

Communications and the VBA

The many values of the ocean



Our ocean clearly has value; the trouble is that some values are more valued than others. The current dominant narrative around the ocean is based on economic values and all too often this leads to short-term thinking and over-exploitation. There is vast and growing financial value in the traded “blue economy” through the sale of goods and services – from fish, to deep-sea oil, to tourism – but much of the value that people attach to the ocean and many of the benefits we derive from it, have no clear monetary basis. The more quantifiable types of value are easier to understand, measure and report, and this may be one of the reasons why ocean conversations tend to focus on a relatively narrow set of values.

For example, whilst the importance of quality livelihoods to human wellbeing is critical and clear, the harder to measure – some would say priceless – value embedded in our emotional, social and cultural ocean experiences, as well as the ocean’s critical but largely invisible role in mitigating climate change, is often overlooked. This omission diminishes opportunities for people to connect with ocean messaging and causes, and with each other. We can end up in siloes defined by particular aspects of who we are, and in deeply entrenched disagreements defined by problems and issues, where change can sometimes feel impossible to achieve.

We believe that refocusing the debate and placing value at the heart of solutions for our ocean can be a unifying force. It is an opportunity to shift the conversation and draw in the breadth of stakeholder engagement needed to accelerate the changes we need to see.

Understanding our audiences

Key to taking a Values Based Approach to communications is understanding where audiences are at – attitudinally, emotionally and behaviourally – and meeting them there. The Values Based Approach understands that people lead complicated, noisy and busy lives, and that we need to connect audiences to the ocean through already existing values and concerns. The Ocean SoundWaves campaign, for example, was effective because it connected people to the ocean through the subject of mental health, a key consideration for many people. The #OneLess campaign connected to London’s audience by tapping into the strength of the city’s identity and the concept of consuming water ‘the London way’. Whether the way people connect to the ocean is through the food they enjoy, their hobbies, a love of wildlife, or a sense of national pride, we need to understand these different audiences and meet them where they are.

