

IMPACT STORY

Protecting children's rights at the Ocean-Climate Nexus:

Bringing the Hub's unique perspective
to the UN climate change framework





The Hub supports children and youth's involvement in climate talks. At COP27 in Egypt, the Hub co-organised an event at the Children and Youth Pavilion at the Blue Zone.

The One Ocean Hub was the first and continues to be the leading international authoritative voice speaking on the need to protect children's human rights that are dependent on a healthy ocean. Through our connections with children's rights groups, the Hub has increasingly engaged with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement processes. In a few short years, we have impacted how UN Agencies and civil society organisations engage with the UN climate change framework.

The Hub has taken steps to:

- enhance and secure the right of children to participate in international processes;
- create spaces to explore nature-based (including ocean-based) solutions to climate change that are rooted in children's human rights; and
- amplify the importance of a healthy ocean to children's rights.

Making space for children at climate talks

Children and young people's right to be heard in international negotiations is key to furthering all their rights. The Hub has worked on this at different levels, from directly supporting the involvement of children and youth with climate talks to advising governments and developing a theoretical framework to approach these issues.

The Hub was very engaged at the UK-hosted 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland (Oct.-Nov. 2021). One of the events we led was a roundtable at the Virtual Ocean Pavilion entitled "Children and young people's human rights to a healthy ocean: Their importance for climate change adaptation & mitigation."

The event brought together children's representatives from different regions, UNEP representatives, and researchers to discuss how to address children's priorities in the international climate change framework. At the event, the UNEP representative expressed the agency's commitment to integrate the human rights of children and young people in their work and to create more space for child and youth participation.

In the lead-up to COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt (Nov. 2022), the Hub contributed to the Children's Environmental Rights Initiative (CERI) coalition's piece: "A COP fit for children: How to support children's participation." The briefing provided the UNFCCC Presidency and COP delegations with recommendations on how to support children's participation as observers at the COP.

Discussions around children's rights to the environment often seem primarily focused on climate adaptation. The Hub advocates for a more integrated approach to the triple crises of climate, biodiversity, and toxins.

Illustration: Margherita Brunori, Photo: Luke Caplan



Building on actions such as these, Hub researchers have now developed a new framework for children's participation in international processes. It is introduced in a paper by Sophie Shields, Andrea Longo, Elisa Morgera, and Mia Strand, "Children's Human Rights and the Protection of the Ocean: Adapting international processes on the marine environment for intergenerational learning and upholding children's right to be heard."

While focused on meaningful engagement of children in global ocean forums, the framework can be adapted to other intergovernmental forums as well. The paper has been published in the 2023 Hub-led special issue of the *International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law* on the ocean-climate-human rights nexus.

The Hub has already started to engage with policy communities and coalition partners around this new framework. We shared it with the UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, as input to a thematic report on "Youth participation in intergovernmental forums: challenges and opportunities."

The Hub contributed to a briefing that provided the UNFCCC Presidency and COP delegations with recommendations on how to support children's participation.

Highlighting the potential for nature-based solutions

Discussions around children's rights to the environment often seem primarily focused on climate adaptation. The Hub advocates for a more integrated approach to the triple crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and toxic pollution.

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Prof Elisa Morgera,
One Ocean Hub Director



Alutha Botha, a youth representative from South Africa was one of the speakers at the Hub-led event at the Children and Youth Pavilion at COP27. Photos: Bernadette Snow



Emilie McGlone, from Peace Boat (USA) speaking at the event that focused on biodiversity finance and the ocean-climate-human rights nexus.

The Hub brought attention to nature-based solutions at COP27. With **Mara Ghilan**, a youth representative from the Global Alliance of Universities on Climate, Peace Boat, and Oceanic Global, the Hub co-organised the side-event “Advancing human rights standards in nature-based solutions: lessons from land to sea.” The event was held at the inaugural Children and Youth Pavilion in the UN Climate COP Blue Zone, bringing together children and youth representatives, organisations that work closely with youth, and Dr. **David Boyd**, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Environment and Human Rights. It provided a platform to hear both young voices and experts speak to nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

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At this event, discussion focused in particular on youth leadership, challenges to youth-led climate action, and the need to respect human rights in climate finance. The Hub has carried these themes forward in subsequent actions. In March 2023, the Hub contributed to a joint submission by UNICEF on behalf of CERl and the Children’s Rights Climate Coalition to the UNFCCC’s first Global Stocktake (described as “a process for countries and

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stakeholders to see where they’re collectively making progress towards meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement – and where they’re not”). Hub inputs included support for nature-based (including ocean-based) solutions to climate change that also support the protection of children’s human rights. In June 2023, Hub’s early-career researcher **Mitchell Lennan** served as rapporteur to a session on “Nature-based solutions and blue carbon” at the Bonn Climate Conference.

