



ECOP
Early Career
Ocean Professionals

COMMUNICATIONS **REPORT** **2023**

Presented By
Natalie Fox
January 2024



Credit: François Baelen / Ocean Image Bank

Contents

Introduction	3
Overview	5
Communications tools and channels	6
Campaigns	12
Additional resources	17
SWOT analysis	18
Recommendations for 2024 and beyond	21

Introduction

The UN Decade of Ocean Ocean for Sustainable Development (UN Ocean Decade) is running from 2021-2030, and, as of July 2023, 970 activities, projects, programmes and contributions have been part of the global framework to achieve “the Science We Need for the Ocean We Want”.



A screenshot of the ECOP Programme's website homepage: [HYPERLINK "http://www.ecopdecade.org"www.ecopdecade.org](http://www.ecopdecade.org)

The Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) Programme was one of the first programmes to be endorsed by the Decade in 2021, and has since worked towards its mission of empowering ECOPs with meaningful networking and professional development opportunities through the framework of the UN Ocean Decade.

This communications report is written by the Communications coordinator, who joined in March 2022. The report covers their second contract with the ECOP Programme and the duration of the consultancy: from 6 March 2023 until 5 December 2023.

There have been many developments within the ECOP Programme during 2023. For a start, the ECOP explanation was updated to include “post-secondary students”, with the new official definition available on the homepage of the website stating: “An ECOP is a person that self-identifies as being early in their career, within 10 years or less of professional experience in any field related to the ocean. This definition includes post-secondary students and any volunteer roles, so not only employed/paid positions. The term ‘professional’ is used in order to be inclusive of professionals from various sectors of society.”

The ECOP Programme has also gone through exponential growth during 2023, increasing its membership from 1500+ ECOPs on the global registry from 100+ countries, to 4080 ECOPs from 162 countries (as of January 2024). There are currently 46 Regional and National Nodes established or in the making plus a new Regional Hub for Ocean Literacy in Asia.



A screenshot of the counter of the homepage of the ECOP Programme

During 2023, members of the ECOP Programme have been part of several events across the World including COP28 in Dubai, and it shows a clear effort from event organizers to integrate Early Career Professionals into high level events and decision making. 2023 also saw the announcement of the Ocean Decade Conference which will take place in Barcelona in April 2024. The support and encouragement offered to ECOPs through the application process has been particularly progressive, and six satellite event proposals submitted by the Global ECOP Programme and its nodes have been accepted, a result that will ensure the ECOP Programme, its team and Early Career Professionals in general will be included extensively in the conference and its outcomes.

The ECOP Programme has received funding for 2024, via IOC-UNESCO and Norad funding mechanisms, and will continue to function through dedicated consultants that help to drive the Programme towards its objectives.

The Medium Term Goals (3-5 years: January 2021 - October 2025) as laid out in the ECOP Programme strategic plan include:

1. Create a global governance structure and network of ECOPs that fosters a sense of community and coordinated action towards achieving the objectives of the Ocean Decade. This structure will include the creation of regional and thematic network nodes worldwide, in collaboration with existing bodies where appropriate.
2. Promote a cultural shift in which institutions formally recognize the value of providing ECOPs with opportunities for professional development related to global ocean sustainability issues and strategic thinking.
3. Secure sources of funding for ECOP related activities throughout the Decade and beyond.

Whilst this introduction briefly shows that results from 2023 are leading the ECOP Programme towards achieving these goals, the rest of this report will breakdown the communications within the ECOP Programme across its various communications channels.

Knowing how the communications work is vital to the operation of the network, from the core team out to the wider audience, and also within the network, striving to make the communications work seamlessly is part of the responsibility of the communications consultant.

A SWOT analysis will follow an overview of the communications flows, to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats within the communications department, before making suggestions for the coming year.

Overview



A diagram of ECOP Programme communications channels and flows of information

The layout of the ECOP Programme communications is as follows. A specific objective for the communications coordinator during 2023 was to transfer the mailing list from Mailchimp to Brevo, and set up this new system. In doing so, the mailing list and global registry would be combined and a monthly system set up for exchanging contacts.

The 2023 objectives of the ECOP communications coordinator role and responsibilities included:

Key cross-cutting functions:

1. Support the ECOP Programme Global Coordinator in the day-to-day implementation of communications activities, ensuring overall integrity and institutional coherence. Draft and edit a wide range of materials, including social media and website content.
2. Design and implement innovative campaign assets, such as visuals, infographics, and other digital content, for sharing information about ECOP Programme existing and new regional and national coordinators and their work, task teams, and overall activities and projects.
3. Systematically monitor and evaluate key communications activities performed by the ECOP Programme, including through social media and web analytics.
4. Assist with the Zoom platform during the ECOP Programme webinar series.

Website and social media:

1. Regularly add and update content for the ECOP Programme website, including preparation of a regular monthly newsletter.
2. Assist the ECOP Programme Global Coordinator in documenting the implementation of the ECOP Programme goals through web stories and video content.
3. Develop and promote short-term social media campaigns to strengthen awareness and key messages among target audiences.

Graphic Design and Video Editing:

1. Assist the ECOP Programme members when required with graphic design and video editing skills.

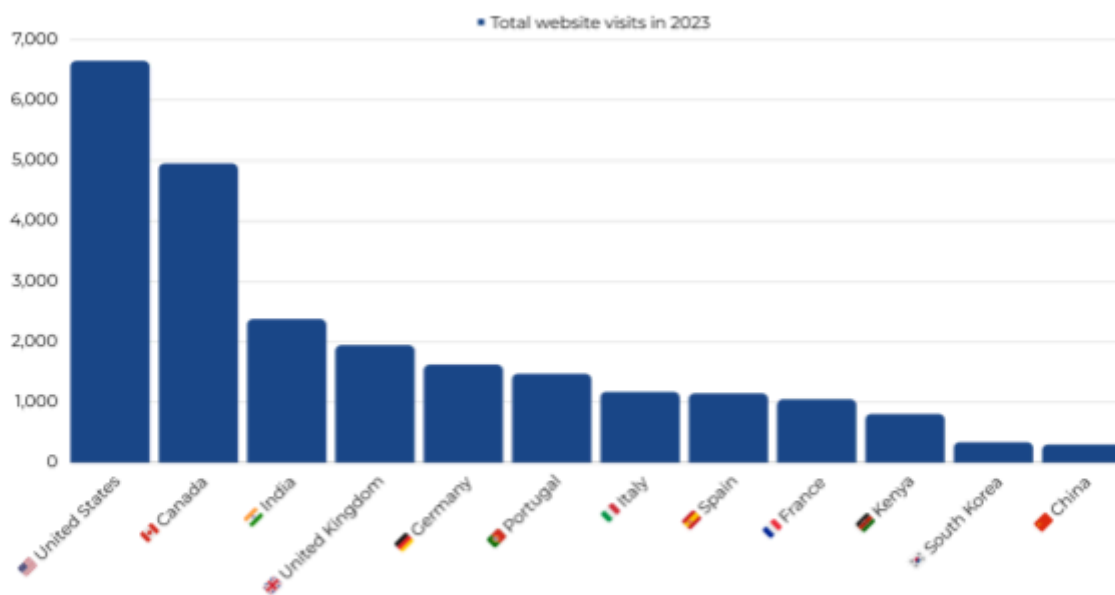
The next section will give an overview of the communications tools and channels: website, newsletter and social media.

