

# Taking Responsibility

## Parley for the Oceans

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A NON-PROFIT ORGANISATION TAKES CHARGE OF OCEAN HEALTH THROUGH MAJOR COLLABORATIONS WITH ARTISTS AND DESIGNERS, PROMOTING PLASTIC-FREE LIFESTYLES.

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If the oceans die, so too does humanity. Our time on Earth would be over. Even so, there are more threats to marine and coastal health than at any other time in history. The pioneering biologist and explorer, Sylvia Earle, put it succinctly: “No ocean, no life. No blue, no green. No ocean, no us.” The seas are a vital part of the global ecosystem. A Greenpeace report, *30×30: A Blueprint For Ocean Protection* (April 2019), produced as part of a year-long collaboration, spelled out exactly how this extinction would unfold: “High seas marine life drives the ocean’s biological pump, capturing carbon at the surface and storing it deep below – without this essential service, our atmosphere would contain 50% more carbon dioxide and the planet would be uninhabitably hot.”

And yet destruction marches on. Almost 80 per cent of the damage comes from land-based sources, according to UNESCO, which include anything from urban development and construction, discharge of nutrients and pesticides to mining and fisheries. This pollution has contributed to a number of low oxygen areas known as dead zones, where most marine life cannot survive, resulting in the collapse of ecosystems. There are now close to 500 dead zones, equaling in total the surface area of the United Kingdom.

Across the globe, governments are waking up to this disaster and are making commitments to help pull us back from the brink of collapse. Following the *30×30* report, Greenpeace called for countries to work together towards a UN Global Ocean Treaty by 2020 that would pave the way to protect at least 30% of the world’s oceans by 2030.

Outside the world of politics, what role does the creative

community have in forcing change? Cyrill Gutsch, founder of non-profit organisation Parley for the Oceans, believes that culture has a “very big responsibility to the environmental cause.” For years, Gutsch co-ran a successful design firm but when he learned in 2012 about the realistic chance that the oceans would die within his lifetime, he felt an urgency to reinvent the company’s purpose and take action.

Now, Gutsch’s focus is addressing the major threats towards our oceans. “When starting Parley, we knew that we didn’t want to be a protest organisation that shames or blames the industry,” he says. “We wanted to move the responsibility to the creative population. To ourselves. Owning the problem means true leadership.” Parley’s central ethos is that the power for change lies in the hands of the consumer. The impetus to shape the consumer mindset lies in the hands of creatives. It is not only scientists and policy-makers but “artists, musicians, actors, filmmakers, fashion designers, journalists, architects, product inventors” who have the tools to mould the world. “We have learned that powerful ideas and visions can turn opponents into partners,” he adds.

In embarking on this venture, Gutsch was aware of the many threats to ocean survival; new pollution hazards compete with old ones and time is running out. Human overpopulation and overconsumption continues to increase and plastic waste has been choking the oceans since 1950s, according to research by Greenpeace, an estimated 12.7 million tonnes of plastic, a truck-load a minute, ends up in our oceans each year. Activist Greta Thunberg tweeted recently: “The problem of plastic pollution in the ocean is even worse than anyone