Waves of Change

What is Ocean Policy?

THE RIPPLE EFFECT
Backgrounder
Grades 4-8

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Oceans, seas and the cryosphere (the frozen part of the Earth's water) play a vital part in sustaining life on our planet (see Figure 1). Canada has more coastline than any other country in the world. Therefore, Canada has an important responsibility to protect these coastlines and keep them safe and clean. This is where Ocean Policy comes in.

Ocean Policy is a set of rules that tell us how to take care of the waters around our country, including how we care for marine life, shipping and trading between us and other countries, renewable energy, climate change and all other industries related to the ocean.

But what is a policy? Is it a law? Is it a set of rules?

A policy is a PLAN. The plan can include laws, rules and processes. Ocean policy is a plan to decide how humans can or should use the waters around our country. There's a little bit of a problem here, though. Canada has its own waters but outside of a certain point, there are international waters which Canada doesn't have power over (see figure 2).

Ocean policy refers to the laws, processes, agreements, rules, and institutions in place to dictate human use of the oceans and its resources outside of the territorial waters of countries, often referred to as the international waters, or the global high seas and the international seabed area or the areas beyond national jurisdiction (see Figure 2). Through various conventions, the United Nations exercises power over the international waters (Naylor Law, 2019).
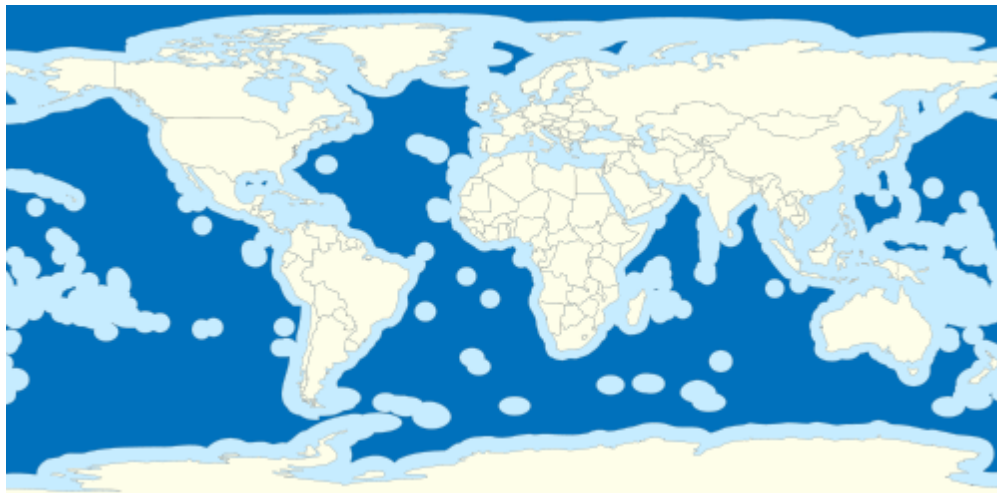
In the wake of this environmental degradation and overexploitation of oceans, made worse by climate change, in 2015 the United Nations released its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 **Sustainable Development Goals** that aim to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequality, tackle climate change and to preserve oceans and forests (see Figure 3).

Figure 1: Our World Ocean

Source: (IISD, 2021)

Figure 2:The Global High Seas and Area (in Dark Blue)

Source (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2021).

The UN Sustainable Development Goals have been adopted by all the United Nations Member States, with the aim "to provide peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). In particular, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal number 14 aims to protect oceans and marine life – i.e., to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources (United Nations, 2021).

Figure 3: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Source: (United Nations, 2021).

Follow this link to explore the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals:

Waters that fall within the jurisdiction of a country are subject to that country's national laws. These are generally referred to as **territorial waters.** However, because oceans connect us all and climate change impacts everything in nature, it is important to have mechanisms and processes in place to ensure all countries are cooperatively working towards the protection of oceans and marine life. The United Nations plays that role of bringing all countries to one table and setting global standards for protection of the people and planet, so that all countries can be held accountable. Canada, as a United Nations Member State, has also adopted the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Canada's Management of Oceans and Marine Life

Canada is a unique country as it has the longest coastline in the world (Pariona, 2019). Canada is bordered by three oceans, the Pacific, the Arctic and the Atlantic. Because of its longest coastline and being bordered by three oceans, Canada is greatly influenced by these oceans, and the impacts of climate change on oceans and coastal communities are deeply concerning for Canada (Natural Resources Canada, 2015).

Canada's oceans are safeguarded and managed by the federal institution of Fisheries and Oceans Canada, ensuring healthy and sustainable aquatic systems and supporting economic growth in the marine and fisheries sectors (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2021).

Together with the Canadian Coast Guard, Fisheries and Oceans Canada work in over 400 locations across Canada to achieve their four core responsibilities, these include (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2021):

- Protection and management of Canada's fisheries, including aquaculture, and supporting Indigenous peoples livelihoods in these communities
- Protecting aquatic ecosystems
- Maintaing waterways for marine navigation
- Marine operations and response to incidents

To learn more about the legislations that have been put in place to protect Canada's oceans, click here.

Glossary

Cryosphere is the frozen part of the earth's water

International waters are areas of the sea or ocean that are too far out to fall under any nation's jurisdiction

International ocean governance refers to the laws, processes, agreements, rules, and institutions in place to dictate human use of the oceans and its resources outside of the territorial waters of countries

Ocean policy involves the set of policies that dictate how humans manage the oceans and its resources – such as marine life, marine trade, ocean engineering, trade, economics, renewable energy, climate change and various other fields and industries related to the oceans

Sustainable Development Goals are 17 goals defined by the United Nations that aim to ending poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests

Territorial waters are waters that fall within the jurisdiction of a country and are subject to that country's national laws

United Nations Environment Program is a body of the United Nations that works towards conserving all nature, including the protection of world's marine and coastal enviornments

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