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Review Article

The Exercise of Sovereign Rights in Maritime Zones Beyond Cameroon's Territorial Sovereignty: A Legal Appraisal

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Abstract

The vitality of the ocean as concerns navigation, mineral resource extraction, environmental protection and national security cannot be over emphasised. The strategic and indispensable importance of the ocean has resulted in conflicts between countries over its control. This is further exacerbated with the commencement and operationalisation of offshore mining. The practicality and legality in the exercise of jurisdiction in maritime zones such as the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf have been met with stiff resistance in some circumstances. This article therefore seeks to determine and evaluate the legal dispensations permitting Cameroon to legislate and enforce its national laws in the maritime zones beyond its territorial sovereignty. To effectively do this, this research adopts both the empirical and doctrinal research methodology, making use of both primary and secondary data. The legal and genetic methods were used to analyse the data. The research concludes that, the sovereign rights enjoyed by Cameroon over the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf are legally backed by both international and national laws. However, these rights are limited to exploration, exploitation, conservation and management of maritime resources, with third States enjoying some freedoms over these maritime zones. The freedoms include navigation, overflight, laying of submarine cables and pipelines within these maritime zones as long as these third States comply with the sovereign rights of the State of Cameroon. It is therefore recommended that, the existing sectoral laws adopted by Cameroon over these maritime zones should be rigorously implemented and enforced in order to ensure uniformity and compliance.

Keywords: Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone, Environment, Fisheries, Law, Maritime, Sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

At a time when the mad rush for natural resources is on a steady rise across many countries, the ocean stands out as a vital resource for both coastal and landlocked countries. Technically, this is due to the centrality of the ocean to international trade and transportation. [1] It is reported that, over 90% of global trade passes through the ocean, [2] thereby exposing the multifaceted role played by the ocean in the achievement of the sustainable development goals. The ocean is also a vital ecological component which produces oxygen and absorbs carbon dioxide (necessary for climate change mitigation) while also serving as a rich source of food and minerals. [3] The significance of the ocean became even more visible with evolutions in technology resulting in the operationalisation of deep seabed mining. This has greatly increased the quest of many States in acquiring larger potions of the ocean, exacerbated with the absence of a natural demarcation of maritime boundaries.

The absence of a natural demarcation of the ocean between States has necessitated the division of the ocean into various jurisdictional zones, establishing the rights and duties of both coastal and landlocked States. [4] The Law of the Sea Convention is predominantly

[1] Galega S. *et al.,* (2025), "Threats to Maritime Navigational Safety within the Jurisdiction Waters of Cameroon and Beyond: The Response of the Law". *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, ISSN N0. 2452-6186 | DOI: 10.4772/IJRISS | Volume IX Issue X.

[2] Available at https://www.riverheadfoundation.org/concept-and-principles-of-the-international-law-of-the-sea/ (Accessed on August 25th 2025)

[3] Ibid

[4] United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea Available at https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/legal/pages/unitednati

modelled to demarcate the ocean into various jurisdictional zones, with specific emphasis laid on the jurisdiction of the coastal States. The ocean is thus divided into the internal waters, the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone, the continental shelf, the high sea and the area. [5] By virtue of Article 2 UNCLOS, a coastal State is endowed with the powers to exercise territorial sovereignty over its Internal Waters and Territorial Sea (including the airspace over these waters).[6] This confers plenary juridical and executive sovereignty upon the coastal State over these maritime zones. To ensure uniformity in the measurement of the breadth of the Territorial Sea across the globe, Article 3 UNCLOS prescribes a maximum of 12 nautical miles from the baseline. [7]

Sovereign rights are exclusive functional powers that the Coastal States hold over natural resources and specific economic activities in the designated maritime zones, such as the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf, without having full territorial ownership over these waters. These rights are limited to exploring, exploiting, managing, and conserving living and non-living resources. However, these waters remain international, enabling third countries to enjoy other rights such as freedom of navigation and overflight over these maritime zones. There are three major principles contained in the Law of the Sea Convention which are used in governing the ocean. These principles include; Freedom, Sovereignty and Common Heritage for Mankind. The principle of freedom ensures the free use of maritime resources especially in zones out of the jurisdiction of coastal States. As concerns the principle of sovereignty, it ensures the protection of the coastal State's interest by giving them exclusive rights over certain parts of the ocean. The principle of common heritage for mankind on its part ensures the proper management and protection of maritime resources for the general good of mankind.

