



Strengthening Marine Environmental Governance in Sri Lanka: Addressing Legal Gaps in Coastal and Ocean Protection

T.T. Edirisinghe*

Department of Legal Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University, Nawala, Sri Lanka

**tledi@ou.ac.lk*

As an island country, Sri Lanka relies heavily on marine and coastal environments for sustainable development. Nevertheless, challenges such as marine pollution, coastal degradation, overfishing, and climate change have revealed many shortcomings in the current governance of the marine environment. Even though there are many laws, such as the Coast Conservation Act and the National Environmental Act, their piecemeal nature and weak implementation measures hamper their effective safeguarding of the marine environment. This research critically evaluates the current governance system for the marine environment in Sri Lanka, identifies the gaps within the regulation and enforcement of laws, and suggests improvements to enhance marine governance. This research employed qualitative and doctrinal research methods. It focuses on primary sources of law such as statutes, regulations, and international conventions ratified by Sri Lanka. Policy documents, literature, and reports from various institutions are also analyzed. The comparative approach is supported by examples of best practices in international marine environmental governance, particularly from Australia and the Philippines. It is found that the marine legal regime of Sri Lanka faces several problems, including overlapping mandates of institutions, poor coordination among institutions, insufficient capacity for enforcing regulations, and inadequate inclusion of international environmental responsibilities into national laws. Additionally, recent challenges, such as coastal changes caused by climate change and marine pollution originating from land-based sources, are not adequately addressed in existing legislation. Recommendations for the legal reforms that will be necessary to harmonize laws, increase compliance mechanisms, and make them more responsive to climate change are provided by the study. Such actions are crucial to ensure the sustainable management, conservation, and long-term protection of coastal and marine resources in Sri Lanka.

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