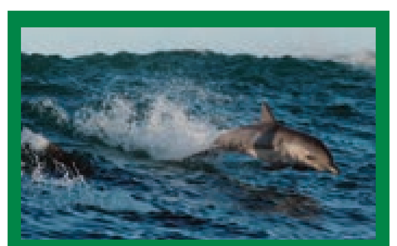
OCEANS

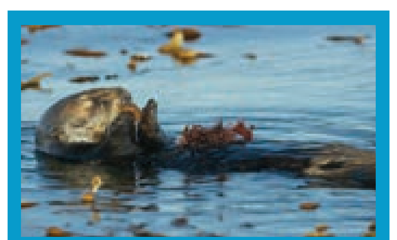
LIFE BENEATH THE WAVES



BOTTLENOSE DOLPHIN

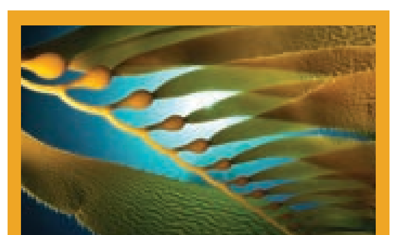
Surfing may be a form of play in bottlenose dolphins, which is important in developing social and cognitive skills.

Some bottlenose dolphins are known to repeatedly rub against a particular species of Gorgonian - a bush-like octocoral.



SEA OTTER

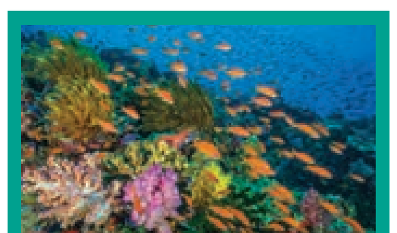
Sea otters must eat around 30% of their body weight every day but, when not hunting, they rest by floating on their backs, frequently wrapping themselves in fronds of kelp for better stability.



KELP

Kelp has a phenomenal growth rate, fuelled by the sun and fed by nutrient-rich waters due to upwelling.

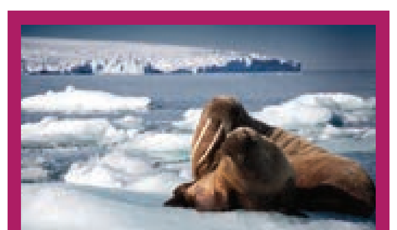
Fronds of bull kelp rise up to the surface, creating towering forests. These are incredibly productive ecosystems and the structure they create is crowded with life.



CORAL REEF

Corals are not plants but in fact animals which are closely related to jellyfish and anemones.

When sea temperatures are elevated by just 1 or 2 degrees Celsius above normal, for just a few weeks, that can be enough to cause the plant-like cells in a coral's tissue to be ejected.



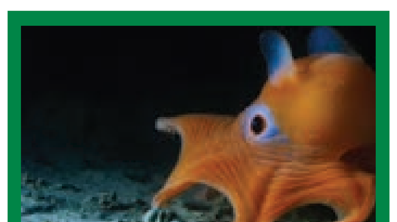
WALRUS

The bond between walrus and her calf is very strong, reinforced by vocal communication and their strong sense of smell.

Hungry polar bears can trigger alarm in walrus colonies causing stampedes. The risk of being crushed in these pose a danger to young calves.

TUSK FISH

These tuskfish are one of the few coral reef fish that use coral outcroppings as a tool. By forcefully smashing the clam on either side of the outcropping, the tuskfish is able to break apart its tough protective shell.



DUMBO OCTOPUS

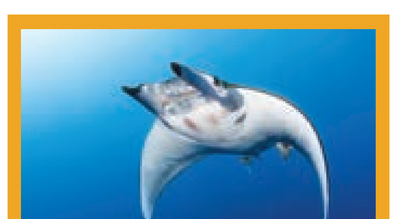
Dumbo Octopus live at extreme depths of 3000m to 7000m making this group the deepest living of all know octopuses.

This flapjack octopus lives in the deep waters off California. It is a type of Dumbo octopus, so-named for the fins it uses to move through the water.

YELLOWFIN TUNA

These predators solely inhabit the open ocean. They can pursue their prey at speeds of up to 40 miles per hour.

These yellowfin tuna were filmed in the Pacific Ocean off Costa Rica, while looking for the 'boiling sea'.



MOBULA RAY

This picture shows a Mobula ray or devil ray in the Pacific Ocean. Mobula rays can grow to have a disc width of 3 metres. They feed mainly on plankton but Blue Planet II filmed them for the first time eating fish.

