



Territorial Waters Jurisdiction Act 1878

1878 CHAPTER 73 41 and 42 Vict

An Act to regulate the law relating to the Trial of Offences committed on the Sea within a certain distance of the Coasts of Her Majesty's Dominions. [16th August 1878]

Whereas the rightful jurisdiction of Her Majesty, her heirs and successors, extends and has always extended over the open seas adjacent to the coasts of the United Kingdom and of all other parts of Her Majesty's dominions to such a distance as is necessary for the defence and security of such dominions:

And whereas it is expedient that all offences committed on the open sea within a certain distance of the coasts of the United Kingdom and of all other parts of Her Majesty's dominions, by whomsoever committed, should be dealt with according to law:

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

C1 Act extended by [S.I. 1972/971, Sch. 1](#)

1 Short title.

This Act may be cited as the Territorial Waters Jurisdiction Act 1878.

2 Amendment of law as to jurisdiction of the Admiral.

An offence committed by a person, whether he is or is not a subject of Her Majesty, on the open sea within the territorial waters of Her Majesty's dominions, is an offence within the jurisdiction of the Admiral, although it may have been committed on board or by means of a foreign ship, and the person who committed such offence may be arrested, tried, and punished accordingly.

3 Restriction on institution of proceedings for punishment of offence.

Proceedings for the trial and punishment of a person who is not a subject of Her Majesty, and who is charged with any such offence as is declared by this Act to be within the jurisdiction of the Admiral, shall not be instituted in any court of the United

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Kingdom, except with the consent of one of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, and on his certificate that the institution of such proceedings is in his opinion expedient, and shall not be instituted in any of the dominions of Her Majesty out of the United Kingdom, except with the leave of the Governor of the part of the dominions in which such proceedings are proposed to be instituted, and on his certificate that it is expedient that such proceedings should be instituted.

Modifications etc. (not altering text)

