

Want to be nice to our Ocean? Start with your ECOPs

It is key to involve and collaborate with **Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs)** in all actions from monitoring biodiversity to ocean governance, as current and future Ocean citizens and stewards, scientists, and policy-makers. Such partnerships across disciplines and generations is a two-way street: ECOPs can bring their ideas and expertise, their values, their energy and networks, and would benefit from the experience of senior Ocean Professionals. In this spirit, ECOPs and young ocean citizens have self-organised into professional networks, organised events to build their capacity and awareness, and participated in ocean actions to build the future they want for the Ocean. **The 2025 UN Ocean Conference (UNOC) can be key in ensuring ECOP participation in the future of our Ocean.**

This submission has been written by Young Ambassadors from the European Marine Board (EMB), with contributions from ECOPs of the UN ECOP Programme, EuroMARINE OYSTER, Youth4Ocean, Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN). **This submission therefore builds on the work of these networks and existing publications about what ECOPs want, and the critical role they can play.**

1. Why having ECOPs onboard is necessary to transform the world

- a. **ECOPs bring their own ideas, expertise, and values:** They are diverse, and aware of scientific or technological developments. ECOPs engaging in science-policy interfaces, such as the UN Ocean Conferences, are highly motivated to drive concrete changes.
- b. **ECOPs did not wait to be invited to become actors of change:** They have already created their own networks, and led many actions. They train each other on biodiversity or policy issues, and show their communication skills and strength in mobilising youth and other actors on various socio-environmental issues. Youth was for example particularly active in defending benthic ecosystems from deep-sea mining at the 2022 UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon, at the Norwegian parliament in February 2024, and generally in meetings of the International Seabed Mining Authority.

Participants to the SOA Youth & Innovation Forum calling countries for a ban of deep-sea mining at UNOC 2022, encouraging UN Secretary-General António Guterres and actor Jason Momoa to join their call.



- c. Importantly, **ensuring ECOPs' participation in decision-making is a matter of justice**. Although not exclusively composed of youth, ECOPs largely include young people at the start of their professional life. Young people are experiencing first-hand the consequences of environmental changes (climate changes, species extinction, ecosystem pollution and destruction) and face the need to address them even more for their own survival. They are particularly vulnerable and aware of ongoing global socio-ecological crises and should be part of building their future.

2. Ensuring ECOPs' representativity

- a. **The need for inclusion and representativity** is a feeling shared unanimously among ECOPs. **ECOPs should be present in decision-making spaces, not only as representatives of the younger generation, but also as professionals in their fields, and as representatives of their countries and their culture**. As a first step for the next UNOC, **ECOPs should be included in the making of the Nice Declaration**.
- b. **ECOPs should be respected as equals in science-policy interfaces like UN Ocean Conferences**. Currently, and in addition to the discrimination felt in other areas of society, **ECOPs believe that their age and their early career stage prevent them from being included meaningfully in decision-making processes**.
- c. **Participation of ECOPs in high level events has to be fair and unframed**. Tokenism, framed participation (e.g., framed questions, non-inclusive and senior-driven selection of ECOPs), or ECOP-related issues and events relegated to the back row are real issues. These can be easily addressed at the UNOC by having ECOPs as keynote speakers, panellists and co-chairs in all main events, and promoting ECOP participation in high level sessions.

3. Supporting ECOPs' participation and empowerment

- a. **ECOPs expect the Nice Declaration 2025 to clearly highlight the points made in this document**. The [2022 UNOC Declaration](#) did not refer to ECOPs' inclusion but only to youth as a focal group to be empowered (paragraph 14.g): ECOPs and youth should be explicitly mentioned, not only as a passive group to be empowered, but as key actors and stakeholders who should be included in decision-making.
- b. **UN signatories should support capacity-development for ECOPs to engage in decision-making processes, including training** to equip them with knowledge and tools to understand the stakes at play and ways to efficiently work in decision-making processes.
- c. **Organising in-person events and allowing ECOPs to join science-policy-society meetings is key for ECOPs to engage and connect with stakeholders and decision-makers**. Organising intergenerational events, bringing all stakeholders together and connecting ECOPs with civil societies, politicians, policy-makers and scientists, would help to build long-lasting relationships and promote collaboration.

