

Oceans: Source of Life

Reflections from the
Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Why Focus on the Oceans?

The United Nations (UN) has embarked on an ambitious development agenda, known as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which is comprised of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals span the broad spectrum of development needs including access to food and water, education, the elimination of poverty, and environmental sustainability. SDG 14 is aimed at improving the health and sustainability of the oceans and it proposes 10 targets for achieving this. We all have a part to play to help achieve this goal.

At that end, the IBVM UN NGO reached out across the IBVM network to ask our sisters to reflect on their experience of the oceans. We asked them to consider their relationship to the ocean, what they considered to be the key threats to its sustainability, and to name the actions and attitudes we need in order to improve ocean health. This document provides excerpts from the responses we received and reflects an international vision for ocean health and sustainability.

The IBVM UN NGO would like to thank all those who participated in this project by providing a response:

Brenda Eagan, Rome, Italy

Clotilde De Maroussem, Morocco

Elizabeth Donnan, Zambia

Ewa Bem, Wales

Françoise Le Guen, Mauritius

Genevieve Maigrot, Mauritius

Jeanne Cover, Canada

Julie Stapleton, USA

Kate Myers, Wales

Lynn Cira, Canada

Margaret C. Honner, Philippines

Maria Lopez, Morocco

MaryAgnes Idiong, England

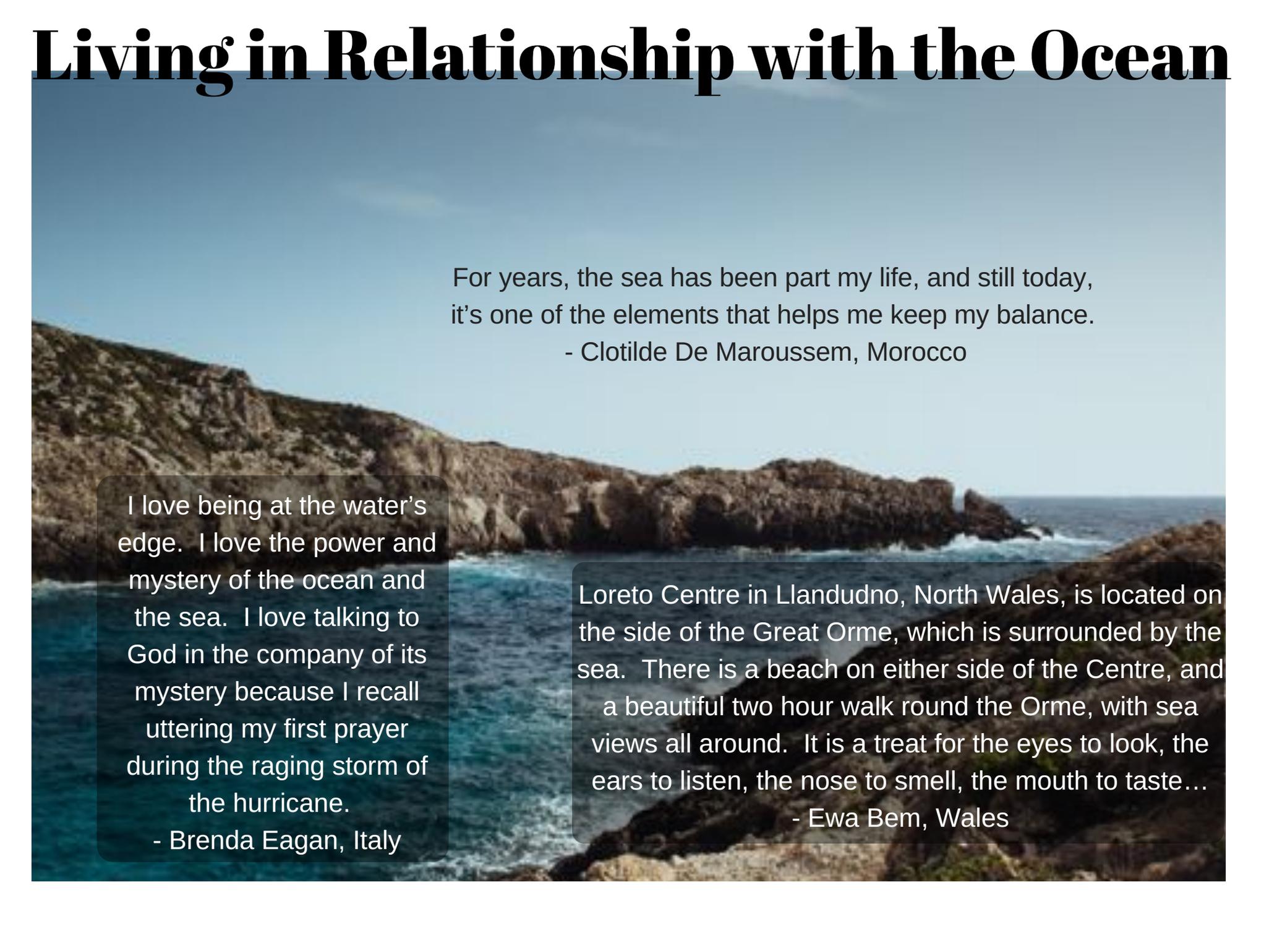
Pilar González Cano, Spain

Pretoria, South Africa Community

Una O'Reilly, Wales

Vietnam Community

Living in Relationship with the Ocean

A scenic view of a rocky coastline with the ocean in the foreground and a clear blue sky above. The rocks are dark and jagged, and the water is a deep blue. The sky is a pale, clear blue.

