

Where River Meets Sea, Justice Flows:

Watu's Wave Rights Recognition



IAIA 26
QUÉBEC CITY, CANADA



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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

How did a wave become a legal subject?

This case study explores the recognition of Rights of the Wave at the Doce River estuary – linking local knowledge, governance, and Ocean ethics.

- Literature review;
- Semi-structured interviews;
- Practice-based case study

THE CASE

Fundão Dam Disaster · 2015

One Ocean

Tailings reached the Atlantic
Ocean

Two States

Minas Gerais & Espírito Santo

Billions m³

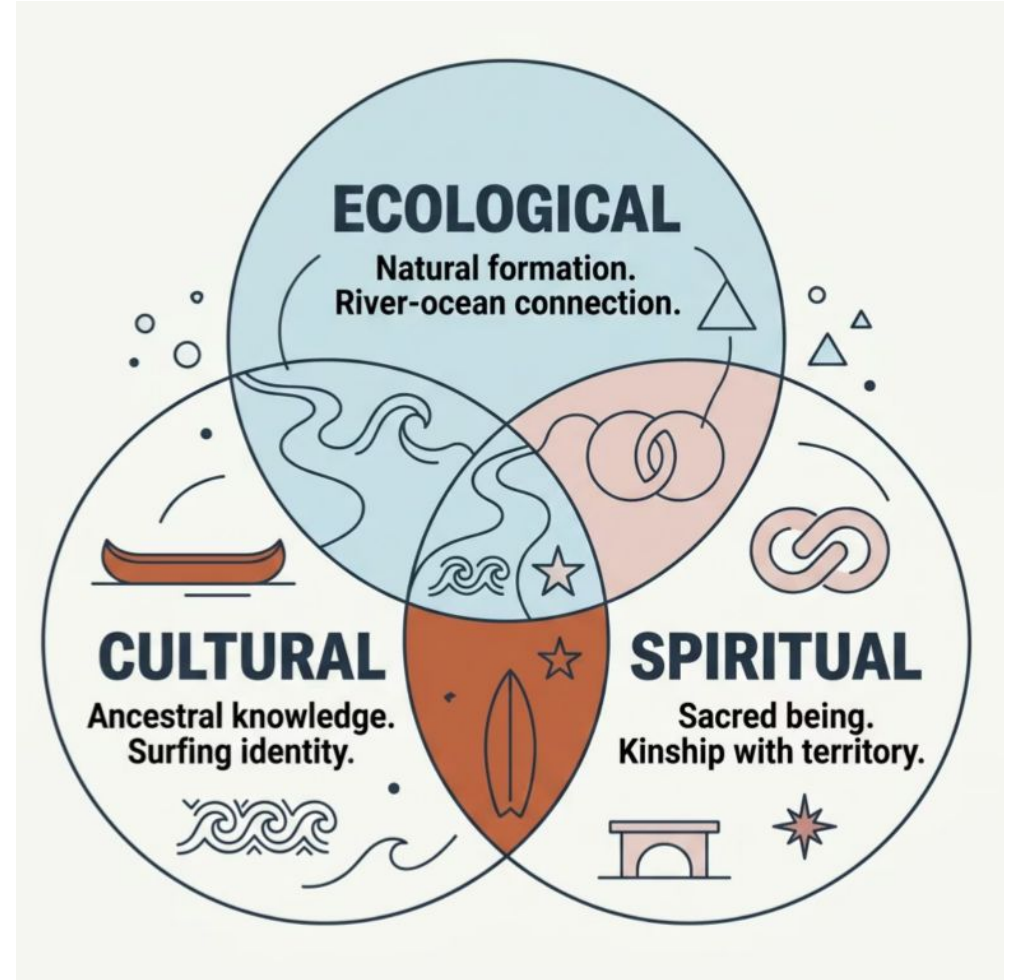
Tailings from VALE, Samarco & BHP



Watu: More Than a Wave

For the Krenak people and local surfers, the wave at the Doce River estuary is not a resource – it is kin. Ecological, cultural, and spiritual meaning are inseparable.

The dam's collapse ruptured not just a river, but a relationship.



