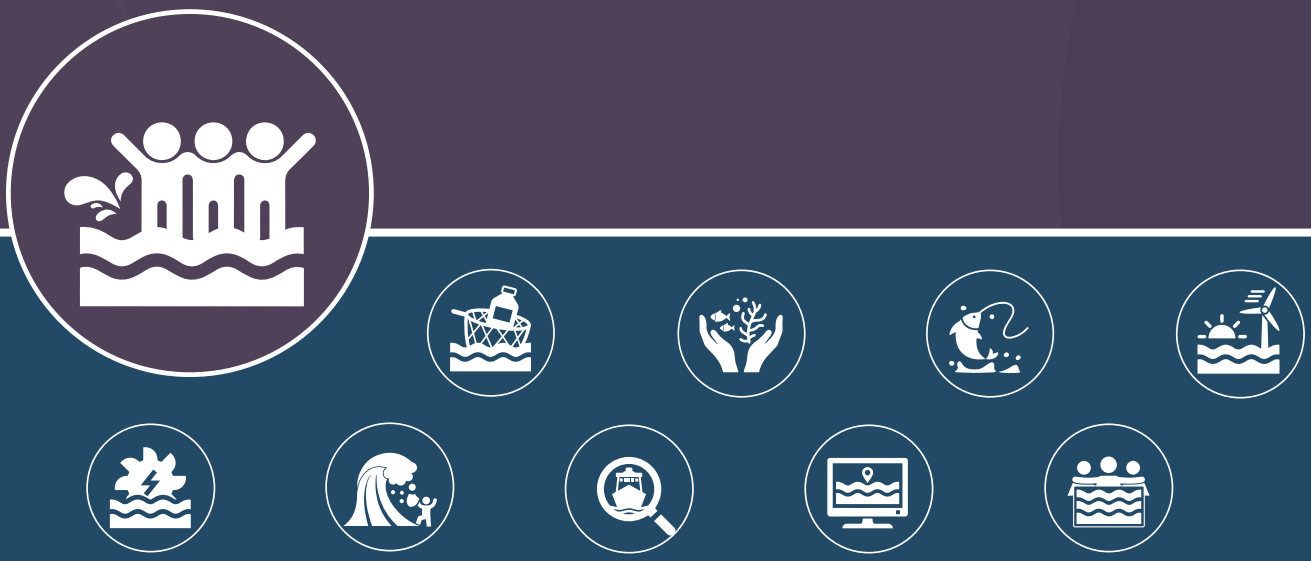
Ocean Decade

Vision 2030

A Theory of Change for the Ocean Decade Challenge 10 (2025-2030)



The United Nations
Decade of Ocean Science
for Sustainable Development
(2021-2030)

2021 2030 United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development

A Theory of Change for the Ocean Decade Challenge 10 (2025-2030)

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The ocean literacy community's contributions and expertise provided important and invaluable inputs to set and identify the future priorities for ocean literacy.

Foreword

It is a privilege to share with you this new Theory of Change 2025-2030, a guiding framework born of our collective aspiration to place the ocean at the heart of global sustainability efforts, both within the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and beyond.

Now more than ever, we need a society that is truly ocean-literate—one capable of hearing what the ocean is telling us through science and observation, and ready to respond with informed action and enlightened policies. Ocean literacy is, at its heart, a matter of connecting research with policymaking, culture, and individual behaviors so that knowledge becomes tangible results.

The ocean connects us all—across nations, generations, and disciplines. In this decade of unprecedented action for the ocean, we have a unique window to ensure that every sector—from education to finance, from cultural heritage to policymaking—becomes a champion of ocean stewardship. This Theory of Change reminds us that our individual and collective choices can create ripples of momentum throughout society, for the benefit of both humanity and the planet. Above all, it underscores that true progress requires sustained collaboration among governments, educators, private enterprises, civil society, and Indigenous Peoples, each sharing knowledge and resources in service of a healthy, thriving ocean. By weaving ocean literacy into every thread of our shared global tapestry, we can foster sustainable livelihoods, bolster environmental resilience, and safeguard cultural heritage that is rooted in the sea.

We stand at an important juncture. The success of this Theory of Change—and of the Ocean Decade—hinges on our resolve to act with courage and urgency in line with its recommendations, to use it as a compass guiding our path to an ocean-literate society. And if we can allow ourselves to be educated by the ocean, then we can shape a future where the ocean is not simply protected, but celebrated as a source of life, knowledge and wonder for all.

Vidar Helgesen
Executive Secretary
Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO

1. Introduction: Ocean Literacy and the Ocean Decade

In 2017, the United Nations General Assembly designated 2021–2030 as the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, a pivotal initiative aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of the ocean's role in sustaining life on Earth. The Ocean Decade provides a common framework for diverse stakeholders to generate and use ocean data and knowledge to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a particular focus on Sustainable Development Goal 14, "Life Below Water". Coordinated by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO as per UN mandate, it emphasizes the need for cross-sector collaboration, innovative solutions, and a transformative shift in how societies interact with and care for the ocean.

At the core of this transformation lies **ocean literacy (OL)**, a concept that has evolved from an educational framework into a strategic mechanism for societal change. Initially defined as "an understanding of your influence on the ocean and the ocean's influence on you" [1] [2], ocean literacy today encompasses a broader, more dynamic approach to fostering ocean stewardship, critical engagement, and interdisciplinary knowledge. This shift is reflected in increasing recognition of the role of ocean literacy in global governance, climate resilience, and sustainable development [3] [4].

The **Theory of Change for the Ocean Decade Challenge 10 (2025-2030)** builds on past efforts to integrate ocean literacy into education, governance, business, culture, and communication. The evolving understanding of OL is now deeply interwoven with critical emerging themes such as **ocean rights**, the **science, policy and society interface**, and the **intersection of ocean health and human well-being**. These perspectives expand the impact of ocean literacy beyond traditional education, embedding it within decision-making processes, economic strategies, and cultural preservation efforts. By positioning ocean literacy as a transformative force, this document outlines a roadmap for its role both within the Ocean Decade and beyond.

