

World Commission on Environmental Law (WCEL) Report 2021–2025

Chair: Christina Voigt

INTRODUCTION

During the 2021–2025 quadrennium, WCEL continued promoting the environmental rule of law globally through the joint work of its Chair Prof. Dr Christina Voigt and Deputy Chair Ayman Cherkaoui, its Steering Committee (SC), eight Specialist Groups (SGs), the introduction of four Task Forces (TF) and WCEL members in general.

MEMBERSHIP

Starting from zero members in 2021, WCEL now counts 1,441 members, from 119 countries.

Gender composition	Number of members	Percentage of total members
Female	739	51.28%
Male	684	47.47%
Gender non-conforming	4	0.28%
Prefer not to disclose	14	0.97%

Age representation	Number of members	Percentage of total members
18-35	368	25.54%
36-50	667	46.29%
51-65	306	21.24%
65 or older	100	6.94%

Regional representation	Number of members	Percentage of total members
Africa	154	10.69%
East Europe, North and Central Asia	44	3.05%
Meso and South America	200	13.88%
North America and the Caribbean	224	15.54%
Oceania	93	6.45%
South and East Asia	258	17.9%
West Asia	17	1.18%
West Europe	451	31.3%

In this period, WCEL has provided a global forum for legal exchanges, lessons learned and capacity-building on environmental law. It has brought together judges, academics and practitioners in exchanges about the role of law in nature conservation and ecologically sustainable resource use. WCEL has also provided legal assistance to many areas of work of the IUCN Secretariat and other IUCN Commissions. It has stimulated legal changes and worked at the forefront of international, regional and local initiatives to review and revise existing legal structures and to create a legal system which supports the transformations necessary for addressing environmental challenges in a just, effective and progressive manner.

For example, WCEL led IUCN's Advisory Opinion submissions before three international tribunals: [the Inter-American Court of Human Rights \(IACtHR\)](#) regarding the request for an advisory opinion to clarify the scope of State Obligations to respond to the climate emergency; [the historic advisory proceedings before the International Court of Justice \(ICJ\)](#) on the Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change; and [the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea \(ITLOS\)](#) on case 31: "Request

for an Advisory Opinion submitted by the Commission of Small Island States (COSIS) on Climate Change and International Law”.

In October 2022, the Commission held the [3rd IUCN WCEL World Environmental Law Congress in Oslo, Norway](#). The topic of the Congress was the “Transformative Power of Law: Addressing Global Environmental Challenges”. It lasted for four days and included 291 speakers (more than 750 participants in total, 377 in person and more than 400 online) from 65 different countries.

Following its recent tradition, in May 2025 WCEL hosted the [4th IUCN WCEL World Environmental Law Congress in Rabat, Morocco](#) under the topic “Integrated Legal Protection of Air, Ocean and Land”. The 4th Congress was held over three days, and included 200 speakers who contributed to the success of this edition which counted approximately 2000 participants (in person and online) from 66 countries.

SPECIALIST GROUPS/TASK FORCES

Biodiversity Law Specialist Group (BLSG)

Chair: Emmanuel Kasimbazi

Deputy Chair: Michell Lim

The Biodiversity Law Specialist Group (BLSG) was established at the start of the 2021–2025 quadrennium. Since then, the BLSG has contributed to core issues of the IUCN *Nature 2030* Programme and across its five priorities and pathways to transformative change.

In recognition of the interconnected and multifaceted nature of biodiversity (and by extension biodiversity law), much of the work of the BLSG since its establishment has been to coordinate group membership and to connect with existing Specialist Groups within the WCEL, across the wider Commission and beyond. The BLSG has also contributed to the development of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) in the lead up to its adoption at CBD COP15 in 2022 and subsequently to its implementation.

Following a survey of members to facilitate understanding of member expertise and interests, six working groups were set up to address legal issues as they relate to the following topics: 1) Biodiversity-Related Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs); 2) Biodiversity Litigation; 3) Biodiversity and Human Rights; 4) Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities; 5) Convention on Biological Diversity’s Global Biodiversity Framework; 6) Access and Benefit Sharing. The BLSG is currently consolidating the governance structure of each of these groups.