From Disaster to Regeneration



Surfer Mobilization



Regenera Rio Doce



Forum for the Rights of Mother Earth | 2018



Wave Law Drafted



THE LAW

What the Law Establishes



Subject of Rights

The Wave recognized as an entity with intrinsic value and legal dignity

Guardians Committee

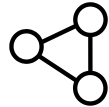
Consultative, participatory
body safeguarding ecological,
cultural & spiritual integrity

Three Core Insights



Ontologies → Norms

Rights of Nature translates ancestral worldviews into enforceable law — a bridge between local and global



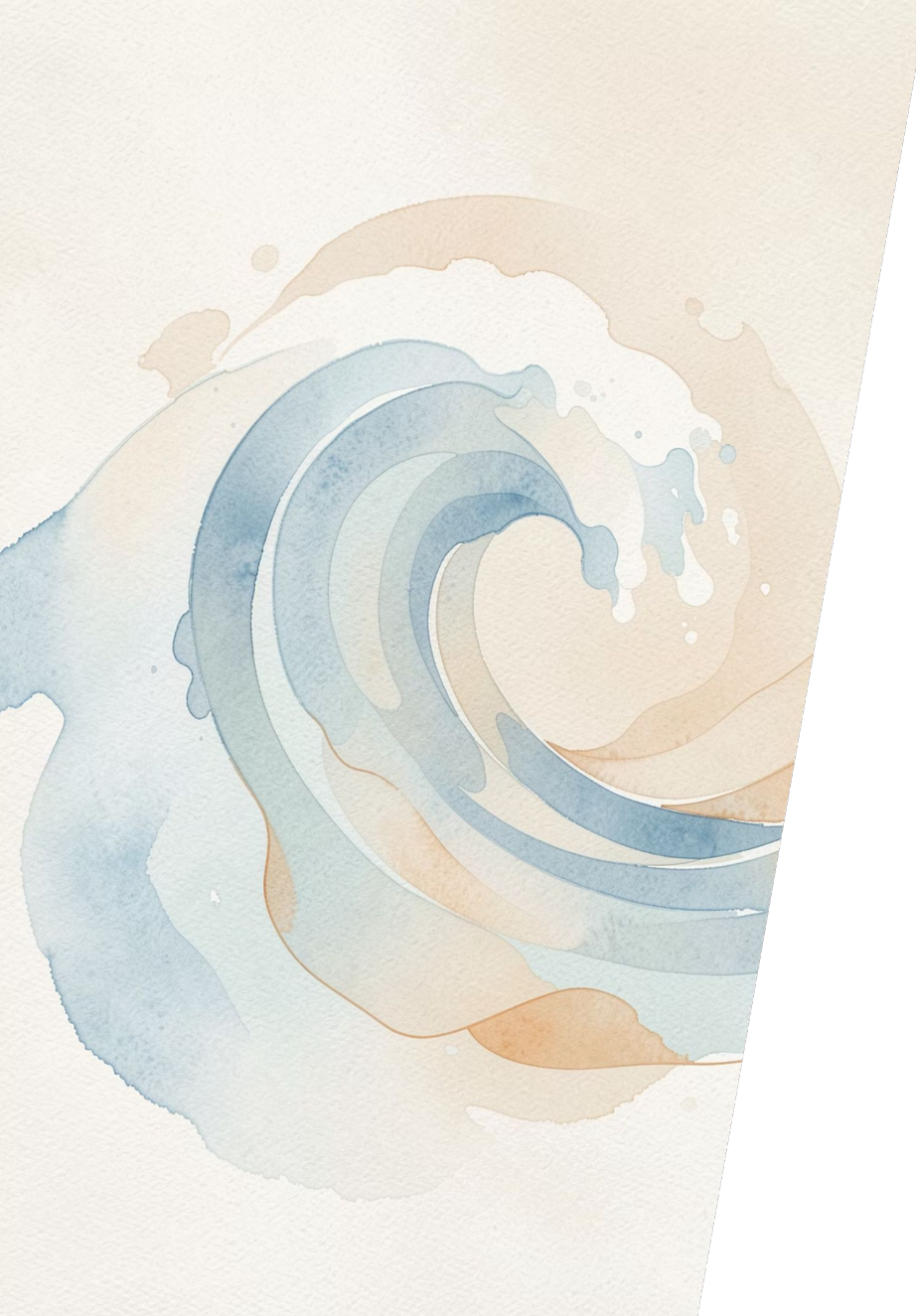
Institutional Innovation

The Guardians Committee enables relational, bottom-up governance — community voices inside bureaucracy



Narrative Power

Speaking of the wave as kin, not resource, reshapes perspective and governance at scale

A watercolor illustration on the left side of the page shows a hand holding a globe. The hand is rendered in shades of blue and green, while the globe is depicted with swirling patterns in blue, green, and orange. The background is a light, textured beige.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Law Is a Starting Point

Ongoing Challenges

Companies still operating.

Tailings still in the ocean.

Communities still asking: what does this mean for us?

What's Needed

Ecological education, active listening, and sustained community engagement

The Movement Remains

Vigilant, connected, and driven by an ethic of care and co-responsibility



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Let's continue the conversation!

Message me your questions or comments in the IAIA26 app.

#iaia26

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