



Proceedings of the Blue Wave Conference: Youth Empowerment for Ocean Science and Action

30-31 October 2025
Shenzhen, PR China

Proceedings of the Blue Wave Conference: Youth Empowerment for Ocean Science and Action – Opening Ceremony and PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders (PNYL) Session

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Introduction

- I. The Blue Wave Conference: Youth Empowerment for Ocean Science and Action – Opening Ceremony marked the first Youth Conference held in Shenzhen, China, on 30–31 October 2025. The event was organized by China Ocean Mineral Resources R & D Association (COMRA), Global Ocean Capital Promotion Council of Shenzhen, Shenzhen Institute of Guangdong Ocean University, Advanced Institute for Ocean Research, Southern University of Science and Technology (AIOR, SUSTech)/ Shenzhen Ocean University Preparatory Office, Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), and Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) Programme.
- II. The PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders (PNYL) session featured four speakers and two reactors, namely: Mr. Akhmad Nurhijayat from the Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Studies (CCMRS), IPB University, Dr. Sim Wei Hung Clarence from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Ms. Keomanivone PHOUTHAKHANTY from Department of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Lao PDR, Mr. Leo Anthony Castro from Mangroves Matter PH, Dr. Shenghui Li from Guangdong Ocean University, Zhanjiang, China, and Dr. Xuan Zhu from Research Center for Pacific Island Countries (RCPIC) of Liaocheng University.
- III. Supporting documents may be found in the Annexes:
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1. Opening Ceremony of the Blue Wave Conference: Youth Empowerment for Ocean Science and Action

- 1.1. Dr. Shenghui Li from Guangdong Ocean University, Zhanjiang, China welcomed all participants to the first Blue Wave Conference. She then called keynote speakers for the opening ceremony, starting with Dr. Zhanhai Zhang, President of China Ocean Mineral Resources R&D Association. Dr. Zhang welcomed the participants of the Conference and highlighted that the blue economy is thriving and global consensus on ocean governance continues to grow. In response, he emphasized the need for young people to act decisively—empowering marine science through concrete actions and contributing innovative solutions for sustainable ocean development. He shared that this vision inspired the Blue Wave Conference, with the theme “Youth Empowerment for Ocean Science and Action,” reflecting the belief that the next generation of researchers and community leaders are not only future leaders but active changemakers today.
- 1.2. He expressed hope that the conference would inspire youth-led innovation in marine science, build consensus on marine policy, and translate into concrete action for marine sustainability. He concluded by encouraging young talents to lead the “Blue Wave” toward a promising future and expressed his hope that the discussions in Shenzhen would foster new ideas, partnerships, and friendships that bring greater energy and purpose to the Conference.
- 1.3. Next was Jian Lin, Chair Professor of SUSTech and Member of Academia Europaea, who expressed his enthusiasm for joining a conference dedicated to youth and the future of ocean sciences. He shared his background as a former scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, emphasizing that the world is rapidly changing and that young people are the driving force behind this transformation. He underscored that youth represent the future of every nation and play a crucial role in advancing ocean science and sustainability. Stressing that the ocean knows no national boundaries—“if you pollute, we suffer; if we pollute, you suffer”—he called for collective action to protect and manage a shared, interconnected ocean.
- 1.4. He highlighted Shenzhen as a model of rapid development and innovation, noting its transformation from a small village 45 years ago into a “Global Ocean City.” Mr. Lin shared that the city is now home to groundbreaking initiatives such as the establishment of Shenzhen Ocean University, the National Deep Sea Research Center, and the Shenzhen Ocean Museum—projects that together symbolize a bold vision for the future of ocean science, economy, and technology. He emphasized that openness is the very DNA of the ocean and that solving global challenges requires cooperation among all nations. Concluding his remarks, he urged the youth to take active roles in shaping a sustainable ocean future, affirming that this conference marks just the beginning of many future collaborations aimed at benefiting all humankind.

