

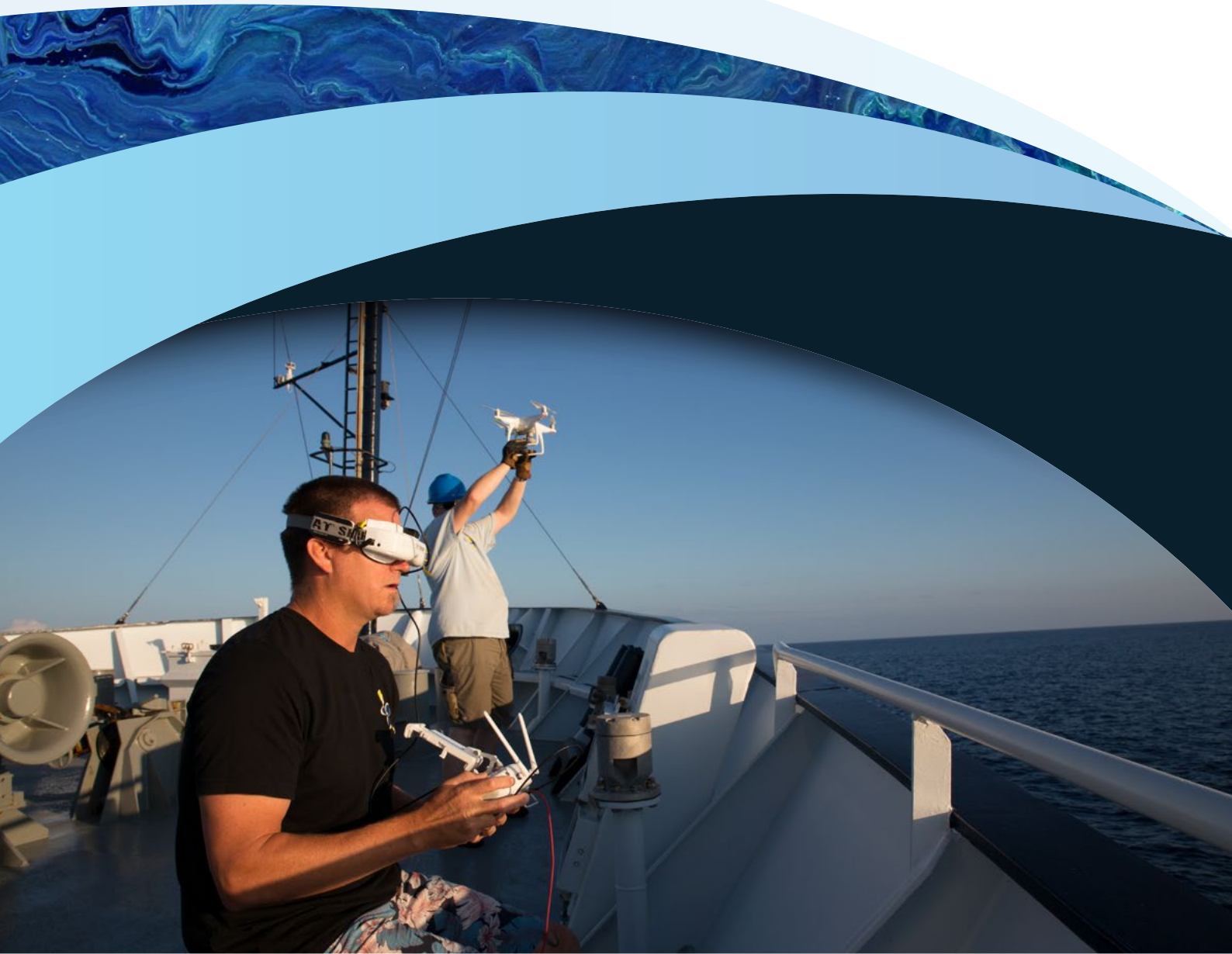


Ocean Rising

THE QUEST TO INSPIRE THE PUBLIC



SPORTS AND GAMING



Ocean Rising

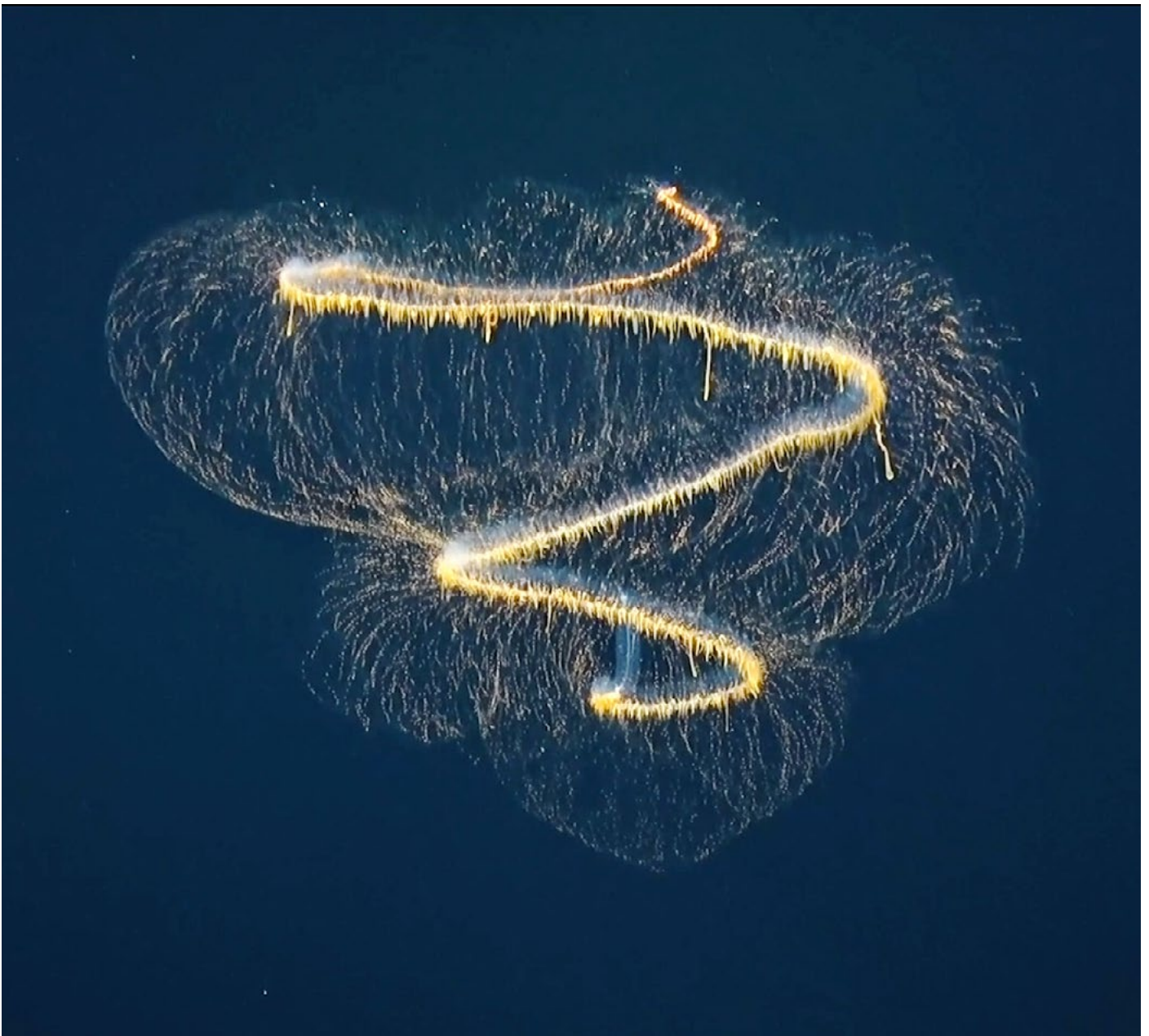
THE QUEST TO INSPIRE THE PUBLIC