1 E. McKinley, D. Burdon, R.J. Shellock, The evolution of ocean literacy: A new framework for the United Nations Ocean Decade and beyond, Marine Pollution Bulletin, Volume 186, 2023, 114467, ISSN 0025-326X, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpolbul.2022.114467

2 Cava F., Tuddenham P, Schoedinger, S., Strang C.. (2005). Science Content and Standards for Ocean Literacy: A Report on Ocean Literacy. 10.13140/RG.2.2.12126.84804

3 Kelly, R., Evans, K., Alexander, K. et al. Connecting to the oceans: supporting ocean literacy and public engagement. Rev Fish Biol Fisheries 32, 123–143 (2022). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11160-020-09625-9

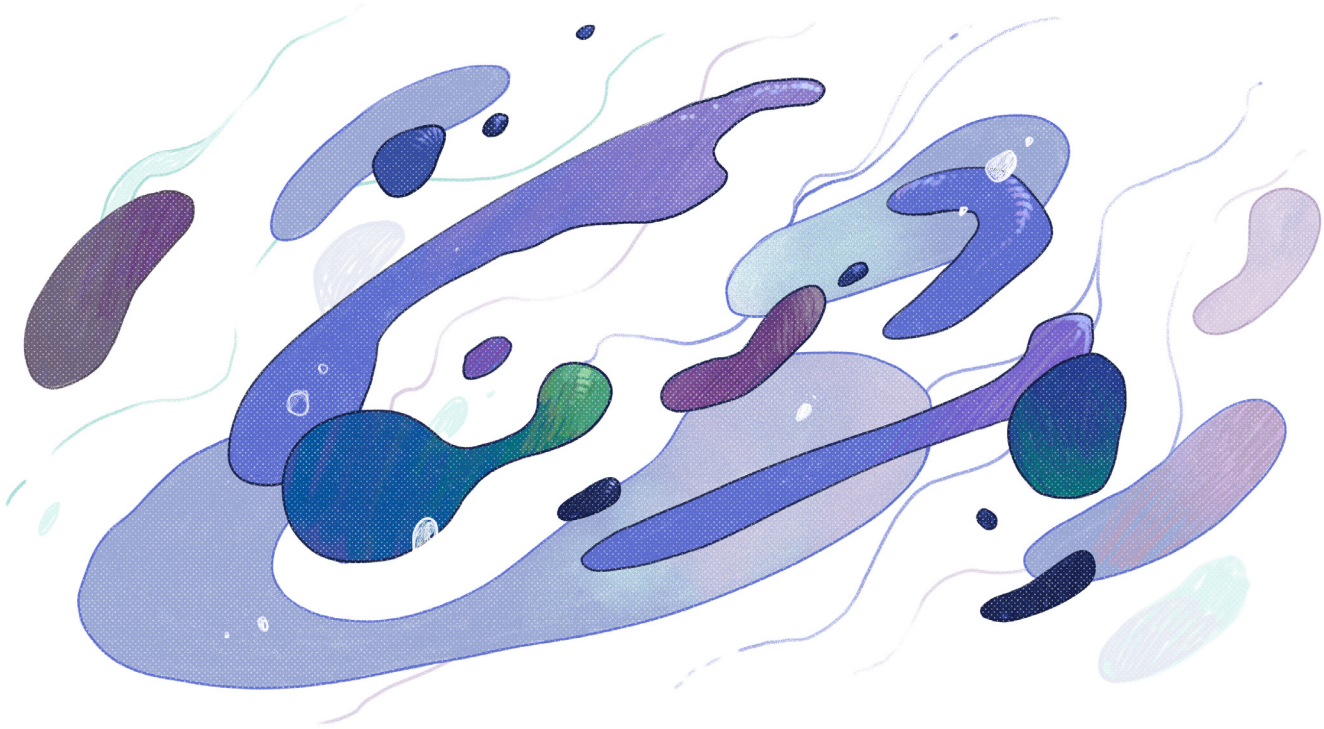
4 Paredes-Coral E., Mokos M., Vanreusel A., Deprez T., 2021, Mapping Global Research on Ocean Literacy: Implications for Science, Policy, and the Blue Economy, Frontiers in Marine Science, Volume 8, 10.3389/fmars.2021.648492

2. Theory of Change for the Ocean Decade Challenge 10 (2025-2030)

The Theory of Change (TOC) from 2025 to 2030 is grounded in the expansion of the topics identified in the previous TOC [5] and in the review of the available literature along with the emergence of relevant concepts such as Ocean Rights (i.e., recognizing the ocean as a living entity with inherent rights and intrinsic values) and the direct link between ocean health and human health.

We have identified five priority areas, updating and re-evaluating the initial priorities. Furthermore, these areas have been aligned with the key drivers outlined in the Challenge 10 White Paper (WP10) [6] that guided also the development and publication of the Venice Declaration for Ocean Literacy in Action [7].

It is crucial to understand that these identified areas should not be seen as isolated silos; rather, they are interconnected and influence each other in various ways. Addressing one area often has implications for others, highlighting the need for a holistic and integrated approach.



5 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377708

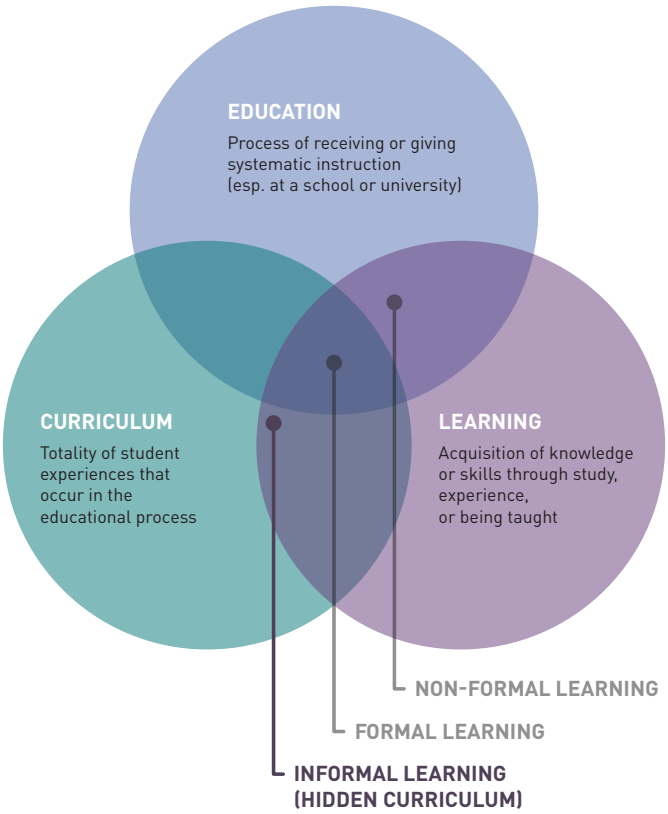
6 Glithero, L. D., Bridge, N., Hart, N., Mann-Lang, J., McPhie, R., Paul, K., Peebler, A., Wiener, C., Yen, C., Kelly, R., McRuer, J., Hodgins, D., & Curtin, F. (2024). Ocean Decade Vision 2030 White Papers - Challenge 10: Restoring Society's Relationship with the Ocean. Paris, UNESCO-IOC. (The Ocean Decade Series, 51.10.). https://doi.org/10.25607/ekwn-wh61

7 Venice Declaration for Ocean Literacy in Action (2024) https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390297_ita

Blue Education

Blue education is an emerging interdisciplinary field focused on expanding ocean literacy, promoting sustainable practices, and elucidating the connections between ocean health, human health, and sustainable economy. This educational approach, initially targeting formal systems to influence curriculum policies, now also adopts context-adapted methods and includes Indigenous knowledge, non-formal and informal education systems [8].

Aligned with SDG 4.7, blue education aims to empower students with the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to promote sustainable development, emphasizing sustainable lifestyles, appreciation of cultural diversity, and marine conservation practices. Educational strategies are designed to not only foster knowledge of marine ecosystems and the economy of ocean resources, but also encourage behavior changes, develop empathy towards marine life, effective communication skills, social activism, and the adoption of sustainability values in daily decisions.



