



General Assembly  
Topic Guides



# UNCLOS

OCEAN GOVERNANCE & OVERFISHING  
IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Chairs:

**Jordan Chapman**  
**Luis Garcia**



**InventMUN**  
Saturday, March 28, 2026

# **UNCLOS TOPIC GUIDE**



**Invent Model United Nations  
March 28th, 2026**

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**Chairs:** Jordan Chapman & Luis Garcia

**Organ:** General Assembly

**Committee Name:** UNCLOS

## I. Letter from your dais



*Via: "Raising Awareness on Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystem." Unesco.org, 2023,*

Welcome to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)! UNCLOS aims to establish and uphold international rules governing the use, management, and protection of the world's oceans. Throughout the simulation, we will discuss pressing issues surrounding ocean governance and overfishing in Southeast Asia, dialogues that have become increasingly important as marine resources face growing pressure. This committee seeks to explore how international law can balance environmental sustainability with economic and developmental needs.

At INVENTMUN, delegates will consider the impacts of overfishing on coastal communities, regional economies, and state relations. You will develop proposals and collaborate with fellow delegates to address illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing while promoting cooperation and sustainable ocean use. We hope to foster open-minded discussion and collaboration on how to best manage shared marine resources, and we look forward to hearing your ideas throughout committee sessions.

Welcome to UNCLOS! My name is Jordan Chapman, and I will be one of your chairs. I'm currently a senior in the Electrical Engineering Pathway shop at Thomas A. Edison CTE High School. I'm currently pursuing a major in biological sciences and I'm very passionate about exploring the interdisciplinary uses of technologies and the effect it has on scarcity around the globe, with their societal impacts. Some fun facts about me are that I am the president of chess club within edison, secretary of the future for the model un organization, and editor– that does most of the editing for the capstone classes– within Edison. In my free time, I love trying out random sushi places with friends and exploring 8th street. I have been involved in Model UN simulations heavily this year and love UNESCO committees. I look forward to meeting you all in March! In the meantime, feel free to contact me with any questions you may have ([jchapmaninventmun@gmail.com](mailto:jchapmaninventmun@gmail.com)).

Hello delegates welcome to UNCLOS! My name is Luis Garcia, and I will also be one of your chairs. I'm currently a senior in the Electrical Engineering pathway shop at Thomas A. Edison CTE High School. I'm currently pursuing a major in Business but type is undecided. I am really fascinated about the leadership, strategy, and obviously money that comes from it but in the end I really want to help people with their financial state and help them live a good life. Some facts about me are that i played soccer for 9 years with blau wiess gotchee and have been on the Edison soccer team for all 4 years as a starter with my junior and senior year being the captain, this is my first year doing model un and im the under secretary general of finance for this portion of this conference. A fun fact is that I love eating tacos, it's my favorite food, and in my free time I love playing video games, watching shows, and reading. I have been involved a lot in mun this year and have loved it and i hope all of you love it too. I look forward to seeing all of you in March! But in the meantime if you have any questions feel free to reach out about InventMUN,

My email is [luisgarcia.inventmun@gmail.com](mailto:luisgarcia.inventmun@gmail.com). See you then!

We are excited to learn more about your solutions and see how you work towards solving these issues,

Your, UNCLOS Dais  
*Jordan C & Luis G*

## II. Introduction To Topic



Via: Nations, United. “Planet Ocean | United Nations.” *United Nations*, 2023,

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982 and entered into force in 1994 as the primary international framework governing the use of the world’s oceans. Often referred to as the “constitution of the oceans,” UNCLOS establishes legal guidelines for maritime boundaries, navigation rights, resource management, and the protection of marine environments. Today, UNCLOS is widely ratified and serves as the foundation for cooperation among states on issues related to ocean governance.

UNCLOS addresses a wide range of maritime concerns, including territorial waters, exclusive economic zones (EEZs), the high seas, and the sustainable use of marine resources. Of particular relevance to this committee is UNCLOS’s role in regulating fishing practices and promoting cooperation to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In regions such as Southeast Asia, where coastal and island nations rely heavily on marine resources for food security and economic stability, effective implementation of UNCLOS remains both critical and challenging.

