

People should have the right to shape marine environmental decisions, says paper

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A compass jellyfish in the waters of the South West of England. Credit: Pamela Buchan

Government and political institutions should do more to make citizens feel empowered within marine environment decisions and give them the right to participate, says new research published in *PLOS ONE*.

Marine Citizenship is the term used for people who get involved in

changing how humans use the ocean. It has been investigated as a potential policy tool to engage the public in marine environmental issues through a new study by the University of Exeter and the University of Bristol Law School.

Despite efforts to tackle human causes such as overfishing, [marine litter](#), microplastics, pollution, [ocean acidity](#), [global warming](#) and [climate change](#), there is still an urgent need to change [the human-ocean relationship](#) for both ecological and human benefits.

Marine citizenship research to date has focused on individuals changing their personal behaviors as an expression of responsibility towards the ocean, including awareness raising, [environmental education](#) and environmental attitudes research.

This study introduces the right for marine citizens to participate in marine environmental decision-making processes as an important part of marine citizenship, recognizing the societal and political dimensions of the human-ocean relationship, instead of solely individual behavioral change.

"Our research shows that marine citizenship is much more than individual pro-environmental behaviors, and government and political institutions have a responsibility to engage individuals and their views when it comes to marine environmental decisions," said Dr. Pamela Buchan, ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow at The University of Exeter.

"Access for citizens to participate in environmental decisions is commonly via charities and [conservation groups](#), however, this is criticized because individuals are unable to give a direct contribution. Our research shows that citizens feel that individuals have the least influence over discussions about the future of our oceans."

Dr. Pamela Buchan was last year announced as early career winner of The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Celebrating Impact Prize 2022 for her research "Prioritizing marine citizenship for ocean recovery in policy and practice," which seeks to grow marine citizenship through changing practices in local government and NGOs.

She devised the Motion for the Ocean to empower marine citizens, which aims to put the ocean into the local government climate emergency response and work towards a sustainable and equitable blue economy, and was co-authored alongside Emily Cunningham, Marine and Coastal Specialist and Nicola Bridge, Head of Ocean Advocacy and Engagement at the Ocean Conservation Trust. To date, [14 Councils have used the Motion to make an Ocean Recovery Declaration](#).

To conclude the study, the researchers propose a new definition of marine citizenship that recognizes rights as well as responsibilities, and call on the government and [political institutions](#) to challenge the public and [scientific community](#) to further look at the potential of marine citizenship to create transformative change.

More information: Marine citizenship: the right to participate in the transformation of the human-ocean relationship for sustainability, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0280518](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0280518)

Provided by University of Exeter

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