



Ocean Rising

THE QUEST TO INSPIRE THE PUBLIC



BROADCAST MEDIA



Ocean Rising

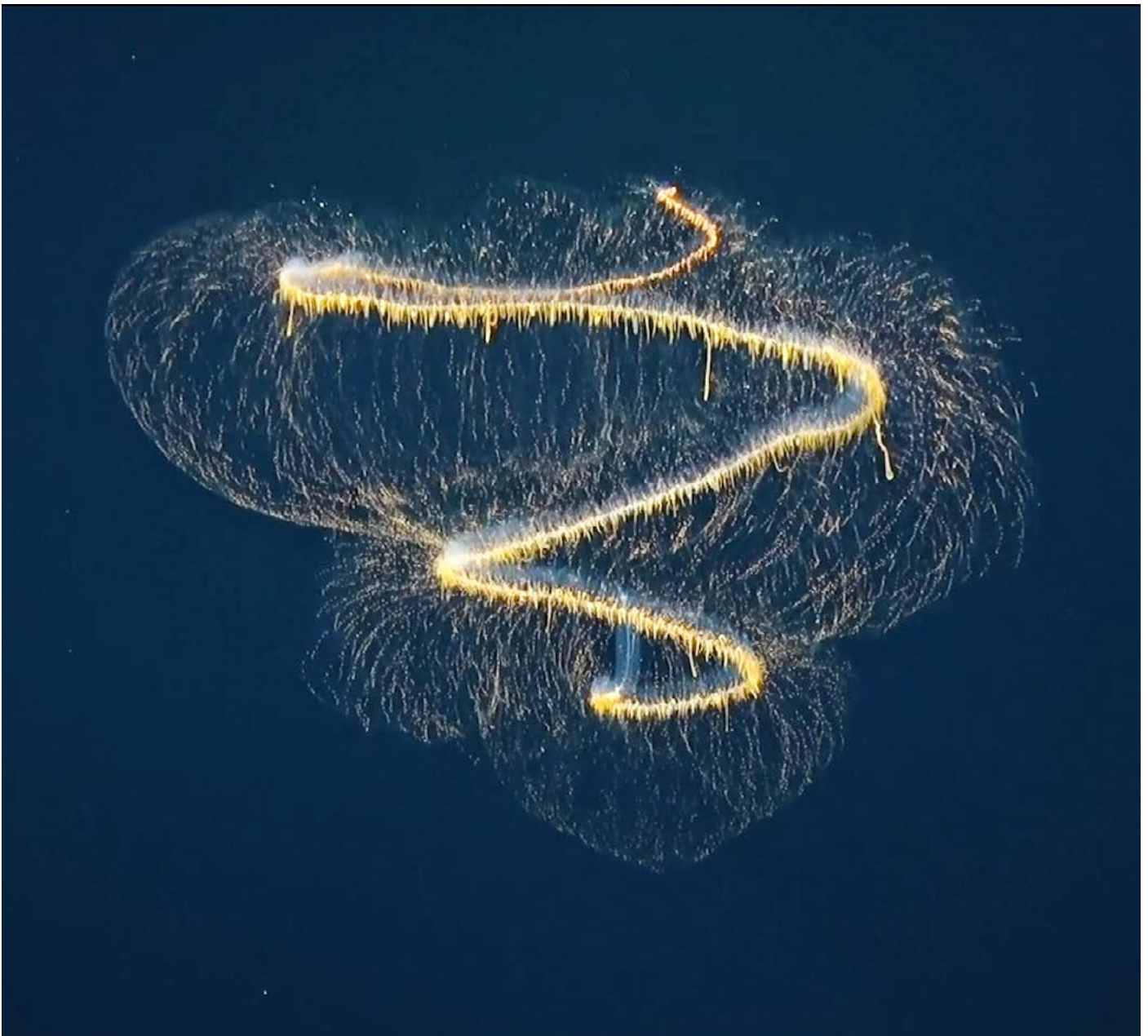
THE QUEST TO INSPIRE THE PUBLIC

INTRODUCTION

Our modern world came to a standstill in 2020, with the global COVID-19 pandemic pausing the fast-paced existence many of us led and proving unequivocally that existential threats are not just the stuff of Hollywood disaster movies. What steps would humanity have taken if we had known years in advance the turmoil that 2020 would unleash? We can't change our past, but we can, with global knowledge and awareness, act to create a harmonious and healthy future.

