



YOUNGO Ocean's Voice

Working Group of YOUNGO

Official Children and Youth Constituency to the United Nations
Framework Convention on Climate Change

Global Ocean Youth Declaration

The YOUNGO Ocean's Voice Working Group declares a state of emergency for ocean health. The ocean is deeply interconnected to many diverse ecosystems; preserving its health is vital for our planet and well-being. Yet, the ocean faces multiple threats: pollution, acidification, eutrophication, algal blooming, extensive exploitation through overfishing, deep seabed mining, hazardous waste disposal, coral bleaching, and more. In response to this state of emergency, ocean-concerned youth from all over the globe have united to produce the Global Ocean Youth Declaration, constructed based on a two-week open consultation under YOUNGO, the UNFCCC's official youth constituency. This declaration is a compilation of policy demands, which addresses the ocean health crisis, the ocean, biodiversity loss, climate injustice, and the need for urgent action to mitigate the damages caused to limit further degradation.

Problem Statements:

- **The Ocean is one of the most impacted victims of human activities:** The ocean is being disproportionately affected by increasing CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, leading to alterations in water temperature, ocean acidification, changes in oceanic circulation, rising sea levels, as well as a significant reduction in the diversity and abundance of marine species and corals. Populations of marine mammals, birds, fish and reptiles have declined by 49% since 1970¹. Coral reefs are dying; without immediate intervention, only 10% of the coral reefs present at the beginning of the century will be alive in 2050². This endangers livelihoods, food security, and human safety since coral reefs are marine habitats, natural barriers that absorb the force of waves and storm surges, keeping coastal communities safe.
- **The effects of a disturbed ocean are devastating for life below water and coastal ecology:** Ecosystems are impacted by rising sea levels and natural disasters of unprecedented intensity as well as frequency, such as typhoons. Flooding in low-lying coastal areas is forcing people to migrate to higher ground, and millions more are vulnerable to flood risk due to rising sea levels. Aside from constituting a grave human rights issue, forced displacement which aggravates the global refugee crisis also threatens the prosperity of the whole international community. Such inseparable connection between the ocean and coastal communities or people living in Large Ocean States thus heightens the urgency of protecting our seas; not just for conservation and ecological sustainability, but for global peace and security.
- **Ocean governance still needs to be improved to maximize synergy between youth, NGOs, state-level stakeholders, and the UN bodies:** Specialized expert-led governing bodies should ensure accountable compliance and political commitment to the policies by the states, and the states should be open to collaboration and cooperation. We also want to ensure genuine youth participation and collective efforts from all parties involved to achieve the shared goal of protecting our oceans.
- **The Oceans Biodiversity Treaty (BBNJ Treaty) has still not received sufficient support to become operational:** This treaty offers opportunities for improving environmental governance with significant stakeholder dialogue, respectful integration of traditional and local knowledge, and considerable marine capacity-building and technology transfer opportunities. Ratification of this treaty is a crucial step towards protecting and conserving our crucial High Seas marine ecosystems, through its area-based management proposals and meaningful obligations for ocean protection through collective international, domestic, and community action.

¹ World Wildlife Fund and the Zoological Society of London, 2015

² Naama Rose Kochman, 2023

- **Investment in our ocean is still insufficient despite ocean protection constituting the preservation of our most precious carbon sink**, which consists of seagrasses, mangroves, marine wetlands and salt marshes that can capture and hold CO₂. Furthermore, the ocean's internal marine processes, collectively called its biological carbon pump, play a critical role in carbon sequestration. They constitute our greatest hope for the future. Hence, maintaining a healthy ocean would bolster our chances to mitigate temperature warming and ensure the survival of countless marine species and ecosystems, as well as the well-being of human life.
- **Efforts to promote research and inculcate expert advice need to be amplified** as they can be deemed the best solution to ensure sustainable ocean health, as more than 80% of the ocean remains unexplored³. Furthermore, responsible action is impossible without strong scientific basis. For this reason, the lack of funding in both theoretical as well as applied research into ocean-related topics deserves immediate attention. Moreover, there is further need to empower marginalized voices in science.
- **Development of the blue economy should be done carefully, and scientifically through sustainable ocean governance**: While the blue economy partisans seem certain that it contributes to mitigation, preserves biodiversity, and provides coherence in the economic sectors linked to marine space without damaging the environment, we believe that the exploitation of ocean resources and the installation of significant innovation technologies that would impact the ocean ecosystem should be calculated reasonably and must prioritize sustainability. As the blue economy offers much potential, investments and smart innovative solutions within the blue economy sector must also promote environmental justice and respect the coastal communities. We believe in the benefits of the blue economy, coastal economy, and tourism, but their development should not be at the expense of ocean health and sustainability.

Recommendations:

1. **Guarantee youth inclusivity and participation**: We ask for increased support for impactful youth-led initiatives, especially through research and community-based approaches. In addition, we highlight the importance of youth engagement in the ocean sector and urge constituted bodies to bring in youth voices from YOUNGO to future events related to the ocean. Furthermore, we encourage UN agencies and other organizations to conduct further collaborative work towards our shared goal of ensuring the protection of our world's oceans, aquatic and marine ecosystems, and biodiversity.
2. **Enhance effective risk prevention for protecting the marine environment**: We must invest in more risk prevention solutions and encourage their propagation through clear guidelines in different languages. We believe all relevant stakeholders must seriously commit to phasing out fossil fuel consumption and offshore drilling. For example, while unintended oil spills have declined in recent decades, evidence shows that the consequences continue to devastate the marine ecology and coastal residents.
3. **Increase protected ocean zones such as designated marine protected areas (MPAs) and high seas**: We welcome the pledge to protect 30% of the planet's ocean, land, and coastal areas and hope to jointly achieve this goal by 2030 to successfully implement the 30x30 target of the Global Biodiversity Framework. This can be achieved through improved strategies for sustainable management, stronger adherence to international and regional regulations and agreements, as well as better drafting and execution of national and local policies that take into account local and youth community contexts.