During the quadrennium, BLSG members have produced over 100 peer-reviewed publications including many that have examined the KMGBF, the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species, Indigenous, forest, animal and human rights. The group is developing an IUCN publication on Target 3 (“30 by 30”) of the KMGBF co-authored with the World Commission on Protected Areas and the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy. In collaboration with NGO Conservation Litigation, the BLSG is finalising guidelines on Conservation Litigation. The BLSG has also been involved in and hosted a number of high-profile webinars [on the KMGBF](#) (with Convention on Biological Diversity Former Executive Secretary Elizabeth Mrema) and on climate/nature litigation.

Climate Change Law Specialist Group (CCLSG)

Co-Chair: Francesco Sindico

Co-Chair: Fabiano de Andrade Correa

Over the past four years the IUCN WCEL Climate Change Law Specialist Group (CCLSG) has undertaken a transformation. It has moved from a project-based group to a group that is based around a network and five clusters.

In its initial years (until 2024), work was organised around three pillars. First, the group continued working on four projects. Two of these have led to tangible outputs: the “climate litigation project” has led to the book [Cambridge Handbook of Climate Litigation](#) (published in 2025, [free access](#)); And the “islands and renewable energy project” has led to a series of policy briefs focusing on the promotion

of renewable energy and legal aspects thereto in Vanuatu. The second pillar of the Specialist Group's work focused on supporting IUCN and WCEL's contributions to UNFCCC COPs. The group actively participated in side events at COPs 26, 27, 28 and 29. The third pillar has been the work on the ICJ climate change-related advisory opinion. The Specialist Group coordinated WCEL's effort from the request to participate in the proceedings up to participation in the oral proceedings.

The Specialist Group now has 702 members and 437 members in our closed LinkedIn group. In order to organise members, and following consultation with them, the leadership agreed in late 2024 that the preferred route was to move away from a project-based group to one framed around five clusters: Climate Litigation; Ocean and Islands; Inclusive Energy Transformation; Cities; and Legal Aspects of Nature-based Solutions.

Against this background, the Specialist Group organises its work around the following five new pillars. The first one is framed around the clusters, with at least one webinar and one policy brief planned per year. The second pillar is the continued work around COPs. The third pillar is the engagement with other international legal processes of interest to WCEL. The fourth pillar will continue the work supporting WCEL's input into the advisory opinion processes. The fifth pillar can be loosely framed around a more effective communications and network strategy. This is where the consolidation of the closed LinkedIn group comes in, as well as plans for a future podcast.

Overall, the 2021–2025 period has laid the groundwork for an effective Specialist Group – one in which the CCLSG also started interacting more with other WCEL Specialist Groups, as well as with other IUCN Commissions and Specialist Groups that touch upon climate-related law, regulation and justice matters.

Early Career Specialist Group (ECSG)

Chair: Marina Venancio

Deputy Chair: Alvin Gachie

The Early Career Specialist Group (ECSG) has a Chair and Deputy Chair appointed to lead its efforts. The ESG Chair is also a member of the WCEL Steering Committee. In 2022, four core projects were launched, each with appointed co-leads, forming the framework for the group's activities. A kick-off meeting on 20 May 2022 introduced project co-leads to the Commission's mandate and outlined how they could contribute. A flyer was subsequently developed in 2023 to publicise the ECSG's purpose—fostering relationships among early-career environmental law professionals and encouraging their engagement in WCEL's work, aligned with the 2021–2024 WCEL mandate and IUCN Programme. The ECSG also contributed to broader youth engagement initiatives, including the IUCN Youth Strategy 2022–2030 and collaborative publications such as the [Oslo Conference report](#). The ECSG's activities have been driven by four core projects:

1. **Next-Generation Environmental Law Research:** This project explored intergenerational equity and youth contributions to sustainable development. A key highlight was a [webinar](#) on 20 September 2023, co-hosted with Youth and Environment Europe (YEE), focused on the intergenerational dimensions of human rights and public interest litigation. Additionally, a presentation was delivered at a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) side event in July 2023, emphasising the role of youth in promoting clean energy and environmental trusteeship.
2. **[WCEL Mentorship Programme:](#)** This initiative facilitated one-on-one mentorship and early career talks. In July 2023, resources including a mentorship guide were published. The first cohort of 38 mentor-mentee pairings began in February 2024. Early career talks were held in September and December 2024, discussing professional development and experiences in climate law practice.
3. **Networks and Partnerships:** In 2022, a database of networks and communities of practice for early-career professionals was developed, alongside the publication of an "Early-Career Voices" article. In 2023 and 2025, the ECSG hosted networking events at key international conferences – the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law Colloquium in Finland and the WCEL World Environmental Law Congress in Morocco. Also, in April 2025, the ECSG held a training session for environmental law students, on linkages between climate and environmental law, policy, and governance frameworks and human rights.

