

## **Sovereign Rights to Africa's Maritime Space – the Practical Pathway for Coastal States to Secure Exploration and Exploitation Rights for Marine Resources.**

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All but 2 of the 33 nations forming the coastline to the African continent already enjoys rights and responsibilities for the governance of various parts of their maritime sovereign space under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Territorial Seas extend to 12 nautical miles from coastal baseline, and the Exclusive Economic Zone continue out to 200 nautical miles. Furthermore, a coastal state's continental shelf can in certain geological circumstances be located as far as 350 nautical miles from baselines, or 100 nautical miles beyond a water depth of 2500 metres, whichever is the greater distance. In all of these areas coastal states have sovereign rights over exploration and exploitation for non-living marine resources on and below the seabed. However, due to the geological and geomorphological evolution of the continental margin, many prospective areas are located so as to be potential prolongations of one or more coastal states, or have been the target of commercial development prior to development of mutually agreed maritime boundaries. Such areas of commercial interest inevitably occur both within and beyond 200 nautical miles. Coupled with the current lack of full knowledge as to the extent to which conventional hydrocarbons such as oil and gas (as well as gas hydrates) continue into ultra deep waters offshore Africa, and the recognition of rapid technological advances in train to address the difficulties of infrastructure and operations in these areas, this paper lays out a number of scenarios for coastal states to develop deepwater offshore regimes in coordinated programmes. Examples ranging from recent Joint submissions of continental shelf cases to the UN, as well as dispute resolution via Joint Development Initiatives will be explored for their advantages, implementation issues and degrees of success. The resource potential, and existing bi- and multilateral maritime boundaries around Africa will be discussed in terms of opportunities for coordination in delivery of practical solutions for deep water maritime space.