



*America, the Ocean, and Climate Change:*  
*New Research Insights for Conservation, Awareness and Action*

# executive summary

June 2009

**A recent major public opinion survey** sponsored by The Ocean Project in collaboration with the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the National Aquarium in Baltimore produced a massive amount of data gathered from more than 22,000 respondents in the United States. The survey expanded considerably on The Ocean Project's landmark research from 1999.

This report, *America, the Ocean, and Climate Change: New Research Insights for Conservation, Awareness, and Action*, distills the survey findings and implications into a succinct, actionable compilation to help aquariums, zoos, and museums, and others, more effectively advance ocean conservation.

**The findings also have implications** that go beyond ocean issues, such as insights into how Americans think about environmental issues, where they get their information, and what they expect of aquariums, zoos, and museums. Through an iterative process The Ocean Project hopes to receive reactions to and interpretations of this data from you to continually improve our initiative in partnership with aquariums, zoos, and museums. We will also be conducting tracking surveys during the next two years to test messages and to measure changes in American public opinion connected to the ocean.





## National Survey Advisory Committee

### Main Advisors:

Jim Hekkers, Managing Director  
Monterey Bay Aquarium

Kathy Sher, Deputy Director, External Affairs  
National Aquarium in Baltimore

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Chris Andrews, Ph.D., Chief of Public Programs,  
and Director of the Steinhart Aquarium  
California Academy of Sciences

Jackson Andrews, Director of Operations  
and Husbandry  
Tennessee Aquarium

Tom Schmid, President and CEO  
Texas State Aquarium

### Principal Investigators:

Paul J. Boyle, Ph.D., Senior Vice President,  
Conservation and Education  
Association of Zoos and Aquariums

Bill Mott, Director  
The Ocean Project

The survey found that not much progress has been made in the last 10 years in increasing either the literacy of the American public about the ocean or awareness and concern about the environmental issues threatening the future of a healthy, life-sustaining ocean. While Americans express awe, concern, and care for the ocean when asked, they do not view ocean conservation issues as urgent, and do not connect the ocean with the environmental issue of most concern to the public — the critical issue of climate change.

Perhaps the most significant implication of the survey findings for aquariums, zoos, and museums is that the public expects and trusts our institutions to educate regarding environmental and conservation issues and to provide guidance about how to address them personally and societally. Collectively, however, we are not meeting these expectations, and the vacuum is being filled by corporate messaging that does not always promote the best interests of conservation.

**What aquariums, zoos and museums can do:** *America, the Ocean, and Climate Change* provides recommendations, and there are numerous initiatives underway that address many of the survey findings and provide case studies for how our institutions can have a greater, more meaningful impact. One such initiative is a new collaboration among aquariums, zoos, and museums to focus on helping the public understand the impact of our changing climate on the ocean and on our own survival.

A second initiative builds on the public's growing interest in making buying decisions that support the concept of sustainability. The sustainable seafood movement provides an example of effectively giving the public what it wants — but is not receiving — from our institutions: tangible actions people can easily take that make a difference.

Survey results confirm the public's willingness to change buying habits to support sustainable fisheries and businesses that do likewise. Dozens of institutions are already working together to engage the public on this issue, which also provides a gateway into other key conservation issues.

Efforts in these two areas can also be guided by other *America, the Ocean, and Climate Change* research findings which point to opportunities with mobilizing youth and other key segments of the population as well as the important role of the Internet.

As trusted institutions concerned about a healthy ocean and a healthy environment, aquariums, zoos, and museums can and must do better over the next decade than we have done in the past decade. Our goal is that this and ongoing research provide you with tangible, actionable ways to communicate about conservation and mobilize the public to take action.



P.O. Box 2506, Providence, RI 02906  
TEL: 401.709.4071  
[www.TheOceanProject.org](http://www.TheOceanProject.org)