Communications tools and channels

WEBSITE

The ECOP Programme website is hosted by DreamHost, on the WordPress platform. In 2023, the website was upgraded to include Elementor Pro, enabling several new design features. There was a content update of the website to accommodate new pages and sections, bearing in mind that the fastest growing part of the Programme is the global network of Nodes, which meant for every new National or Regional Node a new page was created. In 2023, at least 12 new pages were made for new Nodes, and a new UN Ocean Decade section was completed.

For 2023, the most popular pages of the website included: the homepage, the opportunities section (which includes jobs and internships), funding and the mentoring programmes page. The mentoring programme page is a recent addition, compiled by the Training and Mentoring task team, which houses a database of mentoring programmes, across regions, with active links so users can click through to more information and apply. It had over 1000 views during November. In the monthly analytics for the website the top 10 countries users were visiting from is recorded, and below is a graph showing the top 12 for 2023 in total. The United States is where people are visiting from the most, with Canada after that.



Top 12 countries for ECOP Programme website visitors/visits

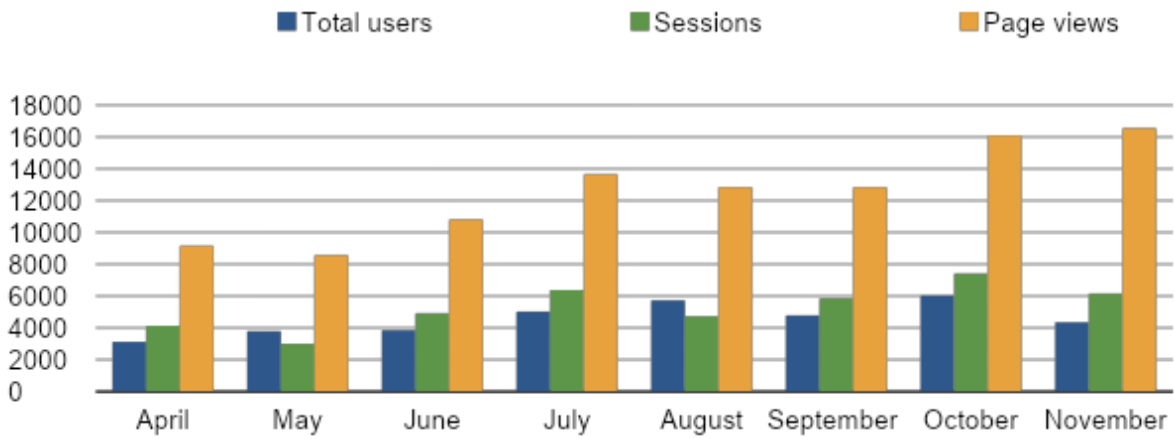
In terms of referrals, visitors tend to click through from the Ocean Decade website the most, followed by LinkedIn, the Brevo newsletter and X (Twitter). The detailed monthly results can be found in the [Monthly Analytics folder](#) in the GDrive.

In November 2023, the ECOP Programme website started experiencing difficulties in loading times and there were also times where the server was down completely. There were several back ups clogging up space, however, with support from DreamHost, these problems seemed to clear up, with the website running at normal speed once again. It was clear the need to stay on top of the user experience - also known as UX - needs to be monitored and that online systems are running smoothly. According to the Google Chrome report there is currently an LCP issue: longer than 4s (desktop). LCP stands for Largest Contentful Paint and measures the time taken by the server to display the largest visible element in the view. Steps can be taken to improve the current loading of content (as it is currently 9.6 seconds for www.ecopdecade.org). Anything longer than 4 seconds is classified as “poor”, with under 2.5 seconds rated as good and capable of improving the Core Web Vital experience.

The Google search console has also recorded a total of 6330 clicks and 180,000 impressions over the last 6 months, with top queries including “ecop”, “ecop canada”, “early career ocean professional(s)” and “ecop programme”. The Google search analytics is not something the communications team regularly monitors but it might be something to watch in the future as it provides key insights into how new users might find the ECOP Programme.

The chart and the graph below, show the increase of users, sessions and pageviews for the ECOP Programme website throughout 2023, with the previous figures taken from the 2022 communications report. The average monthly users, sessions and pageviews, are calculated as 4678 (users), 5315 (sessions) and 12,562 (pageviews), and serve as key indicators that will need to be used over the coming years to track engagement, monitor growth and project realistic targets for the future.

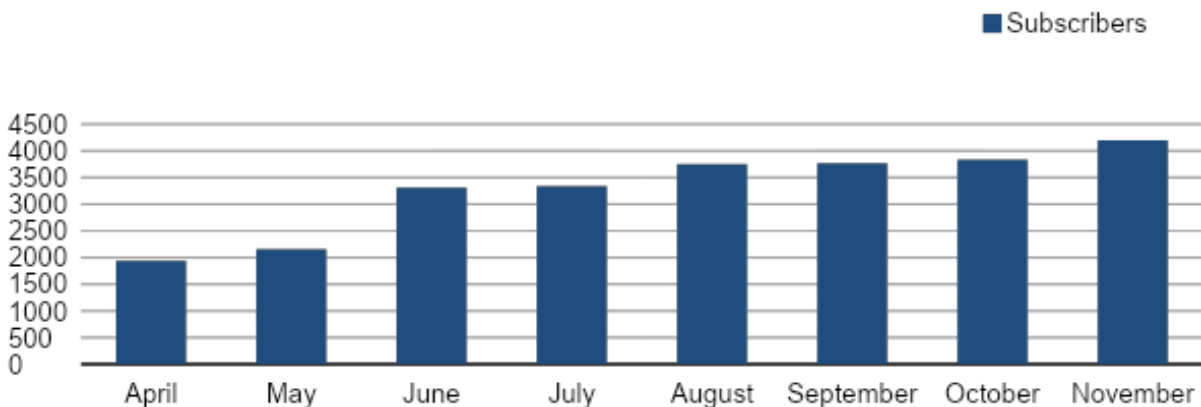
	Total users	Sessions	Pageviews
April	3113	4129	9148
May	3784	2992	8555
June	3845	4903	10,819
July	5015	6369	13, 641
August	5724	4720	12,831
September	4773	5849	12,847
October	6028	7413	16,085
November	4343	6145	16,571
TOTAL	36625	42520	100 497
Growth from April - November	39.5%	48.9%	81%
Growth from 2022 to 2023 (totals)	162%	116%	84%
Average monthly figures for 2023	4578	5315	12,562