- 1.5. Following Mr. Jian Lin was Mr. Yishan LU, Vice President of Guangdong Ocean University. Mr. Yishan Lu warmly welcomed participants to the Blue Wave Conference at the scenic Shenzhen Bay, expressing his honor in hosting ocean scientists and young talents from around the world on behalf of the Shenzhen Institute of Guangdong Ocean University. He noted that since the launch of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development in 2021, the global ocean community has been infused with new vitality and vision. Holding the conference in Shenzhen—a frontier of China’s reform and innovation—symbolizes a shared commitment to a sustainable future. Acknowledging the urgent challenges of climate change and marine biodiversity loss, he emphasized that addressing these global issues requires transformative action and stronger collaboration. He underscored the essential role of young scientists in advancing ocean research and protecting the planet’s marine ecosystems.
- 1.6. Mr. Lu shared that Guangdong Ocean University upholds the motto “Broad learning, clear virtue, the sea and profound action,” reflecting its dedication to cultivating marine talent and advancing research in marine biotechnology, conservation, and sustainable resource use. He highlighted that the establishment of the Shenzhen Institute in 2016 expanded this vision, integrating research in marine biology, new materials, and environmental monitoring to bridge science and industry across the Greater Bay Area. He encouraged participants to continue writing a new chapter in ocean science, reminding them that the ocean connects all humankind and that its protection depends on collective action.
- 1.7. He concluded by expressing his hope that the Blue Wave Conference will inspire lasting partnerships and innovation, wishing everyone good health, new friendships, and meaningful inspiration. He also extended appreciation to the PEMSEA team for their strong support and collaboration, recalling his first meeting with Executive Director Amy Leung in 2018 in the Philippines, and expressing enthusiasm for future Blue Wave Conferences, possibly to be held in Zhanjiang, China.
- 1.8. Lastly, Aimee Gonzales, Executive Director of PEMSEA, welcomed participants to the Blue Wave Conference on Youth Empowerment for Ocean Science and Action. She emphasized that the event was not only a platform to discuss the future of the oceans but also to spark a youth-led movement for ocean sustainability. She underscored that the oceans, covering more than seventy percent of the planet, are the lifeblood of ecosystems and economies and hold the key to a sustainable future.

- 1.9. Ms. Gonzales introduced PEMSEA as a regional, partnership-based organization dedicated to fostering healthy and resilient coasts and oceans through collaboration and inclusivity. From its beginnings with 11 Country Partners and 12 Non-Country Partners, the network has expanded to include 59 local governments and 25 learning centers under the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA). She highlighted that this youth-driven conference aligns with the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration's call for a "whole-of-society" approach and reflects PEMSEA's refined strategy toward 2030.
- 1.10. She emphasized the vital role of youth as the next generation of coastal and marine leaders, whose creativity and innovation are essential to addressing marine pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Since 2006, PEMSEA has engaged young people as key partners in advancing sustainable ocean management. Ms. Gonzales concluded by encouraging participants to continue working together, create positive "waves" of change, and take action to protect the blue planet for future generations.
- 1.11. Dr. Shenghui Li, thanked all speakers for their opening remarks and proceeded to the next segment of the opening ceremony which was the release of the "2025 Blue Wave Shenzhen Initiative" Highlighting the 10
- 1.12. The opening ceremony ended with a signing ceremony of the Collaborative Innovation Institute of Deep-Sea Technology and Engineering.

2. PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders Session: "Rising Tides, Rising Leaders: Youth Science and Action for a Resilient Ocean."

- 2.1. Ms. Francesca Cortez, Secretariat Assistant and host, opened the PEMSEA session and welcomed all participants to the session on PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders Session titled "Rising Tides, Rising Leaders: Youth Science and Action for a Resilient Ocean."
- 2.2. Ms. Aimee Gonzales, Executive Director of the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), welcomed participants to the "Rising Tides, Rising Leaders" session. She reaffirmed PEMSEA's mission to foster healthy and resilient coasts, oceans, and communities through integrated coastal management and strategic partnerships—efforts rooted in collaboration and inclusivity, two of the organization's core values.