- C2** S. 3 excluded by [Petroleum and Submarine Pipelines Act 1975 \(c. 74\)](#), **s. 29(6)**, S.I. 1976/766 art. 5
- C3** Power to exclude s. 3 conferred by Health and Safety at [Work Act 1974 \(c. 37\)](#) s. 84(4)(d)
- C4** Power to exclude s. 3 conferred by [Employment Protection \(Consolidation\) Act 1978 \(c. 4\)](#), **s. 137(3)(e)**
- C5** S. 3 excluded by [Oil and Gas \(Enterprise\) Act 1982 \(c. 23, SIF 86\)](#), **s. 27(5)**, and by [Petroleum Act 1987 \(c. 12, SIF 86\)](#), **ss. 13(6)**, 16(2), and by S.I. 1989/840, **art. 8(2)**
 S. 3 excluded (15.3.1995) by S.I. 1995/263, **art. 9(2)**
 S. 3 excluded (30.4.1998) by S.I. 1998/968, **reg. 16(10)**
 S. 3 excluded (15.2.1999) by [1998 c. 17, s. 12\(4\)](#), (with Sch. 3 para. 5(1)); S.I. 1999/161, **art. 2**.
 S. 3 excluded (15.2.1999) by [1998 c. 17, s. 22\(9\)](#), (with Sch. 3 para. 5(1)); S.I. 1999/161, **art. 2**.
 S. 3 excluded (15.2.1999) by [1998 c. 17, s. 41\(6\)](#), (with Sch. 3 para. 5(1)); S.I. 1999/161, **art. 2**.
 S. 3 excluded (14.3.1999) by S.I. 1999/360, **reg. 18(10)**.
- C6** Power to exclude s. 3 conferred (16.10.1992) by [Trade Union and Labour Relations \(Consolidation\) Act 1992 \(c. 52\)](#), **ss. 287(3)(e)**, 302.
 S. 3: power to exclude (22.8.1996) by [1996 c. 18, ss. 201\(3\)\(e\)](#), 243 (with s. 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 202)
 S. 3: power to exclude (*prosp.*) by [1998 c. 39, ss. 42\(3\)\(d\)](#), 56(2) (with s 36)
 S. 3 excluded (19.3.2001) by S.I. 2001/1091, **reg. 18(8)**
 S. 3 excluded (31.5.2001) by S.I. 2001/1754, **reg. 19(8)**
 S. 3 excluded (11.7.2001) by S.I. 2001/2127, **arts. 9(2)**
 S. 3 excluded (15.5.2002) by S.I. 2002/1355, **reg. 18(8)**
- C7** S. 3 excluded (5.10.2004) by [Energy Act 2004 \(c. 20\)](#), **ss. 86(6)**, 198(2); S.I. 2004/2575, art. 2(1), Sch. 1
- C8** S. 3 excluded (20.8.2005) by [Offshore Petroleum Activities \(Oil Pollution Prevention and Control\) Regulations 2005 \(S.I. 2005/2055\)](#), regs. 1, **16(10)**
- C9** S. 3 excluded (1.10.2005) by [Energy Act 2004 \(c. 20\)](#), **ss. 113(6)**, 198(2); S.I. 2005/877, art. 2(2), Sch. 2
- C10** S. 3 excluded (1.10.2005) by [Energy Act 2004 \(c. 20\)](#), **ss. 98(5)**, 198(2); S.I. 2005/877, art. 2(2), Sch. 2
- C11** S. 3 excluded (1.5.2007) by [Environmental Impact Assessment and Natural Habitats \(Extraction of Minerals by Marine Dredging\) \(England and Northern Ireland\) Regulations 2007 \(S.I. 2007/1067\)](#), regs. 1(1), **28** (with reg. 31)
- C12** S. 3 excluded (21.8.2007) by [Offshore Marine Conservation \(Natural Habitats, &c.\) Regulations 2007 \(S.I. 2007/1842\)](#), regs. 1, **66** (with reg. 3)
- C13** S. 3 excluded (28.9.2007) by [Environmental Impact Assessment and Natural Habitats \(Extraction of Minerals by Marine Dredging\) \(Wales\) Regulations 2007 \(S.I. 2007/2610\)](#), regs. 1(1), **28** (with regs. 1(2), 3)
- C14** S. 3 power to exclude conferred (26.11.2008) by [Pensions Act 2008 \(c. 30\)](#), **ss. 96(5)(b)**, 149(1)
- C15** S. 3 power to exclude conferred (26.11.2008) by [Pensions Act 2008 \(c. 30\)](#), **ss. 97(5)(d)**, 149(1)
- C16** S. 3 excluded (6.4.2009) by [Energy Act 2008 \(c. 32\)](#), **ss. 28(2)**, 110(2); S.I. 2009/45, art. 4(a)(ii)
- C17** S. 3 excluded (12.11.2009 for specified purposes, 6.4.2011 in so far as not already in force) by [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 \(c. 23\)](#), **ss. 319**, 324(1)(b); S.I. 2011/556, art. 3(2)(c)
- C18** S. 3 excluded (13.11.2009 for specified purposes) by [Energy Act 2008 \(c. 32\)](#), **ss. 14(2)**, 110(2); S.I. 2009/2809, **art. 2** (with art. 4)

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- C19** S. 3 excluded by 2008 c. 32, s. 79O(2) (as inserted (6.4.2011) by Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (c. 23), **ss. 314(1)**, 324(3); S.I. 2011/556, art. 3(2)(c))
- C20** S. 3 excluded (6.4.2013) by The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (Application outside Great Britain) Order 2013 (S.I. 2013/240), arts. 1(1), **12(2)**
- C21** S. 3 excluded (E.W.S) (19.5.2013) by The Offshore Combustion Installations (Pollution Prevention and Control) Regulations 2013 (S.I. 2013/971), art. 1(1)**reg. 34(6)**
- C22** S. 3 excluded (N.I.) (18.9.2013) by Marine Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 (c. 10), **ss. 45**, 49 (with ss. 1(1), 46(3), 47)
- C23** S. 3 power to restrict conferred (1.4.2014) by Energy Act 2013 (c. 32), **ss. 117(2)(e)**, 156(1) (with ss. 107, 111); S.I. 2014/251, art. 4
- C24** S. 3 excluded by 1971 c. 77, s. 28(2A) (as inserted (31.5.2016) by Immigration Act 2016 (c. 19), s. 94(1), **Sch. 14 para. 5**; S.I. 2016/603, reg. 2(d))
- C25** S. 3 excluded (30.11.2017) by The Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (S.I. 2017/1013), regs. 1, **73** (with regs. 3, 4(2))
- C26** S. 3 excluded (31.12.2020 immediately before 11 p.m.) by The Offshore Oil and Gas Exploration, Production, Unloading and Storage (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2020 (S.I. 2020/1497), regs. 1(1), **25(10)** (with reg. 1(2)-(6), 20, 29)
- C27** S. 3 excluded (12.4.2023) by 2006 c. 13, s. **21(3B)** (as inserted by Nationality and Borders Act 2022 (c. 36), s. 87(1), **Sch. 6 para. 11**; S.I. 2023/283, **reg. 3(b)**)
- C28** S. 3 excluded (26.12.2023) by Energy Act 2023 (c. 52), **ss. 35(2)**, 334(3)(a)

^{F14} Provisions as to procedure.