8 Non-formal education refers to learning that takes place outside formal educational structures (eg. school). It could have a more flexible learner-centered approach and not bound by the strict schedules or certification processes of formal education. Unlike formal education, non-formal learning often focuses on practical skills and personal development, without a set curriculum or hierarchical system. Informal learning is heavily situation-dependent, and learning may not be intended or recognised by the learner. For this Theory of Change the definition can focus on spontaneous learning that occurs outside structured settings such as schools, often through everyday experiences, family, traditions, peer interactions, or media consumption. Adapted from: https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/665425-formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning-what-are-they-and-how-can-we-research-them-.pdf

Economy and Financial Action

Ocean-derived goods and services significantly contribute to the global economy by creating new jobs and business opportunities. Sectors like fishing, aquaculture (including mariculture), shipping, food, pharmaceutical, mining, forestry, energy, and recreation and tourism, including the culture and heritage sector, are directly linked to the ocean, while others like real estate, urban planning, waste management, finance, and retail benefit indirectly. To cite some examples, the sustainable ocean economy accounts for 4.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) in Barcelona, Spain, and 1.4% of the city's workforce. In the state of California, United States, one in nine jobs connect to port-related activity. Sustainable ocean economy in the region of Flanders, Belgium, grew from 4.5% of GDP in 2018 to 5.2% in 2021, and port activities in the region have a multiplier effect of 2, with 103,000 direct jobs and 230,000 related jobs [9].

Collaboration across these sectors, as well as those outside private business, is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN's 2030 Agenda, especially SDG 17, which calls for 'virtuous partnerships' to spur innovation and create synergies. For over two decades, the United Nations has emphasized the importance of a global network that includes the private sector to promote an ecologically sustainable ocean economy, coastal development, ocean literacy, and ocean preservation. This system could enable the private sector to engage other stakeholders, to foster and scale virtuous marine preservation actions. Leveraging the private sector's potential and resources can significantly aid in preserving and restoring the ocean and coasts, and their communities, both now and for future generations [10] [11].

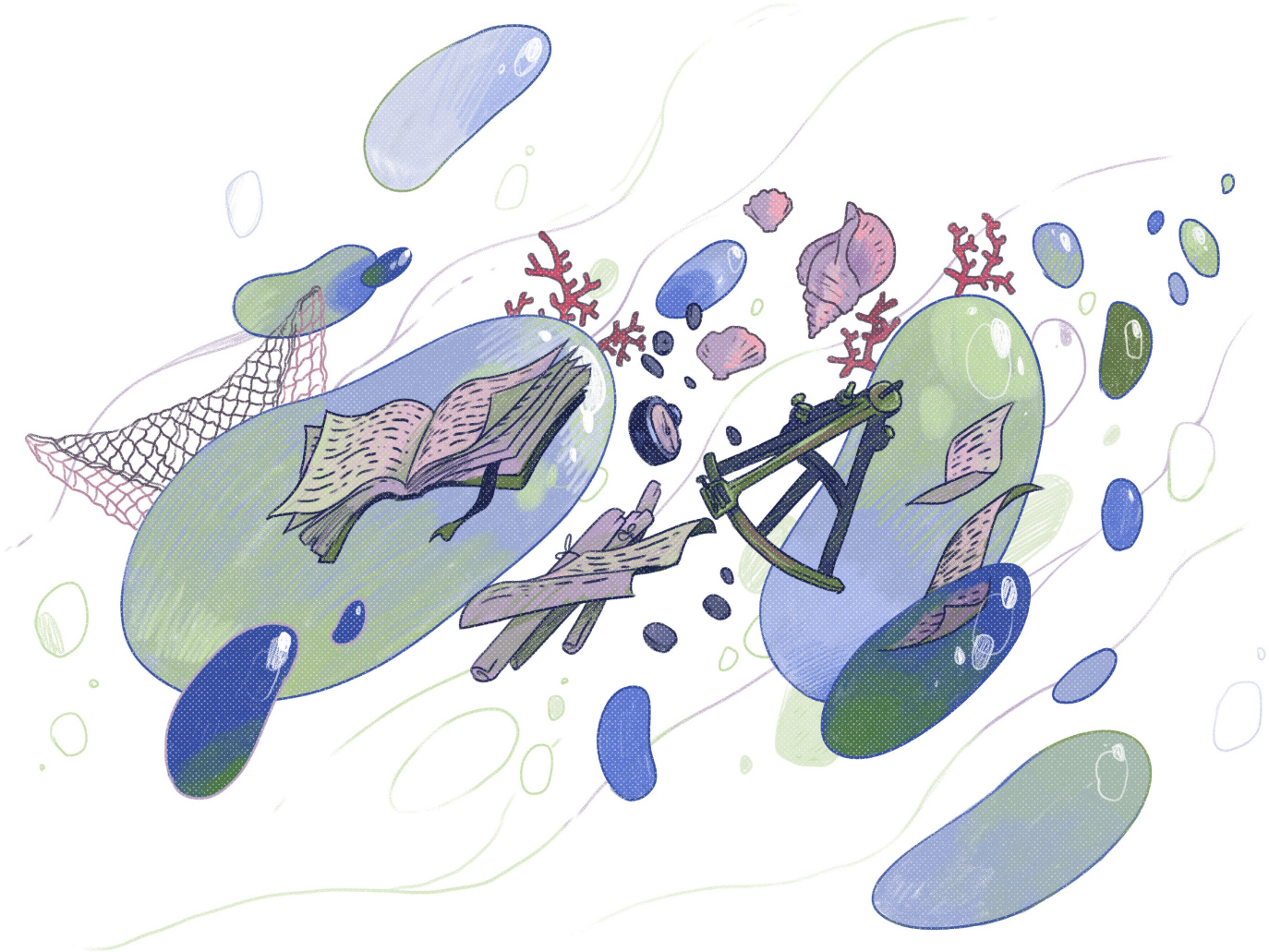
9 OECD (2024). The Blue Economy in Cities and Regions: A Territorial Approach, OECD Urban Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/bd929b7d-en

10 IOC-UNESCO (2023.) Collaborating with the ocean - A new model for ocean-literate corporate action, Paris (IOC Manuals and Guides, 94). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000389278