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OUR BLUE PLANET

Flying fish *Exocoetus volitans*

EPIPELAGIC PHOTIC

Bottlenose dolphin *Tursiops truncatus*

Spotted eagle ray *Aetobatus narinari*

Pacific sea nettle jellyfish *Chrysaora pacifica*

Dugong *Dugong dugon*

Yellow spotted jellyfish *Phyllorhiza punctata*

Yellowfin tuna *Thunnus albacares*

Leatherback sea turtle *Dermochelys coriacea*

Common cuttlefish *Sepia officinalis*

Red lionfish *Pterois volitans*

Flatworm *Pseudoceros susanae*

Necklace starfish *Fromia monilis*

Common clownfish *Amphiprion ocellaris*

Moss animal *Phylum bryozoa*

Whelk *Buccinidae*

Common seahorse *Hippocampus kuda*

Basking shark *Cetorhinus maximus*

Atlantic wolffish *Anarhichas lupus*

Moonfish *Lampris guttatus*

Chambered nautilus *Nautilus pompilius*

Grooved brain coral *Diploria labyrinthiformis*

Beadlet anemone Actinia equina

Sea squirt Ascidia conchilega

200 m

MESOPELAGIC TWILIGHT

Longbill spearfish *Tetrapturus pfluegeri*

Tiger shark *Galeocerdo cuvier*

Yellow tube sponge *Aplysina fistularis*

Spotted moray *Gymnothorax moringa*

Humpback whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

Giant oarfish *Regalecus glesne*

Coelacanth *Latimeria chalumnae*

Pacific hatchetfish *Argyropelecus affinis*

1000 m

BATHYPELAGIC MIDNIGHT

Deep-sea spider crab *Platymaia wyvillethomsoni*

Goblin shark *Mitsukurina owstoni*

Atlantic hagfish *Myxine glutinosa*

Sperm whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

Giant Pacific octopus *Enteroctopus dofleini*

Dana viperfish *Chauliodus danae*

Gulper eel *Eurypharynx pelecanoides*

Cock-eyed squid *Histioteuthis heteropsis*

4000 m

ABYSSOPELAGIC ABYSS

Dumbo octopus *Grimpoteuthis bathynectes*

Giant tube worms Riftia pachyptila

Common fangtooth *Anoplogaster cornuta*

Basket starfish *Gorgonocephalus eucnemis*

Squat lobster Munidopsis profunda

Vampire squid *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*

Sea spider *Colossendeis megalonyx*

Rattail fish *Coryphaenoides yaquinae*

6000 m

HADOPELAGIC HADAL

Angler fish Melanocetus johnstonii

Black swallower *Chiasmodon niger*

Stalked crinoid *Bathycrinus carpenterii*

Snailfish *Pseudoliparis amblystomopsis*

Giant amphipod *Alicella gigantea*

Acorn worm Enteropneusta

Sea pig Scotoplanes globosa

Giant red shrimp Aristaeomorpha foliacea

EPIPELAGIC 0 – 200m

Humans are limited to the upper 50 m of this shallowest region of the oceans. This close to the surface there is light and the winds can make the temperatures relatively uniform

MESOPELAGIC 200 – 1000m

Humans can explore these depths in special submarines such as the Deep Rover which features in Oceans

BATHYPELAGIC 1000 – 4000m

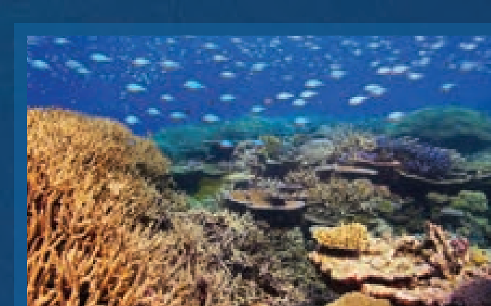
There is virtually no light at these depths. The relatively uniform oceanic temperature makes it a good habitat for many species of adapted fish. Squid at these depths are a major food source for sperm whales

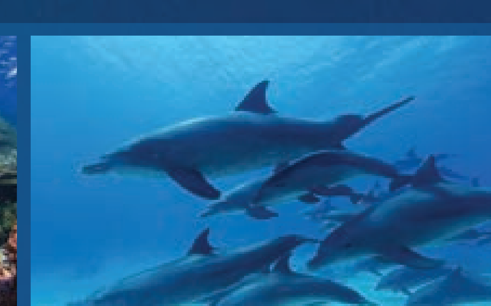
ABYSSOPELAGIC 4000 – 6000m

Sun light never reaches these depths and energy for the fish and benthic animals that live here rains down from above. Very few humans have reached these depths, in special submarines