Cameroon formalised its adherence to the Law of the Sea Convention on the 19th of December 1982 as a signatory, and subsequently ratified it on November 19th, 1985. [8] The economy of the country seriously relies on its maritime resources. [9] This importance was clearly demonstrated with the tussle over the Bakassi Peninsula. Cameroon filed a law suit at the International Court of Justice against Nigeria on the 29th of March 1994 with respect to the question of sovereignty over the Bakassi Peninsula, requesting the Court to determine the course of the maritime boundaries between the two States. [10] This dispute was effectively settled in 2006 through the Greentree Agreement between Cameroon and Nigeria. It is worth noting that, Cameroon has not officially set the limits of its maritime boundaries, but there exist recognised median lines between Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea which serves as limits to their maritime jurisdiction. [11]

Pursuant to Article 45 of Cameroon's 1996 Constitution (as amended) [12], duly ratified international treaties and conventions are incorporated into domestic law, occupying a supra-legislative status, subordinate only to the Constitution itself within the normative hierarchy. The Law of the Sea Convention authorises Cameroon to adopt laws and regulations aimed at preventing, reducing and controlling pollution of the marine environment from activities in zones under its jurisdiction. [13] This responsibility also extends to vessels, installations, structures and other devices flying the flag of Cameroon in international waters. [14]

However, reading through this Convention, the limits of the jurisdiction of Coastal States seems conflicting. This is specifically seen with the question of who has legislative and enforcement jurisdiction over the maritime zones beyond 12 nautical miles from the baseline of Coastal States. To address this, we shall analyse the nature and scope of sovereign rights enjoyed by Coastal States, paying particular attention to the source of these rights. This is possible by tracing sovereign rights from an international perspective (**1.1.**), and also looking at the response of the Cameroonian legislature towards these rights (**1.2.**). We shall also be examining the practical exercise of these rights over maritime activities in the jurisdictional waters of Cameroon (**1.3.**).

1.1. Sovereign Rights over the Ocean from an International Perspective

As aforesaid, the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention is the principal legal instrument governing

onsconventiononthelawofthesea.aspx (Accessed on September 1st, 2025). See also https://www.prestoneasley.com/blog/what-is-the-law-of-the-sea/ (Accessed on September 1st, 2025)

[5] Philip J. *et al* (2017), "Law of the Sea. A Policy Primer". Available at https://sites.tufts.edu/lawofthesea/chapter-two/ (Accessed on August 8th 2025).

[6] Article 2. (1) (2) (3)

[7] Article 3.

[8] Section 2. Of the 2000 law; See also http://www.paclii.org/pits/en/status_pages/1982-6.html (Accessed on July 16, 2025).

[9] Gasu G. *et al.,* (2023), "Legal and Institutional Framework for Ocean Governance in Cameroon". available at www.un.org/oceancapacity/norway/NOGS (Accessed on March 20th, 2026).

[10] Land and Maritime Boundary between Cameroon and Nigeria (*Cameroon v. Nigeria: Equatorial Guinea intervening*), Judgement, I.C.J. Reports 2002, p. 303.

[11] Article 15 of UNCLOS

[12] Law No 2026/002 of 4th April 2026 to amend the constitution of 1996 as amended by Law No 2008/001 of 14th April 2008.

[13] Article 208.

[14] Article 194.

and regulating ocean related activities internationally. This Convention has effectively replaced and consolidated the various 1958 Conventions that previously governed various aspects of maritime law, including those specifically addressing the continental shelf, high seas, territorial sea and the contiguous zone. This has provided a more comprehensive and unified framework for the law of the sea. The effectiveness of the 1982 Convention in harmonising the previous conventions has resulted in many legal scholars now referring to it as "the Constitution of the Ocean."[15] The provisions of this Convention bestow on the coastal States sovereign rights over the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf.