NEWSLETTER

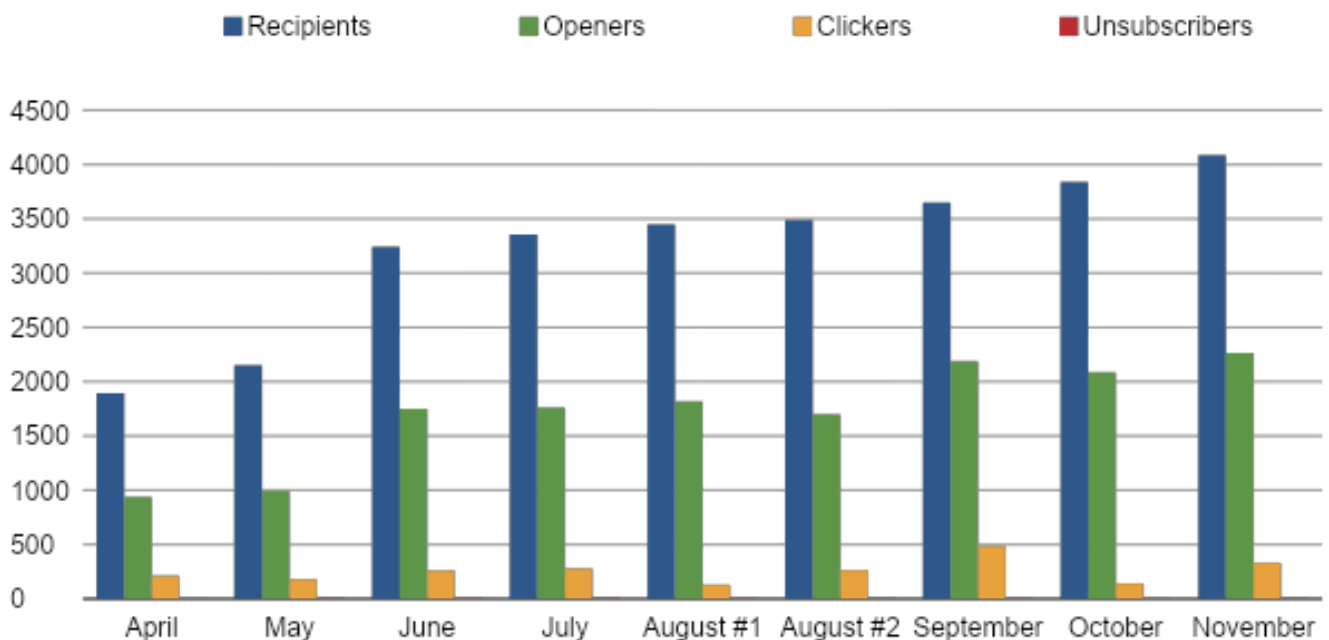
As mentioned, the ECOP Programme newsletter platform changed from Mailchimp to Brevo in 2023, in order to deal with the influx of subscribers and manage an increase in Mailchimp costs (Brevo’s Starter Plan has an allowance of 20,000 emails/month as opposed to Mailchimp’s restricted 3000 contacts). The transfer took place at the end of May and was an opportunity to collate members from the global registry, integrate both systems, as well as putting a sign up form on the home page of the ECOP Programme website. This sign up form allows people to fill in their details and opt into the newsletters, as well as joining the global registry (using a yes/no option to opt in). As you can see from the graph below, subscriber numbers in May and June went from 2153 to 3311, with the additional data proving that the growth rate has been over 100% in 2023.

	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November
Subscribers	1936	2153	3311	3338	3752	3768	3839	4198
NEW Subscribers		217	1158	27	414	16	71	359
Growth rate April - November	116% over 8 months							
Average monthly NEW Subscribers	323 per month over 7 months							



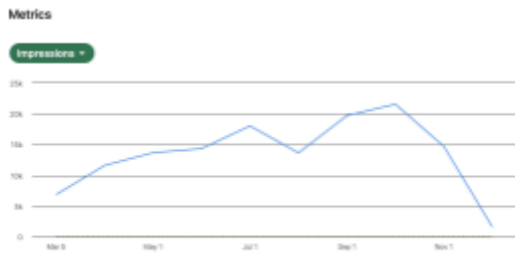
The newsletter content and layout has also changed throughout the year to become more standardised. Each monthly newsletter can be accessed through the link in the table, and whilst unsubscribes are extremely low, both the opening and click rates could be addressed by reviewing and improving the content, format and layout of the newsletter (as well as making sure the emails are going to recipients main inbox).

Newsletter	Sent	Recipients	Openers	Clickers	Unsubscribers
April 	20 April	1896	937	212	2
May 	31 May	2153	994	179	5
June 	7 July	3243	1748	260	3
July 	9 August	3358	1758	278	5
August #1 (events) 	22 August	3448	1818	127	3
August #2 	4 September	3489	1700	265	3
September 	9 October	3651	2186	485	3
October 	6 November	3839	2084	142	2
November 	12 December	4086	2266	330	3



SOCIAL MEDIA

In 2023, LinkedIn took over from Twitter (X) as the ECOP Programme's social media channel with the most followers/subscribers. [Bloomberg reports](#) that LinkedIn users are sharing 41% more content on the network this year, compared to 2021, so this growth is in keeping with current trends and shows there are potentially more opportunities to explore through LinkedIn.



