

4. Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) – International Organization

Spain has formally joined the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and simultaneously upgraded its bilateral relations with India to a Strategic Partnership.

Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI)

Core Idea and Launch

IPOI is India's practical, maritime cooperation framework for the Indo-Pacific, aimed at translating broad principles (free, open, inclusive, rules-based Indo-Pacific) into workable sectoral partnerships. It was articulated by India's Prime Minister at the ASEAN-led East Asia Summit (EAS) in Bangkok in 2019 as a cooperative initiative in the maritime domain.

Nature and Operating Model

Institutional Character

Non-treaty-based, voluntary, and flexible– countries participate by choice and based on capability/interest (not alliance-driven). No new institution– IPOI is designed to work through existing regional architecture, with the EAS as a key convening platform (reinforcing ASEAN centrality).

Strategic Philosophy – IPOI is widely framed as operational support to India's broader maritime vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), i.e., cooperative security + sustainable maritime development.

Seven Pillars and Lead Countries

IPOI is structured into seven pillars, where one or more countries lead/co-lead and others join as partners.

Pillars (with commonly cited leads)–

1. **Maritime Security**– India, United Kingdom
2. **Maritime Ecology**– Australia, Thailand
3. **Maritime Resources**– France, Indonesia
4. **Capacity Building & Resource Sharing**– Germany
5. **Disaster Risk Reduction & Management**– India, Bangladesh
6. **Science, Technology & Academic Cooperation**– Italy, Singapore
7. **Trade, Connectivity & Maritime Transport**– Japan, United States (often noted with partners joining voluntarily)

Evolution, Participation and Strategic Convergence

Alignment with ASEAN Outlook (AOIP) – IPOI is frequently presented as consistent with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)—emphasising inclusivity, openness, and ASEAN centrality rather than bloc politics.

Concrete Outcomes (Example– Australia–India Partnership) – Australia–India Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative Partnership (AIPOIP) is a practical bilateral mechanism under IPOI, especially linked to the Maritime Ecology pillar (marine pollution/plastics, scientific collaboration, best practices).

Expanding acceptance (example– Greece) – Greece formally expressed interest and was welcomed into IPOI in the India–Greece Joint Statement (Feb 2024), indicating the initiative's widening appeal beyond the immediate Indo-Pacific littorals.

Indo-Pacific as a Concept

The Indo-Pacific is not a single fixed map; it is a strategic construct highlighting the interlinkage of the Indian and Pacific Oceans through critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) such as the Malacca Strait (and wider chokepoints). India's official narrative generally treats the Indo-Pacific as

stretching from Africa's east coast to the Americas, while the U.S. framing is often aligned to the operational area of USINDOPACOM.

IPOI Matters

Maritime Security and Rules-Based Order

Helps build cooperative responses to–

1. piracy and armed robbery at sea
2. illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing
3. threats to shipping and SLOC stability
4. maritime domain awareness and interoperability

Reinforces UNCLOS-based and rules-based governance of global commons (freedom of navigation, lawful maritime conduct).

Climate–Ocean Linkages

Maritime ecology pillar matters because oceans regulate climate (heat and carbon absorption), while marine pollution and ecosystem decline create transboundary risks—making ecological cooperation a strategic issue, not just an environmental one.

Connectivity, Trade and Blue Economy

IPOI complements India's push for maritime infrastructure, port-led development, resilient logistics, and blue economy cooperation by providing a “plug-and-play” platform with partners.

Strategic Signalling for India

Positions India as a net security provider and a convenor of issue-based coalitions without formal alliances—useful for strategic autonomy.

Challenges and Limitations

Implementation and “Deliverables Gap”

Voluntary frameworks can face–

1. uneven participation across pillars
2. funding and project execution bottlenecks
3. overlap/coordination challenges with IORA, Quad initiatives, ASEAN mechanisms, etc.

Geopolitical Sensitivities

Some countries may see Indo-Pacific initiatives through the prism of China–U.S. rivalry and therefore engage cautiously, even if the framework is inclusive.

Capacity Constraints

Maritime surveillance, HADR readiness, ocean science, and enforcement capacity vary widely across Indo-Pacific states—requiring sustained capacity-building to make cooperation meaningful.

Way Ahead– What Makes IPOI “Work” on the Ground

Move from pillar declarations to project pipelines with–

1. measurable outputs (training numbers, MDA integration milestones, pollution reduction projects, ocean accounting pilots)
2. pooled funding windows and technical assistance

Stronger interoperability and information sharing for maritime security (without turning IPOI into an alliance framework). Use IPOI to mainstream HADR + DRR cooperation (early warning systems, joint drills, pre-positioning, resilient port infrastructure).

Source– <https://www.mea.gov.in/newsdetail.htm?14116/>