On the trial of any person who is not a subject of Her Majesty for an offence declared by this Act to be within the jurisdiction of the Admiral, it shall not be necessary to aver in any indictment or information on such trial that such consent or certificate of the Secretary of State or Governor as is required by this Act has been given, and the fact of the same having been given shall be presumed unless disputed by the defendant at the trial; and the production of a document purporting to be signed by one of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State as respects the United Kingdom, and by the Governor as respects any other part of Her Majesty's dominions, and containing such consent and certificate, shall be sufficient evidence for all the purposes of this Act of the consent and certificate required by this Act. [^{F1}Any stage of proceedings—

(a) before the summary trial of the offence; or

(b) before the offender has been sent for trial for the offence,]

shall not be deemed proceedings for the trial of the offence committed by such offender for the purposes of the said consent and certificate under this Act.

Textual Amendments

- F1** Words in s. 4 substituted (18.6.2012 for specified purposes, 5.11.2012 for specified purposes, 28.5.2013 for specified purposes) by Criminal Justice Act 2003 (c. 44), s. 336(3)(4), **Sch. 3 para. 29**; S.I. 2012/1320, art. 4(1)(c)(2)(3) (with art. 5) (see S.I. 2012/2574, art. 4(2) and S.I. 2013/1103, art. 4); S.I. 2012/2574, art. 2(2)(3)(c), Sch. (with arts. 34) (as amended (4.11.2012) by S.I. 2012/2761, art. 2) (with S.I. 2013/1103, art. 4); S.I. 2013/1103, art. 2(1)(c)(2)(3) (with arts. 34)

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5 Saving as to jurisdiction.

Nothing in this Act contained shall be construed to be in derogation of any rightful jurisdiction of Her Majesty, her heirs or successors, under the law of nations, or to affect or prejudice any jurisdiction conferred by Act of Parliament or now by law existing in relation to foreign ships or in relation to persons on board such ships.

6 Saving as to piracy.

This Act shall not prejudice or affect the trial in manner heretofore in use of any act of piracy as defined by the law of nations, or affect or prejudice any law relating thereto; and where any act of piracy as defined by the law of nations is also any such offence as is declared by this Act to be within the jurisdiction of the Admiral, such offence may be tried in pursuance of this Act, or in pursuance of any other Act of Parliament, law, or custom relating thereto.

7 Definitions.

In this Act, unless there is something inconsistent in the context, the following expressions shall respectively have the meanings herein-after assigned to them; (that is to say,)

“The jurisdiction of the Admiral,” as used in this Act, includes the jurisdiction of the Admiralty of England and Ireland, or either of such jurisdictions as used in any Act of Parliament; and for the purpose of arresting any person charged with an offence declared by this Act to be within the jurisdiction of the Admiral, the territorial waters adjacent to the United Kingdom, or any other part of Her Majesty’s dominions, shall be deemed to be within the jurisdiction of any judge, magistrate, or officer having power within such United Kingdom, or other part of Her Majesty’s dominions, to issue warrants for arresting or to arrest persons charged with offences committed within the jurisdiction of such judge, magistrate, or officer:

“United Kingdom” includes the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, and other adjacent islands:

..... F2
“Governor,” . . . F3[F4as respects a British possession which] consists of several constituent colonies, means the Governor General of the whole possession or the Governor of any of the constituent colonies; and as respects any other British possession, means the officer for the time being administering the government of such possession; also any person acting for or in the capacity of Governor shall be included under the term “Governor.”

“Offence” as used in this Act means an act neglect or default of such a description as would, if committed within the body of a county in England, be punishable on indictment according to the law of England for the time being in force:

“Ship” includes every description of ship, boat, or other floating craft:

“Foreign ship” means any ship which is not a British ship.

Textual Amendments

F2 Definition repealed by [Territorial Sea Act 1987 \(c. 49, SIF 29:1\)](#), s. 3, [Sch. 2](#)

F3 Words repealed by [Statute Law \(Repeals\) Act 1976 \(c. 16\)](#), [Sch. 1 Pt. VII](#)

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F4 Words substituted by S.R. & O. 1937/230 (Rev. X, p. 545; 1937, p. 963), Sch. Pt. II

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