



## 3rd UN Ocean Conference

**For Prelims:** [UN Ocean Conference](#), [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\)](#), [Oil Spills](#), [Coral Bleaching](#), [Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction](#), [Convention on Biological Diversity](#), [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), [Coral Reefs](#), [Dead Zones](#), [Vadhavan Port](#), [Mangrove](#), [Ocean Currents](#), [Marine Protected Areas \(MPAs\)](#), [Microbeads](#), [Paris Agreement](#), [Seagrasses](#).

**For Mains:** Key outcomes of the third UN Ocean Conference, challenges being faced by oceans and needs to safeguard them, Actions needed to promote ocean sustainability.

[Source: DTE](#)

### Why in News?

The **2025 UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3)**, held in **Nice, France**, adopted the declaration “**Our Ocean, Our Future: United for Urgent Action**”, reinforcing global commitments to [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\) 14 \(Life Below Water\)](#).

- Indigenous leaders called for a **binding plastics treaty** ensuring **justice for vulnerable communities**, with **95 countries** supporting regulation of plastics **from production to disposal**.
- The declaration aims to tackle the **triple planetary crisis** of [climate change](#), **biodiversity loss**, and **pollution** that threatens the world's **oceans**.

### Triple Planetary Crisis

- The **Triple Planetary Crisis** refers to the three interconnected global environmental threats i.e., **climate change**, **biodiversity loss**, and **pollution & waste**.
  - **Climate change** is driven by **greenhouse gas emissions**, causing **global warming**, **extreme weather**, rising seas, and threats to food security and ecosystems.
  - **Biodiversity loss** results from **deforestation**, **pollution**, **habitat destruction**, and **overexploitation**, leading to mass species extinction and weakened ecosystems.
  - **Pollution and waste** — from **plastics**, **chemicals**, and **air/water contamination** — harm human health, marine life, and ecosystems, and contribute to climate and biodiversity crises.
- These crises are **deeply linked** — **climate change accelerates species loss**, **pollution worsens climate impacts**, and degraded ecosystems **reduce carbon absorption** — requiring **urgent, integrated global action**.

## What is the United Nations Ocean Conference?

- **About:** UNOC is a **high-level global summit** convened by the **UN** to **accelerate action** toward **SDG 14 (Life Below Water)**, which aims to **conserve** and **sustainably use oceans, seas, and marine resources**.
- **Theme:** Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean.
- **Purpose:** It aims to address **critical ocean challenges** like **climate change (ocean warming, acidification, sea-level rise)**, **marine pollution** (plastics, **oil spills**, chemical waste), **overfishing** and **IUU (Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated) fishing**, and **biodiversity loss (coral bleaching, habitat destruction)**.
  - The objectives of UNOC3 was to establish the "**Nice Ocean Agreements**" as an international pact aligned with the **UN's 2015 SDGs**, and to advance the **Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)** by securing **ratification from 60 countries** to regulate the **high seas**.
- **Major Outcomes in Past:**
  - **2017 (New York): "Call for Action" declaration;** focus on **marine pollution** and **overfishing**.
  - **2022 (Lisbon): Renewed pledges for 30% marine protection by 2030 (30x30 target).**

## What are the Key Outcomes of the Third UN Ocean Conference?

- **Strengthening Global Ocean Governance:** The declaration urged the **full implementation** of key agreements, including the **Convention on Biological Diversity**, the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, and the **Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)**.
- **Addressing Climate Change and Ocean Acidification:** The declaration called for **enhanced global action to minimize climate change impacts**, including **ocean acidification**, and stressed the need to **adapt to unavoidable climate effects** while **protecting marine ecosystems**.
  - The conference expressed **concern over plastic pollution** and its environmental harm, while reaffirming the **commitment to prevent and reduce marine pollution of all kinds**.
- **Sustainable Ocean-Based Economies:** The declaration recognized the **economic potential of sustainable ocean activities**, particularly for **small island developing states (SIDS)** and **least developed countries (LDCs)**, and highlighted tools like **sustainable ocean plans** for the **effective management of ocean resources**.
- **Indigenous Knowledge, and Ocean Mapping:** The declaration emphasized that **ocean action** should be guided by **scientific research, traditional knowledge**, and the expertise of **Indigenous Peoples**.
  - It also highlighted the importance of **national ocean accounting** and **mapping marine ecosystems** to support **better policy making**.

