



## OCEAN POLLUTION: AN ALARMING SITUATION FOR HUMANITY

Prerna Mehta<sup>1\*</sup>, Sachalang Debbarma<sup>2</sup>, Roshan Kumar Mahto<sup>3</sup>,  
Soma Kaur<sup>4</sup>, Dr.Chandra Shekhar Singh<sup>5\*</sup>

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### Abstract

Ocean pollution is a global problem that jeopardises both the planet's and humanity's health and wellbeing. The sources and types of pollutants, their effects on the ecosystem and human health, present laws and regulations, and prospective remedies and countermeasures to address ocean pollution are all thoroughly covered in this review study. The review emphasises the immediate need for action to solve this pressing problem and offers insights into successful methods for increasing awareness and encouraging both individual and group action at local, national, and worldwide levels. For policymakers, academics, and other stakeholders who are interested in tackling this important issue, the article synthesises results from a variety of sources, including government agencies, international organisations, and academic research. Although the review has some drawbacks, such as relying primarily on secondary sources, it nonetheless offers a thorough analysis of ocean pollution and its effects on people, emphasising the need for quick action to safeguard the ocean and the planet.

**keywords:** Ocean Pollution, Human Health, Environmental Impact, Policies And Regulations, Potential Solutions, Raising Awareness, Government Agencies, International Organizations, Academic Research.

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<sup>1\*,2,3,4</sup>Students, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India.

<sup>5\*</sup>Assistant Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Lovely Professional University, Punjab, India.

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## 1. Introduction

Over 70% of the surface of the Earth is covered by the ocean, a huge body of saltwater.

It is home to a wide variety of marine life and is crucial in controlling the climate of the planet. Varying in size from microscopic phytoplankton to enormous whales and intricate coral reefs. By generating oxygen and serving as a source of food for other marine organisms, phytoplankton act as the base of the marine food chain. While coral reefs support a diverse array of marine life and offer coastal protection, seagrass and seaweed serve as habitat for numerous marine species. The most diversified group of marine vertebrates, fish are essential members of marine ecosystems. Both human populations and many marine ecosystems depend heavily on marine mammals and crustaceans. The enormously diversified flora and fauna of the ocean support critical ecosystem functions for both people and other living things. The health of marine ecosystems and the benefits these species offer to human populations, such as food, medicine, and coastal protection, depend on the survival and well-being of these species. However, in recent years, the ocean has become more and more contaminated with waste produced by humans, which has a detrimental effect on both the wellbeing of marine ecosystems and human health.

When harmful or undesirable elements are present in the ocean, it is said to be polluted. These compounds can originate from many different places, such as industrial processes, agriculture, and household garbage. Chemicals, plastics, oil, and other pollutants are some examples. Marine ecosystems may be negatively impacted by ocean pollution in a variety of ways, including habitat loss, biodiversity loss, and the spread of invasive species.

Additionally, it may harm human populations through risks to the general public's health, consumption of tainted seafood, and exposure to toxic fumes. Improving waste management procedures, reducing pollution at its source, and promoting sustainable behaviours and regulations are all crucial in the fight against ocean pollution. The usage of single-use plastics can be decreased, clean energy investments made, and sustainable fishing and aquaculture methods encouraged. We can contribute to the preservation of the health and wellbeing of both marine ecosystems and human populations by taking action to reduce ocean pollution.

This study's goal is to investigate the problem of ocean pollution, including its sources, impacts, and potential remedies. The introduction of the essay will define ocean pollution and explain how it happens. The several sorts of ocean pollution, including plastic trash, chemical pollutants, and oil

spills, will then be covered. The effects of ocean pollution on marine life, including habitat damage, species extinction, and biodiversity loss, will also be covered in this essay. It will also go through the risks of exposure to pollutants when engaging in recreational activities, as well as the impacts of ocean pollution on human health, including the intake of tainted seafood. The research will also look into the economic and social effects of ocean pollution, including the costs of cleanup and pollution prevention as well as the revenue lost by sectors like fishing and tourism.

The final section of the study will examine contemporary attempts to combat ocean pollution, including regional and local initiatives, government legislation, and international treaties and agreements. The importance of ongoing investigation and action to combat ocean pollution and safeguard the health and wellness of our planet and its inhabitants will be covered in the paper's conclusion.