1.1.1. The Contiguous Zone

The Contiguous Zone by virtue of Article 33 of the UNCLOS, is the maritime area next to the territorial sea, not exceeding 24 nautical miles (nm) from the baseline, wherein, the coastal State effectuates pertinent jurisdictional authority to forestall and punitively address transgressions of its migration, customs, fiscal and sanitary rules and regulations that occurred within its territorial sea. This stipulation unequivocally denotes that, the coastal State possesses enforcement jurisdiction exclusively over the contiguous zone with regards to infringements which occurred within its territorial sea and internal waters, but lacks jurisdiction to legislate within the Contiguous Zone. In other words, the coastal State only enjoys sovereign rights and not territorial sovereignty in this maritime zone. This is due to the fact that, territorial sovereignty entails the exercise of both legislative and enforcement jurisdiction.

Furthermore, the enforcement powers of the coastal States can only be exercised on vessels leaving the said States. This stems from the fact that, it is impossible for an incoming vessel to infringe on the custom and fiscal laws of a coastal State unless the vessel enters the territorial sea of that particular coastal State. This is in line with the literal or restrictive interpretation[16] which holds that, the coastal State only has enforcement jurisdiction over the contiguous zone and as a consequence, the coastal State may only take action for offences committed within its territorial sea and not in the contiguous zone itself. Given the growing importance of the contiguous zone in regulating and combating issues such as illegal drug trafficking, it is possible that, granting coastal States legislative jurisdiction over this area will not be particularly contentious or problematic. [17] However, this raises an interesting question about the practical implications of such jurisdiction. This can best be settled within the compulsory dispute settlement procedure prescribed in Part XV of the UNCLOS.

1.1.2. The Exclusive Economic Zone

The next maritime zone where coastal States enjoy sovereign or exclusive rights is the Exclusive Economic Zone. In accordance with Article 55 of the UNCLOS, the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) constitutes the maritime area situated beyond the territorial sea, contiguous thereto, and stretching not more than 200nm.[18] Approximately, the breadth of the EEZ is 370 kilometres since the territorial sea already extends to 12nm from the baseline, making the actual scope of the EEZ to be 188nm from the Territorial Sea.[19] The sovereign rights enjoyed by the coastal State in this zone are exercised by way of exploring and exploiting the living and non-living natural resources, while also ensuring their conservation and management for sustainable use. [20] In addition, Article 56 1(b) of the UNCLOS empowers coastal States to build artificial islands, carryout marine scientific research and protect the coastal environment. This is further adumbrated in Article 60 of the UNCLOS, which gives the coastal State exclusive legislative and enforcement jurisdiction over such structures and installations for economic purposes only. It is worth remarking that, third States also enjoy some rights such as the right to navigation and overflight over the EEZ which must not be interrupted by the coastal States. [21]

The coastal States have both legislative jurisdiction (to create laws) and enforcement jurisdiction (to ensure compliance with those laws). Article 73 UNCLOS gives the coastal States the powers in exercising their sovereign rights, to take measures aimed at ensuring compliance with its laws by way of boarding, inspecting, arresting and opening up judicial proceedings against suspected vessels. [22] As adumbrated in the provisions of Article 61 of the UNCLOS, Coastal States are empowered to determine the allowable catching rates of living resources in the EEZ in order to ensure prudent management of such resources in a way that will not result in overexploitation and an eventual endangerment of such resources. Importantly, Article 62(4) UNCLOS clearly spells out in detail, the content of the laws and

[15] Reece L. (2025), "The Constitution of the Oceans? The Law of the Sea Convention as a Living Treaty". *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 74, 4-31. Doi: 10.1017/S0020589325000120

[16] Kevin A. (2014), 'The Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone', D. Attard, D, M. Fitzmaurice, and N. Martínez Gutiérrez, *The IMLI Manual on International maritime Law: Volume I* (Oxford) pp 60.

