



## 83 countries are more ocean than land



Eighty-three countries are more ocean than land, but governments are failing in their duty of care for this immense resource.

Image:  
REUTERS/Reinhard  
Krause

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The 1982 UN Law of the Sea was the largest ever annexation of our planet and our ocean. In one stroke, one-third of our planet was formally designated as 'exclusive economic zones', giving coastal countries rights to 200 miles of ocean around their continental shelf. The law came into force in 1994.

This meant 35% of the world's surface - equivalent to the planet's total land area - or almost half of the world's oceans now fell under the jurisdiction of nation states, rather than in international limbo, as much of the high seas are today.

UNDERWATER.

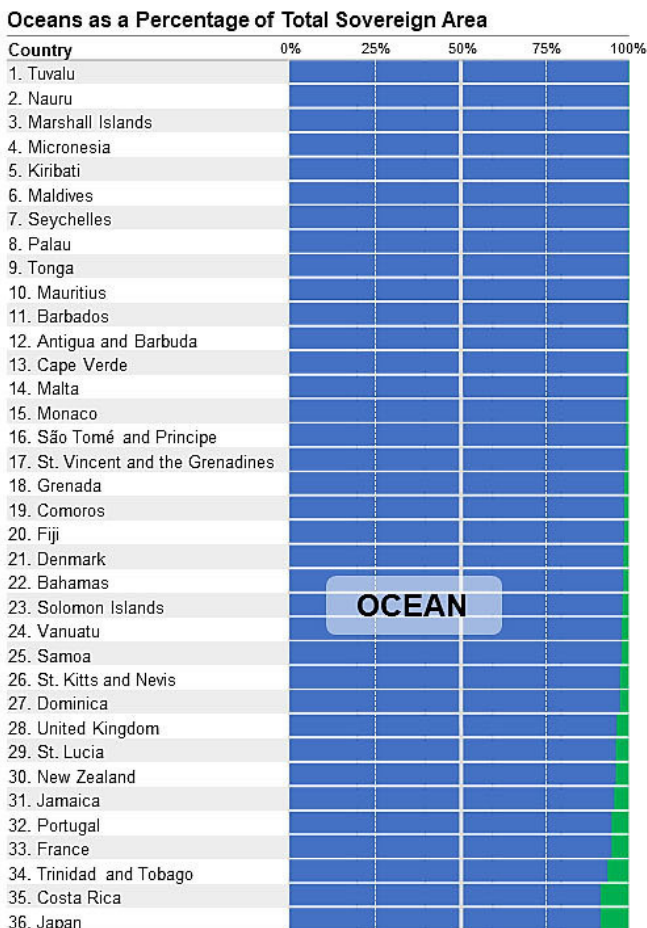
However, governments have not kept pace with the evolution and reality of global ocean thinking. Many government departments with responsibility for our oceans are still siloed within individual ministries or agencies of, for example, fisheries, shipping, tourism, offshore energy or the environment, with few co-ordinating bodies or holistic ocean strategies.

