

OCEAN JUSTICE FORUM

# An Equitable and Just Ocean Policy Platform

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## OCEAN JUSTICE FORUM

# Founding Members

**The Ocean Justice Forum is an initiative co-led by Azul, Center for American Progress, Taproot Earth, and Urban Ocean Lab. Over the last 18 months, the Ocean Justice Forum convened leaders from 18 environmental justice, community, Indigenous, and national nonprofit organizations to develop this consensus-based federal ocean policy platform that promotes racial, climate, environmental, and economic justice.**

- Āina Momona
- Azul
- Brown Girl Surf
- Center for American Progress
- Earthecho International
- Earthjustice
- Green 2.0
- Greenpeace USA
- Healthy Gulf
- Interfaith Power & Light
- Native Conservancy
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- North Atlantic Marine Alliance
- Oceana
- Taproot Earth (previously Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy)
- United Houma Nation
- UPROSE
- Urban Ocean Lab

*Ocean Justice Forum was made possible by contributions of time, experience, and wisdom from our member organizations, and by financial support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Oceankind, ClimateWorks Foundation, and the national environmental organizations that participated in our process.*



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# Purpose

To establish a vision for inclusive, equitable, and just ocean policy, the undersigned organizations—environmental justice, community, Indigenous, and national—commit to the principles and policy goals described on the following pages.



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# Coming Together for Ocean Justice

The need to pursue climate and environmental justice does not end at the shore. Access to ocean resources and influence in shaping ocean policy have been inequitable across racial, economic, and generational lines. This is the result of the legacies and patterns of historical racism, colonialism, militarization, and industrialization.

Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) in coastal communities have been disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, including rising sea levels and intensifying storms, as well as by pollution, overfishing, loss of habitat and biodiversity, and coastal gentrification. Especially, for **ocean justice communities**, the pursuit of justice (racial, ethnic, economic, gender, climate, and environmental) is intertwined with the management of marine ecosystems.

The Ocean Justice Forum, an assemblage of 18 environmental justice, community, Indigenous, and national ocean conservation organizations, co-created this consensus definition of **ocean justice**, set of principles, and federal policy platform.

We use the term BIPOC throughout this document with caution, recognizing that injustice is intersectional and complex. Whenever possible, communities should be disaggregated and individually recognized by their preferred racial, cultural, and ethnic identifiers.

While much of this platform is focused on how people interact with the ocean, we acknowledge at the outset that the ocean has intrinsic value above and beyond what we may take or receive from it.



This platform names and identifies **ocean justice communities** to include communities that—as a result of racism and colonialism—have been systematically excluded from power, under-resourced, under-served, marginalized, and/or over-burdened with the health and environmental burdens of industrialization and development. These communities—primarily comprised of Black, Indigenous, people of color, and/or low-income individuals—are on the climate frontline. They are the most vulnerable and the most adversely impacted by environmental and climate injustice and inequitable governance, and must therefore be the primary beneficiaries of just ocean policy.

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# Definition of Ocean Justice

**Ocean Justice exists at the intersection of social inclusion, ocean stewardship, and justice.**

It harnesses a power shift advancing the voices, full participation and leadership of historically excluded Peoples and Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities in ocean decision-making, ensures meaningful and equitable engagement of all communities, and delivers equal access to healthy and prospering shorelines and oceans for all.



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# Principles

These four overarching principles guided the development of our platform and must guide the work to achieve ocean justice.

## OCEAN JUSTICE REQUIRES:

- 01 Inclusive and equitable policy solutions.
- 02 Resourcing communities for conservation and climate adaptation.
- 03 Equitable representation and authority in decision-making.
- 04 Accountability and a just transition.





01

## OCEAN JUSTICE REQUIRES

# Inclusive and equitable policy solutions.

A just system of ocean decision-making, policy development, and management is one where the needs of communities that are most affected by climate change are addressed first. Inequities in policy that stem from historical and modern day injustices, specifically those levied against BIPOC communities, must be proactively addressed and mitigated, and equitable access to the coasts and to the ocean must be ensured for all. A just ocean policy agenda must also honor and support the traditional and customary practices (i.e., cultural and religious uses) of BIPOC communities, and protect the rights of Indigenous peoples.

Ocean and climate solutions must be as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, and

inequities stemming from colonial legacies must also be addressed.

We must diversify the historically elite field of conservation and management, while recognizing and increasing the power of Indigenous peoples to include traditional ecological knowledge and leadership in the management of ocean resources. This should include recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples to give, modify, withhold, or withdraw their free, prior, and informed consent. Scientific researchers must engage in authentic intellectual and financial partnerships with the communities with which they work in order to receive federal funds.