[17] Robert R. *et al.,* (1999), *The Law of the Sea*. Melland Schill Studies in International Law, 3rd end. Manchester University Press; Yonkers, pp 138.

[18] Article 57.

[19] Yoshifumi T. (2019), *The International Law of the Sea*. Cambridge University Press, Third edition. Pp 129.

[20] Article 56. (1)

[21] Ibid

[22] *See also*,Yoshifumi T. (2019), *The International Law of the Sea*. Cambridge University Press, Third edition.

regulations which coastal States are expected to legislate in relation to fishing activities carried out by nationals of other States. In essence, the coastal State holds the sole authority to exercise legislative and enforcement powers over all individuals and vessels operating within its EEZ, giving it comprehensive but limited control over the zone.

1.1.3. The Continental Shelf

The continental shelf also falls within the parameters of sovereign rights. The continental shelf is defined as the seabed and subsoil extending from the territorial sea of a Coastal State, to either the edge of the continental margin or 200 nautical miles offshore, [23] whichever is farther. The sovereign rights of the coastal State are demonstrated through the exclusive utilisation of natural resources. [24] These rights are considered exclusive because, the resources will remain unexploited if the coastal State does not do so or give an express authorisation to other foreign stakeholders for that purpose. [25] It is worth noting that, the coastal State's rights over the continental shelf are inherent and automatic, requiring neither actual occupation of the zone nor a formal declaration or proclamation to establish its authority. [26] However, countries claiming a continental shelf beyond 200nm must submit their claims to the "*Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf*" for review and recommendation. [27] This arrangement allows the coastal State to exercise its rights over the seabed and subsoil of the continental shelf without restricting the freedoms of navigation and overflight in the superjacent waters and airspace above respectively. [28] Cameroon officially expressed its interest in extending the breadth of its Continental Shelf beyond 200nm from its baseline by submitting preliminary data to the *"Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf"*. [29]

The provisions of the UNCLOS have substantiated the legality of exercising sovereign rights by Coastal States over maritime zones beyond their territorial competence. The Law of the Sea Convention has empowered coastal States to have legislative and enforcement jurisdiction over the Contiguous Zones, EZZ and the Continental Shelf. Relying on the provisions of this convention, Cameroon has responded by putting in place a national legislation which clearly outlines the maritime jurisdictional zones recognised in Cameroon.

1.2. The Domestication of Sovereign Rights over the Ocean in Cameroon

After ratifying the Law of the Sea Convention, Cameroon took an additional step by enacting its own domestic legislation [30] which aligns with the guidelines of the Convention. [31] This law in its Section 16 repeals the provisions of "*Law No. 74-16 of December 1974 fixing the limit of the territorial waters of the United Republic of Cameroon*". By virtue of Section 1 of the 2000 law, Cameroon enjoys sovereignty in defining and demarcating its maritime zones while respecting the provisions of the convention. Cameroon therefore asserts its sovereignty and jurisdiction over its designated maritime areas, ensuring compliance with the Convention's framework while also addressing its own national interests and needs. This enables the country to better manage its marine resources, regulate activities within its maritime zones, and protect its environmental and economic interests. In addition, the 2000 law categorically adheres to the provisions of the UNCLOS, section 3 of this law reaffirms the sovereignty of Cameroon over its territorial sea [32] and internal waters. [33] This assertion of sovereignty recognises Cameroon's authority and control over the abovementioned zones. [34]

Section 4 of the 2000 Law in compliance with the Law of the Sea Convention, establishes the breadth of the territorial sea of Cameroon at 12nm from its designated baseline. Furthermore, Section 5(2) of the law provides specific guidance on drawing a straight baseline in certain geographical contexts. This approach is in accordance with the principles set forth in the UNCLOS, allowing for a consistent and internationally recognised method of delineating the breadth of the territorial sea in complex coastal geographic situations. [35] This approach has ensured clarity and precision in defining the limits of the territorial sea of Cameroon while staying within the ambits of international law.

