

Insights and Updates: Spring 2011

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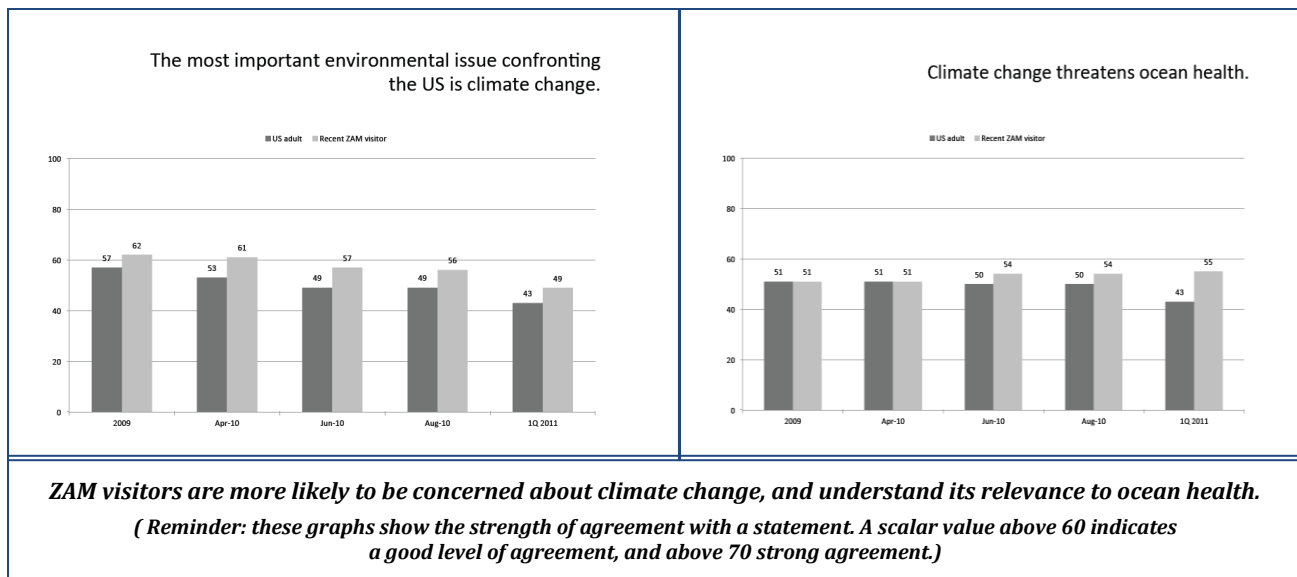
This is one in a series of market research reports that aim to provide our partners – zoos, aquariums, museums (ZAMs) and other conservation-oriented organizations – with what they need to develop strategies and tools to engage their visitors in conservation action. This latest round of research featured a sampling of 6,322 American adults, and was completed between January and March of 2011. As always, we welcome your [feedback!](#)

ZAM Visitors and Climate Concerns

While overall concern about climate change continues to decline among the public as a whole, our latest round of research offers some hope for those of us working specifically with ZAM visitors, who are more likely than non-visitors to be concerned about climate change and are also more likely to connect – albeit still not strongly – concern about climate change with concern about ocean conservation.

While far from cause for celebration, this data does support the way in which an increasing number of ZAMs have been developing innovative outreach strategies on the issue, especially those that are informing visitors of the impacts climate change already is having on particular animals and places, and looking for opportunities to ignite public interest in acting on the issue.

Given ZAMs' special position among the most trusted sources for conservation information, our research, as well as that of others (e.g. Yale Project on Climate Change Communications), suggests that ZAM efforts could prove critical to any improvements we might see in overall public opinion - and action - on this important issue.

