

Influence and Engagement:

Priorities for Effective Ocean-Climate Communication

At the UN Ocean Conference 2022 (UNOC), Comms Inc and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch) convened a conversation on how ocean-climate action can be accelerated through cross-sector influencing and engagement. Funders, NGOs, communicators and programme strategists shared experience in other sectors, exchanged insights, made new connections, and identified how we can collaborate on smarter ocean communications.

The following report summarises the shared calls for action and collaboration that emerged at the event thanks to the engaged and generous participation of attendees.

Opportunities for the ocean sector

Many of the solutions for ocean health are at our fingertips, but current actions by governments, businesses and individuals aren't meeting the scale or urgency of the problem. At UNOC it was clear that despite huge progress getting ocean conservation recognised as a climate solution, more needs to be done. There is a focus on short-term policy campaigns, but how can we foster a collective approach that shifts the public 'mood music' and creates the conditions for change that are favourable to work across the sector?

1

Create a social mandate for change

There was wide consensus that we need the public to be behind ocean action, and impact comes when there is a social mandate for change. To achieve this, we need to change mindsets and behaviours at scale. We need to change the ocean narrative by speaking about it in relatable ways, humanising science and connecting people with issues at an emotional level. We need to convey the urgency while giving people hope – empowering them to care about the ocean and take action by providing concrete examples of change and practical steps to take. All of this requires sustained engagement. Yet ocean communications typically leans towards short-term goals and specific policy wins – and for long-term change, it needs long-term thinking.

2

Long-term strategy with commensurate support

Ocean communications needs significantly greater investment. We need funders to take leaps and invest in 'riskier' but more impactful areas such as narrative change, media partnerships, and consistent campaigning to reach atypical audiences. Funders and practitioners need to think big – expanding to global media and developing countries, and collaborating internationally to strengthen efforts while tailoring communications to localised needs. Ocean-climate can be an echo chamber, so we need to engage with other sectors as well as newer audiences.

3

Better representation and reach

For mass change we need a lot of voices, but ocean-climate communication lacks diversity. We need more voices from the Global South and young people, and power needs to be devolved to underrepresented groups. Learning from the psychology of behaviour change, we need to use audience-relevant messengers. Scientists still have an important role to play in communicating facts and urgency, but other voices such as localised spokespeople are often easier to relate to. Communicate ethically and consider who is affected by what, and how. Stories and tools must be 'two-way' — ocean imagery is one example of where community feedback on use of visuals strengthens the impact and improves representation.

5

Create an architecture that incorporates evidence and action

We need to ensure that research is shared across the ocean sector and translated into actionable insight and, subsequently, action. Communications research is only valuable insofar as we are able to apply it to our communications approaches. We need to create an architecture that enables the sharing of research as a collaborative resource. We also need to integrate these findings into campaign approaches to ensure we are all adopting the most informed communications practice.

4

Develop the research

There is a growing body of evidence on 'what works' — such as framing of the ocean using health metaphors; and using values, a variety of messengers and visual storytelling to create an emotional connection to the ocean. There is also increasing insight into audience 'types' and behaviours which could help ocean-climate communicators develop better, more relevant public calls to action. For more information, see our 'Useful Resources' section.

A particular area of need is long term tracking of ocean-climate perceptions and behaviours. If we want to take a long term approach to change, we need to put in place ways to monitor and evaluate the impact — to show where we are having an effect, to change our course when necessary, and to be sure we are using resources to do the right thing in the right way. This research doesn't have to occur in isolation — it can be a shared resource across the ocean community.

What's working well?

Although this event recognised the need for more collaborative and effective communications, we are not starting from zero. We asked the group what is currently working well in ocean communications and this is what they told us.

- We are starting from a good place: The ocean is easy to feel emotionally connected to and can be understood
- The ocean is more prominent in international climate discussions
- Young people are active and are mobilised
- Journalism is improving, and new technology is enabling powerful storytelling
- Stronger collaborations are forming
- The UN Ocean Decade is a good framework — there is positivity in reaching goals
- The Ocean is becoming more integrated in formal education in some countries
- Investment in sustained communications is becoming more widely recognised
- UNOC was an important step in the right direction. We heard loudly that more commitment to public engagement and strategic communications would help us achieve ocean goals.

Opportunities for action and collaboration

There is much we can do at an organisational and individual level, and through meaningful collaboration, to achieve the sectoral goals outlined above. Here are five things you can do in your everyday work to achieve more impactful ocean-climate communication:

- **Use the evidence:** Focus on proven approaches, and measure our impact to continually improve the evidence
- **Democratise:** Share resources, research products, expertise, spokespeople and messages
- **Align:** Join the dots between individual projects and shared ocean goals / the overarching story
- **Think big:** Take leaps together, jointly invest in communications and seek 'big picture' change opportunities, not just one-off projects
- **Think beyond:** Collaborate with unusual suspects, from media partners and the private sector to organisations focused on other global development areas (climate, health etc).

Useful Resources for Effective Ocean Communication

How to Talk About the Ocean so that People Will Listen

By FrameWorks Institute, supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

A short toolkit and guidance for anyone who talks about the ocean, climate change and nature to different audiences including the public, politicians, policymakers and businesses. It is based on comprehensive research with the UK public.

Reframing the Ocean

By FrameWorks Institute, supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

This framing guide features clear ocean communications dos and don'ts, based on findings from the report [Turning the Tide](#).

Heartwired to Love the Ocean

By Goodwin Simon Strategic Research and Wonder: Strategies for Good, with support from David and Lucile Packard Foundation

This guide (also available in Spanish), based on five years of research, identifies six heartwired ocean mindsets that describe how people experience and relate to the ocean in different ways, and provides communications recommendations for engaging each.

Ocean Rising: The Quest to Inspire the Public

By Schmidt Ocean Institute

This white paper takes prior recommendations on how to inspire the public and puts them into an actionable framework, engaging five different industries: the arts; broadcast media; social media; sports and gaming; and business and industry.

Branding the Ocean: How Innovative Collaborations Can Enhance Public Engagement and Ocean Exploration

By Dr. Carlie Wiener (Schmidt Ocean Institute)

In a similar vein to Ocean Rising, Dr. Wiener's paper focuses on leveraging popular culture, making early connections and unique collaborations for impactful public engagement.

OneOcean Response Room

By OneOcean Flotilla

Beginning in April 2020, the Response Room Briefings include analysis of ocean media coverage (both thematic and around specific events) and offer associated communication recommendations.

Climate Outreach Reports

By Climate Outreach

Climate Outreach has a wide selection of reports with evidence-based recommendations on communicating on climate issues. Papers cover a range of audiences and geographies, and forefront a diverse, representative and equitable approach to communication.

Climate Visuals Image Library

By Climate Visuals

Climate Visuals is a free, evidence-based library of climate and ocean photography. Images are approved based on seven proven principles for effective climate change communication.