LinkedIn impressions since 5 March 2023



Engagement rate with posts since 5 March 2023

LinkedIn also has no character limit, no restrictions on the photo/graphic format and it uploads videos of up to 15 minutes, so is the quickest and easiest channel when it comes to sharing information and content (with the most engagement). According to LinkedIn analytics the top five locations for ECOP Programme followers are: Lisbon, Portugal: 87 (1.8%), Paris, France: 68 (1.4%), London, United Kingdom: 67 (1.4%), Washington DC, U.S.: 56 (1.1%) and Barcelona, Spain: 50 (1%). During 2023 there were 3061 reactions to ECOP Programme content, 68 comments, 402 reposts and a total of (more than) 135,000 impressions.

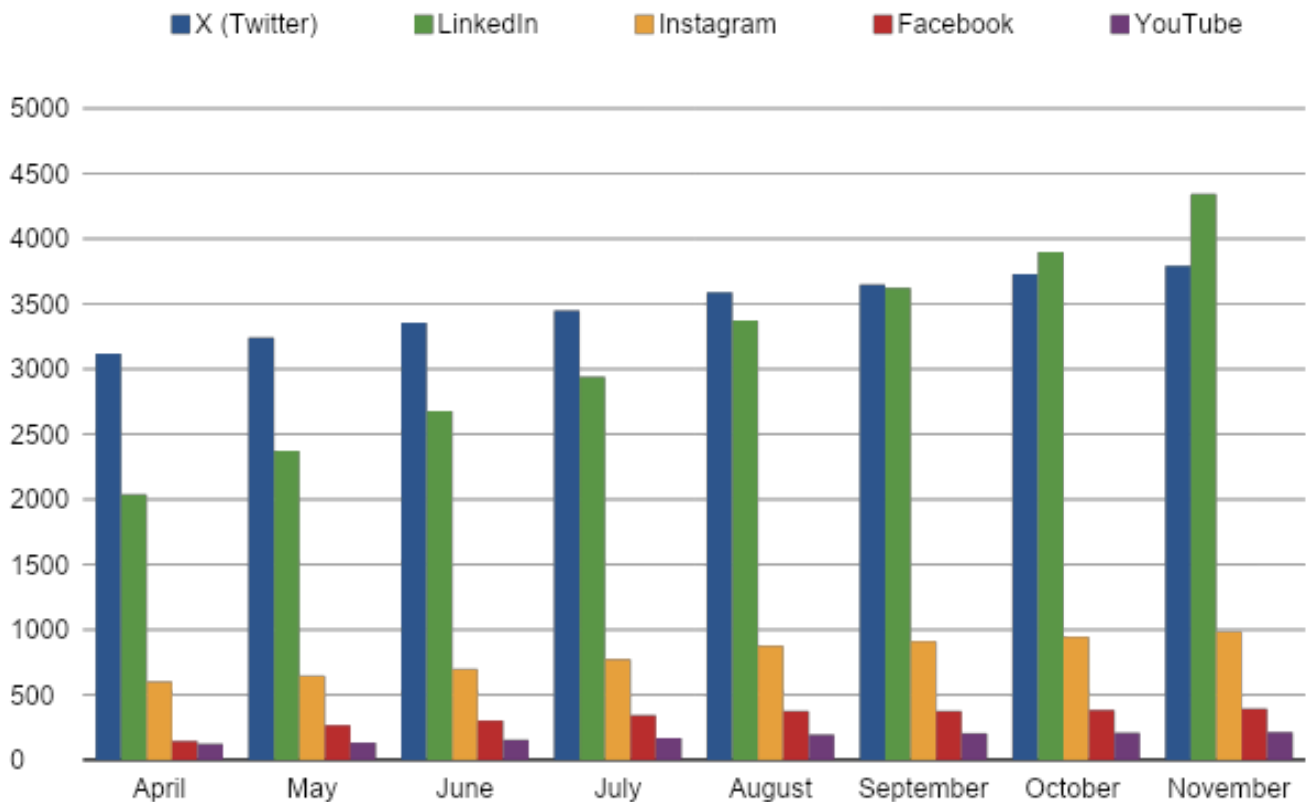
Each channel works slightly differently in terms of format, followers/subscribers, engagement (impressions/visibility/interaction) and measuring engagement, however, posts from Instagram can be shared directly to Facebook, as well as managed, through the Meta platform.

At the moment, the ECOP Programme monthly reports are only tracking engagement through followers/subscribers and doesn't go further into individual posts or other analytics, yet this might be something to track in the future.

In terms of when and what is posted, it tends to be 3-4 times a week, depending on what content is available or news there is to share. Planning and scheduling to make posting more consistent, will likely contribute to steady growth, rather than a drop in visibility when no one is posting (if consultants are between contracts) as well as making it easier to track impact.

	X (Twitter)	LinkedIn	Instagram	Facebook	YouTube
April	3117	2040	602	146	124
May	3241	2373	646	268	134
June	3356	2676	698	303	155
July	3449	2941	774	344	169
August	3589	3372	877	376	195
September	3649	3621	912	376	205
October	3728	3899	946	384	209
November	3791	4344	985	394	214
Growth rate 2023	21.6%	113%	63.6%	170%	72.5%
Growth 2022 - Nov 2023	*(2652) 43%	*(1188) 265%	*(349) 182%	*(85) 363%	*(85) 152%

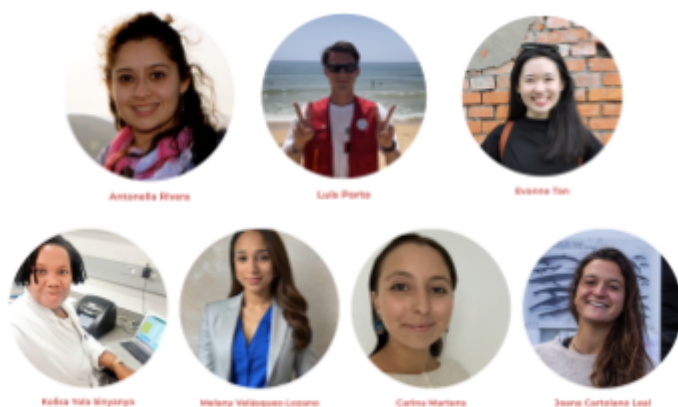
Table of figures for all social media channels from April until the end of November. **(Refers to Nov 2022 figures)*



Campaigns

ECOP STORIES

ECOP Stories is a series that started in 2021 to showcase the diverse community of Early Career Ocean Professionals and their work, from around the world. Throughout 2023, the ECOP Programme featured 7 new ECOP Stories on its website. This included ECOPs from Honduras, Portugal, South Africa, Colombia, Germany and Malaysia, working across the fields of coral reef protection, media, biochemistry, ocean literacy, communications, marine biology and ecotoxicology research. The ratio of female to male was 6:1, so there is a need to make sure there is equal representation going forward.