The implementation and interpretation of UNCLOS are supported by several institutional mechanisms, including the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the

International Seabed Authority (ISA), and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). Together, these bodies help resolve maritime disputes, regulate seabed resource use, and clarify states' maritime entitlements. While UNCLOS provides a comprehensive legal framework, enforcement largely depends on state cooperation and regional coordination, making compliance uneven across different parts of the world.

Delegates will be expected to present solutions that reflect UNCLOS's legal structure while accounting for regional realities in Southeast Asia. Delegates should consider how international law can be strengthened through cooperation, capacity-building, and enforcement mechanisms to address overfishing and resource depletion. It is essential that proposals balance environmental sustainability with economic needs and align with existing maritime law while remaining realistic and implementable within the UNCLOS framework.

### **III. Topic: Ocean Governance & Overfishing in SouthEast Asia**

From the coastal waters of Indonesia and the Philippines to the South China Sea, overfishing and weak ocean governance have become increasingly urgent issues in Southeast Asia. As demand for seafood rises and enforcement remains uneven, marine ecosystems are being depleted faster than they can recover, threatening food security, livelihoods, and regional stability. Delegates in this committee must determine how international maritime law can be strengthened to promote sustainable fishing practices and cooperation among coastal states. Delegates should consider the causes and consequences of overfishing, the challenges of enforcement under UNCLOS, and how these issues can be addressed or mitigated through regional and international collaboration.

### **IV. Topic History**

Overfishing has become an increasingly urgent global issue over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as advances in fishing technology, population growth, and rising global seafood demand have placed unprecedented pressure on marine ecosystems. In the early 1900s, most fishing activity was small-scale and coastal, allowing fish populations time to recover naturally. But, as industrialization expanded and mechanized fishing vessels became more widespread, extraction rates began to exceed sustainable limits in many regions.

After World War II, the rapid expansion of industrial fishing fleets led to significant declines in fish markets worldwide. By the mid-twentieth century, competition over maritime resources intensified, mostly in regions with dense coastal populations and shared waters. Southeast Asia emerged as one of the most affected regions due to its reliance on fisheries for food security and employment, combined with limited regulatory capacity and penetrable maritime borders.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was adopted in 1982 to set

clear rules for how countries use and protect the ocean. One of its key features was the creation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), which gave countries control over fishing and resources within 200 nautical miles of their coast. While UNCLOS created an important legal structure for managing marine resources, many countries struggled to enforce these rules, especially in regions with limited monitoring and patrol capacity. As a result, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing continued to grow, weakening national laws and reducing shared fish populations.

By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, overfishing in Southeast Asia became more severe. Growing global demand for seafood, harmful fishing methods, and unclear or disputed maritime boundaries all contributed to the problem. Many coastal communities began to see smaller catches, damaged marine ecosystems, and increased economic hardship. Although countries have attempted to cooperate through regional agreements, overfishing has remained difficult to control.

## V. Current Situation



Via: “The Ocean in the UNESCO Courier.” [Unesco.org](https://unesco.org), 2023,

Overfishing remains a major challenge in Southeast Asia, affecting countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia, where marine resources are central to food security and economic activity. As fishing pressure has increased, many fish stocks have declined, placing stress on marine ecosystems and coastal communities. These challenges are made more complex by shared waters, disputed maritime boundaries, and varying national regulations across the region.

Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to play a significant role in the depletion of fish stocks. Fishing vessels frequently operate without authorization, exceed catch limits, or fish in poorly monitored areas, particularly in parts of the South China Sea. Vessels linked to states both within and outside the region, including China and Taiwan, are often cited in regional reports. Limited surveillance capacity and inconsistent enforcement make it difficult for many governments to fully control fishing activities within their maritime zones.

At the international level, the United Nations has recognized overfishing as a global concern. Through frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the UN established legal definitions for maritime zones and outlined states' rights and responsibilities regarding marine resources. While these frameworks provide a basis for cooperation, implementation and enforcement vary widely between countries and regions.

