

Zealandia - Lost Continent [UPSC Notes]

Scientists finally confirmed the existence of a “missing” continent which is known as Zealandia. In this article, you can read about the lost continent of Zealandia which is an important topic for current affairs and also the GS-1 Geography segment of the [USPC Syllabus](#).

What is Zealandia?

- Zealandia is a collection of partly submerged continental fragments. It also consists of a continent of approximately 1.89 million square miles in size.
- This is confirmed after 375 years of speculation and exploration.
- In the Māori language, Zealandia is also known as Riu-a-Māui.
- As per scientists, this continent was part of the supercontinent Gondwana around 500 million years ago. Gondwana also included Australia and Antarctica.
- Zealandia started to separate from Gondwana in the Late Cretaceous as a 4000-km-long ribbon continent. The reasons are unknown.
- It began to “pull away” from Gondwana, thus it gradually sank beneath the ocean.
- More than 94% of the landmass is still underwater at a level of 6,560 feet under the water.
- In 1642, for the first time, Dutch businessman and sailor Abel Tasman recorded the existence of Zealandia, when he was on a mission to find the Terra Australis also known as the “Great Southern Continent”.
- Tasman could not find this new land.
- The local Māori provided valuable information about the surrounding landmass, including the existence of a large landmass to the east.
- However, it took nearly 400 years for scientists to agree on the existence of Zealandia.
- In 2017, GNS geologists finally confirmed the existence of the hidden continent of Zealandia.

Importance of the finding:

- Zealandia made up approximately 5% of the area of Gondwana.
- It can give insights into the geological record of the Mesozoic convergent margin of southeast Gondwana.
- Omitting Zealandia, the depictions of the Paleozoic-Mesozoic geology of Gondwana, eastern Australia, and West Antarctica are both incomplete and misleading.
- The importance of Zealandia is not incorporated in comparative studies of continental rifting. This omission could have resulted in a knowledge gap in our understanding of the structure and formation of continents.

- By including Zealandia in investigations, we can discover more about the cohesion, rheology and extensional deformation of continental crust and lithosphere.
- Zealandia is the youngest, narrowest, and most submerged continent on the planet.
- The scientific value of classifying Zealandia as a continent is much more than just an extra name on a list.
- The fact that despite having submerged geography it stayed unfragmented makes it a useful and thought-provoking geodynamic member in exploring the cohesion and breakup of continental crust.