

Ocean on the Board

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Frequently asked questions

What does it mean to appoint “the Ocean” to the Board?

It means creating a Board position dedicated to representing the interests, needs and long-term well-being of the Ocean. The Ocean itself does not hold legal responsibility or have legal rights; instead, a trustee acts as the Ocean’s representative within the Board.

Is this legally permissible for SAMS?

Yes. Charity law requires that trustees act in the best interests of the charity and in line with its charitable purpose. A trustee representing the Ocean must still meet all legal duties and responsibilities. Their Ocean role is an internal framing of their focus and expertise, not a separate legal personality.

Why have SAMS chosen to do this?

Because the Ocean is SAMS’ central stakeholder. Appointing an Ocean trustee ensures that governance decisions reflect marine ecological realities, scientific evidence, long-term thinking and SAMS’ mission.

Does this change how the Board operates?

Not significantly. The Board continues its standard governance functions: strategy, oversight, risk management, compliance. The Ocean trustee simply brings a structured ecological lens to discussions and decisions.

Can the Ocean trustee vote on decisions?

Yes. They are full trustee with normal voting rights and obligations.

What qualifications will the Ocean trustee need?

Skills and experience that enable them to articulate and defend the interests of the Ocean, e.g., understanding of marine ecosystems, scientific uncertainty, cumulative effects, local knowledge, long-term ecological processes and legal understanding. Governance experience is also desirable.

Will this complicate governance?

No. The role provides clarity and a dedicated perspective. It does not create a new legal category or extra paperwork. It strengthens, rather than complicates, governance.

Does this mean that SAMS is giving the Ocean legal rights?

No. It is not a legal personhood or rights-of-nature mechanism. It is a governance innovation that amplifies ecological considerations through an appointed trustee.

How does this benefit marine science?

It builds scientific perspectives directly into decision making, for example, ecology, uncertainty and long-term system processes. It also ensures governance is aligned with the best available evidence.

How does this benefit the Ocean?

It gives the Ocean a structured presence in SAMS, an organisation whose work is centred around the marine environment, helping ensure decisions are responsible, forward-looking and grounded in ecological integrity.

What does it look like in practice?

How does it impact me?

How will this be communicated externally?