11 UN Global Compact: https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/ocean

Ocean Culture and Heritage

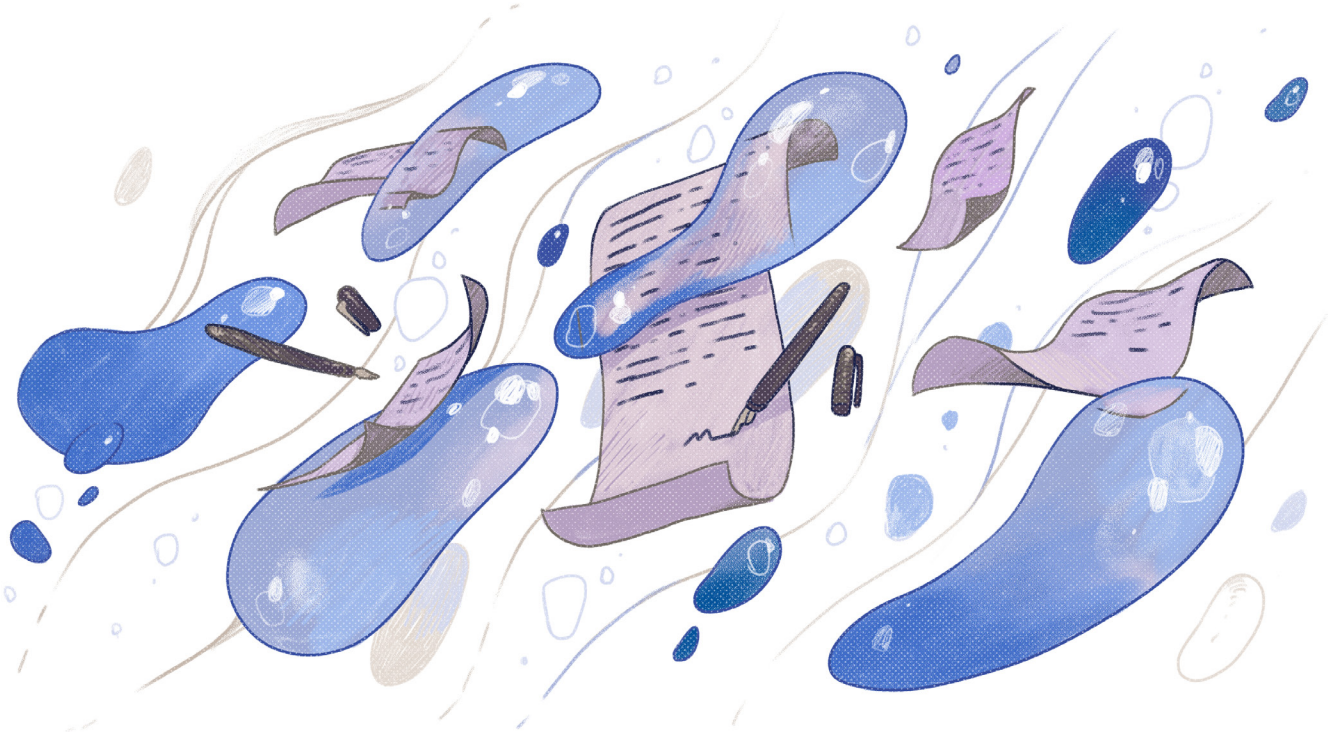
UNESCO defines culture as the unique spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional traits of a society or group, encompassing art, literature, lifestyles, values, traditions, languages, and beliefs. The United Nations General Assembly's Resolution 71/312 (July 2017) underscores the critical role of cultural connections between humans and the ocean in tackling global challenges and promoting sustainable development. To advance the protection, preservation and recognition of ocean cultures and heritage, the Ocean Decade seeks to elevate and celebrate various ocean cultures and heritage, and better recognise socio-cultural dimensions of the ocean in ocean literacy programmes and processes. Integrating culture and cultural heritage into ocean literacy remains essential for achieving a restorative, inclusive, and equal, sustainable development enhancing community involvement (From One Ocean Hub).



Science, Policy and Society Interface

The ocean science, policy and society interface represents a crucial collaboration where transdisciplinary research on ocean ecosystems and climate impacts shapes policies to manage and protect ocean resources. This synergy ensures that societal needs—ranging from economic reliance on fisheries, mineral extraction to cultural health and recreational values—are adequately represented in and integrated into policy-making processes.

Essential components include robust communication and meaningful public involvement, nurturing a society committed to ocean health. Comprehending intricate and complex human-ocean interactions requires appreciating the ocean in terms of its biophysical, cultural, social, intrinsic and economic values, alongside local and Indigenous knowledge systems, all connected to global social well-being. Consequently, critical ocean literacy [12] empowers communities to make informed choices and champion ocean stewardship.



12 Critical ocean literacy involves a reflective and inclusive approach to human–ocean relationships, recognizing diverse values—biophysical, cultural, social, economic, health-related, and Indigenous—while addressing the complexities of social wellbeing and ensuring impactful, equitable ocean literacy initiatives. UNESCO-IOC (2022). State-of-the-Art of Ocean Literacy. UNESCO, Paris. (IOC Technical Series, 176)

Strategic Communication and Narrative Shifting

The language we use profoundly influences conservation efforts by shaping moral considerations toward the ocean, societal values and policy. Effective communication strategies can transform perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors addressing both obstacles and solutions. Laws are created by societies based on their values – vice versa, laws can fundamentally reshape the underpinning values and principles that guide ocean conservation efforts. In this way, values, ethics and norms are important drivers of policy and economic activity. Narrative shifting through legal and policy frameworks such as Ocean Rights can catalyse a transformation to an ocean-literate society.
While certain communication efforts concentrate on specific campaigns or policy matters, continuous and broader public communication through different languages and platforms, aiming for vernacular access, can create a "surround sound" effect.

Embedding a new environmental ethic in communications, law, and policy can help restore society's relationship with the ocean while shaping an ocean-literate society. This approach helps keep an issue prominent, thereby creating a conducive environment for more targeted messages or actions by maintaining issue relevance. Enhancing the skills of global ocean communicators will amplify and improve the quality of ocean narratives, reaching a wider and more diverse audience that can help build interdisciplinary connections [13] .

In addition, to ensure that the Theory of Change (TOC) 2025-2030 is supported by a comprehensive and unified strategy, several cross-cutting themes have been identified. These themes include securing adequate funding, fostering meaningful engagement, upholding values like justice, equity, diversity and inclusion, centering co-production with Indigenous Knowledge, Science and Local Ecological Knowledge holders, implementing robust impact measurement and management systems, and ensuring the active inclusion of youth, early career professionals, elders, and inter-generational dialogue and collaboration.

The TOC, detailed in Table 1 in the form of an outcomes pathway, illustrates a comprehensive sequence of changes that lead from the activities to the ultimate impact we aim to achieve.

