

Young Voices for the Ocean: Our Time to Act!

Dear decision-makers,

The Panel

The One Ocean Youth panel is a group consisting of 16 young individuals, experts in their respective fields, challenging the status quo and the far too slow pace of transitioning into a sustainable relationship with the Earth due to the reluctance of existing power structures and economic interests.

This statement is a culmination of the panel's discussions and stands as a plea to decision-makers. For too long the voices of scientists, activists and indigenous peoples have not received the prioritization they deserve. We are weary of witnessing expert knowledge being largely disregarded by decision-makers when crucial choices are made. In light of these concerns, we urge that the voices of young experts, the leaders of tomorrow, be more fully amplified and recognized at this time. We continue to express the expectation that our collective statement, research and active participation during One Ocean Week, will be a catalyst for tangible and substantial change.

Values

The ocean-related issues are significant in today's society. Ocean acidification, pollution, habitat destruction, overexploitation of resources and climate change are just some of the great concerns that threaten both the sustainability and health of our oceans.

There is a common core understanding within us, young people with concern for future generations, that the issues we now face regarding the ocean are built upon values. We all need the courage to challenge the decision-makers, and action to be able to handle the threats we face. Curiosity and knowledge are crucial values, where we need curious people who want to understand and learn more, and who are committed to expanding the understanding of our oceans through research and education.

To be able to face the challenges of the oceans, we need to have open dialogues and collaborations across different sectors, policy- and decision-makers, scientists, industry, and

beyond. In addition to this transparency, the inclusion of local communities from all over the world, indigenous peoples and of course us, the youth, are essential for making decisions that take care of the needs of all.

The value of independence is empowering all to take meaningful action regarding the challenges we face – everyone has a role to play. But marine issues cannot be solved individually. We all need to share our knowledge, resources and practices on a global scale to be able to have an impact on the goals of a sustainable ocean in the future.

The current institutions will substantially benefit if we, the youth, are provided with platforms, processes and resources to engage with decision-makers on the basis of shared values for continued and concerted action to advance our collective goals.

Accountability

We appeal that young voices be valued and incorporated in the platforms and discussions where our future is being decided. We call for mechanisms that allow us to hold decision makers accountable to their commitments and exercise the right to question and challenge when actions fall short.

Accountability, in our perception, is an active, continuous process that ensures that ocean governance remains transparent, impactful, and consistent with the principles of sustainable development. It is about creating a legacy of ocean governance that we, as the emerging generation, can inherit with pride and continue with the certainty that our actions are rooted in the promise of a thriving, vibrant ocean for all.

Ocean literacy

Confronted with the 10 UN Ocean Decade Challenges, *goal #10- Change humanity's relationship with the ocean*- emerges as a central pillar that a common understanding of the ocean's vital significance in all our lives is critical to address the remaining challenges.

Ocean literacy is about our knowledge of and connection to the ocean. It is about understanding the extent to which the ocean affects you and vice versa. To understand this influence, we need to connect and learn. The ocean must be accessible to all.

And we must acquire knowledge! It is essential to include ocean literacy in school curricula and education programmes. And taking the whole class out, and giving them access and the ability to connect with the ocean.

Acknowledgement of diverse voices

Every person has a role in the face of oceanic challenges and a unique set of skills and perspectives.

Independence and agency are not just concepts. They are actionable forces that propel individuals towards impactful endeavors. And in the spirit of fostering a panel to discuss ocean conservation, we recognize the imperative of acknowledging diverse voices.

Change gains momentum when it includes contributions from every part of society. That is why we call for the extension of discussions beyond the confines of traditional, secluded policy-making spaces and 'closed rooms'. Transparency and availability are the cornerstones upon which we should build our dialogue, ensuring that every decision made is accessible to and influenced by those it affects. Central to this inclusive approach is the amplification of indigenous voices which are often overlooked. The wisdom and lived experiences of Indigenous communities offer invaluable insights into sustainable stewardship of the ocean, which has been maintained across generations. It is with the narrative of our youth panel members with their personal and community stories, that we find the common ground for our call to action.

Deep sea mining

This panel emphasizes the urgent importance of confronting the Norwegian government's recent actions regarding deep-sea mineral extraction.

