

## **May Geography Report by Jane Harrison**

In May we welcomed back Professor Philip Steinberg, who is the Director of the International Boundaries Research Unit, at Durham University. Philip previously spoke about the geopolitics of the Arctic; on this occasion he talked about “Managing the Oceans”.

Coastal states have long claimed rights over their immediate coastal waters, but as untapped resources are found far out to sea the oceans have again become new frontiers.

International agreements are needed to control their exploitation and maintain biodiversity. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), which came into force in 1994, established a legal framework to govern the use of the oceans and their resources. Maritime zones were established which defined territorial limits. The ‘Territorial Sea’, over which a coastal state has sovereignty, extends up to 12 nautical miles from a baseline around its shores. Foreign shipping is allowed ‘innocent passage’ through these waters but activities such as fishing, broadcasting and displays of military strength are not. There are exceptions to allow ‘transit passage’ through narrow straits of strategic importance.

The ‘Exclusive Economic Zone’ (EEZ) extends from 12 to 200 nautical miles. There coastal states have exclusive rights, but not sovereignty, to the living and non-living resources both in the sea itself and on the continental shelf. Beyond that are ‘The High Seas’, which cover two-thirds of the world's oceans and are beyond national jurisdiction. A coastal state may still have rights to the non-living resources on the sea bed on the ‘Extended Continental Shelf’ (ECS) but not in the ‘The Area’, which lies beyond the continental shelf and is administered by the International Sea Bed Authority.

Although over 150 countries and the EU are parties to UNCLOS, conflicts have arisen because of issues concerning sovereignty, strategic ambiguity, geophysical dynamism as coastlines change, muscle-flexing, challenges to old compromises caused by the discovery of new resources and the cost of surveillance and enforcement. Progress is still being made however, and earlier this year the Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (fortunately abbreviated to BBNJ) agreed the framework for Marine Protection Areas and conducting environmental impact assessments in the High Seas area, but there still is a long way to go.

It was a very informative and fascinating talk and as usual there was considerable discussion afterwards.

Next meeting: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023. 2.10pm in the Witham. ‘A Celebration of Africa’ – contributions by members of the Geography Group