*Inequities in policy that stem from historical and modern day injustices, specifically those levied against BIPOC communities, must be proactively addressed and mitigated.*



**OCEAN JUSTICE REQUIRES**

# Resourcing communities for conservation and climate adaptation.

The climate crisis is both an ocean crisis and an equity crisis. Climate change jeopardizes everything the ocean provides, including the oxygen in the air we breathe, our food systems and coastal economies, our weather and climate, homes for treasured wildlife, and the cultures and ways of life passed to us by our ancestors. It is also causing sea levels to rise, storms to intensify, and flooding to become more frequent and severe—and those impacts are being disproportionately felt by ocean justice communities.

We must protect ocean ecosystems and ocean health, and acknowledge that the burden of conservation is often carried by Indigenous peoples. We must ensure coastal communities, particularly ocean justice communities, have the resources and power they need to adapt to the impacts of climate change, while prioritizing racial, climate, environmental, and economic justice.



*We must protect ocean ecosystems and ocean health, and acknowledge that the burden of conservation is often carried by Indigenous peoples.*





03

### OCEAN JUSTICE REQUIRES

## Equitable representation and authority in decision-making.

*<sup>1</sup> Meaningful consultation, participation, and partnerships as called for in the Ocean Justice Platform is separate and distinct from legal definitions for terms such as “meaningful involvement” or “meaningful participation.” Governmental processes for meaningful involvement or participation need to be improved to reach the meaningful engagement standard and better outcomes for which we advocate here.*

To create policy that benefits and lifts up ocean justice communities, a justice-focused ocean policy agenda must acknowledge the authority and follow the leadership of groups that have been historically excluded from power, including, but not limited to BIPOC communities, youth and elders, and low-income individuals, as well as people in the U.S. territories who are excluded from political representation. A just and equitable system of ocean decision-making, policy development, and management is one where these same groups have real power and the ability to direct or influence change.

Existing community engagement processes have been inadequate. Many processes exist, from formal consultation with Tribes to federal comment periods, but all too often these are viewed as box-checking exercises rather than opportunities for input, reflection, and shaping outcomes. Communities deserve a clear, legally-binding standard for what constitutes meaningful consultation, participation, and partnership.<sup>1</sup> This standard must include long-standing and historically-marginalized communities, as well as federally unrecognized Tribes.



***Existing community engagement processes have been inadequate.***

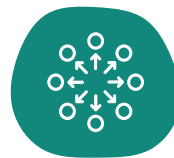
## OCEAN JUSTICE REQUIRES

# Accountability and a just transition.

Along with improving policy design and implementation, we must ensure that existing processes are achieving their stated or intended goals. Examples include delivering on funding promises, ensuring free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples, and providing a significant proportion of ocean and coastal investments to ocean justice communities.

We must recognize that large national ocean conservation organizations have always had prioritized access to funding, including from government sources, foundations, and high-net-worth individuals. Ocean justice requires these large organizations to be accountable for creating deep diversity within their own organizations and creating space and pathways for staff from ocean justice communities to be heard and to lead. Large national organizations must also establish meaningful partnerships with ocean justice organizations and communities and help ensure that such organizations are adequately resourced and funded to facilitate their meaningful participation in policy conversations.

Finally, a just ocean policy agenda is one that recognizes that all communities have the right to a healthy ocean and to a just transition that ensures good jobs, skills training, and economic benefits that are shared by all. Communities who have historically borne the costs of ocean development and climate change should not also be asked to bear the environmental and economic costs of transition and policies to address the climate crisis.



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# An Equitable and Just Ocean Policy Platform

Guided by the preceding principles, an equitable and just approach to ocean policy must:

01

Protect the ocean and the benefits it provides for all.

02

Alleviate the disproportionate burdens placed on ocean justice communities due to ocean pollution.

03

Promote an economy that sustains the ocean and communities that rely on it.

04

Uplift justly-sourced renewable energy from the ocean.

05

Prioritize community social cohesion in disaster response and adaptation investments.



