



UN begins talks on treaty to protect imperilled high seas

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Highlights

- United Nations kicked-off talks on a 2020 treaty that would regulate the high seas, which cover half the planet yet lack adequate environmental protection.
- Four sessions of talks, each lasting two weeks, are planned to take place over two years, with the goal of protecting marine biodiversity and avoiding further pillaging of the oceans.

Focus

- Talk will focus on the high seas and the international zone of marine waters, or about 46% of the planet's surface.
- In 1982, the UN adopted the Convention on the Law of the Sea, but left the high seas free from restrictions.
- "All States enjoy the traditional freedoms of navigation, overflight, scientific research and fishing on the high seas," it said.
- The convention took effect in 1994, without the participation of the U.S.
- Since then, shipping routes have expanded considerably, and the resources of the ocean deep have aroused significant interest, whether by fishing or mineral extraction.
- Talks will focus on creating protected areas on the high seas, more sharing of maritime resources and technology, and research on environmental impacts.

Fishing restrictions

- Some whale-hunting nations, like Japan, Iceland and Norway, are expected to be more cautious than others because they fear overly strict fishing restrictions.
- The U.S. is also reticent because they are opposed to all regulation of marine genetic resources and they did not ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.
- Russia also in similarly yet to decide.