



UN Begins Talks to Regulate the High Seas

The United Nations started talks on a 2020 treaty that would regulate the high seas, which cover half the planet yet lack adequate environmental protection.

- The talks will take place over two years with the objective to protect marine biodiversity and avoid further exploitation of the oceans.
- Since, marine life is already reeling from the impact of industrial fishing, climate change and other extractive industries, it's important to protect our global oceans before it is too late.

High Seas

- Countries can protect or exploit waters under 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) to their shorelines, but everything outside these 'exclusive economic zones' is considered international waters: the high seas.
- The high seas make up two-thirds of Earth's oceans, providing 90% of its available habitat for life and accounting for up to US\$16 billion a year in fisheries catch.
- They are also prime territory for the discovery of valuable mineral deposits, potent pharmaceuticals and oil and gas reserves.
- International law identifies four global commons namely: the High Seas; the Atmosphere; Antarctica; Outer Space.
- Global commons refer to resource domains that lie outside the political reach of any one nation.

Present Scenario

- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regulates activities in international waters, including sea-bed mining and cable laying.
- It lays down rules for the use of the ocean and its resources, but does not specify how states should conserve and sustainably use high seas biodiversity.
- No overarching treaty exists to protect biodiversity or conserve vulnerable ecosystems in the oceans.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

- The 'Law of the Sea Treaty', formally known as United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982 to establish jurisdictional limits over the ocean areas.
- The convention defines distance of 12 nautical miles from the baseline as Territorial Sea limit and a distance of 200 nautical miles distance as Exclusive Economic Zone limit.



- It provides for technology and wealth transfer from developed to underdeveloped nations and requires parties to implement regulations and laws to control marine pollution.
- India became a signatory to the UNCLOS in 1982.
- UNCLOS created **three new** institutions:
 - **International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea**- It is an independent judicial body established by UNCLOS to adjudicate disputes arising out of the convention.
 - **International Seabed Authority**- It is a UN body set up to regulate the exploration and exploitation of marine non-living resources of oceans in international waters.
 - **Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf**- It facilitates the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (the Convention) in respect of the establishment of the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

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