4. Science-Policy Interfaces in the context of environmental rule of law: The ECSG organised webinars exploring the role of science in achieving environmental justice and addressing challenges in science-policy interactions. These included a February 2023 dialogue on interdisciplinary perspectives and a June 2023 [webinar](#) on science-policy interface challenges. In February 2025, the ECSG conducted a survey to gather insights into current barriers and identify actionable solutions to strengthen science-policy engagement in environmental governance.

Environmental Security and Conflict Law Specialist Group

Chair: Karen Hulme

Deputy Chair: Daniëlla Dam-de Jong

The WCEL Specialist Group on Environmental Security and Conflict Law has worked across three areas.

The main project is a response to the call for action in [IUCN Resolution 7.042 Protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict \(Marseille, 2020\)](#). Activities have focused on developing guidance for states and other actors in implementing the International Law Commission's 2022 Principles on the Protection of the Environment in relation to Armed Conflict. The group held several expert workshops and events (particularly in 2022-23) to discuss the Principles, especially in the areas of protected areas management in conflict regions (PERAC principles 4 and 17) and corporate responsibility and liability in relation to natural resources supply chains (PERAC principles 10 and 11). In 2024 the SG wrote some [guidance on implementing corporate responsibility and liability obligations in relation to armed conflict](#), published on the IUCN site. The SG has also engaged with key stakeholders in the field, such as the Special Rapporteurs of the International Law Commission and International Committee of the Red Cross in their work on these issues.

The second area concerns environmental crimes. Through this focus, the SG has contributed to several policy-setting processes. Members submitted [comments for the Draft Policy on Environmental Crimes for the International Criminal Court in 2024-25](#). The SG's input was specifically requested by the lead writer of the policy. Also produced was [a policy paper/proposal on adding an environmental crime to the proposed UN Treaty on Crimes Against Humanity](#), and sponsored events at the UN were held to promote the legal proposal. The group engaged with the Colombian JEP, the European Parliament and Ukrainian authorities on environmental crimes, ecocide and broader international law related to PERAC, and contributed to several conferences and workshops on these themes.

For the third area of work on biodiversity, wildlife and environmental crime more broadly, the SG engaged with conservation organisations in expert workshops, e.g. with the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) on armed conflicts and nature conservation, and treaty processes, and the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ) on the proposal for a new Protocol on wildlife crime.

In addition, the group's members have contributed to several projects, including the GROMADA project that focuses on the environmental recovery of Ukraine. Our members were furthermore active in the Environmental Peacebuilding Association, including co-organising and hosting the 3rd International Conference on Environmental Peacebuilding (The Hague, June 2024). Lastly, SG members have produced numerous publications, including a Research Handbook on International Law and Environmental Peacebuilding.

Ethics Specialist Group (ESG)

Chair: Katy Gwiazdon

Deputy Chair: Cristiane Derani

The IUCN WCEL Ethics Specialist Group (ESG) has been actively engaged with IUCN bodies, practitioners, scholars and students – across sectors and fields – to highlight the ethical underpinnings of law and governance that best supports a just, sustainable world for the future of life. The ESG does this through strategic partnerships with local communities and international organisations, to raise the voice and evidentiary value of the lived experience – the very legitimacy of international work – as well as the acknowledgement of historic harms to better understand current systems of law and governance in our search for a better way forward. The ESG is also the only

Specialist Group of any IUCN Commission that works to strengthen the internal governance of IUCN and member engagement.

In 2024, we celebrated our 40th anniversary with IUCN, created in 1984 at the request of the Director General.

