

# ICES statement for the UN Law of the Sea Intergovernmental Conference on conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction

The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) is a global organization that develops science and advice to support the sustainable use of the oceans. While our focus is on the Northeast Atlantic, our work has great relevance to all oceans, including areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ).

In accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has for more than 100 years promoted international cooperation in marine scientific research in the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent seas, and since 1964 this cooperation has been supported by an international convention between 20 Contracting Parties.

ICES develops knowledge and information products used in marine scientific research to meet societal needs, on the state and sustainable use of our seas and oceans. ICES is a platform for ensuring the coordination of science, data collection, data quality, and accessibility. This science and data contributes to the evidence base required to generate state-of-the-art advice for meeting conservation, management, and sustainability goals.

The ICES network extends well beyond the 20 Contracting Parties; with experts participating in more than 150 scientific working groups that address diverse marine science topics. Participation in the groups is based on expertise and is indifferent of nationality. Many of the groups are a joint effort with other international organizations, meaning that our work covers the Atlantic Ocean, especially the North Atlantic, and extends into the Arctic, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the North Pacific. And including areas within and beyond national jurisdiction. Of the 150 working groups, more than a fifth are dealing with scientific issues in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. Altogether the groups attract over 1500 scientists annually.

The breadth of available scientific expertise means that ICES is capable of, and already providing, scientific advice to its member countries and other intergovernmental organizations in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. Our scientific advice is used as evidence by decision-makers, and generated with a four-step approach; a dialogue with those that request our advice, the knowledge synthesis based on the best available science, an independent peer-review process, and an advice formulation process. A process that is participatory, transparent, and documented and generates advice that is quality-assured, unbiased and independent.

In order to identify, conserve and sustainably use biological diversity in ABNJ, appropriate science and methods are required to develop the evidence base needed to support responsible decision-making; including contributing to impact assessments. Taking the ecosystem approach as a starting point, ICES is a unique and established leader in providing advice to competent authorities on marine policy and management issues related to the impacts of human activities on marine ecosystems and the sustainable use of living marine resources.

Biodiversity is not only critical as a resource, but also to overall functioning of the ecosystem. ICES has recently advised on methods on how to identify special/valued areas in the marine environment, which in turn are key to support marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. ICES advises that a data-driven, expert-informed framework for mapping ecological and biological value and the subsequent identification of special/valued areas in the marine environment should be applied. And that four general ecological dimensions can be used to describe general functional aspects of the marine ecosystem: food web, habitat, biodiversity, and productivity.

ICES regards biodiversity in the broadest sense, as the variety, quantity and distribution of life. Our expert groups

focus on biodiversity that spans the tree of life, from phytoplankton and bacteria to marine mammals and birds. And biodiversity in geographies from the shallow coasts to ABNJ. This integrated understanding of biodiversity in its widest sense informs our science and advice in ABNJ. Combined with our capacity to assess human and environmental pressures on the marine environment, this understanding can provide the basis for area-based management and environmental impact assessment, for example.

ICES also recognizes that valuable areas cannot be intrinsically compared to, or substituted by, one another. An area containing a single unique feature (e.g. a threatened species) is not intrinsically more, or less, valuable than another that contains multiple similar features (e.g. high biomasses of multiple key species like copepods, cod, and capelin), or that combines structurally different features (e.g. coral reefs, nursery areas, and core primary production locations). These areas are important because they contribute significantly to one or more of the features selected on basis of the EBSA criteria.

The dynamics in biodiversity, driven by human activities and climate change means that we are dealing with a non-stable situation that needs continuous observations and assessments. ICES works with impacts and projections for future impacts on ecosystems, and has provided advice on the effects of climate change on the distribution of species and their vulnerability to increasing sea temperatures.

Building capacity and the transfer of knowledge and technology is at the heart of ICES work. Our collaboration platform offers scientists an operational and established basis for coordination of international research, comparison of methods, conventional training programmes, robust data management, and data accessibility, to more than 300 million measurements ranging from biological, hydro-chemical, oceanographic and fisheries data. The ICES data policy is committed to open data and the FAIR principles.

We are dedicated to offering our platform and knowledge to continue to develop the science needed to support a future Convention on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity – and to do this in cooperation with other international organizations.

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ICES is an intergovernmental organization with 20 member countries:

Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States of America.



Through strategic partnerships our work in the Atlantic Ocean, and specifically the North Atlantic, extends into the Arctic, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the North Pacific.



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## ICES PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Advice on fishing opportunities for app. 250 stocks
- Advice in response to special requests
- Ecosystem and fisheries overviews
- International peer review
- Data used in science and advisory products
- Science highlights within areas of societal importance
- Identification of research needs
- Training
- Publications