While often not at the forefront of conversation on the global stage, our ocean is the backbone of climate and life on this planet. Every day we see signs of its impact - in our weather, in nature, along our coasts. It is used to transport goods across our globe, feed more than half the population, and keep humans breathing. The ocean is a magnificent resource that quietly gives to all, but is taken for granted and rarely recognized for the role it plays in planetary and human health. In order to change this status quo, we need to inspire the public about the ocean as they are inspired by space.

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SPACE AND OCEAN INSPIRATION

Technology makes it possible to walk the deepest depths of the ocean and see alien marine life without leaving your living room; however, there is a greater interest in searching for life on other planets. More than 21 million people watched the rover, *Perseverance* touchdown on Mars to begin its rock-collecting mission and search for signs of life, but when a marine scientist brings back volcanic rock from deep sea hydrothermal vents teeming with new life forms, the public barely blinks.

Those who explore the oceans, discovering alien life forms and strange and marvelous landscapes on a daily basis, often wonder why public interest in space exploration is so much greater than in ocean exploration. Is it simply because anyone can see the stars but not everyone lives by the coast, and those that do cannot see what hides beneath the sea surface? No - research shows there is more to this dichotomy than meets the eye.

The two communities have distinct and critical differences in how they inspire and engage a broader audience (Virmani, 2017). While space stories are generally positive, trigger the imagination, and are focused on exceptionalism, coverage of the ocean is negative and tends to be driven by pragmatism and problems. Popular culture and future technological inspirations revolve around space stories, whereas ocean tales are typically set in the past. Conversations about the ocean often have a call to action, which may alienate or even bore a segment of the population. Space conversations differ in that they encourage fun and creativity and although space is currently out of reach for most people, space narratives are mission-based and more easily understandable. Ocean narratives are often idea-based and therefore harder for people to grasp, perversely, making the ocean more inaccessible.



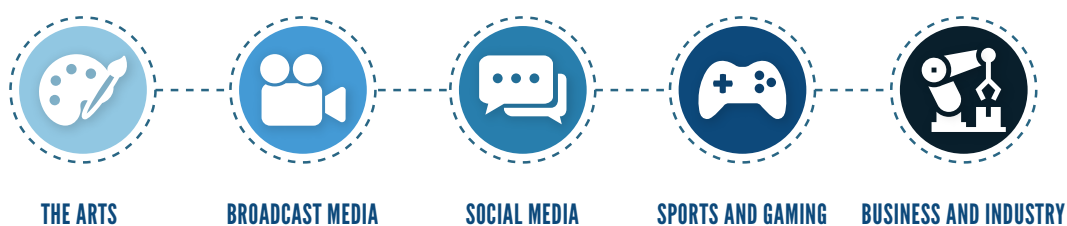
THE CHANGING TIDE

Presently, with the world's attention focused on human health and the economy, the ocean has fallen further down the news agenda. The good news is the growing interest in all forms of science, and a hunger to reconnect with our natural world with positive stories that lead people to explore all frontiers and achieve positive climate action. We have an opportunity to reframe the ocean as exciting, interesting, and spectacular.

As we aim to build back better in a post-COVID world, how do we get the populace to consider the ocean and its impact on our livelihoods, and inspire the public in substantive and meaningful ways? Ocean science is now available for public engagement, bringing in data visualization, technology, and the arts. The tools are in place for experts from all walks of life to convey the story

of the ocean, weaving key messages in unexpected and new ways into our everyday culture. We must expand the reach beyond those connected to the ocean through geography, sport, or career to connect our cultures more deeply to the ocean.

Creating various engagement points and tactics will help to reach diverse and inclusive audiences as every community is different and should be considered. In light of this, we argue that the key to transformation is targeting established industries outside of the community by providing successful examples, identifying what is missing, and making suggestions for a way forward. This paper will take prior recommendations on how to inspire the public and put them into an actionable framework, at first engaging five different industries:



Each sector plays a critical role in defining our diverse cultures and shaping human behaviour. We encourage readers to explore each section individually or read in its entirety, and to share widely with those who have not yet engaged with

the ocean. Our hope is that we can familiarize the public with the ocean – not just making them aware of its plight but engaging them with innovative and inspiring solutions.