Cameroon has also established a contiguous zone stretching 24 nautical miles from the baseline of its territorial sea. [36] Section 10 of the 2000 law is verbatim of Article 33 UNCLOS, which bestows on Cameroon the authority to exercise control and enforcement within its contiguous zone. The monitoring and enforcement powers over this zone ensures the protection of national interests and compliance with the necessary laws. In

[23] Article 76. (1).
[24] Article 77. (1).
[25] Ibid (2).
[26] Ibid (3).
[27] Article 76. (8).
[28] Article 78. (1) (2).
[29] This application was prepared for the Government of Cameroon by the Ministry of External Relations, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Mines the Institute of Cartography and the National Hydrocarbon Company (SNH). Available at http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/preliminary/cmr2009informationpreliminaire.pdf (Accessed on August 12, 2025)
[30] "Law No. 2000/02 of 17 April 2000 relating to Maritime Zones of the Republic of Cameroon"
[31] Section 2.
[32] Section 8.
[33] Section 6.
[34] Section 2.
[35] Section 7. (1)
[36] Section 9.

accordance with Article 57 UNCLOS, the 2000 Law by virtue of its Section 11 establishes the breadth of the EEZ of Cameroon at 200nm from the baseline. It is worth saying that, the 2000 law does not specifically say the EEZ of Cameroon is 200 nautical miles, but its reliance on international law for this purpose succinctly invokes Article 57 UNCLOS which sets the breadth at 200nm from the baseline from which the territorial sea is measured. This therefore bridges the gap between the silence of the law on the exact measurement and the standards of the international law.

The continental shelf of Cameroon just as stipulated in the UNCLOS, specifically includes the seabed and ocean floor of its EEZ, extending beyond the territorial sea. [37] Section 14 of the 2000 Law legalises the sovereign rights of Cameroon over its continental shelf. [38] However, these sovereign rights are enjoyed without prejudice to the laws governing the waters and airspace above them and to the rights and freedoms of other States. [39] This means that, third States still enjoy freedom of navigation and overflight over the superjacent waters and airspace above the continental shelf respectively. Cameroon has submitted preliminary information to the *"Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf"* about its continental shelf's outer limits beyond 200nm indicating its willingness to extend the breadth of its continental shelf. This illustrates the importance the country gives to ownership and governance of offshore resources.

It is therefore worth saying that, Cameroon has succinctly respected international standards and practice in enacting the 2000 law. The provisions of this law are verbatim of some provisions of the UNCLOS and in areas where the law is silent, it expressly makes recourse to international law (that is, the Law of the Sea Convention). Therefore, the sovereign rights enjoyed by Cameroon over the abovementioned maritime zones are rooted in the very spirit of both the convention and the 2000 law. It is thus undeniable that, Cameroon has domesticated most of its internationally recognised rights over the various maritime zones through the 2000 law. However, the 2000 law is not exhaustive as it simply establishes the breadth of the various maritime zones under the jurisdiction of Cameroon. It leaves a gap with regards to practical maritime activities taking place within the various maritime zones. This gives room for various sectoral laws to be put in place to regulate activities in the maritime zones under the jurisdiction of Cameroon.

1.3. The Practical Exercise of Sovereign Rights over the Ocean in Cameroon

Reading through the provisions of Article 193 of the Law of the Sea Convention, there is a clear balance between enjoying maritime resources and ensuring marine environmental protection. This provision affirms that, States possess the exclusive authority to exploit natural resources in line with their specific environmental policies and priorities. In addition, it emphasises that, this authority must be exercised in conjunction with the duty to safeguard and conserve the marine environment. This invokes the importance of responsible resource management. In line with this, the Republic of Cameroon has been exercising sovereign rights over its EEZ and Continental Shelf through deep seabed mining, the protection of shipping routes and offshore installations, fishing and the protection of the maritime environment. This has been guided by specific sectoral laws aimed at facilitating exploration and exploitation activities within these maritime zones, while ensuring the protection and conservation of the marine environment.

1.3.1. Deep Seabed Mining and Hydrocarbons Extraction

The mining and petroleum sectors play a pivotal role in the economy of Cameroon. This explains why the government of Cameroon has put in place specific laws to regulate these sectors. The Mining Code [40] and Petroleum Codes[41] regulate the extraction of mineral and petroleum resources from the jurisdictional waters of Cameroon respectively.

