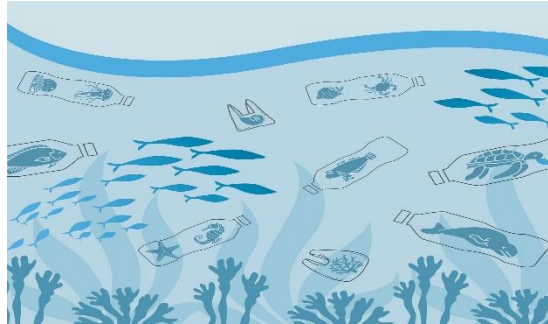


## Charting a New Era of Global Cooperation for Ocean's Future

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The Ocean covers 70 percent of earth's surface and contains 97 percent of water on the planet. Ocean is central to life on earth as it influences weather patterns, regulates climate, provides oxygen and stores carbon dioxide. Additionally, its ecosystem, biodiversity, resources and energy is critical. The significance of oceans has been recognised historically over centuries, shaped by scientific advancements, early navigation and exploration of oceans and growing environmental awareness. Increasingly the health of the ocean is threatened by planetary crises like climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Escalating environmental degradation, pollution is damaging marine ecosystems and ocean acidification, rising temperatures and extreme weather patterns are also threatening marine life. Plastic and garbage, expansion of dead zones and bleaching of coral reefs are some of the challenges. From the mid twentieth century concerns were raised by several scientists and growing marine environmental degradation was also acknowledged at several global platforms including the [Stockholm Conference](#), [Rio Earth Summit](#), etc. Growing concerns of overfishing and fishing, national claims, geopolitical tensions and lack of unified framework led to the [1958 Convention on the High Seas](#). It was preceded by the [freedom of the seas doctrine](#) which restricted national jurisdiction to a narrow coastal belt. The 1958 Convention laid the groundwork for modern ocean governance. However, it lacked enforcement mechanisms and lacked clarity on exclusive economic zones that failed to address emerging maritime challenges. The Third United National Convention on the Law recognised the need for clear maritime boundaries, resources exploration, environmental and pollution issues as well as equitable ocean governance. These led to the signing of the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea](#) in 1982 which came into force in 1994. It introduced the Exclusive Economic Zones, deep-sea mining regulations and environmental protections.

The Millennium Development Goals did not have a dedicated ocean goal but [Goal 7](#) which focused on ensuring environmental sustainability highlighted 'coastal marine areas' under Goal 7b which concerned biodiversity loss. The United Nations officially recognised June 8 as the [World Oceans Day](#) in 2008. Alongside, there was a growing recognition for the need for concerted and collaborative action to tackle challenges facing the Oceans. The [Nagoya Protocol](#) (2010) [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#) (2013) emphasised on access to marine genetic resources and mercury

pollution affecting marine ecosystems including fish, marine mammals, sea turtles, etc. respectively. The [Paris Agreement](#) (2015) also recognised the need for ensuring integrity of all ecosystems including oceans, and protection of its biodiversity and aims to address ocean-related climate impacts. Additionally, Ocean conservation became a global goal of the Sustainable Development Goals. [SDG14](#) focuses on life below water, including targets such as reducing marine pollution, protecting ecosystems, regulating fishes and increasing ocean research. Two years back, the High Seas Treaty, formally known as the [Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction \(BBNJ\) Agreement](#) was adopted to regulate and protect marine biodiversity in international borders. It also aims to support scientific collaboration and technology sharing to help developing nations participate in ocean governance. Although it is a legally binding treaty under UNCLOS, it only applies to countries that ratify it. As of date, [51 countries have ratified/accepted/approved](#). The Agreement would enter into force 120 days after the sixtieth instrument of ratification, approval, acceptance or accession.

The United Nations Ocean Conference is dedicated towards advancing SDG14 which focuses on conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources. The [First UN Ocean Conference](#) co-hosted by Fiji and Sweden was held in 2017 at the UN Headquarter in New York aimed towards mobilising global action to address climate impacts on oceans and its health, marine pollution, plastic waste, overfishing, biodiversity loss. The [Second UN Ocean Conference](#) took place in 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal and was co-hosted by Kenya and Portugal. It emphasised scaling up of ocean action, high-seas and deep-sea mining regulation, financing of coastal nations and marine protection. The Conference led to the adoption of the Declaration [Our Ocean, Our Future, Our Responsibility](#) emphasising on sustainable Blue Economy. The [Third UN Ocean Conference](#) was held in Nice, France during 9-13 June 2025 co-hosted by France and Costa Rica. These conferences reinforce urgency and need for global governance of oceans and are key to raising awareness of the issues, challenges faced. It brought together heads of states, ministers, international organisations and UN agencies, scientists, S&T institutions, civil society organisations, private sector, industry, etc. including participation from the Global South to accelerate global action for ocean protection and sustainable marine governance. The role of indigenous and local communities for sustainable ocean management was also underlined. The political declaration [Our Ocean, Our Future: United for Urgent Action](#) for marine conservation, decarbonisation of marine transport and combating marine pollution was adopted. Additionally, the [European Commission and New Zealand](#) made major financial commitments to enhance ocean governance in the Pacific. French Polynesia announced the creation of the marine protected area.

India has actively participated in the UN Ocean Conferences and committed towards enhancing ocean research, science-based ocean solutions and marine technology transfer. India strongly backed a legally binding [Global Plastics Treaty](#) to combat marine litter and also unveiled its initiatives towards marine conservation which include [Samudrayan](#) Deep Ocean Mission, [SAHAV Digital Ocean Portal](#), [Swachh Sagar](#), [Surakshit Sagar Campaign](#). Additionally, also advocated swift ratification of the BBNJ Agreement.

The United Nations Ocean Conferences are a significant forum that plays a key role in paving the future of marine conservation and ocean governance. These conferences will continue to shape international policies that are required for a sustainable future of the ocean ecosystem. The recent Nice Ocean Action Plan reinforces science-based policymaking, international cooperation and

financial commitments to address issues of plastic pollution, deep-sea mining, ocean acidification, marine biodiversity loss, etc. The BBNJ Agreement is yet another milestone which will ensure a legally bound framework for international waters. Ocean governance rests on continued scientific cooperation and diplomatic engagement. However, implementation of these commitments, funding for marine conservation and ratification of global treaties amidst growing technological sovereignty and geopolitical tensions will determine how these translate into actions. Science diplomacy can play a key role in bridging geopolitical divides, fostering innovation and informed decision-making is essential for ensuring a sustainable and resilient ocean governance.