13 Glithero, L. D., Bridge, N., Hart, N., Mann-Lang, J., McPhie, R., Paul, K., Peebler, A., Wiener, C., Yen, C., Kelly, R., McRuer, J., Hodgins, D., & Curtin, F. (2024). Ocean Decade Vision 2030 White Papers - Challenge 10: Restoring Society's Relationship with the Ocean. Paris, UNESCO-IOC. (The Ocean Decade Series, 51.10.). https://doi.org/10.25607/ekwn-wh61

3. Proposed Outcomes Pathway TABLE 1

Vision		"An ocean-literate society in which people are equipped and empowered to implement behavioral change in their own lives and work to the same end, and to advocate for societal change including policies that respect and regenerate the ocean."
Impact		"All members of society across regions, sectors, and scales have increased motivation, understanding and reach to foster equal and just opportunities to make decisions and behave in ways that ensure a healthy ocean."
OUTCOME 1 Blue Education	**OUTPUT 1**	By 2030, the ocean is integrated into at least 50 Member States curriculum frameworks, ensuring OL is an essential component of national, regional and municipal educational systems.
	OUTPUT 2	By 2030, National Blue Schools Networks are enlarged and strengthened through distributed leadership in at least 50 UNESCO Member States.
	OUTPUT 3	By 2030, an OL Framework with an emphasis on Indigenous, Traditional and Local Knowledge and Science, will be developed ensuring that learning about the ocean continues beyond the classrooms and into the workforce.
OUTCOME 2 Economy and Financial Action	**OUTPUT 1**	By 2030, ocean sustainability will be incorporated into business planning and operations, including Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policies, environmental policies, and R&D budgets.
	OUTPUT 2	By 2030, ocean funding is increased by 50% thanks to corporate actions that follow the recommendations of the UNESCO reports.
OUTCOME 3 Ocean Culture and Heritage	**OUTPUT 1**	A comprehensive understanding of the form and substance of marine tangible and intangible cultural heritage, informed by existing research and collaboration with UNESCO's Culture (CLT) sector.
	OUTPUT 2	Policies, laws, regulations that specifically address the preservation and protection of both marine tangible and intangible cultural heritage are revised or newly developed.
OUTCOME 4 Science, Policy and Society Interface	**OUTPUT 1**	Enhanced participatory policy-making and planning in urban and coastal regions leading to balanced and forward-looking policies that address ocean governance, health and the ocean-climate nexus.
	OUTPUT 2	Human behaviour is comprehensively understood through transdisciplinary programmes that integrate natural, social, and behavioural sciences with humanities, spirituality and ocean-centric design.
	OUTPUT 3	An expanded, pluralistic approach to human-ocean bonds that takes the multiplicity of marine cultures into consideration.
OUTCOME 5 Strategic Communication and Narrative Shifting	**OUTPUT 1**	Amplification of ocean literacy (OL) across high-level forums (e.g., World Ocean Summit, UNOC, COP, World Economic Forum, the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, the African Union, MSP Global Forums), emphasizing its role in fostering a sustainable and equitable ocean economy.
	OUTPUT 2	Strengthening of Ocean Communicators Networks at national, regional, and global levels, enhancing coordination between diverse stakeholders.
	OUTPUT 3	Fostering a shift in the narrative of the human-ocean relationship to bring a new ethic of ocean conservation.

OUTCOME 1

Blue Education

By 2030, a comprehensive and integrated OL framework is established globally, considering local adaptations, characterized by the widespread adoption of the Blue Curriculum in educational systems (e.g. national, regional etc.), and the implementation and strengthening of the Global and National Blue Schools Networks.

OUTPUT 1	By 2030, the ocean is integrated into at least 50 Member States curriculum frameworks, ensuring OL is an essential component of national, regional and municipal educational systems.
Activity 1	Provide technical support to curriculum development: conducting ad hoc meetings with and providing technical guidance to Ministries and local education departments, showcasing Blue Curriculum examples and successful case studies.
Activity 2	Promoting the initiative in events, congress, and other occasions, supporting to incorporate ocean-related topics into their national curricula.
Activity 3	Awareness campaigns on Blue Curriculum in partnership with public, private, civil society, young ocean leaders, and ocean education platforms at the cutting edge of blue upskilling.
Activity 4	Work with higher-level education to frame university courses, in all disciplines, with a critical ocean literacy and inclusive approach.
OUTPUT 2	By 2030, National Blue Schools Networks are enlarged and strengthened through distributed leadership in at least 50 UNESCO Member States.
Activity 1	Hold meetings with Blue Schools national coordinators and stakeholders involved in the initiative to keep the community engaged and active.
Activity 2	Conduct mentorships for national coordination teams, supporting the creation of diffuse leadership to align with blue schools practices, priorities and ways forward. These programs also include workshops, courses, and field trips, both in person and online, training the future of the regenerative ocean economy workforce.
Activity 3	Collect data with networks for creating a Blue Schools Global Report (BSGR), to be published once every year, followed by a biannual meeting.
Activity 4	Support MS to activate a Blue School national board.
OUTPUT 3	By 2030, an OL Framework with an emphasis on Indigenous, Traditional and Local Knowledge and Science, will be developed ensuring that learning about the ocean continues beyond the classrooms and into the workforce.
Activity 1	Activate a consultation process with the Ocean Literacy Group of Experts, the members of the Ocean Decade Ocean Literacy With All programme, the members of the Ocean Decade Coordination Office "Connecting People and Ocean", and the wide ocean literacy community, to collect advice and understand how to collaborate with existing informal OL networks, to advance OL to more sectors and fields.
Activity 2	Identify gaps and informal educators not involved in IOC initiatives (eg. aquariums, NGOs, museums, repositories, watersports centers, diving clubs, creative arts communities, sustainable tourism providers, living labs, training platforms, etc).
PROGRESS INDICATORS	— Number of universities, schools, teachers, and students that are part of the blue school program by 2030 — Number of Member States that introduced ocean literacy in their educational frameworks by 2030 — Number of people reached by blue education media campaigns — Number of policy-makers involved (eg. training sessions) — Number of laws or policies developed, that include OL mentions by 2030

OUTCOME 2

Economy and Financial Action

Ocean sustainability is incorporated into business planning and operations, taking into account environmental and social practices and policies.

OUTPUT 1	By 2030, ocean sustainability will be incorporated into business planning and operations, including Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) policies, environmental policies, and R&D budgets.
Activity 1	Develop a research fund dedicated to assess how an ocean-literate society can promote more equitable economic models.
Activity 2	Design and deliver OL capacity building programs and training for future employees (university students and early career professionals) of the corporate sector collaborating with universities (MBA, Masters programs) and business schools.
Activity 3	Integrate Ocean Literacy actions within Research & Development operations, investments and reporting (Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), corporate standard operating procedures (SOPs)), Transition Policies, Corporate Social Investment (CSI) and Human Resources Development (HRD)) policies to advance ocean conservation via capacity-building programmes for managers and employees.
Activity 4	Engage with other UN agencies, intergovernmental, international organizations, and consultancy firms to promote the integration of Ocean Literacy and ocean conservation into their own partnerships with the private sector.
OUTPUT 2	By 2030, ocean funding is increased by 50% thanks to corporate actions that follow the recommendations of the UNESCO reports.
Activity 1	Create and disseminate new guidelines for ethical and ocean-literate corporate actions and develop capacity-building programmes to promote the increase of investments in measurable ocean-related initiatives.
Activity 2	Activate a multi-donor fund to support OL initiatives worldwide by engaging banks, financing agencies, and other corporate actors, building on existing similar initiatives, such as climate funds.
Activity 3	Develop a call for good practices to engage and inspire new partners in developing new OL initiatives.
PROGRESS INDICATORS	— Number of companies that have integrated ocean sustainability into their CSR and ESG policies and reports. — Percentage of R&D budgets allocated to OL programs. — Number of businesses adopting ocean literacy (OL) capacity-building programs. — Increase in the number of businesses and university programs collaborating on OL capacity-building and ocean sustainability training. — Amount of funding allocated and disbursed for ocean literacy research projects, including the number of funded and completed projects. — Number of OL capacity-building programs developed and delivered. — Number of employees and managers trained in OL. — Number of partnerships and joined initiatives established with UN agencies and international organizations. — Percentage increase in ocean-related funding from corporate sources. — Number of new corporate donors or partnerships established for ocean initiatives. — Number of OL initiatives supported by the fund.

