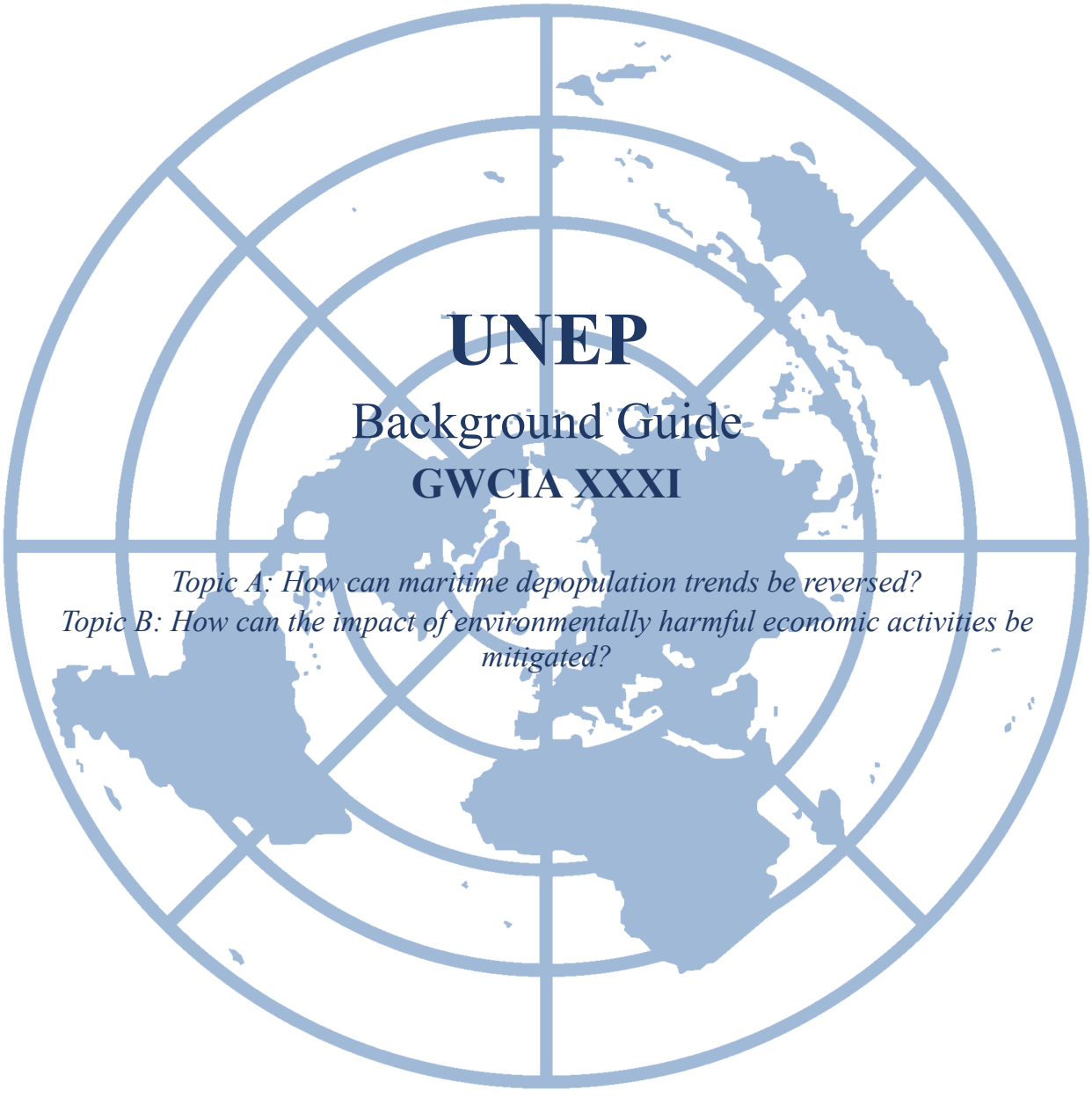


UNEP

Background Guide

GWCIA XXXI

Topic A: How can maritime depopulation trends be reversed?
Topic B: How can the impact of environmentally harmful economic activities be mitigated?

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Conference Policies

Misconduct Policy

GWCIA acknowledges that collegiate Model UN spaces often echo or perpetuate real-world discrimination towards various historically marginalized communities. As such, GWCIA enforces a zero tolerance policy for harassment or discrimination based on race, color, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual identity, national origin, religion, age, disability, or any other identity-based designation. Additionally, GWCIA practices a zero tolerence policy for sexual misconduct of any kind, including sexual harassment and sexual assault. This includes, but is not limited to, inappropriate 1) content in notes passed or documents created during committee sessions, 2) conversations throughout GWCIA, and 3) conduct at The George Washington University campus or at any GWCIA-sponsored programming. If a delegate experiences any kind of discrimination, social discomfort, or sexual misconduct, they are urged to bring it to the attention of any GWCIA secretariat member or report the instance via our anonymous misconduct form, which can be found on our Conduct Policies website page and in each committee room. Any potential cases of discrimination or sexual misconduct will warrant immediate investigation and may result in disqualification from awards and/or dismissal from the conference at the sole discretion of the Secretary-General.