Starting with the mining sector, the management of offshore mining activities just like onshore mining activities are governed by the Mining Code of Cameroon. Cameroon exercises sovereign rights over all the mineral deposits within the continental shelf since such mineral deposits are considered to be the property of the State of Cameroon. [42] In addition, Section 10, subjects all mineral deposits in the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone under the ambits of the Mining Code. This aligns with the provisions of the UNCLOS which grants coastal States sovereign rights over the continental shelf [43] and the exclusive economic zone [44]. This reveals that, the exploration and exploitation of minerals within these maritime zones under the jurisdiction of Cameroon are subject to the provisions of the Mining Code. In line with this, it is obligatory for anyone interested in carrying out exploration and/or exploitation within these maritime zones to obtain permits from the competent authorities in

[37] Section 13.
[38] Nyuimbe, G. *et al.,* (2023), "Ocean Governance Study of Cameroon". Available at https://www.un.org/oceancapacity/norway/NOGS (Accessed on September 1st, 2025).
[39] Ibid (2)

[40] Law No 2023/014 of 19 December 2023 relating to the Mining Code
[41] Law N0 2019/008 of 25th April 2019 to Institute the Petroleum Code.
[42] Section 4 of the Mining Code.
[43] Article 81
[44] Article 56

Cameroon. The above provisions of the UNCLOS in conjunction with the Mining Code, justifies the legality in exercising sovereign rights over the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf by the State of Cameroon.

The petroleum sector is jointly regulated by the 2019 Petroleum Code and the enabling Decree of 2023. [45] These legal instruments have clearly made provisions regulating various aspects of hydrocarbons extraction and commercialisation. Section 3(2) of the 2019 Mining Code clearly stipulates that Cameroon enjoys sovereign rights with regards to hydrocarbons found within its territory. Relating this to the relevant provisions of the UNCLOS and the 2000 law, unequivocally incorporates maritime zones beyond the territorial sovereignty of Cameroon under this paradigm. There are several companies currently carrying out offshore mineral and petroleum extraction within the jurisdictional waters of Cameroon. [46] These activities are regulated by both the Mining and Petroleum Codes, thereby signalling Cameroon's sovereignty over the continental shelf and the exclusive economic zone.

1.3.2. The Protection of Shipping Routes and Offshore Installations

As aforesaid, it is the responsibility of the coastal State to ensure the safety of navigation through the waters under its jurisdiction. The EZZ falling within the jurisdiction of Cameroon as established in the UNCLOS and the 2000 Law, therefore remains within the regulatory parameters of Cameroon as far as navigational safety is concerned. Cameroon enacted a national legislation in 2022 [47] aimed at suppressing unlawful acts at sea and in waterways within the jurisdiction of Cameroon. One of such unlawful acts that this law frowns at is the direct or indirect disturbance of navigation within the waters under the jurisdiction of Cameroon. Section 4 of this law clearly stipulates that, committing acts such as ship hijack, violence against those on board, damaging ships or cargo, placing destructive devices, disrupting maritime facilities, spreading false navigation information, threatening or harming passengers and crew, manufacturing unmarked explosives, or violating safety regulations can result in severe penalties, including life imprisonment and/or a hefty fine ranging from 20 million to 200 million CFAF. This is aimed at deterring all forms of threats to maritime navigational safety within the jurisdictional waters of Cameroon.