OUTCOME 3

Ocean Culture and Heritage

Preservation and protection strategies for both tangible and intangible cultural heritage are in place and fully incorporated into ocean governance frameworks across sectors, policy areas and geographic scales.

OUTPUT 1	A comprehensive understanding of the form and substance of marine tangible and intangible cultural heritage, informed by existing research and collaboration with UNESCO's Culture (CLT) sector.
Activity 1	Support Indigenous Peoples and community-led initiatives in the leveraging of research and knowledge regarding cultural heritage to increase sense of heritage ownership and community input into processes of coastal and ocean cultural heritage management.
Activity 2	Co-designed public information campaigns (for use in schools, museums...) showcasing the multifaceted cultural and historical significance of the ocean.
Activity 3	Mapping and integration of traditional methods of coastal and ocean science, philosophy, and stewardship in ocean management to advance inclusive, just and equitable planning and implementation of ocean care.
OUTPUT 2	Policies, laws, regulations that specifically address the preservation and protection of both marine tangible and intangible cultural heritage are revised or newly developed.
Activity 1	Develop guidelines and good practices for integrating cultural heritage considerations into MSP and ocean governance.
Activity 2	Training programs and workshops for stakeholders (government officials, local communities, marine planners) on the importance of community engagement in marine tangible and intangible cultural heritage and how to incorporate it into MSP and sustainable ocean planning.
PROGRESS INDICATORS	— Number of joint programs with Indigenous Peoples and local communities. — Long-term impact of co-management with Indigenous Peoples on ocean ecosystem health, human wellbeing, and local economies. — Number of Ocean related programs, exhibitions and cultural events. — Number of MSP projects supported by Indigenous and local community science, knowledge, traditions and practices. — Number of implemented trainings or workshops on the importance of marine tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

OUTCOME 4

Science, Policy and Society Interface

Established cross-sectorial, national and cross-national partnerships to advocate for governance structures that prioritize health of both humans and the ocean and that also address underlying political, economic, and ethical causes of planetary crisis (From Ocean Panel Blue Paper).

OUTPUT 1	Enhanced participatory policy-making and planning in urban and coastal regions leading to balanced and forward-looking policies that address ocean governance, health and the ocean-climate nexus.
Activity 1	Develop OL capacity-building programmes (trainings, workshops, citizen science projects, etc.) for municipalities, engineers, architects, local businesses and residents that empowers them to actively participate in marine management decisions and conservation plans (*capacity building*).
Activity 2	Strengthen the position of OL within the UN agenda, fostering the support from UN vice chairs, IOC Regional Commissions and IOC Member States to promote the implementation of OL across UN agencies and programmes.
Activity 3	Develop national OL strategies and pursue lobbying activity to find high-level representatives and promote the implementation of these strategies.
OUTPUT 2	Human behaviour is comprehensively understood through transdisciplinary programmes that integrate natural, social, and behavioural sciences with humanities, spirituality and ocean-centric design.
Activity 1	Engage communities in transdisciplinary research projects where they can contribute with their knowledge and experience, promoting a socio-ecological approach and the development of sustainable livelihoods (*community engagement* and *co-creation of research projects*).
Activity 2	Support the establishment and ongoing work of consortia and networks that include academic institutions, Indigenous Peoples, local and coastal communities, government agencies, non-profits, and private sector organizations to collaborate in the co-creation of research and interventions (*partnerships*).
Activity 3	Collect evidence of the positive impacts that OL programs have on public engagement in urban planning and ocean health, in the form of case studies and transdisciplinary data collection and inform policy-makers (*raise awareness*).
Activity 4	Develop and distribute policy briefs that summarize research findings on transdisciplinary research in human behavior related to the ocean and provide actionable recommendations for policy-makers (*raise awareness*).
OUTPUT 3	An expanded, pluralistic approach to human-ocean bonds that takes the multiplicity of marine cultures into consideration.
Activity 1	Promote research efforts to further develop marine identity and marine citizenship concepts to investigate people's relationship with the ocean.
Activity 2	Support the development and implementation of projects, programmes and initiatives to restore humanity's relationship with the ocean based on marine identity and marine citizenship.
Activity 3	Disseminate a variety of Ocean Stories, Myths and Legends to show the breadth and scope of cultural diversity among human communities in terms of their visions of and relationships with the Ocean.
Activity 4	Support the development and implementation of projects, programmes and initiatives seeking to establish legal and policy frameworks that respect the ocean's inherent right to exist, flourish and regenerate.
PROGRESS INDICATORS	— Number of capacity-building programmes — Number of attendees to capacity building programmes — Number of high-level representatives (UN vice chairs, IOC Regional Commissions, Member States, policy) openly supporting Ocean Literacy implementation — Number of research institutions openly supporting Ocean Literacy implementation — Number of implemented transdisciplinary research / projects / initiatives put in action — Number of established transdisciplinary networks (output 2 activity 2) and related members — Number of policy briefs produced and distributed — Number of Member States including Ocean Literacy within their national policy-making, and their national biodiversity and climate policy planning processes by 2030 — Integration of Ocean Literacy into Marine Spatial Planning processes globally — Number of publications mapping Human - Ocean relational models — Number of publications about Ocean Myths — Number of publications about marine identity and thalassophilia

OUTCOME 5

Strategic Communication and Narrative Shifting

A coordinated and adaptive communication strategy is developed to enhance the visibility and impact of ocean literacy initiatives, both internally within UNESCO-IOC and externally through media and public engagement. This strategy will foster a shift in the narrative recognizing the ocean's intrinsic value and promoting its sustainable stewardship, while addressing emerging challenges such as misinformation and fake news.