### How Ocean Pollution occurs:

Plastic debris, which enters the ocean through several different channels, such as littering, sewage overflow, and stormwater runoff, is one of the most significant sources of ocean pollution. Plastic trash can linger in the ocean for decades or even millennia, harming marine life through entanglement and ingestion. In addition to industrial waste, agricultural runoff, and air deposition, chemical contaminants can also enter the ocean. These pollutants can have detrimental effects on marine life, such as aberrant development, problems with reproduction, and even death. A risk to human health exists when chemical contaminants build up in the tissues of fish and other shellfish that are then consumed by humans. Human activities such as overfishing and climate change, in addition to direct pollution, can also have an indirect impact on the health of the oceans, which can result in a reduction in biodiversity and the destruction of marine ecosystems.

There are various categories of ocean pollutants, each with distinctive traits and potential negative effects on both human health and marine life. Typical forms of ocean pollution include:

1. **Plastic waste:** One of the most prevalent types of ocean pollution is plastic garbage, which can take hundreds of years to disintegrate. By entangling and choking animals as well as by releasing poisonous chemicals when it decomposes, plastic garbage can harm marine life.
2. **Chemical pollutants:** Pesticides, industrial chemicals, and heavy metals are just a few examples of the chemical pollutants that can negatively affect marine life and reach the ocean through several different paths. When

- people eat polluted seafood, there is a risk to their health since these contaminants can build up in the tissues of fish and other shellfish.
3. Oil and petroleum products: Oil spills and other petroleum-related pollution can have a catastrophic effect on marine ecosystems, causing widespread devastation and habitat destruction. The ingestion of polluted seafood or exposure to harmful vapours are two other ways that oil pollution can have an impact on human health.
  4. Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, Vietnam, and Mexico are the top 10 nations contributing to eutrophication in the world's oceans, according to a 2019 study that was published in the journal *Marine Pollution Bulletin* (Carstensen et al., 2019). There may be more elements and sources to consider when evaluating a country's impact on ocean pollution; thus, these rankings are not necessarily exhaustive or conclusive.

#### **Impact of Ocean Pollution on Human and Marine Life:**

The ecosystem, marine life, and human health are all seriously threatened by ocean pollution. Negative effects of ocean pollution on sectors that rely on it, like fishing and tourism, may result in financial losses and job displacement. Human health is at risk because swimming in dirty waters or eating contaminated seafood can result in diseases, respiratory issues, and skin irritation. A loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services can result from the destruction of habitats, such as coral reefs, seagrass beds, and mangroves, which can have a ripple impact on the entire ecosystem. Ingestion of plastic and other contaminants by marine creatures, such as fish, turtles, and seabirds, can result in choking, asphyxia, and hunger. Fishing gear and plastic debris can entangle marine species, causing harm and even death. Additionally, chemical pollutants can disrupt the reproductive processes of marine organisms, resulting in infertility, abnormal development, and population declines. The establishment and spread of invasive species can be facilitated by pollution, which can displace native species and disturb entire ecosystems. Ocean pollution can have a severe effect on the ability of the ocean to absorb carbon dioxide and control temperature, which can have an adverse effect on infrastructure and human life. To lower pollution levels and safeguard our oceans for future generations, quick action is therefore required.

#### **Nations with a higher risk of ocean pollution:**

Ocean pollution is a serious problem in many nations throughout the world. Because they depend on healthy marine ecosystems for their food, livelihoods, and tourism, Small Island Developing

States (SIDS), like the Maldives, Seychelles, and Kiribati, are especially vulnerable to the effects of ocean pollution. The health of their coastal ecosystems is in danger due to rising sea levels and ocean pollution, which includes plastic waste and chemical contaminants (UNEP, 2019). China is one of the countries that contributes the most ocean plastic pollution, therefore controlling its marine garbage presents considerable difficulties. The nation's problem with marine pollution has been made worse by the country's rapidly growing economy and population (Jambeck et al., 2015). With its large coastline, high levels of plastic usage, and trash, Indonesia is another significant source of ocean plastic pollution. The nation is attempting to resolve this problem by combining policy actions, public awareness campaigns, and private sector involvement (Wijaya et al., 2021). Numerous ocean pollution problems, such as plastic waste, chemical pollutants, and nutrient pollution, affect the United States. Ocean pollution can cause increased flooding, erosion, and habitat loss, and coastal cities and communities are especially susceptible to these effects (NOAA, 2021). India, with its sizable and quickly expanding population and weak waste disposal infrastructure, is another significant source of ocean plastic pollution. Through programmes like the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan campaign and the National Clean Energy Fund, the nation is attempting to address this issue (Kumar et al., 2019). It is crucial to understand that ocean pollution is a problem that all countries must deal with. But in many countries, especially those that heavily rely on healthy marine ecosystems for their survival and access to sufficient food supplies, it has the potential to exacerbate already serious economic, social, and environmental problems. To resolve this problem, therefore, governments, businesses, and individuals from all throughout the world must cooperate (UNEP, 2021). Ocean pollution poses a serious threat that must be addressed even though it is false that it is the primary cause of a country's approaching collapse.