Ocean Rising



Broadcast Media

Consumption of traditional broadcast outlets such as film, television, and radio has decreased with reliance on digital sources; however, consumers around the world still spend an average of 7.5 [hours per day with media](#) (Watson, 2020). Broadcast media as a source of ocean news and awareness is critical, but the narrative has not changed much over the last thirty years. The ocean is typically portrayed with a story of doom and gloom or as a place of historical adventures; what is missing is a consistent beat of the bigger, inspiring picture. We see this in the occasional inspirational documentary, such as *My Octopus Teacher*, which clearly hit a chord with the general public and recently won an Oscar. Many ocean advocates, inspired by Jacques Cousteau's aquatic adventures, have built up a lifetime of awareness of the problems in the ocean, and it is now time to weave in a new and more diverse narrative. We need to reach those who are not interested in the ocean, by bringing in public figures who do not normally talk about the ocean, but can now do so in a positive reframing.

How can we take the stereotypes out of film and television and develop more relatable stories, creating a full spectrum of voices? Part of this lack of originality is historical. Ocean scenes are hard to film and expensive – which is why you mostly see fictional undersea stories looking through a porthole. However, we have moved past this now, and technology will allow for expansive creativity and visualization without filming at sea, so filming challenges are no longer an excuse.





WHAT ARE GREAT EXAMPLES?

IMAGINATION IN ANIMATION

Movies and television can familiarize viewers with animals and environments that they highlight and have a great influence on their audience's desire to become more acquainted based on how they are portrayed (Militz & Foale, 2017). Three of Disney's top-grossing movies have been ocean-centric plots that have evidenced this introduction with *Moana* (2016) at \$637 million in box office sales worldwide, *Finding Nemo* (2003) at \$940 million, and its sequel *Finding Dory* (2016) at \$1.03 billion (Sim, 2020). In particular, the *Finding Nemo* franchise created a whole generation of children interested in the ocean, with the ability to identify clownfish by name. A massive boom in aquarium trade followed the initial film, but the problem was that it did not

create links on how children could help conserve or learn more about the oceans (Militz & Foale, 2017). In fact, there was much controversy over the demand for aquarium trade fish following the initial film (Andrews, 2016). Learning from the 2013 release, Disney expended more of a significant effort with *Finding Dory* in 2016 raising more awareness about the aquarium trade, providing related lesson plans and educational content around ocean ecosystems and caring for the ocean. What these movies evidence, though, is the impact they can have in making the public care about the ocean. The link between caring and action from viewers is what is now needed.



DOCUMENTARIES WITH IMPACT

A similar argument exists for documentaries focused on the ocean. The popularity of at-home streaming has completely transformed the reach of small-budget productions, amplifying the audience by millions. Movie studios are now releasing films direct to streaming on-demand services and bypassing traditional theaters altogether (Morgan, 2019). Netflix subscribers have grown [10% a year](#), and the streaming service now has an estimated 208 million subscribers worldwide (Statistica 2021).

This capacity to influence millions of viewers has allowed for small production houses and new series to become famous overnight, which some experts call [The Netflix Effect](#). It has catapulted many ocean documentaries over the past few years, bringing familiarity and ocean issues to the public. Films like [My Octopus Teacher](#) (2020) and [Chasing Coral](#) (2017) are hugely successful Netflix documentaries that share personal stories to help people relate and care about what's living in our ocean.

BRINGING THE OCEAN TO PEOPLE'S LIVING ROOMS

The spectacular imagery captured with underwater film technology has brought a new level of public interest and inspiration to the ocean. BBC's Blue Planet series most successfully did this. The episodes created a careful balance between inspiring people with beautiful high-resolution imagery and alarming them with shocking visual evidence of ocean plastics impacting environments and animals. Compared to the majority of previous natural history programming produced by the BBC which largely focused on the wonder of the natural world, Blue Planet II widened the lens to include the oceans' plight and has done more than most in alerting the world to the plastics crisis and motivated change with good storytelling. In a 2018 survey, nearly 88 percent of people in the United Kingdom who saw the BBC's Blue Planet II episode about the effect of plastics changed their behavior in some way (Waitrose and Partners, 2018).

