

ALL-ATLANTIC OCEAN RESEARCH
AND INNOVATION ALLIANCE

#AAORIAForum25

From Enlightenment to Action
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Borderless Ocean Protection

From the High Seas to the Community

2025 INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

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Policy Brief

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Executive Summary

Two-thirds of our planet's ocean lies beyond national borders. This includes the High Seas, waters that regulate climate, carry 90% of global trade, and sustain billions of people. Yet they remain largely invisible in education and policymaking.

In January 2026, the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, that seeks for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in these waters, will enter into force. This is a historic step for global ocean governance. But without public awareness, skilled professionals, and political engagement, the Treaty risks remaining symbolic. The All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance (AAORIA) can change that through **Borderless Ocean Protection** — a transatlantic initiative that connects science, policy, and communities to turn the BBNJ's promise into practice.

The Challenge

Most people, including future decision-makers, do not recognize how the High Seas underpin food security, climate stability, and the national economies critical for present and future generations. Current outreach focuses mainly on coastal or national waters, leaving out the High Seas, a critical knowledge gap that limits Blue Economy innovation and evidence-based policymaking.

The Solution

We propose **Borderless Ocean Protection**, AAORIA's BBNJ flagship initiative that will:

- integrate High Seas governance into education and training across a broad range of disciplines including law, economics, political science, and environmental sciences.
- reach over 10,000 learners and 500 professionals through adapted ocean literacy materials.
- strengthen community and policy engagement through workshops, dialogues, and virtual expeditions.

Scale and Value

Over three years (2026–2028), with contributions from AAORIA leadership and partners, the initiative will deliver multilingual content across the Atlantic, partnerships with 30+ institutions and communities, and measurable increases in BBNJ and Blue Economy integration in education and policy.

The Outcome

By 2028, AAORIA will have established a skilled, transatlantic network advancing sustainable ocean governance, transforming the BBNJ Treaty into a living framework for innovation, inclusion, and Blue Economy growth.

Introduction

National borders stop a few miles from the coastline—but the ocean does not. This disconnect has left two thirds of the ocean, which includes the High Seas, largely ungoverned and out of sight, even though they:

- regulate Earth's climate and absorb 25% of global carbon emissions;
- carry 90% of global trade and connect telecommunication networks;
- support billions through fisheries, transport, and tourism.

In June 2023, the United Nations adopted the [Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction](#) (BBNJ) Agreement to promote the conservation and sustainable use of the oceanic Global Commons, the marine resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction (United Nations, 2023) (Figure 1). In September 2025, the Agreement was ratified by the required number of member states, officially triggering its entry into force as a legally binding treaty.

The BBNJ Agreement seeks to achieve its objectives through:

- the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to **safeguard vulnerable ecosystems**;
- rigorous **Environmental Impact Assessments** before undertaking exploitative/damaging activities (e.g., deep-sea mining, infrastructure development);
- to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits from **marine genetic resources** (for e.g., new pharmaceuticals, food innovation);
- to develop capacity-building and **marine knowledge transfer** to strengthen the ability of all nations to engage in ocean science and governance.

We, as ocean professionals, stand at the forefront of a historic opportunity to shape the multilateral governance of vast ocean spaces and the ocean floor. The BBNJ Agreement is vital for the Blue Economy because it ensures that economic activities in the high seas are sustainable, equitable, and environmentally responsible—protecting marine biodiversity whilst enabling innovation, trade, and livelihoods.

However, these vast, borderless waters remain invisible to most societies, and the lack of understanding of the connection between inland and coastal livelihoods and the vast expanse of the oceans means that decisions on ocean governance are often disconnected from most people even though they regulate the planet's climate, sustain global trade and telecommunications, and underpin coastal livelihoods. Without a deeper public understanding of how the High Seas and ocean health is intertwined with human well-being—from food systems and weather patterns to economies and cultural identities—the BBNJ Treaty risks remaining a symbolic achievement rather than a transformative one.

Even those directly affected by the unsustainable exploitation of borderless waters such as coastal and indigenous communities, remain excluded from shaping policies that affect their future. Meaningful change and real-world impact will depend on deliberate investment in education, community engagement, ocean economies and capacity building to bridge the perceived distance between people and the High Seas.

