

What the UN's Treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Means for Deep-Sea Science

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Over the last few years, the United Nations has been developing a treaty on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction or "BBNJ").

The emerging BBNJ instrument represents an important opportunity to establish guidelines that will help maintain critical ecosystem services and ensure more equitable engagement with marine research and resource use globally. But what will the new regulations mean for deep-sea science and scientists? This special session will guide attendees through the treaty, "translating" legal language into logistical realities and actionable insights. Scientific and legal experts focusing on each of the treaty's four pillars – environmental impact assessments, marine genetic resources, area-based management tools, and capacity building / transfer of marine technology – will clarify how scientific research may both influence and benefit from the BBNJ instrument. The session will specifically address how a new legal regime is likely to affect pre- and post-cruise notifications, data generation and dissemination, capacity building strategies, technology transfer opportunities, and conservation research priorities.

The BBNJ treaty will set the terms for scientific engagement with the deep sea in areas beyond national jurisdiction for decades to come. Encouraging deep-sea scientists to start incorporating new priorities and obligations into research plans as soon as possible – while also providing an opportunity to provide input and feedback as the treaty moves toward implementation – will promote conservation, sustainable use, equitable participation, and research opportunities for the scientific community.