

## **UNITED NATIONS OCEAN CONFERENCE (UNOC): INTERNATIONAL RELATION**

**NEWS:** What was decided at the UN Oceans Conference?

### **WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?**

The 2025 United Nations Oceans Conference in Nice marked major progress in marine governance, with 56 countries nearing ratification of the High Seas Treaty and over €1 billion pledged for ocean conservation. India committed to ratify the treaty and proposed a 10-point roadmap for sustainable ocean governance, reinforcing its global leadership role.

### **Background of UNOC**

- The United Nations Oceans Conference (UNOC) supports SDG 14 (Life Below Water), aiming to promote conservation and sustainable use of ocean resources.
- 1st UNOC (2017): Held in New York, co-hosted by Sweden and Fiji.
- 2nd UNOC (2022): Lisbon, co-hosted by Portugal and Kenya. Emphasized science-based marine solutions.
- 3rd UNOC (2025): Held in Nice, France, co-hosted by Costa Rica with the theme: “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean.”

### **Major Outcomes of UNOC 2025**

- **Near Ratification of the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ Agreement):**
  - 56 of the 60 required countries have ratified the treaty.
  - The treaty empowers nations to create Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the high seas, regulate access to marine genetic resources, and conduct mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).
- **Significant Financial and Political Commitments:**
  - European Commission: Pledged €1 billion to marine conservation and sustainable fishing.
  - French Polynesia: Announced the largest MPA in the world, covering its entire EEZ (5 million sq. km).
  - Global Political Declaration: Over 170 countries adopted the Nice Ocean Action Plan with 800+ voluntary commitments ranging from youth engagement to scientific capacity building.
- **Pushback on Deep-Sea Mining:**
  - Multiple countries demanded a precautionary pause on deep-sea mining due to ecological risks.

### **India's Contributions and Commitments**

- India pledged to ratify the BBNJ/High Seas Treaty.
- Proposed a 10-point roadmap for sustainable ocean governance, including:

1. Expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).
2. Scaling up the blue economy.
3. Reducing marine pollution.
4. Promoting offshore renewable energy.
5. Supporting a global plastics treaty.
6. Investing in ocean science and innovation.
7. Strengthening coastal resilience.
8. Ensuring equitable access to marine resources.
9. Moratorium on deep-sea mining.
10. Fostering global and regional partnerships.

### **About the High Seas**

- High seas are areas beyond national jurisdiction (beyond 200 nautical miles from a nation's coastline).
- Governed under UNCLOS, these waters form nearly two-thirds of the ocean and are essential for climate regulation, biodiversity, and global fisheries.

### **Importance of Oceans**

- Absorb 25% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and produce 50% of Earth's oxygen.
- Provide protein to over 3 billion people and drive a \$3–5 trillion global ocean economy.
- Serve as vital biodiversity hotspots with immense potential for scientific research and future innovations.

### **Key Environmental Concerns**

- **Ocean Pollution:**
  - Plastic: 75 to 199 million tonnes in oceans; 8–12 million tonnes added annually.
  - Asia contributes ~81% of plastic ocean waste due to poor waste management.
  - Microplastics found in 60% of seafood consumed by humans.
  - Great Pacific Garbage Patch holds 1.8 trillion pieces of trash; by 2050, ocean plastic may outweigh fish.
- **Acidification:** Ocean pH has dropped to 8.1 (30% more acidic since pre-industrial times).
- **Overfishing:** Threatens marine species and food chains.

- **Climate Change:** Causes rising sea levels, coral bleaching, and increased ocean temperatures.
- **Deep-Sea Mining:** Emerging threat to fragile ecosystems.

### History of Ocean Conservation

- **Pre-1970s:** Early efforts like the International Whaling Commission (1946).
- **1970s–1990s:** Landmark laws like the U.S. Marine Protection Act (1972) and UNCLOS (1982) established global norms.
- **2000s–2010s:** Expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs); technological tools like satellite tracking for marine fauna conservation.
- **2020s Onward:**
  - High Seas Treaty (2023) enables legally binding conservation beyond EEZs.
  - COP15 (2022): Nations committed to the 30x30 goal — protect 30% of oceans by 2030.
  - Indigenous and community-based knowledge increasingly recognized in ocean stewardship.

### Challenges to Implementation of High Seas Treaty

- **Equitable Benefit Sharing:** Disputes over profits from marine genetic resources and bio-extraction.
- **Enforcement & Legal Harmonisation:** Treaty only takes effect post-60 ratifications and needs domestic law alignment.

### Other Major Pledges at UNOC 2025

- New Zealand: US\$52 million for Pacific Ocean governance.
- Germany: €100 million for cleaning munitions from North & Baltic Seas.
- Canada: \$9 million to support Small Island Developing States (SIDS) for climate resilience.
- Spain: Declared 5 new MPAs, with a goal to protect 25% of its marine area.
- Coalition for a Quiet Ocean: 35+ countries, including Panama and Canada, working to reduce ocean noise pollution.
- UN Agencies: Launched ‘One Ocean Finance’ initiative to mobilize investments in the blue economy.

**Source:** <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/what-was-decided-at-the-un-oceans-conference-explained/article69710425.ece>