WIO LMMA ALLIANCE
COLLECTIVE VOICE

Call to Action Statement

We speak today not as a single voice, but as a representatives of the collective voices from coastal communities across the Western Indian Ocean—people whose lives are closely linked to the ocean through fishing, coastal livelihoods, and local economies, and who are directly affected by changes in marine ecosystems.

In our coastal communities, the ocean is not an abstract space. It is our food, our work, our memory, and our identity.

Today, we see our oceans changing: fewer fish, declining reefs, disappearing mangroves, and growing pressure from illegal fishing, pollution, and climate change.

Yet, even in the face of these challenges, communities have not waited. Across islands and coastlines, people are already acting. They are closing fishing areas temporarily so the sea can recover. They are replanting mangroves by hand. They are patrolling their shores, often with very little equipment. They are creating locally managed marine areas, because their survival depends on it.

We are doing what we can, but we are doing it without enough recognition, without enough support, and often without the authority to fully protect what we are trying to save.

Too often, decisions about our ocean are made far from us. Rules are designed without our voices. Policies are implemented without our realities.

We are not asking just to be included. We are asking to be recognised for what we already are: managers, stewards, and defenders of the ocean.

We need legal recognition of our community-led marine areas and governance systems. Not as pilot projects, not as temporary initiatives, but as legitimate parts of national and regional ocean governance.

We need direct and sustained support—not only for a season or a project cycle—but long-term investment in the people who live with the ocean every day.

We need the tools to do the work: boats, equipment, communication systems, and safe conditions for those who patrol and protect our waters.

We need opportunities beyond fishing, so that protecting the ocean does not mean sacrificing dignity or survival. We need livelihoods that allow both people and nature to thrive.

We need to be part of the decisions that shape our future—not after they are made, but while they are being designed.

And above all, we need trust. Trust that communities are not obstacles to conservation, but its strongest foundation.

16 June 2026
Statement made during an official side event at the 11th Our Ocean Conference, Mombasa, Kenya