## Key Ocean Conservation Initiatives Announced at UNOC3

- **European Commission:** Announced a **1 billion Euro investment** to promote **ocean conservation**, **advance marine science**, and support **sustainable fishing practices**.
- **French Polynesia:** Pledged to create the **world's largest marine protected area** — covering its entire **exclusive economic zone (5 million sq km)** to safeguard marine biodiversity.
- **Spain:** Announced the creation of **five new marine protected areas**, enhancing its network of safeguarded marine zones.
- **Indonesia & World Bank:** Introduced a '**Coral Bond**' — an innovative financial tool to **fund reef conservation** and restoration efforts in Indonesia.
- **High Ambition Coalition for a Quiet Ocean:** A **37-country coalition** led by **Panama and Canada**, focused on tackling **underwater noise pollution** to protect marine life.

# How the Triple Planetary Crisis is Harming Oceans and Marine Ecosystems?

- **Climate Change Impacts:** Oceans absorb **90% of excess heat** from global warming, causing **thermal expansion**, **increased salinity**, and disruption of [marine ecosystems](#).
  - They also absorb **23% of anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions**, making oceans **30% more acidic** since pre-industrial times and harming **shell-forming organisms** and [coral reefs](#).
  - **Warmer waters** hold less oxygen, creating [dead zones](#), while **melting polar ice** and **glacier calving** are rising **sea levels**, threatening **coastal cities** like **Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata**.
- **Coral Reef Destruction:** Rising temperatures trigger **coral bleaching**, as corals expel **symbiotic algae (zooxanthellae)**, turning white and often leading to mass die-offs.
  - The **4<sup>th</sup> Global Mass Bleaching Event (2023-2025)** affected **84% of the world's coral reefs** across **82 countries**, causing severe damage to **marine biodiversity hotspots**.
- **Overexploitation of Marine Resources:** **Overfishing** has caused **significant decline** in key species e.g., a **75% drop in oil sardine catch** along the **Kerala coast** in 2021, while projects like [Vadhavan Port](#) face criticism for displacing **fishing communities** and harming the **marine ecosystem**.
  - **Bottom trawling** and plans to **mine the ocean floor** for metals threaten to destroy **coral, sponge habitats**, and **undiscovered species**, creating **underwater dust clouds** that could suffocate marine life over vast areas.
- **Plastic & Chemical Pollution:** Millions of tons of plastic enter oceans each year, causing harm to **marine life** through **ingestion** and **entanglement**.
  - **Oil spills**, **ship accidents**, and **industrial runoff** introduce toxic chemicals, as seen in the **recent sinking of a Liberian-flagged vessel near the Kochi coast**, threatening the region's rich **biodiversity** and nearby communities, prompting the **Kerala government** to declare it a **state disaster**.
- **Habitat Destruction:** [Mangrove forests](#), vital coastal nurseries for fish, are being cleared for **shrimp farms** and **resorts**, while **coastal development** builds over **turtle nesting beaches** for hotels.