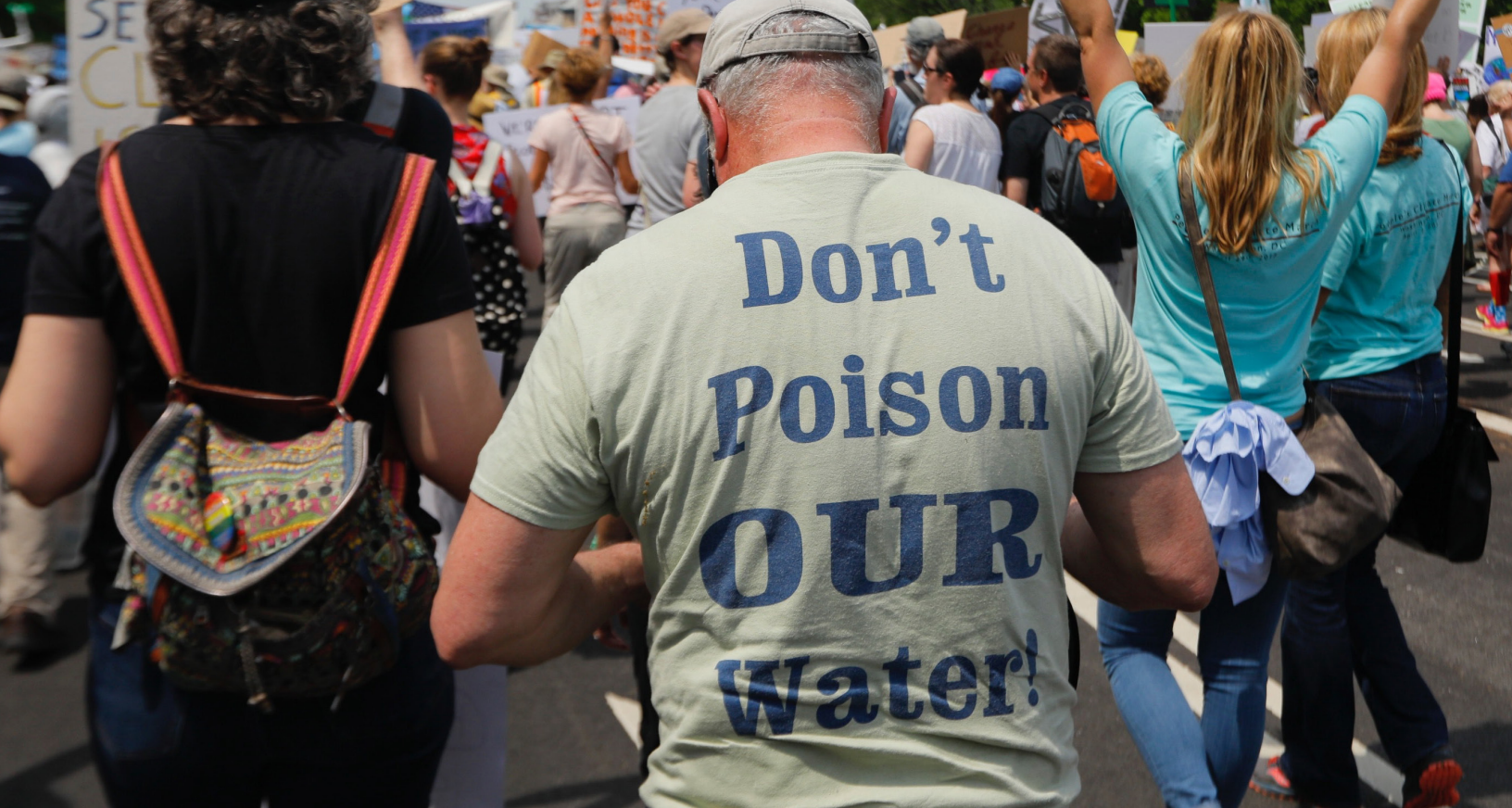


## Protect the ocean and the benefits it provides for all.

The ocean is under threat from industrial resource extraction, climate change, and the biodiversity crisis. Ocean justice communities—especially those whose homes, livelihoods, and ways of life are tightly linked to the ocean and coasts—are most at risk. A clean, biodiverse, and healthy ocean can provide communities with economic opportunities, recreation, cultural and spiritual practices, and other benefits from nature. As we work to protect and restore marine biodiversity and coastal and ocean ecosystems, including through the goal of protecting 30 percent of U.S. ocean habitats and ecosystems by 2030, meaningful partnerships must be crafted with these communities that provide opportunities for shared leadership and sufficient support, rather than replicating the injustices of the past.

To that end, ocean justice communities must be prioritized in ocean conservation and management, including the creation and management of protected areas, distribution of funding and resources, and species conservation. Equitable access to healthy coastal and ocean environments must be provided for ocean justice communities, including for recreational and cultural activities.

For ocean protected areas and fisheries management, Indigenous peoples should have free, prior, and informed consent for design, designations, and management (including systems of co-management where applicable). Subsistence and other use and treaty rights should be appropriately protected.



