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## China's Presence Near Ecuador Waters

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### Why in News

Recently, **Ecuador** has expressed an **official discomfort** over the sighting of a flotilla of 260 mostly **Chinese fishing** vessels near the Galapagos archipelago (a part of Ecuador).

The flotilla also consisted of **some Liberia and Panama-flagged vessels** which was detected in an international water corridor situated between two areas of Ecuadorian jurisdiction– 200 miles away from both the **Galapagos Islands and mainland Ecuador**.

### Galapagos Archipelago

- **Location:**



- The Galapagos Islands, spread over almost **60,000 sq km**, are a part of **Ecuador**.
- These are located in the **Pacific Ocean** around 1,000 km away from the South American continent.
- **Protection Status:**
  - Ecuador made a part of the Galapagos a **wildlife sanctuary in 1935**, and the sanctuary became the **Galapagos National Park in 1959**.
  - In 1978, the islands became **UNESCO's first World Heritage Site**.

- **Wildlife:**

- It contains aquatic species such as **manta rays and sharks** which have been endangered by commercial fishing.
- It also hosts a wide array of aquatic wildlife, including marine iguanas, fur seals, and waved albatrosses.
- Also, the giant tortoises found here – '**Galápagos**' in old Spanish – give the islands its name.

- **Significance:**

- The British naturalist Charles Darwin made key observations in 1835 that shaped his theory of evolution.
- Darwin described the islands as a “world in itself”.

## Key Points

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- **Past Occurrences:**

- Ecuador has stated that the situation is **repeated every year** and such vessels reach the **outer limit of the archipelago**, outside the country’s exclusive zone.
- In 2019, 245 Chinese fishing vessels were sighted in the area where Ecuador’s writ does not extend.
- In 2017, a Chinese ship had entered Ecuador’s waters and its authorities seized the ship.
  - That time Ecuador had discovered **300 tonnes of wildlife** on board, mostly the critically endangered scalloped hammerhead sharks.
  - It has been observed that the two-thirds of hammerhead shark fins found in Hong Kong markets come from the Galapagos area.

## The Humboldt Current



- **Reasons:**

Chinese ships are **frequent** in Ecuador's waters during august month of the year as the **cold Humboldt Current brings in nutrients** that lead to a **high congregation** of marine species.

- The Humboldt Current, also called the **Peru Current**, is a **cold, low-salinity ocean current** that flows north along the western coast of South America.
- The Humboldt Current is a **highly productive** ecosystem. It is the most productive eastern boundary current system. It accounts for roughly **18-20%** of the total worldwide marine fish catch.

- **Conflicts with Other Countries:**

- Chinese vessels have also run into trouble with other countries in the region.
- In 2016, **Argentina's** coast guard chased and sank a vessel that it claimed had been illegally fishing in the South Atlantic Ocean.

- **Diplomatic Consequences:**

- The matter has been escalated to a diplomatic level and Ecuador has officially expressed its "**discomfort**" to China.
- Ecuador has also stated that it will **discuss the threat with Peru, Chile, Colombia, and Panama** – coastal countries of the region that have also been affected in the past.
- The USA, which is already opposing China on multiple fronts, expressed its support for Ecuador. The USA has also expressed that it is against any aggression directed towards **economic and environmental sovereignty**.

- **China's Stand:**

- China maintains that it is a “responsible fishing nation” with a “zero tolerance” policy toward illegal fishing.
- It also stated that China respects Ecuador's measures to protect the environment and preserve marine resources.

## **Way Forward**

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- All the nations including China need to be extra cautionary regarding environmental issues considering the looming threat of climate change.
  - The warming of oceans due to climate change is expected to further increase fishing pressure around these islands.
- Thus, effective global collaboration is the only way forward to resolve such issues.

**Source: IE**