For years, the sea has been part my life, and still today, it's one of the elements that helps me keep my balance.

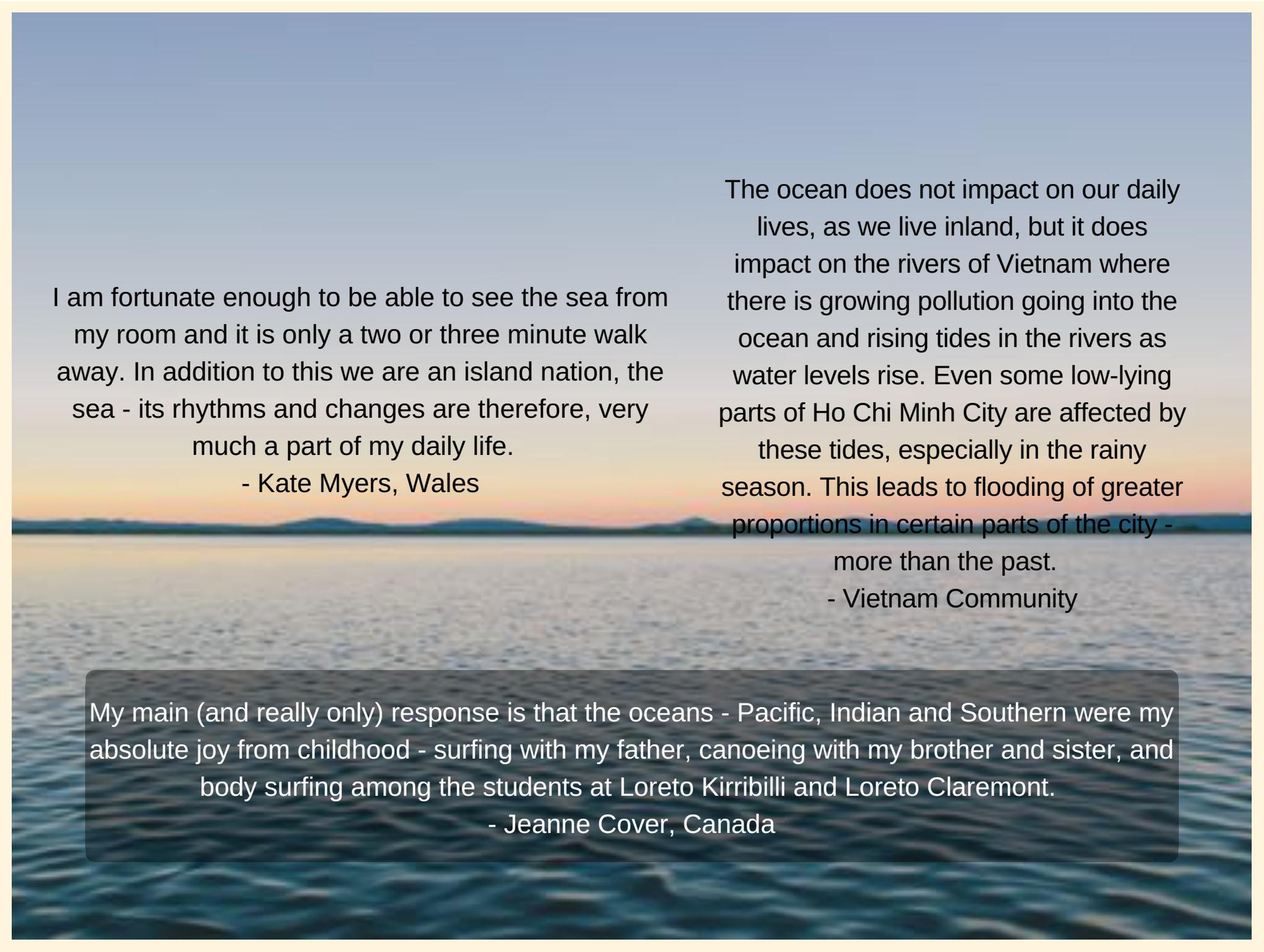
- Clotilde De Maroussem, Morocco

I love being at the water's edge. I love the power and mystery of the ocean and the sea. I love talking to God in the company of its mystery because I recall uttering my first prayer during the raging storm of the hurricane.

- Brenda Eagan, Italy

Loreto Centre in Llandudno, North Wales, is located on the side of the Great Orme, which is surrounded by the sea. There is a beach on either side of the Centre, and a beautiful two hour walk round the Orme, with sea views all around. It is a treat for the eyes to look, the ears to listen, the nose to smell, the mouth to taste...