Also, in conjunction with the provisions of Article 60 and 80 UNCLOS which authorises coastal States to construct artificial islands, the 2022 law protects artificial islands and economic structures found within the jurisdictional waters of Cameroon. This is particular important with the presence of temporal oil facilities off the coast of Kribi. Furthermore, it is adumbrated in Section 5 of this law that, any individual who resorts to force, or threats of hijack, or takes control of a maritime platform, [48] or causes destruction/damage that jeopardises the safety of the platform and its occupants, will face severe penalties. [49] Similarly, committing violent acts against passengers onboard capable of compromising the safety of the platform, or placing any device/substance that could potentially destroy or sabotage the safety of the platform will attract punishment. [50] The penalties for such offenses include life imprisonment and hefty fines ranging from 20 million to 200 million CFA francs. [51] These provisions are very significant, especially with the presence of offshore oil and military platforms within the jurisdictional waters of Cameroon. Any sabotage to these platforms will have a devasting navigational and environmental consequence. Therefore, the enactment of this law not only demonstrates the country's willingness to ensure navigational safety and environmental protection, but it also illustrates the sovereign rights enjoyed by the country over the maritime zones beyond its original 12 nautical miles. If these laws are adequately implemented and enforced, Cameroonian waters and platforms will be considerably safe for all designated activities.

Therefore, the legality of Cameroon exercising jurisdiction over the maritime zones beyond its territorial sovereignty is founded. The 2022 law adheres to the standards of international law and solidifies Cameroon's jurisdiction in criminalising unlawful maritime activities. This substantiates the country's commitment in upholding international maritime law and ensuring the safety of navigation through its territorial waters and sovereign rights zones.

1.3.3. Fishing Activities

The fishing industry is another sector where Cameroon exercises sovereign rights beyond its maritime territorial boundaries. Fishing is a huge source of livelihood in the coastal areas of Cameroon. The economy of these areas also greatly depends on revenues obtained from the fishing industry. Fishing in Cameroon is not limited to its territorial waters but also extends to the Exclusive Economic Zone. These activities are

[45] Decree N0 2023/232 of 4th May 2023 to Lay Conditions for Implementing Law No. 2019/008 of 25 April 2019 to Institute the Petroleum Code.
[46] Business List (2026), "Top 26 Mining Companies in Cameroon". Available at https://www.businesslist.co.cm/category/mining/2 (Accessed on August 2, 2026).
[47] Law No 2022/017 of 27 December 2022 Relating to the Suppression of Piracy, Terrorism and Offences against the Safety of Maritime Navigation and Platforms.
[48] By virtue of Section 1 (3).
[49] Section 5: (1) (a) (b).
[50] Ibid (c)
[51] Ibid (d)

regulated by the 2024 law on fisheries and aquaculture. [52] One of the major objectives of this law is to ensure a sustainable exploitation and protection of fishery resources and their ecosystems in all the maritime zones under the jurisdiction of Cameroon. [53] Reading through the provisions of Section 12 (2), it is expressly provided that, except for the High Sea and the Area, all the other maritime zones fall within the jurisdiction of Cameroon. Interestingly, Section 12 (1) flashes the green light to fishing activities within the above maritime zones. This law also extends its tenacity to vessels flying the flag of Cameroon by granting them the permission to extend their activities to maritime zones under the jurisdiction of third States, provided the relevant legal requirements are met. [54] In addition, Section 2 permits Cameroonian vessels and nationals to carryout fishing activities in the High seas. This is in conformity with the provisions of the UNCLOS which establishes the freedom of the high seas. [55]

Therefore, for fishing activities to be carried out in zones under the jurisdiction of Cameroon, the concerned fishing vessels and their occupants must respect the procedure which has been clearly spelled out in the law. The authority Cameroon has to regulate fishing activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone is drawn from Article 61 (1) UNCLOS. It is noteworthy that, in line with the provisions of the UNCLOS, nationals of foreign countries are permitted to fish within the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cameroon, provided they comply with all the laws and regulations put in place by Cameroon; [56] which currently is the 2024 Law. The UNCLOS gives Cameroon the authority to regulate all fishing activities and enforce its laws, and it must provide due notice of its conservation and management regulations to ensure compliance. Section 27 of the 2024 Law has made a long list of 21 fishing related activities which are prohibited in order to ensure proper management and sustainability in the fishing industry. These are all aspects of sovereignty which Cameroon demonstrates over maritime zones beyond its territorial sovereignty.