HADOPELAGIC > 6000m

Ocean trenches make up a tiny proportion of the Earth's surface. They descend from the oceans' abyssal plains to huge depths, the deepest reaching almost 11 km. Only 3 humans have been this deep





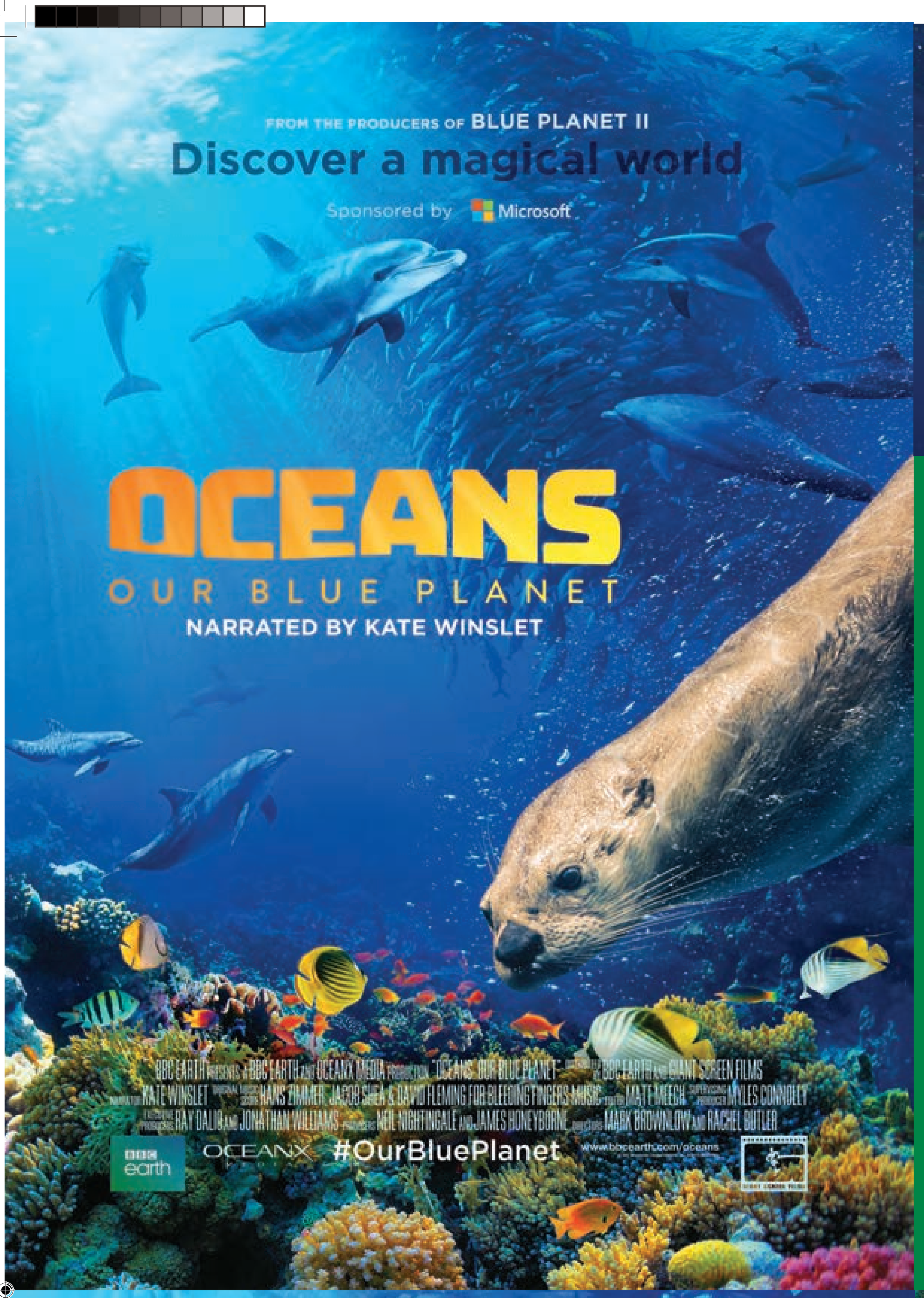
Our oceans dominate Earth's natural systems. They control the climate and the carbon cycle, produce half of all the oxygen we breathe and support an astounding diversity of life

- The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest living structure. It is made up of around 3000 coral reefs and is larger in area than the entire United Kingdom
- Coral reefs cover just 0.1% of the ocean's surface area, yet they are home to a quarter of all known marine species
- Dolphins have lungs and breathe air like we do. They can hold their breath for more than 10 minutes
- The common octopus is capable of behaviours so smart and sophisticated, that scientists compare their activities to chimpanzees
- More people have been to the moon than have been to the deepest parts of our oceans
- The deep seafloor looks barren and inert. But its sediment, made from organic matter fallen from the surface over millennia can become compressed into pockets of methane gas. For the very first time, violent eruptions of bubbles of gas the size of basketballs have been filmed, shooting out of the seabed almost a half-mile down

