

1.



The potential for aquariums to communicate awareness of the Ocean's problems to their visitors.  
Paul Van den Sande – Philippe Jouk.

It is a great pleasure to stand here before you to discuss the potential for our aquariums to communicate awareness of the Ocean's problems to our visitors.

## 2. INTRODUCTION



The public's perception of the role of a public aquarium has been greatly influenced by great improvements in exhibition standards and the commitment to exhibiting animals in properly adapted settings. Moreover aquariums play a very important role in raising the visitor awareness and helping them to understand the threats facing the ocean's health, the impact of global climate change, etc.... Aquariums offer the best platform to communicate with visitors: Modern exhibition techniques attract an ever growing number of visitors worldwide. These new techniques have an astonishing impact and stir emotions. Aquariums can and should use this emotional momentum to sensitize and incite their visitors to act. Whilst submerged in this atmosphere, visitors are more receptive to the messages that we try to pass on.

By trying to fulfill visitor's expectations, aquariums offer a unique chance to induce a more lasting commitment to act for a better future.

Surveys revealed the increased interest of the public in the issues impacting the oceans and other aquatic bodies on earth.



3. Aquariums offer a unique platform to inform visitors about ocean related issues such as climate change, pollution, acidification, fisheries etc.

Several surveys have been carried out in past years in Europe, funded by the EU community, to investigate the actual knowledge of the public at large, about the threats facing the oceans and other aquatic environments on our planet.

I have pleasure presenting you some relevant conclusions from some of these studies.

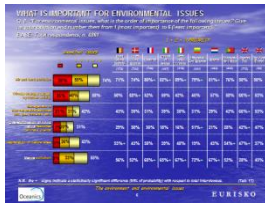
4. In 2003 the EU funded a first survey, conducted in 12 of its member states.



The aim was to :  
find out what the European visitors of aquariums, science and natural history museums know about the oceans.  
and the perception of this knowledge on the part of scientists and science communicators

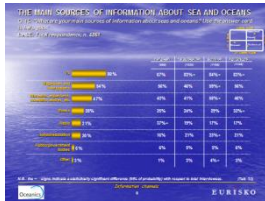
The surveys were carried out by 7 aquariums and 3 museums

5. This table shows clearly that :



People are aware that one the most important environmental issues is climate change caused by human activity  
The issue that is most knowledge-related is the degradation of the marine environment by man

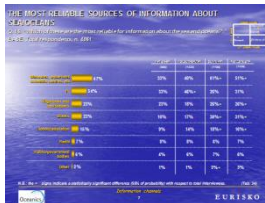
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The results on the question : “what are your main sources of information about seas and oceans” is very clear: First comes TV, secondly magazines and newspapers and thirdly, with 47 % aquariums, museums and science centers.

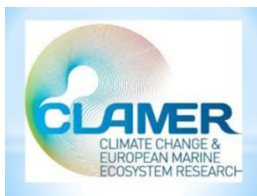
In conjunction with the question on reliability of information (previous table), it is clear that aquariums have a major role to play.

7.



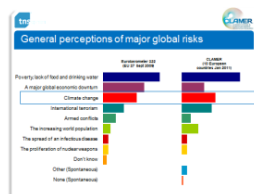
47% of visitors considered museums, aquariums and science centers to be the most reliable sources of information about the sea/oceans, ahead of TV, magazines, newspapers and other information sources.

8.



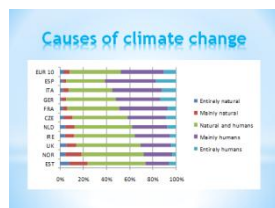
In 2010 another study was funded by the European Community. This ”CLAMER” study questioned over 10.000 EU citizens in 10 countries. The aim of this study was to investigate the knowledge of the general population on the impact of climate change and other threats to the oceans and seas.

9.



In general, climate change was considered to be the third major global risk in 2009, whilst in the Clamer survey of 2010, it ranks second.

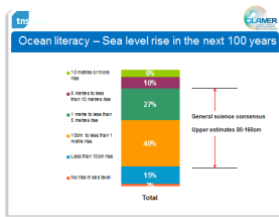
10.



A majority of the general public in most EU countries believes that climate change is mainly caused by a mix of natural events and human activities. A slightly smaller group thinks that climate change is principally caused by human impact. A smaller portion is convinced that it is entirely induced by human activity.

