



## **Editorial Style Guide: High Seas Alliance**

**Latest Update: June 2025**

**Please note, this is a working document. Refer to it often as we continue to improve and expand our Editorial Style Guide, including efforts to make our language more inclusive, respectful, and accurate. We recognize that language evolves and that no single approach will suit everyone, but we are committed to learning, adapting, and centering the perspectives of those most impacted by our work.**

### ***Language***

The general rule is to use American English for High Seas Alliance materials. Frequently misspelt words include organization, emphasize, institutionalize, behavior, labor, realize, organize, and program.

**We refer to the High Seas as singular i.e., ‘The High Seas contains a wealth of biodiversity’, or ‘The High Seas is rich in biodiversity’. We always capitalize ‘High Seas’.**

Capitalized: The High Seas is a specific name to refer to an area of the ocean, that is the areas beyond national jurisdiction. As a proper noun denoting this legal zone, we treat it as a named entity (such as Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, etc), hence the preference for capital letters.

Singular: Referring to the High Seas as singular emphasizes its unity as one legal domain, rather than implying it's made up of disconnected regions. (Compare to: “The High Seas is home to...” vs. “The High Seas are...”). All areas of the ocean with names are referred to as singular (such as Pacific Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, etc).

**Ocean is always singular and spelled with lowercase o.**

Lowercase: “ocean” is used here as a general, collective noun rather than a proper name like “Pacific Ocean” or “Atlantic Ocean.” Lowercase aligns with a tone that treats the ocean as one living system, not as a set of human-labeled divisions.

Singular: Like “climate” or “atmosphere,” using “ocean” in the singular reflects the scientific reality that Earth has one global ocean system, interconnected and indivisible by physical or ecological boundaries.

**We also capitalize the word ‘Treaty’** when referring to the High Seas Treaty e.g., ‘...it is imperative that all governments ratify the Treaty as soon as possible.’ When referring to treaties in general, we use lower case.

**We capitalize ‘Agreement’ when referring to the BBNJ Agreement.**

We capitalize ‘Member States’ because it’s often used as a proper noun.

We capitalize ‘governments’ when it is a Proper noun, such as ‘The Government of the Maldives’.

We use contracted words (isn’t and it’d, etc.) in blogs and quotes, but not in the main text of other materials, such as press releases and factsheets.

## ***Abbreviations and acronyms***

Always spell out the abbreviation or acronym in the first instance it is mentioned and give the shortened form in brackets afterwards, e.g., United Nations (UN) | environmental impact assessments (EIAs) | biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ).

Try to avoid using ‘HSA’ in public facing materials – write it in full whenever possible.

Some abbreviations commonly found in more technical papers include, e.g., (for example); i.e., (that is); et. al., (to reflect a long list of co-authors); etc.

## ***Common abbreviations***

Area-based Management Tool (ABMT)

Access and Benefit-Sharing Committee (ABSC)

Capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology (CB&TMT)

Capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology Committee (CBTMTTC)

Clearing-House Mechanism (CI-HM)

Conference of the Parties (CoP) – use CoP when abbreviating CoP on official documents. COP is OK to use on social media materials

Digital sequence information (DSI)

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Institutions, Frameworks, and bodies (IFBs)

Free prior informed consent (FPIC)

Implementation and Compliance Committee (ICC)

Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IP&lc) – We prefer to spell out this acronym whenever possible to distinguish the different inherent roles and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. “Indigenous Peoples” is always plural and capitalized. If you are to use the acronym please make sure to include ‘&’ to stress the differentiation between Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as opposed to IPLC.

Indigenous Peoples are distinct political and legal entities with inherent rights, including collective rights to lands, territories, natural resources, self-determination, and cultural heritage. These rights are affirmed under international law, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Marine genetic resources (MGRs)

Mutually agreed terms (MAT)

Landlocked developing countries (LLDCs)

Least developed countries (LDCs)

Scientific and Technical Body (STB)

Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

Preparatory Commission (PrepCom) – refer to PrepCom in the singular as it entails an entire process. When used as plural add in a noun, e.g. PrepCom sessions, PrepCom meetings, PrepCom discussions

## ***Specific notes on language***

### **Traditional Knowledge versus Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples**

The official text of the High Seas Treaty refers to “Traditional Knowledge,” a term also frequently used by State delegates. However, Indigenous Peoples and representatives have raised concerns that the term “traditional” may imply that this knowledge is static or outdated. In reality, the knowledge of Indigenous Peoples is dynamic, evolving, and deeply tied to living cultural and ecological relationships.