**Water, water, everywhere**

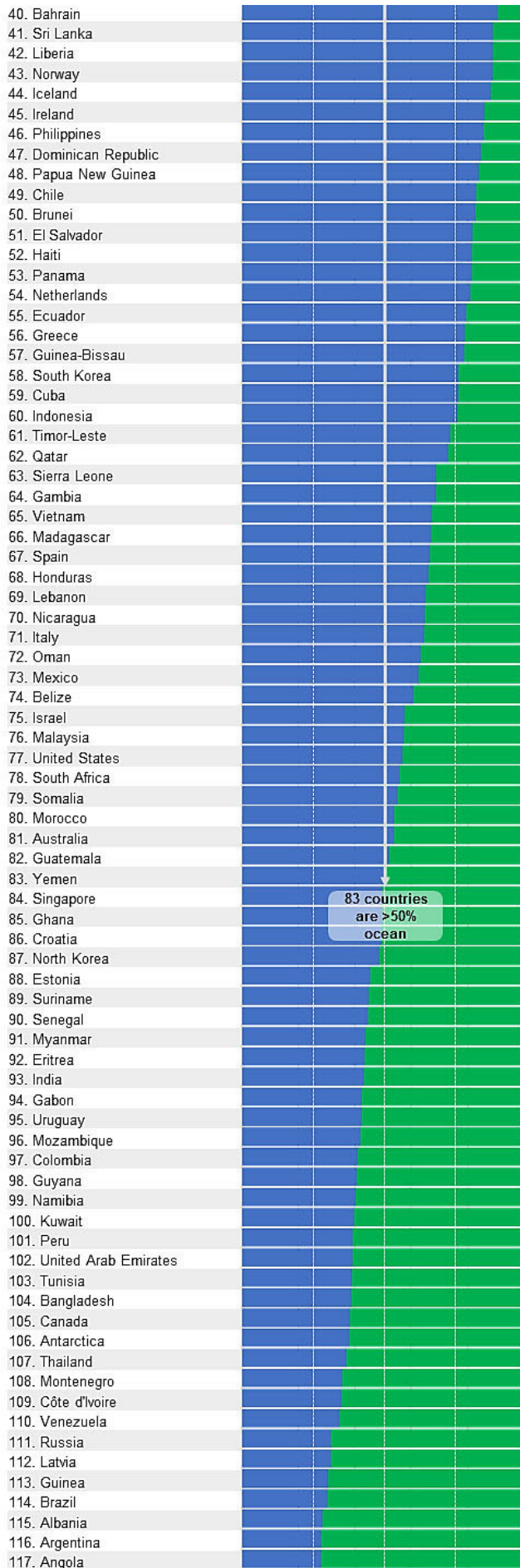
Indeed, looking at the total territorial areas of countries following the 1982 law, 83 countries are more ocean than land, and 54 countries are more than 80% ocean.

However, most of these countries have not organized themselves as ‘ocean states.’ Just look at the difference in many countries, especially in non-OECD regions, between how land-based ministries are organised (e.g. transport, energy, residential, industry or national parks), compared with ocean-based ministries.

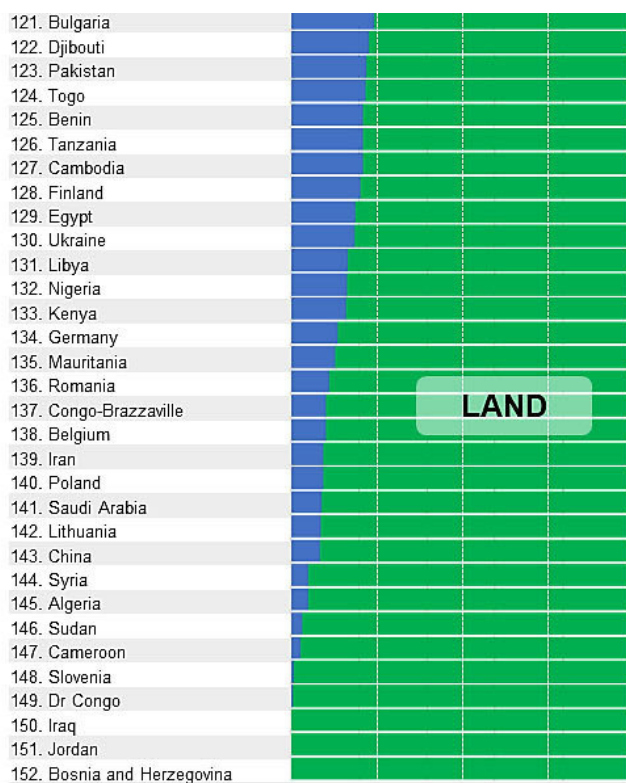
As we discover more about the important role that oceans play in regulating the global climate, and about the economic resources contained within them, it becomes increasingly critical to develop the tools, capabilities and knowledge to more effectively govern our oceans.



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## National Ministries of Oceans

Recently, some countries have started founding more co-ordinated Ministries of Oceans, to ensure closer and more harmonious interaction between the different users of the oceans.

The government of Mauritius, for example, has created a Ministry of Ocean Economy, along with a joint co-ordinating public-private National Ocean Council, to ensure stronger collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Creating equivalent Ministries of Oceans around the world would radically transform how our ocean resources are used and managed. It would facilitate new capabilities, thinking and tools for holistic ocean governance, not just within national waters.

## Global governance of our oceans

At the international level, meanwhile, global ocean governance is similarly fragmented.

