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MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Sustainable Seafood: An analysis of environmental rhetoric in public education campaigns

LAURA POWER

Dr. Ava Cross

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## **ABSTRACT**

This MRP looks at the communication used in environmental advocacy public education campaigns, specifically focusing on those promoting sustainable seafood consumption. Organizations such as Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch aim to educate the public about the importance of choosing ocean-friendly fish, using a variety of communication tools and techniques to achieve their goals. This MRP focuses specifically on communication materials available in the public domain. Looking at the language used by these organizations on their websites, in documents found online and through their use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter, I analyzed a variety of their communications to determine whether they employ particular environmental rhetorical strategies in their public education campaigns.

I focused my analysis by using Herndl and Brown's (1996) rhetorical model for environmental discourse, which is designed to "identify the dominant tendencies or orientation of a piece of environmental discourse" and "help clarify the connections between a text, a writer, and the setting from which a piece of writing comes in an effort to elicit the underlying motives around a text or topic" (p. 10). This model looks at the relationship between three elements of environmental rhetoric (regulatory discourse, poetic discourse and scientific discourse) potentially found in pieces of environmental discourse. My MRP examines how Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch employ deliberative environmental rhetoric throughout their public education campaigns.

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## INTRODUCTION

A number of environmental advocacy organizations are currently working to promote the protection of the world's oceans through reducing pollution, eliminating overfishing and encouraging the practice of consuming sustainable seafood. This Major Research Paper (MRP) will look at the public education campaign communications of two environmental advocacy organizations that focus on encouraging sustainable seafood consumption (in this context, consumption includes both eating and purchasing behaviours) as one of the most effective ways individuals can change an essential world ecosystem such as the ocean. Using Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown's model of environmental rhetorical analysis as a framework, this MRP analyzes the communication of two organizations in particular, Ocean Wise (Canada) and Seafood Watch (USA). These organizations are a vital part of the sustainable seafood movement, as they are both credible programs based out of reputable aquariums, the Vancouver Aquarium and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, respectively. This paper will examine the strategies used by Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch to communicate the need for responsible seafood consumption and other related ocean ecology issues in order to reach their ultimate goal of engaging their publics in their conservation efforts.

The world's oceans are in crisis. According to the Monterey Bay Aquarium, "nearly 75% of the world's fisheries are fished to capacity, or overfished" (Monterey Bay Aquarium, n.d.). To further emphasize the severity of the crisis, the Monterey Bay Aquarium issues the following warning on the "Ocean Issues" section of their website:

...Over the past five decades technology has allowed us to fish farther, deeper and more efficiently than ever before. Scientists estimate that we have

removed as much as 90 percent of the large predatory fish such as shark, swordfish and cod from the world's oceans. In 2003, the Pew Oceans Commission<sup>1</sup> warned that the world's oceans are in a state of "silent collapse," threatening our food supply, marine economies, recreation and the natural legacy we leave our children. (Monterey Bay Aquarium, n.d.)

Seafood Watch stresses that pollution and climate change continue to alter world ecosystems, including those of the oceans, creating increased acidification of ocean waters, increased depletion of coral reefs and an increased number of dead zones, which are low-oxygen areas completely devoid of life. Dead zones, typically found in coastal areas, are “associated with major population centers and watersheds that deliver large quantities of nutrients,” such as nitrogen-based fertilizer runoff (Diaz and Rosenberg, 2008, p. 926). The increase in global dead zones is tied directly to human behaviour because “their distribution matches the global human footprint in the Northern Hemisphere,” where they are found in the Adriatic Sea, the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, Chesapeake Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, to name a few examples (Diaz and Rosenberg, 2008, p. 926 - 927). Additionally, overfishing is contributing to the unhealthy state of the oceans, one of the world’s most important food sources. According to Meryl Williams of the International Food Policy Research Institute, seafood is the most important source of protein for over one billion people in Africa and Asia (cited in Halweil, 2006, p. 30). Further compounding the crisis is the danger of clearing the ocean of all edible fish within the next 40 or 50 years, if consumption and resource exploitation remains at current levels, as reported by the UN in 2010 (Smith, 2010). The potential impact of increased ocean destruction could be disastrous for people who rely on the ocean as a

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<sup>1</sup> The Pew Oceans Commission is part of the Pew Charitable Trust, an international organization committed to “improving public policy, informing the public and stimulating civic life”. The Commission was formed to review American ocean policy. ([www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org)).

major source of food and economic activity. The global ocean crisis is a pressing situation and an important area of concern for communications professionals working in areas related to environmental conservation.

A model of environmental rhetorical analysis will be used to provide a framework for this MRP, since environmental rhetoric is a broad area of theory particularly relevant to technical and professional communication. According to Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown, “the field of environmental rhetoric is immense and remarkably varied, so varied in fact, that we think it connects almost every part of our social and intellectual life, crossing the boundaries between various academic disciplines and social institutions” (1996, p. 4). One of the key roles of a technical communicator is adapting technical or specialized information for a specific audience (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xiii). Technical communicators can be regarded as an important bridge, or translator, between technical data and scientists, the general public and policy makers, as “technical communicators have skills to accommodate the position of the scientist and that of the politician” (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xiii). There are important connections between technical communication and environmental rhetoric that can be said to encompass “deliberative rhetoric”, described as “discourse that attempts to change attitudes and inspire action regarding matters of public concern” and “environmental discourse”, which is the “language we use to speak and write about the environment” (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xiii). In this paper, environmental rhetoric will be understood to mean the combination of “deliberative rhetoric” and “environmental discourse”.



The focus of this MRP is a case study (as described above, the communication used in the public education campaigns of Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch) viewed through an environmental rhetoric lens. Through this lens I explore issues relevant to communicating in the field of environmental conservation, and in particular, issues of communication during an ongoing environmental crisis, such as the global ocean crisis. Through the study of the environmental rhetoric used by non-profit advocacy organizations during an environmental crisis, I hope to gain insight into communication strategies and techniques and to develop a more complete understanding of environmental communication. As every organization faces important decisions and challenges in their choice of rhetorical strategy and communications plan, this MRP could offer insight into the value and applicability of tools designed to provide a better understanding of the scope of environmental rhetoric. Through this MRP I hope to expand the application of a model, such as Herndl and Brown's model, to analyze a situation or setting of environmental communication.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Environmental communication is a vast field of study, encompassing a number of areas of research and practice. The National Communication Association defines environmental communication as the study of "connections between people and the places and communities they occupy" and the analysis and examination of "how environmental crises are communicated via the media, government and other responsible parties" (National Communication Association, 2011). There are many anthologies, books and journal articles concerning environmental communication that are essential to

any overview of the literature relevant to this field and to the research and analysis in this MRP in particular.

One key anthology, *Green Culture: Environmental Rhetoric in Contemporary America*, edited by Carl Herndl and Stuart Brown, is a collection of essays that look at the rhetorical strategies used in environmental communication. This book, which contains 11 essays on environmental rhetorical criticism, offers both a model for analysis that can be applied to the environmental writing of groups such as Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch, as in this MRP, and a number of examples of environmental rhetorical analysis, found throughout the chapters of the book. This source provides a model for rhetorical analysis that although “does not always tell us what to say or how to say it in future situations” can “provide a method for analyzing our public rhetoric, and principles which can guide our rhetorical practice in the future” (1996, p. 10).

*Green Culture* offers a model for analyzing the rhetorical strategies of environmental communication, which the editors say is “loosely adapted from Ogden and Richards’ rhetorical triangle” and from Killingsworth and Palmer’s “Continuum of Perspectives on Nature”, which is a map very similar in function to the model proposed by Herndl and Brown (1996, p. 10). Their “Continuum of Perspectives on Nature” attempts to chart the variety of environmental discourses across a continuum from “traditional and mainstream science” to what they term “deep ecology”, or “wilderness ethic and nature mysticism” (Killingsworth and Palmer, 1992, p. 11). In *Green Culture*’s introduction, Herndl and Brown present their model, which asks the analyst to “determine the attitude...of a

particular text regarding an environmental topic”, by using three perspectives, including:

1. “regulatory discourse”, which “represents the powerful institutions that make decisions and set environmental policy” (1996, p. 10)
2. “scientific discourse”, which “represents the specialized discourse of the environmental sciences” (1996, p. 11)
3. “poetic discourse”, which “refers to the language we use to discuss the beauty, the value, the emotional power of nature” (1996, p. 12)

Through this model, Herndl and Brown address the ethos, logos and pathos aspects of rhetorical analysis, applied directly to environmental communication (1996, p. 10). They claim their model should be used “as a heuristic” to help “navigate the sometimes bewildering variety of discourses on the environment, their cultural importance, and the array of rhetorical techniques available to the critic or the writer” (1996, p. 12).

Particularly relevant to my analysis is their exploration of a direct mail campaign as a “genre of environmental writing”, and whether its use of particular rhetorical strategies is effective at achieving its goal. This example provides a starting point for the analysis found in this MRP, as the example used in their chapter does not include or explain their full analysis; rather, it is a brief explanation of how the model could be applied. This MRP will extend the application of their model, using it to conduct an analysis of the rhetorical techniques used in a different example of environmental communication, that of the communication used in Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch’s public education campaigns.