OUTPUT 1	Amplification of ocean literacy (OL) across high-level forums (e.g., World Ocean Summit, UNOC, COP, World Economic Forum, the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, the African Union, MSP Global Forums), emphasizing its role in fostering a sustainable and equitable ocean economy.
Activity 1	Engage diverse media platforms (traditional and digital) to promote OL, ensuring that ocean-related content reaches varied audiences working with young ocean content creators, ocean campaign platforms, and communities of ocean-action practice.
Activity 2	Design and execute multimedia campaigns, highlighting the role of the ocean, integrating social listening tools to monitor public discourse, and counteract misinformation while amplifying key OL messages.
Activity 3	Build a network of advocates across public and private sectors who actively promote OL in decision-making processes, contributing to a broader societal shift toward ocean stewardship.
OUTPUT 2	Strengthening of Ocean Communicators Networks at national, regional, and global levels, enhancing coordination between diverse stakeholders.
Activity 1	Establish a comprehensive database of ocean communication experts, influencers, champions, environmental journalists, ocean activists, and creatives to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing.
Activity 2	Organize OL-focused conferences, training and mentorship programs for communication professionals, tailored to specific sectors and regions, leveraging existing networks where appropriate.
Activity 3	Empower youth and early career professionals through diversifying career pathways and accessibility of ocean-related careers in addition to storytelling and advocacy training, equipping them to become influential voices in ocean conservation efforts.
Activity 4	Develop and distribute independent, high-impact OL content (e.g., documentaries, digital assets) that resonates with broad audiences and promotes a global understanding of ocean sustainability.
OUTPUT 3	Fostering a shift in the narrative of the human-ocean relationship to bring a new ethic of ocean conservation.
Activity 1	Develop and disseminate guidelines for developing OL content and communications that recognize the ocean's intrinsic value.
Activity 2	Design and support multimedia campaigns shifting the narrative of ocean conservation across public, private and governmental sectors.
Activity 3	Develop and organise training to build capacity and empower communicators, individuals, communities and other stakeholders to shift the narrative toward a more interconnected and respectful human-ocean relationship.
PROGRESS INDICATORS	— Number of media outlets (traditional and digital) actively incorporating OL themes into their content by 2030. — Reach and engagement metrics of multimedia campaigns highlighting the ocean and promoting ocean literacy (OL), including views, shares, and public sentiment analysis. — Number of partnerships established with key media organizations and influencers (e.g., BBC, National Geographic, Guardian Seascape, The Economist) to amplify OL narratives. — Frequency of positive mentions of OL in high-level forums and mainstream media coverage by 2030. — Number of training sessions, symposia and workshops on OL storytelling and communication delivered to journalists, influencers, and communication professionals. — Size and growth rate of the Ocean Communicators Network, including the number of registered experts, influencers, and journalists engaged in OL activities. — Number of misinformation incidents addressed or corrected related to ocean science topics, as tracked through social listening tools. — Number of OL-focused publications or media assets (e.g., documentaries, podcasts, online articles) produced and distributed globally. — Number of Marine Spatial Planning Processes embracing Ocean Literacy in their development process — Number of decision-makers across sectors endorsing and promoting OL, tracked through public statements and support initiatives. — Increase in public awareness and understanding of ocean literacy concepts, as measured by pre- and post-campaign surveys or public opinion polls. — Number of new communication assets created and distributed, focusing on key issues like ocean health, conservation, and sustainable practices. — Volume and quality of collaborative initiatives with similar organizations (e.g., Friends of Ocean Action, Comms Inc, Ocean Uprise and other youth-led ocean organizations), measured by joint campaigns or projects launched annually.

4. Assumptions and Evidence TABLE 2

We have then identified our assumptions and evidence. Assumptions and evidence explain and justify the connections between our activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact.

- **Assumptions:** These are our beliefs about how and why our programme works. They include the needs and motivations of our target audience, the context of our intervention, and any external factors that might affect our results.
- **Evidence:** This is the data we have or need to collect to confirm our assumptions. It can include results from similar programmes, feedback from stakeholders, and research findings.

For each assumption and piece of evidence, we tried to mention the source and quality of the data, and note any gaps or limitations.

	Assumptions *Things that must happen for the programme to work*	**Evidence** *Why do we know those things are true?*	**Gaps** *What don't we know yet?*
Blue Education	Policy-makers will be interested in the theme	Blue Curriculum Toolkit; Ocean Literacy meets Outdoor education Toolkit; Policy Brief	Lack of a standardized method of monitoring and measuring the impact of Blue Education; Lack of an officially established Global Blue School Network
Economy and Financial Action	ESG considers the ocean; Collaboration with UN Global Compact is possible; Collaboration with other UN agencies is possible; Private sector will be interested in/ being trained in Ocean Literacy	Collaborating with the Ocean Report; Ocean Finance: Financing the Transition to a Sustainable Ocean Economy; National Accounting for the Ocean and Ocean Economy	Lack of implementation of a common self-assessment; Lack of an Ocean Literacy Fund; Lack of a standardized methodology to assess ocean accountability; Lack of an ocean-literate private sector to further advance ocean conservation and improve ocean health; Lack of a global network that includes the private sector to ensure a coordinated, comprehensive and proactive approach to sustainable ocean economy and coastal development, ocean literacy, and ocean preservation and regeneration

	Assumptions *Things that must happen for the programme to work*	Evidence *Why do we know those things are true?*	Gaps *What don't we know yet?*
Ocean Culture and Heritage	Indigenous Peoples and local communities are willing to collaborate with IOC OL; Other IOC offices (IOC MSP) are willing to collaborate with IOC OL; High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy	International Agreements (The Human Relationship with Our Ocean Planet); Pilot Projects (Asia and South America); Transformative pathways: indigenous peoples and local communities leading and scaling up conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; Paper about Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Ocean Observing: A Review of Successful Partnerships; Blue paper on Co-producing SOPs with Indigenous and traditional knowledge holders, to be publicly launched on on December 4th; Marine identity papers	Lack of an inclusive decision-making process with Indigenous Peoples; Lack of a co-created narrative approach with Indigenous Peoples; Lack of a clear Marine identity construct; Lack of a comprehensive map of relational Ocean-human models; Lack of dissemination and awareness of the outsized benefits of investing in Indigenous-led ocean conservation efforts and tools; Lack of Indigenous-led solutions to restore biodiversity, cultural heritage, and economic coastal sovereignty with self-determined programs and free-flowing impact capital; Lack of a database of successful co-management, ocean governance, solutions, and collaborative case studies showcasing the crucial role of Indigenous People in boosting ocean and human health, while advancing ocean rights
Science, Policy and Society Interface	OL is fostered and highlighted by selected IOC Member States and vice-chairs; OL is understood and acknowledged as the enabling factor for science-policy-society interface; OL is considered in the decision-making process, in the political representatives and in the national planning (infrastructures, services, investments etc.)	WP10; Coastal Development: Resilience, Restoration and Infrastructure Requirements; The Human Relationship with Our Ocean Planet; How can a healthy ocean improve human health and enhance wellbeing on a rapidly changing planet?	Lack of an assessment of Member States which already integrated OL in their policy-making; Lack of standard criteria to foster, promote and fund transdisciplinary projects, supporting the SSP interface; Lack of definition of nudges and facilitation from UN to the Member States which decide and prove to integrate OL in their decision-making

