

# Oceans: the new frontier

**T**HE outcome of a longstanding cooperation between the The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) of Delhi and two French institutions, the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) and the French Development Agency (AFD), the 2011 issue of the annual work on sustainable development, *A Planet for Life*, is being officially released during the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit. While global discussions have often turned their attention to biodiversity, the climate, or environmental governance, our 2011 book focuses on oceans, considered as the new frontier of human activity.

Oceans have played a defining role in our history, our cultures, our economies, our capacity for innovation, our integration in globalisation. Links between continents, their role in great explorations and, in modern times, the trade of merchandise is also at the heart of the dynamics of globalisation. Yet, this theme is too often left to specialists. Today, technological innovation has made all oceans accessible to human beings. The distance from the coastline or their depths no longer constitutes insurmountable obstacles. For us, oceans are the next frontier. The question is clear: will we be able to do away with a predatory exploitation model and think up the sustainable management of these new resources? This article will illustrate three aspects of these links between the ocean and sustainable development.

The first aspect is the role of oceans as a stock of resources essential for human activity, partially unblocking the limitations of land resources. The promise of oceans is immense, from exploration and exploitation of marine biodiversity to the discovery and exploitation of old and new sources of energy, passing through the enhancement of knowledge of the planet or the development of sports or touristic activities. But the example of fishing reveals all the challenges that the use of these resources poses: a negotiated share of access, adherence to established rules, disciplined exploitation to avoid over-exploitation and the exhaustion of stocks

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## GUEST COLUMN

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- **Though the promise of oceans for human development is huge, tapping the promise responsibly is a global challenge**
- **Oceans are both an essential instrument and a vital goal in the fight against the climate change**
- **The race for resources and the lack of rule of law call for greater global action on regulation and governance of the seas**

and respecting surrounding ecosystems. And the example of disasters arising from oil drilling or the transport of dangerous commodities emphasises to what extent risks should be better appreciated and responsibilities better defined. Because overexploitation is already obvious, as reflected in the depletion of certain stocks of fish or the pollution and destruction of ecosystems.

The second aspect concerns connections between oceans and the climate. We now know that oceans play a major role in the functioning of the planet's climatic system and that changes in the climate, particularly those arising from human activities, affect the capacity of the oceans to play properly their role as regulator, without which life becomes impossible. It also changes the balance between oceans and lands, a sensitive issue for many little islands threatened with disappearance. This understanding of oceans as an essential element of the planetary ecosystem

reinforces the necessity of not only protecting them but also fighting climate change, and highlights the oceans both as an instrument and a goal of this fight. This brings us back to one of the constants of sustainable development: this is not about protecting an area — be it biodiversity, climate, or specific sites — but understanding that our modes of development have set interaction between human beings and their natural surroundings on an unsustainable trajectory.

The third aspect has to do with international collective action. However, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea now appears to be fragmented and incomplete in part. Its amendment responds to sets of problems similar to those concerning global governance: protection of threatened territories or, like the Arctic — containing considerable fossil resources — regulation of economic activities, such as fishing and sea transport, regulation of property rights, management of police and conflicts, etc. The freedom of the seas is often synonymous with non-law and the race for resources is faster than the building of common rules.

Our book throws light on the recent transformations that have drastically changed today's maritime world, the complexity of organising its sustainable use as well as the perspectives that should lead to making tomorrow's activities compatible with the preservation of ecosystems. It offers suggestions for constructing a governance of oceans by drawing on regional experiences, shows the necessity of instituting new regulations for dangerous activities such as offshore drilling. Through the numerous challenges they throw to the international community, the oceans call for redefining the basis of fair, legitimate and efficient global governance. We would like this collective effort to contribute to nurturing the dialogue between our countries on sustainable development and governance of globalisation.

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