Other organizations outside the film industry have also created remote and interactive experiences,



BBC Blue Planet

allowing the public to watch live robotic dives to the seafloor. Nekton pioneered live submersible based broadcasting and partnered with Associated Press and Sky News in 2019 to broadcast the first-ever live submersible newscasts, Deep Ocean Live, that was carried in 140 nations (Moore, 2019). More ocean exploration organizations are using their footage for public production, like OceanX, who recently announced plans to turn their work into a new National Geographic/BBC ocean series with James Cameron (Clarke, 2019).

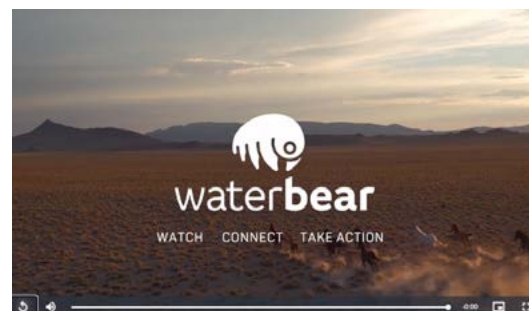


WHAT ARE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES?

Ocean films and documentaries tend to amplify the problems we face and do little to promote solutions or actions that can help address the issues. Additionally, fictional stories about the ocean continue to play up old stereotypes of the ocean as vast and dangerous (e.g.) [Jaws](#), [Open Water](#), [Adrift](#), [The Meg](#), etc. doing little to create a new narrative. With one notable exception: *Jaws*. The detrimental effect this had on sharks resulted in an entire week of programming devoted to sharks, which is now the [longest-running programming](#) in U.S. cable TV history – Shark Week. During this week, educational material is shared, anti-finning PSA are aired, and funds are raised for shark research and preservation.

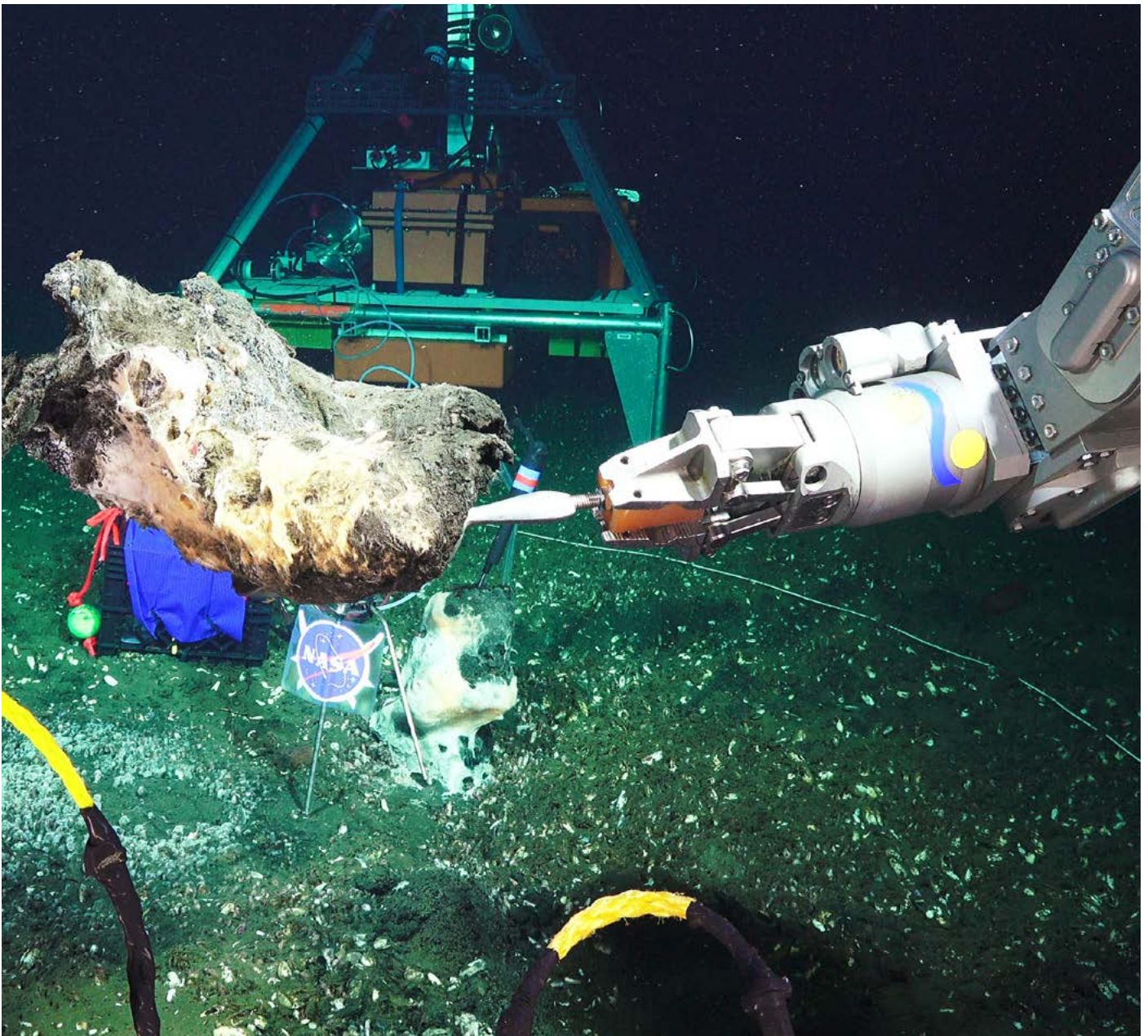
Generally, mainstream films have not done anything to shift public perception of the ocean in any dramatic way – especially compared to space movies (e.g.) [Apollo 11](#), [Martian](#), [Gravity](#), where human stories of exceptionalism and heroism inspire engagement. When we do see inspiration, edge-cutting ocean themes and futuristic ocean technologies, it is typically in the context of space set on other planets. This reinforces the common perception that we know everything about Planet Earth. The real hook should be that we don't know everything, not even close. The stories of journeys into the unknown, resulting in pioneering discovery – whether of geographic or scientific exploration – have and continue to inspire audiences globally. We need more of them about the ocean, the last great geographic frontier on our planet.