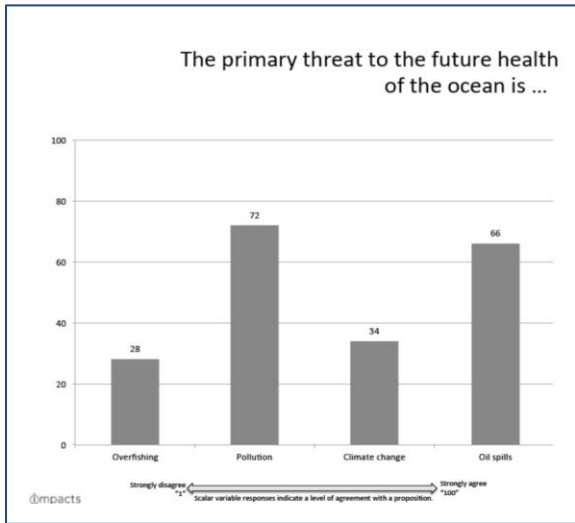


Case Study: Deepwater Horizon Disaster

The BP disaster brought about a spike in public concern for ocean health and interest in ocean conservation last year (see previous [update](#)). The heightened public concern and interest – consistent with other studies on public attention spans and catastrophes (intense and short) – has all but disappeared now, but reinforces the three themes from our market research on public opinion and the ocean:

- 1) When it comes to perceptions of ocean threats, the public tends to focus on those that they can see and

- discount those that they can't
- 2) The public holds an ongoing (mis)perception that the ocean is ultimately indestructible, able to overcome in the long term anything we might do to harm it in the short term (including, it seems, spilling 5 million barrels of oil!)
 - 3) Even when there is evidence to the contrary, America is seen by Americans as a good ocean steward.



The public has much higher concern for oil spills than overfishing and climate change.

Implications for ZAMs

While a catastrophe itself is unlikely to change public perception, it does provide ZAMs with a small but significant window of opportunity in which to present information and promote conservation action.

Coupled with research showing that the public responds better to examples of impacts on *specific animals or places* rather than in the context of the ocean as a whole, disasters such as the BP oil spill present significant opportunities for ZAMs to link their educational and outreach efforts with what is foremost in the public's mind. Images of oil-covered pelicans and sea turtles, oil-drenched Gulf wetlands, and other such emotive visuals make the impact visible and understandable by the public, and thereby have significant potential for motivating the public to action. The data clearly suggests, too,

that it is best to provide suggestions for how people can be part of a solution, rather than discussing how they might have been part of the problem.

Moving forward – and recognizing that changing exhibits can take months if not years to prepare – ZAMs may want to tap into other avenues for rapid response with onsite and online visitors. Docents, interpreters, social media, and interactive screens, and related resources can all be used to help ZAM visitors make that linkage between what they are seeing onsite or online and what is happening in the outside world; they can also be used to recruit visitors to be part of the solution.

Grants Awarded to Three Partners

Thanks to NOAA, this year we developed a small grants program and are pleased to announce the first recipients, who are taking up the challenge to inspire their visitors to conservation action. To varying degrees, their projects work with youth and/or minorities: two constituencies identified with significant potential to make a difference for conservation. After an extensive review, our external Small Grants Advisory Panel selected these winners:

- [Aquarium of the Bay](#) - Fully funded at \$12,000 to hold workshops for their informal science educators and volunteers, and help create a new call to action tool for their visitors
- [Detroit Zoological Society](#) - Fully funded at \$15,000 to support a summer program for minority middle school students, focusing on connecting the Great Lakes with ocean and climate issues
- [Utah's Hogle Zoo](#) - Fully funded at \$10,000 to double participation its Zoo-school Arctic Ocean conservation science partnerships with elementary school teachers from underserved populations across Utah

Our next [RFP](#) will be posted by June 15, with proposals due by September 1, 2011.

Communications Project Coordinator Hired

To increase our outreach with our partner ZAMs and help our partners to take full advantage of the market research and related resources, The Ocean Project recently hired [Wei Ying Wong](#) as our Communications Project Coordinator. You can learn more about her [here](#) and can reach her at wuwong@theoceanproject.org.



About this Initiative: This ongoing market research initiative - in collaboration with Monterey Bay Aquarium, National Aquarium, and AZA - is made possible with funding from [NOAA](#). Earlier reports, including copies of the two landmark studies, *America, the Ocean, and Climate Change: New Research Insights for Conservation, Awareness, and Action (2009)* and *Communicating About Oceans: Results of a National Survey (1999)*, along with complete results of the tracking surveys can be found [here](#).