The seven ECOPs who took part in ECOP stories



New style of graphics

Whilst the original concept was to alternate between written and video interviews, only 1 of these participants were able to record a video (which was in fact recorded personally by the consultant), which means the series is predominantly in written format. The graphics were updated with a new design template to be more attractive.

On a regional basis, the Japan Node was inspired to begin their own “ECOP stories”, as the first ECOP to be featured was Aoi Sugimoto, a Japanese social scientist. Their series developed into Japan Video Letters and included interviews with 6 more Japanese ECOPs across different fields. The consultant was responsible for working with the Japan team to add the English subtitles into the videos and upload them onto a YouTube playlist, as well as displaying them on the Japan National Node page on the ECOP Programme website.

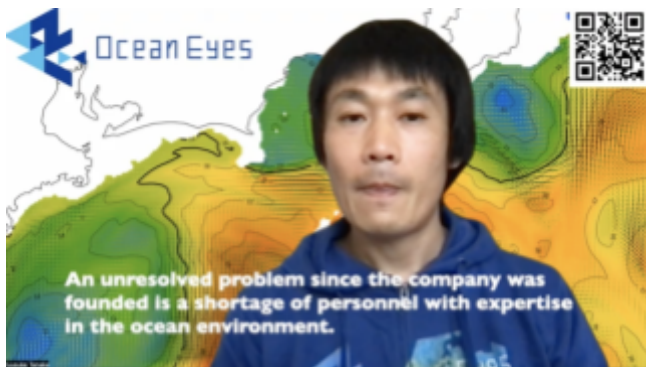
JAPAN VIDEO LETTERS



Poster for ECOP Japan

Whilst most ECOP Programme Regional and National Nodes are yet to establish communications outlets or content series of their own, ECOP Japan have created their own video interviews with Japanese Early Career Ocean Professionals. The series began with Aoi Sugimoto, who was also the first ECOP Stories participant, and in 2023 six more video letters were edited (including adding English subtitles) and released on the ECOP Programme YouTube channel and ECOP Japan Node page (on the ECOP Programme website).

To further promote this series and attract viewers to visit the videos, ECOP Programme intern Dhriti was tasked with designing digital posters. Dhriti pulled out key points from the interviews and used these quotes in the poster design, which was then approved by the Japan Node coordinating team.



Yusuke Tanaka, Ocean Eyes Co., Ltd



Kazura Koda, Mitsui O.S.K.Lines (MOL)

ECOPS ENVISION



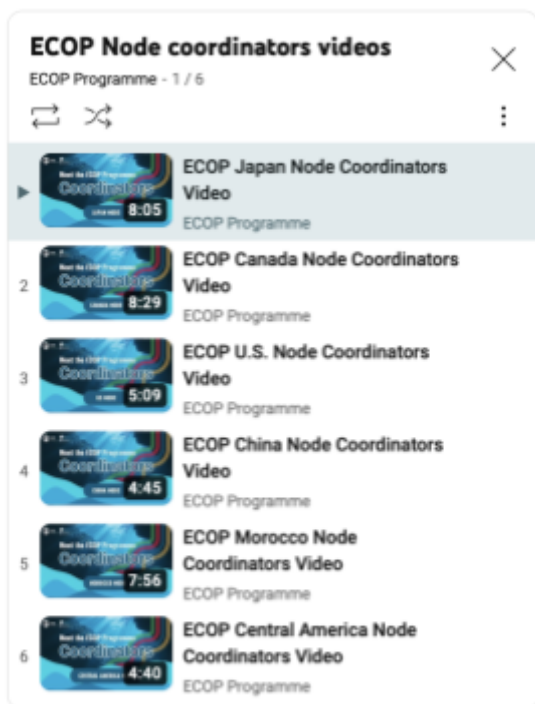
Compilation of ECOPs Envision photos, with participants holding up a graph of their own quote.

The ECOPs Envision campaign aimed to raise awareness of the ECOP Programme’s second anniversary (on 7 June 2023), to provide something interactive for members of the community to take part in and to also highlight the seven Ocean Decade outcomes, and how ECOPs in particular, are working towards them. The photos were shared as a reel on [instagram](https://www.instagram.com) and also on the main grid (the portrait format and sizing is specific to Reels).

Participants of the ECOPs Envision campaign also sent in videos (filmed in a landscape format), which were edited together and shared via the ECOP Programme [YouTube](#) channel.



Watch the ECOPs envision video by clicking the link (the graphic) above



MEET THE COORDINATORS VIDEO CAMPAIGN

In August 2023, coordinators of ECOP Programme Nodes were invited and encouraged to record an informative and engaging video to share updates with viewers regarding what has been happening in their Nodes.

The videos from Canada, Central America, China, Japan, Morocco and the United States were uploaded to YouTube and then released during September across LinkedIn and Twitter. The videos were also added to the respective Node pages on the website and provided a personal introduction to the ECOPs, their goals and objectives for the Node and how those who would like to join can get involved. There is hope to keep this campaign open and for more Nodes and coordinators to record and send their videos in 2024.

YouTube playlist of Node Coordinators Videos

MY COASTLINE

The “My Coastline” campaign was designed to connect with the wider ECOP community, and through video submissions learn about where they live - including the threats and issues surrounding their coastline - and what they are doing to help their local “blue spaces”.

In order to communicate to participants what they needed to provide for the campaign, a Google form was made which included questions to prompt them to discuss their connection to their coastline, explain what was happening there and discuss the work they are doing to monitor, conserve, protect or restore their coastline.

Participants were from Italy, Portugal, Madagascar and Nigeria (two were originally from Germany and UK), and they were working across different fields: policy, coastal management, art, oceanography and blue carbon (mangrove restoration). The first round of videos were released in September, which were shared on LinkedIn and Twitter, and live permanently on the ECOP Programme website on the Campaigns page. In October, the campaign opened for a second round of participants, however, there were less responses this time despite following up with those that had filled in the form. These ECOPs were from Sudan and Senegal, and their videos were shared in December. Two more videos have since been uploaded to the GDrive folder from participants in Madagascar and Kenya, and will be edited and added to the campaign in early 2024.



The My Coastline series, with matching graphics, as designed by ECOP Programme intern Mhairi

OCEAN DECADE ECOPS

Following on from the 2022 Ocean Decade ECOPs campaign, which focussed on the UN Ocean Decade's 10 challenges, the Ocean Decade ECOPs campaign for 2023 used the 7 ocean outcomes as a way to share how ECOPs are integral part of the Ocean Decade framework.