Oceans: Our Blue Planet is now playing at museums and giant screen theatres.
For screening dates and show times or to find out more about Oceans: Our Blue Planet, visit **www.bbcearth.com/oceans**

#OurBluePlanet

The Open University



PLASTIC OCEANS

The demand for plastic continues to grow but its durability – the key characteristic that makes plastic so popular – is also the reason why it is so widespread in the oceans. Plastic debris in our oceans is emerging as a new, truly global challenge and one that requires a response at local, regional and international levels.

THE CHALLENGE

Global production of plastics is rising – in 2015 global plastic production exceeded 320 million metric tons. A 2015 study estimated that 275 million metric tons of plastic waste was generated in 192 coastal countries in 2010, and between 4.8 and 12.7 million tons of it ended up in the ocean as a result of poor waste management. The study also predicted that, without waste management improvements, the quantity of plastic waste entering the ocean from land will increase by an order of magnitude by 2025, resulting in 1 ton of plastic for every 3 tons of fish.

Although there is substantial concern about macroplastic debris (comprising, among other things, fishing nets, plastic bags, and drinks containers), recent research highlights the growing presence and abundance of microplastics in marine environments. These plastic particles can be as small as a virus, and are now found worldwide, from the Arctic to the Antarctic, on beaches, in surface waters and in deep-sea sediments. It is estimated that, on average, every square kilometre of the world's oceans has 63,320 microplastic particles floating on the surface and in some places concentrations can be 27 times higher.

Where do microplastics come from?

Some microplastics in the ocean result from the incomplete degradation of larger plastic pieces. However there are several other sources. These include microbeads found in skin cleansers, toothpaste and shaving cream; abrasives used to strip paint and/or remove rust from buildings, cars, ships and aircraft; fibres from synthetic fabrics (more than 1900 microplastic fibres are released from a single synthetic garment in just one wash); and the mechanical abrasion of car tyres on roads.

So why should we care?

Plastics adversely affect terrestrial and marine ecosystems at both the macro and micro scales. Nearly 700 marine species have been reported to either ingest and/or become entangled by plastic. This includes almost 50 per cent of all seabirds, sea snakes, sea turtles, penguins, seals, sea lions, manatees, sea otters, fish and crustaceans. The effects can be fatal but may also have sub-lethal consequences, compromising their ability to catch and digest food, escape from predators, maintain body condition and migrate. Plastics contain chemicals (added to increase their durability) that, when eaten, leach out and disrupt normal hormonal function. Microplastics also absorb a wide array of organic and inorganic pollutants from the surrounding environment. Their large surface-area-to-volume ratio means they concentrate organic pollutants and can be up to six orders of magnitude more contaminated than sea water. Ingestion of microplastics by marine zooplankton at the bottom of the food chain is magnified in organisms higher up the food chain, where toxins accumulate and concentration is increased.

OCEAN FACTS

Why do seabirds eat plastic?

Seabirds such as albatrosses, shearwaters and petrels are known as tube-nosed seabirds. They fly vast distances to find their food and mainly use smell to locate it. They feed on squid, fish and krill. Dimethyl sulphide (DMS) is a chemical that is released from the cells of marine alga when krill eat it. DMS therefore serves as an olfactory cue alerting the birds to the presence of krill.

A new study has shown that tube-nosed seabirds swallow large amounts of plastic compared to other birds because plastic debris coated with algae has a high level of DMS associated with it and so smells like food to the birds.

CLIMATE WARMING & OCEAN CIRCULATION

One of the most worrying and widely anticipated impacts of ongoing global warming is a weakening or collapse of the oceans' overturning circulation. This vast system of oceanic currents plays a major role in maintaining our regional climates and our oceans' biological productivity by transporting enormous volumes of heat, salt, nutrients and carbon around the planet.

POLAR SINKING

The Arctic Ocean between Greenland and Norway, and the Southern Ocean around Antarctica, are both areas where cooling and higher salinity make the seawater at the surface dense enough to sink into the abyss to form the descending currents of the oceans' global circulation system. Predictions are that global warming will cause surface ocean waters in these polar regions to become warmer and less dense (more 'buoyant') and thus less likely to sink. A stronger hydrological cycle, coupled with ice sheet melting, will lower the salinity of polar surface waters, which will also increase the buoyancy of surface waters. All these factors could weaken the oceans' overturning circulation or even make it collapse.