During this quadrennium, our annual workplans focused on advancing democratic principles of governance, from a systemic approach, and with historical understandings, and included projects related to decolonising international law; countering hierarchies of harm (including capitalism, racism and sexism), conflict and the commodification of life; advancing applied ethics in climate change; and supporting the evolution of law for peace and justice to better counter our crises, such as through ecological law and governance, the recognition of the rights of nature, and raising the seriousness of harms to the foundations of life through international criminal law.

In order to best serve WCEL and IUCN, the ESG fostered partnerships with organisations such as the Ecological Law and Governance Association, the Global Ecological Integrity Group, the International Network for Epidemiology in Policy, the World Future Council, the UN Harmony with Nature programme, JoWomenomics (Jordan), the Australian Earth Laws Alliance, and the United Urban Network (USA) – hosting events in Italy, Portugal, Germany, Brazil and the USA – as well as assisting IUCN Member organisations and National Committees (USA and France) with Congress preparation for motions and forum events. ESG members also contributed to the publication of *The Routledge Handbook on Applied Climate Change Ethics* (2023) and *Ecological Integrity and International Law: Peace, Public Health, and Global Security* (2025).

Ocean Law Specialist Group (OLSG)

Chair: Cymie Payne

Deputy Chair: Pradeep Singh

The WCEL Ocean Law Specialist Group (OLSG) has been very active, providing research and knowledge products to international courts, policymakers, diplomats and the general public, particularly in relation to marine areas beyond national jurisdiction, a common concern and common heritage of humankind.

Specifically, the OLSG advanced IUCN's mission and objectives at: the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (provided written and oral submissions on behalf of IUCN for the Tribunal's momentous Climate Change Advisory Opinion); both the UN Intergovernmental Conference and the Preparatory Commission for the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement (BBNJ) (the Chair of the OLSG serves on the Advisory Committee of Informal Track 1.5 High Seas Dialogues and High Seas Alliance Policy Group, as legal advisor to the IUCN delegation); the International Seabed Authority (deep seabed mining regulations; the Chair of the SG is legal advisor to IUCN delegation); and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (Ocean-Climate Change Dialogue). The group provided support to IUCN's UN General Assembly Permanent Observer, for example in relation to the UNGA High-Level Meeting on Sea Level Rise. The OLSG had the honour of initiating IUCN's work on the Plastics Treaty, convening the Secretariat Ocean Team and OLSG to participate in the organisational meeting of the Plastics Treaty International Negotiating Committee and nominating the Chair of the Task Force on Plastic Pollution. The SG also provides expert knowledge to IUCN members for World Conservation Congress 2025 motions that they are proposing on these topics.

Examples of the OLSG contributions include: numerous published peer-reviewed articles on each of these topics; oral interventions, written briefing notes, webinars and other means of support, and expert advice during the negotiation, adoption and supporting drive for ratification and implementation of the new BBNJ Agreement; convening meetings among like-minded states on deep seabed mining regulations and moratorium; written evidence submitted to the UK Parliament-House of Lords; comments on ICCA proposal for Paris Agreement/UNFCCC Conciliation Annex; participation in international meetings, including UNFCCC COP 28; and research and collaboration with scientists and IUCN Members on new topics of impacts of geoengineering on the marine environment and conservation of the ocean "twilight zone". Publications that OLSG members contributed to include *Deep Sea Mining & the Law of the Sea* (Routledge, London & New York, 2022), *Research Handbook on Ocean Acidification Law and Policy*, edited by OLSG co-chairs emeriti Nilüfer Oral and David Vanderzwaag, and Tim Stephens (Edward Elgar), *The Agreement on Marine Biodiversity of Areas*

Beyond National Jurisdiction: Commentary and Analysis (Mossop and Freestone eds., Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2025).

Soil and Sustainable Agriculture Law Specialist Group (SoilSAL SG)

Chair: Irene Heuser

Deputy Chair: Edwin Alblas

In this period, the Soil and Sustainable Agriculture Law Specialist Group (SoilSAL SG) underwent a number of internal changes, developing into an interactive group that uses modern communication media (with our LinkedIn account currently having 429 members), and integrated the Youth International Governance Commission into the SG.