- 2.3. She highlighted PEMSEA's longstanding commitment to youth engagement through initiatives such as the East Asian Seas (EAS) Youth Forum, held every three years alongside the EAS Congress, which has brought together over 300 young leaders, and the PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders (PNYL), which unites youth advocates across the region. Both platforms aim to empower young people as active leaders and partners in advancing the sustainable development of coasts and oceans.
- 2.4. Ms. Gonzales noted that the session builds on these efforts by engaging the young leaders present to help shape PEMSEA's strategy for the next five years—particularly in identifying ways to further strengthen youth empowerment and participation in ocean governance and coastal sustainability.
- 2.5. Ms. Cortez then introduced the event as a milestone in strengthening collaboration in marine science, education, and youth engagement, marking the Signing Ceremony of the Letter of Cooperation between Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and the Asia Institute of Oceanology and Research (AIOR) of the Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech).
- 2.6. She invited on stage Mr. Jian Lin, Chair Professor and Director of the Advanced Institute for Ocean Research, Southern University of Science and Technology, and Leader of the Shenzhen Ocean University Preparatory Office, together with Ms. Aimee Gonzales, Executive Director of PEMSEA, along with their respective witnesses, for the official signing of the Letter of Cooperation. The partnership was highlighted as a symbol of shared commitment to a future where science, innovation, and youth leadership unite to sustain the oceans for generations to come.
- 2.7. Following the signing ceremony, the session proceeded with the introduction of the main program. Ms. Cortez invited participants to transition to the next segment, which began with an overview of the session's objectives and featured presentations from inspiring youth speakers under the theme "Youth Science and Action for a Resilient Ocean."
- 2.8. Ms. Francesca Cortez introduced the moderator for the session, Ms. Abigail Cruzada, Secretariat Coordinator (PRF) and the four featured young leaders from across the East Asian Seas region, each presenting their innovative contributions toward ocean sustainability; Mr. Akhmad Nurhijayat from the Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Studies (CCMRS), IPB University, Dr. Sim Wei Hung Clarence from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Ms. Keomanivone PHOUTHAKHANTY from Department of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Lao PDR, Mr. Leo Anthony Castro from Mangroves Matter PH.

- 2.9. Ms. Cruzada took over as moderator of the session. She opened by expressing her gratitude and enthusiasm for moderating the discussion, noting that it was inspiring to be among so many passionate young leaders and early-career ocean professionals. She shared that it was refreshing to see a conference where many participants were from her own generation, expressing her excitement to learn from their insights and experiences.
- 2.10. Ms. Cruzada provided an overview of the session, explaining that PEMSEA has been supporting ocean and coastal governance in the region for over three decades through the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA). She highlighted major progress in the region, including the expansion of marine protected areas, the adoption of integrated coastal management by more local governments, strengthened science-based policies and planning, and enhanced collaboration in innovation and community engagement. However, she also noted persistent gaps—such as fragmented solutions to transboundary issues, limited translation of science into policy and practice, and the lack of integration of community knowledge and youth perspectives in national decision-making.
- 2.11. She emphasized that while youth contributions are often impactful, they tend to be short-term or project-based and not always structurally supported. Through this session, she hoped to explore ways to integrate youth leadership more systematically into regional and national mechanisms. The guiding question for the session was how to create systems and partnerships that allow youth leadership to connect, grow, and thrive.
- 2.12. Ms. Cruzada outlined the flow of the session, which featured four lightning talks from young professionals presenting their work on climate change, biodiversity, sustainable fisheries, and water quality management. This was followed by a panel discussion on the challenges and opportunities for youth in advancing ocean sustainability, and concluding reflections from two reactors who linked the discussions to broader regional action.

Social Ecological System of Shark and Ray Fisheries Case Study in Indonesia

- 2.13. The first presenter was Mr. Akhmad Nurhijayat from the Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Studies (CCMRS), IPB University who presented the social ecological system of shark and ray fisheries case study in Indonesia. He introduced his background, noting his role as Assistant for the Indonesia Stakeholder Study Group (ISSG) under the South Asia Framework for Ocean Action and Mitigation (SIFOM) of the Climate Work Center, Munich University. He is also a collaborative research fellow between IPB University and Oxford University. Since 2024, his PhD research has focused on the conservation and management of sharks and rays in Indonesia, conducted in partnership with local institutions and the Mobula Project Indonesia under the Manta Trust Global network.