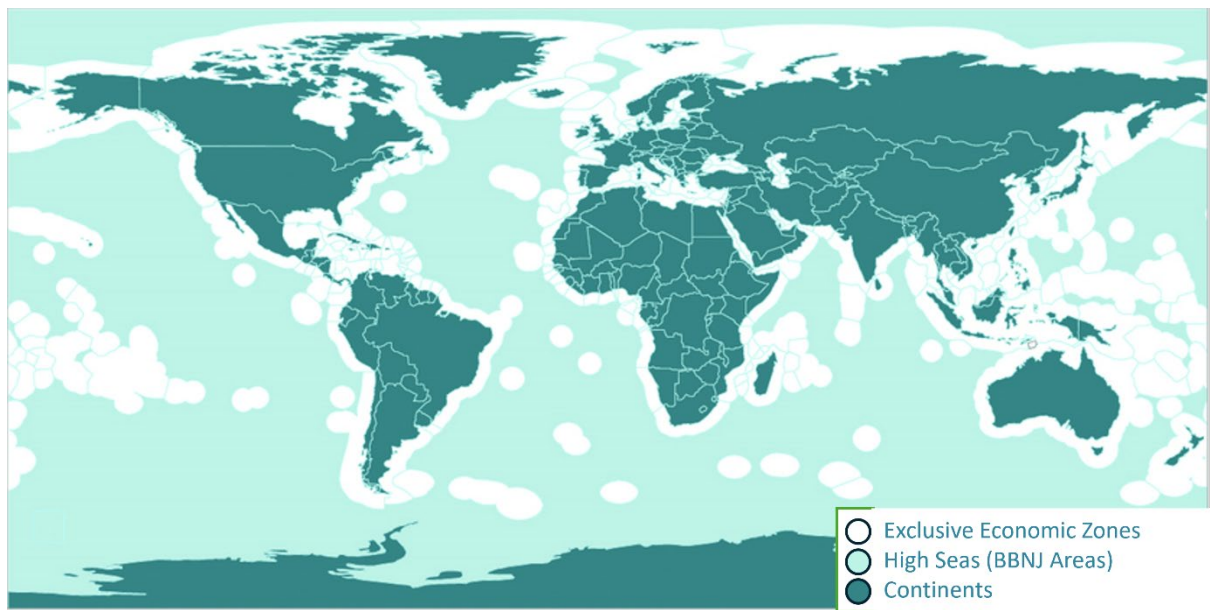


Figure 1. Global map indicating EEZs and the High Seas. Modified from VLIZ 2009.

Proposed Actions

We propose an AAORIA BBNJ flagship knowledge transfer initiative, entitled **Borderless Ocean Protection**. This would be led by AAORIA, through the Blue Intergenerational Programme, with support from Early Career Ocean Professional (ECOP) members, to promote the enhanced understanding of and our reliance on the High Seas and the aims of the BBNJ Agreement. This initiative aims to foster oceanic connections across communities and countries, from school-level through universities to communities, policy makers and industrial professionals, translating BBNJ goals into meaningful, real-world long-term impact throughout the Atlantic and beyond.

The initiative will establish ECOP BBNJ Ambassadors to spearhead the objectives which will operate under two strategic pillars:

1. Education and Intergenerational Knowledge Transfer

Integration of the concept of the “borderless ocean” into classrooms, universities, and professional training through:

- creating a tailored BBNJ educational toolkit that transforms existing knowledge-building materials into engaging, interactive lessons on marine ecosystems—connecting BBNJ themes directly to national curricula for schoolchildren;
- co-creating age-appropriate learning materials for coastal/marine wildlife charities that connect High Seas governance to coastal livelihoods;
- integrating High Seas governance, marine biodiversity and climate science into all Environmental/Maritime Law, Political Science, Economics and Coastal/Marine Engineering/Technology degrees, as well as Environmental Science/Earth Science/Ecology/Biology/Geography/Oceanography undergraduate and postgraduate university-level qualifications;
- fostering exchange programmes and internships for young people between interior regions/countries and coastal marine institutes, environmental NGOs, charities and wildlife trusts.

Measurable Outcomes

- BBNJ toolkit adopted by multiple AAORIA member states by 2027.
- Integration of High Seas governance into university curricula across at least five new disciplines in multiple AAORIA member states by 2027.
- Active engagement of AAORIA ECOPs in BBNJ-related learning.

2. Community Capacity Building and Public Engagement

Empower interested communities from AAORIA member states and partners to understand and influence decisions on the High Seas through:

- co-creating learning materials for coastal/marine wildlife charities that connect High Seas governance to coastal livelihoods;
- organising workshops, exhibitions, and digital storytelling campaigns linking local realities/communities (e.g., coastal/fishing communities) to global ocean governance;
- co-creating and launching virtual expeditions and interactive outreach events to make the High Seas visible and relatable;
- hosting dialogues with policymakers and business leaders to highlight the economic and political value of sustainable High Seas and ocean management, including in the Blue Economy;
- facilitating the integration of indigenous and traditional knowledge into all activities, to ensure inclusive participation and tap into the collective intelligence.

Measurable Outcomes

- A minimum of three multi-stakeholder partnerships per AAORIA member state established by 2027, connecting community groups, academic institutions, and local government representatives.
- At least 200 trained participants (community leaders, educators, and early-career professionals) equipped with practical tools to apply BBNJ and Blue Economy principles in their local or national contexts by 2028.
- Inclusion of community- or locally sourced recommendations on BBNJ implementation in at least two national or regional policy briefs of AAORIA by 2028.
- Digital and media campaigns reaching at least 30,000 people across all platforms, within the first year, increasing public awareness of the High Seas and AAORIA's leadership role.

Why Our Team

The Green Group (ECOPs) brings together early-career scientists, educators, and community leaders from the Atlantic Basin and Beyond. Our strength lies in:

- expert knowledge on the BBNJ Agreement, and its interlinkages to existing frameworks;
- deep regional networks linking academia, NGOs, and local communities;
- experience in science communication, education design, and stakeholder engagement;
- proven ability to mobilize action through AAORIA's collaborative platform.

With AAORIA's institutional support, we can ensure that the BBNJ Treaty is not just adopted but implemented through inclusive, borderless cooperation.

Conclusion

The ocean knows no borders. Neither should our response. By investing now in Borderless Ocean Protection, AAORIA and its partners can transform the BBNJ Treaty from paper to practice—connecting coastal livelihoods, national economies, and the high seas in one shared vision for a sustainable Atlantic and a thriving planet.

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