*Technical Communication, Deliberative Rhetoric and Environmental Discourse:*

*Connections and Directions*, edited by Nancy W. Coppola and Bill Karis, is another key anthology in the study of environmental communication. This collection of essays “offers its readers viewpoints, techniques, and theoretical perspectives that identify meaningful connections and directions among technical communication, deliberative rhetoric, and environmental discourse” (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xiv). According to Coppola and Karis, the role of the communicator is to use their communication skills to “accommodate the position of the scientist and that of the politician,” in order to “help people visualize and understand environmental data so they can make informed decisions” (2000, p. xiii). The book is comprised of three sections focusing on the:

1. construction of “environmental discourse on the framework of theory and models” (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xxiii)
2. “visual rhetoric in environmental communication” (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xxiii)
3. specific case studies of environmental rhetoric for “strategies of implementation and practice” (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xxiii)

Chapters of particular interest to this MRP are chapters one, two and eight, of which chapters one and two have also appeared in editions of *Technical Communication Quarterly*. Chapter one, “Defining Sustainable Development: A Case Study in Environmental Communication” by Craig Waddell, is considered to be a key reading in environmental communication studies (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xv). This chapter uses a case study featuring public deliberations on issues of sustainable development to illustrate four models for public participation (what Waddell describes as the

“Technocratic Model”, the “One-Way Jeffersonian Model”, the “Interactive Jeffersonian Model” and the “Social Constructivist Model”) ultimately focusing on the model of social constructivism (Waddell, as cited in Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. 6-11). While the models used in this case study differ from the model applied in this MRP, the format of this chapter provides an example of a successful environmental communication analysis centered around a case study, therefore providing a reference for this MRP. Further, Chapter two, “Rhetorical Analysis of Stakeholders in Environmental Communication: A Model” by Nancy Walters Coppola, highlights the importance of an interactive and research-based audience analysis in “creating effective communication strategies” (Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. xxiv). This chapter helps situate the importance of audience analysis as an essential consideration in any public engagement or awareness campaign, including the Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch campaigns studied in this paper. While not the main focus here, the idea of audience analysis is an important and complementary consideration in any communication or public engagement strategy. Finally, Chapter Eight, “Multimedia Pedagogy and Environmental Communication: The Rhetoric of Citizen Action in the Information Age”, by Branda Miller, offers a look at a very similar study to the one being completed for this MRP. However, Miller centres her research on the use of multimedia, specifically in her experience creating Witness to the Future, an “interactive, multimedia environmental education teaching tool that incorporates CD-ROM, videotape (with reference to full transcripts), and Internet links”, whereas this MRP looks at a number of documents and content online (Miller, as cited in Coppola & Karis, 2000, p. 149). This chapter is exceptionally relevant to this MRP, as Miller begins her essay with the same or similar questions to those I explore in this MRP. Therefore,

this chapter provides a useful reference for structure and format, like the other chapters discussed here.

Additionally, there are a number of journal articles relevant to a study of environmental communication. One of these journal articles is “(Environmental) Rhetorics of Tempered Apocalypticism in *An Inconvenient Truth*” by Laura Johnson, which looks at the rhetorical strategies used in *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore’s popular global warming documentary. She argues that the film successfully “moderates its apocalyptic tendencies with scientific rationalism and constructions of audience agency”, in order to appeal to a diverse audience (Johnson, 2009, p. 29). Johnson also claims this film reinforces the belief that there is not just one environmental rhetoric, but multiple environmental rhetorics that “mirror the contentious climate of environmental politics” (Johnson, 2009, p. 29). Further, Johnson outlines four “environmental rhetorics operant in the film: scientific, utilitarian, aesthetic and apocalyptic”, but focuses mainly on the use of apocalyptic rhetoric and related questions of audience agency, drawing heavily on M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer’s “Millennial Ecology: The Apocalyptic Narrative from Silent Spring to Global Warming” (Johnson, 2009, p.30). Johnson’s descriptions of environmental rhetoric strategies relate directly to Herndl and Brown’s model for environmental rhetorical analysis, although she furthers their model for her own application by adding a fourth environmental rhetoric category of apocalyptic rhetoric. Through her paper, Johnson demonstrates how a model of environmental rhetorical analysis can be used as a framework to examine a specific example of environmental communication. This article is a relevant source for this MRP as it

demonstrates the use of a model to examine a specific case study or example of environmental communication. Ultimately, this MRP is a similar type of study, however using Herndl and Brown's model of environmental rhetorical analysis specifically.

Another article important to the study of environmental communication is "From Environmental Rhetoric to Ecocomposition and Eco poetics: Finding a Place for Professional Communication" by M. Jimmie Killingsworth. This article argues for a "revived ecological pedagogy and research program for professional communication" (2005, p. 360), and is included in this literature review because it supports the place of environmental communication and environmental rhetorical analysis in the field of professional communication, by providing the background and history of how environmental communication came to be part of the field. "Environmental rhetoric, in tying activist work and political discourse into science and technology, fed directly into the more specialized fields of scientific rhetoric and technical communication", writes Killingsworth (2005, p. 360). After providing history and context for environmental communication in the field of professional communication, the focus of Killingsworth's paper shifts to ecocomposition, which focuses on the "place" aspect of writing, specifically looking at the relationship between discourse and place or site (in all of its meanings, including the physical locale, a text or document itself and the Internet as a separate entity altogether), and eco poetics, which "tries to say what happens to the things and places of the earth" (2005, p. 367). Killingsworth closes with a list of tips or suggestions for integrating elements of ecocomposition and eco poetics into professional communication pedagogy, with the goal of shifting "practice toward place-centeredness"

(2005, p. 370) in teaching, ultimately arguing the place for “environmental studies within the field of professional communication” (2005, p. 359). While the pedagogical aspects of Killingsworth’s paper are of less importance to this MRP, and will not be part of the examination and analysis, the history and context of environmental communication as a key area of professional communication situate this MRP within the field and justify it as an important area of study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As discussed, organizations like Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch aim to educate the public about the importance of choosing ocean-friendly, sustainable seafood. In order to achieve their goals, they use a variety of tools and techniques to communicate their message. This MRP focuses on the communication tools and techniques available in the public domain, as that is the information central to a public education campaign and the information received by their target audiences. Additionally, in order to further focus the research and topic, all documents selected for analysis deal specifically with issues of seafood/fish consumption (either purchasing or eating) and issues of overfishing and fish stock collapse. While extensive ocean ecology information is available on each organization’s website, this information was reviewed primarily as background information supporting their public education campaigns, and is not the focus of this paper’s analysis.

Looking at the language used by Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch in their documents, website content and use of social media, Herndl and Brown’s model is used as a tool for conducting an analysis of their use of environmental rhetoric. This model was selected



for two reasons. First, it is directly related to environmental communication, which is the overarching topic of this paper. Second, it offers an applicable framework for analysis, which Herndl and Brown argue asks the analyst to “determine the attitude...of a particular text regarding an environmental topic”, using three perspectives, including regulatory discourse, scientific discourse and poetic discourse. As Herndl and Brown claim, their model should be used “as a heuristic” to help “navigate the sometimes bewildering variety of discourses on the environment, their cultural importance and the array of rhetorical techniques available to the critic or the writer,” (1996, p. 12). This MRP attempts to apply their model in the way they recommend it be used.

By analyzing selected communications materials such as website content, online documents and social media content, it was possible to observe similarities or patterns in these materials, grouping the content based on Herndl and Brown’s model, in order to determine how or when these organizations are using a particular environmental rhetoric strategy (or combination of strategies) for their public education campaigns.

Research for this MRP centred on document collection and the analysis of the collected public documents from each organization (listed in the Appendices), published between 2006 and 2011. In total, over 45 documents and web pages were considered for analysis, with additional web content, videos and social media content rounding out the material reviewed (but not necessarily included in the full analysis). After downloading or viewing these documents from each organization’s website, Twitter feed or Facebook page, the documents or content were classified based on their fit into Herndl and Brown’s model, as described above.

Studying the language, or environmental discourse, found in both organizations' written documents and website content and through their use of social media, provided me with the opportunity to determine whether these organizations are using a particular environmental rhetoric strategy, or combination of strategies, for their public education campaigns. By categorizing the rhetorical elements found in the documents, based on Herndl and Brown's model, using the categories of ethnocentric (ethos), ecocentric (pathos) and anthropocentric (logos) environmental discourse, I observed similarities and differences between each organization's communication and within each organization itself. Keeping in mind that "successful writing often combines the styles, forms and rhetorical appeals of more than one of these discourses" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p.12), related models, as described in the literature review, specifically those from Coppola and Karis' *Technical Communication, Deliberative Rhetoric and Environmental Discourse: Connections and Directions*, were considered as required. The results of the analysis of Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch's use of environmental communication are explained in the following section.

## **ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION**

At the outset of *Green Culture*, the editors offer a model for analyzing rhetorical strategies used in environmental communication, which encompasses a vast field of work and study across a number of disciplines. The work of organizations like Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch can be included in this field, as they focus on communicating environmental issues related to the world's oceans and their health and protection.