- Ewa Bem, Wales



I am fortunate enough to be able to see the sea from my room and it is only a two or three minute walk away. In addition to this we are an island nation, the sea - its rhythms and changes are therefore, very much a part of my daily life.

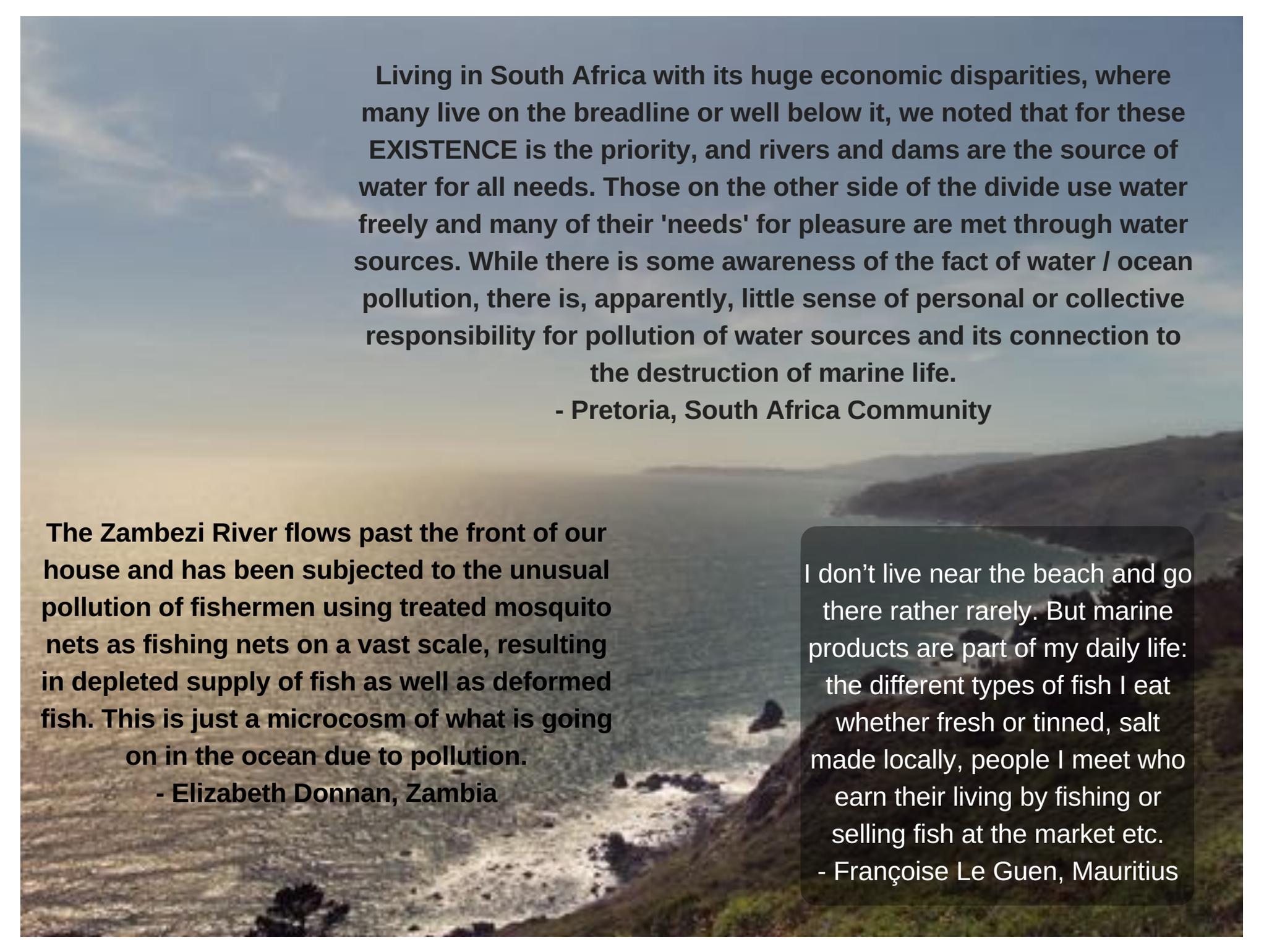
- Kate Myers, Wales

The ocean does not impact on our daily lives, as we live inland, but it does impact on the rivers of Vietnam where there is growing pollution going into the ocean and rising tides in the rivers as water levels rise. Even some low-lying parts of Ho Chi Minh City are affected by these tides, especially in the rainy season. This leads to flooding of greater proportions in certain parts of the city - more than the past.

- Vietnam Community

My main (and really only) response is that the oceans - Pacific, Indian and Southern were my absolute joy from childhood - surfing with my father, canoeing with my brother and sister, and body surfing among the students at Loreto Kirribilli and Loreto Claremont.

- Jeanne Cover, Canada



Living in South Africa with its huge economic disparities, where many live on the breadline or well below it, we noted that for these EXISTENCE is the priority, and rivers and dams are the source of water for all needs. Those on the other side of the divide use water freely and many of their 'needs' for pleasure are met through water sources. While there is some awareness of the fact of water / ocean pollution, there is, apparently, little sense of personal or collective responsibility for pollution of water sources and its connection to the destruction of marine life.

