

How to share ocean's health with aquarium visitors

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Annually, aquariums receive a few hundred million visitors worldwide. The last decades the role of aquariums has changed from bringing a simple 'aquarium show' to the development of a much more educational environment. Conservation and spreading information became very important issues, if not the most important ones. Aquariums do not have iconic ambassadors such as big mammals but they are well-positioned to show a variety of animals, including marine mammals and sharks in a semi-natural setting.

While looking at the beauty of e.g. a school of fishes, the visitor can be overwhelmed. This makes him or her receptive to well-chosen messages presented in an easy understandable and recreational manner. In this way aquariums can also communicate about the problems associated with climate change, environmental threats, etc. and propose actions that stimulate an active participation of the public.

The European Union has organised a few surveys on the public's awareness on oceans and their problems. Similar surveys have been conducted in the US and probably also elsewhere. Aquariums have been actively involved in these exercises. This presentation deals with the outcome of some of these surveys. It demonstrates, among other results, that the public considers aquariums as a reliable source of information. They also appreciate the educational material that is being developed and offered for free.