Ice sheet melting

Global warming is melting Earth's ice. Arctic sea ice is thinning dramatically and its geographic extent is shrinking too. The Greenland ice sheet is also shrinking, shedding nearly 300 billion tons of water a year into the North Atlantic. The West Antarctic ice sheet is also melting and showing signs of becoming increasingly unstable. As well as raising global sea levels, this melting will weaken deep ocean circulation by adding huge volumes of fresh water into the polar ocean surface, thus increasing its buoyancy and reducing its capacity to sink. While the Antarctic ice sheet is not experiencing as much net melting as Greenland, its surface waters are nevertheless becoming more buoyant because of climate warming and a stronger hydrological cycle delivering more fresh water as rain.

Has ocean circulation already started to change?

Ocean circulation in the North Atlantic seems to have slowed in recent decades, but it is currently unclear whether this slowdown has been triggered by climate change or is just part of a normal cycle of faster and slower currents. It is also unclear whether circulation in the Southern Ocean, which circles the Antarctic continent, has started to change yet, although its surface waters have warmed substantially.

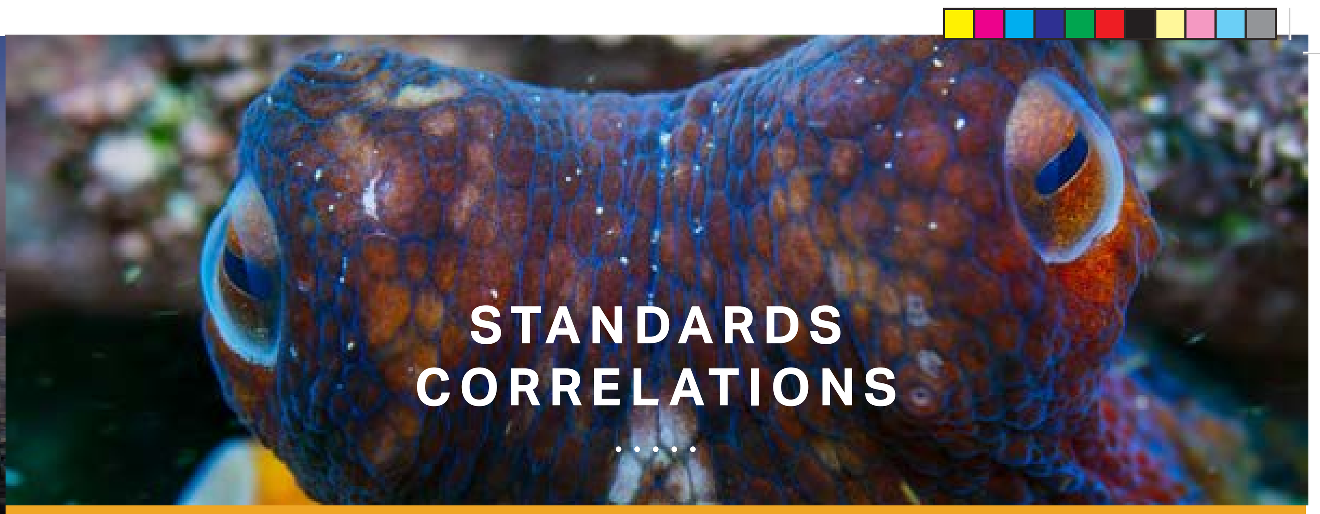
The past as a guide to the future

The big question is: when (or) will ocean circulation in the North Atlantic and Southern Ocean switch to new circulation patterns in response to ongoing global warming? We don't yet know. But if circulation does slow or change flow direction, it would have major consequences for regional climates and ocean ecosystems. The past offers us insights into what Earth would look like should the oceans' circulation change. Data from the geological past and computer models both show that if the North Atlantic circulation slows or shuts down, the entire Northern Hemisphere cools, Indian and Asian monsoon areas dry up, and less ocean mixing results in less plankton and other life in the ocean.

OCEAN FACTS

The hydrological cycle

The hydrological cycle describes the large-scale movement of water between Earth's major reservoirs: atmospheric water vapour (e.g. clouds), rain water, fresh water, ice sheets, sea ice and saline ocean water. The broad pattern on Earth is that ocean water is evaporated from the warm ocean surface in the tropics, is carried polewards by the major wind systems, and finally falls as rain (or snow) in polar regions. A warmer climate will strengthen this water cycle, causing more rainfall nearer the poles, and thus greater buoyancy in polar surface waters, reducing their sinking capability and potentially slowing down the deep ocean conveyor circulation.



