Press release marking the halfway point of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030)

With over 62 million contacts, the German Ocean Foundation is shaping the UN Ocean Decade in Germany

With a cumulative reach potential of over 62 million contacts, the projects supported by the German Ocean Foundation (DMS) have reached a significant milestone for marine awareness in Germany in the first half of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030). The foundation is thus sending a clear signal nationwide and setting standards in terms of visibility, impact and strategic implementation of the decade's goals in Germany.

The UN Decade of Ocean Science is the United Nations' central international framework for the ocean and promises ‘a revolution in marine science’ so that governments worldwide can make a stronger commitment to sustainable marine, climate and environmental policies on a scientific basis. Germany plays an important role in this global process – not least through the strong involvement of civil society actors. Because it is not too late for a sustainable future, emphasised 90-year-old ocean pioneer Dr Sylvia Earle: ‘The greatest joy is to realise that we have the opportunity to care for the ocean and make a difference in the next five years.’

Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General of the UN/UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and responsible for the Decade, underlines the great importance of cooperation between science, industry and civil society: ‘Love Your Ocean does exactly that: it makes science visible, understandable and usable.’ Love Your Ocean is one of a total of 12 official UN Decade projects run by the German Ocean Foundation and plays a key role in their implementation. Other active and important institutions include the GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel, other Helmholtz and Leibniz Institutes, and the Alfred Wegener Institute in Bremerhaven, which are making key scientific contributions to the Ocean Decade with their excellent research work. According to the Ocean Decade Committee, over 180 initiatives from more than 90 institutions are part of the Decade in Germany.

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The 12 projects initiated and supported by the German Ocean Foundation since the beginning of the Decade range from participatory education and engagement formats to science communication, exhibitions, festivals and conferences. Since 1992, it has been bringing marine research and science communication directly to people with the climate-friendly research vessel ALDEBARAN; the world's largest ocean citizen science initiative with divers – in cooperation with Scuba Schools International (SSI) – provides millions of valuable temperature data to the European science database EMODNet; the nationwide marine competition has been inspiring young people with their own research expeditions since 2005; Ocean Lovers Education brings marine knowledge together with the International OCEAN FILM TOUR; Love Your Ocean in the classrooms at boot Düsseldorf reaches a mass audience with hundreds of partners and presents the Ocean Tribute Award; the Ocean Conference Series promotes dialogue between civil society, business and politics; Ocean Heroes provides a platform for committed marine conservationists; Ocean modules in Miniatur Wunderland bring the Decade to life for millions of people; the Ocean Knowledge Base translates current research into actionable knowledge; the permanent Ocean Science Multimedia exhibition on the Cap San Diego presents marine research in an interactive way.

Bridging the gap between global politics and social implementation

The German Ocean Foundation plays a leading role in the UN Decade of Ocean Science: it combines international scientific and environmental policy objectives with concrete, tangible measures. ‘The German Ocean Foundation makes an important and measurable contribution to strengthening marine awareness in order to support scientific-based political decision-making processes and the long-term implementation of the goals of the UN Decade of Ocean Science – both nationally and internationally,’ says Frank Schweikert, Executive Director of the German Ocean Foundation.

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12 current Ocean Decade projects of the German Ocean Foundation

The German Ocean Foundation is committed to promoting knowledge, participation and social responsibility in relation to the ocean through twelve Ocean Decade projects. From research and citizen science to education, exhibitions, major events and political dialogue, these activities reach millions of people. Together, they make a concrete contribution to the implementation of the goals of the UN Ocean Decade in Germany and beyond.
The projects are organised into different categories. Contributions promote the implementation and visibility of the Decade in the form of infrastructure, personnel, communication formats and events. Projects are supported by targeted national and regional initiatives. Activities are educational offerings, dialogue formats, exhibitions and public relations work that directly contribute to achieving the Decade's goals and challenges.

