



Joint Statement by the Five Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations Secretariats

International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)

Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC)

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC)

Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT)

Agenda Item E: Cooperation with Relevant Legal Instruments, Frameworks and Bodies

BBNJ Preparatory Commission 2 | 28 August 2025

Co-Chair, distinguished delegates,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Secretariats of the five tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (t-RFMOs): the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT).

We have had the opportunity to listen to the statements made last week under Agenda Item E, and we welcome particularly those stressing that RFMOs are an essential component of the implementation of the BBNJ and should be therefore given priority when considering cooperation arrangements with IFBs. We recognize particularly to the constructive comments and suggestions made by CARICOM, PSIDS, the African Group, Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, Turkey, New Zealand, Iceland, and China, among others.

Complementary Roles, Scientific Depth, and Shared Commitments

The BBNJ Agreement and the five t-RFMOs share a common commitment to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). While the BBNJ Agreement introduces a new global framework for biodiversity governance, the tRFMOs have, for decades, carried binding mandates, grounded in UNCLOS, the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and related instruments. These mandates regulate tuna, tuna-like species, and associated and dependent species through

binding measures. They are supported by robust scientific research, compliance oversight, and a holistic, ecosystem-based approach to the governance of these fisheries, particularly on the high seas. This approach reflects the shared recognition that there cannot be sustainable fisheries without preserving the health of marine ecosystems and their biodiversity.

Across all ocean basins, the t-RFMOs have developed long-standing deep scientific capacity. This includes comprehensive datasets on high seas ecosystems, built over time through coordinated stock assessments, environmental and biological monitoring, and collaborative research efforts. This accumulated knowledge and expertise certainly will be of interest and use in any future cooperation arrangements between BBNJ and RFMOs.

We welcome the recognition in Article 5 that the BBNJ Agreement shall be interpreted and applied in a manner that does not undermine relevant legal instruments and frameworks and relevant global, regional, subregional and sectoral bodies, and that promotes coherence and coordination with those instruments, frameworks and bodies (IFBs). However, we also note that there is the potential for different interpretations of the term “undermine” and this will need to be fully discussed, and a common understanding reached by all parties concerned to ensure an effective and appropriate implementation of this Article. In addition, we acknowledge the important provision in Article 8(2), which provides that Parties shall endeavour to promote, as appropriate, the objectives of the BBNJ Agreement when participating in decision-making under other IFBs.

This offers a constructive basis for enhancing coherence between the BBNJ framework and established institutions—such as our own t-RFMOs—which already play a central role in conserving and sustainably using marine biodiversity in ABNJ. Another essential element for facilitating such coherence is ensuring due coordination at the national level between the agencies responsible for the BBNJ Agreement and for the RFMOs respectively. We view this as an opportunity to strengthen mutual support and complementarity, while respecting the mandates and governance arrangements of existing bodies.

Prioritizing Cooperation with Mandated Bodies

We welcome the Preparatory Commission’s focus on identifying cooperation arrangements that are both substantive and practical. In that regard we welcome New Zealand’s suggestion that IFBs with binding mandates for high seas management, including our five t-RFMOs, should be considered the first tier of cooperation partners for the BBNJ Conference of the Parties (COP). In addition, RFMOs should enjoy a differentiated status as observers in the COP and subsidiary bodies, to ensure their right to participate in these meetings. We see this as a useful step in quickly establishing working relationships between the t-RFMOs and the BBNJ.

This approach is imperative for the effective implementation of **Article 22(1)(c)** on the establishment of area-based management tools, including marine protected areas. The

Agreement enables the BBNJ COP to make recommendations to existing bodies—such as the tRFMOs—regarding the adoption of relevant measures, in accordance with their respective mandates. Ensuring that this engagement is based on prior dialogue, respect for legal competences, and operational feasibility will be essential to achieving coherent, science-based outcomes.

How BBNJ Can Work with t-RFMOs

As primary sources of information, scientific data, and institutional experience, and as regional fora that bring together States and relevant stakeholders — including Indigenous Peoples, civil society, and environmental NGOs — the t-RFMOs stand ready to engage across multiple dimensions of BBNJ implementation.

The COP and its subsidiary bodies may wish to consider several pathways for cooperation. Each of the five t-RFMOs operates under a binding Convention that includes explicit provisions for cooperation with other international bodies and for the exchange of scientific and management information. This legal foundation aligns with the BBNJ framework and provides clear, functional pathways for engagement.

Furthermore, we consider there should be a three-pronged approach to cooperation, fostering dialogue at the decision-making level, at the operational (or Secretariat) level, and at the scientific/technical levels. This model is aligned with the BBNJ Agreement and the t-RFMOs Conventions, and would ensure cooperation is appropriate, science-based, and effective. It should draw on best practices in ocean governance.

A Foundation for Coherent Ocean Governance

Co-Chairs, distinguished delegates, the establishment of the BBNJ Agreement presents a timely opportunity to strengthen coherence across global and regional ocean governance frameworks. Cooperation with the t-RFMOs can serve as a model for how new global instruments may work constructively alongside existing institutions, particularly at the regional and sectoral level.

We believe this cooperation must be reciprocal, transparent, and fit for purpose. It should be guided by mutual respect for mandates, cost-effectiveness, and a shared commitment to ocean stewardship.

The t-RFMO Secretariats stand ready to collaborate actively with the BBNJ institutions within our mandates, to ensure this new agreement is implemented in a way that is operationally feasible, scientifically robust, and legally coherent.

Thank you, Co-Chairs