STANDARDS CORRELATIONS

STANDARDS	PLASTIC OCEANS	CLIMATE WARMING & OCEAN CIRCULATION	OCEAN ACIDIFICATION	INVISIBLE PLANKTON	MARINE CONSERVATION
K-ESS2-2		•			•
K-ESS3-3					•
2-ESS2-3		•			
3-LS4-4		•		•	•
4-ESS3-1					•
5-PS3-1				•	
5-LS2-1				•	
5-ESS2-1		•	•		
5-ESS3-1		•	•		
MS-ESS3-3	•				•
MS-ESS3-4					•
MS-ESS2-6		•	•		
MS-LS1-6				•	
MS-LS2-5		•			
HS-LS2-7	•	•			•
HS-LS4-6	•	•			•
HS-ESS2-2		•	•		
HS-ESS2-4		•			
HS-ESS3-3					•
HS-ESS3-4	•	•	•		
HS-ESS3-6		•	•		

Oceans: Our Blue Planet supports the practice of formal science education. The articles included within this poster correlates with the following areas as outlined in the National Science Education Standards.

EARTH SYSTEMS

K-ESS2-2	Construct an argument supported by evidence for how plants and animals (including humans) can change the environment to meet their needs.
2-ESS2-3	Obtain information to identify where water is found on Earth and that it can be solid or liquid.
5-ESS2-1	Develop a model using an example to describe ways the geosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, and/or atmosphere interact.
MS-ESS2-6	Develop and use a model to describe how unequal heating and rotation of the Earth cause patterns of atmospheric and oceanic circulation that determine regional climates.
HS-ESS2-2	Analyze geoscience data to make the claim that one change to Earth's surface can create feedbacks that cause changes to other Earth systems.
HS-ESS2-4	Use a model to describe how variations in the flow of energy into and out of Earth's systems result in changes in climate.

ECOSYSTEMS: INTERACTIONS, ENERGY, AND DYNAMICS

5-LS2-1	Develop a model to describe the movement of matter among plants, animals, decomposers, and the environment.
MS-LS2-5	Evaluate competing design solutions for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services
HS-LS2-7	Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity

FROM MOLECULES TO ORGANISMS: STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

MS-LS1-6	Construct a scientific explanation based on evidence for the role of photosynthesis in the cycling of matter and flow of energy into and out of organisms.

EARTH & HUMAN ACTIVITY

K-ESS3-3	Communicate solutions that will reduce the impact of humans on the land, water, air, and/or other living things in the local environment
4-ESS3-1	Obtain and combine information to describe that energy and fuels are derived from natural resources and their uses affect the environment.
5-ESS3-1	Obtain and combine information about ways individual communities use science ideas to protect the Earth's resources and environment.
MS-ESS3-3	Apply scientific principles to design a method for monitoring and minimizing a human impact on the environment
MS-ESS3-4	Construct an argument supported by evidence for how increases in human population and per-capita consumption of natural resources impact Earth's systems.
HS-ESS3-3	Create a computational simulation to illustrate the relationships among management of natural resources, the sustainability of human populations, and biodiversity.
HS-ESS3-4	Evaluate or refine a technological solution that reduces impacts of human activities on natural systems.
HS-ESS3-6	Use a computational representation to illustrate the relationships among Earth systems and how those relationships are being modified due to human activity.

BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION: UNITY AND DIVERSITY

3-LS4-4	Make a claim about the merit of a solution to a problem caused when the environment changes and the types of plants and animals that live there may change.
HS-LS4-6	Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity

ENERGY

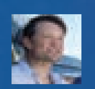
5-PS3-1	Use models to describe that energy in animals' food (used for body repair, growth, motion, and to maintain body warmth) was once energy from the sun.

OCEANS: OUR BLUE PLANET SYNOPSIS

Oceans: Our Blue Planet takes us on a global odyssey to discover the largest and least explored habitat on earth. New ocean science and technology has allowed us to go further into the unknown than we ever thought possible. From the coastal shallows to deeper, more mysterious worlds, we reveal the untold stories of the oceans' most astonishing creatures. Dolphins leap for joy through the waves, as we begin our journey into the blue. Our first stop is the coral reefs, where we meet fascinating characters like the ingenious tusk fish that uses a tool to open its food. In the great forests of the sea, we find a cunning octopus who shields herself in an armoury of shells to hide from predators.

As we journey through our oceans, we share these extraordinary discoveries and uncover a spectacular world of life beneath the waves.

PRODUCER CREDITS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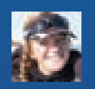
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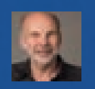
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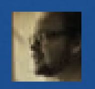
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recycle

OCEAN ACIDIFICATION

Our oceans are currently absorbing half of the carbon dioxide (CO_2) emitted by burning fossil fuels. This absorption is increasing ocean acidity, threatening the survival of marine organisms and their habitats, and affecting our oceans' health. If the continuing rise in emissions are not controlled, ocean acidity will reach 150 per cent by the next century.

