

Research examines what it will take to foster empathy for the world's oceans

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Oceans support all life on Earth. Yet for many, oceans remain out of sight and, as a result, out of mind.

A Brock University-led research team set out to find out if people would feel more empathy for the oceans—which typically means a willingness to care for the environment—if they are shown either optimistic or pessimistic future scenarios of the high seas.

The research, "Fostering ocean empathy through future scenarios," used both virtual reality and written formats to give participants two differing scenarios about the future of the oceans: one describing a future of environmental sustainability and [social equality](#); and another describing a world dominated by resurgent nationalism, regional conflicts and environmental degradation.

"Our results showed that post-test empathy levels were significantly higher than pre-test levels," said Jessica Blythe, Assistant Professor in Brock's Environmental Sustainability Research Centre (ESRC). "In other words, future scenarios fostered ocean empathy. We also found the pessimistic scenario resulted in higher empathy compared to the optimistic scenario."

While seeing the [future scenarios](#) impacted participants' feelings toward oceans, the research team's findings, published last month in the journal *People and Nature*, show little difference between the [virtual reality](#) and written formats.

"As one of the first studies to demonstrate the influence of an intervention purposefully designed to build ocean empathy, the research presents a novel approach for supporting [ocean](#) sustainability," said Blythe.

More information: Jessica Blythe et al, Fostering ocean empathy through future scenarios, *People and Nature* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/pan3.10253#support-information-section](https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10253#support-information-section)

Provided by Brock University

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