When ocean documentaries become popular, they can often be polarizing, as demonstrated by the recent [Seaspiracy](#) (2021) on Netflix, with accusations it made false claims (Allen, 2021) and racially stereotyped ethnicities from a western perspective. Many in the ocean sciences and industries felt the film contained misleading information, incorrect statistics, and out-of-context interviews (McVeigh, 2021). The themes covered in the film are important, and if the messaging was less accusatory and brought in accurate facts, it could have been a potent educational tool. What is promising is the expanded reach that these once niche films can have with the broader public through streaming platforms. [Waterbear](#) is a nascent example of this potential, a new streaming network devoted to nature documentaries. However, we need to ensure that these types of films are not tucked away in niche platforms, but brought to the mainstream.



www.waterbear.com

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WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

Technology continues to accelerate new ways of telling stories about the ocean, allowing for 8K filming from the deep sea and surround sound to create an immersive experience close to submerging yourself in the ocean. New documentaries in production will soon reveal the capabilities and impact of these developments.

As streaming content providers like Apple, Netflix, and Amazon increase their production and host a whole new platform for content, there are more opportunities than ever to grow ocean subject matter for the public. From meaningful kids programming that educates and excites the ocean (e.g.) [Splash and Bubbles](#), [Octonauts](#), [The Deep](#); to stories of human endeavor that inspire, like *My Octopus Teacher*.

Fiction can change the narrative and create new interest in relevant and topical issues. For example, the popular science fiction novel, [The Swarm](#), is in production for a new film series with updates to provide commentary on the issue of seabed mining (Vivarelli, 2020). Netflix is in production on a large four-year ocean production.

Setting aside narrative and documentary works, another genre not often utilized in ocean communication is comedy. Typically, marine scientists are portrayed in both nonfiction and fiction series as very serious and do not appeal to a lighter side. The ocean could greatly benefit from a comedic element either through late-night talk show hosts or through funny spokespeople. When ocean science has taken itself more lightly it has been met with wide-spread appeal, as demonstrated by the naming of the “hoff crab” because of its bare chest like the U.S. [Baywatch](#) actor David Hasselhoff (BBC, 2015), the popular Wes Anderson mockumentary, [The Life Aquatic](#), about ocean scientists on a submarine or the partnership between the US radio channel Sirius XM and Nekton to produce the [deepest live radio comedy show](#).