The ECOP Programme reached out to 7 ECOPs (some who had participated in previous campaigns) to profile them as Early Career Ocean Professionals working towards: a clean ocean, a healthy and resilient ocean, a productive ocean, a predicted ocean, a safe ocean, an accessible ocean and an inspiring and engaging ocean.

The participants had a slightly broader representation, location wise, coming from: France (working in Hawaii), Costa Rica, Tanzania, South Korea, Italy, Bermuda and Canada.

The Ocean Decade ECOPs graphic was shared across all channels, included in the final newsletter of 2023 and shared with the featured ECOPs so they could also be proud to share in their networks.

To conclude the year, the final “end of the year campaign” gathered all the 2023 achievements of the ECOP Programme into one infographic to showcase its impact. With so much growth happening, especially geographically across Regional and National Nodes, it was difficult to encapsulate the expansion fairly and accurately; yet this issue also helped to inspire a better visual graphic of the Ocean Regional and National Nodes, made by the Regional Node coordinator for Asia.

2023 IMPACT

2023 has been a busy and productive year, full of growth for the Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) Programme, during which we reached a milestone number of members in our network:

4080 ECOPs from 162 countries

X46 REGIONAL AND NATIONAL NODES
Established or in the making

X64 TASK TEAMS

X86 ENDORSED PROJECTS

Including x2 Ocean Literacy Regional Hubs

ECOP engagement

- 36,000+ website users, 42,000+ sessions, 100,000+ pageviews
- 4198 subscribers, 10 newsletters sent to 25,000+ recipients
- 3791+ followers, 90,000+ tweet impressions
- 4344 followers, 2000+ unique visitors, 5550+ page views
- 400+ followers, 3900+ reach, 1400+ profile visits
- 214 subscribers, 4900+ views, 126k impressions, 180 hours of watch time
- 1527 members in the Ocean Decade Network group

Our opportunities section includes jobs, internships, mentoring programmes, funding opportunities, events and ECOP Programme internships. We released 3 reports featuring the analysis of regional and national assessments, and an embarking handbook for coordinators and local partners.

We showcased ECOPs & their work through social media campaigns: 7 new ECOP Stories, Ocean Decade ECOPs, Meet our coordinators, ECOPs' advice "My coastline"

Capacity development: We ran 2 trainings on data analysis with 8 in cooperation with OceanTeacher Global Academy and trained 83 participants (867 applications in total). We hosted (and co-hosted) 28 webinars, seminars and online events. We welcomed a total of 9 interns.

www.ecopdecade.org

End of the year infographic

MEET EARLY CAREER OCEAN PROFESSIONALS ACHIEVING "THE SCIENCE WE NEED" WITH A VISION OF 2030

OCEAN DECADE ECOPs

Ocean Decade Outcome 1: where sources of pollution are identified and reduced or removed.
Astred runs "STORAGE" (an ECOP Programme endorsed project) which is conducting repeated field surveys on plastic on beaches in Hawaii. STORAGE will help evidence-based decision making and inform targeted beach clean-ups, providing a 'last chance' to remove temporarily beached plastic before it is released into the vast ocean.

A CLEAN OCEAN **ASTRED DELORME EUROPE/HAWAII**

Ocean Decade Outcome 2: where marine ecosystems are understood, protected, restored and managed.
Diego is co-coordinator of the Costa Rica National Node within the Central America Regional Node of the ECOP Programme. He is currently studying a Masters in Marine Biology at the University of Costa Rica, collaborates in and leads projects that support the understanding of the abundance and spatial distributions of sharks, rays and bony fishes.

A HEALTHY AND RESILIENT OCEAN **DIEGO PALLAS MADRIGAL COSTA RICA**

Ocean Decade Outcome 3: supporting sustainable food supply and a sustainable ocean economy.
Nancy is a marine scientist, coral restoration expert as well as co-founder and Chief Executive Officer of Healthy Seaweed Cafe, an award winning social enterprise that innovates diverse seaweed for food products in Tanzania while improving the lives of women seaweed farmers. As a One Young World ambassador Nancy is sharing about the power of seaweed on the global stage.

A PRODUCTIVE OCEAN **NANCY BABA TANZANIA**

Ocean Decade Outcome 4: where society understands and can respond to changing ocean conditions.
Minkyoung Kim is part of the Coordination Unit for the ECOP Programme's South Korea Node. As an ocean biogeochemist, currently working at Kyungpook National University, she is using radiocarbon and lipid biomarkers to research ocean carbon and biogeochemical cycling, and contribute to the Southern Ocean Observing System (SOOS).

A PREDICTED OCEAN **MINKYOUNG KIM SOUTH KOREA**

Ocean Decade Outcome 5: where life and livelihoods are protected from ocean-related hazards.
Nicolo Di Tullio is a PhD Candidate in Management - Sustainability, Innovation, Healthcare at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies. Nicolo's passion for marine science and watersports has culminated in a career that involves protecting his local coastline, and engaging in local government and policy through his role as President of the Consortium for Genova Ocean Agora.

A SAFE OCEAN **NICOLO DI TULLIO ITALY**

Ocean Decade Outcome 6: with open and equitable access to data, information and technology and innovation.
Noelle is co-host of the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute Youth Climate Summit (2022-23), a weeklong event uniting over 150 students from schools across Bermuda. As founder of non-profit SALTED: Supporting Advanced Learners in Technology and Eco-Development, she is focussing on nurturing STEAM-passionate women and girls to succeed in ocean science, despite barriers they may face.

AN ACCESSIBLE OCEAN **NOELLE YOUNG BERMUDA**

Ocean Decade Outcome 7: where society understands and values the ocean in relation to human wellbeing and sustainable development.
Morone is a newly appointed Advisory board member for ECOP Canada as well as being a deep-sea explorer and oceanographer. She is the founder of "The Imaginative Scientist", a science communication and creative consulting brand. Her sci-comms blend traditional outreach and artistry to produce an audience-first approach that engages, invites and inspires curiosity.

AN INSPIRING AND ENGAGING OCEAN **MORONE HARRIS CANADA**

JOIN THE ECOP COMMUNITY: **WWW.ECOPDECADE.ORG**

Poster for OceanDecadeECOPs

Additional resources

WEBINARS

The Communications consultant also assisted in the ECOP Programme webinar series - creating the different promotional materials for episodes 6 - 12. They were also the host for episodes 7 and 9. Whilst organising and delivering the webinars comes under the remit of the Training and Mentoring task team, the consultant worked with the team to make sure the online events were promoted and the recording shared.