Contributions

- Research vessel ALDEBARAN
  The climate-friendly research vessel ALDEBARAN has been a central instrument of the German Ocean Foundation since 1992, connecting research, education and science communication. As a mobile platform, it enables interdisciplinary research projects in the North Sea and Baltic Sea as well as adjacent European marine areas. Scientists use the ship for measurement campaigns, environmental monitoring and testing new methods. At the same time, ALDEBARAN functions as a floating classroom and public meeting place for science. Port visits, school programmes and public events bring current ocean issues directly to the people. Media partnerships and live broadcasts ensure that research is transparent and comprehensible. Citizen science formats actively involve interested laypeople in scientific processes. In this way, ALDEBARAN contributes significantly to strengthening ocean literacy and anchoring the goals of the UN Ocean Decade in society.
  Cumulative reach potential: 8,902,500

- Ocean Science Multimedia on the Cap San Diego in Hamburg
  With the Ocean Science Multimedia exhibition on the Cap San Diego, the German Ocean Foundation operates the only permanent exhibition on the UN Ocean Decade in Germany. The historic backdrop of the museum ship combines maritime history with current marine research. Fourteen exclusive exhibits, interactive media stations and regular events convey complex scientific content in a clear and understandable way. Topics covered include climate change, biodiversity loss, marine use and conservation strategies. The exhibition is aimed equally at school classes, specialist audiences, decision-makers and tourists. Its permanent accessibility means that its impact extends far beyond

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one-off events. It creates a permanent venue for dialogue between science and society and visibly anchors the UN Decade of Ocean Science in the public sphere.
Cumulative reach potential: 2,300,014

- Miniatur Wunderland with ocean module
  In cooperation with Miniatur Wunderland Hamburg, an innovative ocean module is being created to communicate the goals and challenges of the UN Decade of Ocean Science to an international audience of millions. In the world's most visited model railway layout, oceanic processes, human interventions and protective measures are presented in a unique visual language. The module translates abstract concepts such as overfishing, marine pollution and climate impacts into easily understandable images. By embedding it in a popular leisure attraction, target groups are reached that are rarely addressed by traditional science formats. The project combines entertainment, education and social relevance. It helps to anchor marine conservation as a natural part of social responsibility.
  Cumulative reach potential: 887,650

Projects

- Citizen science with divers
  This initiative is the world's largest maritime citizen science activity. In close cooperation with Scuba Schools International (SSI), recreational divers worldwide are involved in data collection for marine research. Standardised environmental and biodiversity data is collected with every single dive. This data is fed into the European research database EMODNet. The project makes a measurable scientific contribution to research into species distribution and environmental change. At the same time, it promotes strong environmental awareness within the global diving community. Divers are transformed from observers to active participants in research. In this way, the project combines research excellence with social engagement.
  Cumulative reach potential: 8,500,000

- Ocean Knowledge Base
  The Ocean Knowledge Base is a digital knowledge platform that processes scientific ocean research for decision-makers from politics, business, the media and civil society. Current studies, reports and data are summarised in an understandable way, classified and explained in terms of their social impact. The aim is to close the gap between research and action. The platform promotes evidence-based decisions and accelerates the implementation of sustainable measures. In particular, it addresses the challenges of the UN Decade of Ocean Science in the areas of knowledge access and

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governance. Clear language and practical classification make scientific information relevant for action.

Cumulative reach potential: in progress

Activities

- Love Your Ocean at boot Düsseldorf

  Love Your Ocean is the world's largest sustainability initiative in water sports and has been an integral part of boot Düsseldorf since 2017. Around 100 partners from business, science and civil society present innovative solutions for marine conservation on 800 square metres of exhibition space. Attractive exhibits, lectures, discussion formats and events appeal to a wide audience. The initiative anchors sustainability where the use of the sea can be experienced first-hand. The annual 'ocean tribute Award' honours outstanding personalities and projects and increases their public visibility. Love Your Ocean reaches people far beyond the traditional scientific context and makes a decisive contribution to anchoring the UN Decade of Ocean Science in society.