Overfishing is also addressed through the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water), which highlights the need to conserve and sustainably use oceans and marine resources. Despite the inclusion of marine protection within the SDGs, progress toward these targets has been uneven, especially in regions with high dependence on fisheries and limited regulatory capacity.

The impacts of overfishing are increasingly visible across Southeast Asia and neighboring island states such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Fiji. Declining fish populations, damaged habitats, and economic strain on small-scale fishing communities continue to shape regional concerns. As global seafood demand grows and geopolitical tensions persist, overfishing remains a complex issue influenced by environmental, economic, and political factors within the existing international framework.

## VI. Questions To Considered

- How does overfishing currently affect coastal communities and national economies in Southeast Asia
- What challenges do states face in enforcing maritime laws within their Exclusive Economic Zones under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)?
- In what ways does illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing complicate cooperation between neighboring states, especially in disputed or shared waters?
- How do differences in national capacity, technology, and resources affect a country's ability to monitor and regulate fishing activity?
- What role do non-coastal or distant-water fishing nations play in the issue of overfishing in Southeast Asia?

- How does global demand for seafood influence fishing practices and pressure on marine ecosystems in the region?
- To what extent have existing international agreements and UN initiatives addressed overfishing, and where do gaps in implementation remain?
- How does overfishing intersect with broader UN priorities, including Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water)?
- What environmental, economic, and political factors make overfishing a complex issue to address at both the regional and international levels?

## VII. Delegations

### **Australia**

Australia has extensive maritime zones and experience in fisheries management. It engages actively in regional ocean governance discussions in the Indo-Pacific.

### **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh relies heavily on fisheries for food security and employment. Coastal pressure and limited enforcement capacity affect fish stocks.

### **Brazil**

Brazil controls a large Exclusive Economic Zone and has significant commercial fisheries. Marine resource management is tied closely to economic interests.

### **Brunei**

Brunei has a small fishing sector but values control over its maritime zones. Fisheries are important for domestic consumption.

### **Cambodia**

Cambodia depends largely on small-scale fisheries for food security. Limited monitoring resources affect enforcement.

### **Canada**

Canada has experience managing fisheries sustainably. It participates in international maritime governance discussions.

### **Chile**

Chile's fishing industry plays a major role in its economy. Maintaining fish stock stability is a

national concern.

### **China**

China operates one of the world's largest distant-water fishing fleets. Its activities strongly influence regional fishing dynamics.

### **Denmark**

Denmark maintains fishing interests through its maritime zones. It emphasizes regulatory compliance and monitoring.

### **Fiji**

Fiji relies on fisheries for food security and tourism. Limited infrastructure affects enforcement capacity.

### **France**

France holds extensive maritime zones through overseas territories. It plays an active role in international ocean governance.

### **Germany**

Germany influences maritime policy largely through international and EU frameworks. It emphasizes sustainable ocean use.

### **Ghana**

Ghana's coastal fisheries are central to livelihoods. Illegal fishing remains a concern.

### **India**

India has extensive coastal fisheries and a growing fishing fleet. Domestic demand strongly shapes its maritime interests.

### **Indonesia**

Indonesia controls one of the largest maritime zones globally. Enforcement challenges persist due to the size of its waters.

### **Japan**

Japan has high seafood demand and a long fishing tradition. It participates actively in international maritime governance.

### **Kiribati**

Kiribati relies heavily on fishing license revenues. Monitoring its vast ocean territory remains difficult.

**Liberia**

Liberia depends on fisheries for food security. Limited enforcement capacity affects regulation.

**Malaysia**

Malaysia's fisheries support domestic consumption and exports. Enforcement challenges exist in shared waters.

**Maldives**

The Maldives depend heavily on fisheries and marine health. Overfishing directly threatens livelihoods.

**Mauritius**

Mauritius relies on ocean-based industries. Monitoring distant fishing fleets is a challenge.

