

Aquaculture Magazine

Corporate Ocean Responsibility: Industry Leadership and Collaboration for Sustainable Development and the Blue Economy

Paul Holthus, CEO, World Ocean Council

Aquaculture is increasingly important for feeding the world and the aquaculture industry depends on healthy marine ecosystems, clean marine waters, access to marine space and the social license to operate. Aquaculture industry leadership is essential to addressing these challenges and ensuring the long term health of the industry and the marine environment on which it depends.

At the same time, there are many other industries operating in the shared ocean with many of the same sustainable development challenges and opportunities. With the growing use of marine areas by an increasing variety of commercial interests there are increasingly complex risks from environmental impacts, conflicts in the use of marine space and resources and the development of policies and regulations that do not support responsible “Blue Growth” by both aquaculture and other ocean users. The best efforts by a single company or whole industry sector will not be able to address these challenges and opportunities.

The World Ocean Council (WOC) brings leadership companies from the aquaculture industry together with those from the diverse range of ocean industries, e.g. shipping, fishing, oil and gas, tourism, offshore renewable energy, and others. The WOC creates an international multi-industry business leadership alliance on ocean sustainability, science and stewardship – “Corporate Ocean Responsibility”. In addition to the more than 80 WOC Members, the WOC network includes over 34,000 ocean industry stakeholders around the world.

The WOC Sustainable Ocean Summit (SOS) is the only multi-sectoral gathering of the international ocean business community with a focus on Corporate Ocean Responsibility. The 3rd SOS will convene the ocean business community in Singapore on 9-11 November 2015, around the theme of “Sustainable Development and Growing the Blue Economy - the Next 50 Years”.

Private sector access to ocean resources, services and space - even by companies with the best environmental record - is increasingly at risk from the loss of the social license to operate. Many of the policy, practical and reputational aspects of ocean industry activities are now affected, if not dominated, by environmental concerns. These issues are affecting all industries that use ocean space and resources. This is creating important needs and opportunities for collaboration in the ocean business community.

Achieving sustainable ocean development requires a clear understanding of the status and trends in economic use of marine space and resources – as well as the potential new kinds and areas of use. Achieving a balance between ‘blue’ growth, jobs, and a sound maritime environment will largely be based on addressing the opportunities and challenges facing the diverse, extensive set of existing ocean activities. Success in improving ocean governance and sustainable marine development will require coordinated leadership and collaboration by the diverse ocean business community.

Many companies want to address marine environmental issues, differentiate themselves from poor performers, collaborate within and across sectors, and engage other ocean stakeholders. Through the WOC there is now there is a structure and process for companies to work on complex, intertwined, international ocean sustainability issues. A multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach can result in cost-savings (e.g. collaborative research to develop best practices in sustainability and find science-based solutions to shared issues) and reduce the risk of costly, unplanned and unnecessary restrictions to responsible business operations in the marine environment.

Addressing these ocean industry challenges requires good science, credible risk assessment, performance monitoring and the best available technology. To identify and address the priority ocean needs, the WOC has created cross-sectoral industry working groups in the priority program areas: ocean policy and governance; marine spatial planning/ocean zoning; operational issues, e.g. biofouling and invasive species, marine debris, marine sound, marine mammal impacts, etc.; regional interests, e.g. the Arctic, Mediterranean, Caribbean; adaptation of ports and coastal infrastructure to sea level rise/extreme weather events; and the Smart Ocean-Smart Industries, i.e. data collection by industry.

For example, the WOC flagship Smart Oceans-Smart Industries program to expand, improve and better coordinate the role of industry in collecting and sharing ocean, weather and climate data. The objective of this initiative is to ensure a wide range of industry vessels and facilities, e.g. aquaculture facilities, are participating in the collection of ocean data. This will contribute to describing the status, trends and variability of marine conditions. Industry involvement in providing such data can create direct benefits to the aquaculture industry in the form of improved modeling of ocean conditions and water quality, better forecasting of extreme events that may damage aquaculture installations, etc.

As the global ocean continues to be home for an ever-increasing kind, level and extent of economic activity, industry leadership and collaboration is key to sustainable ocean development and the future of the aquaculture industry. An increasing number and range of ocean industry companies from around the world are distinguishing themselves as leaders in “Corporate Ocean Responsibility” by joining the WOC. The Sustainable Ocean Summit (SOS), Singapore on 9-11 November 2015, gives will bring together the ocean business community – including the aquaculture industry – to advance the collaboration needed for sustainable Blue Growth of responsible ocean use.