Next Steps

The above-mentioned examples are just a few of the efforts that connect the public to the ocean. We need to engage with the cross-section of the public that is not connected to the ocean in any way, and explore those sectors of our popular culture that have a global reach. How do we make knowing our ocean a celebrated experience? Businesses, artists, sports people – all can help to inspire the public about the ocean, engage new audiences, and bring the ocean to topics of dinner table conversation.





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THE WAY FORWARD

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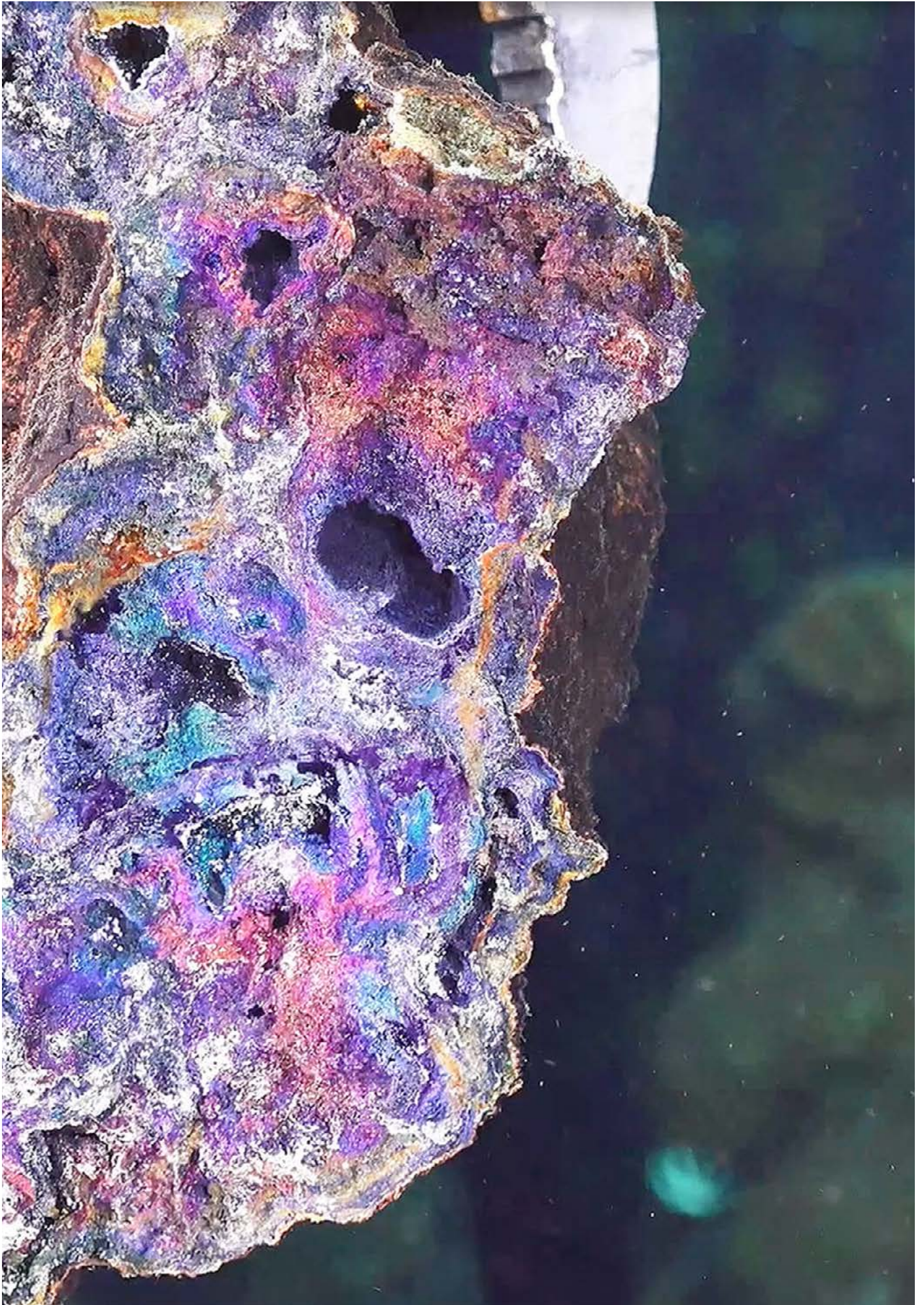
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NEKTON

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