## What is the Need of Safeguarding Oceans?

- **Ecological & Biodiversity Significance:** [Phytoplankton](#), producing over **50% of Earth's oxygen**, and **plankton** form the foundation of marine food webs that sustain **fish, marine mammals, and seabirds**.
  - **Oceans**, the largest ecosystem, support **94% of all life** and nearly a **million known species**, with **coral reefs** and **mangroves** serving as vital biodiversity hotspots. E.g., [Ocean currents](#) create **fertile fishing grounds** (e.g., **Newfoundland's Grand Banks**) by bringing nutrient-rich waters to the surface.
- **Climate Regulation:** Oceans **regulate global temperatures** and play a key role in **climate balance** by absorbing and redistributing heat through **currents** like the [Gulf Stream](#).
  - They drive the **hydrological cycle**, influencing **rainfall, monsoons, weather systems**, and ensuring **freshwater availability**. Oceans also act as the world's largest [carbon sink](#), absorbing vast amounts of **CO<sub>2</sub>** to help **mitigate climate change**.
- **Economic & Livelihood Support:** Over **3 billion people** rely on **seafood** as a primary protein source, with **fisheries** and **aquaculture** supporting millions of jobs, while **continental shelves** hold vast reserves of **oil** and **natural gas** (e.g., **Gulf of Mexico, Persian Gulf, Bombay High**).
  - **Oceans** are vital to the **global economy**, enabling **90% of trade** through shipping routes and supporting **multi-billion-dollar coastal tourism** in regions like the **Caribbean** and **Mediterranean**.
- **Scientific & Medicinal Value:** **Marine organisms** have contributed to **medical breakthroughs**, including **anticancer compounds** from **coral** and **algae**.
  - **Deep-sea exploration** enhances understanding of **Earth's geology, climate history**, and the potential for **new resources**.

# What Actions are Needed to Promote Ocean Sustainability?

- **For Governments & Policymakers:**
  - **Expand Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):** Expand [MPAs](#) to protect **30% of oceans by 2030 (30x30 target)**, as seen in the [Galápagos Marine Reserve](#), where **industrial fishing is banned** to let **wildlife thrive**.
  - **Reduce Plastic Pollution:** Finalize the [draft Global Plastic Treaty](#) to phase out **single-use plastics**, support ban on [microbeads](#) and **non-recyclable plastics** to stop plastic leakage into oceans.
  - **Fight Climate Change:** Meet [Paris Agreement](#) goals to cut **CO<sub>2</sub> emissions** and promote **blue carbon ecosystems** like **mangroves** and [seagrasses](#) to limit **ocean acidification**.
- **For Businesses & Industries:**
  - **Sustainable Fishing:** Use **selective fishing gear** (e.g., turtle-safe nets), avoid **overfished species** like **bluefin tuna** and **shark**, and promote **plant-based seafood alternatives** (e.g., algae-based fish).
  - **Green Shipping & Tourism:** Switch to **low-sulfur fuels** and **electric port systems**, along with adopting **coral-safe sunscreen policies** (e.g., banning **oxybenzone**).
  - **Circular Economy:** Redesign packaging with innovations like **edible seaweed wrappers** and **recycling fishing nets** into clothing.
- **For Individuals:** Choose **sustainable seafood** (e.g., Marine Stewardship Council labels), ditch **single-use plastics** (carry reusable bottles, bags, utensils), and join **beach cleanups** to stop trash from entering the ocean.
- **Indigenous & Local Knowledge:** Learn from **coastal communities** by adopting **traditional fishing methods** like Palau's *bul* system and Hawaii's *kapu* system that protect fish stocks.

## Conclusion

The **2025 UN Ocean Conference** reinforced global commitment to protect **oceans** from **climate change**, **pollution**, and **overexploitation**. While policies like the **BBNJ Agreement** and **30x30 target** offer hope, **urgent**, **inclusive**, and **science-based action**—from ending plastics to empowering **Indigenous stewardship**—is vital to safeguard **marine ecosystems**, ensuring **biodiversity**, **climate stability**, and **livelihoods** for present and future generations.

### **Drishti Mains Question:**

What are the major threats facing the world's oceans today? Suggest measures to ensure ocean sustainability.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

### **Mains**

**Q.** What is oil pollution? What are its impacts on the marine ecosystem? In what way is oil pollution particularly harmful for a country like India? (2023)

**Q.** What are the consequences of spreading 'Dead Zones' on marine ecosystems? (2018).

