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eOceans launches its first global pilot project following the release of their mobile app: Our Ocean in COVID-19

When the shutdown began, eOceans' Team went home, like so many others. Ready to do what was needed to curb the pandemic. After going through the various stages of stages of disbelief, grief, and reality checks they wondered, how can they help?

They found their answer shortly after as the media started to circulate feel-good stories of how the Earth was "recovering" during this global pause. People started reporting novel observations of whales, dolphins, sharks, and others uniquely coming in close to shore. They realized that this unprecedented circumstance could offer valuable data on how human activity affects ocean life.

Now, they have launched the "Our Ocean in COVID-19" project to utilize these data.

eOceans' founder, Dr. Christine Ward-Paige said that she "put the project on Research Gate and Dr. Easton White, from the University of Vermont, reached out to collaborate." Then, she thought it would be a great opportunity to bring researchers, tourism operators, ocean dwellers, and ocean explorers around the world together and launched it more widely for collaborators.

Over 30, mostly early career researchers, in 28 countries reached out to collaborate.

This international team of researchers are not only interested in how humans impact the ocean, or how the ocean impacts humans, but also how human uses can be more sustainable.

Although there have been countless reports of people using destructive harvesting practices that had been curbed decades ago (e.g., bomb fishing, overfishing of tidepools), during this time, people have found solitude by the ocean. Many have been surfing, fishing, sailing, kayaking, and beach walking at times when they would be in school or at work. Many of these activities depend on clean and healthy oceans.

Unfortunately, the change hasn't been positive for everyone. Tourism-dependent coastal communities have been decimated by canceled flights, and travelers and workers forced home. Ocean researchers and managers also had to stay home, delaying, postponing, and canceling entire field seasons. In the absence of enforcement and tourism, poaching and destructive fishing practices have reappeared.



With this in mind, eOceans designed the primary scientific goals of the project to understand:

- i) the socioeconomic value of the ocean during these hard times, and
- ii) the interaction of humans with wildlife.

Since launch, scientists, and community leaders from around the world who are equally interested in these questions for their own regions have joined us as collaborators. It has turned into a truly global and inclusive ocean science project.