- d. Supporting ECOP networks with visibility and funding is key.** Many networks have been created and actions implemented, but most often through voluntary positions for ECOPs. UN signatories should support the networks and ECOPs engaged via financial and in-kind means, to ensure their long-term and impactful engagement.

4. What ECOPs want for our Ocean

- a. Integrated and inclusive governance to include Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities across multiple scales of decision-making,** to recognize their contributions to protect biodiversity and ensure the inclusion of their interests, values, knowledges, institutions and ways of living.
- b. The Ocean science-policy-society interface should be strengthened,** notably through the creation of more participatory spaces and events for exchanges between stakeholders at all levels, and an improved inclusion of scientific results, including those from social sciences, in decision-making.
- c. Protection of marine ecosystems and biodiversity,** through well-connected, representative and effective networks of Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Conservation Measures. These areas should ensure human rights, including the informed participation in decision-making of communities. These should be accompanied by appropriate funding, monitoring, and restoration measures, in national and international waters.
- d. Adaptive marine spatial planning, sustainable practices and reduced consumption of ocean resources** to limit impacts of land-based and maritime activities at sea, including by prohibiting highly impacting activities. This includes reducing large-scale industrial fisheries, decarbonizing sea industries, upscaling recycling, and promoting sustainable activities through education and awareness-raising to change behaviours, such as consumption habits and practices. All actions should be taken to limit environmental impacts, such as climate change, pollution, spread of invasive species, and bycatch.
- e. Supporting and protecting communities** from environmental disasters and unfair measures. This includes incentives and mitigation measures to develop sustainable practices, protection of communities, and the ending of harmful subsidies that fuel industries recognized as destructive, polluting, or responsible for human slavery.
- f. Strengthen ocean science and literacy for our Ocean,** by supporting collaborative research across disciplines with increased funding and facilitated work for early-career researchers, including so far less-considered social scientists, and activists. Ocean literacy to be strengthened through transformative education by including ocean focussed curricula in schools and universities.

5. References

- EMB ECOPs, first Forum proceedings ([link](#));
- Call for action One Ocean Summit University ([link](#));
- ECOP Programme Impact Report from the 2022 UN Ocean Conference ([link](#));
- Youth declaration on transforming education ([link](#));
- GYBN's policy brief on transformative education ([link](#));

6. Networks description

The [EMB ECOP Network](#) connects ECOPs across 38 EMB member organisations from across 19 European countries, and empowers them to engage in the marine science-policy landscape, by providing training and improving their representativity in science-policy interfaces.

The [UN Ocean Decade endorsed ECOP Programme](#) and its worldwide regional and national nodes ensure ECOPs' representation in UN Ocean Decade processes, support ECOPs in their capacity development and provide meaningful networking, training, professional development, funding opportunities and creating capacity for cooperation and knowledge exchange.

[OYSTER](#) (Orienting Young Scientist of EuroMarine) is an independent working group funded by the EuroMarine network, composed of 48 European organisations. OYSTER members are dedicated to promoting and supporting opportunities for Early Career Researchers in marine sciences by providing skills development and networking opportunities.

The [Youth4Ocean Forum](#) is a diverse network of young ocean changemakers, coming together to make the Ocean a concern of all EU citizens through ocean literacy and advocacy actions. The Forum also equips young project leaders with visibility, training, resources, and the opportunity to connect with a wide variety of marine and maritime experts.

The [Global Youth Biodiversity Network](#) is an international network of youth organizations and individuals working to prevent and halt biodiversity loss. It is the official youth constituency to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. GYBN represents the voices of global youths in negotiations, raises awareness, and connects youth individuals and organizations to build a global coalition for biodiversity.