

What are the most important elements for ocean conservation that political leadership should take forward within its countries, and how can the Decade of Ocean Science help promote

The oceans are complex, vast and unique realities with multiple issues at stake. There are coastal areas, the ocean floor, wetlands, corals... so many different ecosystems.

I believe that quite simply we need to refocus on the very principle of human development and ocean conservation.

These are economic choices as much as political ones:

- To promote ocean-friendly economic activities.
- To support the sustainable exploitation of marine resources and control them using sound international legal instruments for the High Seas. To promote responsible tourism for which demand will continue to grow once we have overcome the pandemic To end funding for destructive activities.
- To promote marine protected areas which directly contribute to the prosperity of coastal populations.
- To develop the use of alternatives to plastic, which causes so much damage to the marine ecosystems and to consider new threats which are endocrine disruptors and nanoparticles. And obviously to intensify efforts in regard to the energy transition in order to limit global warming and its consequences, such as ocean acidification.

All of this is not in conflict with economic development, on the contrary.

In this respect, I believe that the “United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development” lives up to its name, because science has a significant role to play, by informing governments about the consequences of their decisions, and by helping to identify sustainable and innovative solutions, which are economically viable and respectful of the environment.

You have been such a prominent voice and driver of ocean science and exploration - how can we convince other world leaders to act with renewed urgency, particularly in light of the post covid19 recovery phase?

Here again, economic reasoning must be used.

Governments have a legitimate concern to address the needs of their people. However, especially in times of crisis such as the one we are experiencing and – perhaps even more serious – the impending crisis, these concerns focus predominantly on economic and social issues.

We therefore need to emphasise the fact that the blue economy offers beneficial solutions to address this crisis, whilst the irresponsible predation of marine resources, in the long term, will only cause further disaster.

I would like to point out that it is estimated that over 3.5 billion people depend on the ocean for their main source of food. This figure could increase two-fold within the next 20 years, reaching seven billion. These people need to be allies, not enemies.

Just over a year ago, the weight of this blue economy was estimated by the Boston Consulting Group at 270 billion Euros.

Consequently, we need to make this blue and sustainable economy a priority, by supporting ethical industries, by monitoring their development, by taking all the measures necessary at every level – tax incentives as well as regulation of access to resources and ecosystems, especially the most fragile which are also often the most coveted.