THE OTHER CO_2 PROBLEM

Oceans are absorbing additional CO_2 emitted to the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels. The absorption of CO_2 increases the oceans' acidity through a series of chemical changes and reduces the availability of molecules essential for calcium carbonate shell formation. Also, oceans' ability to hold CO_2 is affected by temperature. Cold water holds more CO_2 than warm water, and because the oceans are warming rapidly, their ability to absorb CO_2 in the future is going to be severely hampered. As a result more CO_2 will remain in the atmosphere, further increasing Earth's temperature. In short, ocean acidification is caused by rising atmospheric CO_2, which increases oceans' acidity and reduction in essential ions required for shell formation, with potentially devastating consequences for marine ecosystems and our planet

Dissolving shells

When carbon dioxide dissolves in the ocean it produces carbonic acid, which, in addition to making the ocean more acidic, also binds up with carbonate ions, essential building blocks for shell formation. The reduced availability of essential shell-forming ions means investment of more energy in shell formation at the expense of other essential activities, overall hampering growth in organisms such as corals, oysters, clams and mussels. Many species of plankton are making thinner carbonate shells and their fate is particularly important because they form the base of marine food webs. Shell-forming marine creatures face two potential threats from ocean acidification: they are unable to build robust shells and their shells dissolve more readily as the ocean acidifies and becomes more corrosive.

Acidity and ecology

Continued ocean acidification will result in coral reefs corroding faster than they can be rebuilt, threatening their long-term viability and that of the estimated one million species that rely on them for survival. Other ecological impacts of acidification on marine organisms include reductions in the spawning and larval growth of fish, the oxygen-carrying capacity of blood in squid and predator-avoidance behaviour in sea urchins and fish. In contrast, plants and many algae (including seaweeds and sea grasses) may flourish in a high CO_2 world. However, future increases in coastal pollution may counteract this potential benefit.

Neutralising acidity

The current rise of atmospheric CO_2 and its impact on ocean acidity does not allow sufficient time for organisms and ecosystems to adapt. To alleviate this pressure, reduction in global CO_2 emissions and ocean acidity are required. Ideas being explored include addition of neutralisers to the oceans, and the capturing and safe storage of atmospheric CO_2. These positive steps are essential for saving our oceans, upon which we depend for food, natural resources and recreation.

OCEAN FACTS

Unprecedented change

Fifty-six million years ago the oceans became so acidic that many marine organisms died out, in particular organisms with carbonate shells. However, some surface-dwelling plankton species and other animals survived and the oceans slowly recovered over hundreds of thousands of years. So why should we be so concerned about the ocean acidification that is happening today? One big difference is that, back then, acidification of the ocean happened over a period of thousands to tens of thousands of years. This gave some organisms a chance to adapt and allowed ocean sediments to neutralise the extra acidity. Today's acidification rate is at least 10 times faster than 56 million years ago.

INVISIBLE PLANKTON

Marine phytoplankton are the foundation of oceanic biological productivity, supporting complex marine food webs, and are a vital component of life on Earth. Using energy from the sun, they absorb as much carbon as all the trees and other plants on land, through photosynthesis. They also produce half of all the oxygen that we breathe.

THE 'INVISIBLE PLANTS' OF THE OCEAN

Marine plankton consist of microscopic algae and bacteria (phytoplankton) and animals (zooplankton). Phytoplankton form the base of marine food webs. They are eaten by zooplankton – thousands of species of tiny animals, some of which are the larval forms of larger animals. Zooplankton, in turn, become meals for larger predators, ranging from small fish to enormous whales. Like land plants, phytoplankton have chlorophyll and, through photosynthesis, they use sunlight, nutrients and carbon dioxide to produce organic carbon compounds in the form of soft tissues, releasing oxygen as a by-product.

A biological pump

Organic matter and shells of calcifying plankton settle to the ocean floor when phytoplankton and calcifying plankton die. Organic matter is lighter than seawater so its vertical transport is through adsorption at the surface of other falling particles such as shell fragments, dust, sand and faecal matter. These falling particles of dead plankton and other organic materials are called marine snow because they resemble snowflakes falling from the upper ocean. The majority of marine snow disintegrates during the journey to the ocean floor, with only 1 per cent making it to the deep ocean where it provides food for many deep-sea creatures that filter it from the water or scavenge it from the ocean floor. The small percentage not consumed is incorporated into ocean floor sediments.