#### **Economic Impact of Ocean Pollution:**

Ocean pollution is a developing problem with serious economic repercussions for the fishing and tourism industries, as well as high expenditures for cleanup and pollution prevention. By 2050, the World Economic Forum estimates that the economic impacts of ocean pollution will be \$1.2 trillion annually (WEF, 2016). The cost of eradicating and preventing ocean pollution can be high; according to the UN, the annual economic cost of marine litter alone ranges from \$6.8 to \$44.0 billion (UNEP, 2014). Ocean pollution can also have a significant negative influence on the fishing industry, with lower fish populations and decreased seafood quality and safety translating into lower

earnings According to Suaria et al. (2019), the economic cost of lost fishing possibilities as a result of plastic pollution in the Mediterranean Sea alone could be as high as €1.5 billion annually. Similar to this, polluted beaches and rivers can lessen the allure of coastal locations, costing the industry money. According to a study, a 10% rise in beach trash results in a 1.7% drop in visitor numbers, which lowers revenue for coastal tourism (Phaneuf & Smith, 2019). Shipping and offshore oil and gas are two examples of industries that may see an increase in insurance costs as a result of ocean pollution.

According to the UNEP (2017), marine pollution can push up the price of marine insurance by up to 10%. In general, reducing ocean pollution is both an environmental and an economic necessity. To avoid significant economic losses in the future, it is critical to invest in waste management and recycling infrastructure, enact and enforce pollution rules, and take other steps to minimise ocean contamination.

#### **Social Impact of Ocean Pollution:**

Beyond its effect on the world economy, ocean pollution has a wide range of negative effects on different facets of civilization. Public health may be negatively impacted by contaminated seafood due to ailments like mercury poisoning, respiratory issues, and skin irritation (National Ocean Service, 2021). Furthermore, coastal communities that depend heavily on fishing and seafood consumption may be more at risk of being exposed to tainted seafood (Lippmann et al., 2020). Cultural locations, artefacts, and practises that are connected to the water can be harmed or destroyed by ocean pollution (Hauzer et al., 2020). Because they may depend more heavily on seafood for their diets and may have less access to clean water, low-income and marginalised communities may be disproportionately affected by pollution (Greenpeace, 2019). In addition to reducing recreational opportunities and the aesthetic value of beach habitats, ocean pollution, particularly plastic pollution, can have detrimental effects on human wellbeing (Galgani et al., 2013). People may experience negative psychological effects from pollution of natural habitats, especially the ocean, such as feelings of loss or mourning (UNEP, 2014). Lastly, ocean pollution can influence education since it can restrict possibilities for outdoor education and hands-on ocean learning and because contaminated water might affect school attendance and academic performance (National Geographic, 2021).

#### **Objectives:**

- To determine the sources and categories of contaminants affecting the ocean and their effects on the environment and human health.

- To investigate the ecological and economic repercussions of ocean pollution, particularly how it affects coastal populations, food security, and marine life.
- To assess the current policies and regulations in place to address ocean pollution and their effectiveness, and to recommend potential solutions and measures for improving these efforts.
- To raise awareness about the urgent need to address ocean pollution and to promote individual and collective action to protect the health and well-being of humanity and the planet.

#### **Hypothesis:**

The health of marine ecosystems and, ultimately, human well-being are seriously threatened by the critical threshold of ocean pollution that has already been achieved. Effective solutions for addressing ocean pollution must be multi-faceted and involve a combination of regulatory policies, technological innovations, and public education and awareness campaigns.

