

Ocean rights

Policy brief - UNOC 2025



GARN
GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR
THE RIGHTS OF NATURE



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PROPOSITIONS :

Include in the Nice declaration “Our ocean, our future: accelerating action” on the occasion of UNOC, the following wording :

Proposition 1 : add new paragraph after 6 quart

We encourage Member States to adopt and implement legal and governance models that recognize and uphold the intrinsic value and rights of the Ocean ("Ocean Rights") to protect and restore marine environments for planetary health. We further encourage Member States to embrace and implement transformative approaches, such as the Rights of Nature and Mother Earth-centric actions, that are critical to achieve the rapid and transformative change required to reverse biodiversity loss, as recalled in the IPBES Transformative Change Assessment Report.

Proposition 2 : add to paragraph 6 quart:

*We will take effective legal, policy, administrative, and capacity building measures at all levels, as appropriate, to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and from digital sequence information and traditional knowledge on genetic resources, as agreed upon as global targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. **These efforts should ensure the full integration of marine biodiversity and its multiple values, including intrinsic, relational and cultural values in addition to economic values, in line with section H of the KMGBF.** These efforts should **also** recognize and respect **diverse value systems and concepts and** the integral role and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including over traditional territories, where applicable, and in line with section C of the KMGBF.*

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3. Proposition : add to Paragraph 4:

We recall the Pact for the Future including the recognition of the urgent need for a fundamental shift in our approach in order to achieve a world in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and our decision to take ambitious action to protect, conserve, sustainably use and restore the ocean and its ecosystems. We encourage States to explore [and implement/amplify] transformative approaches that recognize and respect diverse value systems and concepts, including Mother Earth centric actions and non-market-based approaches, in line with Section C and H of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).

4. Proposition : add to paragraph 14bis :

We recognise the contributions of effective area-based management tools, such as marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, including through traditional marine tenure and community-based resource management, and Mother Earth centric actions and non-market-based approaches in line with section H and C of the KMGBF, to support the health and resilience of the ocean and coastal ecosystems, their species, and the coastal communities that depend on them.

Assessment

The **UNOC 2025** has set the ambition of “accelerating action and mobilizing all stakeholders to conserve and sustainably use the ocean.” The effective implementation of SDG14 [requires a change](#) in how humanity uses, manages and views the ocean (a paradigm shift in the human-ocean relationship).

Sustainable use of the marine environment requires an understanding of, and respect for, the interconnected human-ocean relationship and the ecological capacities and functions of marine ecosystems. The dire state of the ocean necessitates adjusting our relationships with marine ecosystems and species, with whom our health is inextricably linked through 3.8 billions years of coevolution. An ethical human-ocean relationship can help shift how humanity

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relates to the ocean, and achieving this requires the implementation of legal, political, educational, economic and community-based measures. Acknowledging the ocean as a living entity with intrinsic value (Ocean Rights) is an innovative approach to establish a new norm for global ocean governance to guide and ensure sustainable development. There is no sustainable solution without understanding and respecting the functioning of marine ecosystems. There is no sustainable use of the ocean without **adjusting our relationships with the other living beings** on whom we depend and with whom we are inextricably linked through **3.8 billion years of coevolution**. This adjustment cannot happen without recognizing those with whom we share a common destiny. We have no choice but to acknowledge the **right to exist** of every marine creature to build a sustainable relationship with the Ocean. The search for a sustainable and desirable societal model for both humans and non-humans requires a new “natural contract,” as the philosopher **Michel Serres** already proposed in 1990.

The integration of diverse value systems and concepts, such as the **Rights of Nature** and the **Rights of Mother Earth**, serves as a key lever for achieving the transformative changes necessary to protect biodiversity by 2050, as highlighted by the [IPBES assessment report on transformative change](#) in December 2024. It is therefore consistent that the **Rights of the Ocean** be included in the **Nice Declaration**, which explicitly aims to encourage “**transformative, ambitious, just, and bold actions.**”

Recognizing and conserving the ocean's intrinsic value aligns with globally accepted principles such as intergenerational equity, ecosystem integrity, and the precautionary principle and international law. The **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework**, to which the signatories of the Nice Declaration refer, emphasizes that the **Rights of Nature are an ‘essential factor’ for its successful implementation** in countries that recognize them. It further calls for States to “ensure the full integration of biodiversity and its multiple values into policies, regulations, planning and development processes and, as appropriate, national accounting.” Similarly, the Agreement under the UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National

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Jurisdiction (BBNJ) preamble asserts States' desire to conserve the inherent value of biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction.

In November 2024, **IUCN France** adopted a motion titled **“Making the Rights of Nature operational through their implementation in territories”**, aiming to encourage the experimentation and recognition of the **Rights of Nature** on an international scale. Additionally, Panama and Vanuatu are co-sponsoring a motion titled “Advancing an ethical human-Ocean relationship” encouraging States to adopt laws and policies that recognise and protect the Ocean's inherent rights and intrinsic values. These motions will be presented at the **World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi** next October.

Finally, the **UNESCO** and **UNOD Venice Declaration for Ocean Literacy Action** calls for “an ocean-literate society that advocates for policies that respect the ocean's inherent right to exist, flourish and regenerate, and ensures the protection of human and ocean rights.” Further, dialogue on advancing Ocean Rights through implementing approaches that advance an ethical human-ocean relationship was advanced by Cabo Verde and Monaco in the 2023 UN Omnibus Resolution on Oceans and Law of the Sea, of which only one State did not consent.

The Rights of Nature in Brief

First theorized in the early **1970s**, the **Rights of Nature** movement gained international momentum in the **2000s**. Ecuador was a pioneer, enshrining **Nature's Rights** in its **Constitution in 2008**. Since then, this legal innovation has expanded from the **United States to New Zealand, from India to Uganda**, and now to **Europe**, including **Spain, Ireland, and even France**.

The **Rights of Nature** are based on the principle that **all of Nature has inherent and fundamental rights**, possesses **intrinsic value**, and **should no longer be considered an object or property**, but rather a subject **with its own rights**.

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This framework also acknowledges that **humans are part of Nature** and, therefore, **human rights and Nature's rights are inseparable**, as the former depend on the preservation of the latter.

Around the world, **rivers, mountains, and forests** have been recognized as legal entities with rights. Recognizing the **rights of the Ocean**, both as a living community and as a habitat for countless interdependent entities, would strengthen **our legal framework** to preserve and restore **ocean health for future generations**. It would also promote a **deep rethinking of national and international governance**, ensuring that the ecological needs and interests of the Ocean are considered **for peaceful and sustainable coexistence**.

Partners

[Wild Legal](#) (FR), [Longitude 181](#) (FR), [Vagues](#) (La Réunion Island), [Ocean Vision Legal](#) (US), [Earth Law Center](#) (US).

Other committed actors: [Varda Group](#), the [Let's be Nice to the Ocean initiative](#), or the [ORKA – Ocean Rights and Kinship Alliance network](#)

Upcoming Key Event

On **Saturday, June 7, 2025, in Nice**, the **Wild Legal** program will organize a **mock trial** on the theme **“Ocean Rights and Shark Culling in La Réunion”**, in collaboration with **Longitude 181** and **Vagues**. This program is **officially labeled “La Mer en Commun”** by UNOC.

This event aims to shed light on the **legal controversies surrounding the protection of marine ecosystems** and serves as an opportunity to advocate for the **recognition of the Rights of the Ocean**.

[For more information...](#)