- 2.14. Mr. Nurhijayat explained that Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic state, has a complex and dynamic fisheries system. His case study examines small-scale demersal fisheries targeting snapper, grouper, and crustaceans, where sharks and rays are often caught as bycatch. His research identified 17 shark species—six of which are critically endangered—and 22 ray species, seven of which are critically endangered. Through collaboration with partners from Oxford University and the Mobula Project Indonesia, his study seeks to inform policy frameworks that align with Indonesia's long-term ocean sustainability goals (2025–2045). He emphasized that effective management of critically endangered species requires integrating conservation, socio-economic, and policy approaches under the broader principles of sustainable resource use and blue economy development. He concluded by reaffirming his commitment to promoting sustainable shark and ray fisheries in Indonesia.

Water Quality and Discharge Management

- 2.15. Next presenter was Ms. Keomanivone PHOUTHAKHANTY from the Department of Water Resources who discussed water quality and discharge management. She first expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the Blue Wave Conference and to share her department's ongoing efforts to ensure sustainable water management. She noted that although Lao PDR is a landlocked country, it remains closely connected to the coastal and marine environment through the Mekong River Basin, which plays a vital role in supporting both national and regional ecosystems. She highlighted that water quality in the basin faces pressures from domestic wastewater, agricultural runoff, and mining activities—key challenges that the department continues to address.
- 2.16. Ms. Phouthakhanty explained that the Department of Water Resources is mandated to oversee both water quantity and quality, ensuring the effective implementation of national water management policies. The department has developed a National Water Quality Management Plan and a National Water Resource Action Plan, both grounded in the national water law and adopted in June 2020. These frameworks provide the policy and regulatory foundation for monitoring and improving water quality across the country. She shared that Laos operates a nationwide water quality monitoring network with approximately 265 sampling points covering national, provincial, and district levels. Field activities include regular sampling and laboratory analysis following national monitoring standards. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of continuous monitoring, data-driven management, and regional cooperation to safeguard water quality and support ocean health.

Mangroves Matter's work in mainstreaming marine conservation

- 2.17. The third presenter was Mr. Leo Anthony Castro from Mangroves Matter PH (MMPH). Mr. Leo shared the organization's work in mainstreaming marine conservation, with a focus on mangrove forests, their biodiversity, and the coastal communities that depend on them. He emphasized the vital ecosystem services mangroves provide, including carbon sequestration, coastal protection, water filtration, and fisheries support. Mangroves serve as nurseries for many commercially important marine species and as key sources of livelihood through restoration initiatives and ecotourism. However, he highlighted that mangrove ecosystems continue to face threats from urbanization, reclamation, aquaculture conversion, and plastic pollution, all of which contribute to their degradation.
- 2.18. Mr. Castro also presented MMPH's four main pillars: science communication, policy lobbying, community engagement, and youth leadership. He shared examples of their advocacy work, such as campaigns for single-use plastic bans, the establishment of 11 new protected areas—seven of which have already been signed into law—and lobbying for the National Coastal Greenbelt Bill and the High Seas Treaty (BBNJ Agreement). He concluded with a message of encouragement, noting that impactful environmental action often begins with small, local initiatives, citing how MMPH grew from a campus organization into a national youth movement that recently organized the first-ever National Mangrove Youth Summit in the Philippines.

Sentinels of Change from the Arctic to Tropical Coasts

- 2.19. The last presenter, Dr. Sim Wei Hung Clarence from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, discussed what he sees as sentinels of change from the Arctic to tropical coasts. He shared insights from his research on the ecological roles of microorganisms in marine ecosystems. Drawing from his PhD work in the Arctic, he emphasized that microorganisms form the foundation of polar food webs, acting as the “primary producers” in regions without vegetation. His studies revealed that sea ice hosts diverse microorganisms vital to the survival of small herbivores such as copepods and krill. However, with rising global temperatures and sea ice loss, these foundational organisms—and consequently entire Arctic ecosystems—face disruption. His research also found evidence of “atlantification,” or the intrusion of warmer-water microorganisms from the Atlantic into the Arctic, signaling major ecological shifts at the base of the marine food web.

- 2.20. Dr. Sim also discussed his current research on microorganisms that live on seagrasses and corals, explaining their critical functions in photosynthesis, nutrient cycling, disease prevention, and potentially in thermal protection amid ocean warming. He underscored the importance of science communication, sharing that he uses social media, podcasts, and news platforms to make marine science more accessible and combat misinformation. He concluded by reminding young scientists of their responsibility to share research beyond academia and to actively engage with both the public and policy sectors for greater environmental impact.

