



Written Statement to the 2025 UN Ocean Conference

We applaud the 2025 UN Ocean Conference's (UNOC) call to "accelerate action and mobilize all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean," in accordance with SDG14. To meet this aim, Earth Law Center and Wild Legal urge Member States and UN agencies to adopt a Rights of Nature approach to ocean governance. Conservation and sustainable use of the ocean require aligning governance with ecological limits, including by recognizing that the ocean has inherent rights.

Historically, the sustainable development approach has been primarily anthropocentric. Although the SDG framework has gained widespread support, large-scale ecological degradation has accelerated as Nature continues to be valued for the services it supplies to humans rather than for its intrinsic value.

The ocean is not merely a resource. It is a living entity essential to life, climate stability, biodiversity, and cultural identity. Today it faces cascading harms from pollution, climate change, overexploitation, and biodiversity loss. These threats stem from anthropocentric legal frameworks that treat the ocean as property rather than a rights-bearing entity with intrinsic value. To achieve lasting ocean health and effectively implement SDG14, we must shift our relationship with the ocean from dominance to mutual respect and reciprocity.

The draft 2025 UNOC Declaration calls for "bold, ambitious, just and transformative action." Supporting the rights of the ocean is precisely such an action. It reflects the growing global Earth law movement, including Rights of Nature and other Earth-centred laws, which realigns human legal systems with the natural world.

The Rights of Nature are increasingly applied to marine ecosystems, including in Spain, Brazil, and Panama. Recognizing the rights of marine ecosystems can create legal pathways for redress, restoration, and resilience. This framework also can empower Indigenous Peoples and other customary stewards by recognizing their role as legal guardians of the ocean and centering their belief systems within ocean governance.

We urge Member States and UN bodies to support the Rights of the Ocean within the 2025 UNOC Declaration by including one of the following proposed Amendments, or similar:

Proposal 1: Amend §9 as follows:

We affirm the importance of full and effective implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and its Protocols, as well as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF), including its ocean-related goals and targets as well as its mission to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. We recognize the role of conserving, restoring and sustainably using the ocean, seas and marine resources in achieving these

objectives, as well as the importance of legal and governance models that uphold the intrinsic value of the ocean and promote Mother Earth-centric actions.¹

Alternatively, Proposal 2: Insert a new paragraph after §10

*In accordance with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, section C.7. **Different value systems** (b) Nature embodies different concepts for different people, including biodiversity, ecosystems, Mother Earth, and systems of life. Nature's contributions to people also embody different concepts, such as ecosystem goods and services and nature's gifts. Both nature and nature's contributions to people are vital for human existence and good quality of life, including human well-being, living in harmony with nature, and living well in balance and harmony with Mother Earth. The **Declaration** recognizes and considers these diverse value systems and concepts, including, for those countries that recognize them, rights of nature and rights of Mother Earth. This **includes the application of these rights to marine ecosystems and species** as an integral part of successful implementation of the Declaration.*

(The text of Proposal 2 is pulled from Section C.7(b) of the KMGBF. The final sentence has been added to contextualize its application to the ocean in the implementation of this Declaration.)

These recommendations do not replace existing instruments like UNCLOS. Rather, they enhance and support them by serving as a unifying framework that reduces fragmentation and supports coordination across global ocean law.

Efforts to conserve and sustainably use the ocean cannot succeed without addressing the values that underlie our governance systems. A Rights of Nature approach offers a bold yet practical foundation for inclusive, resilient, and ecologically sound ocean governance. We urge all actors to take up this call and work toward a future in which the ocean's voice is heard and protected.

¹ As defined in the KMGBF.