As outlined in the introduction and methodology sections, Herndl and Brown's "model is designed to identify the dominant tendencies or orientation of a piece of environmental discourse" and is "designed to help clarify the connections between a text, a writer and the setting from which a piece of writing comes in an effort to elicit the underlying motives around a text or topic" (1996, p. 10). Consequently, this model was used to analyze a number of communications materials from Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch (a list of materials is included in the appendices), in order to gain a better understanding of how these organizations use the rhetorical elements of ethos, logos and pathos in their communications materials in order to convey their messages related to environmental conservation. Through this model, Herndl and Brown address the ethos, logos and pathos aspects of rhetorical analysis applied directly to environmental communication (1996, p. 10). The following diagram is Herndl and Brown's representation of their model of environmental rhetorical analysis, which they assert is "loosely adapted from Ogden and Richards' rhetorical triangle" and from Killingsworth and Palmer's "Continuum of Perspectives on Nature" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 10):

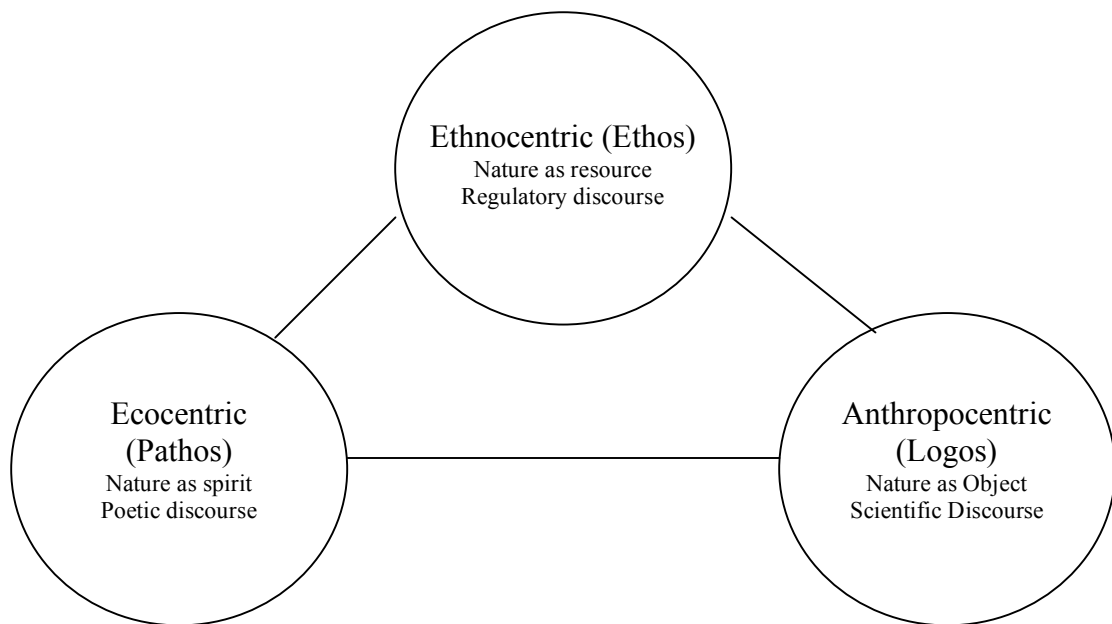


Figure 1: Herndl and Brown's model of environmental rhetorical analysis (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 11)

Modeled after Ogden and Richards' rhetorical triangle, and using key ideas from Killingsworth and Palmers "Continuum of Perspectives on Nature", such as the phrases or categories "Nature as spirit", "Nature as object" and "Nature as resource", Herndl and Brown blend elements from these two models to create their own heuristic for thinking about the rhetorical appeals used in environmental communication. Herndl and Brown's model is useful for showing the relationships between each area of environmental discourse, and the fluid nature of this type of communication.

Ultimately, Herndl and Brown argue, "What we learn in analyzing a text gives us a broader understanding of the world" (1996, p. 10). This broader understanding of the world is imperative in a time of environmental crisis, such as the current situation of the world's oceans, as the messages and methods an organization uses to communicate with its publics or audiences can determine the action that public takes, or does not take.

Understanding the arguments and rhetorical elements used to communicate during an environmental crisis, and the ways these arguments are used, can help guide communication in the future and provide a better understanding of the arguments used by outside organizations.

As explained in the methodology section, this analysis was organized using the three areas of Herndl and Brown's model to group related concepts found throughout Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch's communications materials, including online documents or publications and website and social media content (see Table 1). There were a number of general themes that emerged, related to each area of the model:

1. The regulatory discourse, or ethos, focused on both organizations' reliance on quoting experts or trusted sources in the field, in order to support their claims and give weight to their arguments.
2. The poetic discourse, or pathos, mostly focused on an individual's ability to change or shape the future health of the world's oceans, and the importance of this action for future generations to come.
3. The scientific discourse, or logos, centered on hard facts and statistics, basically the results of relevant research reports and studies.

As predicted by Herndl and Brown, these organizations are using elements from each type of discourse in a variety of ways, often using more than one rhetorical element or strategy in a single communications piece, in order to link ideas, strengthen arguments and instill a sense of urgency in their messaging.

### **Ethnocentric/Regulatory Discourse (Ethos)**

The area of regulatory discourse in Herndl and Brown's model broadly "represents the powerful institutions that make decisions and set environmental policy" (1996, p. 11).

While it could be argued that Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch do not work directly towards shifting policy or changing political decisions, nor are they organizations responsible for setting environmental policy, they do have an indirect impact in that they attempt to transform decision making and purchasing decisions at individual and organizational levels, which could in turn impact the environmental policy decisions made by larger institutions and governments.

Regulatory discourse regards nature as a resource, "one among many others, to be managed for the greater social welfare" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 11). This "ethnocentric discourse" is devoted to "negotiating the benefits of environmental policy measured against a broad range of social interests" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p.11).

Again, while Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch do not work directly in the area of environmental policy, their associated organizations (The Vancouver Aquarium and The Monterey Bay Aquarium) focus on research, education and action in order to improve the health of the oceans and manage the oceans' resources, with the goal of eventually having a positive impact on the policy decisions of large organizations and governments.

However, there is an element of regulatory discourse crucial to the communication tactics used by Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch directly. As Herndl and Brown maintain, "the political power of this discourse comes from its institutional context, but its rhetorical

power emerges from the rhetorical notion of ethos, the culturally constructed authority of the speaker or writer who represents these institutions” (1996, p. 11). Throughout the communications analyzed for this study, it is apparent that both organizations make use of this “rhetorical notion of ethos” in order to provide credibility to their arguments and to solidify their organization’s position of authority to speak on behalf of their area of expertise. Although Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch may not continually display their political power through the use of regulatory discourse, they habitually use the rhetorical element of ethos.

Ocean Wise employs this type of rhetoric in a number of areas, including their website content, social media content and media releases. To begin, their website includes a number of sections that reference their affiliation with the Vancouver Aquarium, which is a federal government-recognized, internationally accredited aquarium dedicated to “the conservation of aquatic life through display and interpretation, education, research, and direct action,” (Vancouver Aquarium, n.d.). The Vancouver Aquarium is a highly-regarded aquarium which “Leading aquarium professionals generally place...among the top five in the world, or even in the top three. Innovative programming, superlative animal care, and a commitment to aquatic research has seen the Aquarium held in high esteem year after year,” (Vancouver Aquarium, n.d.). To draw on the rhetorical power of ethos, Ocean Wise creates opportunities to remind their publics of their affiliation with the Vancouver Aquarium, a renowned and credible organization, generally using a statement such as, “Ocean Wise is a Vancouver Aquarium conservation program created to educate and empower consumers about the issues surrounding sustainable seafood,”

(Ocean Wise, n.d.). This statement, or similar statements, recur frequently on their website, including the 'About Ocean Wise' page (Figure 2).

