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**CARING FOR THE
BLUE PLANET, YOU
CAN MAKE A
DIFFERENCE**

SAFEGUARDING THE WORLD OCEAN: AN IMMENSE COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL CHALLENGE FOR THE EUROPEAN PEOPLE AND THE INHABITANTS OF THE BLUE PLANET

A contribution from the World Ocean
Network European Chapter to the public
consultation on a future European
maritime policy

1) IT IS HIGH TIME WE DID SOMETHING

Our planet Earth, 72% of the surface of which is covered by oceans, is a unique object in the solar system. The world ocean is a major element in regulating climatic change due to its great inertial mass. It is also, by far and away, the Earth's most fecund source of life. The oceans contain over 90% of our planet's biomass and, every year, they provide us with over 80 million tonnes of living resources through fishing. 3.5 billion human beings are thought to be directly dependent on this source of food. In Europe alone maritime regions account for over 40% of GDP.

Be this as it may, the oceans have never deteriorated so quickly as during the last ten years. Today 75% of the fish stocks are either being fished to their limit or overfished. It is estimated that 90% of all large fish have already been caught. Coral reefs, on which 90% of marine species depend directly or indirectly, are today facing very serious threats. 28% of the surface reefs have died off and 2006 looks like being a particularly bad year due to the phenomenon of intense bleaching in a large number of areas throughout the world.

Few oceans remain untouched by pollution, 80% of which is a result of land-based activities while 75% of large waste consists of plastic. According to a recent United Nations report the non-treatment of sewage and wastewater (which affects 2.5 billion human beings) costs \$13 billion per year, \$8 billion of which are accounted for by treating hepatitis alone.

It is quite clear that if we do not all begin



to change our ways within a very short space of time, we are rushing headlong towards the greatest catastrophe the human race has ever known.

However, in some areas, pollution has begun to recede. This is particularly true along the Mediterranean coasts where in some areas fish can now be seen again contrary to the situation of 30 years ago. This is largely due to the fact the large towns have been equipped with more efficient sewage systems. European beaches are clean: 96,7% of them comply with the mandatory standards for bathing water.

We must therefore set in motion a massive overall change; raising public awareness world-wide would be a great help.

Europe, which has the world's first largest maritime territory, can and must make a major contribution. Present on the Atlantic, Indian and Arctic Oceans, the Mediterranean, the Baltic, the North Sea, the Black Sea, and the Caribbean Sea, Europe is in a unique position to foster sustainable use of the world's ocean.

2) WE ARE ALL INVOLVED

2.1) Individual action

While the overall direction given by international organizations and the decisions taken at national level by various countries are certainly a vital step in the right direction, it nevertheless remains true that the role played by each individual is crucial. Each and every one of us, acting as citizens, can influence the decisions taken at higher levels.

As individuals we all have our part to play in preserving the ocean, especially within the framework of our everyday activities, whether it be DIY or gardening (do we use products containing pollutants or not), producing and sorting waste (do we buy overpackaged articles or not, do we use throw-away plastic bags or not), eating (we should choose the fish and seafood we eat according to

where they come from and how the stocks are managed), tourism (we should behave responsibly on the beaches and in our nautical activities), carbon dioxide discharge (car exhausts). It is therefore urgent for everybody first to assess the effect of their daily activities on the oceans and then to act in order to limit the negative repercussions they may have on the oceans.

A public survey conducted in 2003 at European level in which 4861 visitors to aquariums, museums and science centres, all members of the OCEANICS* work group, were questioned, showed that, although they were aware of the threats to the environment, two thirds of the people questioned thought that the state of the ocean's health was either good or acceptable. The public at large seemed unaware of or poorly informed about the problems. They could not make a realistic assessment of the urgency of the situation and the impact it could have on their own lives. There was, however, a desire for better information about the degradation of the ocean caused by Man and his activities, about the threats to marine habitats and species, as well as about what concrete action could be taken to protect the environment.

