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Belgium officially submits its candidacy for the BBNJ Secretariat

On Friday 28 November, Belgium officially submitted its candidacy to host the Secretariat of the new BBNJ Agreement (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) in Brussels. With this candidacy, Belgium is making a tangible contribution to the protection and conservation of marine biodiversity in the ocean.

Belgium has traditionally been a committed international partner that strongly believes in effective multilateralism. Hosting the seat of the BBNJ agreement is in line with this tradition. The Belgian candidacy envisages that the secretariat will be housed in the Residence Palace in Brussels, in the immediate vicinity of international and European institutions and the large diplomatic community that Brussels is home to. This will allow the secretariat to count on easy access to networks and strong institutional support from the outset. *"Brussels, with the largest diplomatic community in the world, offers all the advantages for hosting the future secretariat of the BBNJ agreement. With the official submission of our candidacy to bring this secretariat to Belgium, we are committed to a secretariat that connects and delivers concrete results for the protection and conservation of the ocean from day one,"* said Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Development Cooperation, Maxime Prévot.

Belgium has a strong and internationally recognised community of marine biologists, lawyers and researchers who were closely involved in the negotiation of the BBNJ agreement. In addition, Ostend is home to the InnovOcean Campus, an important centre where international organisations such as the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC-UNESCO) and Belgian research institutions such as the Flanders Marine Institute collaborate on marine scientific research, innovation and the global collection, organisation and sharing of marine data.

Belgium can therefore make an important contribution to the development of the new international ocean framework. With its successful combination of scientific knowledge and institutional capacity, Belgium is ready to play a leading role from day one. Minister of Justice and North Sea Affairs, Annelies Verlinden: *"With this candidacy, Belgium confirms its ambition to play a pioneering role in global ocean policy. The BBNJ Secretariat in Brussels will not only be a centre for cooperation, but also a driving force for concrete action to protect our marine biodiversity. This is a unique opportunity to bring together science, diplomacy and ocean protection."*

The final decision on the location of the secretariat is expected during the first Conference of the Parties (COP) to the BBNJ agreement, which will take place in January 2027.

What is the BBNJ Agreement (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction)?

The BBNJ agreement is an international agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which focuses on the protection and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, such as the high seas and the deep sea. These zones cover almost two-thirds of the ocean and are not under the authority of individual countries. The treaty provides rules for, among other things, the conservation of ecosystems, the protection of marine protected areas, the sharing of marine genetic resources, environmental impact assessments and capacity building for developing countries. The aim is



to strengthen cooperation between countries and provide a legal framework that protects the ocean.

The BBNJ agreement will officially enter into force on 17 January 2026.

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