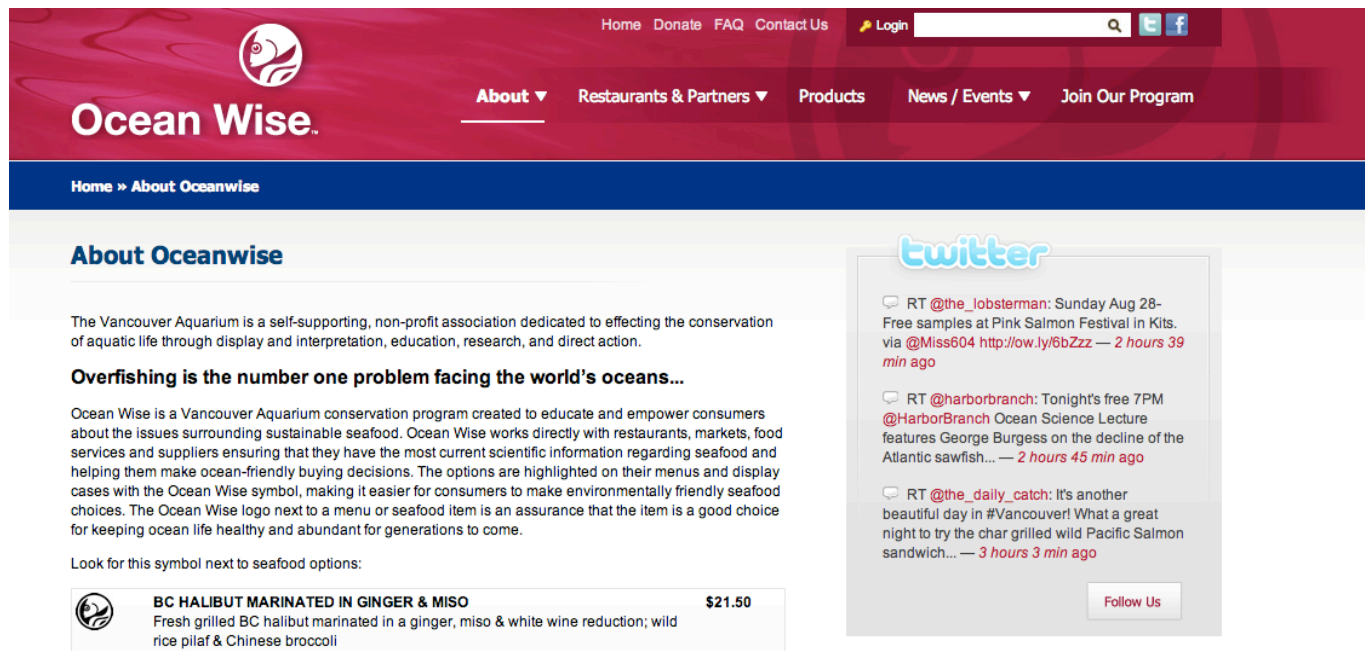


Figure 2: “About Oceanwise” page on the Ocean Wise website featuring their affiliation with the Vancouver Aquarium.

This constant affiliation with the Vancouver Aquarium allows Ocean Wise to leverage the Aquarium’s reputation and credibility to support their cause.

Ocean Wise’s use of social media, particularly through their Facebook page, also reinforces their use of ethos as a rhetorical strategy in their environmental communication, but to a lesser degree than the website and media release content. Ocean Wise uses the wall on their Facebook page mainly to discuss relevant issues, post events and engage those who have “liked” their page in “conversation”, by responding to the comments made to their posts or wall. However, their relationship with the Vancouver



Aquarium is featured prominently on the info section of the Ocean Wise Facebook page, where they provide an “About” section, the company overview and mission which all make reference to Ocean Wise’s affiliation with the renowned Vancouver Aquarium.

Finally, Ocean Wise’s media releases are another example of their communications materials where this type of discourse is prevalent. In an Ocean Wise media release from June 26, 2007, the organization writes, “The health of our oceans is in danger, and according to the journal Science, current research indicates the world’s fisheries may collapse by 2050 unless there is a drastic change in the way they are managed,” (Vancouver Aquarium, 2007). Here, Ocean Wise is relying on the journal Science, an institution with existing credibility, to provide a fact in support of their cause and message. Additionally, they again rely on the weight of their own organization’s credibility to strengthen their arguments, in a media release entitled “Panago Pizza takes leading role in purchasing sustainable seafood toppings”, dated September 2, 2008:

Overfishing is THE number one problem facing the world's oceans. With over 90% of ocean animals longer than 6 feet now gone, and with most ocean fisheries on the brink of collapse within the next 25 years, it is a major problem that we must respond to," Dr. John Nightingale, President, Vancouver Aquarium. (Vancouver Aquarium, 2008)

Statistics and figures such as these are ascribed to the President of the Vancouver Aquarium without further support or evidence, indicating that the organization feels their President has the authority to speak on such matters with credibility. Further, they also depend on related organizations, like Seafood Watch, to provide additional credibility, when required. In the Panago Pizza media release from September 2, 2008, Ocean Wise

looks to Seafood Watch as another trustworthy source to provide a sense of authority on the subject: “Ocean Wise sustainable seafood assessments are based on recommendations and research by leading marine conservation organizations such as Monterey Bay Aquariums’ Seafood Watch Program and Sea Choice Canada” (Vancouver Aquarium, 2008).

Seafood Watch takes a similar approach in their use of ethos as a rhetorical tool through their website and social media content, though they differ in their predominant application of this rhetorical element in their media releases. Content on the Seafood Watch website and Twitter feed asserts their credibility through the voice of their representatives, similar to Ocean Wise’s practices. However, Seafood Watch’s main focus while using ethos in media releases tends to be building credibility through demonstrating their positive influence or effect on other organizations or groups. For example, in an April 17, 2008 media release entitled “Aquarium, ARAMARK announce partnership to promote shift to sustainable seafood”, Seafood Watch highlights their position as a trusted advisor on matters related to sustainable seafood information:

The Aquarium will help ARAMARK to make the transition by providing timely, expert information about what sustainable seafood is available in the market; advice and assistance about finding sources of sustainable seafood; and providing staff support and a suite of programs to help ARAMARK with staff training and education efforts among its clients and customers. (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2008)

This partnership, and Seafood Watch/Monterey Bay Aquarium’s role in the partnership, emphasizes their position as the expert on the subject of sustainable seafood and ocean-

friendly seafood choices, which is a position they maintain throughout their communications.

Additionally, Seafood Watch repeatedly mentions an award they received from Bon Appétit Magazine (awarded to them in 2008) in a number of their media releases<sup>2</sup>. To provide one example, in a release from September 5, 2008, Seafood Watch announces, “Bon Appétit Magazine has named Monterey Bay Aquarium as its “Tastemaker of the Year” for 2008, recognizing the aquarium’s Seafood Watch program ([www.seafoodwatch.org](http://www.seafoodwatch.org)) for its influential role in transforming seafood buying habits across the United States” (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2008). The repeated mention of this award in a number of their media releases supports the organization’s “culturally constructed credibility” of both the Monterey Bay Aquarium and its Seafood Watch program, thus further increasing Seafood Watch’s ability to employ this type of regulatory discourse without providing further supporting evidence (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p.11).

Conversely, while Seafood Watch’s media releases often highlight their influence on other organizations as one way of strengthening their credibility, their social media and website content tends to feature strategies similar to those used by Ocean Wise. For example, the Seafood Watch Facebook page features a “Company Overview” section, which highlights their affiliation with the non-profit Monterey Bay Aquarium, another

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<sup>2</sup> Media Releases featuring the Bon Appétit Magazine award include: “Monterey Bay Aquarium Wins Tastemaker Award from Bon Appétit Magazine”, September 5, 2008; “Monterey Bay Aquarium's New iPhone App Connects Seafood Lovers to Best Choice”s, September 1, 2009; “New Seafood Watch App for Android”, March 31, 2011; and “Aquarium's Updated iPhone App Puts Ocean-Friendly Seafood on the Map”, December 13, 2010;

renowned non-profit aquarium whose mission is to “inspire the conservation of the oceans” (Monterey Bay Aquarium, n.d.). Additionally, Seafood Watch uses social media such as Facebook and Twitter to connect with their audience, providing them updated information which frequently includes links to articles or other pieces that highlight Seafood Watch and the Monterey Bay Aquarium as trusted sources in the world of ocean conservation and sustainable seafood (see Figure 3).

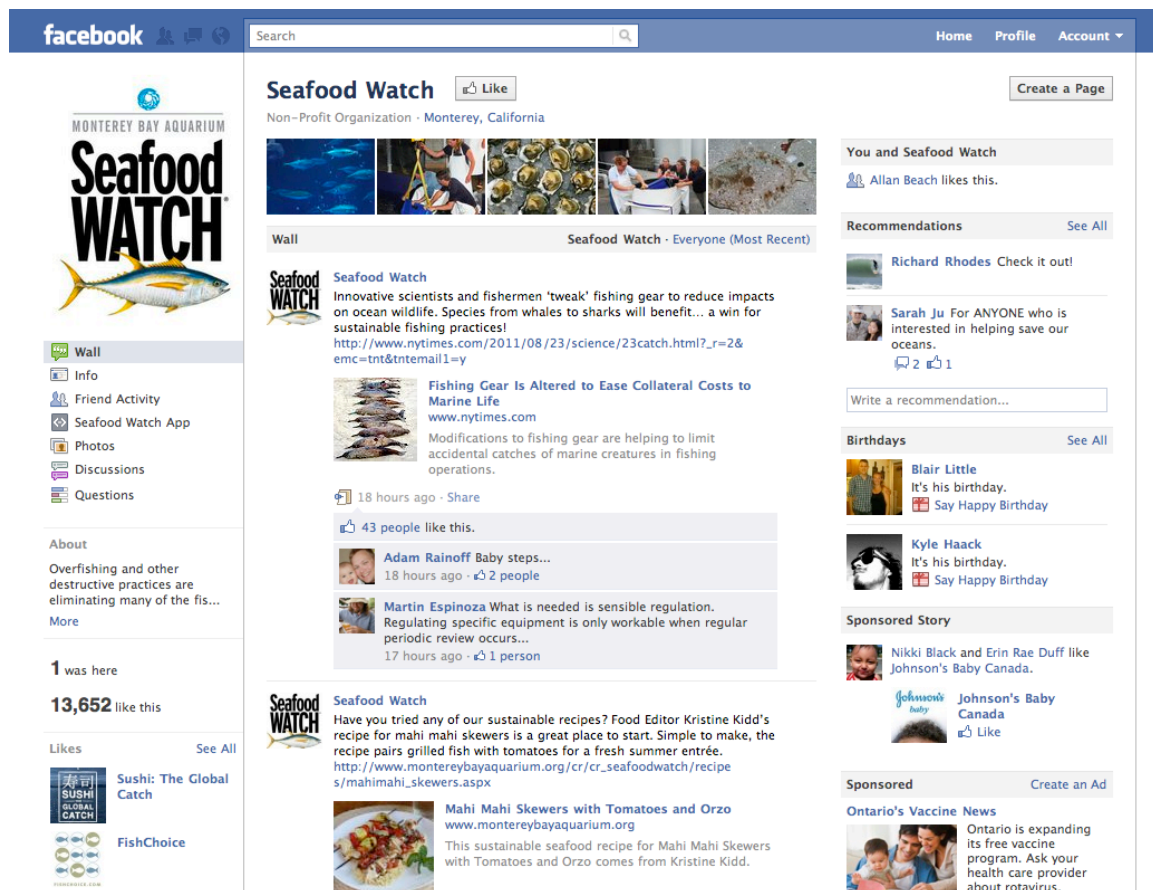


Figure 3: Seafood Watch Facebook page.