02

## Alleviate the disproportionate burdens placed on ocean justice communities due to ocean pollution.

We must alleviate the disproportionate burdens placed on ocean justice communities by ocean pollution, including toxins, agricultural runoff, fossil fuels, noise, and plastic. Policymakers must ensure polluting corporations and industries are held legally and financially accountable for their actions, and work towards reducing, removing, and limiting pollution at the source.

This also means cleaning up legacy pollutants from industrialization, removing abandoned industrial infrastructure such as pipelines, and significantly reducing the land-based runoff of fertilizers and pesticides, and lowering noise levels from activities in the ocean. It must also include significantly reducing the export of plastic waste to other countries that often lack the capacity to manage these materials, and implementing land-based and upstream measures to stop future plastic pollution.



***Policymakers must ensure polluting corporations and industries are held legally and financially accountable for their actions.***

## Promote an economy that sustains the ocean and communities that rely on it.

A just ocean economy must sustain and prioritize communities – not corporations. The ocean economy, from fishing to shipping to tourism, should uplift communities, provide family-sustaining jobs, and safeguard ocean life, not simply extract labor and resources. To advance a healthy, resilient, and climate-ready ocean economy, policymakers and managers should ensure ocean justice communities dependent on coastal resources are deeply and meaningfully involved in decision-making, and have equitable access to ocean resources and the ability to support their historic and traditional ways of life. The United States must also fully implement treaties with tribal nations and protections afforded to Indigenous peoples and protect Indigenous use rights in marine ecosystems.

The United States government should also sponsor, support, and enforce fisheries policies that ensure communities' access to food from the sea, and protect the health of ocean resources and ecosystems. The United States must also work to deter illegal fishing and human rights abuses throughout the global seafood supply chains.



*The ocean economy, from fishing to shipping to tourism, should uplift communities, provide family-sustaining jobs, and safeguard ocean life, not simply extract labor and resources.*



04

## Uplift justly-sourced renewable energy from the ocean.

The ocean can provide justly-sourced renewable energy that supports the ocean's life-sustaining properties, protects biodiversity, and is not a source of life-threatening pollution. We reject the continued expansion of extractive energy production and false solutions that prolong our dependence on fossil fuels and continue or increase pollution that affects ocean justice communities. To that end, we advocate for an end to all new offshore oil and gas leasing, and the elimination of taxpayer subsidies for fossil fuel production. No longer should workers and the communities where they live be forced into a false choice between a living wage and their health. Instead, responsibly-sited and responsibly-operated ocean-based renewable energy should prioritize family-sustaining jobs for adjacent communities.

The fossil fuel supply chain, from extraction to processing and transport, has damaged our

health, climate, and environment. Ports must eliminate emissions so that they no longer disproportionately impact the health of the communities nearby, and cargo ships must transition to use justly-sourced renewable clean fuel, while also implementing practices such as reduced ship speeds and discharge limitations, to protect ecosystems and wildlife.

We also must ensure that the minerals needed to support a renewable energy future are sourced sustainably and justly. To that end, a moratorium is needed on any deep seabed mining used to secure these minerals until the cultural and environmental impacts of such mining are understood and addressed. Communities across the Pacific are expected to be on the frontline of this activity and will bear the brunt of damages to ocean health, including fisheries and coral reefs that are central to cultures and sustenance.



## Prioritize community social cohesion in disaster response and adaptation investments.

For too long, government entities have measured the worth of communities they are charged to protect in property values, leaving ocean justice communities in many regions to face rising seas and stronger storms largely alone. State and federal government have also largely failed to support the island and coastal communities being driven from their homes due to sea level rise.

Instead, the federal government should invest to expand community capacity by bolstering planning for adaptation, providing ongoing resources to minimize the climate impacts that are already guaranteed as a result of emissions-to-date, and increasing emergency response funds for those disasters that are expected to become more frequent and severe. Federal investments in climate adaptation and disaster recovery must assist the communities that need them most, not those with the loudest voices, most expensive properties, and best access to legal support and representation. These investments should be led and shaped by the communities themselves in order to ensure that on-the-ground needs are met.

Coastal and working waterfront communities must have the resources and support necessary to make their own short- and long-term decisions. The federal government should establish the high-level leadership and interagency coordination needed for equitable support and planning in order to ensure that investments in climate adaptation prioritize the social cohesion of ocean justice communities.