Panel Discussion

- 2.21. Ms. Cruzada thanked all the presenters for sharing their work and passion, noting how diverse and creative youth-led actions can be—from science and community engagement to policy development and innovation. She then opened the panel discussion to explore what makes it difficult to sustain such initiatives, the kinds of support young professionals need, and how collaboration through networks like the PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders (PNYL) can strengthen collective impact.
- 2.22. Starting with the question on the biggest barriers youth face in scaling up their contributions to ocean and coastal work, Ms. Cruzada addressed Mr. Akhmad Ijay, asking about the gaps he sees in data use, governance, or recognition of local knowledge when working with small-scale fisheries and coastal communities. Mr. Ijay emphasized that youth are agents of change, but noted that challenges persist in improving and consolidating fisheries data—especially for critical and endangered species such as sharks and rays. He highlighted the need for stronger data collection, wider networking, and greater access to regional and global information to better inform policy and promote sustainable fisheries management.
- 2.23. Ms. Cruzada then directed the next question to Ms. Keomanivone Phouthakhy, asking, “What are the challenges for youth in influencing pollution management or connecting river work to coastal outcomes?”
- 2.24. Ms. Keomanivone explained that one of the main difficulties lies in the lack of a systematic water quality database, which makes it hard to consolidate and access data across different monitoring networks. Without centralized and accessible information, it becomes challenging for young people to translate data into meaningful action or implementation. She also highlighted limitations in technical and financial resources, particularly in providing capacity-building opportunities for youth to strengthen their knowledge and skills in water quality and pollution management. Ms. Cruzada noted that these are common issues across many countries—especially limited access to data, funding constraints, and the need to invest more in youth capacity development.
- 2.25. She then turned to Mr. Leo Anthony Castro, asking, “In community-based mangrove conservation, what tensions or gaps emerge between youth-led mobilization and long-term institutional support?”

- 2.26. Mr. Castro responded that funding remains one of the biggest challenges faced by youth organizations. He explained that Mangrove Matters PH operates independently and relies heavily on grants, partnerships, and fundraising efforts. However, many grants do not cover operational or professional fees, which makes sustaining initiatives difficult. He added that for rural and coastal youth groups, the challenges are even greater—limited resources, lack of access to networks or mentorship, and fewer opportunities to join regional platforms or conferences. These, he noted, are the persistent gaps that hinder the long-term sustainability of youth-led conservation work.
- 2.27. Ms. Cruzada then posed the final question to Dr. Sim Wei Hung Clarence, “In your experience as a researcher, what limits early-career scientists from applying their findings to policy or regional collaboration on climate and coastal resilience?”
- 2.28. Dr. Clarence responded that while he could not speak for all countries, he felt fortunate to be in Singapore, where the government actively engages researchers in policy and decision-making processes. He noted that this was not always the case a decade ago, but today, even early-career scientists like himself have opportunities to be heard and contribute to national discussions. He added that while Singapore has made significant progress in bridging science and policy, he hopes researchers, NGOs, and youth organizations across the region will also have equal opportunities and platforms to engage their governments and influence decisions on climate and coastal resilience.
- 2.29. Ms. Cruzada thanked everyone for sharing their insights, noting that there are persistent and common barriers among the experiences shared. She emphasized the importance of identifying what systems could better support young professionals in strengthening their capacities and sustaining their contributions effectively.
- 2.30. She then posed a follow-up question: “Which actors or institutions do you think could play a stronger role in supporting youth—such as government, research institutions, or civil society organizations? And where do you see the gaps between the support that currently exists and what youth actually need?”
- 2.31. She then invited Ms. Keomanivone Phouthakhanty and Mr. Leo Anthony Castro to share their thoughts.
- 2.32. Ms. Keomanivone Phouthakhanty responded that in Lao PDR, strengthening youth capacity requires more focused training programs on technical skills such as environmental monitoring, hydrological assessment, and water quality management. She noted that these opportunities remain limited, and emphasized that the government has a vital role to play in building youth capacity, providing access to data, and integrating youth efforts into national policy frameworks.