We intend to elevate public awareness of seabed mining decisions and to mobilize a united advocacy for the protection of marine ecosystems for present and future generations.

Although Norway has not initiated actual seabed mineral extraction, its preliminary exploration activities are troubling steps that signal to the public and industry stakeholders the likelihood of such developments in Norwegian waters. The present Youth Panel, composed of young leaders, scientists and activists with specialized expertise (such as marine biology and environmental policy), categorically demands that the Norwegian government stop any progress towards seabed mining. The scientists in our panel echo their global counterparts and insist that the Norwegian authorities should abstain from making premature decisions based on an insufficient understanding of the deep-sea environment and the potential impacts of extracting minerals from these profoundly unexplored marine areas.

Sustainable Ocean Governance

Sustainable ocean governance is a goal many countries have committed to pursue.

However, there is a gap between pledges and actions that needs to be addressed. Sustainable ocean governance encapsulates all the UN Decade Challenges, and to tackle them in time drastic transformations need to happen.

Therefore, the panel urges decision makers to not only vaguely commit to, but to actively:

- Guarantee the inclusion and meaningful participation of all relevant actors and groups, especially interest and knowledge of indigenous and local communities, in the formulation, adoption and evaluation of conservation policies and programmes, in compliance with good governance practices such as transparency, inclusiveness and accountability.
- Institute marine protected areas within each nation-state's jurisdiction to safeguard critical marine habitats such as mangroves and kelp forests, coral reefs, and others. Additionally, actively commit to an international responsibility to share approaches of practices and resources, to intensify efforts to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030.
- Counter coastal erosion with strategies that mitigate the adverse effects of man-made structures, to secure food security in developing countries and small island states.
- Reevaluate fishing quotas with a significantly increased frequency compared to current practices.

- Refrain from the exportation of toxic waste substances and ships from corporations and developed countries to developing countries. In the terms of these agreements, it is imperative to exceed current regulations to ensure that recipient countries adopt sustainable management practices, including prohibitions of the dismantlement of ships at the coast and in contact with agricultural structures.
- Cease practices by developed countries that undermine food security and livelihoods in developing countries through overexploitation of their marine resources for aquaculture and offshore energy necessities.
- Implement proactive steps to enforce stricter regulations to eliminate pollution sources including offshore platforms operations, plastics and shipping industries.
- Increase the availability of funding for local and community-driven initiatives to rehabilitate marine life, coastal ecosystems and the well-being of affected populations, particularly in developing countries.
- It is imperative for more nations to assume greater accountability and responsibility in this regard.
- The Norwegian government must immediately cease the process of facilitating the development of deep-sea mining operations, considering warnings from the global scientific community about the adverse impacts of these activities on marine ecosystems.

Tangible outcomes - What do we expect from decision-makers?

In seeking real, lasting change, we look for tangible outcomes—clear, actionable steps that lead to a healthier ocean based on a blend of innovation, respect for diverse perspectives, and unwavering accountability.

We expect decision-makers to commit to measurable goals and transparent progress tracking. This should ensure that promises made are promises kept, fostering trust and ensuring that each step taken is a stride toward a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable use of our oceanic resources.

We expect policies that not only draw from the well of modern science but also honor and incorporate the rich tapestry of indigenous knowledge and diverse perspectives.

We demand an immediate suspension of the rapid advancement of deep-sea mining exploration, an activity that poses immeasurable risks to fragile ocean ecosystems and considering the potential damage to deep seabed ecosystems that we simply do not yet completely comprehend. At this stage, we advocate not just a temporary halt, but a thoughtful, science-based moratorium until it is clear that deep-sea mining activities will not result in irreversible damage.

For the use of the oceans that should not be at the expense of the health and integrity of the life-supporting marine ecosystems of our planet.

Closing remarks

Our message resonates with clarity and purpose. The Young Voices of the Ocean Panel has laid forth actionable steps underscored by a commitment to sustainability and inclusivity.

In closing, we extend a heartfelt invitation to all stakeholders—policymakers, industry leaders, communities, and especially the youth—to heed this call.

The One Ocean Youth Panel 2024



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