High Seas Treaty

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Environment, Ecology & Climate Change

Why in news?

The High Seas Treaty has secured the 60 ratifications needed for its entry into force, paving the way for the treaty to take effect next year.

- It is officially known as ***Biodiversity beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty.***
- BBNJ is ***first legal international treaty*** under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- **Adopted in –** 2023.
- **Aim -** Protecting biodiversity in international waters, those that ***lie beyond the jurisdiction of any single country.***

  Territorial waters extend from the baseline to 12 nautical miles (1 nautical mile = 1.852 km), beyond that up to 200 miles (370 km) lies the Exclusive Economic Zone.

- **Objectives -**
  - Demarcation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs - that do not allow any fishing, mining, drilling, or other extractive activities).
  - Sustainable use of marine genetic resources and equitable sharing of benefits arising from them.
  - Initiate the practice of environmental impact assessments for all major activities in the oceans.
  - Capacity building and technology transfer.
- **Enforced by -** Individual countries to regulate their own ships and companies.
- **Binding in nature** – It is a ***legally binding*** treaty.
- **Signed countries –** At present, *143 countries have signed* the treaty and it is ratified by 60 countries.

- **Newly ratified countries -** Recently, *Sri Lanka, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone and Morocco* ratified the treaty.
- **Non-Ratified Countries - *India has signed the treaty but yet to ratify*** it. (U.S., China, Russia and Japan – not ratified).

*According to **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN),** currently, 6.35% of the ocean is protected, but only just over 1.89% is covered by exclusively no-take MPAs.*

- **Threats -** International waters account for nearly 2/3rd of the ocean and nearly ½ of Earth's surface and are vulnerable to threats including ***over-fishing, climate change and deep-sea mining***.
- **Significance -** The treaty is essential for achieving ***"30x30" target***, protect 30% of the planet's land and sea by 2030 and a major step toward ***inclusion of small island nations*** in decisions making.

Quick facts

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
• UNCLOS is ***legally binding international treaty*** that establishes rules for using the world's oceans and their resources. • It sets out the legal framework for all marine and maritime activities and rules for resolving disputes between state parties. • ***India is a party to the UNCLOS***.

References

1. The Hindu | High Seas Treaty
2. Down to Earth | High Seas Treaty

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