Bringing the ocean to children’s human rights

Notwithstanding the official inclusion of the ocean on the international climate agenda at COP26, the ocean still remains far from the minds of most international climate negotiators and experts. For instance, the World Resources Institute’s “The State of Climate Action 2022” analyses progress across 40 indicators of action. However, it barely includes the ocean, only giving passing mention to blue carbon and a few indicators for mangroves under Forest and Land and maritime shipping under Transport. Similarly, the 2022 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on racial discrimination in climate change does not refer to the ocean.

Thus, while the Hub works to ensure the protection of children’s rights in the context of climate change action, we are simultaneously committed to ensuring that the ocean is not “forgotten” in the UN climate regime, as children and youth demand across the world. By joining CERl as a core partner in 2022, we have significantly amplified our message. CERl is an international multi-stakeholder platform working to ensure that children’s rights are placed at the

There is much work to be done to ensure that new ocean-based actions on climate change consider children's rights, and that ocean governance bodies act on their obligations to children. Photo from South Africa by Eric Nathan.



centre of environmental decision-making and action. CERl's COP27 (2022) advocacy brief "Incorporating Children's Rights into Climate Action" was the *first time* this international coalition referenced the ocean.

The brief gave the ocean prominent placement as one of six "entry points" for child rights at COP27. Based on Hub research, we explained the current state of play of the ocean-climate nexus in the UNFCCC processes and detailed specific 'asks' of Parties in relation to oceans.

Moving forward

Those working for children's human rights to a healthy environment must include the ocean in their efforts. We've seen how Hub engagement in UNFCCC processes and within children's rights coalitions have brought significantly more attention to the ocean. The UNFCCC has committed to integrating "ocean-based action" into its existing mandates, and we will continue to inform these processes.

At the same time, children's human rights must be at the heart of ocean governance. This means raising the profile of children's human rights at the UNFCCC as well as other relevant international forums. The Hub has brought this vital message to negotiations for a new plastics treaty, on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, and on the regulation of deep-seabed mining at the International Seabed Authority.

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Moving forward, the Hub will continue to translate our researchers' findings into policy recommendations. There is much work to be done to ensure that new ocean-based actions on climate change consider children's rights, and that ocean governance bodies act on their obligations to children. The Hub is committed to strengthening intergenerational equity at the ocean-climate nexus.

Publications:

1. J Knox and E Morgera, "Human rights and the environment: The interdependence of human rights and a healthy environment in the context of national legislation on natural resources" (2022), FAO Legal Paper 109, <https://www.fao.org/3/cb9664en/cb9664en.pdf>.
2. E Morgera, "Biodiversity as a human right and its implications for the EU's external action" (2020). Report to the European Parliament, requested by European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/603491/EXPO_STU\(2020\)603491_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/603491/EXPO_STU(2020)603491_EN.pdf).
3. M Lennan and E Morgera, "The Glasgow Climate Conference (COP26)" (2022), 37 The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law 137-151, https://brill.com/view/journals/estu/37/1/article-p137_6.xml.
4. E Morgera, M Sweeney and S Shields "SDG14 and Children's Human Rights" (2022), <https://oneoceanhub.org/publications/sdg-14-and-childrens-human-rights/>.
5. E Morgera and M Lennan, "Strengthening intergenerational equity at the ocean-climate nexus: Reflections on the UNCRC General Comment No 26" (2022), 52 Environmental Policy and Law 445-459.
6. M Strand, S Shields, E Morgera, D McGarry, AMSN Lancaster, L Brown, and B Snow, "Protecting children's rights to development and culture by re-imagining 'ocean literacies'" (International Journal of Children's Rights, under review).
7. S Shields, A Longo, E Morgera, and M Strand, "Children's human right to be heard at the ocean-climate nexus" (2023), The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law (published online ahead of print 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718085-bja10140>.