One recent example is a link provided on Seafood Watch’s Facebook page directing readers to an article from the Business section of the website Good, a multimedia company for “for people who want to live well and do good” (Good, n.d.). This article, called “The most sustainable sushi restaurant in America”, features both the Monterey

Bay Aquarium, as a trusted partner of Bamboo Sushi in Portland, Oregon, who they look to for support on ocean conservation issues, and the Seafood Watch program as a way to ensure individuals can make ocean-friendly seafood consumption decisions (Goldmark, 2011). By highlighting stories such as this for their Facebook and Twitter audiences, Seafood Watch is able to promote the issues at the core of their mission while increasing their credibility as a source, thus improving their overall ability to use ethos as a rhetorical tool.

Finally, the Seafood Watch website continuously links the Seafood Watch program to the Monterey Bay Aquarium through its name at the top of the website and across a number of its web pages. While Seafood Watch is an Aquarium program, and thus has its own webpage linked to the Aquarium's website, it is frequently referred to as both Seafood Watch and the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch. While there are issues with this, such as potential confusion over the ownership of the program, it is still a relevant example of Seafood Watch's use of ethos as a rhetorical tool. Consequently, this example supports the assertion that Seafood Watch uses its website to harness the power of "the rhetorical notion of ethos" which can be viewed as "the culturally constructed authority of the speaker or writer who represents these institutions" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 11). In this case, Seafood Watch is using its relationship with the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which is an existing source of credible and trusted authority, to provide "the culturally constructed authority of the speaker or writer" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p.11). Seafood Watch highlights its link to the Aquarium, as well the program itself, throughout its homepage (see Figure 4).

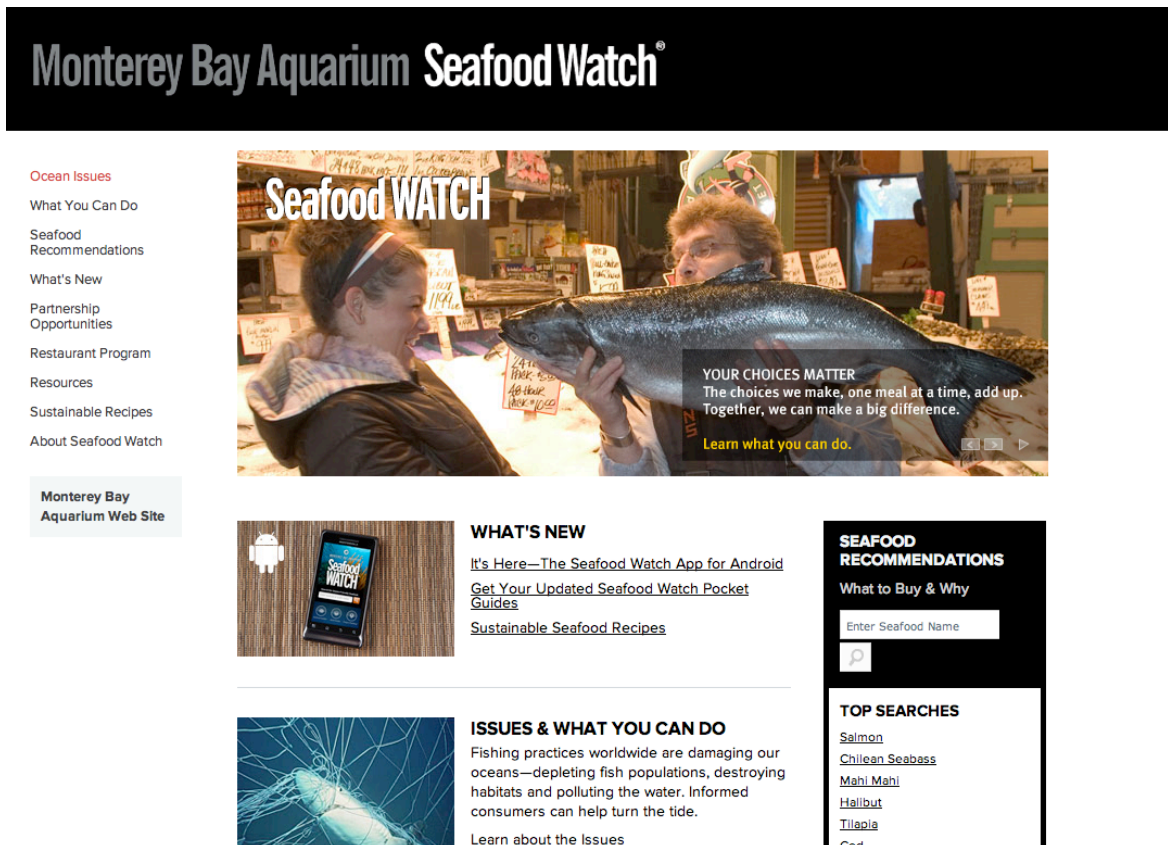


Figure 4: Seafood Watch homepage, highlighting its connection to the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

Through the analysis of both organizations' communications based on the "rhetorical notion of ethos" as defined by Herndl and Brown, it is apparent that these organizations use this type of environmental discourse in order to increase the credibility of their arguments and to strengthen their organizations' position in the field of ocean conservation and sustainable seafood initiatives. By repeating similar messages and support for their arguments throughout a number of their communications, Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch continue to develop their positive reputation and increase their ability to use this type of environmental discourse in future communications.

### **Ecocentric/Poetic Discourse (Pathos)**

Another area of Herndl and Brown's model "refers to the language we use to discuss the beauty, the value, the emotional power of nature" (1996, p. 12). This element of their model for environmental rhetorical analysis views nature as a "spiritual or transcendent unity", one that affects all people on a personal, emotional level (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 12). Poetic discourse could potentially be seen as a more subjective element than the other rhetorical areas of ethos and logos, as the appeal to the emotions of an audience and an audience's view of "the beauty, the value and the emotional power of nature" will vary somewhat from place to place and from person to person (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 12).

This "ecocentric discourse" is one that "largely considers humanity as part of nature and seeks to locate human value in harmonious relation to the natural world" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 12). There are many possible conflicts or difficulties when dealing with human values and emotions in relation to the environment and the natural world (for example, differences of values, opinions, culture, gender, worldview and past experience, to name just a few possibilities). However, the strength of poetic discourse is in the human emotion and reaction inherently tied to the human experience with nature and the environment, as the "power of this discourse comes largely from aesthetic or spiritual responses to the rhetorical notion of pathos, or appeals to the emotions of the audience" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 12). Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch frequently employ this type of discourse in some of the communications used in their public education campaigns, specifically in their website content and media releases, by focusing on the

impact individuals can have on their environment, particularly through simple changes to their behaviour. Both organizations use poetic discourse in a way that attempts to connect the audience with the environment in order to elicit emotions that could spark positive action. This type of message is repeated throughout the communications of both organizations.

For example, in a November 14, 2006 media release entitled “Aquarium’s Ocean Wise program celebrates sustainable seafood”, Ocean Wise draws their audience’s attention to their personal habits and the direct impact they may be having on their environment with a release focused on celebrating sustainable seafood: “This 3-day celebration asks Vancouver restaurant-goers to consider the seafood they eat and the consequences those choices may have on the ocean environment” (Vancouver Aquarium, 2006). While this is a simple request included in a media release, it can be viewed as an example of poetic discourse, as it is asking the consumer or public to pay attention to their habits and consider the consequences of their actions. By asking this of the public, Ocean Wise is attempting to make connections between people and their environment, linking their actions to environmental impact. Additionally, this message is repeated in more recent media releases, including a release from January 29, 2010 entitled “Ocean Wise turns 5 – Canada’s leading sustainable seafood program celebrates its most successful year”, where Ocean Wise reiterates individual responsibility, again attempting to draw their audience’s attention inward, to their personal habits and relationship with the environment: “The program enables Canadians to make environmentally-friendly seafood choices” (Vancouver Aquarium, 2010). They choose a similar message again the following month



with a February 5, 2010 called “Ocean Wise Canstruction inukshuk, revealed!”, where they state “Ocean Wise makes it easy for Canadians to play an active role in conserving them now and for future generations”, referring to every Canadian’s individual ability to play a role in the conservation of the world’s oceans (Vancouver Aquarium, 2010).