#### **Significance:**

This review article is important in several ways. First, it draws attention to the pressing need for action to be taken to solve this widespread issue that has detrimental effects on both human health and the surroundings. Second, it offers a thorough and in-depth assessment of the origins and types of pollutants, their effects on the ecosystem and human health, the policies, and rules in place at the time, and prospective remedies and steps that could be taken to combat ocean pollution. Third, it integrates findings from numerous sources, including academic research, government agencies, and international organisations, offering a useful tool for decision-makers, researchers, and other stakeholders who are interested in addressing this important issue.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The paper assesses secondary data for research such as, Peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, NGO publications, and online databases such as the Ocean Conservancy, the United Nations Environment Programme, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. These sources provide data on the sources and types of pollutants in the ocean, the impacts of pollution on marine life and coastal communities, and policy and regulatory frameworks aimed at mitigating ocean pollution.

#### **Review of Literature:**

Ocean pollution is a developing issue that has a negative influence on both the environment and human health. There are many different studies and

reports on the subject, according to a survey of the literature on this research topic. The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) study, which exposes the detrimental effects of pollution on marine life and ecosystems, is just one of the many publications and datasets about ocean pollution that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has created (UNEP, 2019). Data on ocean pollution is provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), for example, the Marine Debris Programme, which emphasises the effects of plastic debris on marine life and the food chain (NOAA, 2022). Ocean pollution has been found to significantly harm both the ecosystem and human health, according to research. For instance, pollution can result in disease outbreaks, seafood contamination, and coral reef devastation (WHO, 2019). The loss of revenue and jobs for coastal communities, the decline of food security, and the rise in healthcare costs connected to pollution-related illnesses are some of the socioeconomic effects of ocean pollution (Costello et al., 2016). Despite the numerous negative effects of ocean pollution, current policies and laws frequently fall short of meeting this need. To better safeguard the ocean and its resources, worldwide agreements and national legislation are required (EPA, 2022). Ocean pollution can be addressed in a number of ways, including by reducing plastic waste, enhancing wastewater treatment, encouraging sustainable fishing methods, and spending money on renewable energy technology (Ocean Conservancy, 2021).

The literature study highlights the urgent need for action against ocean pollution as well as the necessity of a thorough and coordinated strategy including local, national, and international organisations. There is no question that pollution has a detrimental effect on both the environment and human health, hence immediate action is required to solve this global issue.

#### **Current Efforts and Future Prospects:**

Diverse measures have been put in place to address this global issue due to the significant economic and social repercussions of ocean pollution, including decreased revenue for industries like fishing and tourism as well as unfavourable health impacts on human populations. International agreements, technology developments, governmental legislation, and adjustments in consumer behaviour are some of these measures. In order to improve and expand these efforts for a future ocean that is cleaner and healthier, it is crucial to evaluate how well they are doing now.

The use of international accords is crucial in the fight against ocean pollution. The worldwide community has established several agreements to lessen pollution and safeguard the oceans. The

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is one of the important agreements. This 1982 pact, which has been approved by 168 nations, establishes guidelines for managing the world's seas and natural resources. The convention fosters collaboration between nations to address problems like pollution and overfishing and includes rules for the protection and preservation of the maritime environment. Other international agreements aimed at lowering ocean pollution exist in addition to UNCLOS. These include the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Squanders and Other Matter, and the Worldwide Program of Activity for the Assurance of the Marine Climate from Land-based Exercises.

Ocean pollution has become a major issue in recent years thanks in large part to technology and creativity. Ocean clean-up tools and biodegradable packaging materials are only a few of the many novel technologies and methods that have recently been developed. Unmanned underwater vehicle (UUV) development, which can autonomously map and monitor marine habitats, detect oil spills, and gather information on water quality, is one of them. Utilising organic materials like chitosan and cellulose to make biodegradable packaging materials that can replace conventional plastics is another creative solution. Scientists are also investigating the potential of bacteria to degrade plastics and other contaminants in the water. (European Commission, 2021). The way in which consumers behave is also very important in mitigating ocean pollution. There are initiatives happening to promote more sustainable practises and increase consumer knowledge of the effects of their decisions on the environment. Utilising eco-labels, which inform consumers about a product's environmental impact and assist them in making better decisions, is one important strategy. Sustainable seafood certification programmes are offered by a number of organisations, including the Marine Stewardship Council and the Aquaculture Stewardship Council. Reusable products such as bottles, bags, and other items can help cut down on plastic waste dramatically. Campaigns like Plastic Free July and Zero Waste Week urge people to use less single-use plastics and develop more environmentally friendly habits. (National Geographic, 1921).

