What is Ocean Policy?

THE RIPPLE EFFECT
Backgrounder
Grades 9 - 12

What is Ocean Policy?

Oceans, seas and **cryosphere**, the frozen part of the earth's water (National Ocean Service, 2021), play a vital role in sustaining life on earth. Without these, we cannot live on this planet (see Figure 1). Therefore, their protection is essential to life on earth. **Ocean policy** involves the set of policies that dictate how we manage the oceans – such as marine life, marine and other trades, ocean engineering, economics, renewable energy, climate change and various other fields and industries related to the oceans (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d.).

Oceans span across the globe and connect different countries. The territorial waters are the water bodies that fall within the jurisdiction of a country, and therefore, that country governs the management of those waters. However, "**international waters** are areas of the sea or ocean that are too far out to fall under any nation's jurisdiction" (Naylor Law, 2019). Therefore, it is important to have international governance in place for effectively managing international waters.

International ocean governance therefore, 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 1) (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2021). Through various conventions, the United Nations exercises power over the international waters (Naylor Law, 2019).

The United Nations through its environmental body, the **United Nations Environment Program** (UNEP), works towards conserving all nature, including the protection of world's marine and coastal environments (UN Environment Programme, 2021). However, as these international waters are outside of the national jurisdiction of countries, they have historically been hard to protect. This has led to overexploitation, pollution, excessive resource extraction and habitat degradation, which has led to severe undermining of earth's vital support systems (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2021).

In the wake of this environmental degradation and overexploitation of oceans, exacerbated 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 2) (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021).
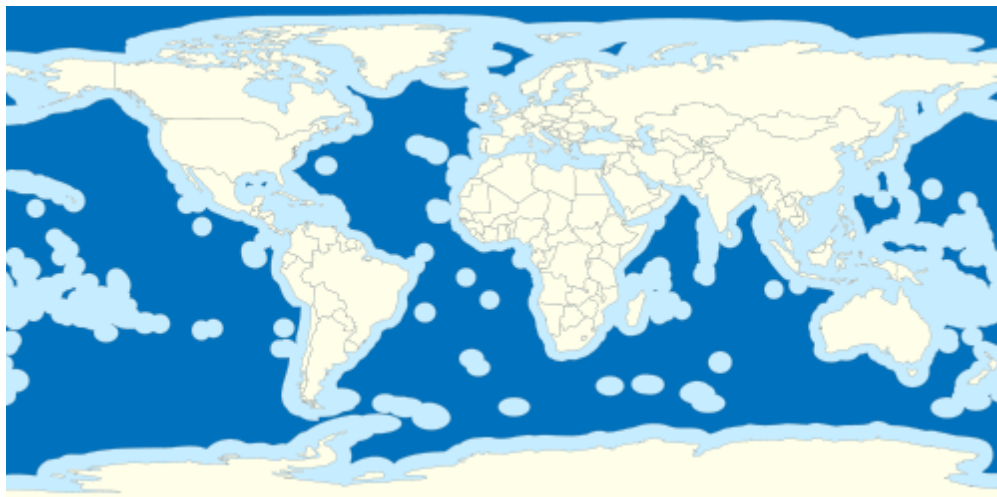
Figure 1: Our World Ocean

OUR WORLD OCEAN provides

THE AIR WE BREATHE
>50% The ocean produces over half of the world's oxygen and stores 50 times more carbon dioxide than our atmosphere.

CLIMATE REGULATION
70% Covering 70% of the Earth's surface, the ocean transports heat from the equator to the poles, regulating our climate and weather patterns.

TRANSPORTATION
76% Percent of all U.S. trade involving some form of marine transportation.

RECREATION
From fishing to boating to kayaking and whale watching, the ocean provides us with so many unique activities.

ECONOMY
$282 billion Amount the U.S. ocean economy produces in goods and services. Ocean-dependent businesses employ almost 3 million people.

FOOD
The ocean provides much more than just seafood. Ingredients from the sea are found in surprising foods such as peanut butter and soymilk.

MEDICINE
Many medicinal products come from the ocean, including ingredients that help fight cancer, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, and heart disease.

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).

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

The key pieces of legislation that dictate Fisheries and Oceans Canada's work in the management of and all affairs related to oceans include, the *Oceans Act*, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Species at Risk Act*, the *Coastal Fisheries Protection Act,* the *Canada Shipping Act (2001),* and the *Fishing and Recreational Harbours Act* (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2021). To learn more about these legislations, 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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