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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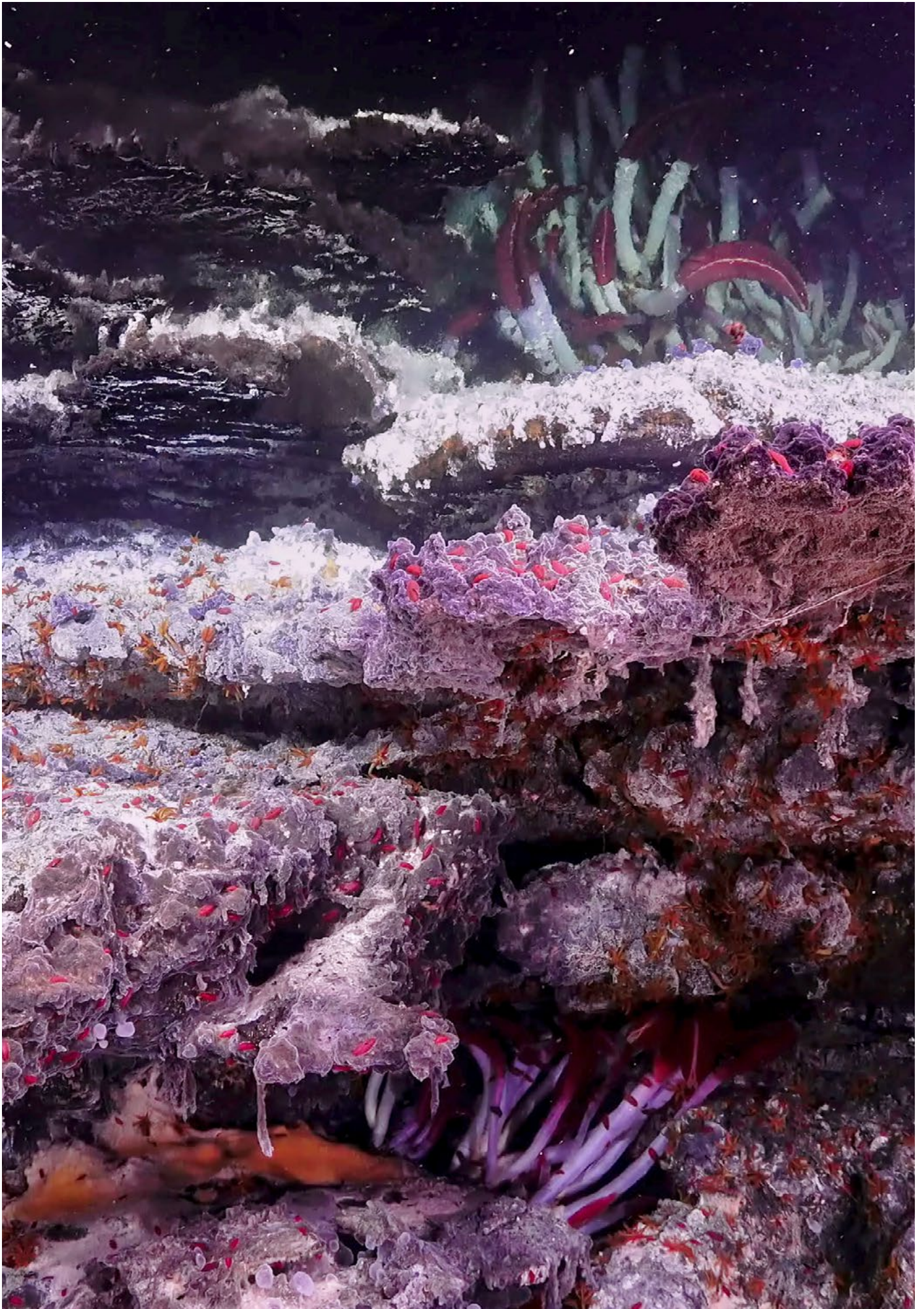


SPACE AND OCEAN INSPIRATION

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.





Sports & Gaming

Sports and gaming are two areas where ocean advocacy and awareness campaigns can reach a large population of people, while two separate industries, sports and games traditionally appeal to people's sense of achievement and triumph.