The main thematic focus was on:

- Soil and sustainable agriculture governance, especially an international legal instrument for the protection and sustainable use of soil
- Agenda 2030: SDG Target 15.3 on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)
- Food security, the transition to sustainable agriculture and tipping points for soils
- Sustainable land management
- Protecting, conserving, restoring and sustainably using soils for climate change objectives
- Supporting soil protection law developments in Africa, India and South-East Asia
- Legal instruments for the protection of soils against specific threats, e.g. soil biodiversity loss
- Linking with soil ethics and Indigenous knowledge

SoilSAL SG members contributed to numerous publications, especially the International Yearbook on Soil Law and Policy with its own essays and as editors (IYSLP 2020/2021, IYSLP 2022, IYSLP 2025) and its own legal IUCN review in support of sustainable agriculture law, and participated or hosted conferences/webinars on SoilSAL related topics, especially together with FAO and IUSS. Highlights were the active participation at the Centennial Congress of the International Union for Soil Sciences in May 2024 (fire-side chat together with the Common Action for Soil Health) and at the new global initiative of the Aroura Soil Security Think Tank which is dedicated to soil security as a global priority for a sustainable future. The SoilSAL SG held a strategic workshop at the University of Lisbon in June 2025.

In preparation for the World Conservation Congress 2025, the SoilSAL SG has drafted motion 007 on soil security law (together with the Global Center for Environmental Legal Studies, with Pace University as a proponent), which has been very well received and is currently leading to extensive IUCN discussions. The group intensively works together with the new IUCN Agriculture Team and commonly influences policies to promote sustainable production systems. Participation in the UNCCD COP 16 in Riyadh in December 2024 has strengthened this cooperation.

Water and Wetlands Law Specialist Group (WWSG)

Chair: Stefano Burchi

Deputy Chair: Michael Hantke-Domas

In the period under review, the SG's work focused on three main projects:

1. The "Manifesto for the Freshwater Rule of Law", following on from the predecessor Manifesto for National Integrated Legal Frameworks for Water Resources Governance;
2. Research on the "Reverberations in domestic legislation of the ecosystem support function of groundwater"; and
3. Research on "International liability for environmental damages caused in transboundary waters".

Work on the first project culminated in a [*Manifesto for National Integrated Legal Frameworks for Water Resources Governance*](#), which was presented at the 2023 UN Water Conference jointly by WCEL, the International Association for Water Law (AIDA), and the Environmental Law Institute (ELI), and in partnership with a number of other institutions. Following on from it, a small team of SG members has revisited the Manifesto also in a bid to enhance its normative value to national policymakers and legislators. The group held an in-person meeting in Rome in December 2024, and a new and expanded "Manifesto for the Freshwater Rule of Law" was conceptualised and drafted, building upon the predecessor Manifesto. The new Manifesto was presented at the 2025 WCEL

Congress (Rabat, 4–7 May 2025), and is about to be posted on the SG website for consultation and reference. Rounds of consultations are on the SG's 2025 agenda, beginning with a launch webinar scheduled at end June/early July.

Work on the research project on *Reverberations* in domestic legislation of the ecosystem support function of groundwater has yielded five original internally peer-reviewed papers contributed by as many SG members. All five papers have been accepted for publication in the [Journal of Water Law](#), as a standalone special Issue of the Journal. Publication is scheduled in the course of 2025.

Work on the research project on International liability for environmental damages caused in transboundary waters yielded an inception document drafted by Prof. O. McIntyre. Subsequently the group decided to focus on international judicial decisions. The group has not been able to reconvene, but plans to organise a webinar on the subject later in the course of 2025.

Also in the period under review, the SG organised a [webinar](#) on “The evolving legal framework for the management and governance of groundwater - domestic and transboundary”. The webinar was held on 7 August 2023.

Agreement on Plastic Pollution Task Force **Chair: Alexandra Harrington**

Since it was founded in July 2022, the IUCN WCEL Agreement on Plastic Pollution Task Force has been quite active in the negotiation process for the international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution (ILBI), including in the marine environment, as well as in many other negotiations, Conferences of the Parties and UNEP exploratory meetings on pollution and related topics that connect to plastics.