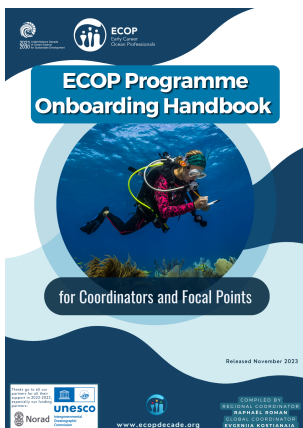
Five of the seven webinars that were held in 2023, as displayed on [HYPERLINK "http://www.ecopdecade.org/webinars"](http://www.ecopdecade.org/webinars) www.ecopdecade.org/webinars.

It took approximately 2 months to arrange, promote, deliver, upload and share the recordings of each webinar (on average, although some webinars were held much closer together than 2 months). It is a good starting point to see if there is capacity to maintain or increase this number in 2024, and work alongside the Training and Mentoring team to reach their goals and objectives.

INTERNSHIPS

In 2023, the ECOP Programme was joined by 9 interns in total, four of which assisted in the communications department. Their assignments included formatting for the covers of reports, making the graphics to promote them, developing infographics for the results of the Asia, India, Africa and China surveys, working on the event calendar and creating a poster series advertising Japan's Video Letters.

REPORTS AND SURVEYS



Five reports were released in 2023, featuring results from regional and national surveys across Africa, Asia, Canada, China and India. These reports shared vital insights and provided an analysis by coordinators to help strategically plan the next stages for their Nodes. In addition, several new surveys were released for ECOPs in or from: Japan, Latin America and Caribbean, South Korea, Germany, Spain and Malaysia. An onboarding handbook for node coordinators and focal points was released on 30 November 2023, designed to assist anyone running or looking to set up an ECOP Programme node or thematic hub at the National or Regional level. The communications team supported these by designing the cover graphics and promotional material, as well as sharing across the ECOP Programme channels.

SWOT analysis

This report has provided an overview of many of the tasks, activities and workload carried under the duration of the communications consultancy. The following section will provide a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to evaluate these four factors, and act as a useful tool to be able make more informed decisions and if conducted on a regular basis, will help the ECOP Programme develop a more strategic and informed approach to communication efforts, ultimately enhancing its effectiveness in achieving long term goals.

STRENGTHS

It is clear that from the exponential growth of its membership base (newsletter subscribers and global registry members) that the ECOP Programme provides a unique and valuable service to Early Career Ocean Professionals who are in need of mentoring, networking, funding, training and capacity development opportunities. Establishing feedback loops (such as Regional and National surveys) to help inform Regional and National Node coordinators, is highly necessary to guide the expansion of the programme in the right direction, and consider cultural and geographical differences and variations. There has been steady, continual and organic growth across the Regional and National Nodes, and looking ahead to 2024, it appears this trend will continue.

The 2023 ECOP Programme communication campaigns have been particularly successful by positively impacting and supporting the growth of the ECOP Programme, attracting new members and raising its profile as a leading network among Early Career Ocean Professionals, whilst utilising the new social media channels and the followers that come from them.

Communications systems and workflows are improving as coordinators get more accustomed to working with each other and the available resources. It was a smart move to transfer the newsletter platform and it's important to keep an overview of all the tools, channels and platforms to make sure that they are working *for* the ECOP Programme and not slowing it down. There are many ways for ECOPs to engage in the ECOP Programme; from the website to newsletter, to global registry, to social channels, to the Ocean Decade Network; it is crucial to make sure the ECOP Programme is ahead when it comes to identifying new avenues of growth (like LinkedIn's popularity increase) and potential challenges (such as the change from Twitter to X).

The ECOP Programme had some fantastic interns helping to produce content, develop ideas and produce materials to support the communications, as well as ECOPs who are part of different Regional and National Nodes contributing to the sharing of information through their own channels and networks. The ECOP Programme professional network continues to grow, and a number of partnerships have been strengthened in 2023, particularly with host institution IOC-UNESCO and The UN Ocean Decade coordination team - including being featured in the Ocean Decade newsletters and publications.

WEAKNESSES

Whilst the website content has evolved and will continue to grow, the functionality of the website, specifically its long loading time and the fact that the server has been down on several occasions in 2023, is a considerable challenge the ECOP Programme will need to address. If the website is unreliable, it will impact user experience and could endanger people spending time on there, limiting their access to resources or signing up to their specific National/Regional Nodes. There are plenty of ways to tackle this, which are suggested in the next section.

Aside from newsletters and campaigns, there was a lack of forward planning, strategy and coordination for social posting and growing the social media channels, mainly because there just wasn't enough time. Posts were made as and when there was information to be shared. However, going forward it is recommended to create a social media strategy and factor into the whole process of the posting (planning, creating, scheduling and sharing content) to make best use of resources, save time and provide a roadmap for online presence, help navigate the complexities of different platforms whilst ensuring consistency, engagement, and measurable success.

As with any organisation, exponential growth can be both exciting and challenging, yet managing exponential growth requires a balance between innovation and stability, to harness the potential of such growth without being knocked off course by it. With the ECOP Programme having gone from 3 Nodes initially to 46, there are many new coordinators, members and activities to keep up with. The internal structure and communications systems, in particular, need to be scalable and regularly reassessed to adapt to changing circumstances, having enough time or human resources to complete tasks is also a challenge to navigate.

OPPORTUNITIES

The main system used for sharing documents is GSuite and Google Drive, and there are also other online tools available to use for free, such as the calendar, photo sharing, chat and workspaces. Aligning communications systems is vital to allow the streamlining of work flows and now that the systems are in place, training and guiding core members on how to exchange information as efficiently as possible.

There are plenty of workflow platforms that could assist the agile and remote team to work more efficiently, exploring them would be a possibility to design internal communications for further growth.

Canva has been one of the most used tools for creating graphics and materials for the ECOP Programme, as it is extremely fast and affordable (the Communication consultant pays for Canva Pro) and has the options of building teams and sharing designs and templates. There is also potential to incorporate AI, and to design and create content

The [Trello board](#) that the Ocean Decade team uses is a great place for digital, visual resources and could be something that the ECOP Programme could employ to share graphics with other coordinators. The [Ocean Image Bank](#) has also provided many of the high quality images used in promotional materials, and continues to be a fantastic free resource that helps new content to be created.

