

Draft statement of the organized constituency of Local and Regional Governments on Oceans

**at UN Ocean Conference 3
Nice, France, June 2025**

The ocean is a vital element of our planet's equilibrium, sustaining life, regulating the climate, and supporting the livelihoods of millions. However, its health is increasingly at risk due to human activity and climate change, demanding urgent and collective action at all levels. We, the Local and Regional Governments, gathered under the networks of the Global Taskforce, reaffirm our unwavering commitment to the protection, sustainable management, and resilience of our oceans, seas, and coastal cities and regions. As the closest level of government to communities, we bear the direct responsibility of ensuring the well-being of our citizens while safeguarding the health of our shared marine ecosystems.

Local and Regional Governments as Global Guardians of Our Oceans

The ocean covers 70% of our planet and is vital for sustaining life. It produces oxygen, absorbs carbon dioxide, regulates climate, and supports economic and social livelihoods. Yet, human activity has pushed our marine environment to a tipping point. Pollution, overfishing, biodiversity loss, rising sea levels, and ocean acidification pose immediate and long-term threats to our ecosystems and communities, particularly those in coastal cities, small island states, and vulnerable territories

Recognizing the interdependence between human settlements and ocean health, local and regional governments underscore the urgency of a holistic approach integrating land and ocean policies. In the spirit of caring, local and regional governments, and their associations and networks, gathered through the Global Taskforce, recognize that the protection of our ocean is pivotal in our joint fight towards the conservation of the commons and natural resources. The ocean and maritime ecosystems are a paramount source of biodiversity and jobs, and represent cultural values deeply embodied by traditional communities, islands and coastal cities.

We emphasize the crucial need for integrated water management, recognizing the close link between freshwater and marine ecosystems. Local and regional governments play a key role in managing both, addressing the challenges of pollution, water scarcity, and the preservation of aquatic biodiversity. By aligning efforts across SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water), we ensure a holistic approach to water governance that benefits both coastal and inland communities.

The effects of human activity and urbanization transcend city boundaries in many senses. Our constituency has turned the spotlight on the importance of the urban-rural continuum, observing the interconnections among our cities and broader territories, particularly in their constant flow of goods, services and resources. Hence, we acknowledge the pertinence of our local and regional governments, especially intermediary cities and small towns, to embrace a sustainable development model. In this regard, we stress the critical role of sustainable land-use planning, coastal zone management, and ecosystem restoration as key instruments to mitigate land-based pollution and enhance marine resilience.

Addressing Fragmentation in Ocean Governance

As stated in the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, the persistent fragmentation of information and governance structures prevents decision-makers from adopting a coherent vision of the ocean as an interconnected system. This lack of integration hampers efforts to address land-ocean interactions effectively, particularly at the level of local and regional governments, which are at the forefront of implementing sustainable solutions. To overcome this challenge, we call for enhanced coordination across all levels of governance, improved knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and stronger institutional linkages between freshwater and marine policies. An integrated approach is essential to ensure that territorial planning, coastal management, and ocean conservation efforts are aligned for greater impact.

In accordance with SDG 14 on Life Below Water, it is fundamental that we also stress the presence of 'urban-ocean linkages', and call upon the engagement of local and regional governments in global efforts and decisions to protect the ocean and maritime resources.

A Human Right to a Sustainable Ocean

A healthy ocean is a fundamental human right. It is a global common that must be protected through ambitious international commitments and action at all levels. The Law of the Sea laid a foundation, but today's challenges require bolder, enforceable global agreements and empowered local action. We call for legally binding international instruments that recognize the role of local and regional governments decision-making, planning and implementing SDG 14 and addressing marine crises at the territorial level.

Local and Regional Governments call for an urgent shift towards an equitable and sustainable Blue Economy that prioritizes resilience, inclusivity, equality and climate justice. This transition must adopt a nexus approach, recognizing the interdependence between fisheries management, coastal and marine ecosystem conservation, agriculture (SDG 2), and water management (SDG 6). By incorporating circular economy principles into marine and coastal governance, LRGs can enhance resource efficiency, minimize waste, and strengthen local resilience.

As urbanization advances, particularly in coastal areas (SDG 11), and as economic transitions (SDG 17) impact traditional sectors, alternative livelihoods must be developed to ensure social equity (SDG 10, SDG 5). Policies should support the creation of green jobs and sustainable economic opportunities, particularly for coastal communities directly affected by climate change and rising sea levels. Additionally, the private sector must be held co-responsible for the sustainability of our oceans, contributing to long-term ocean conservation efforts through enforceable commitments and sustainable business practices.

It is our duty to seek the appropriate global commitments to safeguard the rights of future generations and ensure the sustainability of life on Earth.

