

Preface

Man is inextricably tied to the oceans. Making sure that citizens – whether they live on the coast or inland – understand how the oceans affect their daily lives and how mankind affects the oceans, is what Ocean Literacy is all about. As the oceans are changing rapidly and over a range that can have a profound influence on human societies, ocean literacy becomes important because sooner or later informed decisions will need to be taken to address the impacts of the changing oceans. While there is a worldwide movement of people expressing serious concern about the protection and the health of the seas and oceans, Europe has yet to provide a structure to make Ocean Literacy its priority. There is an urgent need for a consensus on what Ocean Literacy means for the continent and what European citizens should know about the marine realm to allow them to make informed and responsible decisions regarding the seas and oceans and their resources. However, the large cultural diversity across Europe – e.g. in the many languages, educational systems and traditional ways of living with the sea – complicates the implementation of a unique and consistent Ocean Literacy plan. Data and information on what people know, want to know and should know about the oceans is scarce. This suggests that ocean knowledge of the wider public is (too) limited, and that in most European countries ocean sciences and knowledge are underrepresented and not integrated in the school curricula. On top of that, no direct reference is being made in European key marine policy documents on how to strengthen the position of ocean sciences in science standards.

The First Conference in Ocean literacy in Europe is therefore a timely and important milestone in developing a more ocean literate society. Scientists, educators and policy makers discuss the future societal challenges related to the European seas. The conference also addresses the lack of ocean-related content in science education standards of the formal educational system(s) at the same time emphasizing how outreach projects and informal education efforts (e.g. public aquaria, science centres, museums, NGOs, media) are essential tools for more public involvement and active participation.

Ocean Literacy is a prerequisite for Europe's quest for a more ocean-oriented society and economy. Preparing an entire community for a closer interaction with the sea is rewarding for the marine research community and for the science policy-makers. A more informed public will better understand and support investments in ocean sciences and the need to manage the marine ecosystem in a science-based, sustainable and respectful way.

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