As we look at the targets for 2023, we can see the main channels have reached or nearly reached their targets (with the exception of Facebook and YouTube) - the question is: **now what?** There will be some important questions to ask at the beginning of 2024. What is more important? Growth rate or member satisfaction? How can we measure member satisfaction? How can we

mitigate and manage growth? What tools do we need? What resources do we need to update or secure? What are the priorities for the ECOP Programme moving forward?

A key opportunity in 2024 will be The Ocean Decade Conference, and with 6 events already confirmed (that the ECOP Programme is co-hosting with other partners) there will be many things to coordinate. How the information regarding events will reach members of the ECOP community will need to be organised, as well as an overall strategy developed regarding ECOP Programme engagement at the conference including clarifying objectives, identifying risks, optimising resources, strategically planning along a realistic timeline and measuring outcomes and impacts.

Going from online to in-person events will be a big step forward for the ECOP Programme, but will mark a milestone in its external communications, especially as the Programme was launched during the Pandemic and was still affected by Covid-19 during the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in 2022. The ECOP Programme has not had any opportunities to gather its core team together in person or hold any of its own in person events as yet. 2024 will be a significant year for the team and the global ECOP community to network, build working relationships and work together to achieve ECOP Programme objectives during live events in Barcelona.

THREATS

It is important that all members of the core team, coordinators, interns and task team members know and understand what the ECOP Programme is, understand its goals, objectives and activities and are able to direct how others might be able to get involved. They are the bridge between the organisation and the global ECOP community.

The onboarding handbook for node coordinators and focal points is an important new resource for learning about how to set up or run a Node, however, without in person or online sessions to run through the handbook, items could be missed or misunderstood.

As the ECOP Programme starts to branch out further, certain Nodes and Hubs might have more specific goals, yet it is vital that they adhere to the global ECOP Programme vision, mission, policies and still integrate themselves into the wider network. How best can they be supported to communicate clearly, concisely and correctly about the ECOP Programme, is a question the communications team should be prepared to answer and develop the tools to help them do so.

In 2024, it is important to check that we are up to date with relevant policies (such as cookies and GDPR), updating if necessary as well as developing content release forms for anyone that features in ECOP Programme campaigns and communications, such as blog posts, photos or videos. A simple disclaimer form, with a digital signature would suffice.

As mentioned, the Ocean Decade Conference is a huge opportunity during 2024, but this also might mean that work priorities will change. There are also challenges linked to this event taking place in Barcelona on 8-12 April 2024 — finding the resources, dedicating enough time to planning and supporting core team members from the Global South to attend the conference will be some of the hurdles the ECOP Programme and communications team will need to surmount.

OVERVIEW OF 2023 TARGETS

This table shows the KPIs for 2022 and 2023, and whether the ECOP Programme was successful in reaching its targets. It is time to consider what to be aiming for in 2024, considering the growth rate of the various channels, available resources and the proposed communications strategy for 2024.

	November 2022	Key Performance Indicators	Dec 2023 Target		December 2023	December 2024 Targets*
Website	3704	Users	6000*	✗	2528	*7000
Mailing list	1151	Subscribers	3000	✓	4243	8000
Twitter	2656	Followers	4000	✗	3821	4500
LinkedIn	1188	Followers	2000	✓	4602	10,000
Instagram	349	Followers	1000	✓	1080	3000
Facebook	85	Followers	1000	✗	405	1000
YouTube	85	Subscribers	1000	✗	216	1000

*The ECOP Programme did reach this target in October 2023, with 6028 website users recorded

*Average monthly users worked out over the year. ie. 4578 Users for 2023, calculated in December.

Recommendations for 2024 and beyond

In this final section, you can find the recommendations that take into the SWOT analysis and lay out the steps recommended for the next year within the communications and engagement area of the ECOP Programme.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Meet with the ECOP Programme Global Coordinator to identify priorities for the year ahead, fill in the targets for 2024, deciding upon KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and highlight metrics that will be used to measure success (do we use the same or choose different indicators across the different channels, is it more about in person engagement, new partnerships or successful funding bids?)

Working from the aims outlined by the ECOP Programme Global Coordinator, create a communications strategy that includes SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) goals, laying out the communications objectives for the next year.

The original communications strategy for the ECOP Programme is available [here](#), but was published in 2021 and therefore, it is imperative that it is updated and that adequate time is given to this planning and preparation. Use this framework to brainstorm and design a new communications strategy that reflects the current status of the ECOP Programme.

Whilst the communications strategy is being compiled, release a survey to ECOP Programme members in order to identify their choices, needs, challenges and satisfaction when it comes to

current communications tools (website, newsletter, social media channels), and gain feedback, particularly from Node coordinators to help inform the communications strategy.

The communications strategy should include: Vision/mission, assessment of current communications (2023 report), objectives, audience breakdown, key messages, communications channels, work plan (including social media strategic plan), success metrics and milestones. The results of the survey should also be presented in the communications strategy to help inform audience demographics, feedback and identify future objectives.

WEBSITE OPTIMISATION

The website issues will need to be looked at and suggestions include:

1. Optimise Images:

- Compress images without compromising quality. Tools like TinyPNG or ImageOptim can help.
- Use the appropriate file format (JPEG for photographs, PNG for graphics with transparency, and SVG for scalable vector graphics).

2. Minimise HTTP Requests:

- Reduce the number of elements on each page, such as images, scripts, and stylesheets, to minimise the number of HTTP requests.

3. Enable Browser Caching:

- Set up your server to leverage browser caching. This allows returning visitors to load your site faster as certain resources are stored locally.

There are plenty of tutorials online, [like this one](#), or an Udemy course which teaches “[Non Techies Wordpress Speed Optimization](#)”, there are also [experts on Fiverr](#) who will deliver this service from 40 euros. It is suggested to remove WP Forms which is currently attracting a lot of spam on the contact page; and design and embed a different way for users to make enquiries, so that they are monitored and reach the correct person seamlessly.

EARLY PLANNING FOR IN PERSON EVENTS

Use effective time planning to assure resources are allocated appropriately for the planning of the Ocean Decade Conference events. Are there any promotional materials needed? How many campaigns are feasible in 2024, will they take advantage of the in person events at the Conference? Map out and brainstorm ideas, and develop campaign briefs - identifying the objectives and how success will be measured. Decide if an impact report will be produced for the Ocean Decade Conference, as it was for the UN Ocean Conference in 2022, and what will be covered in it.