

Ocean Literacy

Shared Understandings

Here are some shared understandings of ‘ocean literacy’ curated through our Living Glossary workshops with our community of practice. These can be used as starting points in your work and projects.

Ocean literacy is:

- 1) An understanding and appreciation of the ocean and how it is changing
- 2) How people understand, talk about, relate to and value the ocean. An ocean literacy needs to encompass a coastal orientation.
- 3) Understanding of water and our relationship to it
- 4) An understanding of your influence on the ocean and its influence on you. It is a societal outcome that recognises multiple dimensions including knowledge, emotions and access, and results in a society that values the ocean
- 5) Enough understanding of how the ocean works and its value to the global ecosystem to manage it sustainably

Further Reading

- McKinley, E., Burdon, D., & Shellock, R. J. (2023). The evolution of ocean literacy: A new framework for the United Nations Ocean Decade and beyond. *Marine Pollution Bulletin*, 186, 114467.
- Shellock, R. J., Fullbrook, L., McKinley, E., Cvitanovic, C., Kelly, R., & Martin, V. (2024). The nature and use of Ocean Literacy in achieving sustainable ocean futures: A Systematic Map. *Ocean & Coastal Management*, 257, 107325.
- Kelly, R., Evans, K., Alexander, K., Bettiol, S., Corney, S., Cullen-Knox, C., ... & Pecl, G. T. (2022). Connecting to the oceans: supporting ocean literacy and public engagement. *Reviews in fish biology and fisheries*, 32(1), 123-143.
- Santoro, F., Selvaggia, S., Scowcroft, G., Fauville, G., & Tuddenham, P. (2017). *Ocean literacy for all: a toolkit* (Vol. 80). UNESCO Publishing.
- Asikin, N., Suwono, H., Sumitro, S. B., & Dharmawan, A. (2025). Teaching ocean literacy in science education: a systematic review. *Environmental Education Research*, 1–26.

Etymology

Ocean stems from the **ancient Greek** Ὠκεανός, referring to a vast river encircling the Earth and personified as a deity. It passed into **Latin** as *Ōceanus*, then into **Old French** and **Anglo-Norman** as *occean* in the 12th century, meaning a vast body of salt water.

Literacy - etymon: literate stems from the **Latin** *litterātus*, meaning marked with letters and later learned or cultured. It referred to someone well-versed in literature or culture. (Source: Oxford English Dictionary)