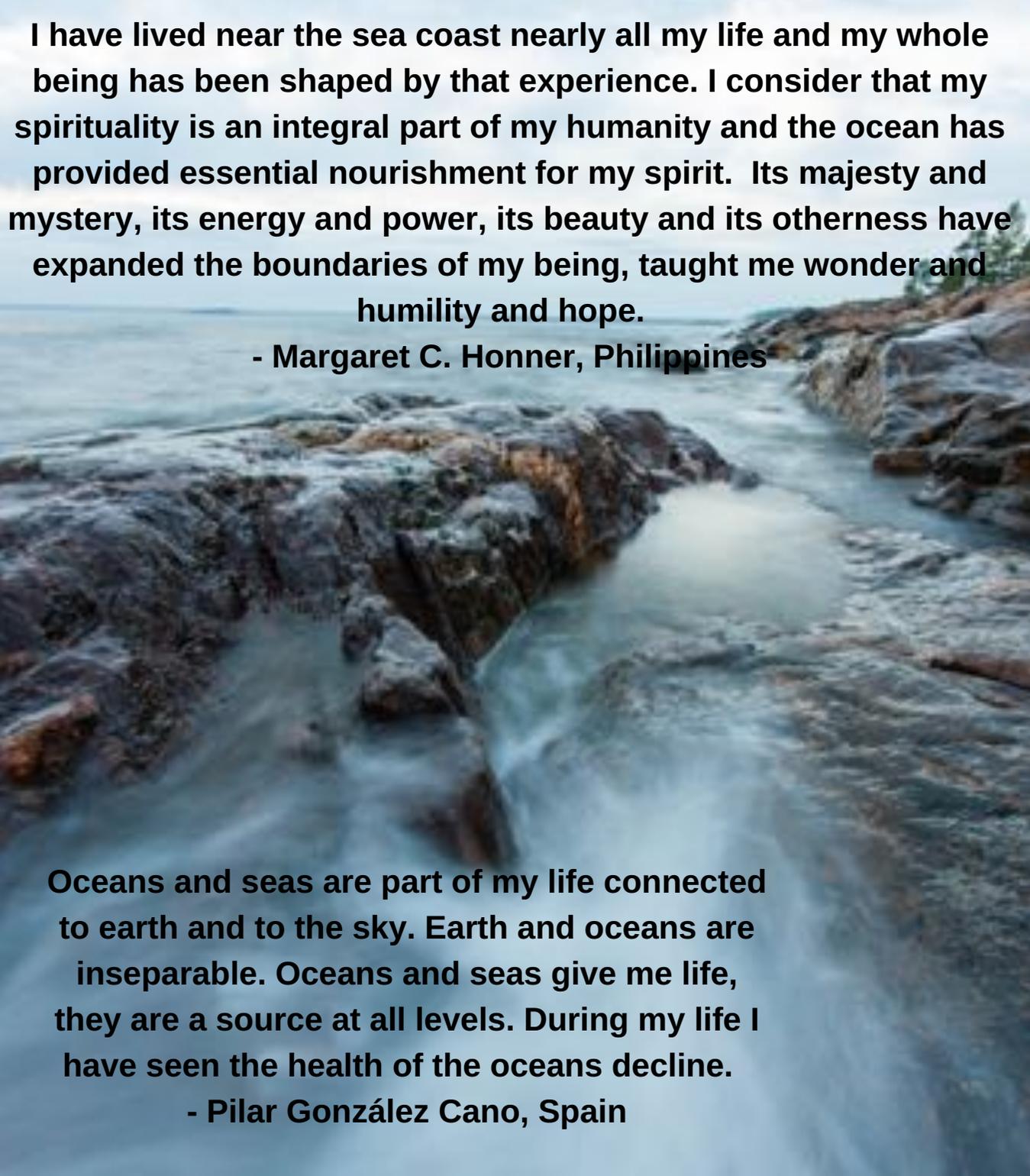
- Pretoria, South Africa Community

The Zambezi River flows past the front of our house and has been subjected to the unusual pollution of fishermen using treated mosquito nets as fishing nets on a vast scale, resulting in depleted supply of fish as well as deformed fish. This is just a microcosm of what is going on in the ocean due to pollution.

- Elizabeth Donnan, Zambia

I don't live near the beach and go there rather rarely. But marine products are part of my daily life: the different types of fish I eat whether fresh or tinned, salt made locally, people I meet who earn their living by fishing or selling fish at the market etc.