Opportunities to educate about the ocean have grown over the last ten years with the advancement of sustainability in sports, and its influence on pro-environmental behaviors. Sports sustainability has even elevated to its own sub-discipline of sport management called sport ecology (McCullough, Orr & Kellison, 2020). Reaching masses of people at one time is not the only focus; consideration for the environmental impact of spectatorship is evaluated including how sports organizations can be conduits of sustainability messaging to promote

pro-environmental behaviors among fans. The sporting industry's commitment to reducing its impact is becoming increasingly important; some sports fans even feel a deeper connection to their team when there is an apparent concern for the natural environment. However, communicating about the ocean can be a challenge when the science is complicated, and the scope of the problem is perceived as overwhelming. Can we use a fan's attachment with a team, city, stadium, community, or athlete to deliver a message about the ocean or connect a behavior towards ocean conservation? An easy place to start in the USA for example could be with teams who already carry an ocean-related name - Miami Dolphins, Tampa Bay Rays, Pittsburgh Penguins to name a few.





WHAT ARE GREAT EXAMPLES?

SUSTAINABILITY IN SAILING

There are many instances where people already use the ocean for sports and recreation including sailing, surfing, scuba diving, and fishing – this is a great place to look for examples of broad audience engagement. In particular, sailing has taken on sustainability through [The Ocean Race](#) and the work of [11th Hour Racing](#). Together, they created the ‘Racing with Purpose’ campaign, aiming to help restore ocean health and create a platform to engage partners looking to contribute to sustainability through science, restoration, and

education. 11th Hour Racing has taken the lead on this. They establish strategic partnerships with coastal communities where sailing takes place, inspiring local solutions that can address global ocean problems and building local stewards for the ocean. This model also uses global events to spotlight community grant projects throughout the world. In the past 10 years, 11th Hour Racing has sponsored 37 competitive seasons in 17 countries around the world, generating 12.2 billion media impressions.



SURFING FOR GOOD

Surfing is intricately connected to the ocean; however, in the past few years there have been excellent initiatives to further this connection through sustainability campaigns and citizen science. WSL Pure, the World Surf League's nonprofit arm, has put out a [We Are One Ocean](#) campaign that includes a petition to advocate for 30 percent protection of the ocean, part of a larger global UN campaign, and created a video series to accompany the program. WSL Pure has selected influential ocean health advocates to be the face of their campaign, including [Clifford Kapon](#), a Hawaiian professional surfer with a chemistry Ph.D. that started the Surfer Biome Project (Motion, 2020) and Dr. [Ayana Elizabeth Johnson](#), who is focused on climate solutions that involve the ocean.

The [Smartfin Project](#), born out of the [Wendy Schmidt Ocean Health XPRIZE](#), was one of the first citizen science projects to target the surfing community in 2014, bringing together the surfing and research communities to fill a gap in oceanographic data. The project, now collecting water temperature data, developed data-collecting surfboard fins to transfer useful nearshore data to the cloud for oceanographic scientists to use in their research. Not only did it create a way for the surfing community to take action, but it provided a platform for discussion of ocean health and climate change, bringing together participants both on and offline.



smartfin.org

Another shining example of sustainability development in the sport of surfing is the [ECOBOARD Project](#), a program by Sustainable Surf, as an independent “eco-label” for surfboards focused on reducing carbon footprints, increasing the use of recycled materials, and reducing toxicity within the surfboard manufacturing process. Most leading surf brands have now adopted the label, and the group works to educate and engage those in the surf community about the environmental impacts of the surfboard making process.



EXTREME E RACING

There are an increasing number of examples of how sports players and teams can ensure sponsorship with companies that do not cause harm to our planet, and use sustainability or the ocean itself in “brand deals”. Extreme E is an excellent example of motorsport highlighting the plight of the ocean. World Champion F1 racers like Nico Rosbert and Lewis Hamilton have raced electric cars alongside villages impacted by rising sea levels and waters that are plastic soups. Legacy programmes at each of Extreme E’s remote venues ensure that locations are left improved by hosting the event.

“Extreme E is the first sport that has had sustainability at its core. It’s purpose is racing and doing good for our planet, for our environment and for us all,” stated former F1 world champion and Extreme E owner Nico Rosberg. “As a team owner my vision is that global sports teams around the world put sustainability as their core purpose. Sports teams have such power. They are emotionally connected to millions of fans. They have a unique opportunity to convey messages”.