1.3.4. Marine Environmental Protection and Conservation

Environmental activities in Cameroon are generally regulated by the 1996 law. [57] This law considers the environment as a national common heritage, which is part of the universal heritage of mankind, making the proper management of its resources very essential to the general interest of all. [58] In protecting the marine environment, Section 31 of the 1996 law in conjunction with the provisions of the UNCLOS, [59] prohibits the dumping of harmful substances in the maritime zones under Cameroon's jurisdiction. [60] This prohibition also extends to substances capable of obstructing maritime activities such as navigation through these zones.

In cases where accidents or damages occur to vessels, aircraft or platforms transporting hazardous materials or hydrocarbons within Cameroonian waters, and these incidents pose a significant threat to the marine ecosystem, the defaulting stakeholders are held financially responsible. [61] The finances obtained are used in remediation efforts which are led by the relevant maritime authorities, thereby ensuring that the contaminated site is restored and the environmental damage is mitigated. [62] In situations where immediate action is required due to an emergency, the relevant authorities intervenes and implement the necessary remediation measures at the expense of the shipowner, trader, or platform owner. [63] In such situations, the authorities seek reimbursement from the aforementioned parties for the total costs incurred in carrying out the mitigation efforts, ensuring that, those responsible for the environmental harm bear the financial burden of rectifying the damage. [64]

While this law is vague in most of its provisions, it is interesting to see that, most of the other sectoral laws relating to maritime activities have environmental protection in their provisions. For example, Section 8 of the 2022 Law relating to Offences Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation and Platforms punishes anyone who intentionally dumps noxious liquid substances into waters under the jurisdiction of Cameroon. In addition, a joint reading of Sections 77(c), Section 78 and Section 80 of the 2024 Law Governing Fishing and Aquaculture, severely punishes those who fish using chemicals that are very dangerous to the marine ecosystem. Also, Section 100 of the 2023 Mining Code makes it obligatory for mining activities to conform to the environmental laws in force and that such activities must only be carried out after a proper environmental impact assessment has been carried out. Lastly, the 2019 Petroleum Code in its Section 91, requires petroleum operators to ensure environmental protection by taking all necessary measures to ensure the safety and protection of ecosystems, while also safeguarding hydrocarbon

[52] "Law No 2024/019 of 23 December 2024 to Lay down the Rules and Regulations Governing Fisheries and Aquaculture in Cameroon".
[53] Section 1.
[54] Section 12 (3).
[55] Article 87 (1). (e).
[56] Article 62 (4).
[57] Law No. 96 /12 of 5 August 1996 Relating to Environmental Management.
[58] Section 2.
[59] Article 194. (1) (2).
[60] Section 31 (1).
[61] Section 32 (1).
[62] Ibid
[63] Section 32 (2).
[64] Ibid

deposits and surroundings. This law also requires an environmental impact assessment before operations are carried out. [65]

Therefore, the responsibility of Cameroon in ensuring maritime environmental protection does not only end within its territorial waters. It extends to all other maritime zones where the country enjoys sovereign rights.

CONCLUSION

The ocean is a very vital resource as it supports the ecological balance, ensures food security, serves as a depository for mineral resources and also as international route for the transportation of goods. The Law of the Sea Convention and the relevant Cameroonian legislations we have seen above provide a succinct framework for managing ocean activities, balancing the rights and responsibilities of the State and other stakeholders with regards to the sustainable use of maritime resources, navigation and marine environmental protection. Cameroon thus, exercises sovereign rights over the Exclusive Economic Zone and the Continental Shelf with authority drawn from the UNCLOS and domestic legislations. The splendour of these rights is in the fact that, they are exclusive; this means that, only the State of Cameroon can exercise jurisdiction over these maritime zones through legislative and enforcement powers. However, these rights are not absolute because they are limited to issues of exploration, exploitation, management and conservation of maritime resources. Cameroon cannot therefore prevent other States from enjoying freedom of navigation and overflight over these zones. In addition, these third States have the freedom to lay submarine cables and pipelines, provided they respect the sovereign rights of the coastal State. Cameroon should therefore ensure adequate implementation and enforcement of its laws over these maritime zones while also respecting the established rights and freedoms of third States.

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