- Françoise Le Guen, Mauritius

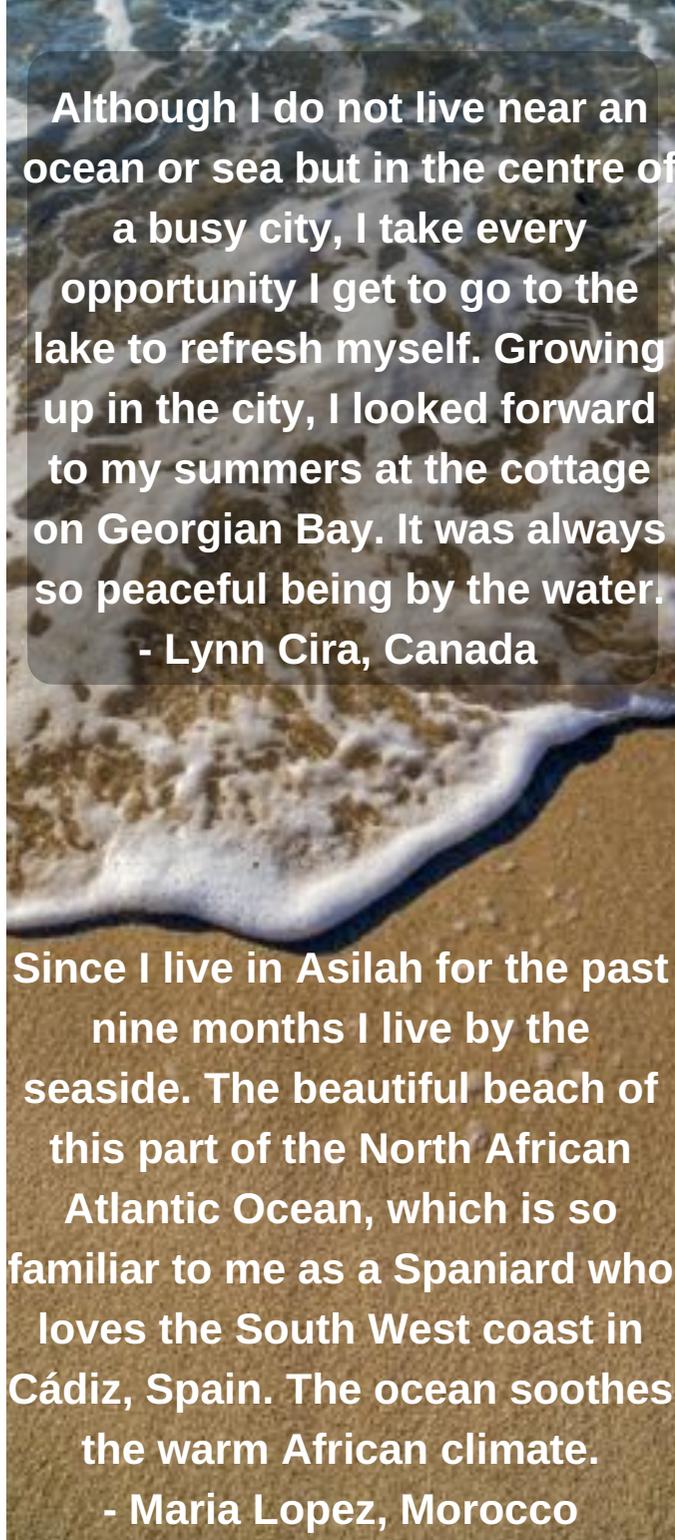


I have lived near the sea coast nearly all my life and my whole being has been shaped by that experience. I consider that my spirituality is an integral part of my humanity and the ocean has provided essential nourishment for my spirit. Its majesty and mystery, its energy and power, its beauty and its otherness have expanded the boundaries of my being, taught me wonder and humility and hope.

- Margaret C. Honner, Philippines

Oceans and seas are part of my life connected to earth and to the sky. Earth and oceans are inseparable. Oceans and seas give me life, they are a source at all levels. During my life I have seen the health of the oceans decline.

- Pilar González Cano, Spain



Although I do not live near an ocean or sea but in the centre of a busy city, I take every opportunity I get to go to the lake to refresh myself. Growing up in the city, I looked forward to my summers at the cottage on Georgian Bay. It was always so peaceful being by the water.

- Lynn Cira, Canada

Since I live in Asilah for the past nine months I live by the seaside. The beautiful beach of this part of the North African Atlantic Ocean, which is so familiar to me as a Spaniard who loves the South West coast in Cádiz, Spain. The ocean soothes the warm African climate.

- María Lopez, Morocco

Threats to the Oceans and Seas

PLASTIC

**Illegal fishing
and
overfishing**

Rising sea
TEMPERATURE

Pollution

Acidification



I believe humans and how they use the oceans and their unwillingness to change has the biggest impact on the health and sustainability of the oceans... Lately there has been a lot in the media about the affect plastics is having on the oceans and marine life. How we use products made of plastic and how we dispose of them needs to change.

Can we get along without them? We did once.

- Lynn Cira, Canada

I am very conscious of the melting of the icecap and the rising of sealevels with the danger of people losing their lives and their homes. I am aware also of the loss to our planet of vast areas of the Great Barrier Reef.

- Una O'Reilly, Wales

Among the major threats to the oceans, I would name the ruthlessness of economic development and governments seeking or encouraging that at all costs. Industries are allowed to pour poison into our waterways and ultimately our oceans, especially in poorer countries, with few effective sanctions.

- Margaret C. Honner, Philippines

In my opinion, the major threat is the plastic pollution and its consequences. 80% of pollution enters the oceans from the land. Life in the oceans and seas is dying because we poison them. If earth is not kept healthy, humans will die.