2.2) Collective responsibility

The OCEANICS survey further showed that up to 90% of the people interviewed in European venues were willing to give partial or complete support to measures aimed at preserving the oceans even if this meant reducing their consumption of highly-valued species of fish for less highly-valued species while 92% stated that they would partially or completely support measures which would lead to their spending more money to purchase fish which had been caught using "sustainable" techniques.

After acting as individuals, responsible citizens can act collectively, within the framework of an association, for

example, or a network, in their workplaces, through work councils, trade



unions and so on ... or more simply by disseminating ideas in the different groups to which they belong.

The same applies to those professional categories which make their living from the sea, whose practices could be modified by raising their awareness levels: these range from fish farmers and large scale professional fishermen to industrialists and farmers and include town and country planners, the building trade, local authorities along the coasts, as well as shipping companies, oil companies, etc.

2.3) Towards a new governance

Because the marine environment is largely an alien environment – or at least an unknown one – to most people, there is little natural impetus for legislative enactment from this quarter. Educating the public makes it easier for people to articulate the need for laws to protect the marine ecosystem.

A further direct consequence of making the public aware of the legislative support required to ensure a healthy marine ecosystem is the establishment of a strong public lobby for government to act to ensure the protection of the marine environment. When public awareness of an issue is raised, the politicians find themselves forced to take the issue seriously and meet public demands.

3) WORLD OCEAN GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC AWARENESS.

International and national measures are being taken to stimulate good management of the world ocean and to inform and educate the public.

* Acquario di Genova, Chester Zoo, ECSITE, EUAC, Fondazione IDIS – Città della Scienza, Institut Océanographique, Lithuanian Sea Museum, MUSEON, NAUSICAA – Centre National de la Mer, North Sea Museum, OCEANARIO, Royal Institut of Natural Sciences of Brussels

3.1) International level

The action plan negotiated by the UN member states at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 gave a new, much larger place to issues concerning the oceans. During the Summit meeting the Global Forum on Oceans, Coasts and Islands was set up. It aims at inciting the inhabitants of the planet, from governments down to the public at large to act in such a way that the international community honours its commitments for safeguarding the oceans and rationalizing the sustainable management of their resources. The forum has four goals:

- To work together with governments and other international organizations to implement the commitments made by the international community in favour of the oceans.
- To pool resources and know-how and organize actions to contribute to the good governance of the oceans.
- To generate interest in the oceans and mobilize resources to address the issues raised at global, national and regional levels.
- To disseminate information and mobilize public awareness on oceans, coasts and islands.

The Global Forum has entrusted the World Ocean Network with the task of mobilizing the public.

In 2002 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution designating the period 2005 to 2014 as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. This is principally about learning to:

- Assess, care for and restore the state of our planet;
- Live in a world where all people have sufficient food to lead a healthy and productive life;
- Be caring citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally.

3.2) European public mobilisation

The Green Paper argues that there are too few who realise that all maritime activities are interlinked and who are

conscious that they are citizens of a maritime Europe. In this regard a Europe wide campaign based on a strong network of aquariums, science museums, education centres, zoos, etc. would have a major impact. Various campaigns of differing nature have shown just how effective mobilizing the public can be. The campaign for promoting the wearing of seatbelts, for example, saw children successfully enjoining their parents to comply with the rules. In the fields of sustainable development and peace building, the following examples are worthy of note: action of Handicap International against Landmines, the struggle against child labour, Tropical Hardwoods and Certification, and Fair Trade.

4) AQUARIUMS ARE IDEALLY PLACED TO REACH THE GENERAL PUBLIC. THEY CAN MOBILISE THEIR AUDIENCE FOR THE SUCCESS OF MARITIME POLICY OBJECTIVES.

To successfully conduct a large-scale awareness campaign it is essential to call on existing players who are already experienced in taking action and can depend on the support of existing networks. Their experience and the strength of their determination are efficient springboards for actions to raise awareness in citizens.

From this point of view aquariums, science museums or protected natural spaces and zoos are ideally placed.