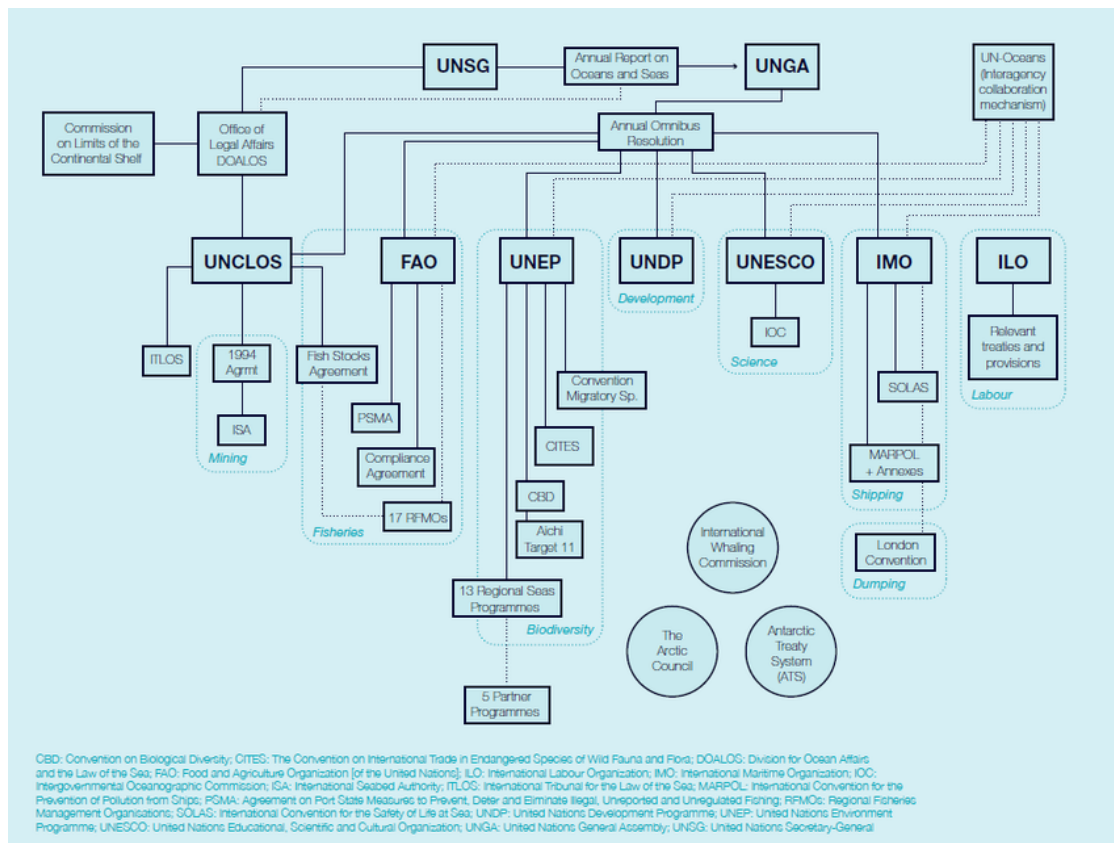


Image: Global Ocean Commission

[A recent study by the Global Ocean Commission](#) (GOC) called for the formation of regional ocean management organizations, and asked governments and heads of state to appoint ocean envoys or ministers. The creation of national Ministries of Oceans, it is hoped, may prompt a rethink of how the different divisions of the UN engage with governments in this area, and could also start to build more integrated thinking around how we govern our high seas.

## UN Special Envoy for the Oceans

In September 2017 - and also as recommended in the GOC's report - the UN Secretary-General appointed the first [UN Special Envoy for the Ocean](#), Ambassador Peter Thomson, who will be responsible for exploring a more holistic approach to our oceans. This builds on the momentum that began with the creation of a Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) dedicated to the oceans (Goal 14), and a major [UN Summit on the Ocean SDG](#) held at the UN Headquarters in June.

As we discover more about our oceans; about [how interconnected ocean life](#) is to the air we breathe, to global rainfall and weather patterns, as well as the role of our oceans in mitigating

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understand and better manage our use of the oceans.

Our oceans and the life within them are not hampered by political or organizational boundaries - and neither should our thinking be limited by traditional silos, particularly in this era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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