  Cumulative reach potential: 30,751,935

- Marine competition 'Research at Sea'

  Since 2005, this nationwide marine competition has been motivating children and young people to engage with the sea in a scientific way. Teams of schoolchildren develop their own research questions on the ecology, use and protection of the oceans. The best teams take part in week-long marine research expeditions in the North Sea or Baltic Sea. In the process, they gain practical research experience and work together with scientists. The competition promotes scientific thinking, teamwork and a sense of responsibility at an early age. It makes an important contribution to promoting young talent in marine sciences.

  Cumulative reach potential: 2,400,750

- Ocean Lovers Education

  Ocean Lovers Education is a nationwide educational programme that combines the emotional power of film with sound marine science. In collaboration with the International OCEAN FILM TOUR, selected films are supplemented by workshops, discussion formats and didactically prepared learning materials. The programme is aimed in particular at children, teenagers and young adults and deliberately uses visual and narrative approaches to make complex ecological relationships understandable.

  Scientific content is conveyed in an age-appropriate manner and linked to concrete options for action in everyday life. Teachers and educational institutions receive practical materials for preparation and follow-up. Ocean Lovers Education promotes critical thinking, emotional connection to the ocean

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and long-term commitment. The programme extends beyond the traditional educational setting and strengthens ocean literacy as a social competence.
Cumulative reach potential: 949,360

- Ocean Conference Series
  The Ocean Conference Series is an ongoing series of interdisciplinary dialogue formats that brings together stakeholders from science, politics, business and civil society. The aim is to translate the challenges and goals of the UN Decade of Ocean Science into a structured exchange and to highlight concrete options for action. The conferences combine scientific input with political and social perspectives. They create space for controversial discussions as well as cooperative approaches to solutions. A particular focus is on the transfer of knowledge into decision-making processes. The series strengthens long-term networks and partnerships for marine conservation. At the same time, it increases the visibility of ongoing Decade projects.
  Cumulative reach potential: 2,300,315

- Ocean Heroes
  Ocean Heroes offers committed marine conservationists a visible platform and focuses on their work, motivation and impact. Interviews, portraits and digital formats tell individual stories that show how personal commitment can trigger social change. The project highlights different roles in marine conservation – from science and activism to entrepreneurship and education. Young people in particular are specifically addressed and encouraged to become active themselves. Ocean Heroes creates identification and lowers the threshold for personal engagement. At the same time, the project strengthens the public perception of marine conservation as a collective task.
  Cumulative reach potential: 1,950,060

- Ocean Festival Berlin
  The Ocean Festival Berlin is a long-term dialogue and event format that brings together science, politics, culture and the public. It kicks off with regular parliamentary ocean evenings at the Zeiss Großplanetarium, which address current marine policy issues. The festival expands this approach to include cultural, media and social formats. Scientific findings are linked with art, film and discussion. The aim is to make marine and sustainability issues emotionally tangible and at the same time generate political attention. The festival strengthens the exchange between decision-makers and civil society. It positions the ocean as a central topic for the future in public discourse.
  Cumulative reach potential: 2,425,425

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- Marine light installation

  The German Ocean Foundation marked the official start of the UN Ocean Decade in 2021 with a large-scale marine light installation. The live broadcast of the event, which took place as part of Boris Herrmann's arrival from the Vendée Globe, combined ocean sports, science and marine conservation to create an impressive public moment. The installation sent a strong visual message about the global importance of the oceans. It translated abstract challenges such as climate change and biodiversity loss into an emotional experience. The media coverage made the start of the Decade accessible to a wide audience. The project exemplified how symbolic formats can draw attention to long-term transformation processes.

