



BBNJ Treaty

For Prelims: UNCLOS, BBNJ, IUCN.

For Mains: BBNJ Treaty, Conservation.

Why in News?

Recently, the **fourth meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC-4) was held in New York to conclude a draft of the instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine Biological diversity in areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ).**

- The IGC-4 is **convened under the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#).**

What is the BBNJ Treaty?

- The “BBNJ Treaty”, **also known as the “Treaty of the High Seas”**, is an international agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, **currently under negotiation at the [United Nations](#).**
- This new instrument is **being developed within the framework of the UNCLOS**, the main international agreement governing human activities at sea.
- It will achieve **a more holistic management of high seas activities**, which should better balance the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.
- BBNJ **encompasses the high seas, beyond the exclusive economic zones or national waters of countries.**
 - According to the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\)](#), these areas account for **“almost half of the Earth’s surface”**.
 - These areas are **hardly regulated and also least understood or explored** for its biodiversity - only 1% of these areas are under protection.
- Launched at the [One Ocean Summit](#) in February 2022, the **High Ambition Coalition on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction** brings together many delegations engaged in the BBNJ negotiations on a common and ambitious outcome at the highest political level.
- The negotiations are **centred around a package of elements** agreed upon in 2015, namely:
 - the **conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction**, in particular, together and as a whole, marine genetic resources, including questions on the sharing of benefits
 - area-based management tools, including marine protected areas
 - environmental impact assessments
 - capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology

What is the Need of Legally Binding Instrument for BBNJ?

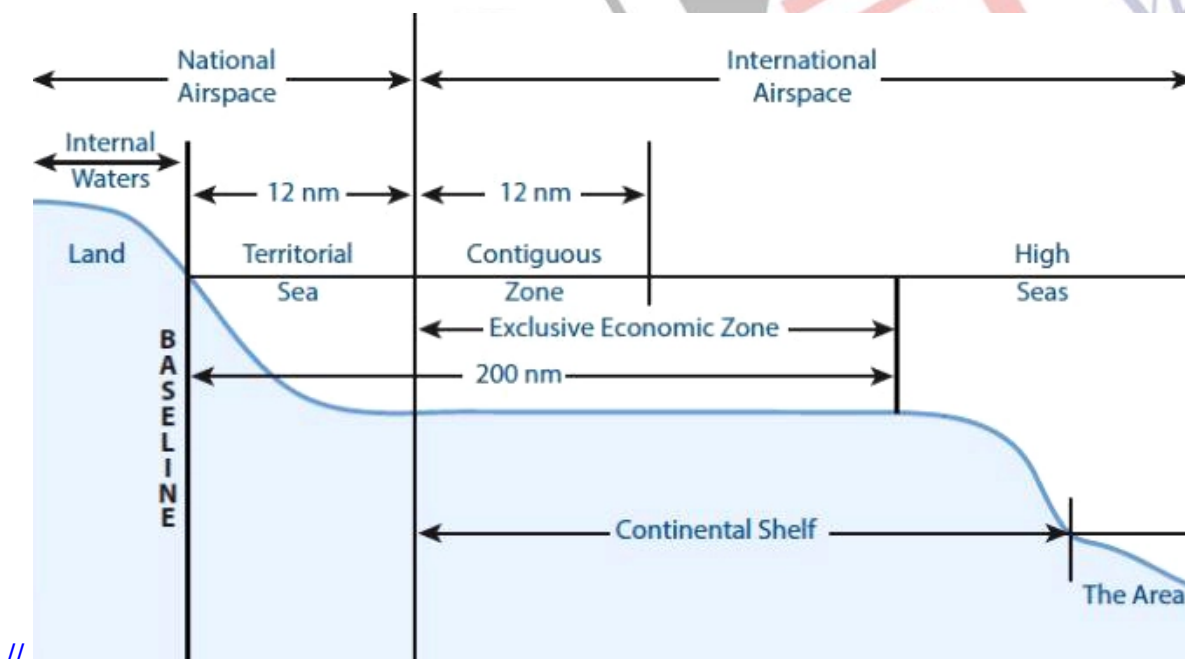
- **Areas beyond national jurisdiction comprise 95% of the ocean** and provide invaluable ecological, economic, social, cultural, scientific and food-security benefits to humanity.
- However, these areas teeming with life are now **vulnerable to growing threats**, including

pollution, overexploitation, and the impacts already visible of climate change.

- The increasing demand for marine resources in the coming decades – for food, minerals or biotechnology – threatens to exacerbate this problem.
- The high seas are **extremely biodiverse and have been exploited** without even knowing its impacts.
- While there are scientific explorations of the surface water of the high seas, **the deep sea i.e. below 200 metres of the surface has hardly been studied.**
- The deep seafloors, believed to be the harshest habitat, the extinction process is setting in.
 - The 184 species (of Molluscs) assessed, 62% are listed as threatened: 39 are critically endangered, 32 are endangered and 43 are vulnerable.
 - In the Indian Ocean vents, 100% molluscs are already listed as critically endangered. This shows the urgent need to protect them from extinction. Yet, the International Seabed Authority, a Jamaica-based intergovernmental body, is allowing deep sea mining contracts.

What is UNCLOS?

- The [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\), 1982](#) is an international agreement that **establishes the legal framework for marine and maritime activities**. It is **also known as Law of the Sea**.
- It divides marine areas into **five main zones** namely- **Internal Waters, Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** and the **High Seas**.
- It is the only international convention which stipulates a framework for state jurisdiction in maritime spaces. It provides a different legal status to different maritime zones.
- It provides the backbone for offshore governance by coastal states and those navigating the oceans.
- It not only zones coastal states' offshore areas but also provides specific guidance for states' rights and responsibilities in the five concentric zones.



[Source: DTE](#)

