

Fisheries aspects within the international agreement on marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

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The European Parliament adopted by 651 to 8 with 53 abstentions a resolution on the fisheries aspects within the international agreement on marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Preservation of biodiversity: Parliament stressed that the preservation and conservation of marine biological diversity is a **common concern for all humankind** and should be treated as such. The outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, 2012 underlined that protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are the overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development.

The resolution recalled that the ocean plays an **integral role in many of the Earth's systems including climate and weather and is the place where a wide range of human activities are conducted such as fishing, energy, transport and trade.**

An estimated 64 % of the sea, notably the high seas and the deep seabed, are areas beyond the national jurisdiction of states and are governed by international law. However, **less than 1 % of areas beyond national jurisdiction are protected** as a result of the establishment of marine protected areas.

Towards a binding legal instrument: the EU plays a key role in the world governance of the seas and oceans and exerts great influence internationally with regard to fisheries. Parliament felt that this leading role implies that the EU is **responsible for adopting a proactive policy** regarding the protection of marine biodiversity worldwide.

It welcomed the decision taken by the UN General Assembly to develop an international legally binding **instrument** under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction in order, amongst other things, to address the current shortcomings. It highlighted the importance of achieving the aim of finalising the draft text by the **end of 2017.**

Improving governance of the oceans: the EU and the international community must promote conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity by implementing, among other measures, **modern and sustainable concepts of marine ecosystem management**, as well as principles of ocean governance by:

- managing the exploitation of marine resources (be it exploitation of minerals, energy drilling, etc.) and fisheries,
- incorporating science-based marine governance,
- restoring and maintaining stocks above levels which are capable of producing maximum sustainable yield,

- ecosystem-based management and conservation of marine biodiversity,
- enforcement of existing legislation, and the precautionary approach.

Taking into consideration the major actor position of the EU fishing industry and market and the fact that the European fisheries policy is geared towards sustainability, Members encouraged the Commission to further promote, coordinate, and ensure that the impact of human activities, including fisheries and all forms of sea bed and ocean exploitation, on biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction is **effectively addressed** within the context of this new international agreement. They noted the need to further promote the enforcement of existing legislation and to develop the necessary management tools to ensure coherence and consistency.

The Commission was urged to:

- call upon states that have not done so to ratify or accede to the UNCLOS;
- promote a **holistic and comprehensive approach** with regard to marine protected areas (MPAs) because no genuine coordination and cooperation on conservation efforts is possible without the participation of the widest possible circle of stakeholders involved in a comprehensive variety of human marine activities in oceans and seas;
- promote the designation and implementation of **ecologically or biologically significant marine areas** in areas beyond national jurisdiction;
- process a set of **comprehensive data** on marine biodiversity in Europe's regional seas;
- promote enhanced **cooperation, coordination, transparency and accountability between all concerned stakeholders**, including between the new instruments negotiated, the existing United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and FAO instruments, Regional fisheries management organisations and other sectoral bodies such as, inter alia, the International Seabed Authority and the International Maritime Organisation;
- push, in the context of the new international agreement, for recognition of environmental damage at sea and identification of the chain of responsibility for such damage.

New institutional mechanism: Parliament asked the Commission and Member States to promote, within the mandate of the new international agreement under UNCLOS, the development of an institutional mechanism for the implementation of prior Environmental Impact Assessment, with a solid scientific basis as far as practicable. These must be accompanied by detailed environmental and socio-economic monitoring.

Developing countries: the new international agreement should, moreover, address the specific needs of developing countries, in particular small island states, in terms of capacity-building with a view to achieving the goals of the international community concerning Marine Protected Areas.

Members underlined that the seas and oceans have a potential for **blue growth** that is still largely untapped, such as in the areas of renewable energy and pharmaceutical products, which could also be seen as a valid development path for today's developing countries.

Lastly, Parliament called for the EU to take a leading role in **combating plastic marine litter**, which was a threat to marine biodiversity, and for the relevant research to be funded under the [blue economy](#).