Cumulative reach potential: 950,220

10 challenges of the UN Ocean Decade

1. Understanding and combating marine pollution
2. Protecting and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity
3. Feed the world's population sustainably
4. Develop a sustainable, resilient and equitable ocean economy
5. Develop ocean-based solutions to climate change
6. Increase the resilience of communities to ocean and coastal risks
7. Sustainably expand the global ocean observation system
8. Create a digital representation of the ocean
9. Skills, knowledge, technology and participation for all
10. Restoring the relationship between society and the ocean

For more information, see:
https://oceandecade.org/
https://ozeandekade.org/

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Opening by Vidar Helgesen, Secretary-General of the IOC-UNESCO (Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission) – Transcription of the Video

Dear ocean lovers, let me start by thanking Frank Schweikert and the German Ocean Foundation for inviting me to speak at this celebration midpoint of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development at boot Düsseldorf 2026. I would also like to thank Petros Michelidakis and the boot Düsseldorf team for their strong support for the Love Your Ocean initiative. This is an initiative made possible by a wide range of partners, exhibitors, civil society organisations, businesses and ocean users contributing to Love Your Ocean and to the UN Ocean Decade.

Boot Düsseldorf is a unique global meeting place for water sports, businesses, innovation and civil society; a community very much driven by passion for the ocean. Love Your Ocean is a strong supporter, a long-standing supporter of the Ocean Decade with a structure of seven interactive islands designed around seven Ocean Decade outcomes. This community matters because sailors, surfers, divers, ocean racers, foilers, they are often the first to see what is going on with our ocean – on the surface, below the surface, along coastlines, the changes that are happening and that are happening at an ever-faster pace.

As such, these users of the ocean are critical ocean citizen scientists and they can be powerful enablers and powerful communicators of what is going on and of the need for action to change course. This matches very much the basic idea of the Ocean Decade. It is a decade for ocean science but it is not a decade for scientists only.

It is a decade for ocean action supported by science, supported by knowledge, and since the future of the ocean depends on tens of thousands of decisions made every day in governments, in local authorities, in businesses, in households, we depend on knowledge being distributed and reaching new communities so that people can make the right decisions for the benefit of the ocean. So progress for the Ocean Decade depends on connecting knowledge to people and to all those decisions. Love Your Ocean is doing exactly that, making science visible, making science understandable and making science usable.

This is what we need even more of in the second half of the Ocean Decade. Midway through, we know the challenges are huge and growing. We know changes are happening faster and faster and therefore our response to these changes needs to be even faster and on a bigger scale.

For that, we depend on strong partnerships. We depend on partnerships of different categories of people and actors, and Love Your Ocean and boot Düsseldorf are exactly those kinds of initiatives that can mobilise different communities, turning engagement and commitment into ocean impact, lasting impact for the benefit of the ocean, for the benefit of humanity. So I thank you and I wish you every success.

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Statement by Dr Sylvia Earle, Her Deepness
Founder Mission Blue

I have come with a message from the ocean to salute you, 21st century human beings, to think about how lucky you are to be here, now, armed with knowledge that not only did not but could not exist until right about now, and perhaps the last best chance we will ever have to secure an enduring future for everything we care about, mostly our very existence, because of the chance we now have to use our individual and collective power to take care of the ocean.

We are halfway through the decade of ocean exploration, understanding and care to use our power to reverse this trend in the next five years from decline to recovery. Boot Dusseldorf is an example of people who are coming together to celebrate water sports, to celebrate how much fun it is to be out there in the ocean, but the greatest joy of all is to realise we have a chance to care for the ocean, to make that difference in the next five years.

The German Ocean Foundation has been investing in this message throughout its history. Mission Blue is working with the German Ocean Foundation and together with other organisations, individuals and governments around the world to seize this opportunity. It is unprecedented to take the knowledge we have, to use it to secure an enduring future for ourselves within the natural systems that make our existence possible.

Bravo to you who see that and will get others to see that. This is a moment in time that was not possible until right about now. Fifty years ago, we simply did not know what is now known. Fifty years from now, even five years from now, we will have lost some of the opportunities that are right here before us.

Bravo to all of you for doing what it takes. This is the time, a moment in time. Be grateful that we know what we know and there is time to use what you have, what we all have, aligned to secure an enduring future, for ourselves, for the whales, for the fish, for the ocean, for all of nature, for all of us. Thank you.

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