**Mexico**

Mexico's fishing sector supports coastal economies. Enforcement varies across regions.

**Morocco**

Morocco has one of Africa's largest fishing industries. Fisheries are central to exports and employment.

**Myanmar**

Myanmar's fisheries support coastal livelihoods. Political instability affects governance capacity.

**Namibia**

Namibia's fisheries are economically significant. It places importance on control over fishing access.

**Netherlands**

The Netherlands has strong maritime expertise and port influence. It engages actively in global ocean policy discussions.

**New Zealand**

New Zealand has experience managing fisheries through quota systems. It participates in international maritime forums.

**Nigeria**

Nigeria faces challenges regulating fishing in its coastal waters. Enforcement capacity remains limited.

**Norway**

Norway has extensive experience managing fisheries. It plays a strong role in international maritime policy.

**Panama**

Panama's shipping registry gives it influence in maritime affairs. Fisheries governance is tied to oversight.

**Papua New Guinea**

Papua New Guinea controls large fishing zones with valuable tuna stocks. Monitoring challenges persist.

**Peru**

Peru hosts one of the world's largest commercial fisheries. Stock stability is crucial to national revenue.

**Philippines**

The Philippines relies heavily on fisheries for livelihoods. Maritime disputes complicate enforcement.

**Russia**

Russia maintains significant fishing capacity. It emphasizes national control over marine resources.

**Senegal**

Senegal's fisheries are central to food security. Foreign fishing activity affects local stocks.

**Seychelles**

Seychelles depends heavily on tuna fisheries. Maintaining control over fishing access is a priority.

**Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone relies on small-scale fisheries. Illegal fishing impacts coastal communities.

**Singapore**

Singapore is a major port and seafood trade hub. Its interests focus on maritime law and stability.

**Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands depend on fisheries for food and income. Enforcement capacity is limited.

**South Africa**

South Africa's fisheries are economically significant. It engages actively in maritime governance.

**South Korea**

South Korea operates a distant-water fishing fleet. Access to fishing grounds shapes its position.

**Spain**

Spain operates one of Europe's largest fishing fleets. It has strong interests in global fisheries access.

**Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka's fishing sector supports coastal employment. Access disputes and enforcement remain challenges.

**Thailand**

Thailand has a major seafood export industry. Overfishing concerns affect international trade relations.

**Timor-Leste**

Timor-Leste relies heavily on subsistence fishing. Limited capacity affects regulation.

**United Kingdom**

The UK supports rule-based maritime governance. It participates in global fisheries discussions.

**United States**

The United States plays a major role in international maritime governance. It emphasizes data and monitoring.

**Vietnam**

Vietnam depends heavily on fisheries and aquaculture. Enforcement challenges persist under international scrutiny.

## VIII. Glossary



Via: “United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.” *International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, 2017,*

### Glossary

#### **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)**

A sea zone extending up to 200 nautical miles from a country’s coastline where that country has the right to explore, use, and manage marine resources.

#### **Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing**

Fishing activities that violate national or international laws, are not properly reported to authorities, or occur where no management rules exist.

#### **Ocean Governance**

The system of rules, practices, and institutions used to manage human activities in the ocean.

#### **Maritime Boundary**

An agreed or claimed line that separates the ocean areas under the control of different countries.

#### **Distant-Water Fishing Fleet**

Fishing vessels that operate far from their home country’s coastline, often in international or

foreign waters.

### **Enforcement Capacity**

A government's ability to monitor, regulate, and enforce laws and rules effectively.

### **Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water)**

A United Nations goal focused on conserving and sustainably using oceans, seas, and marine resources. SDG 14 addresses issues such as overfishing, marine pollution, ocean acidification, and the protection of coastal and marine ecosystems. (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Glossary)

### **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**

An international treaty adopted in 1982 that establishes the legal framework governing the use of the world's oceans and seas. UNCLOS defines maritime zones such as territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and outlines states' rights and responsibilities regarding navigation, fishing, resource management, and marine environmental protection. (*United Nations Treaty Glossary*)

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