OCEAN GAMING

A report published by [DFC Intelligence](#) identified nearly 3.1 billion video game consumers in 2020 – about 40 percent of the global population (Williams, 2021). If ocean topics could reach even a small portion of this group, we could touch a large segment of the global population. One of the largest gaming franchises in the world, [Bioshock](#), is actually set underwater, however the ocean community remains largely unaware of this and the possibilities that this may offer. Conversely, there is awareness of a limited number of ocean-themed games that engage users in ocean exploration, such as Tigertron’s [Jupiter and Mars](#), Unknown World’s [Subnautica](#), and E-Line Media’s [Beyond Blue](#).

Beyond Blue launched in 2020 and incorporates real-life ocean footage into a future-set scenario where the player explores the ocean as a deep-sea explorer and scientist. The game was inspired by the BBC Blue Planet series, and used ocean scientists to help in its formation. What makes the game stand out is the well-developed narrative and ways to interact in a more meaningful way. The game’s website suggests how to get involved with ocean work and is a shining example of incorporating the ocean into the gaming world. [Koral](#) and [Abzu](#) are other games that do a worthy job of allowing players to explore the ocean depths in a positive way, solving puzzles to revive coral reefs, and interacting with many underwater species. How do we expand games like Beyond Blue that bring realism and activism to the gaming world, developing new narratives for underwater scenes beyond pirates, treasure, and sea monsters?

WHAT ARE MISSED OPPORTUNITIES?

Increasing connection to the ocean involves broadening messaging about the ocean to the masses and not just focusing on niche markets. Mainstream sports with mass audiences need to do more to include oceans reaching out to the football / soccer or rugby fans, hockey enthusiasts, and baseball fanatics.

In the UK, Sky Plc, the TV rights holder of the Premier League, the most powerful football league in the world, took their corporate campaign - Ocean Rescue - to the clubs, stadiums, fans and broadcasts. Joining forces, footballers kicked plastic bottles into nets during build, campaigns were established to remove single use plastics, and captive audiences, previously unaware of ocean plastics, were activated as new campaigners.

“Football has a unique ability to reach billions across the world and I’m delighted that the Premier League and its clubs are getting involved to further build on our Ocean Rescue campaign. Today we’re calling on football fans to make a simple change and join us to help stop our oceans drowning in plastic.” explained Head of Sky Sports, Barney Francis at the [launch](#).

Corporate social responsibility has grown in importance, and sports is a place where the ocean can be incorporated. Imagine the impact of an ocean advocacy campaign during the Super Bowl, or if individual sports professionals came together as advocates for the United Nations Decade of Ocean Sciences for Sustainable Development. How do we amplify ocean activities more in the public consciousness?

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.





WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

Sports and gaming both have large audiences that could be engaged in ocean health, but perhaps are not. The first step is to understand better what is most effective in communicating to these audiences about the ocean and how to distill the many issues of the ocean into manageable pieces of information that are simple yet convey urgency (McCullough, Orr & Kellison, 2020). The ocean community can expand its reach to growing ocean-based sports, as illustrated by both the sailing and surfing industry, or to the outdoor swimmers, a pastime that grew during the global pandemic (Cosslett, 2020). However, expanding past water-based sports and reaching those with no direct ocean contact is critical to growing awareness. Maybe the entry is through more detailed articles or recurring columns in sporting publications and outdoor magazines.

Another audience to engage more deeply is the gaming communities through conventions like [GenCon](#), a gathering focused on role playing and board games, with a small element of video. What if live ocean dives were streaming on Twitch, and viewers could watch ROV operators pick up samples in real time? A new way to engage gamers is with virtual reality, allowing participants to experience extreme ocean environments in a more personal setting. It may be a key tool to create empathy for fragile ocean habitats and inspire a new generation of ocean ambassadors.

Either way, the ocean community needs to rethink how it engages with audiences outside the usual participants, embracing new technologies to do so. Can artificial intelligence based programming for species identification be turned into a participatory game? For this to work, scientists could reach beyond their labs and begin working with gaming companies, as we saw with the Beyond Blue game.

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SUSTAINABILITY IN SPORT

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