About three-quarters of the deep ocean floor is covered by sediment that can reach thicknesses of over a kilometre. In this way, marine snow transports carbon captured at the ocean surface into the deep and is part of a biological 'carbon pump'. If the pumped carbon dissolves in deep waters, it is locked away for hundreds or thousands of years, whereas if this carbon becomes buried in the sediment, it is locked away for millions of years.

Plankton in future oceans

Hundreds and thousands of species of phytoplankton live in Earth's oceans, each adapted to particular seawater conditions. Changes in water temperature, clarity, nutrient content and salinity affect both the diversity and abundance of phytoplankton communities. In response to trends in increasing ocean temperatures and acidity, the diversity of phytoplankton communities is also changing, becoming more diverse in the polar regions and less diverse in the tropics. Phytoplankton are also changing in abundance and hence productivity. As surface waters warm, there is less vertical mixing to recycle stored nutrients from deep waters back to the surface. The complex effects of these changes on marine food webs, carbon capture and oxygen production is not yet clear, but they could result in a cascade of negative consequences throughout the marine ecosystem that may ultimately threaten the abundance and diversity of all life in the ocean.

OCEAN FACTS

A vital role

Phytoplankton form the foundation of marine ecosystems and carry out half of all photosynthesis on Earth. Half of all the oxygen in our atmosphere comes from oceanic photosynthesis. In addition to providing us with oxygen, oceans remove a substantial amount of carbon dioxide created by human industrial activity, making them a crucial component in the battle to slow human-engineered climate change. Future warming of the oceans will not only threaten phytoplankton growth (due to limited availability of nutrients), but also risk the health of marine ecosystems, including our fisheries.

MARINE CONSERVATION

Today the oceans face many challenges from extensive human impacts. We have used the oceans for fishing, trade, communication and warfare and, as the Earth's population has increased from ~1 billion in 1800 to more than 7.5 billion today, so the pressures have increased – particularly on fishing.

FISHERIES

Fishing is often described as 'harvesting the oceans', but it is different from farming. What farmer would knowingly deplete his stock without ensuring there was a reliable supply of replacement animals? Fishing in the recent past has resembled the large-scale unsustainable slaughter of the herds of buffalo on the North American plains, and marine ecosystems worldwide are paying the price.

Human impacts on marine environments

As human population has increased, so has the pressure on fish stocks. Unfortunately, 'stocks' implies there are large supplies of available fish, and this is often not the case. Pressure on fish stocks has increased as humans have moved from fish traps thousands of years ago to factory ships today, which catch and process large quantities of fish while still at sea. The result has been significant overfishing of some species over the last century. For example cod, once abundant in the North Atlantic, has been so depleted that current fishing is heavily restricted. Another issue is so-called 'bycatch', when trawlers catch a species that they do not want. Historically, this bycatch was discarded and, because the fish were killed, there is an additional impact on the ecosystem. This impact includes the fish not being a food source for other species.

Managing fisheries

The UN Law of the Sea treaty determines where states can fish, but the treaty is not binding on states that have not ratified or acceded to it, such as the USA. Fish are mobile and at different points in their life cycles they can pass through the legal responsibility of many states. This makes managing marine stocks challenging. Many states claim exclusive fishing rights to the full 200 nautical miles of their exclusive economic zone (or a line between them where states are closer than 200 nautical miles apart). Good management limits the amount of fish caught so that no species is over-exploited and the overall ecosystem does not decline. Today, many experts believe that in many cases we must aim to allow fish populations to rise, even if that means reducing our current exploitation rates.

Marine protected areas

We can restrict human activities, such as commercial fishing and mineral development, by using the laws. We can create marine protected areas (MPAs) to limit shipping and reduce both local pollution and acoustic noise. But do they work? Studies of MPA effectiveness have shown they consistently improve biodiversity (the number of species present), and fish numbers within them are higher too. How much human activity can be restricted depends on whether the MPA is in international waters, the exclusive economic zone or territorial sea. The largest MPA is currently an area of 1.5 million square kilometres of the Ross Sea in Antarctica (about 6 times the area of the United Kingdom). About 2 per cent of the oceans are protected by MPAs, and there are plans to expand this.

OCEAN FACTS

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

Coastal states have a territorial sea out to 12 nautical miles (1 nautical mile = 1.852 km) where they set and enforce laws and can use any resource. The measurement is from a notional base line. For a further 12 nautical miles, states can enforce a contiguous zone, which is important for immigration, pollution, customs and taxation. For 200 nautical miles from the baseline, states have an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) where they have rights over natural resources. Outside this are international waters (or high seas) where no state is in control. Where states are closer than 200 nautical miles apart, boundaries lie at the mid-point between them. This is called the median line.