

REFLECTION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Although our oceans cover more than 70 percent of the Earth, and hold 97 percent of the world's water supply, the majority of them remain unexplored. The ocean plays a vital role in both climate and weather, and absorbs approximately one third of all human induced CO₂ emissions. Yet, the general knowledge about the ocean, its habitants, and its ecosystems remains alarmingly low, at least when it comes to the three subjects interviewed for this paper. The three interviewees were asked 'What do you know about the concept of "Sustainable Development" in relation to oceans and coasts?', and were then asked three follow up questions regarding the ecosystems and functions of the ocean and coasts, the role of living animals and organisms in the ocean, and the impact of industrial fishing. The three interviewees were all in different ages (27, 46, 64) from different backgrounds.

MALE, 27, DATA ENGINEER (M27)

M27 is aware of climate change and the term sustainable development, yet was not able to pinpoint what either actually meant. For him, the most pressing issue in regard to oceans were the dumping of garbage and release of toxins, through for example the use of environmentally damaging sunscreen, yet he could not explain what exact effect either would have on the environment.

M27 could not explicitly describe any ocean ecosystem. He talked about the value of plankton and coral reefs. He assumed that coasts are important because that is where the waste from the inland regions come from, thus if you control the coasts you can prevent waste from entering the ocean.

M27 believes that trawling for fish is extremely damaging for the oceans, and compared it to ripping all trees and bushes in a forest in the search for truffles. He believes that fishing can only be sustainable if it is done in a self sustaining manner. M27 did not know what role fish or other living organisms play in the health of the ocean.

FEMALE, 46, ARCHITECT (F46)

F46 starts with saying that the oceans are the lungs of the Earth, therefore it is crucial to keep them healthy. She believes that the best way to do this is to reduce the use of fossil fuels and stop discarding plastics in the ocean.

F46 described the ecosystem as the bigger fish eating the smaller fish. She did not know anything concrete about coastal ecosystems or functions, yet thought that there must be some function of it.

F46 does not believe that trawling is sustainable because of the bycatch. F46 does not know what kind of fishing would be sustainable, but assumes that small-scale fisheries would be the best way to do it.

FEMALE, 63, SALES REPRESENTATIVE (F63)

F63 attest that the effects of climate change are exaggerated by mainstream media and are not accurate. She thinks that the sustainability discourse is unnecessary. Nevertheless, she believes that we should stop dumping garbage in the ocean, and that this is an issue.

F63 could not describe any ocean ecosystem. She believes that the oceans create balance in the world and that the coral reefs dying is a result of our dependence on fossil fuels. Coasts are simply a divider between sea and land.

F63 described trawling for fish as an effective, yet destructive way, to catch fish, due to all the bycatch. She believes that small scale fisheries can provide humans with fish in a sustainable way. F63 did not know what role fish or other living organisms play in the health of the ocean.

FINDINGS

All of the interviewees described fossil fuels and plastics as one of the greatest threats to ocean health, yet none could describe why or how. None of the interviewees could describe a single marine ecosystem confidently, and neither believed that the coasts played any important role in regard to climate change or sustainability. Finally, all three interviewees believed that trawling for fish was unsustainable, however mainly because of the large numbers of bycatch. Neither considered the effects of decreasing fish stock and what effects that could have on the marine ecosystem.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Even though most people hear about the importance of sustainability almost daily, there is a large knowledge gap in what sustainability actually means and how to achieve it, especially in regards to the oceans. If we based our actions on the answers from these three interviews, the way to achieve sustainability in the oceans would be to reduce our use of fossil fuels and stop dumping plastic in the ocean. This is not enough. If we are to achieve any kind of sustainable future, the oceans must receive more attention, the importance of marine animals and organisms must be acknowledged, and the knowledge gap must be filled, so that people can make conscious, informed decisions that benefit our oceans and in extension, all of us.

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