Thus, according to the OCEANICS survey



which we spoke about earlier, in Europe, these establishments are among the three principal sources of information on the seas and oceans coming after television and newspapers and magazines. Above all, they are considered to be far more reliable than the other information sources. Furthermore, the large European aquariums welcome about 60-80 million visitors every year, of all ages and from all walks of life.

Other sites available to the public play a similar role. Science centres around Europe have also undertaken information campaigns on topics linked to sustainable development. They reach out 30 to 40 million people / year.

Together they can reach over 100 million visitors.

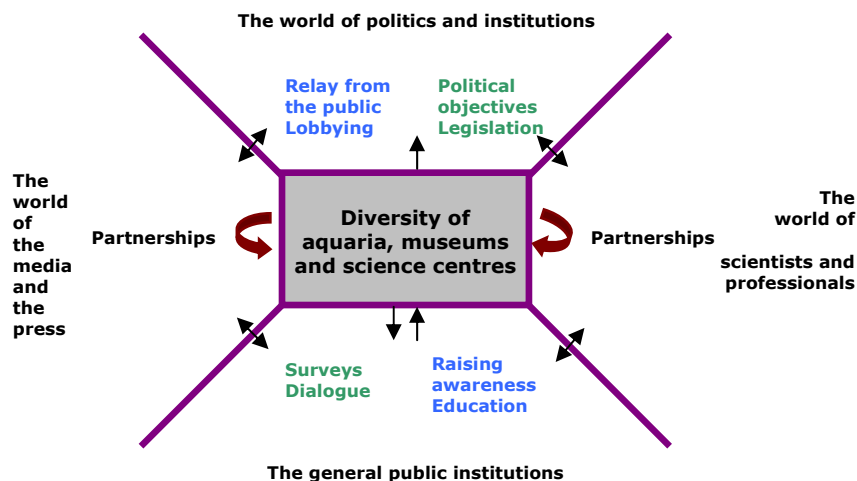
The potential impact of mobilizing the public in such large numbers is considerable.

Let us examine, for instance, the way people eat fish: if the 1 000 000 visitors to a large aquarium changed their eating habits for only one meal by choosing to

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It can be asserted that aquariums, museums and science centres actively mediate today between four worlds, the political world and institutions, the scientific world and sea professionals, the media and the press, and the general public:



"Aquariums, museums and science centres act as relays with the public by providing information, explanations, and comments on the policies and laws that apply to oceans. They also act as relays with politicians and decision-makers, informing them of the concerns of the public (i.e. the voters). (...) Aquariums, museums and science centres are the "voice" of scientists to politicians, to the public, as well as to the press and the media. By popularizing the latest scientific findings (...), they make them accessible to as many people as possible. The press and the media, (...) are partners for mediation with the public where many exchanges can be planned, but also partners for action since they are able to act as multiple relays of messages and information campaigns launched by the aquariums, museums and science centres. (...) The general public is the number one representative. It is for the general public, and thanks to it, that aquariums, museums and science centres exist and work."

Extracts from the Proceedings of the 1st International Meeting "Acting together for the future of the Blue Planet"

5) "THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY": THE ACTION PLAN OF THE WORLD OCEAN NETWORK

The three oceans constitute a single ecosystem whose elements permanently interact with each other. Any degradation of the resources of one ocean region will have repercussions on other areas. Any degradation of the ecosystem is highly detrimental for human health and can have dramatic consequences on the lifestyle of the most vulnerable populations. A concerted action on a world scale is therefore vital to preserve the natural balance and better to manage resources.

A far-reaching action is required to define policy in this respect and to disseminate the widespread use of "best practices". Such an action requires the



support of the general public who must be persuaded to change their habits and behaviour.

5.1) The World Ocean Network

Informing the general public about the state of the ocean, helping individuals to gain better understanding of their roles in conservation actions and of their relation to the natural environment, and promoting public commitment – these have been the World Ocean Network's priorities since it was set up in 2002. The actions towards the general public are guided by three requirements: to disseminate appropriate information, to

provide high-quality education and, for members of the public, to enter into eco-citizen commitments.