Again, this message is reiterated throughout other communications materials as well, with a very similar message appearing on the “About us” page of their website and the info section of their Facebook page. For Ocean Wise, their logo (see Figure 5) is a key piece of their public education campaign, because they promote it as a signal to the public that any product with the logo is a good choice for the environment.



Figure 5: Ocean Wise logo.

As mentioned on their “About us” page, Ocean Wise describes the presence of their logo on a menu, package or label as “your assurance that you are making the best choice to ensure the health of our oceans for generations to come” (Ocean Wise, n.d.). This phrasing speaks directly to their audience in an attempt to have the audience consider the

environmental impact of their consumption habits. By asking their audience to make choices that will impact the health of the ocean for future generations, Ocean Wise is attempting to make an connection to their audience by appealing to the human desire to care for families and future generations that do not yet exist. Through this type of language Ocean Wise attempts to elicit human emotions directly related to the environment.

Seafood Watch employs the same tactics as Ocean Wise, focusing their strategic use of pathos around an individual's contribution or impact on their own environment, found in communications such as media releases and in other website content. Not only does Seafood Watch focus on highlighting the issues, they routinely link a message of personal responsibility or potential for action with the worldwide problems they want to solve. For example, the Seafood Watch website features a section called "Issues & What you can do" on its homepage. The description for this section exemplifies their use of pathos in their communications: "Fishing practices worldwide are damaging our oceans—depleting fish populations, destroying habitats and polluting the water. Informed consumers can help turn the tide," followed by links to "Learn more about the issues", "Learn what you can do" and "Choose a pocket guide" (Monterey Bay Aquarium, n.d.). Here, Seafood Watch is using a form of emotional appeal, by setting up the message in a way that asks the audience consider the current state of the environment and their role in the situation, directly drawing their attention to the issue and implying that "informed consumers" can make a real difference in the fate of the oceans and environment. Further, there are additional messages on their homepage about "creating a better future for our oceans" by

working with businesses and other partners to create awareness of their effect people can have on the environment, and thus the oceans.

Moreover, while Seafood Watch appears to use its Facebook page primarily as a place to engage their audience in “conversation” on important and current ocean issues, these pathos-based messages occasionally appear in their use of social media as well. For example, on July 14, 2011, Seafood Watch posted a short message and link about tuna on their Facebook wall: “The power and majesty of swimming tuna inspires people to conserve this important keystone species.” By focusing on the beauty of a swimming tuna as a point of inspiration for changing behaviour, Seafood Watch is using poetic discourse to attract their audience’s attention, connecting their emotions to their environment in order to encourage a response to this emotional appeal.

Finally, Seafood Watch continues to use pathos as a strategic rhetorical tool throughout many of their media releases. For example, in a release from April 15, 2009 entitled “Seafood Watch Alliance Announced at San Francisco Institutions”, the Monterey Bay Aquarium Executive Director Julie Packard is quoted as saying, “For more than a decade, the Monterey Bay Aquarium has worked with consumers and businesses nationwide to help them see that their seafood choices can have a tremendous impact on the health of the oceans,” (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2009). Again, in a release from October 20, 2009, “Benchmark Monterey Bay Aquarium Report Finds Future of Global Seafood Supply at a Turning Point”, Packard uses similar language: “Our Seafood Watch initiatives address the most critical issues raised in ‘The State of Seafood’ report. They give everyone –

from consumers to chefs to major seafood buyers – an opportunity to be part of the solution,” (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2009).

The constant emotional appeals, through the use of poetic discourse geared towards triggering an action or response in the audience, are created by first drawing attention to the severity of the problem facing the world’s oceans, then by highlighting the actions individuals may take in order to do their part towards protecting the environment and ensuring the survival of the oceans. While an effective example of the organization’s use of pathos as a rhetorical tool, a short section from a November 10, 2009 Seafood Watch media release entitled “Aquarium, Santa Monica Seafood Partner to Promote Shift to Sustainable Seafood”, also exemplifies Seafood Watch’s use of the rhetorical element of pathos:

“The future of seafood, and the fate of ocean wildlife, is an urgent environmental issue,” Cassano<sup>3</sup> said. “Globally, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization reports that the majority of all commercial fisheries are being fished at or beyond their limits. However, as a recent report in Science shows, we can turn the tide by engaging a suite of conservation initiatives and connecting these actions to business commitments and consumer actions. (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2009)

While poetic discourse can be viewed as a more subjective area of environmental rhetoric, the analysis of Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch’s communications alludes to a specific use of pathos in their public education campaigns. While the messages shift slightly depending on the type of text or document, the overall intended effect is consistent. By drawing the audience’s attention to key issues and their role in the crisis,

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<sup>3</sup> Ed Cassano is the senior director of Seafood Watch.

then presenting the options for solving the problem, Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch appear to be making a deliberate appeal to their audiences' emotions.

### **Anthropocentric/Scientific Discourse (Logos)**

The final element of Herndl and Brown's model of environmental rhetorical analysis is scientific discourse, which "represents the specialized discourse of the environmental sciences" (1996, p. 11). This element is perhaps the most easily recognizable of the three elements in this study, as much of the content found in the communications is based in scientific research. This rhetorical element of logos is the one that regards nature as an "object of knowledge constructed through careful scientific methodology", or one that views nature as a concept to be studied and eventually understood in a meaningful way (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 12).

According to Herndl and Brown, this "anthropocentric discourse" is "grounded in its faith in the human ability to come to know nature's secrets" (1996, p. 12). As it is the area that focuses on the science-based aspects of environmental communication, "this discourse locates the human researcher as outside and epistemologically above nature", reinforcing the view that through study and science humans can "come to know nature's secrets" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 12). As this type of discourse is often used to support arguments and make decisions, the "immense cultural power of this discourse comes from our rationalist faith in science and in the productivity of the scientific method. The rhetorical power of this discourse emerges from the rhetorical notion of logos, the appeal to objective fact and reason" (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 11-12). This

appeal to “objective fact and reason” is found throughout the communication used by Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch in a number of ways.

The use of scientific discourse, or the implementation of logos as a rhetorical strategy, is found in all types of Ocean Wise’s communications, including their media releases, website content and online documents. Additionally, the variety of scientific discourse that appears in Ocean Wise’s communication is more diverse than the variety of the other types of rhetorical discourse, in this case, regulatory and poetic, but nonetheless remains consistently focused on its central theme, saving the world’s oceans. For example, the topic of overfishing recurs in over five separate media releases alone<sup>4</sup>, as one of the central problems plaguing the world’s oceans today. The statistics and scientific data provided to back up this claim vary, from the simple statement on its own, to claims such as: “overfishing is THE number one problem facing the world's oceans. With over 90% of ocean animals longer than 6 feet now gone, and with most ocean fisheries on the brink of collapse within the next 25 years, it is a major problem that we must respond to,” found in a September 8, 2008 media release entitled “Panago Pizza takes leading role in purchasing sustainable seafood pizza toppings” (Vancouver Aquarium, 2008). They also use a slightly different version of the same message, one focused more on Ocean Wise’s work, to communicate the same information in a media release called “Ocean Wise turns 5 – Canada’s leading sustainable seafood program celebrates its most successful year!”

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<sup>4</sup> The five media releases include: September 2, 2008 – Panago Pizza takes leading role in purchasing sustainable seafood toppings; April 2, 2009 – WISE UP, CANADA! Vancouver Aquarium sustainable seafood program, Ocean Wise, launches nationwide; December 4, 2008 - Ocean Wise Awarded 'Supplier of the Year!' – Canada's leading sustainable seafood program wins 2009 Pinnacle Award; January 29, 2010 – Ocean Wise Turns 5 – Canada's leading sustainable seafood program celebrates its most successful year!; February 5, 2010 – Ocean Wise CANstruction Inukshuk, Revealed!

dated January 29, 2010: “overfishing is the number one problem facing the world’s oceans. Ocean Wise addresses this critical issue by promoting sustainable fishery practices to prevent habitat destruction and enable species to thrive at optimum population numbers,” (Vancouver Aquarium, 2010). Further to their use of logos in their media releases, Ocean Wise uses this type of argument on their website and in their online documents as well. For example, the “Sustainable Seafood” section of their website reiterates the message that “overfishing is the greatest threat to our oceans today” and supports this statement with statistics and reference to “scientific studies” (although these “scientific studies” appear as unnamed studies in the communications materials themselves, the facts are verifiable in a number of easily found studies, such as those by the UN, included in the list of references here) (Vancouver Aquarium, n.d.). The “Media Package” on their website begins with an introduction to the issues addressed by Ocean Wise, focusing on overfishing, bycatch and habitat degradation specifically. By providing solid scientific examples and relating these issues to the goals of the Ocean Wise program, Ocean Wise is effectively using logos as a means of rhetorical appeal. Additionally, the Ocean Wise Backgrounder once again features that same statement regarding overfishing, “Overfishing is the number one problem facing the world’s oceans” (Vancouver Aquarium, n.d.). By using consistent and repeated messaging supported by verifiable scientific data across a number of document types, such as their website, media releases and documents like their Backgrounder, Ocean Wise is using aspects of scientific discourse to appeal to their audience’s sense of “objective fact and reason” (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 12).