- Pilar González Cano, Spain



In the middle of the country, there is a major steel factory owned by Taiwan which last year discharged toxic waste directly into the sea. We believe that the government has taken bribes from the company so that it won't be shut down or forced to spend money on fixing the problem. As a result it destroyed fish in a 400 kilometre radius and thus fishermen and their families suffered because they can no longer make a living. They resorted to demonstrations which lead to arrests and imprisonment for a number of the demonstrators, not the company!

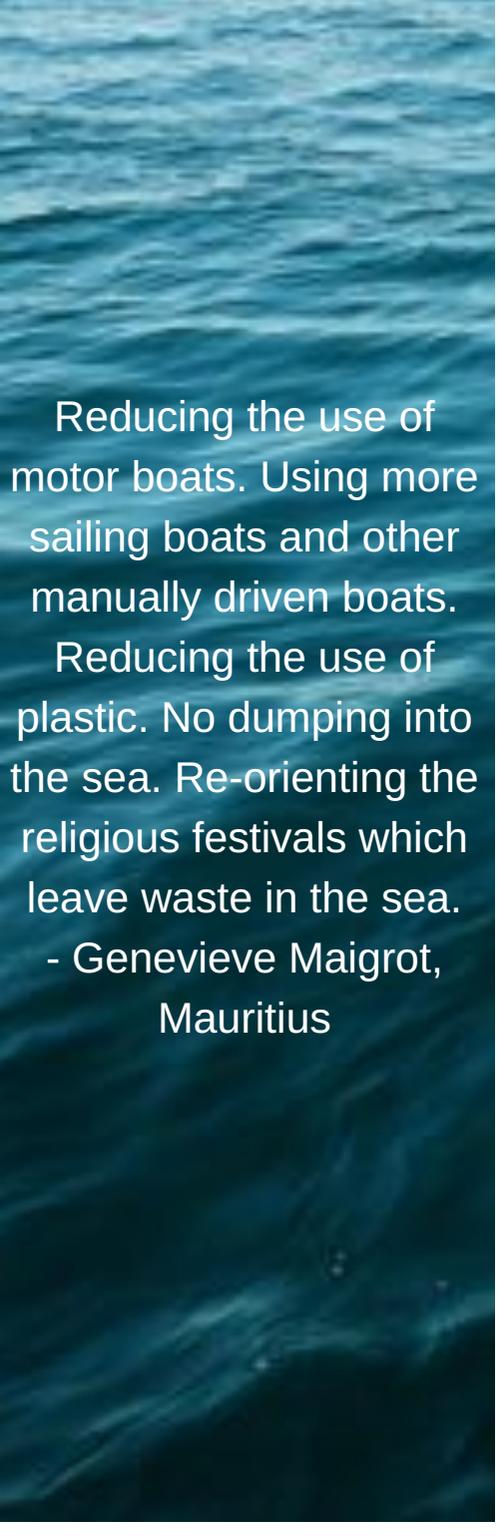
- Vietnam Community

What can we do to improve ocean health and sustainability?



What can we do to remedy some of this? We can feel passionate about it, talk about it, write about it, join others in protesting about it on social media. We can cut down on the use of plastic bags and recycle as much as possible. We can also watch our carbon footprint by trying to save energy in ways as simple as turning off lights and taps, using long-life electric bulbs, etc.

