CommOCEAN 2026
Plenary 1:
‘Communication and impact to benefit the ocean and society’
Wednesday 2 September
10:15-11:15

SPEAKERS:

- **M. Carmen Garcia-Martinez, Researcher, Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO-CSIC): ‘Strategic Ocean Science Communication, Trust and North–South Knowledge Co Production in Benin’**
- **Peter Haugan, Policy Director, Institute of Marine Research (IMR): ‘A new kind of more communicative ocean science’**
- **Esther Maina, Communications and Knowledge Management Lead, Regional Seas Programme, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): ‘One Voice, 18 Regions: How the Regional Seas Programme coordinates ocean communication’**
- **Lukasz Larsson Warzecha, Managing Director and Chief Storyteller, Öresund Patrol: ‘Seeing the Sound: Visual Storytelling as a Gateway to Citizen Science in Öresund’**

Moderator: Sverre Ole Drønen, University of Bergen and member of the European Marine Board Communications Panel

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M. Carmen Garcia-Martinez, Researcher, Spanish Institute of Oceanography (IEO-CSIC): 'Strategic Ocean Science Communication, Trust and North–South Knowledge Co Production in Benin'

In an era of accelerating climate disruption, coastal food security in the Global South is not only a biological or economic issue, but also a matter of trust, communication, and power. Along the coastal lagoons of southern Benin, oyster farming (Crassostrea tulipa) is a cornerstone of food security and women-led livelihoods. Yet scientific interventions often risk reinforcing asymmetries or mistrust if communication is not carefully addressed.

This plenary contribution presents a case study from a bilateral cooperation project between Spain (IEO-CSIC) and Benin (IRHOB) that approached communication as a strategic, security-relevant practice. While the research focused on oyster larval dynamics and environmental drivers, equal emphasis was placed on translating science into locally meaningful tools. Technical knowledge was co-developed with women oyster farmers into practical resources, such as adapted oyster seed collection calendars that support everyday decision-making.

Beyond technical outputs, the project invested in trust-building through deliberate communication choices, reciprocal institutional stays, and long-term capacity building, including co-supervised doctoral training. Framed as science diplomacy, this experience shows how scientific cooperation can function as strategic ocean communication in contexts of vulnerability.

The key message is simple and urgent: coastal resilience depends not only on better science, but on equitable knowledge co-production and trust.

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Peter Haugan, Policy Director, Institute of Marine Research (IMR): 'A new kind of more communicative ocean science'

Accelerating ocean crises driven by interacting stressors such as fossil-fuel driven warming and inequitable governance, are pushing marine systems toward tipping points with cascading global impacts. This presents a call for ocean science to move beyond observation toward active engagement by forging strategic alliances, centring storytelling and acknowledging the political nature of science (Strand et al 2026, npj Ocean Sustainability, accepted). By engaging in this manner, ocean scientists can help transform crisis into opportunity, re-building the science-society interface to advance more resilient and just ocean futures.

The present contribution builds upon experience from the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in June 2025, the preceding One Ocean Science Congress and the efforts from the ocean science community to prepare for these events and to contribute constructively to the science-policy-society interface. Members of an expert group convened by the International Science Council (ISC) reflected on the experience in a recent paper (Strand et al, 2026). It includes recommendations for scientists to forge strategic alliances, tailor communication and make science personal and political. I will discuss in particular the key role of communication and the perhaps controversial recommendation to explicitly support science activism and recognition of how science is political and personal.

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Esther Maina, Communications and Knowledge Management Lead, Regional Seas Programme, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): 'One Voice, 18 Regions: How the Regional Seas Programme coordinates ocean communication'

Strong ocean governance depends on how well priorities are communicated, understood, and acted upon. For a programme spanning 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans in 146+ countries, that is no small task, and it is precisely what the Regional Seas Communications Working Group (CWG) was established to address. The CWG unites communication focal points from each Regional Sea to drive strategic, aligned communication throughout the Programme.

The CWG has already delivered joint newsletters, collaborative campaigns, and various content showcasing regional ocean priorities. Guided by a four-year roadmap (2026–2029) and annual implementation plans, and with Terms of Reference, a Chair and Co-Chair in place, the group is building a durable structure for long-term coordination and shared delivery.

The CWG will track its progress through annual reporting and an impact evaluation framework, measuring how coordinated communication strengthens visibility, engagement, and policy dialogue. Peer learning, capacity building, and strategic partnerships are central to how the group works, ensuring that collaboration is not just structural, but actively practised within Regional Seas.

This presentation will show how the CWG works in practice in detail: how joint products are developed, how messaging is aligned, and what lessons have emerged around coordination, capacity gaps, competing timelines, and collaboration (what has worked, and what the group) is still learning.

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Lukasz Larsson Warzecha, Managing Director and Chief Storyteller, Öresund Patrol: 'Seeing the Sound: Visual Storytelling as a Gateway to Citizen Science in Öresund'

Öresund Patrol (ÖP) is a Swedish-Danish nonprofit that combines independent marine research in a citizen science capacity with visual storytelling. In this presentation, Lukasz Larsson Warzecha, ÖP founder and National Geographic contributing photographer, will explain how the Know-Care-Act principle can drive change and how visual storytelling can inspire action and share knowledge.

Öresund is one of the world's busiest waterways and the most densely populated metropolitan area of the Nordic countries. Over centuries, the continuous changes in the Sound meant that every generation inherited the strait in a poorer state without necessarily realising it. Scientists call this shifting baselines.

According to the BBC, 99.9% of Earth's population has never experienced an underwater environment firsthand. That disconnect shapes everything: policy, funding, and public priorities. Meaningful change around any problem requires three things: knowing there is a problem, caring that it matters, and acting to fix it.

Öresund is worth protecting because nearly four million people who share a language of stewardship, democratic trust and care for the natural world live alongside a partially recovered, uniquely productive and deeply fragile marine habitat. Together, they face a choice about what kind of legacy they want to leave. Can storytelling provide a meaningful path to agency?