

BATHYMETRY-CONTINENTAL MARGIN

From a physiographical perspective the continental shelf can be characterised as the area of shallow seas with a regional extension. According to UNCLOS, the continental margin “comprises the submerged prolongation of the land mass of the coastal State, and consists of the seabed and subsoil of the shelf, the slope and the rise. It does not include the deep ocean floor with its oceanic ridges or the subsoil thereof” (Art. 76.3).

The continental shelf is the domain immediately adjacent to the continent, from which it inherits its structure and nature. It has high environmental, economic and scientific importance as it forms a delicate ecological balance where it is under intense pressure from humans and resource exploitation, and also because it is one of the Earth’s most dynamic areas.

A range of bathymetric steps have been represented to indicate the capacity for exploitation that the different sectors of this area under Spanish jurisdiction have. The spatial planning that could be done in

these areas depends in part on the ability to gain access to the resources, which is determined by their depth.

The deepest zones are in the north western sector of Spanish waters although there is also a widespread area of shallow waters off the whole of the Cantabrian coast (under 200 m). The shallowest area in the Gulf of Cadiz is also quite wide although it narrows greatly in the Alboran Sea only to widen again in the eastern part of the Levantine Shelf. These zones do not exceed 3,500 m. in Spanish Mediterranean waters. The deepest waters adjacent to the Canary Islands archipelago are in the western part, while in the areas around the easternmost islands the waters do not exceed 2,500 m in depth.

An approximate calculation of waters under Spanish jurisdiction would put these waters at three trillion litres.

BASIC DATA

Continental margin under Spanish jurisdiction (sq km)

Under 200 m	75 075
From 200 to 2 500 m	267 339
From 2 500 to 3 500 m	223 686
Over 3 500 m	547 824
Water volume (km ³)	2 697 325

Governance

Legal framework	•
Institutions	•
Instruments	•



