



# WORLD LEADERS CALL ON NATIONS TO SWIFTLY RATIFY UN OCEAN TREATY

In September 2023, nations around the world came together to sign the UN's 'High Seas Treaty', formally known as the agreement on 'Biodiversity Beyond Natural Jurisdiction' or 'BBNJ'. This historic agreement marked the culmination of over a decade of multilateral work, with negotiations beginning as early as [2004](#).

The HST aims to address a historic gap in ocean governance; there was little protection for the environment in the waters outside of a country's exclusive economic zone. These waters contain marine resources and biodiversity, providing invaluable ecological, economic, social, cultural, scientific and food security benefits to humanity. At the same time, they are under mounting pressure from pollution, overexploitation, climate change and [biodiversity loss](#).

According to the UN, more than one-third of global fish stocks are over-exploited. At the same time, over 17 million metric tons of plastic entered the world's oceans in 2021 – by 2050, there could be more plastic in the sea than fish unless [action is taken](#).

At the time of signing, only [around 1%](#) of the high seas were protected.

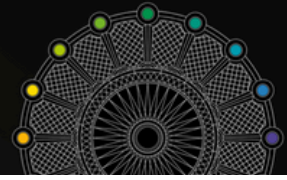


*'While countries are responsible for the conservation and sustainable use of waterways under their national jurisdiction, the high seas now have added protection from such destructive trends as pollution and unsustainable fishing activities.'*

## The 'High Seas Treaty'

The treaty aims to provide for the common governance of about half of the Earth's surface and 95% of the ocean's volume, to promote equity, tackle environmental degradation, fight climate change and prevent biodiversity loss. Once ratified, the treaty will allow for the establishment of ['marine protected areas'](#) in the high seas worldwide. This global pact is seen as a crucial tool to meet a target of protecting 30% of the Earth's land and sea by 2030, known as ["30 by 30"](#).





The EU has played a central role in this agreement, leading a 'High Ambition Coalition' of 52 countries, such as the UK, the US, and India. This coalition gathers parties committed to achieving [an ambitious outcome of the treaty](#). It has pledged 3.5 billion euros to protect the ocean and promote sustainability, alongside 400 new environmental commitments totalling [\\$10 billion](#).

## **Ratification**

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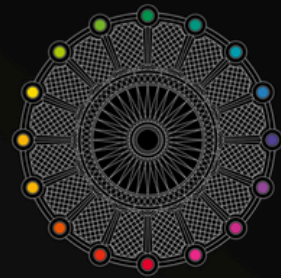
Despite being signed by 89 nations, only four countries have [formally ratified](#) the treaty: Palau, Chile, Belize and the Seychelles. The treaty will enter into force 120 days after the 60th ratification – which, given the time-sensitive “30 by 30” target – could undermine the efficiency of the treaty. According to Peter Thomson, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Ocean; *“We don't want (treaty) implementation to take decades the way the treaty itself took. [We have to get this done quickly.](#)”*

Likewise, the EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries [Virginijus Sinkevicius](#) has said, *“We hope to gather the other 60 ratifications needed for the agreement's entry into force as soon as possible... The ocean is part of who we are and it is our shared responsibility.”*

The importance of swift ratification is further amplified given current pollution trends – with plastic pollution set to double or triple each year by [2040](#). While the agreement itself is a significant step in the right direction, only time will tell if it was ‘too little, too late’ to prevent catastrophic damage to our oceans.

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