

Protection of the Marine Environment

Public opinion is rightly concerned over the continuing degradation of the marine environment; and more particularly, it is acutely aware that indiscriminate utilization of the sea may inflict long-lasting damage upon the marine environment.

In his search for new sources of food, man is relying more and more on the sea and shoreline which abound in nutritious living organisms. He is also strongly attracted by the sea environment for purposes of recreation. Oil spills or seepages from the seabed often have deleterious effects on the living resources of the sea and the quality of the shoreline, even though the pollution of the oceans is primarily caused by land-based sources. Norms are needed to keep man's activities in, over, below or on the sea within acceptable limits.

Protection of the marine environment from contamination has so far been discussed in two main international fora: the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) and the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

Since its inception, IMCO has been administering a number of conventions aimed at regulating navigation so that it will cause as little deterioration as possible of the marine environment; the most notable of these instruments are:

- the 1954 International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil (amended in 1962, 1969);
- the 1962 Convention on the Liability of Operators of Nuclear Ships;
- the 1969 Convention relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties;
- the 1969 Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage; and