

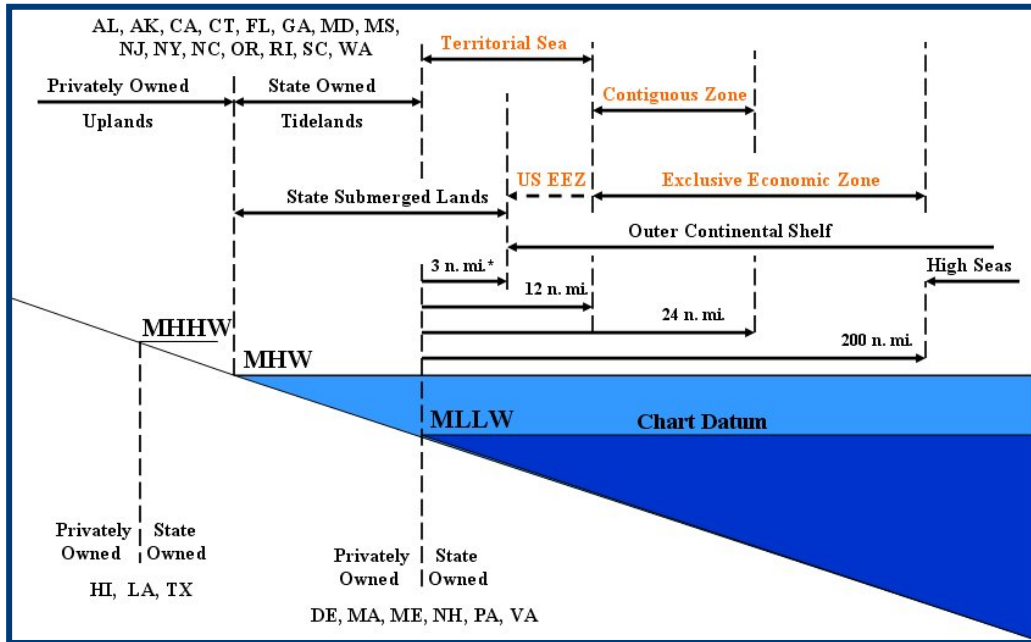


NOAA OFFICE OF COAST SURVEY

MARITIME ZONES OF THE UNITED STATES

Territorial Sea, Contiguous Zone, and Exclusive Economic Zone

U.S. MARITIME ZONES



The extents of the U.S. maritime zones are highlighted in orange text

The United States, pursuant to international treaties and customary law, has established maritime zones in which various activities are controlled or restricted. NOAA is responsible for depicting on its nautical charts the limits of the 12 nautical mile Territorial Sea, 24 nautical miles Contiguous Zone, and 200 nautical miles Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Each of these maritime zones is projected from what is called a “normal baseline.” A “normal baseline” as defined in the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone refers to the low-water line as marked on officially recognized, large-scale nautical charts. Since low water is not an official tidal datum, the U.S. applies the term to reference the lowest charted datum, which is mean lower low water (MLLW) in the U.S.

HOW ARE MARITIME LIMITS CREATED???

The maritime limits are created using a method called “envelope of arcs,” which is a method by which one would roll a virtual circle along the charted low water line and select salient points. These salient points are contributing baseline points. Arcs generated from these baseline points are blended together to form a continuous limit line or envelope of arcs. The baseline is reviewed and approved by an interagency committee called the U.S. Baseline Committee, chaired by the Department of State.

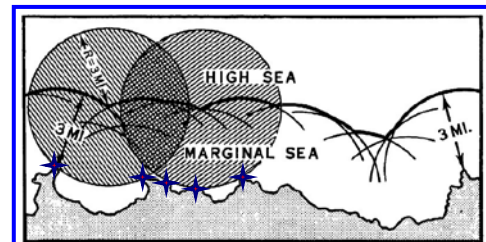


FIGURE 27.—The envelope line is the locus of the center of a circle rolled along the coastline with circumference always in contact with it.

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MARITIME ZONE QUICK FACTS

Territorial Sea:

- The origin dates back to the 1600s regarding the extent to which a country could protect its waters from shore. The “cannon shot” rule was implemented and many countries, including the United States in 1789, claimed a 3 nautical mile territorial sea. In 1988, President Reagan by Proclamation extended the U.S. territorial sea to 12 nautical miles.
- The U.S. sovereignty over its terrestrial lands extends to its internal waters and territorial sea, including the airspace above and the seabed below. Within the U.S. territorial sea, ships of all countries enjoy the right of innocent passage.



Contiguous Zone:



- In 1799, the U.S. Congress passed legislation to allow boarding of foreign flag vessels within 12nm. This zone was known as “customs waters” and was later called the “contiguous zone.” In 1999, President Clinton by Proclamation extended the U.S. contiguous zone to 24 nautical miles.
- Within the contiguous zone a coastal State may exercise the control necessary to prevent infringement of its customs, fiscal, immigration or sanitary regulations within its territory or territorial sea. Additionally, the U.S. may regulate and enforce its laws against the salvage or removal of underwater cultural heritage by U.S. and foreign nationals out to 24 nautical miles.

Exclusive Economic Zone:

- In 1945, President Truman set the stage for the current day, internationally-recognized zone called the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) by issuing two Proclamations—one for conservation of fisheries and another for Continental Shelf jurisdiction over natural resources in its seabed and subsoil. In 1983, President Reagan by Proclamation established the U.S. EEZ at 200 nautical miles, which encompasses these issues.
- Within the EEZ, the U.S. has sovereign rights for the purpose of exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing natural resources, whether living and nonliving, of the seabed and subsoil and the superjacent waters.

