

Coastal and Marine Environmental Management in Sri Lanka: Doctrinal Perspectives on the Legal Framework for the Protection of the Marine Environment

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Sri Lanka's coastal and marine environment plays a vital role in supporting fisheries, biodiversity conservation, tourism, maritime trade, and coastal livelihoods. However, these ecosystems are increasingly under pressure from exploitation, unregulated coastal development, marine pollution, and the adverse impacts of climate change, including sea-level rise and ocean acidification. This study critically examines the legal and institutional framework governing coastal and marine environmental management in Sri Lanka, with an emphasis on the adequacy, coherence, and effectiveness of existing laws, regulations, and governance mechanisms. Key legislative instruments, including the Coast Conservation and Coastal Resource Management Act and the Marine Pollution Prevention Act, are analysed alongside Sri Lanka's obligations under international environmental frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). A doctrinal research methodology was adopted, based on the analysis of statutes, case law, and international conventions, and relevant scholarly literature. A comparative perspective is also used to contextualise Sri Lanka's regulatory approach within broader international practices. The study identifies significant institutional overlaps, fragmented governance structures and enforcement limitations that weaken the effectiveness of coastal and marine regulation. It further highlights the tension between economic development priorities and environmental sustainability in policy implementation. This paper concludes by proposing legal and policy reforms aimed at strengthening integrated coastal zone management, improving institutional coordination, and enhancing enforcement mechanisms to promote sustainable and resilient ocean governance in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Coastal and marine governance, Marine environmental law, Sri Lanka, Coastal resource management, Marine pollution*