On the other hand, Seafood Watch demonstrates even more variety in their use of scientific discourse, mainly through the explicit naming of their sources in their media releases. While this organization also keeps a tight focus on their topic (saving the world's oceans and choosing sustainable seafood), they include a wider variety of information sources than does Ocean Wise. For example, Seafood Watch has issued a number of a number of press releases over the past five years that include information from outside organizations such as United Nations Food and Agriculture reports, and from inside their own organization, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, where Seafood Watch is based. The information included is mainly scientific fact, such as this statement in a September 5, 2008 media release titled "Monterey Bay Aquarium wins Tastemaker award from Bon Appétit Magazine":

Globally, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization reports that the majority of all commercial fisheries are being fished at or beyond their limits. And scientists recently projected that unless we change our fishing patterns, virtually all commercial fisheries will be gone within 50 years. (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2008)

Seafood Watch focuses on using this scientific data or information to create meaning for their audience, by then explaining what they can do about the issues.

Further, Seafood Watch uses its Twitter account and Facebook page as opportunities to engage their audience in the "objective fact and reason" of science. For example, a recent Seafood Watch tweet makes the claim that "95 % of all the oysters eaten are farmed. They don't require wild caught fish, they like tight spaces and clean the water," with a link to a photo of oysters from their Facebook page. Following this tweet, they engage in a short conversation with one of their followers, where they also provide the link to the



related research, found in a Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Fisheries and Aquaculture report on global capture production, which provides information on “data of volume of nominal catches, for recent years by country, species and major fishing areas,” (FAO, 2011). This example helps demonstrate Seafood Watch’s varied use of science-based arguments throughout its communications materials.

Using Herndl and Brown’s model to analyze the environmental communication used by Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch reveals a number of concepts and general themes. They describe their model as a tool to help “identify the dominant tendencies or orientation of a piece of environmental discourse” and “clarify the connections between a text, a writer and the setting from which a piece of writing comes in an effort to elicit the underlying motives around a text or topic” (1996, p. 10). Their model focuses on the three rhetorical strategies of ethos, logos and pathos, however, ascribing to them specific environmental focuses.

Most apparent, and something Herndl and Brown touch on, is the frequency with which two or three rhetorical elements are used in combination with one another, in order to strengthen the “dominant tendencies” or orientation of a piece of communication. By appealing to audiences in more than one way, and through more than one channel, Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch are attempting to ensure they reach as many people as possible. Through the inclusion of appeals to a person’s emotions towards nature, the use of credible agents to add weight to an argument and the use of scientific fact and discourse

on the environment, these organizations are creating more well-rounded, complete arguments that could help attract support to their cause.

One difficulty with using this particular model is its value when the motives of an organization are clearly stated. In this case, the motives of organizations like Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch are made explicit right up front throughout their documents and communication. Therefore, this type of analysis is perhaps less useful in helping the reader “clarify the connections between a text, a writer and the setting from which a piece of writing comes in an effort to elicit the underlying motives around a text or topic” than it may be when an organization’s values and goals are not as up front or explicit (1996, p. 10). To provide a different example, there is currently a major advertising campaign being run by the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers to provide Canadians with the “real story” behind oil sands development. This situation presents an environmental issue with multiple stakeholders, opinions and messages – and the science presented by both sides of the argument is still being debated in the public arena. Therefore in this scenario, Herndl and Brown’s model may prove more useful in clarifying or uncovering any “underlying motives around a text or topic” (1996, p. 10). Regarding the issue of the global ocean crisis, organizations such as Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch are not focusing their efforts on contesting the messages of large corporations or governments who oppose their views. For the most part, there seems to be a general consensus of the need to protect the ocean and its resources; however, the motives behind this need varies between non-profit advocacy organizations, multinational corporations, or government or regulatory bodies. Consequently, while the model offers a solid structure for completing

an environmental rhetorical analysis, it appears its main ability in this context is to facilitate an analysis to determine a central theme or idea. It does not appear to be as useful for finding any “underlying motives” in an organization’s communications, in the case of Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch.

As the model was most useful in highlighting or determining a central theme, one area where a specific theme or idea appeared to arise during the analysis was in the repetition of one specific word: “sustainable”. This repetition emerged while attempting to group or classify each document or section of each document based on Herndl and Brown’s model. While it doesn’t relate specifically to just one of the three rhetorical elements included in the model, the repetition of the word “sustainable” seemed to appear across all three areas of environmental rhetoric included in this model.

The word “sustainable”, or “sustainability”, appears in almost every single communication used by both Seafood Watch and Ocean Wise, and is the most frequently occurring environment-specific word observed throughout this analysis. Often, this word appears more than once in a document, even recurring more than eight times in a single page media release produced by Ocean Wise<sup>5</sup>. At first glance, the repetition of this word seems to make sense, as both organizations are focused on promoting sustainable seafood choices and environmental sustainability in general. However, like any word repeated frequently for emphasis, it is important to consider carefully the meaning behind the word itself and the ways in which it is used.

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<sup>5</sup> July 24, 2009: Ocean Wise Welcomes Albion Fisheries as Founding Supplier Partner.

For Ocean Wise, the meaning of “sustainable” as it relates to seafood is very clear. One of their communications, the Ocean Wise Recommendation Policy, begins by explaining their classification system: sustainable (anything Ocean Wise certified) or unsustainable (anything not Ocean Wise certified). This leads to an interesting “right or wrong” way of looking at seafood and seafood consumption, as Ocean Wise is claiming their way is the only way to be sustainable. This type of argument or language could be viewed as “ecospeak”, a term created by M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer to describe “a form of rhetoric that involved reducing public debate about the natural environment into two opposing options – environmentalist versus developer, for example, or clean air versus new jobs,” (2005, p. 360). Ocean Wise is creating a type of opposition or conflict by structuring their explanation of sustainable versus non-sustainable seafood in this way. This issue becomes even more complex when Ocean Wise includes a more thorough explanation of their definition of sustainable seafood in another area of their website. On their page regarding seafood, they offer the following definition:

What is sustainable seafood?

Sustainable seafood can be defined as species that are caught or farmed in a way that ensures the long-term health and stability of that species, as well as the greater marine ecosystem. (Ocean Wise, n.d.)

This definition is clearly more robust “than Ocean Wise equals sustainable” and “everything not Ocean Wise equals unsustainable”, but is only presented in one area of their website. However, it is important to note that this area of the website is very detailed, making great use of scientific, regulatory and poetic discourse, as classified by Herndl and Brown’s model. Without including this definition or explanation explicitly

throughout their communications materials, it appears that they are assuming a shared understanding of the words “sustainable” and “sustainability”, and that all audiences will accept their implied definition of the words.

Seafood Watch, on the other hand, tends to provide more information through their publications, ensuring their definition of “sustainable” and “sustainability” is frequently reinforced. However, they still use the words “sustainable” and “sustainability”, reiterating their importance, without defining or specifying their meaning in a number of the communications reviewed. Again, this use of these words without definition or explanation raises questions of whether they are assuming a shared understanding or acceptance of their use of the words “sustainable” and “sustainability”. For example, in one media release called “Seafood Watch Alliance Announced at San Francisco Institutions”, dated April 15, 2009, they use a quote from another organization describing sustainability as a core value:

Sustainability is a core value at the California Academy of Sciences, and as part of the San Francisco Seafood Watch Alliance, we are looking forward to expanding our outreach to visitors, equipping them with the tools they need to make sustainable seafood choices,” says Chris Andrews, Director of Steinhart Aquarium at the California Academy of Sciences. “By tying this message into our exhibits and programs, we hope to inspire people to appreciate Earth’s oceans and take a more active role in protecting them. (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2009)

While this is arguably a strong message employing poetic discourse, specifically the phrase “...we hope to inspire people to appreciate Earth’s oceans and take a more active role in protecting them”, the release does not goes on to explain exactly what these organizations understand sustainability to mean, or whether each organization has a

different understanding of the word. Further, the majority of the communications studied for this MRP did not provide a more detailed explanation of their own organization's definition of the word sustainable. By missing the opportunity to reinforce their definition of sustainable seafood and sustainability repeatedly, there is the question whether their message will be understood exactly the way they intend it. According to Ruth Katz of the Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture, the word sustainable has undergone a shift in its common understanding over the past 20 years. "Throughout the 1990s academics and practitioners struggled over the word *sustainable* and gradually shifted its accepted meaning from an exclusively environmental focus, to one that includes both environmental and economic resilience. That made sense to most advocates," asserts Katz (2010, p. 375).

Although Katz acknowledges that the shift was gradual and made sense to most, this shift in the common understanding of the word sustainable also creates the possibility for the word to be misused: "More recently, however, the agro-chemical and seed company Monsanto has adopted the word sustainable to describe its own practices. Most long-time sustainable agriculture advocates do not approve of Monsanto's use of the unregulated term sustainable," (Katz, 2010, p. 375-376). The use of "unregulated terms" like sustainable is an important consideration in environmental communication. While organizations like Seafood Watch and Ocean Wise may assume their public shares their view of "sustainable" and "sustainability", there are other organizations using the same words in a seemingly similar fashion, with potentially opposite results, such as Monsanto's use of the word "sustainable". Therefore, one of the more apparent outcomes

of this analysis is the need to ensure consistent language and word choice, as well as consistent definitions, throughout public education materials.