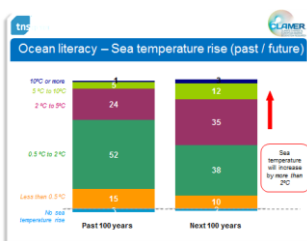
From this result, it is clear that an overwhelming part of the population is aware that human activities are either partly or entirely responsible for climate change.

11.



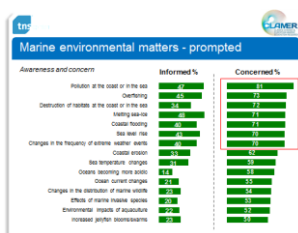
Almost everyone agrees the sea will rise in the next 100 years. The majority of the public expects that sea level will rise between 10 cm and 1 meter or even less.

12.



Scientific data demonstrated a more or less pronounced rise in sea water temperatures, depending on geographical location. The public is aware of this phenomenon as shown in the graph on the left. In terms of the next 100 years, the opinion on the rate of temperature increase shifts and respondents across all countries believe the temperature will increase by more than it has done in the last 100 years.

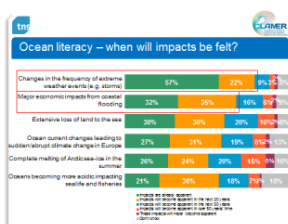
13.



On other marine environmental matters, the general public seems to be best informed about coastal pollution, overfishing, melting sea-ice and sea level rise. The major issues on which they are concerned are broadly the same: coastal pollution, overfishing, melting sea-ice and sea level rise. Two additional fields of concerns seem to be the destruction of coastal habitats and changes in the frequency of extreme weather events.

The graph shows that some important issues like e.g. acidification are much less well known, and more information needs to be provided in future, especially on those less-well known issues.

14.



On the question of when the impact of changes will be felt, an important part of the respondents agree that, depending of the type of threat, the impacts are already very apparent, and the vast majority believes they will be felt in the coming decades.

15.



In the United States similar surveys have been conducted and the results can be compared to the European results:

The survey shows that the public is most concerned about climate change but that there is clear difference between age classes.

Age class up to 20: 75% of the questioned persons are concerned while up to 65 only 20% are concerned.

They are looking for ways they can act to help as individuals. They now believe that their individual actions can have a fair amount or a great deal of impact. Young people are more concerned and engaged than older persons when it comes to solving problems like climate change.

16.



There is a growing need to combine our forces to:

- Improve communications on global challenges and problems
- Promote worldwide concerted actions, taking into account regional and cultural differences
- Take concerted action to influence decision makers

17.



As the public concludes that our institutions do not meet all of their expectations:

**WE HAVE TO INVEST MORE IN OUR EFFORTS  
UNITED WE CAN DO !**

18.



Visitor Numbers (partial)

Data collected in :

- 14 Chinese aquariums
- 31 European aquariums
- 58 Japanese aquariums
- 37 United States aquariums

2009 : 112.853.735

2010 : 116.483.457

2011 : 117.600.629

World-wide there are (estimated) a little over 400 leading aquariums. The 136 aquaria who provided their visitor numbers alone already welcome an ever growing number of visitors, reaching probably 120 billion this year.

Our institutions and professional aquarium organizations should use this attendance to communicate intensively with their guests.

19.



A good example of such an initiative is the World Ocean Day.

World Ocean Day which started out as an initiative of Nausicäa grew to become a world-wide event, that has been recognized by UNESCO as an official World Action Day and takes place every year on the 8th of June. The actions are coordinated by WON ( the World Ocean

Network and the Ocean Project in the US.). Local initiatives such as beach cleaning, discussion platforms, a youth parliament.....take place.

And further new initiatives are being developed such as .....Blue Planet, Sea for Society ....

20.

Another initiative that can help to reach the goals we all have in common is the IAF. .... (can be found at the website)



International Aquarium Forum IAF

[www.intaquaforum.org](http://www.intaquaforum.org)

In 2004 the IAC participants created IAF.

Its main purpose is to improve worldwide communication amongst public aquarium professionals between the IAC's in order to strengthen capacity building, promote sustainable practices and to conserve global aquatic ecosystems.

21.

Let us think Globally and act locally. This is, I think, the message aquariums have to pass to their visitors.



CARING FOR THE BLUE PLANET  
WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.  
(©WON)

Think of the significant difference 7 billion of us can make !  
Thank you for your attention