

OUR FUTURE OCEAN NEEDS STRENGTHENED COMMUNICATION

New Ocean challenges and opportunities fuel the need for enhanced marine and solution-oriented science communication. Strengthening its capacity is critical, as well as developing dedicated training programs, deeper and wider collaboration with stakeholders, and close interaction with the UN Decade of Ocean Science (2021-2030) and EU's Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters. These are the main conclusions from a survey among 80 European experts, 1861 students, and 23 European Marine Board Member organizations.

Over the coming decade, marine science communication will become critical to achieving a more Ocean literate and sustainable society. "Knowing and understanding the Ocean's influence on us, and our influence on the Ocean is crucial to living and acting sustainably. By sharing the world's Ocean knowledge, we are committed to building a global Ocean movement to protect the planet on which we live", recalls Jan Seys, spokesperson of the Flanders Marine Institute and coordinating author, from a respondent of one of the surveys. Future conflicts between the use of marine resources and marine protection will require solutions that need to be explained by experts and can be understood by non-specialists. An Ocean of challenges and opportunities requires an increase in the generation of content for scientific dissemination and specialized communication.

The increased awareness of topics such as 'plastic soup', 'climate change, and 'sea-level rise' has fuelled the perception among experts (89%) and students (67%) that the Ocean is now more visible in the media than it used to be. As both experts (92%) and students (90%) expect marine science communication to become even more important in the future, and based on the outcomes of the three surveys, the European Marine Board Communications Panel recommend strengthening the capacity and impact of marine science communication in Europe.

The Future Science Brief 'Marine Science Communication in Europe: a way forward', published by the European Marine Board, highlights four main priority actions:

1. When asked why certain Ocean news stories caught their attention, 47% of the students answered "because it is scary and it makes me worry for the future". That '**negative bias**' in Ocean news needs to be balanced with a more optimistic perspective, providing solutions and opportunities. The **communication baseline** shaping the international Ocean Literacy movement could serve that goal, stating that to create more stewardship for the Ocean "every citizen should have an understanding of the Ocean's influence on them and their influence on the Ocean". Marine science communicators should stick to the facts but also promote positive stories about the Ocean and highlight the added value of Ocean science to society.

2. In order to cope with future marine science communication needs, Ocean research institutions and funders need to further **acknowledge, value, and strengthen** their **science communication efforts** with additional **funding and human resources**. Today, all scientific institutions realize the importance of having staff dedicated to communication tasks, and all of them make a considerable effort to maintain dedicated personnel. However, in most cases, communication staff amounts to less than 5% of the workforce. The European Marine Board Communications Panel recommends that marine science institutions should dedicate at least **10% of their staff time** to marine science communication.
3. In marine science communication, there are plenty of growth opportunities in order to better share expertise and learn from each other. **Connections** with other **science communicators** and with **communicators in other domains** should be enhanced. Dedicated **training** programs and events (e.g. the CommOCEAN conferences <https://commocean.org/>) need to be further developed, both for marine scientists and for other marine science communication stakeholders. A marine science communication **platform or database sharing expertise and resources** is not available today but could stimulate the exchange of skills and ideas. This enhanced connectivity could also help to make better use of **new technologies and approaches** to reach the wider public in order to **enhance successful traditional methods** (story-telling, hands-on activities, arts, visuals, etc.), 'to make the invisible visible, to stimulate curiosity and hunger for knowledge, and to actively connect with a wider audience.
4. Finally, this is the perfect moment to make it happen. The entire Ocean community should collaborate under the umbrella of the **UN Ocean Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)** and the '**EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and waters**', both unique opportunities to enhance marine science communication to help achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Further reading: European Marine Board Future Science Brief No. 8 'Marine Science Communication in Europe: a way forward (2022).

<https://www.marineboard.eu/publications/marine-science-communication-europe-way-forward>
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