

Nations reach accord to protect marine life on high seas

"We only really have two major global commons — the atmosphere and the oceans," said Georgetown marine biologist Rebecca Helm. While the oceans may draw less attention, "protecting this half of earth's surface is absolutely critical to the health of our planet."

"This is a once in a generation opportunity to protect the oceans — a major win for biodiversity," Nichola Clark, an oceans expert at the Pew Charitable Trusts who observed the talks in New York, said.

The treaty will create a new body to manage conservation of ocean life and establish marine protected areas in the high seas. And Clark said that's critical to achieve the U.N. Biodiversity Conference's recent pledge to protect 30% of the planet's waters, as well as its land, for conservation.

The treaty also establishes ground rules for conducting environmental impact assessments for commercial activities in the oceans.

"It means all activities planned for the high seas need to be looked at, though not all will go through a full assessment," said Jessica Battle, an oceans governance expert at the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Many marine species — including dolphins, whales, sea turtles and many fish — make long annual migrations, crossing national borders and the high seas. Efforts to protect them — and human communities that rely on fishing or tourism related to marine life — have previously been hampered by a confusing patchwork of laws.

"This treaty will help to knit together the different regional treaties to be able to address threats and concerns across species' ranges," said Battle.

That protection also helps coastal biodiversity and economies, said Gladys Martínez de Lemos, executive director of the non-profit Interamerican Association for Environmental Defense focusing on environmental issues across Latin America.

"Governments have taken an important step that strengthens the legal protection of two-thirds of the ocean and with it marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities," she said.

The question now is how well the ambitious treaty will be implemented.

The high seas have long suffered exploitation due to commercial fishing and mining, as well as pollution from chemicals and plastics. The new agreement is about "acknowledging that the ocean is not a limitless resource, and it requires global cooperation to use the ocean sustainably," said Malin Pinsky, a biologist at Rutgers University.

Amazing benefits of our green friends

Plant a sapling today – for yourself and others

Ali Amiri
Staff writer

EXCLUSIVE



One day Khosrow I, traditionally known by his epithet of Anushirvan, goes outside his palace to sight-see. On his way, he sees a very old farmer planting a fig tree.

To the Sassanid king of kings, the decrepit farmer doesn't seem like somebody who is going to live much longer. So, hastily, he attributes the planting of the tree to greed, and tells the farmer that instead of planting trees which will take years to bear fruit, he had better think about the afterlife.

"You cannot eat the fruit of the tree you plant today," says the king.

"Others planted, and we ate. Now we plant so others can eat," answers the wise old man, and to make his point even further, he adds,

"If you look closely, we're all farmers for each other."

The depth of the farmer's knowledge and wit amazes and inspires Anushirvan, who promises him a great prize — tax exemption for his garden, to be exact — if he manages to bring the king a fig from the tree as soon as it bore fruit.

The farmer, the story goes, lives long enough to both eat the fruit of the tree he planted and receive the

kingly gift.

This is a tale from *'Marzbān-Nāma'*, an early 13th-century prose work in Persian consisting of various didactic stories and fables used as illustrations of morality and right conduct. Also, another version of the tale, this time in verse, appears in the poet laureate Mohammad-Taqi Bahar's collection of poetry. In his version, the farmer is planting a walnut sapling which, by the king's estimate, takes a decade to turn into a fructiferous tree.

The popular tale has been narrated ever since in various versions for children and adults alike, modernly to the effect of broadening the horizons of the masses, even perhaps instigating in them a will to plant saplings.

The tale surely deserves a mention, and maybe a re-interpretation in light of the environmental issue of climate change, on Iran's National Tree Planting Day (March 6).

Putting aside the culinary benefits of some trees, planting any kind of tree is beneficial to the environment in more ways than meets the eyes. The most important one, perhaps, is reducing the adverse effects of climate change. Trees help fight the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, through absorbing CO2 and thus removing it from the air, while producing oxygen instead. Every year, an acre of trees can absorb the amount of carbon dioxide equal to driving your car 42,000km.

"Trees are our main survival tools," writes Mattea Jacobs for Greenpop, clarifying, "Only one tree can produce enough oxygen for four people."

Another inedible and invisible yet totally tangible benefit of a tree is its air purifying quality. They absorb pollutant gases such as nitrogen oxides, ozone, ammonia, and sulfur dioxide.

Our green friends also have the potential to absorb odors and act as a filter as little particulates get trapped in their leaves.

One year's oxygen consumption of a big family of 18 can be compensated by a mature acre of trees. Something to really think about. Have you ever wandered the scorching streets of a crowded city in summer, thinking that all

you need is a shade and a glass of cool water? Well, the next benefit of a mature covers that. Trees cool down our streets considerably through providing shades and releasing water — although, of course, the water is undrinkable; bring your own bottle.

If you're still not convinced that you need to grab a shovel and plant a sapling as soon as possible, still thinking of its advantage for you, it is interesting to know that trees are natural air conditioners.

If you're thinking that you could cut down your energy bills by

planting trees strategically around your home, you are in fact on to something. Although, the perks of such a move extend beyond your wallet, since saving energy will, in the long run, reduce the overall amount of emissions from power plants, thus reducing the global warming.

Besides cooling, trees also save water. "Because of the shade they provide, water will evaporate slowly from low vegetation," writes Jacobs. Trees need about 56 liters a week in order to survive and they release about 750-1,700 liters of water per day.

Therefore, there is no need to think twice about the appropriateness of planting trees — lots and lots of trees — as a water-saving strategy for arid regions. When it comes to water, trees are like prime investments.

If you have followed this pen up to this point, you might be intrigued. If you're wondering whether you need to plant a sapling today, I refer you to the wisdom of the old farmer. Even if not for yourself, plant one for your children.