Our communication aims to center the voices of Indigenous Peoples while remaining accurate when referencing official Treaty language. We recognize the importance of language in shaping understanding and respect.

Preferred Usage:

Use “knowledge of Indigenous Peoples” when referring to the knowledge systems, practices, and innovations of Indigenous Peoples in our own voice, including narratives, social media content, blogs, reports, and campaign materials.

Use “Indigenous knowledge holders”.

The term “Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples” does not include the knowledge of local communities.

Example: “Indigenous Knowledge holders are crucial to ocean stewardship.”

Use “Traditional Knowledge” only:

In direct quotations from the Treaty, formal country interventions, or official documents, and when referencing specific Treaty language, to maintain legal accuracy.

Example: “The Treaty text acknowledges the importance of ‘Traditional Knowledge’ (Article X).”

### **Small Island Developing States (SIDS) vs. Big Ocean States**

The official term in the Treaty and UN documents is Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and we use this terminology when referencing formal agreements, official statements, or when aligning with Treaty language.

However, when writing in our own voice, including blogs, campaign materials, and social media, we encourage the use of Big Ocean States as a more empowering and

accurate term. This framing acknowledges the vast ocean territories these nations steward and their significant leadership in ocean governance and conservation.

Example:

“Big Ocean States have long advocated for stronger High Seas protection.”

“The Treaty recognizes the special circumstances of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).”

### **Critters vs. Guardians**

In some High Seas Alliance campaigns, we use hand-knitted marine animals as storytelling tools and advocacy symbols. Previously these were informally referred to as “critters”, however, we recognize that this term may feel dismissive or diminutive of real ocean creatures and the values they represent.

We now refer to them as High Seas Guardians or Ocean Guardians. This term better reflects their symbolic role as protectors of the ocean and allies in our shared stewardship.

### **Gender-neutral language**

Avoid gendered terms like “chairman” or “mankind.”

Use: “chair,” “humanity,” “humankind,” “representative.”

### **Community empowerment**

Don’t frame people as passive recipients (e.g., avoid “beneficiaries” unless it’s legal text).

Use: “community-led,” “rights-holders,” “stakeholders,” “partners.”

## ***Commonly used footnotes***

In press releases, we usually add footnotes to:

- a) Clarify the use of the term High Seas Treaty (as opposed to BBNJ Agreement), using this wording agreed by the Steering Committee:

The High Seas Alliance sometimes uses the term “High Seas Treaty” as a shorthand for the BBNJ Agreement. It acknowledges that the scope of the BBNJ Agreement encompasses all Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, including the seafloor and water column. This choice of wording is intended to ease understanding for broad audiences and does not convey a prioritization among the components or principles of the BBNJ Agreement.

- b) To explain what signing and ratifying a Treaty means.

**Signing** does not establish consent for States to be bound to the Treaty, but it does express the willingness of the signatory State to continue the treaty-making process and for it to proceed to ratification. Signing also creates an obligation to refrain, in good faith, from acts that would defeat the object and the purpose of the Treaty. Following signature, countries can ratify the Agreement at any time.

**Ratification** is when nations formally consent to the new international law, and this often entails ensuring that their national laws are consistent with it. The speed and process to ratify varies by country. In some countries, the act of ratification is simply a Leader's decree, while in others Parliamentary approval is needed.

### *Use of AI tools when drafting content*

The use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT to support content ideation, language refinement, translation and drafting assistance is ever increasing. These tools can help speed up workflows, explore alternative phrasings, or summarize technical material **but they do not replace human judgment, lived experience, or subject matter expertise.**

All outputs from AI tools should be reviewed, edited, and verified to ensure accuracy, tone, style and alignment with our mission and values. You should be especially mindful when it comes to language related to Indigenous rights, ocean science, legal frameworks, and inclusive representation and be aware of the inherent gender and other biases common within AI.

Please continue to critically evaluate all AI-generated content and revise it with nuance, care, and context.