



UPSC &amp; STATE PCS CURRENT AFFAIRS · UJIYARI.COM

**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# High Seas and the Governance Gap — Why the BBNJ Treaty Matters

 **DOWN TO EARTH**10 April 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **IR** · **GS3** · **GS2**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

 [linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)**ALSO FROM THE CREATOR****BharatNotes**Free UPSC notes, MCQs, PYQ analysis. **100% Free.**[bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com) →**ADVERTISE****Advertise with Ujiyari**

Reach thousands of UPSC aspirants daily.

 [epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)


# High Seas and the Governance Gap — Why the BBNJ Treaty Matters

 Down to Earth

10 April 2026

GS3

GS2

 Down to Earth

4 tags ▾

## INTERVIEW ANGLE



*"The BBNJ Treaty was adopted in 2023 but has not yet entered into force. India signed but has not ratified. What are India's strategic interests in early ratification — and what would delayed ratification cost?"*

The high seas — ocean areas beyond any nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), covering approximately 64% of the ocean surface and 43% of Earth's total surface — are the planet's last significant ungoverned commons. Down to Earth argues that the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty, adopted by the UN in June 2023, is the most important step in a generation toward filling this governance gap — but its promise depends on swift ratification that is not happening fast enough.

## WHAT THE HIGH SEAS ARE — AND WHY THEY MATTER

### The Regulatory Void

The 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) established a comprehensive legal framework for ocean governance — but left a critical gap. UNCLOS governs:

- **Territorial sea (12 nm):** Full state sovereignty
- **Exclusive Economic Zone (200 nm):** Economic rights for coastal state
- **Continental shelf:** Resource rights

What UNCLOS left largely unregulated: **the biological resources of the high seas** — organisms, genetic material, and ecosystems in the areas beyond 200 nm. This regulatory gap has been exploited for decades.

### What's at Stake

The high seas contain:

- **Deep-sea biodiversity hotspots:** Hydrothermal vents, seamounts, cold-water coral reefs — hosting thousands of species found nowhere else

- **Marine genetic resources (MGRs):** Extremophile organisms from the deep ocean are sources of pharmaceutical compounds, industrial enzymes (including those used in COVID-19 PCR tests — Taq polymerase from deep-sea bacteria), and biotechnology feedstock
- **Carbon cycling:** Deep ocean currents and biological pump sequester enormous quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> — disruption has climate consequences
- **Global fisheries:** High-seas fisheries, though only ~10% of total catch, support biodiversity that underpins coastal fisheries

The problem: high-seas MGRs are currently accessed by whoever has the ships and technology — predominantly wealthy nations and large corporations — with no obligation to share benefits with developing countries or with the global community.

## THE BBNJ TREATY — WHAT IT DOES

The Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Treaty), also called the “High Seas Treaty,” was adopted on June 19, 2023 after 20 years of negotiations.

### Key provisions:

- 1. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the High Seas** For the first time, states can collectively designate Marine Protected Areas in international waters — restricting fishing, mining, and shipping in ecologically critical zones. This provides a legal tool to protect biodiversity beyond the reach of any single state.
- 2. Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) for Marine Genetic Resources** Companies and researchers accessing MGRs from the high seas must share benefits — financial and technological — with developing nations through a global fund. This mirrors the Nagoya Protocol’s ABS framework for terrestrial biodiversity, extended to international waters.
- 3. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in the High Seas** Before any major activity (deep-sea mining, large-scale fishing, infrastructure) in the high seas, an EIA must be conducted. This closes a major gap: currently, no consistent EIA standard applies to high-seas activities.
- 4. Capacity Building and Technology Transfer** Developed nations must support developing countries’ capacity to participate in and benefit from marine science and resource management in the high seas.

## STATUS — WHY URGENCY MATTERS

MILESTONE	STATUS
BBNJ Treaty adopted	June 19, 2023 (UN, New York)
Opened for signature	September 2023
Signatures	91 nations (as of March 2026)
Ratifications needed	60 (to enter into force)
Ratifications achieved	~47 (as of March 2026)
India	Signed; NOT yet ratified

The treaty is close to the 60-ratification threshold — but the gap between signing and ratifying is widening as domestic legislative processes in key nations lag.

## INDIA'S INTERESTS — WHY EARLY RATIFICATION MAKES SENSE

India has an expansive strategic interest in the high seas:

- **Deep Ocean Mission:** India's ₹4,077 crore deep ocean programme targets **polymetallic nodule** mining and marine biodiversity research
- **Marine biological research:** CSIR, CMLRE (Kochi), and DST have active deep-sea exploration programmes
- **ABS equity:** As a biodiversity-rich developing country, India benefits from ABS frameworks that ensure benefit-sharing from MGRs accessed from areas adjacent to its EEZ
- **Geopolitical:** Early ratification signals India's commitment to **multilateral** governance — consistent with its Leadership of the Global South identity at G20

*The BBNJ Treaty is the most important high-seas governance instrument in decades — but it risks being stillborn if ratification proceeds too slowly. India should ratify quickly to shape implementation norms and benefit from ABS provisions that serve developing-country interests.*

*High seas = 64% of ocean area; BBNJ adopted June 2023; 60 ratifications needed; India: signed, not ratified; Deep Ocean Mission: ₹4,077 crore*

*BBNJ Treaty, marine genetic resources, Access and Benefit Sharing, Marine Protected Areas, UNCLOS, high seas governance, Deep Ocean Mission*

*The Nagoya Protocol (2010) took 4 years to enter into force despite being adopted under CBD — BBNJ risks the same delay. What can India do as a G20 leader to accelerate ratification among developing nations?*

## RELATED DAILY ARTICLES

10 Apr [Current Affairs Today — April 10, 2026](#)

10 Apr [Sijimali Bauxite Mining — Tribal Rights vs Industrial...](#)

10 Apr [Exercise Cyclone-IV & Brahmastra — India's Defence...](#)

8 Apr [Current Affairs Today — April 8, 2026](#)

### ← PREVIOUS EDITORIAL

[CBSE's AI Curriculum — Lofty Goals, Little Clarity](#)

### NEXT EDITORIAL →

[Nari Shakti — India's Defining Reform for the Next Decade](#)



CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

## Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator &amp; Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/04/bbnj-treaty-high-seas-biodiversity-governance/>

### ALSO FROM THE CREATOR

## BharatNotes

Free UPSC study platform — subject-wise notes across all 4 GS papers, Prelims MCQs, Mains answer frameworks, PYQ analysis & progress tracking. **100% Free • No Login Required.**

[Start Preparing → bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)

### 📌 OPPORTUNITY

## Advertise with Ujiyari

Reach **thousands of serious UPSC & State PCS aspirants** daily through our PDFs, website, and social channels.

**Ideal for:** Coaching institutes • EdTech platforms • Book publishers • Exam prep apps

[✉ epicbharat@gmail.com](mailto:epicbharat@gmail.com)

Write to us for rates & media kit

Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs · [ujiyari.com](http://ujiyari.com) · [bharatnotes.com](http://bharatnotes.com)