	Assumptions *Things that must happen for the programme to work*	Evidence *Why do we know those things are true?*	Gaps *What don't we know yet?*
Strategic Communication and Narrative Shifting	Communication is considered a key component for the success of the OL initiatives, with dedicated funding to ensure maximum impact	Comms Inc; Guardian Seascape series; BBC Blue Planet; National Geographic; Oceanic Global; The Pew Charitable Trusts; World Economic Forum's; Friends of Ocean Action; Global Ocean Forum; Economist Impact World Ocean Initiative; Future Swell; Ocean Uprise; Parley for the Oceans; Sustainable Ocean Alliance; For The Ocean Partners; Drop the S campaign	Lack of comprehensive social listening tools and methods to monitor public sentiment, identify misinformation trends, and assess how ocean-related topics are perceived by different demographic groups; Limited data on the effectiveness of multimedia campaigns in promoting ocean literacy (OL) across varied media platforms (e.g., digital, traditional, social); Lack of internal communication protocols to foster collaboration between UNESCO-IOC, other UNESCO Sectors (e.g. Education), other UN agencies and programmes (e.g. UNDOALOS, UNEP, FAO), and similar organizations (e.g., Friends of Ocean Action, The Economist Impact, Comms Inc); Inadequate resources and programs to train communication professionals and early-career individuals on effective storytelling for ocean-related topics; Insufficient work opportunities at the intersection of science, communication, media, and/or policymaking; Insufficient representation of Indigenous Peoples, marginalized communities, and non-Western perspectives in the global narrative about ocean conservation; Limited partnerships between ocean communicators and major media outlets to consistently integrate ocean science in general news and entertainment; Difficulty in assessing how communication efforts influence policy-making and public opinion shifts regarding ocean governance and sustainability; Build collaborative campaigns with ocean media organizations like FutureSwell that mobilize young ocean storytellers + content creators to win big ocean campaigns

5. Stakeholders mapping TABLE 3

Next, we identified the stakeholders for each outcome. We recognized all parties with a vested interest in our initiative's results, ensuring that all perspectives are considered. This approach leads to more balanced and effective decision-making.

	Stakeholders
Blue Education	Policy-makers from the education sector; Curriculum experts; IBE; ESD; AspNET; UNESCO Edu focal points; Existing regional networks (NMEA, AMEA, EMSEA, EUBSN); NGOs working in OL in schools (grassroots organizations); NGOs with OL in informal education; Green and UNESCO schools; Teachers and educators; Students; Local business; Local communities; Research centers; Universities focused on the marine field - science, industry (e.g. World Maritime University); National governments (e.g. Sweden); Goodwill Ambassadors; Office for Climate Education; Educational Online Training Platforms
Economy and Financial Action	Finance brands and groups; Luxury brands and groups; Tech brands and groups; Outdoor brands and groups; Gaming industry; Renewable energy companies; Small local businesses; International and intergovernmental organizations and UN Agencies (i.e. UNDP, UN Global Compact, European Commission, World Bank, High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy); Influencing profiles (i.e. UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors and Champions, UNESCO Green Citizens); Not-for-profit organizations; Corporate consultancy; CSR networks; Start-ups (i.e. innovative materials, nature-based solutions etc.); UN agencies; Intergovernmental organizations; International organizations; Consultancy firms; Financial Education Institutes - Universities

	Stakeholders
Ocean Culture and Heritage	DCU expert in Indigenous and local knowledge; MSP strategists; National governments (e.g. Sweden); UNESCO World Tangible and Intangible Heritage and Marine and Underwater Cultural Heritage; Geoparks; UNESCO MAB (Man and the Biosphere Programs); Memory of the World Register; UNESCO Atlas Languages in Danger; UNDOALOS; Goodwill Ambassadors; Artists; Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA); International and intergovernmental organizations and UN Agencies (i.e. UNDP, UNEP, IUCN...); Ocean Decade-endorsed Cultural Heritage Framework Programme
Science, Policy and Society Interface	National governments (i.e. Sweden, Brazil...); UNESCO Cities networks (i.e. Learning Cities Network, Creative Cities Network...); International and intergovernmental organizations and initiatives, and UN Agencies (i.e. UNDP, UN Global Compact, UNEP, FAO, UNDOALOS, BBNJ, CBD, UNCLOS, IPOS, MSP, IUCN...); ICLEI; UNESCO Green Citizens; UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors and Champions; Ocean Decade DCCs, DCOs (i.e. DCC-CR, DCO Connecting People and Ocean...); European Parliament and European Council; Selected IOC Member States and vice-chairs
Strategic Communication and Narrative Shifting	Digital, traditional and social media; Independent journalists; Press agencies; Local media; National media; International media; Specialized media; Multimedia agencies; Cinema industry an platforms; Gaming industry; Media events (i.e. The Economist - World Ocean Summit); Art industry and artists; CI sector of UNESCO; Podcast industry; UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors and Champions; Influencers and VIPs
Transversal stakeholders	OLWA Steering Committee and members; OL Group of Expert of UNESCO; DCO Steering Committee; DCU; ECOPs and Youth networks; International and intergovernmental institutions

6. Conclusions

As we chart our course toward 2030, ocean literacy emerges more clearly than ever as a powerful lever for systemic, transformative change—one that can unify education, governance, economics, and culture around the ocean we share. This **Theory of Change (2025—2030)** underscores the urgency of embedding ocean literacy within every sector and discipline, shaping policies that safeguard marine health, catalyze economic resilience, and preserve cultural heritage for generations to come.

The five priority areas—**Blue Education**, **Economy and Financial Action**, **Ocean Culture and Heritage**, **Science, Policy and Society Interface**, and **Strategic Communication and Narrative Shifting**—collectively reveal the breadth of potential solutions. Each domain calls for concerted, multi-stakeholder efforts to ensure that **ocean literacy** does more than inform: it activates new behaviors and fosters meaningful relationships between people and the sea.

Formal, non-formal, and Indigenous knowledge systems must be integrated so that the expansion of **blue education** equips learners of all ages with the skills and mindset to care for the ocean. The private sector, meanwhile, has a pivotal role in translating ocean literacy into socially responsible and regenerative business models, ensuring that global economies value the ocean's intrinsic worth. On the cultural front, celebrating our ocean heritage and traditions elevates our shared identity and inspires stewardship. Strengthening the **science, policy and society interface** will be critical to making evidence-based decisions and to placing ocean health at the center of governance. Lastly, a robust, **strategic communication** framework is essential to amplifying success stories, countering misinformation, and forging a cohesive narrative that drives widespread support for ocean stewardship.

Achieving these goals demands **sustained investment**, **cross-sector partnerships**, and **robust monitoring and evaluation**. It requires unwavering dedication to **equity**, **justice**, and **inclusion**, especially for those whose voices have historically been overlooked. By embracing diverse perspectives—particularly Indigenous, local, and marginalized communities—we can co-create more effective and enduring solutions.

By 2030, an **ocean-literate society** will be equipped to make decisions that uphold ocean health, reinforce sustainable economic practices, and champion the global common good. This Theory of Change is our roadmap to that vision, firmly positioning ocean literacy at the core of the Ocean Decade's lasting legacy. Let it serve as both an inspiration and a call to action: the time to act boldly is now, and the power to shape our blue planet's future lies in every one of us.

United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)

Proclaimed in 2017 by the United Nations General Assembly, the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development(2021-2030), provides a convening framework to develop the scientific knowledge and partnerships needed to catalyse transformative ocean science solutions for sustainable development, connecting people and our ocean. The Ocean Decade is coordinated by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

Established during the Preparatory Phase and to continue throughout implementation until 2030, the IOC's Ocean Decade Series will provide key documentation about this global initiative and aims to serve as a primary resource for stakeholders seeking to consult,monitor and assess progress towards thevision and mission of the Ocean Decade.

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