## **CONCLUSION**

This MRP examined the some of the online public education campaign communications of two environmental advocacy organizations that focus on encouraging sustainable seafood consumption as a key way to save the world's oceans. Using Carl G. Herndl and Stuart C. Brown's model of environmental rhetorical analysis as a framework, this paper examined the strategies used by Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch in particular, in an attempt to determine the type of communication they use, how they use it, and whether it may or may not be effective at reaching their audiences and fulfilling their education campaign goals.

Through the use of Herndl and Brown's model, it was possible to categorize different types of environmental rhetoric found in the communication materials studied. This categorization proved useful in determining key themes and the overall orientation of the texts. While the model did not elucidate any new information about the motives behind the texts, messages or authors, it did reveal an important pattern or consistent use of a key word (sustainable) and some potential difficulties or issues with its use. Although Herndl and Brown's model does not attempt to make specific suggestions for strategies to improve future communication, it is a useful tool to develop a stronger sense of the variety of communications and messages used in a particular area of environmental communication. In the future, it would be interesting to apply the model to

communication used by other organizations or governments working on the same issue, the global ocean crisis, to see whether the model does indeed “help clarify the connections between a text, a writer and the setting from which a piece of writing comes in an effort to elicit the underlying motives around a text or topic” (Herndl and Brown, 1996, p. 10).

Future research could also include a focus on the visual rhetoric used throughout both the Ocean Wise and Seafood Watch campaigns. Both campaigns use a wide variety of images (both realistic and cartoon), logos and specific colours all throughout their messaging. A complete analysis of these visual elements may offer more insight into their campaigns and communication strategies. Additionally, this paper touched on the issue of using a commonly understood word, such as sustainable, without providing a context-specific definition each time it is used. Future research in this area could take a closer look the language and specific words often found in environmental communication, such as sustainable, and the many issues associated with their use.



**TABLE 1: Classification of documents analyzed using Herndl and Brown's model of environmental rhetorical analysis**

<b>REGULATORY DISCOURSE (ETHOS)</b>	<b>POETIC DISCOURSE (PATHOS)</b>	<b>SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE (LOGOS)</b>
<b>Seafood Watch</b> <b>Media Releases:</b> April 2008 September 2008 January 2009 September 2010 December 2010  <b>Ocean Wise</b> <b>Media releases:</b> May 2008 September 2008* April 2009 December 2009	<b>Seafood Watch</b> <b>Website content:</b> Ocean Issues Restaurant Program <b>Media Releases:</b> January 2009 April 2009 October 2009 November 2009 March 2011  <b>Ocean Wise</b> <b>Documents:</b> Flat Sheet <b>Website content:</b> Why Sustainable Seafood About Ocean Wise <b>Media Releases:</b> June 2006 November 2006 December 2006 May 2007 September 2008* January 2010 February 2010 November 1, 2010 November 4, 2010	<b>Seafood Watch</b> <b>Website content:</b> Ocean Issues About Seafood Watch <b>Media Releases:</b> April 2008 September 2008 October 2009  <b>Ocean Wise</b> <b>Documents:</b> Fact sheet Flat Sheet Backgrounder <b>Website content:</b> Why Sustainable Seafood About Ocean Wise Media Package intro <b>Media Releases:</b> March 2006 June 2006 September 2006 December 2006 June 26, 2007 May 2008 September 2008* April 2009 July 2009 December 2009 January 2010
<b>ETHOS/PATHOS</b>	<b>PATHOS/LOGOS</b>	<b>LOGOS/ETHOS</b>
<b>Seafood Watch Documents</b> <b>Media Releases:</b> January 2009	<b>Seafood Watch</b> <b>Website content:</b> Ocean Issues <b>Media Releases:</b> October 2009  <b>Ocean Wise Documents</b> Flat Sheet <b>Website content:</b> Why Sustainable Seafood About Oceanwise <b>Media Releases:</b> June 2006 December 2006 January 2010	<b>Seafood Watch Documents</b> <b>Media Releases:</b> April 2008 September 2008  <b>Ocean Wise Documents</b> <b>Media releases:</b> May 2008 April 2009 December 2009

\* September 2008 appears in all three categories

## APPENDIX 1

### OCEAN WISE

#### DOCUMENTS

##### Media Releases

##### 2010

November 4 - [The Ocean Wise Cookbook: Seafood Recipes Good For The Planet](#)

November 1 - [Canadians Celebrate Ocean Wise Month](#)

February 5 - [Ocean Wise CANstruction Inukshuk, Revealed!](#)

January 29 - [Ocean Wise Turns 5 - Canada's leading sustainable seafood program celebrates its most successful year!](#)

##### 2009

December 4 - [Ocean Wise Awarded 'Supplier of the Year'! - Canada's leading sustainable seafood program wins 2009 Pinnacle Award](#)

November 26 - [Locals Support Sustainable Seafood Conservation by Slurping Chowder - 2nd Annual Ocean Wise Chowder ChowDown](#)

July 24 - [Ocean Wise Welcomes Albion Fisheries as Founding Supplier Partner](#)

April 23 - [Smart Sushi Makes Waves - Vancouver leads the way for sustainable sushi](#)

April 2 - [WISE UP, CANADA! Vancouver Aquarium sustainable seafood program, Ocean Wise, launches nationwide](#)

February 16 - [4 Candles for Older, Wiser Ocean Wise - Vancouver Aquarium's Sustainable Seafood Program Celebrates](#)

##### 2008

September 2 - [Panago Pizza takes leading role in purchasing sustainable seafood toppings](#)

May 9 - [Compass Group Canada takes leading role in sustainable seafood purchasing](#)

January 8 - [Aquarium's Ocean Wise Program Celebrates Three-Year Anniversary](#)

##### 2007

July 31 - [Aquarium's Ocean Wise Program Welcomes 38 New Participants](#)

June 26 - [Aquarium's Sustainable Seafood Program Launches in the Okanagan](#)

June 11 - [Aquarium Raises \\$228,000 at Inaugural 'Night at the Aquarium' Fundraiser](#)

May 25 - [Aquarium's Sustainable Seafood Program Launches on Vancouver Island at the Fairmont Empress](#)

##### 2006

December 4 - [Aquarium's Ocean Wise Program Announces 19 New Participants](#)

November 14 - [Aquarium's Ocean Wise Program Celebrates Sustainable Seafood](#)

September 19 - [Capers Donates \\$40,000 to Vancouver Aquarium's Ocean Wise Program](#)

June 9 - [10 New Restaurants Join Aquarium's Ocean Wise Program](#)

March 28 - [Vancouver Aquarium's Toast to the Coast](#)

## **Media Kit**

[Backgrounder](#)

[Flat Sheet](#)

[Fact Sheet](#)

## **Research**

[Ocean Wise Recommendation Policy \(PDF\)](#)

## **WEBSITE CONTENT**

[Homepage \(featuring video content\)](#)

[About Ocean Wise](#)

[Why Sustainable Seafood?](#)

[Media Kit Intro](#)

[Ocean Wise News](#)

[Ocean Wise Recommended Product Showcase](#)

[How To Join](#)

## APPENDIX 2

### SEAFOOD WATCH

#### DOCUMENTS

##### Media Releases

##### 2011

March - [New Seafood Watch App for Android.](#)

January - [Updated Seafood Watch Recommendations Recognize Improved East Coast Groundfish Stocks.](#)

##### 2010

December - [Aquarium's Updated iPhone App Puts Ocean-Friendly Seafood on the Map](#)

September - [Whole Foods Market Partners with Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch](#)

##### 2009

November - [Aquarium, Santa Monica Seafood Partner to Promote Shift to Sustainable Seafood](#)

October - [Benchmark Monterey Bay Aquarium Report Finds Future of Global Seafood Supply at a Turning Point](#)

April - [Seafood Watch Alliance Announced at San Francisco Institutions](#)

January - [Monterey Bay Aquarium's New iPhone App Connects Seafood Lovers to Best Choices](#)

##### 2008

September - [Monterey Bay Aquarium Wins Tastemaker Award from \*Bon Appétit Magazine\*](#)

April - [Aquarium, ARAMARK Announce Partnership to Promote Shift to Sustainable Seafood](#)

##### Research

[Saving White Sharks](#)

[Saving Sea Otters](#)

[Revealing Tuna Secrets](#)

[Global Tagging of Pacific Predators](#)

[Seahorse Propagation](#)

[Wild Bird Rehabilitation](#)

[Sharks and Rays Research](#)

[Jellies Propagation and Research](#)

[Tropical Corals Propagation](#)

[Ocean Sunfish Research](#)

[Humboldt Squid](#)

[Research and Conservation Report](#)

## **WEBSITE CONTENT**

[Ocean Issues](#)

[What You Can Do](#)

[Seafood Recommendations](#)

[Partners](#)

[Restaurant Program](#)

[Resources](#)

[Sustainable Recipes](#)

[About Seafood Watch](#)

## **GUIDES**

[Seafood Watch Pocket Guides](#)

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