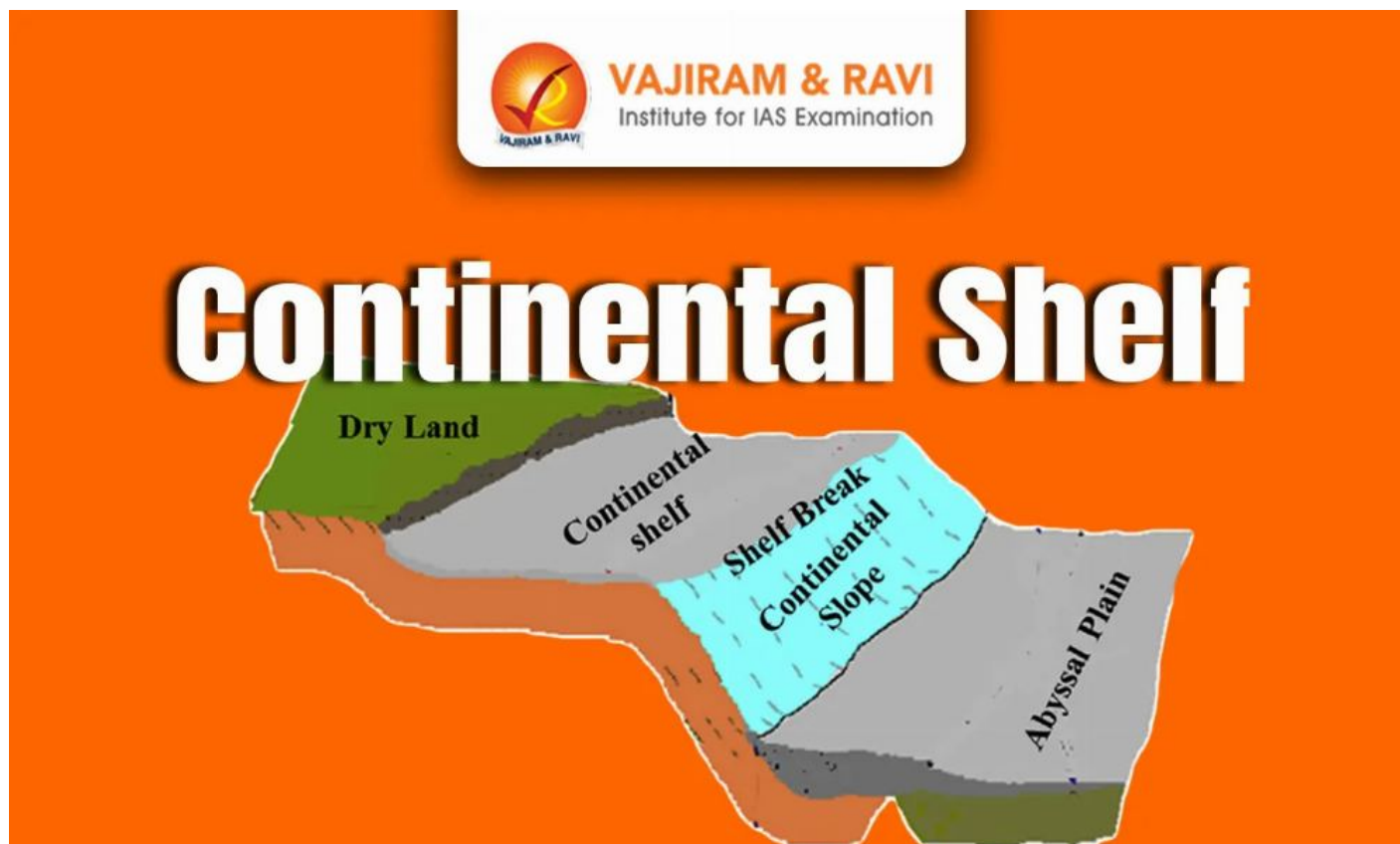


Continental Shelf

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Continental Shelf Latest News

India has increased its claim in the Central Arabian Sea, as part of its 'extended continental shelf' by nearly 10,000 sq.km but also modified an earlier claim to avoid a long-standing dispute with Pakistan over the maritime boundary between the two countries.

About Continental Shelf

- It is the **edge of a continent that lies under the ocean.**
- It is the **extension of a coastal State's land territory under the sea.**
- It **extends from the coastline of a continent to a drop-off point called the shelf break.**
- **From the break**, the shelf **descends toward** the deep ocean floor in what is called the **continental slope.**
- The actual boundary of a continent is not its coastline, but the edge of the continental shelf.
- **Formation:**
 - Over many millions of years, organic and inorganic materials formed continental shelves.

- **Inorganic material built up as rivers carried sediment**—bits of rock, soil, and gravel—to the edges of the continents and into the ocean.
- These sediments **gradually accumulated** in layers **at the edges of continents**.
- **Organic material**, such as the remains of plants and animals, **also accumulated**.
- The **widths** of the continental shelves **vary**.
- **Most** continental shelves **are broad, gently sloping plains covered by** relatively **shallow water**.
- The **average width** of continental shelves is about **65 km** (40 miles).
- Water depth over the continental shelves averages about 60 meters (200 feet).
- **Sunlight penetrates** the shallow waters, and many kinds of **organisms flourish**—from microscopic shrimp to giant seaweed called kelp.
- **Ocean currents and runoff from rivers bring nutrients** to organisms that live on continental shelves.
- **Plants and algae make continental shelves rich** feeding grounds for sea creatures.
- The shelves make up less than **10 percent of the total area of the oceans**.
- **In some places, deep canyons and channels cut through** the continental shelves.
- Little light penetrates these submarine canyons, and they are sometimes the least-explored areas of continents.

What is the Extended Continental Shelf?

- **Geopolitically, under the** United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (**UNCLOS**), **coastal countries have special rights over the continental shelf** for exploring and exploiting natural resources **up to 200 nautical miles (exclusive economic zone)**.
- **In addition** to this, such **States can make claims for more area** in the ocean **provided they can scientifically establish to** a UN body, called the **Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS)**, that this claimed area extends unbroken from their landmass all the way to the seabed.
- **All of this oceanic area is considered part of a country's extended continental shelf**.
- This gives them **rights to commercially mine for valuable minerals, polymetallic nodules, and oil reserves**.

Continental Shelf FAQs

Q1. What is the difference between EEZ and continental shelf?

Ans. The continental shelf includes only the seabed and subsoil, whereas the EEZ also includes the water column.

Q2. Which is the largest continental shelf in the world?

Ans. The world's largest continental shelf extends 1,500 km (about 930 miles) from the coast of Siberia into the Arctic Ocean.

Q3. Which is the longest continental shelf in India?

Ans. The Indian state with the broadest continental shelf is Gujarat.

Source: TH

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