

How to foster transparent and accountable ocean practices through ocean literacy

“How to” workshop summary

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Summary

Bluewashing—when industries or governments misleadingly present their activities as environmentally friendly without meaningful action—distorts public perception and undermines genuine sustainability efforts. This practice not only misleads investors, consumers and policymakers but also slows progress towards sustainable ocean governance. Enhancing ocean literacy is essential in recognising and countering bluewashing, ensuring that sustainability claims are backed by real action. Ocean literacy goes beyond basic awareness; it involves a deep understanding of marine ecosystems, human impacts on the ocean and the ability to critically assess sustainability claims. This session explored strategies to foster transparency, hold organisations accountable, and use ocean literacy as a tool to promote credible and sustainable ocean practices.

- **Ocean literacy must be comprehensive and research-driven**—A true understanding of marine ecosystems and the ocean's role in global systems requires continuous scientific research. Without a strong foundation in ocean science, efforts to evaluate sustainability claims and detect misinformation remain ineffective.
- **Awareness of human impact on the ocean is evolving**—While ocean literacy has improved, gaps remain in understanding the full scope of human activities—such as pollution, overfishing and coastal development—that have an impact on marine ecosystems. Expanding education and data collection is key to addressing these gaps.
- **Cross-sector collaboration is essential**—The ocean-literacy gap can only be bridged by bringing together diverse disciplines, including natural sciences, economics, education, culture and the arts. Partnerships with organisations like UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) can strengthen collective efforts to improve ocean health.
- **Corporate bluewashing can be both intentional and unintentional**—Some organisations deliberately mislead consumers about their sustainability efforts, while others lack the knowledge, governance structures or tools to integrate genuine environmental considerations into their business models. Better education and regulation can help prevent both forms of bluewashing.
- **Ocean literacy is a financially viable way to address climate and ocean-related risks**—Understanding how human activities impact the ocean is not just an environmental concern but an economic one. Businesses



and policymakers equipped with ocean literacy can make informed decisions that mitigate financial risks associated with climate change and ecosystem degradation.

- **Fear of unintentional bluewashing can discourage corporate sustainability efforts**—Some businesses avoid making environmental claims altogether for fear of being accused of bluewashing. Clear guidelines, third-party verification and better communication strategies can help businesses engage in sustainability efforts with confidence.
- **Consumers alone cannot be responsible for identifying bluewashing**—While consumer awareness is important, the burden of identifying misleading claims should not fall solely on individuals. Regulations, legal frameworks and independent audits are necessary to hold corporations accountable and ensure transparency.
- **Decision-makers need better data on how economic activities impact ocean health**—Many

policymakers and industry leaders lack access to reliable, high-quality data on the environmental impacts of their actions. Closing this gap is essential for improving decision-making, ocean literacy and sustainability outcomes.

- **Ocean literacy must be strategically applied across multiple sectors**—Beyond public education, targeted ocean-literacy efforts should engage policymakers, industry leaders, journalists and educators to ensure a broad and informed approach to sustainability challenges.
- **Standardised ocean-literacy metrics and regulatory frameworks are needed**— Establishing common benchmarks for what it means to be “ocean literate” and implementing regulatory frameworks at national and international levels can facilitate better communication and collaboration across sectors, fostering systemic change.

Strengthening ocean literacy is key to fostering transparency, holding industries accountable and ensuring that ocean-sustainability efforts are genuine and impactful. Bluewashing remains a significant challenge, but by equipping individuals, businesses and policymakers with the knowledge to critically assess sustainability claims, we can drive meaningful change. Collaboration across sectors, improved regulatory frameworks and increased access to reliable data will help bridge the gap between rhetoric and action. Ultimately, a well-informed society is the strongest defence against misinformation, ensuring that ocean health and sustainability remain at the forefront of global priorities.