In advance of each of the intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) rounds – INC-1 in Punta del Este in November 2022, INC-2 in Paris in May 2023, INC-3 in Nairobi in November 2023, INC-4 in Ottawa in April 2024 and INC-5.1 in Busan in November 2024 – the Task Force has produced responsive legal briefs that mirror the emerging needs and issues at the negotiations. To date, the Task Force has published nearly [two dozen legal briefs](#) and will continue to do so as the negotiations continue at INC-5.2 in August 2025 as well as into the future, when the focus will shift from treaty negotiation to ratification and implementation of the future ILBI. The Task Force also hosted three webinars on the outcomes of: [INC-1](#), [INC-4](#) and [INC-5](#).

The Chair of the Task Force has attended the INCs as part of the IUCN delegation and has spoken at dozens of events regarding the INC process and the future ILBI, including official side events during the INCs and other Conferences of the Parties, notably the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention COPs in 2023 and 2025. She has worked with multiple intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations to promote discussion and awareness of all aspects of proposed language for the future ILBI.

Through the [Africap project](#), a joint initiative of IUCN and GRID-Arendal funded by Norad, the Chair of the Task Force has been and continues to be a leading advisor to the negotiating delegations from five West African countries: Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal and Sierra Leone. She was an appointed expert to the delegation of Sao Tome and Principe during the intersessional working group meetings between INC-4 and INC-5, and serves as an appointed legal expert for Guinea Bissau on the Legal Drafting Group for the INC process that was established during INC-4. The Africap project work has allowed the Task Force to work seamlessly with IUCN Headquarters, including those from the Centre for Policy and Law and the Oceans Team, creating a compact and highly functional group before, during and after each of the INC meetings.

Additionally, the Chair of the Task Force has represented – and continues to represent – IUCN as part of its official delegations to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Convention COPs, the SAICM negotiation process and the Global Framework on Chemicals, Minamata Convention on Mercury COP, the OEWG process for the creation of a Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution Prevention, and various UNEP consultations relating to all forms of pollution.

Looking forward, the Task Force plans to continue its work to assist in the negotiation of a future ILBI as well as to provide assistance to countries, communities and to IUCN Headquarters regarding necessary steps for the Preparatory Committee for the ILBI, the Diplomatic Conference for the ILBI, ratification of the ILBI and its implementation nationally and through future COP processes.

Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (GJIE) Task Force

Chair: Nicholas Bryner

The WCEL Task Force on the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (GJIE) has played a critical role in coordinating WCEL's engagement with the judiciary around the world in promoting and advancing the environmental rule of law.

Since 2021, GJIE has made significant strides in establishing itself as a network of judges, for judges, in carrying out judicial education workshops and capacity-building programmes and in serving as a network for exchanging experiences and information about good practices in the adjudication of environmental law disputes. GJIE is now registered officially as a charitable organisation under Swiss law, but works in close coordination with support from its secretariat at the UN Environment Programme's Law Division and with WCEL and other key partners to undertake its activities.

Some of the major highlights since 2021 have included:

- December 2021: High-Level Judicial Segment of the 2nd IUCN WCEL World Environmental Law Congress, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, held in conjunction with a meeting of the GJIE General Assembly and Governing Board;
- June 2022: Symposium on Judges and the Environment as a two-day side event to the Stockholm+50 Conference in Stockholm, Sweden;
- July 2023: Participation and organisation of judicial panels at the World Law Congress in New York City, in conjunction with a meeting of the GJIE Governing Board and the launch of the Model Forest Act Initiative (MoFAI);
- December 2023: Series of side events on the role of the judiciary in addressing climate change held at the UNFCCC COP28 in Dubai, UAE, and in Abu Dhabi;
- November 2024: Side events on the role of the judiciary in environmental law and climate change at the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan and at the UNFCCC COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan.

In addition to these major global-scale events, WCEL's Task Force has worked with GJIE members and other partners to conduct workshops and capacity-building events across several continents, in conjunction with regional networks, such as the EU Forum of Judges for the Environment (EUJFE) and the African Judicial Education Network for Environmental Law (AJENEL).

