

Venice Declaration for Ocean Literacy in Action

PREAMBLE

We, the Delegates convened in Venice for the Ocean Literacy World Conference, extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Italian Government and the Municipality of Venice for hosting us in this exceptional setting: a city whose profound relationship with the sea has shaped its very essence. The history, identity, and destiny of Venice, like many coastal cities and regions around the world, reflect the inextricably intertwined nature of humanity's relationship with the ocean.

INTRODUCTION

The ocean is the lifeblood of our planet, producing more than half of the oxygen on planet Earth, regulating our weather and climate and underpinning the water cycle which makes life on land possible. Its importance to human life cannot be overstated: From providing sustenance, being a space for fun and recreation, as well as supporting our mental and physical health, the ocean's well-being is inseparable from our own. As our understanding of marine ecosystems improves, so too does our awareness of the profound impact that human behavior has on the ocean's health. This interconnectedness underscores the critical role of Ocean Literacy for the success of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, and, more generally, in shaping a sustainable future.

Ocean Literacy is more than just understanding the science of the ocean; it means recognizing our influence on marine ecosystems and the far-reaching consequences of our actions. By cultivating a global culture of ocean stewardship, we can facilitate a future where humans and the ocean thrive in harmony. It is our collective responsibility to foster a more just and sustainable relationship with this vital global commons: all life on Earth depends on it. We need an ocean-literate society that advocates for policies rooted in a deep respect for the ocean's inherent right to exist, flourish and regenerate its life cycles, structures, functions and evolutionary processes.

The Ocean Literacy movement has undergone a remarkable evolution. From its beginnings as a school-based initiative to teach ocean science, it has blossomed into a vibrant, global community united by its recognition of the ocean's vital importance to our future. This diverse network, spanning cultures, generations, and geographies, shares a passion for the ocean and a commitment to respect it. In a promising shift, the movement is increasingly embracing the wisdom of indigenous and local communities, and acknowledging the critical role of Ocean Literacy in responsible maritime spatial planning.

Through common purpose and close collaboration, this community is working tirelessly to restore humanity's relationship with the ocean. These efforts align with the goals of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and will be instrumental in

building a sustainable ocean economy that ensures environmental well-being and human prosperity for generations to come.

GOALS

The Declaration is designed to catalyze a new wave of action to establish Ocean Literacy in the spheres of education, science, policy, economics and culture. By expanding humanity's understanding of the ocean, Ocean Literacy will empower communities to respect the marine environment and preserve ocean cultures around the world. Ultimately, it can become the foundation for all sustainable development.

ACTIONS

We urge the governments of France and Costa Rica, as co-hosts of the upcoming 2025 United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice (UNOC 2025), as well as all UNESCO Member States and all other stakeholders and interested parties, to place Ocean Literacy at the forefront of the conference agenda. We appeal for the forging of robust partnerships between indigenous communities, local knowledge holders, educational institutions, scientific organizations, businesses and the broader public to recognize the importance of Ocean Literacy and bring it into action. In the year leading up to UNOC 2025, we call for policies and strategies that ensure no one is left behind, by seeking to:

- 1. Make the processes of urban planning and policy making more participatory.** This requires motivating all stakeholders by creating Ocean Literacy programs for municipalities, planners, local businesses and residents to educate them on ocean governance and ocean law, ocean health, climate change, and sea level rise. Improving Ocean Literacy in urban areas and fostering collaboration among key actors enables citizens and policymakers to create balanced, forward-looking policies together.
- 2. Launch transdisciplinary programs that merge natural and social sciences with humanities and design** in joint projects and studies. This approach prioritizes collaboration and generates knowledge collectively. By forging partnerships with non-academic stakeholders, Indigenous Peoples and coastal communities, we develop opportunities centered around knowledge, ethics, and context.
- 3. Develop a solid and adaptable Blue Curriculum framework.** Support a Blue Curriculum through inclusive programmes such as the Blue Schools Global Network recognizing the importance of integrating ocean contents across disciplines, fostering a deeper human and emotional connection with nature. We appeal to governments to facilitate this process by supporting the Blue Schools programme, transforming their educational content, practices and culture to prioritize a whole-school approach. An integrated ocean literacy educational approach should

ensure the protection of children's rights and restore value to local and traditional knowledge systems as well as to intangible heritage practices.

4. **Enhance access to funding to drive ocean-focused innovation.** Innovation thrives on bold ideas and the availability of financial resources. By simplifying application processes, offering mentorship to new innovators, and ensuring equal opportunities, we can fully harness human creativity and drive meaningful change in our relationship with the ocean.
5. **Make Ocean Literacy actionable, accessible, equitable, diverse, and inclusive.** We must adopt a multifaceted approach, from physical to digital and multisensory experiences, in multiple languages. By offering personalized access to ocean knowledge, and crafting narratives that forge emotional bonds, we can ensure greater inclusivity and impact.
6. **Raise awareness of the inextricable link between ocean health, human well-being and climate change,** which demands immediate attention and decisive action. We must confront the impact of human behaviour as a regenerative force and as a destructive one. Advocating for policies that mandate regenerative practices is paramount.
7. **Support resilience programs through proper education, funding, and policy.** Ocean Literacy is a framework that can empower vulnerable communities to teach what they learn from direct experience. Indigenous and local communities must be empowered as pivotal partners, and we must actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in all our efforts.
8. **Safeguard the wealth of marine cultural heritage,** encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects. The preservation of this legacy is essential for the long-term health and sustainability of our ocean. A reimagined approach is required, one that empowers coastal communities as rightful stewards and recognizes their rights and wisdom. It is imperative that we prioritize community-centered approaches to protecting marine cultural heritage, ensuring that this rich legacy forms an integral part of a more sustainable ocean future.
9. **Disseminate an inclusive multimedia campaign to advocate for the importance of an ocean-literate society** through an approach that facilitates engagement with a broad and diversified audience. This could be achieved with the support of trained ocean communicators, equipped with adequate scientific information and skilled in mediating scientific concepts, who can incorporate diverse knowledge systems and cultural heritage into ocean narratives.
10. **Foster a sustainable ocean economy by promoting Ocean Literacy and maritime career training.** We must invest in holistic education that bridges the gap between natural and social sciences and the humanities, as well as in targeted

career training programs. This will build capacity among ocean professionals to shape an equitable, sustainable ocean economy while preserving ocean health.

FUTURE VISION

The Venice Declaration is a contribution to the wider global conversation around sustainability and the ocean, advocating for the inclusion of Ocean Literacy as a central element at UNOC 2025.

The Declaration is conceived as a **living document** that will evolve through continuous dialogue among stakeholders everywhere. As such, the Declaration belongs to no single individual or institution, but to everyone. It is a common heritage which will be refined and expanded from the grassroots to advocate for Ocean Literacy worldwide, and, ultimately, to restore humanity's relationship with the ocean.