Technology Policy — General Assembly

Using technology is prohibited in GWCIA general assembly committees, unless a delegate has an approved accommodation. GWCIA will provide delegates with one white legal pad and a pen that they may use to write clauses and contribute to resolutions. Delegates are free to bring their own additional notepads, staplers, Post-Its, or other supplies, as these will not be provided.

Plagiarism, Pre-Writing & AI Policy

All pre-written, plagiarized, or AI-generated content, which can include working papers, draft resolutions, directives, or crisis notes, is strictly prohibited at GWCIA. Pre-writing constitutes any language or content that was written outside of unmoderated caucuses in General Assemblies and outside of when debate is formally opened in crisis committees. This means that creating content before or after committee sessions or during moderated caucuses in Assemblies & Specialized committees is pre-writing. Writing during USG feedback, announcements, or during guest speakers equally constitutes pre-writing. All dais members and undersecretaries general are specifically instructed to monitor for pre-writing by checking typed and written materials that delegates may have prepared before the conference if potential pre-writing is suspected.
By participating in GWCIA, your delegation acknowledges that they understand this policy and the consequences if it is broken. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, verbatim or near-verbatim copying and pasting from academic sources or other websites. Any delegate found guilty of pre-writing, plagiarism, or flagrant AI usage will be immediately disqualified from any award in their committee. The GWCIA Secretariat reserves the right to search computers and laptops, notebooks and binders, USBs, and any form of electronics for Model UN specific documents in response to allegations. They additionally reserve the

discretion to run any content through an AI detector. In order to report a case of substantive misconduct, please see the anonymous misconduct form on our Conduct Policies page or contact a member of the Secretariat.

Awards Policy

While GWCIA recognizes that the core value of participating in any Model UN committee is education in international affairs and the development of related skills such as productive collaboration, public speaking, and critical thinking, we also recognize the value of rewarding delegates who are exceptionally prepared and proficient in these skills. At GWCIA, we value delegates who can leverage creativity, diplomacy, substantive knowledge, and critical thinking skills to debate effectively, lead negotiations and blocs, and write comprehensive clauses. We especially look favorably towards delegates who individually develop meaningful solutions to the committee's main issues while keeping in mind the realistic diplomatic dynamics of our world, as well as those delegates who are able to advocate for their solutions and ideas to be adopted. The dais encourages delegates to lead in a manner that uplifts and respects their competitors while also introducing strong, unique solutions that consistently anchor their group's directive or working paper. On the other hand, attempts to undermine the goals of the committee without reason or acting without detailed thought of consequences are discouraged. Any rude, disrespectful, or demeaning conduct towards other delegates' ideas will not be tolerated.

Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

My name is Aidan Farrell, I'm a junior studying International Affairs at George Washington University, and I'm excited to be serving as your committee chair! I hope you will use the opportunity of this committee, whether it's your first or last time doing Model UN, to learn more about global environmental issues and interpersonal cooperation.

This General Assembly will explore the challenges posed by climate change and extractive economic activities on oceanic regions globally. Oil spills, global warming, and seabed mining have caused a significant reduction in the population of aquatic species, contributing to ecological decline and the destabilization of maritime communities. As representatives of coastal states, you will be encouraged to cooperate and create solutions to global issues like overfishing, maritime depopulation, and piracy, while simultaneously protecting economic interests of the countries you represent.

For this committee, I hope to see creative solutions from delegates to address the decline of marine biodiversity. As a General Assembly, you will be able to enact policy which will combat environmental degradation and restore depleted marine populations. This committee will also emphasize states protecting their own national interests, which will require each delegate to have a working knowledge of their nation's maritime policies. As always, the most important part of this committee is to have fun, and for delegates to grow and improve themselves as thinkers, speakers, and writers.

Aidan Farrell
aidan.farrell@gwmail.gwu.edu

Reminder: Delegates must CC their advisor on any email sent to the Chair.

Background

For most of human history, the oceans were viewed as an endless source of food and wealth. As industrialization transformed the global economy during the 19th and 20th centuries, humanity's ability to exploit maritime resources improved dramatically. Innovations like offshore drilling and mechanized fishing promoted economic growth, but they also greatly strained ocean ecosystems, killing countless numbers of fish, whales, birds, and other marine organisms. By the late 20th century, governments and scientists finally recognized that marine environments were experiencing a drastic, perhaps terminal, decline. Entire species were near extinction, ecosystems were on the verge of total collapse, and the emergence of climate change was accelerating these changes. Although international agreements and conservation efforts have curtailed this crisis, the world has yet to agree on a comprehensive approach. As delegates, you will find an answer to this emergency by selecting one of the following topics, debating ideas, drafting responses, and implementing solutions.

Topic A: How can maritime depopulation trends be reversed?

