

UN Accord To Protect Marine Life on High Seas

March 6, 2023 • vajiramandravi.com



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Why in News?

- For the first time, United Nations members have agreed on a unified treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas.
- This represents a turning point for vast stretches of the planet where conservation has previously been hampered by a confusing patchwork of laws.

What are high seas?

- The high seas are the parts of the ocean that are not included in the exclusive economic zones, territorial sea or internal waters of a State.
 - Water beyond 200 nautical miles from the coast of a country is known as high sea.
- High seas are the areas of the ocean for which no one nation has sole responsibility for management.
- Geographically, the ocean constitutes approximately two-thirds of the planet and the high seas comprise 64 percent of its surface and nearly 95 percent of the ocean's volume.

News Summary: UN Accord To Protect Marine Life on High Seas

- UN members have agreed on a unified treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas – nearly half the planet's surface – concluding two weeks of talks in New York.

Background: UN Accord To Protect Marine Life on High Seas

- Also referred to as the Paris Agreement for the Ocean, the treaty to deal with Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction was under discussion for several years.
 - The treaty, under discussion, dealt with the ocean existing beyond the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).
 - EEZ lie from the coast of a country to about 200 nautical miles into the sea (Countries have special rights for exploration till 200 nautical miles).
- The treaty was being negotiated under the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982.
- There was no treaty for conserving the health of vast swathes of the earth's oceans known as high seas.
- Hence, a UN resolution in 2017 had decided to address this issue while setting 2022 as the deadline.

Key highlights of the proposed treaty To Protect Marine Life on High Seas

- **New body created**
 - The treaty will create a new body to manage conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas in the high seas.
- **Includes various aspects of marine conservation**
 - Some aspects of agreed treaty included:
 - establishing marine protected areas to put limits on certain activities,

- establishment of ground rules for environmental impact assessments or clearances for sustainability of works,
- financial support to countries and
- sharing other scientific knowledge.
- **Rights of companies engaged in exploration activities in the high seas**
 - A key aspect of the agreement is deciding on the rights of companies that undertake exploration for biological resources in the high seas.
- This treaty will be legally binding in nature.

What is the significance of the agreed treaty to protect marine life on High Seas?

- **Protection of global commons**
 - There are two major global commons — the atmosphere and the oceans.
 - While the oceans may draw less attention, protecting this half of earth's surface is absolutely critical to the health of our planet.
- **Protection of endangered species and habitats**
 - With this treaty, comprehensive protection of endangered species and habitats is now finally possible on more than 40% of the Earth's surface.
- **Achieving U.N. Biodiversity Conference's recent pledge**
 - This treaty is critical to achieve the U.N. Biodiversity Conference's recent pledge to protect 30% of the planet's waters, as well as its land, for conservation.
- **All activities to be open for scrutiny**
 - Every country has the right to access open seas and there was no treaty specifically dedicated to protecting the ocean health.
 - This had resulted in large-scale drilling and trawling operations for catching fish and other animals for commercial purposes.
 - Now, after the enforcement of this new treaty, all activities planned for the high seas will to be looked at, though not all will go through a full assessment.
- **Helps coastal biodiversity and economies**
 - This treaty will help to knit together the different regional treaties to be able to address threats and concerns across species' ranges.
 - It will strengthen the legal protection of two-thirds of the ocean and with-it marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities.

Conclusion

- The high seas have long suffered exploitation due to commercial fishing and mining, as well as pollution from chemicals and plastics.

- The new agreement is about “acknowledging that the ocean is not a limitless resource, and it requires global cooperation to use the ocean sustainably.”
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Q1) What are global commons?

Global commons refer to the Earth’s shared resources that are not owned or controlled by any single country or entity but are essential for the well-being of humanity and the planet. Examples of global commons include the atmosphere, oceans, outer space, and Antarctica.

Q2) What is UNCLOS?

UNCLOS stands for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is an international treaty that sets out the legal framework for the use and management of the world’s oceans and their resources. The convention was adopted in 1982 and came into force in 1994 after it was ratified by 60 countries.

Source: [Nations reach accord to protect marine life on high seas](#) | [Indian Express](#)

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/un-accord-to-protect-marine-life-on-high-seas/>

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