³ Oceana, 2020

4. **Ensure the swift ratification of the Ocean Biodiversity Treaty (BBNJ Treaty):** We urge the parties to sign the BBNJ treaty into law as soon as possible. This is important on a domestic and international level. The opportunities provided by the treaty for enhanced collaboration across stakeholder groups, enabling work towards intersectional and multispecies justice, is invaluable as we race to face the interconnected oceanic multi-crises.
5. **Implement a deep-sea mining moratorium, nationally and internationally:** We acknowledge that the deep-sea is one of the least understood ecosystems on the planet. So far, we know that deep-sea mining will release sequestered carbon, and its impacts on deep-sea biodiversity are permanent. We must follow the precautionary approach— this means not greenlighting regulations to exploit deep-sea minerals.
6. **Promote sustainable ocean governance with comprehensive regional policy frameworks:** We believe countries must be held accountable and must commit to regional ocean policy frameworks based on principles of just international cooperation, as the SDGs, including the protection of life under water, cannot be achieved without collaboration and peer learning. This can be done through implementing more robust legal infrastructures and agreements to maintain sustainable ocean health, promoting ocean-based climate action, transitioning to sustainable maritime resource management, and mitigating the damage caused by the specific ocean crises in their regions.
7. **Increase capacity building of coastal communities and most affected peoples and areas (MAPA):** We encourage training programs to better equip communities for climate adaptation and resilience through community-based projects, such as promoting indigenous wisdom, providing socializations about policies and processes relating to the oceans. We aim to ensure that they are fully aware of their rights and are protected from exploitation by anyone harming the health of the oceans, through projects that center and uphold equity and marine genetic resources (MGRs). They should also be encouraged to learn how to reduce their impact on the oceans, as they are at the forefront, and find alternate sources of earning to allow for ocean rejuvenation.
8. **Prioritize indigenous wisdom and local knowledge:** We recognize the invaluable contribution of indigenous peoples and local communities to the stewardship of marine resources and traditional ecological knowledge. For this reason, we encourage the integration of indigenous perspectives and practices into ocean governance frameworks, decision-making processes, and resource management strategies, and thereby their preservation. Above all, our systems must empower indigenous communities to participate in policy discussions, conservation efforts, and sustainable development initiatives that affect their coastal and marine territories.
9. **Develop sustainable strategies for coastal and ocean ecosystem management:** Based on an ecosystem approach that recognizes the following, we want to develop sustainable strategies, mostly through knowledge dissemination via campaigns and support for enterprises that work with nature-based solutions (NBS). We support responsible coastal development, which recognizes the vital role of deltas and creeks in influencing the ocean by delivering sediment, cycling nutrients, providing habitats, regulating water quality and erosion, contributing to climate regulation, and supporting various human activities. We believe that these factors are crucial for the overall health and ecosystem dynamics of the oceans.

10. **Improve the overall marine research architecture and its transparency:** We ask for the timely availability of resources needed to holistically support ocean research to gain further insight to be inculcated into conservation efforts, assessment of ocean chemistry, data collection, processing, dissemination, and capacity-building programmes. Transparency and open data in this regard must also be maintained. We recognise and support the potential opportunities for improved scientific collaboration and marine technology transfer that is outlined in the BBNJ treaty and support its enactment.
11. **Implement regulations for sustainable procurement of seafood from fisheries and aquaculture:** We urge national governments to develop clear regulations for sustainable management of fisheries and large-scale aquaculture operations. Recognising the inadequacy of the 1994 Fish Stocks Agreement, we encourage the development of improved, equitable and accountable governance structures, especially to minimize exploitative dynamics between local fishers and large company runners, as well as to sustainably manage the fish stocks within both coastal and High Seas waters.
12. **Promote sustainable blue economy initiatives:** We advocate for adopting and implementing responsible blue economy principles that prioritize sustainable development while preserving ocean ecosystems. This includes supporting investment, transfer of technology, capacity building and policy support to projects that integrate conservation with economic activities such as eco-tourism, sustainable fisheries, renewable energy, creative ocean-based economy, and marine biotechnology. Governments and international organizations should provide incentives and funding mechanisms to foster innovation and blue entrepreneurship.
13. **Strengthen international cooperation on marine pollution:** We call for enhanced collaboration among countries to address the global challenge of marine pollution, including plastic waste, chemical contaminants, and marine debris. This can be achieved by establishing robust monitoring systems, developing adequate waste management infrastructure, and implementing regulations to reduce pollution inputs into the ocean. International agreements and partnerships should be strengthened to facilitate information sharing, technology transfer, and capacity building.

The ocean must be at every negotiation table.

It's time to act.

It's time to stop destroying our best ally and save marine life.

Through the Global Ocean Youth Declaration, we advocate for actions that are absolutely necessary to preserve and protect the ocean. The specific points are targeted to the youth communities, UNFCCC, national, regional, and local authorities, researchers, NGOs, and companies meant to work together to instill tangible changes. It highlights the importance of youth engagement in the ocean sector and encourages cross-sector collaborations amongst stakeholders to protect our dear marine ecosystems and biodiversity. It is our greatest hope as the united voice of ocean-conscious youth around the world that these recommendations will be endorsed and inspire concrete action for the ocean.

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