Model Forest Act Initiative (MoFAI) Task Force

Chair: Antonio Benjamin

Since its creation in the beginning of this quadrennium, the Task Force on the Model Forest Act Initiative (MoFAI) coordinates support from IUCN WCEL as a key partner of the Initiative. MoFAI is an interdisciplinary, multistakeholder effort to create a model legal framework – the Model Forest Act – that can foster harmonised approaches to the preservation, conservation, restoration, and sustainable use and management of flora throughout the world. It is currently being developed by a high-level drafting committee led by partners that include WCEL as well as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UNEP, UNDP, UN Forum on Forests, World Bank, FAO, IFAD, CIFOR-ICRAF, and others.

In 2023, the MoFAI organised the “Regional Judicial Symposium on Forest & Protected Areas Legislation and Jurisprudence: Bridging Law and Science” in the National Judicial Academy of Nepal. Later that year, the Task Force hosted the launch meeting of the Model Forest Act Initiative in New York (organised by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), UNEP, GJIE, the International Association of Judges and WCEL).

During 2024, MoFAI collaborated closely with the Global Judicial Institute on the Environment (GJIE). An example of this collaboration was seen at COP29 during the Forest Policy and Instruments Day.

In 2025, MoFAI is finalising the first draft of the General Part of the Model Forest Act. In January, the MoFAI Drafting Committee met in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, Brazil with focus on the Amazon Region stakeholder consultation/workshop. Continuing with this work in May, the Task Force held a Plenary panel discussion on MoFAI, as well as a consultation with WCEL members during the IUCN WCEL 3rd World Environmental Law Congress in Rabat, Morocco.

The Drafting Committee will continue its work in September with an in-person meeting in Tokyo, Japan. The Task Force has also proposed a Forum session at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in October on forest law highlighting the work of MoFAI, with a pre-launch of the first draft of the Model Forest Act General Part.

The WCEL MoFAI Task Force relies on a small amount of financial support from the IUCN WCEL COF to allow for travel to and participation in MoFAI meetings and events. Most of the funding for these events is provided by co-organising institutions and partners.

Rights of Nature Task Force **Chair: Philippe Cullet**

Since it was founded in September 2022, the Task Force on Rights of Nature has engaged in a variety of activities:

The Task force has organised consultations and experts' workshops:

- In 2023, the Task Force held an initial consultation in London, which brought together rights of nature experts from a multitude of disciplinary backgrounds;
- In 2024, the Task Force held a consultation on tribal ecological knowledge and rights of nature in Shillong, India;
- In 2025, the Task Force organised a consultation in London focusing on new themes emerging (including on global commons, on animal rights and on operationalisation of rights of nature); and
- The Task Force initiated a conversation with UNEP in 2023 leading to the organisation of the [first-ever official engagement by UNEP and UNDP, at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, on rights of nature](#). Linked to this consultation, an Information Note was drafted in late 2023 for joint publication by IUCN/UNEP/UNDP. This should be published in 2025.

The Task Force organised two WCEL-hosted webinars:

- In August 2023, an [introductory webinar](#) was organised; and
- In March 2025, a [webinar](#) on emerging debates related to ocean rights.

The Task Force has been contributing to developing the knowledge base around rights of nature through publications. This includes:

- A contribution to a multi-authored thought piece on ocean rights (Michelle Bender, Lydia Slobodian, Kristina Gjerde, Philippe Cullet, Pradeep Singh and Chloe Olsen, 'The Rights of Nature and Legal Personhood in an Ocean Context', 39 *Ocean Yearbook* 81-117 (forthcoming 2025); and
- A special issue in the *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* on 'Indigenous Ecological Knowledge in South Asia – Lessons for Rights of Nature Discourses', which includes papers arising from the 2024 consultation organised.

The Task Force started a process of engaging with different actors working on other dimensions of environmental law and their links with rights of nature:

- Contributing to the drafting of proposed motions for the 2025 IUCN Congress (on ocean rights, on Antarctica rights, with IUCN France);

- Co-sponsoring a World Conservation Congress forum proposal on Earth Jurisprudence and the Rights of Nature: Transformative Solutions for Communities and Courts, and co-sponsoring a world café on Operationalising the rights of nature through their implementation in the territories; and
- Working with the International Law Association on setting up a Committee on Rights of Nature.

WCEL: Outputs and Outreach (2021-2025)*	Number
Webinars	42
Publications	91
Policy Briefs	56

* For more information, please check the “Resources” section in each of our SGs/TFs in the WCEL website.