- 2.33. Mr. Leo Anthony Castro, on the other hand, shared that institutions can provide crucial resources for youth initiatives, though the level of support varies across countries. He highlighted the roles of civil society and private organizations in offering mentorship, training, and seed funding, while the academe can help bridge science and practice through research support. He added that youth themselves form a strong support system—through passion, determination, and collaboration, they can continue advancing shared advocacies for coastal and ocean sustainability.
- 2.34. Ms. Cruzada thanked both speakers for their insights and introduced one of PEMSEA's key initiatives—the PEMSEA Networks of Local Governments and Learning Centers—which provide various capacity-building activities across the region. She shared that PEMSEA is currently exploring ways to further utilize these networks to engage early-career ocean professionals, offering mentorship and training opportunities to strengthen youth participation in coastal and ocean governance.
- 2.35. Ms. Cruzada then addressed the next question to Dr. Clarence and Mr. Akhmad Ijay, noting the earlier discussions on barriers and institutional support. She asked how regional youth groups could strengthen their role in empowering young professionals—particularly how the PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders (PNYL) could connect with their ongoing work or networks at national and community levels.
- 2.36. Dr. Clarence responded that, as cliché as it may sound, there is power in numbers. He shared that he is deeply inspired by student-led groups in Singapore—from high schools to universities—that advocate for conservation and environmental causes. He emphasized that if these youth groups across Southeast and East Asia could collaborate through inter-country efforts, events, or even online campaigns, they could collectively capture greater public and government attention.
- 2.37. Mr. Akhmad Ijay, on the other hand, shared that he is part of the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers (PNLC) under IPB University, which works on areas such as marine protected areas (MPAs), integrated coastal management (ICM), and capacity development. He noted that while local institutions often do not directly follow global issues, networks like the PNLC help bridge that gap by providing access to global perspectives and information. He emphasized that the PNLC plays an important role in connecting local knowledge and experiences with broader international discussions, thereby strengthening cooperation and raising awareness at the community level.
- 2.38. To close the panel discussion, Ms. Cruzada asked all presenters to share what change they hope to see for youth engagement in ocean and coastal action in the coming years. The panelists responded with the following messages: “Don’t change, just keep fighting,” “Youth be seen as equal partners and part of decision-making,” “Youth empowerment means more equality in management in the future,” and “Together to be better.”

- 2.39. Ms. Cruzada thanked the youth panel for the thoughtful and inspiring reflections which will be useful in further developing the PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders. It is also a wish of PEMSEA to be able to give youth a voice in the decision-making platform. So that we reinvigorate the PNYL so they can be part of and represent the youth in the East Asian Partnership Council which discusses the strategic directions for the East Asian region in terms of sustainably managing the oceans and coasts

Reactors Insights


- 2.40. To connect these reflections to the broader regional and governance context, Ms. Cruzada introduced two reactions who have worked with PEMSEA. Dr. Shenghui Li from Guangdong Ocean University, Zhanjiang, China and Dr. Xuan Zhu from Research Center for Pacific Island Countries (RCPIC) of Liaocheng University.
- 2.41. Dr. Shenghui Li expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to share feedback and highlighted two key points. First, she emphasized the value of diversity among participants—coming from different academic and professional backgrounds such as fisheries biology, conservation, and climate science—which fosters a richer exchange of perspectives. She noted that early-career researcher networks, like ECOP and those supported by PEMSEA, provide not only opportunities for collaboration but also emotional support and encouragement among peers facing similar challenges. Reflecting on her own experience since attending her first EAS Congress seven years ago, Dr. Li shared how such international dialogues and partnerships have inspired her to contribute to mentoring and supporting other young professionals.
- 2.42. Second, Dr. Li underlined the importance of seeking multiple sources of funding and collaboration, especially in the current economic climate. She cited the Blue Wave Conference as an example of a joint effort supported by NGOs, governments, and universities, demonstrating how diverse partnerships can strengthen research and project implementation. She encouraged participants to explore similar collaborative approaches in their own work to expand opportunities and impact.
- 2.43. Dr. Xuan Zhu began by expressing her gratitude and delight at being part of the session, noting that it felt like returning to the PEMSEA family with whom she had previously collaborated. She shared that, having started her career about 15 years ago, she could relate to the experiences of the young professionals in the panel—particularly their efforts to engage with local communities and strengthen systems for water monitoring and ecosystem management across borders.