The Role of Local and Regional Governments: Turning the Tide

The sustainable management and protection of islands and coastal areas poses additional challenges and risks to our cities and regions, which require greater resilience to endure future distresses. Through water and sanitation and waste management, circular and blue economy, protected areas, ecotourism, fishing and others, governments at all levels can interact and contribute to enhance territorial cohesion, and reduce marine pollution, the loss of habitats and biodiversity.

Local and Regional Governments, at the frontline of ocean-related challenges, demand a place at the decision-making table. We pledge to:

- **Lead the Global Ecological Transition:** Our constituency commits to champion climate action and ocean conservation by integrating sustainable marine and coastal governance into our policies. We call for dedicated innovative financial mechanisms and technical support to enable local governments to implement ambitious ocean protection strategies. This necessitates recognition and direct participation in multilateral fora and discussions. Harnessing digitalization and emerging technologies, such as remote sensing, AI-driven resource management, and early warning systems, will further enhance the effectiveness of local and regional government action in ocean governance.
- **To protect marine biodiversity and implement nature-based solutions,** our members require an enabling environment for decision-making, implementation, and monitoring. **Strengthen Coastal Resilience:** We demand enhanced financial and technical support for local adaptation strategies to combat rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and extreme weather events. The most affected regions, particularly Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and vulnerable coastal communities, must receive urgent assistance.
- **Combat Marine Pollution and Promote the Circular and Blue Economy:** Our constituency calls for intensified efforts to reduce environmental impact and material consumption, particularly by tackling the most critical sources of marine pollution, including plastics, hydrocarbons, and chemical waste. This requires ambitious measures to eliminate plastic waste, improve wastewater treatment, and transition to sustainable fisheries and tourism practices that protect, rather than exploit, marine resources. Embracing circular economy principles will further enhance resource efficiency and minimize waste, contributing to healthier oceans and coastal ecosystems.
- **Secure Multi-Level Governance and Finance for Ocean Protection:** The international community must ensure that local and regional governments have the means to define and implement ocean-related policies effectively. We urge for a dedicated global financing mechanism that enables local action towards achieving SDG 14. A comprehensive multi-level governance framework should empower subnational authorities, particularly intermediary cities, with adequate resources and mandates.
- **Mobilize Science, Innovation, and Knowledge Exchange:** We call for greater investment in ocean science and innovation, not only improving access to data but also strengthening its generation and collection. This requires better coordination between local and global monitoring efforts and stronger collaboration between scientists, policymakers, and communities. Our cities and regions must be equipped with the best available knowledge to drive evidence-based decision-making.
- **Ensure Equality-based, Inclusive and Just Transition Processes:** Considering its proximity to citizens, local and regional governments can join and facilitate the collaboration with communities and stakeholders in processes of co-creation to define common actions to protect coast and marine ecosystems, especially to preserve the rights of future generations for a healthy planet. Local governments will engage communities, indigenous peoples, and local stakeholders in co-designing and co-implementing ocean governance policies. Sustainable ocean management must leave no one behind.

A Call for Global Ocean Governance with Local Action

Concerned with the future of humankind, local and regional governments stand for a strong multilateral system, which adopts the protection of the ocean and seas as the backbone of a worldwide **Nature Pact**, in line with the vision set forth by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in **Living in Harmony with Nature** and the ongoing discussions for a new global biodiversity framework. It is urgent to address the necessary ecological transition of our economies and societies, embracing the principles of **Re-Naturing** to tackle inequalities and rethink our relationship with nature, in defense of humanity's rights to a sustainable planet.

As we get closer to the end of the UN decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021–2030, we demand a systemic transformation in ocean governance that reflects the realities and expertise of local and regional governments. We welcome the establishment of the Ocean Rise & Coastal Resilience Coalition for Cities and Regions as a critical mechanism to drive cooperation, finance, peer-learning, and policy alignment across all levels of government.

In view of the next generation of multilateralism, we emphasize the importance of including local and regional governments at the table of global negotiations.

We stand united in advocating for an ambitious, legally binding, and effective international framework that integrates the voice and leadership of local and regional governments. In this spirit, we encourage the recognition and promotion of *Voluntary Commitments* by coastal cities and local communities, ensuring their initiatives—ranging from pollution reduction to the rehabilitation of mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs—are made visible at national and global levels. These commitments should complement those of national governments and international organizations, fostering synergies, mutual learning, and a stronger role for LRGs in achieving SDG 14. We reaffirm our commitment to a future where oceans are protected, economies are sustainable, and societies thrive in harmony with nature.

The leadership of local and regional governments on these topics, provided that collaboration with other spheres of governments is fostered, could turn the tide of global ocean degradation. Through a strong global cooperation, our constituency is committed to protecting our planet and societies. Together, we can and must turn the tide on ocean degradation and forge a sustainable future for our planet and generations to come.