Background

In 1982, after centuries of relentless commercial whaling had driven many species to the brink of extinction, the International Whaling Commission adopted a moratorium on whale hunting. At the time, the population of species like the Blue, Humpback, and Fin whales had fallen to less than five percent of their previous numbers. Although conservation efforts have led to some species recovering, many whale populations have yet to recover to their historic levels. The decline of whales is only one example of a broader trend of humans negatively impacting ocean ecosystems, as countless species of fish, sea turtles, and seabirds continue to experience severe population loss as a result of human activity. Overfishing has depleted fish stocks faster than they can naturally replenish, while bycatch kills millions of non-target species annually. Habitat destruction caused by seabed mining and pollution has damaged breeding and feeding grounds which many species depend on for survival. Even species that are not directly targeted by human activity suffer consequences, as disruptions at one level of the food chain ripple throughout the broader ecosystem.

As a result, entire maritime regions have seen their populations dwindle. Declining fish stocks have undermined local economies that have depended on the sea for generations, forcing humans to migrate elsewhere in search of work. These challenges are particularly severe in developing nations, where alternative employment opportunities are limited and governments are unable to address the issue. The loss of biodiversity further weakens ecosystem resilience, making oceans less capable of recovering from environmental disturbances in the future. If

marine ecosystems continue to decline, the burden will only shift even further onto humans, as established communities collapse and livelihoods disappear.

However, despite the severity of the threat posed, the maritime ecosystems aren't doomed. The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is an area around Hawaii where commercial fishing was until recently strictly prohibited. Established in 2006 and expanded in 2016, Papahānaumokuākea was initially established in response to the depletion of marine populations of fish and lobster because of overfishing in the 20th century. Encompassing an area of nearly 600,000 square miles, Papahānaumokuākea has led to the revitalization of previously endangered species and created an environmental spillover effect where bordering regions have also seen upticks in maritime populations, due to migration from Papahānaumokuākea, which has proved economically beneficial for Hawaiian commercial fisherman. Ultimately, although the current environmental situation in oceans is terribly grim, the example of Papahānaumokuākea shows that recovery is still possible.

Current Situation

Your objective as delegates is to determine how marine populations can be replenished without placing an unfair burden on any one nation. Delegates should consider the material importance of fishing and maritime industries, particularly for developing states and coastal communities that rely on marine resources for economic opportunities. The success of any resolution depends on international cooperation, as marine ecosystems cross national boundaries, and need coordinated actions to achieve a lasting recovery. While the future of maritime communities in the real world will not be decided by this committee, knowledge and understanding from the delegates can.

Topic B: How can the impact of environmentally harmful economic activities be mitigated?

Background

During his exploration of the Northwest Atlantic, the 15th century Italian explorer John Cabot wrote that the cod population in Newfoundland was "so thick by the shore that we have hardly been able to row a boat through them." This massive fish stock, possibly the largest in the world, sustained maritime communities in New England and Canada for centuries. In the 1950s, the factory fishing of cod in the region began with the advent of "super-trawlers," with the annual catch peaking in 1968 at 810,000 tons, or approximately 3600 Statues of Liberty's worth of cod. This placed an incredible strain on the cod population in the Northwest Atlantic, and in 1992, the stock collapsed to one percent of its historic levels as a result of decades of overfishing by humans.

Human economic activity is the primary cause of the decline in ocean ecosystems, with overfishing, oil spills, having greatly depleted once bountiful maritime populations globally. The nutritional, energy, and consumer demands of eight billion people pose a severe threat to the ecological balance. The threat of human economic activity extends beyond overfishing and also includes oil pollution, global warming, and seabed mining. Oil spills, like the Deepwater Horizon Disaster in 2010, caused the discharge of nearly 5 million barrels of oil over a 5 month period, causing billions in damage and the disruption of fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. Deep-sea and continental shelf mining have reached areas of the ocean previously untouched by humans, wrecking the carefully cultivated ecosystems there. Climate change has disturbed long-standing oceanic currents, and the increase in global sea temperatures will have untold consequences on oceanic communities worldwide. Additionally, the melting of Arctic ice threatens to cause an

increase in ocean acidification and lead to decreases in the populations of native fauna and flora, including polar bears, bowhead whales, and walruses.

As delegates representing coastal states, you must find solutions to this crisis without compromising your own economic interests. Nations with large fishing sectors may oppose strict catch limits that threaten employment, while developing nations may argue that environmental regulations unfairly restrict their own economic growth. Likewise, states with large offshore oil reserves or mineral deposits must weigh the benefits of resource extraction against the long-term consequences of environmental degradation. Finding common ground will require careful negotiation and creative solutions,

Potential areas of discussion include strengthening international fishing management, expanding marine protected areas, regulating deep-sea mining, improving international standards for oil drilling, combatting illegal fishing, and promoting technological innovation. Delegates should also consider the role international organizations can play in assisting governments implement sustainable solutions. Finding common ground will require careful negotiation and creative solutions, and recognize that healthy maritime ecosystems are the foundation of global food security, international trade, and the future prosperity of coastal communities around the world.

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