shared Understanding) focused on the human and institutional dimensions of cooperation, highlighting **trust as a critical prerequisite for successful implementation**. Participants agreed that transparency should extend beyond data-sharing and include greater clarity regarding mandates, responsibilities, decision-making procedures and institutional processes. Discussions highlighted that limited understanding of how different organisations operate can create unnecessary misunderstandings and hinder cooperation. Participants therefore **stressed the need to improve communication between fisheries and biodiversity communities, increase awareness of RFMO activities and achievements, and strengthen mechanisms for dialogue at national, regional and international levels**. There was also widespread recognition that effective cooperation does not require complete agreement on every issue, but rather a shared commitment to engagement, mutual respect and constructive problem-solving. **Building stronger interfaces between different policy communities, developing common objectives and creating opportunities for sustained dialogue** were identified as important steps towards achieving a more coherent and effective ocean governance framework.

Closing remarks by Mark Dickey-Collas (IUCN-CEM FEG) highlighted the need to balance ambition with pragmatism as Parties move towards implementation of the BBNJ Agreement. He welcomed the constructive engagement demonstrated throughout the conference and noted that discussions reflected a shared willingness to explore practical solutions while recognising the diversity of mandates and perspectives involved. He emphasised that decision-making authority remains with Parties and stressed the importance of providing them with practical tools and information to support implementation. Among the priorities identified were the development of common templates, inventories of existing measures and gaps, clearer approaches to data needs and sharing arrangements, and stronger recognition of the full range of conservation measures already in place, including OECMs alongside MPAs. He concluded by **stressing that lasting progress will ultimately depend on continued dialogue, mutual understanding and trust, supported by practical cooperation mechanisms that build upon existing governance frameworks rather than duplicating them**.