

The UN High Seas Treaty: Maintaining Biodiversity?

The December 7 - 19, 2022, UN Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP 15) in Montreal, Quebec led to an agreement to protect 30% of land and oceans by 2030 and an international framework to prosecute it. Forty-three days later on March 3rd, 2023, the UN Ambassador for Oceans and President of the UN Biodiversity Committee announced to a jubilant committee, "the ship has reached the shore". Equally enthusiastic were the environmentally affiliated NGOs who participated. The announcement was a draft agreement prepared for presentation to the UN General Assembly, for ratification, the claiming of a continent-sized mare nullius, a vast ocean Commons that exists beyond national jurisdictions that has been occupied—peopled for centuries and regulated for decades under the international Law of the Sea (LOS). Moreover, the committee proposes a UN High Seas Treaty to operate under the LOS and to include the creation a new administration to manage and protect 30 percent of the high seas for "conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity". The world's well fed (WWF) were celebrating more than ten years of conspiring to deny access to almost a third of the world's ocean high seas, where those who dare venture to procure the fish that sustain us are also certain to also suffer, economically. Denials will be presented in language inherently imprecise and lacking the measurements required for real and honest decision-making. Moreover, reductions in former reliable fish markets will not be accepted without complaint. Demands for explanation will be required of the politically elected, not the bureaucratically appointed. It is yet to be ratified...ratifiers beware!

Unrelated climate change fears pervaded the discussions. Thermodynamic disorder of the oceans and related O₂ production, CO₂ uptake and release were emphasized repeatedly; subsumed in the agreement's rationale. Whereas these natural processes are beyond human control, fishing is not, hence sure to be compromised—traded-off for economically assumed, yet to be identified pharmaceutical and genetic benefits of other ocean fauna and flora. Expect policies that reflect these aspirations—new beginnings to prevail upon innocent taxpayers worldwide to pay for the efforts, including a plethora presumed to prevent Earth's demise from over-heating. Mining was also a concern exposing a new range of fears that should be lowered as the costs of extracting minerals from the sea floor are excessive—prohibitive and technically challenging. Extracting liquids and gasses from the seabed has been done effectively in many of the world's oceans for decades and will continue as long as a market for them prevails.

Secretary General of the UN, Antonio Guterres's reminded attendees of COP 15 that the oceans provide benefits to millions of people; sustaining them for millennia. Controlling all life that dwells within the oceans was a daunting enough task for Poseidon, god of the seas, a protector of seafarers and guardian of cities; a UN bureaucracy attempting the same over one-third of Earth's oceans is beyond daunting; more like a legitimate fear.

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