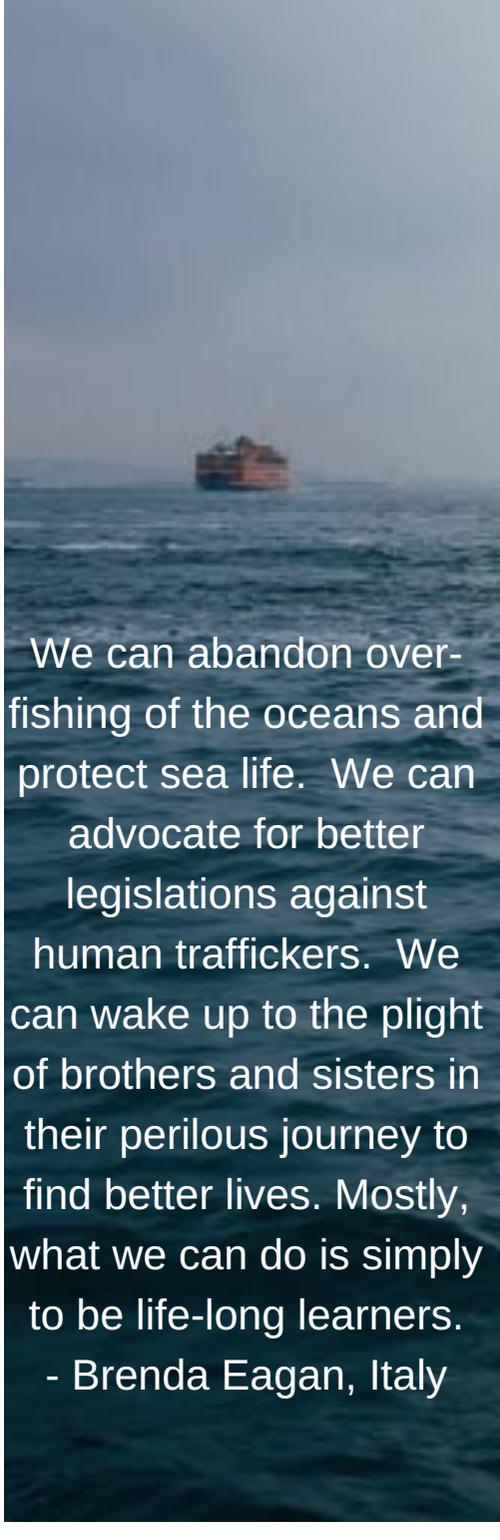
- Una O'Reilly, Wales



Reducing the use of motor boats. Using more sailing boats and other manually driven boats.

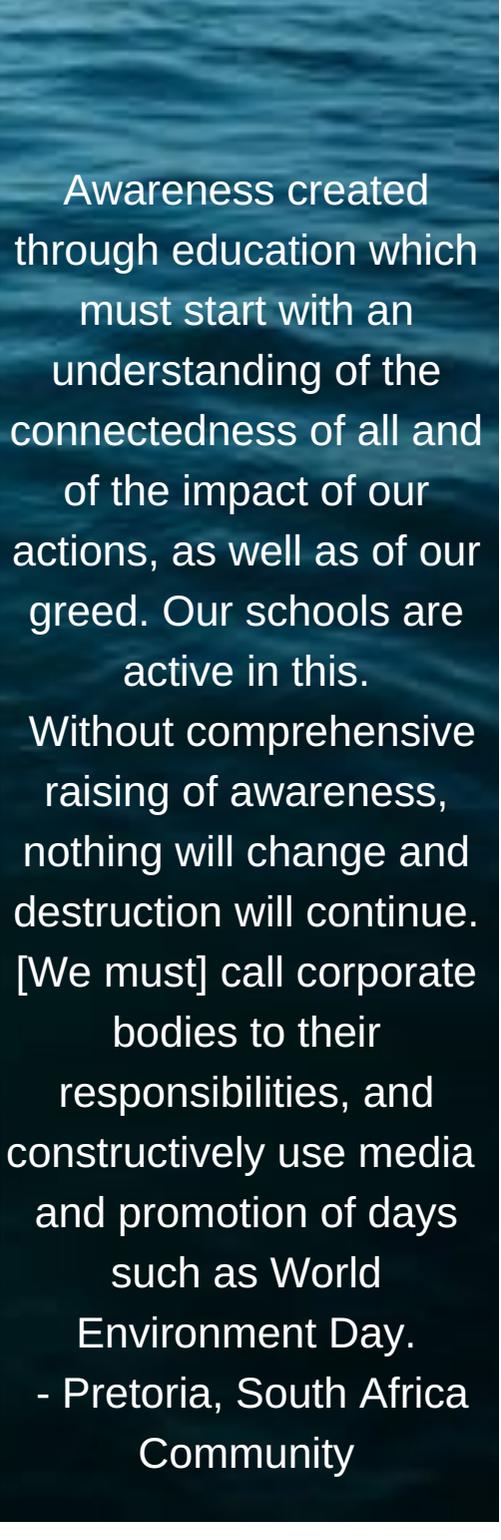
Reducing the use of plastic. No dumping into the sea. Re-orienting the religious festivals which leave waste in the sea.

- Genevieve Maigrot, Mauritius



We can abandon over-fishing of the oceans and protect sea life. We can advocate for better legislations against human traffickers. We can wake up to the plight of brothers and sisters in their perilous journey to find better lives. Mostly, what we can do is simply to be life-long learners.