- 2.44. Dr. Zhu acknowledged the common challenges raised by the presenters, such as limited access to funding, data, and other resources. She emphasized that building and maintaining networks is essential to overcoming these barriers. Networks not only connect people but also link them to new resources, ideas, and funding opportunities. She noted that gatherings like the Blue Wave Conference play a crucial role in bringing together young scientists and professionals from diverse backgrounds to foster collaboration and innovation.
- 2.45. On future partnerships, Dr. Zhu highlighted several regional and international initiatives that could further support youth engagement in ocean and coastal governance. These include the UN Ocean Decade Early Career Professional Project, which provides training and development opportunities; the IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC), which hosts youth forums and offers financial support for young scientists to participate in international conferences; and the APEC Ocean and Fisheries Working Group, which supports ocean-related initiatives and skills development projects under its “Blue Citizen” program.
- 2.46. She concluded by encouraging young professionals to continue seeking diverse sources of funding and expertise—from governments, NGOs, and international partners—to amplify their voices and influence in decision-making processes. Dr. Zhu expressed her eagerness to continue collaborating with youth leaders and researchers in the future.
- 2.47. Ms. Cruzada thanked both reactors for sharing their valuable insights and highlighting opportunities for collaboration. She agreed on the importance of networking and providing youth with access to resources to better utilize and apply their work. She noted that many governments face challenges due to limited technical manpower and expertise in addressing issues that young professionals are already working on. Hence, it is encouraging to see cross-cutting opportunities where partnerships can be strengthened and youth can be more engaged in ongoing initiatives.
- 2.48. She also emphasized the need to inform partners that there are young experts who are passionate and willing to contribute to advancing ocean and coastal action. Ms. Cruzada concluded by thanking the reactors for their thoughtful reflections and for reminding everyone that youth engagement is essential in decision-making—especially in the ocean sector, which, as she noted, is “an aging population” that needs more young ocean leaders to take on today’s growing challenges. She then opened the floor for questions, comments, and additional reflections from participants.

Participants Reaction

- 2.49. Mr. Sou Phalla from the Ministry of Environment, Cambodia, shared his reflections, noting Cambodia's growing efforts toward youth engagement in environmental protection. He explained that while the country has many regulations on environmental protection, enforcement remains limited. However, he emphasized the important role of youth in driving change, citing a successful national campaign led by the Ministry of Environment called "Today I Will Not Use Plastic Bags."
- 2.50. Through this campaign, around 40 million Cambodians, including five million youth, participated in efforts to reduce plastic waste flowing into the ocean. As a result, Cambodia achieved an 85% reduction in plastic bag imports. Mr. Phalla shared that this initiative has helped raise awareness among people of all ages—from children to older citizens—about the environmental impacts of plastic. Communities across the country have begun cleaning their homes, workplaces, and public spaces to combat plastic pollution. He added that while the first step focused on reducing plastic bags, future efforts aim to address other types of plastic waste as well.
- 2.51. Mr. Omar Hussein, Director of the Brilliant Blue Challenge from Canada, shared his reflections, noting that his program currently operates in around 40 countries. Coming from the tech industry, he offered observations on the blue economy based on his experience so far.
- 2.52. He highlighted that fragmentation and siloed efforts are common challenges across regions, emphasizing the need to break down these silos and foster greater collaboration. Mr. Hussein also noted that many initiatives tend to duplicate efforts that already exist elsewhere, when in fact, there are opportunities to learn from other regions and build on existing programs.
- 2.53. He mentioned, for example, that some of the challenges raised by Mr. Leo might already have potential solutions or similar initiatives in other countries, such as Singapore. He concluded by encouraging participants to look for opportunities to collaborate and learn from one another, remarking that "sometimes what you're looking for is just next door."
- 2.54. Ms. Cruzada thanked everyone who shared their insights and invited all presenters and participants to join for a group photo to close the session.

Annex 1 - Programme


 会议手册-Conference+Manual.pdf

Annex 2 - Presentation


[Link](#)

Annex 3 - Photos

<https://muuarv253q.inmuu.com/v2/photolive/news/5167025>

 Photos

Annex 4 - List of participants

 List Of Participants