Through laws and policies, governments from all over the world are addressing ocean pollution. They can put into practise laws and rules to lessen ocean pollution, such as banning single-use plastics, limiting destructive fishing methods, and creating marine protected zones (UNEP, 2021). To lessen the quantity of plastic garbage that ends up in the ocean, both the European Union and China have



enacted bans on single-use plastics and waste imports. In order to alleviate ocean pollution, governments are also funding research and development of innovative technology. An initiative to remove and prevent marine trash has been started by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the US. Additionally, to address ocean plastic pollution, the US government created the Trash Free Seas Alliance, which brings together business, NGOs, and government organisations.

Ocean pollution reduction measures are also being done in India. The use of single-use plastics, including straws, cups, and bags, was outlawed state-wide in India in 2018 (The Guardian, 2018). The quantity of plastic waste entering the ocean has decreased as a result of this prohibition. In recent years, the Indian government has started various coastline clean-up programmes in partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan" (Clean India Mission) programme, for instance, was introduced by the Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change in 2014 and includes clean-up initiatives for beaches and coastal areas (Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change, n.d.). Additionally, regulations have been put in place to minimise industrial discharge into rivers and other waterways that eventually empty into the ocean. The Central Pollution Control Board, for instance, has imposed restrictions on the volume of pollutants that businesses are allowed to discharge (Central Pollution Control Board, n.d.). They even started efforts to encourage eco-friendly behaviours, such as the usage of biodegradable products and the use of cloth bags in place of plastic ones (Business Today, 2021).

#### Limitations:

There are several limits to this review essay on ocean pollution and how it affects people that should be noted. First, rather than using primary data, the review heavily relies on secondary sources like reports, datasets, and scholarly articles. Secondary sources are helpful for giving a general overview of the topic, but they might not necessarily reflect the most recent or correct data. Second, the review may not include all pertinent sources due to the scope of the literature that is now available, especially those that were released after the September 2021 deadline. Third, the review might not have well-thought-out viewpoints of all parties involved in addressing ocean pollution, including policymakers, business representatives, and community organisations. The review may not have measured the complex and subtle changes in ocean pollution in diverse locations and circumstances. Therefore, additional research may be required to address these issues and develop a more thorough understanding of the

issue.

#### Strategies for raising awareness:

- Education and outreach are two of the most successful methods for spreading awareness about ocean pollution. This can be done through a variety of outlets, including public events, social media, community centres, and schools. Educational campaigns can inspire individuals to act by educating them about the effects of ocean pollution and how they can lessen their own personal influence.
- Community-Based Initiatives: Addressing Ocean pollution can be accomplished through community-based programmes. Together, residents, local companies, and organisations may make these efforts to lessen pollution in their community. Community clean-up days, recycling campaigns, and a reduction in single-use plastics are all excellent methods to engage people in the fight to protect the ocean.
- Policy and Regulation: Ocean pollution can be significantly impacted by policies and laws at the local, national, and international levels. Governments have the power to control how plastics are used and disposed of, encourage the use of renewable energy sources, and encourage sustainable fishing methods. Legislation, taxes, and subsidies can all be used to accomplish this.
- Corporate Social Responsibility: Businesses have a big part to play in lowering ocean pollution. They can spend money on waste reduction efforts, eco-friendly product promotion, and sustainable production methods. Corporations may be inspired to adopt more environmentally friendly practices through public pressure and governmental restrictions.

### 3. Conclusion

Global ocean contamination is a problem. It crosses international borders and comes from many different places. It is the result of insufficient prudence, narrow-mindedness, and unsustainable resource extraction. It poses a hazard to human health, imperils marine habitats, obstructs the creation of atmospheric oxygen, and other issues, yet it is still not fully understood. Like other types of contamination, ocean pollution can be controlled by putting in place a structured framework that is based on data-backed strategies and makes use of laws, regulations, technology, and enforcement that are directed at the most important sources of pollution. This study emphasises how serious ocean pollution is as a global problem and how urgent action is required to address it. The causes, forms, and effects of pollution on people and marine life, as well as its financial and societal repercussions,

are all examined in the study. It also outlines existing initiatives to address ocean pollution, including local, national, and international laws and regulations, and offers insights into successful methods for increasing awareness and encouraging both individual and group action. Although this study has some drawbacks, such as its reliance on secondary sources, it is still an important tool for researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders who are trying to address this pressing issue. The study's contribution to the body of knowledge as well as its potential to influence current research and policy-making activities make it significant.

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