

SEA BEYOND

VENICE DECLARATION FOR OCEAN LITERACY IN ACTION

How to engage society to regenerate the most valuable
ecosystem on our Planet

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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 interdependent nature of our 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. The ocean provides sustenance; it is a space for **fun and recreation**, and it supports 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 impact that our behavior has on the ocean's health. This **interconnectedness underscores the critical role of Ocean Literacy** in shaping a sustainable future and for the success of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

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

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 that recognizes 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 an ocean-literate society.

SEA BEYOND

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 Ocean Decade 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 restoring and 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 UN Member States and all other stakeholders and interested parties, to place Ocean Literacy at the forefront of the conference agenda. We commit to enacting the actions outlined below in all our programmes and we appeal for the forging of robust partnerships with local and Indigenous communities, educational and scientific institutions, businesses and the broader public. In the year leading up to UNOC 2025, we demand the following policies and strategies be implemented without leaving anyone behind:

Make policy, urban and coastal planning more participatory by motivating governments and all stakeholders through Ocean Literacy programs for municipalities, engineers, architects, local businesses and residents to educate them on ocean governance, ocean law, ocean health, pollution (plastic and other forms of pollution), and the ocean-climate nexus. Improving Ocean Literacy in urban and coastal areas and fostering collaboration among key actors enables citizens and policymakers to create balanced, forward-looking policies together.

Launch transdisciplinary programs to better understand and inform our behaviour; merge natural, social, and behavioural sciences with humanities, spirituality and ocean-centric design in joint projects and studies. This approach values traditions but also evaluates them according to

SEA BEYOND

recent scientific findings. By fostering collaboration with non-academic stakeholders, Indigenous Peoples, coastal and local communities, we develop opportunities such as citizen science and nature-based solutions centred around knowledge, ethics, and experience.

Develop a solid and adaptable Ocean Literacy framework for formal and non-formal educational systems for all stakeholders, from students to educators, and policy makers. The challenges we face—climate change, systemic crisis, resource depletion—demand for a transdisciplinary, holistic, experiential, skill-based approach, not only in classrooms but also outdoors, in nature and by the water. In parallel, we need to raise awareness about the ocean's demands and opportunities, and ask governments and educators to expand the Blue School network and support partnerships between countries. An integrated Ocean Literacy educational framework should ensure the protection of human and ocean rights and restore value to local and traditional knowledge systems as well as to intangible heritage practices.

Enhance access to funding to expand Ocean Literacy, sustainable ocean-climate and nature-based solutions, as well as social and technological innovation. By favouring public-private initiatives, simplifying application processes, offering mentorship, and ensuring equitable opportunities, we can fully harness human creativity and drive meaningful change in our relationship with the ocean.

Make Ocean Literacy actionable, accessible, equitable, diverse, and inclusive. We urge governments and institutions to adopt a multifaceted approach: from physical to digital and multisensory experiences, in multiple languages, and across different media. Bringing together ocean knowledge and active exchange with life and professional experiences forges emotional bonds and allows for more actionable engagement.

Raise awareness of the complex, interconnected link between ocean health, biodiversity, human well-being and climate change. We must confront the impact of short and long-term human behaviour as a regenerative force and as a destructive one. We demand for a systemic approach to restore, repair, regenerate and reconnect our relationship with the ocean in all our activities—sports and recreation, jobs, education and governance.

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Co-create resilience programs through education, funding, and policy. Ocean Literacy in Action is a framework that can empower vulnerable communities to share what they learn from direct experience. Indigenous, coastal and local communities must be empowered, and we must actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in all our efforts.

Safeguard and promote the wealth of marine cultural heritage to rebuild identity and belonging, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects. The preservation of this legacy is essential to respect the long-term health of ocean ecosystems. A reimagined approach is required, one that empowers Indigenous Peoples, coastal and local communities as stewards and recognizes their rights and wisdom. It is imperative that we prioritize community-centred approaches to protect coastal and submerged natural and cultural heritage, ensuring that this rich legacy forms an integral part of a more sustainable ocean future.

Disseminate multisensorial multimedia campaigns and bottom-up initiatives to advocate for the importance of an ocean-literate society. Inclusive approaches facilitate engagement with broad and diversified audiences—trained ocean communicators, artists, information designers, skilled mediators—who can incorporate diverse knowledge systems and cultural heritage into ocean narratives.

Foster a sustainable ocean literate workforce. We must invest in holistic transdisciplinary education that bridges the gaps between sciences and humanities, finance, and technology. Encourage inter-generational dialogue and exchange, value Early Career Ocean Professionals' (ECOPs) mindset, include them in the decision-making process and create the environment to allow them to emerge as new leaders. Inform students about job opportunities, legitimize the workforce, and offer life-long learning. 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.

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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.