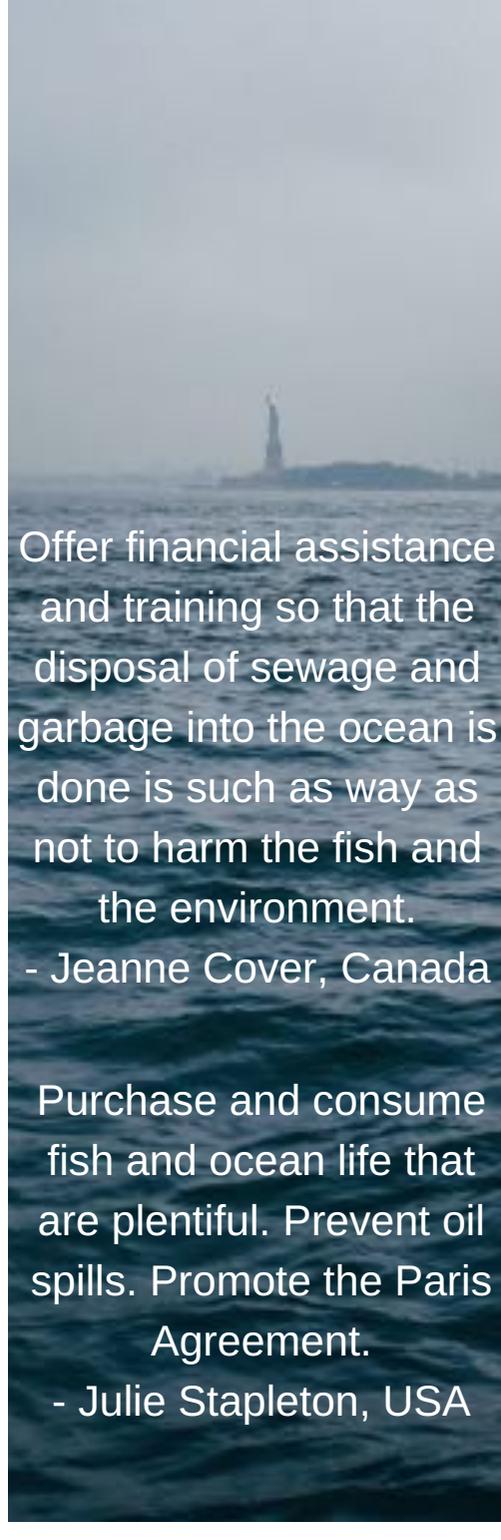
- Brenda Eagan, Italy



Awareness created through education which must start with an understanding of the connectedness of all and of the impact of our actions, as well as of our greed. Our schools are active in this.

Without comprehensive raising of awareness, nothing will change and destruction will continue. [We must] call corporate bodies to their responsibilities, and constructively use media and promotion of days such as World Environment Day.

- Pretoria, South Africa Community



Offer financial assistance and training so that the disposal of sewage and garbage into the ocean is done in such a way as not to harm the fish and the environment.

- Jeanne Cover, Canada

Purchase and consume fish and ocean life that are plentiful. Prevent oil spills. Promote the Paris Agreement.

- Julie Stapleton, USA

Actions for Ourselves and our Governments

Reduce pollution by reusing materials. As an IBVM community, we buy crates of sodas in recyclable glass bottles. All our plastic packaging - bottles, jars, bags at least get a second life. We give most to village communities in the rural areas where there is a high demand for the same and the rest we reuse ourselves. Our glass bottles/jars also get a second life in the villages. Reduction in land and river pollution may indirectly reduce ocean pollution.

- Elizabeth Donnan, Zambia

Shipping needs to be held responsible for its garbage and required to meet protocols for disposing of garbage in officially monitored methods and sites. Littering along shorelines should be a major responsibility of local authorities and communities.

Poverty does prevent people from considering bigger issues and so the imbalance of wealth and poverty add to the problem and need to be addressed as part of the solution. Wealthier countries must take on more responsibility for assisting others with programmes and infrastructure so that there can be a global response.

- Margaret C. Honner, Philippines

Encourage world powers to accept the reality of the human contribution to climate change and take humanly available measures to counter it.

Call on governments to draw up policies and laws to prohibit offshore exploitation and totally ban the use of our waters as test grounds for nuclear and chemical weapons.

Organise workshops to conscientise people on the danger of unhygienic disposal: advocate for environmental friendly governmental and societal policies and undertakings to protect our lands and waters from pollution.

- Mary Agnes Idiong, England

What attitudes do we need?

Developing a stronger relationship with the sea.

Appreciating the role of creatures in the sea in order to respect them more through education.

- Genevieve Maigrot, Mauritius

One attitude required is the desire to become better informed about ocean pollution. Acknowledgement of the interconnected nature of all creation underpins humans taking responsibility for their personal actions to preserve the planet for future generations.

- Elizabeth Donnan, Zambia

Our planet is mostly water. Our bodies are mostly water. Our awareness should be as persistent as our thirst for life. It is in the one drop of water that we build on a conscience that is reflective, honest, and determined to see God in all things.

- Brenda Eagan, Italy

Perhaps it all comes down to living more simply and less wastefully, and cutting down our carbon footprint. If we all chip away at it, as individuals and communities, then change will follow.

- Ewa Bem, Wales

Development of a sense of the Sacred, of RESPECT and REVERENCE.

- Pretoria, South Africa
Community

Be convinced that we are co-creators. Ask for the grace to marvel at such a free and generous gift. To be able to explore it with an inner knowledge. Our responsibility and personal call to care for the sea wherever we are.

- Clotilde De Maroussem,
Morocco

Intensify formation for families and school going students of all ages for a radical change of individualistic mentality into awareness and love of environment that will gradually cause a desire to care for it. It is often a lack of knowledge on the origin of things that causes total disregard and neglect for them. Proper knowledge is often followed by respect and admiration, and therefore care.

- Françoise Le Guen, Mauritius

As Mary Ward women, let us extend our talks and thoughts about participative leadership to the sustainability of our environment. We want to do things together. We must reach out beyond ourselves and immediate communities to extend our hands to all areas and corners of our society and world and work together to protect and preserve our common environment.

- Mary Agnes Idiong, England

We need to have a sense that we are not the owners of our seas and oceans we are simply the current caretakers and it is our duty to protect them for future generations.

- Kate Myers, Wales

For More Information

Visit the UN SDG 14 Website:

<https://oceanconference.un.org/sdg14>

Visit the Ocean Action Hub:

<http://www.oceanactionhub.org>