

An ECOP's perspective on the UN Ocean Decade

I am often asked the question: What is the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development? Typically, my answer is the Ocean Decade is what you make of it. While I am very new to the Ocean Decade, and to Ocean Science in general, I feel confident in that answer. I started my position as a Sea Grant Knauss Fellow working on US Domestic Engagement for the Ocean Decade on February 1, 2023. I have a background in environmental analytical chemistry, and no background in marine science. When I was starting my Knauss Fellowship, I knew I would have an uphill race to learn as much as I could. Not only is the marine science aspect a whole new world for me, my position requires me to understand a lot about science policy and everything Ocean Decade simultaneously.

While I like to think that now, I have my feet under me, and have more situational awareness, there is no way I would have figured it all out on my own. A large part of my confidence in my position comes from having a wonderful mentor, three insightful former Decade Fellows (who left behind an extensive Google Folder that allows me to see all the work that was before me), exceptional colleagues working on the

US International Ocean Decade portfolio, and a whole lot of people who have been willing to chat. The amount of people who have said yes when I have pinged them asking if I could get their opinions and background knowledge floors me. Through my position, I have met so many ocean professionals that have been welcoming, helpful, and supportive. Despite all of that support, it took me a while before I felt comfortable identifying as an Early Career Ocean Professional (ECOP).

However, I am extremely fortunate that I was able to get involved with the United States Early Career Ocean Professional node early on in my fellowship. I was able to join the steering committee team shortly before the public launch and dive in to learning ways that I can help serve as a liaison with Decade Collaborative Centers, given my fellowship position, to connecting with other ECOPs, outside the node, or youth who are not yet at the ECOP stage in their lives. Finding ways to be involved has helped me feel more confident in embracing my status as an Ocean Professional. Especially when I consider that my engagement does not end with my fellowship year and instead is what I decide to make it. I look forward

to how we can expand and involve more ECOPs across the country in the coming months, as well as ways we can engage with the Global ECOP coordinating team to maximize impact.

The Ocean Decade, as a concept, is never easy to explain. Depending on the audience I am speaking to, the aspects I emphasize differ, but one part of my answer on “What is the Ocean Decade?” is constant: The Ocean Decade is what *we* make it. Science does not happen in a vacuum, and it does not happen without the people. While we need the science and knowledge that goes toward protecting and conserving the ocean, the people working to make that happen are the driving force. We make the Ocean Decade.

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