The World Ocean Network has organized three international meetings *Acting together for the Future of the Blue Planet* of aquariums, museums, science and education centres, research institutes, NGOs, etc. in 1999, 2002, 2006.

The World Ocean Network European chapter developed owing to the OCEANICS project in 2002 and held the 1st European Meeting in Oceanario, Lisbon, 2005. The aim of the chapter is to relay the Network's messages and to coordinate the actions of the active organizations in their respective areas.

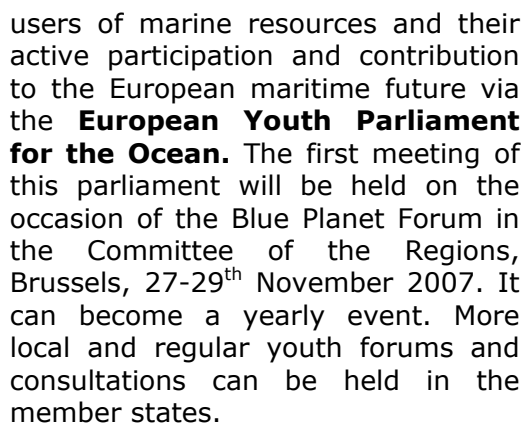
The actions of the World Ocean Network are relayed in different parts of Europe through existing networks such as EUAC (European Union of Aquarium Curators), ECSITE (The European Network of Science Centres & Museums), CEDIP (European Committee of Professional Diving Instructors) and with local partners in most of the European countries.

The public awareness raising action could be developed through stronger European coordination. It can support the objectives and implementation of European maritime policy.

5.2) Deciding on a European plan of action to inform and educate the public

Particular attention is given to the reinforcement of a sense of common European maritime identity and heritage, and an individual and collective responsibility. For this reason, the World Ocean Network European chapter has started to forge a new vision for a Blue Europe – part of the World Ocean – as a common good and legacy of mankind. The world's oceans are interconnected to form one ocean, a huge common territory with no frontiers and its own identity that every human being is responsible for it. They are our home and country.

- The promotion of the European youth involvement in the ocean stewardship and governance as future decision makers, managers, consumers and



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World Ocean a common territory that they are in charge of. The Passport provides inspiration and ideas of simple conservation actions and demonstrates the determination of its holders to act for the benefit of the marine environment. For this purpose they have rights – to discover and use ocean resources in a sustainable manner, for example – but they also have responsibilities – to think about their daily actions and their impact on the environment and, above all, to behave differently. The Passport already exists in 8 European languages

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World Ocean Day

Tag des Meeres

1. Mai 2009

10 - 18 Uhr





Wirden Sie Bürger der Weltmeere

Erfahren Sie mehr über die Schönheit und Gefährdung der Meere

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Vorträge und Informationen

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 Mi. 22. 13 - 18.30 Uhr
 Tel. 93 11 49-93 17
programm@aquarium-duesseldorf.de







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organising events, activities, and supplying the public with concrete actions and measures to protect the oceans.

The World Ocean Day is now observed by over **174 organisations in more than 12 countries in Europe** and celebrated on June 8th under the aegis of the UNESCO Intergovernmental

Oceanographic Commission. The World Ocean Day is undoubtedly one of the easiest promotional actions on the oceans to implement. It would have a far greater impact if it was officially designated as a European day and as an international day by the United Nations.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, let us recall the words of Patricio Bernal, Assistant Director General of the UNESCO, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, in his closing address at the 1st International Meeting of Aquariums, Museums and Science Centres "Acting together for the future of the Blue Planet", on 6th June 1999.

"Don't be shy, don't be conservative, let's be daring. We have an immense task ahead and we are very few. We are the only ones who strengthen the link with the rest of the population. We are conscious of the problems, we have the capacity, and we have to sharpen our focus to deliver a very valuable message!"