



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 CO₂ 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 [4th 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 **CO₂** 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 **CO₂ 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).

