



Toward a Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights

Initiative Overview and History

In March 2022, The Ocean Race, Earth Law Center, Nature's Rights and the municipality of Genoa launched the initiative towards a Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights. A core group provided strategic direction to the initiative that comprised the following individuals: Antonio Di Natale, Callie Veelenturf, Patricia Sala, Lucy Hunt, Richard Brisius, Bronwen Golder, Mumta Ito, Michelle Bender, Johan Strid and Rachel Bustamante.

The Ocean Race provided a platform for eight 'Innovation Workshops' (termed the 'Genova Process'), which were held March 2022 to September 2023. The workshops gathered 150 + stakeholders of all expertise and representations and initiated critical dialogues on the vision, scope, strategies, pathways and challenges towards international recognition of Ocean Rights.

Alongside The Ocean Race 2022-2023 stopovers, six summits in six countries and four continents were held that raised awareness on Ocean Rights, while gaining official support from Governments): Genoa, Italy; Aarhus, Denmark; The Hague, Netherlands; Itajai, Brasil; Newport, Rhode Island; the state of Rhode Island, USA; Kiel, Germany; and the state of Santa Catarina, Brasil). The summits involved 19 ministers, five heads of state/government, the EU Commission President, UN Secretary General, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, as well as stakeholders of all sectors.

In January 2023, at The Ocean Race Summit in Mindelo, Cabo Verde, over 300 representatives of government, science, NGOs, sailing teams, businesses and other national and international institutions issued The Mindelo Declaration, which states: "that the Ocean has the inherent right to exist, thrive, and regenerate its vital cycles, to integral health, diversity, and restoration and is revered by many as a source of spiritual and cultural sustenance with whom we have responsibilities to respect and care for" and urged all nations "to recognise the inherent rights and intrinsic value of the ocean, and to support a future decision on a Universal Declaration of Ocean Rights."



In September 2023, Ocean Rights made waves at the United Nations.

1. Feedback from the Genova Process Workshops, bi-lateral meetings and an online comment period were considered in the drafting of 'We are the Ocean and the Ocean is Us.' This document outlines principles underpinning the framework of Ocean Rights and aims to establish a robust foundation for ongoing dialogue at the international level. This is not a draft Declaration, but rather, a living document that attempts to capture a shared understanding of humanity's interconnected relationship with the Ocean, and principles and standards for how best to respect and protect that relationship. Other prominent voices offered support, including Lewis Pugh and Sylvia Earle.
2. 'We are the Ocean and the Ocean is Us' was formally presented within the United Nations at [The Ocean Race Summit: Presenting Ocean Rights](#). Ocean Rights received support from speakers representing Panama, Brasil, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and Volvo Cars.
3. The government of Cabo Verde, with the support of Monaco, proposed a text to initiate dialogue on the human-Ocean relationship in the 2023 Omnibus Resolution on Oceans and Law of the Sea. The original proposal encouraged States to explore the concept of Ocean Rights further and received important interventions from States on the need to understand the concept more. Ultimately, changes were made to the proposal to encourage States to consider the inherent value of the Ocean and how humankind views, values and relates to the Ocean, of which only one State did not consent to in its final reading.

The initiative is currently in a re-strategising phase, and being coordinated by Michelle Bender, Legal Counsel and Head of Ocean Rights at Ocean Vision Legal. Contact michelle@oceanvisionlegal.com to learn more.