

As High Seas Treaty nears force, India plans domestic framework

V Sajeet Kumar

Kochi

With the High Seas Treaty set to come into force from January 17, 2026, India has begun shaping a domestic framework to support its ratification and implementation.

The agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), adopted in March 2023, is widely seen as a landmark for protecting biodiversity in international waters.

Of the 145 signatories, 76 countries, including India, have ratified the pact.

A national stakeholder consultation convened by

the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), in collaboration with the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), the Centre for Marine Living Resources and Ecology (CMLRE) and other partners examined India's preparedness for the Treaty's rollout.

The meeting brought together policymakers, legal experts, scientists, fisheries representatives and maritime industry stakeholders to assess the scientific, legal and institutional mechanisms required for effective implementation.

‘TURNING POINT’

Experts termed the Treaty's entry into force a turning point in global ocean governance, aimed at enabling equitable access to high seas resources and strengthening conservation, amid rising

pressures from climate change, overfishing and marine pollution.

Senior advocate Sanjay Upadhyay said the Treaty provides a structured framework to manage these challenges while safeguarding national interests.

P Krishnan, Director of the Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation, highlighted India's strengths in ocean science and marine technology, urging greater scientific engagement with ocean governance, maritime law and high seas management.

CMFRI Director Grinson George noted that activities in the high seas affect fish stocks within India's Exclusive Economic Zone, despite the country's dependence on nearshore and small-scale fisheries.