To ensure that the needs of affected communities are identified and addressed in the aftermath of disaster, agencies must ensure that communities are fully engaged in and leading decisions about response and recovery. Nonprofits that respond to disaster must, at minimum, have an existing relationship with the affected communities, and ideally be deeply rooted in them.

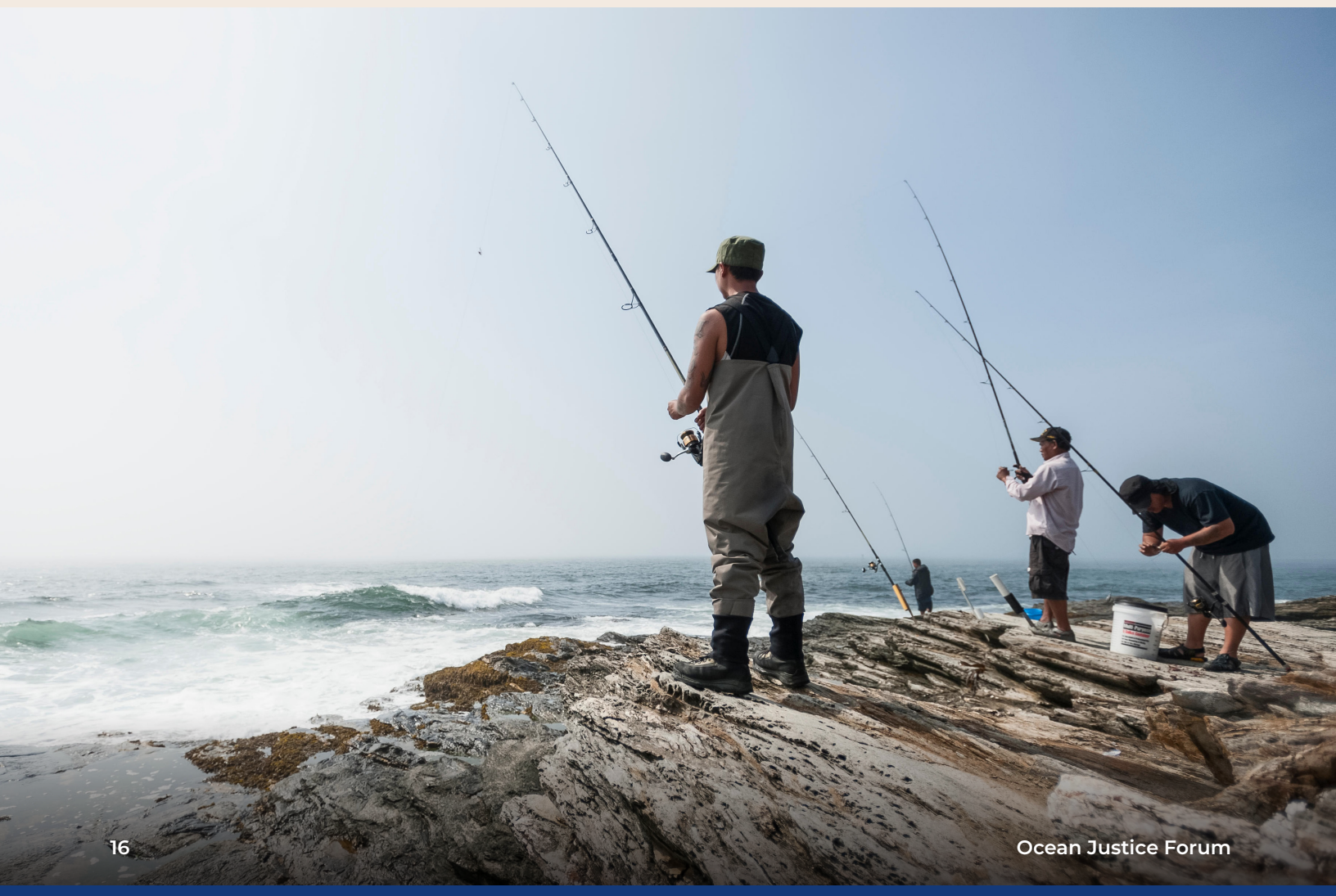


*Federal investments in climate adaptation and disaster recovery must assist the communities that need them most.*

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# Onward, Together, to Ocean Justice

To date, many federal policies, programs, and resourcing decisions have at best failed to advance ocean justice, and at worst further entrenched injustice. To address this, the Ocean Justice Forum offers our consensus definition of “ocean justice,” along with this set of principles and a policy platform. We hope this offering will guide the creation and implementation of policy in the direction of ocean justice.





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Read and sign  
the platform:  
[oceanjusticeforum.info](http://oceanjusticeforum.info)