

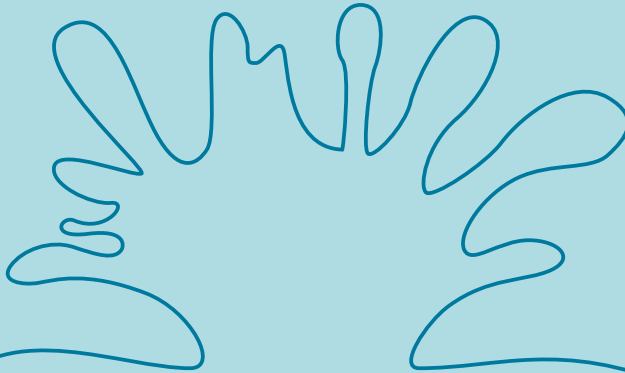


University of  
St Andrews

**STACEES**

St Andrews Network for Climate, Energy,  
Environment and Sustainability

## The Sustainability Series



Taking ocean engagement  
to new depths

The Museums of the University of St Andrews,  
Scottish Oceans Institute (SOI), and  
Marine Alliance for Science and  
Technology for Scotland (MASTS)

September 2021

# Taking ocean engagement to new depths

The Museums of the University of St Andrews, Scottish Oceans Institute (SOI), and Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MASTS)

(Article written by Martin Ince)

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*Dive in: Protecting our Ocean* is an interdisciplinary collaboration between museums, marine scientists and behavioural change experts that will take visitors under the sea to explore the importance of the ocean for life on Earth, the threats that it faces, and the changes we can make to address these challenges. It will result in an immersive exhibition and programme of events at the University's Wardlaw Museum from autumn 2021. The exhibition draws together museum professionals, experts in behavioural change, and marine scientists from the University's Scottish Oceans Institute (SOI) and the People Ocean Planet initiative from the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland (MASTS).

"The learning process of creating the exhibition is as important in some ways as the final result," says Claire Robinson, Collections and Exhibitions Curator at the University Museums. The project seeks to understand how museums can encourage visitors to change the way they behave in order to have a positive impact on the environment. "We want to go beyond providing information on topics such as climate change and its effect on the oceans. We want visitors to have a more impactful journey," she adds.

The *Dive In* team seeks to build visitors' understanding of the importance of

the ocean through the world-leading research of marine experts at the SOI and the University's extensive natural history collections, building an emotional connection through an immersive, experiential exhibition. *Dive In* will encourage audiences to take action to protect the marine environment, promoting solutions that demonstrate that everyone can contribute to ocean sustainability. This, in turn, supports wider social and cultural change.

The museum's relationship with the SOI and MASTS is key to the success of the project, which makes use of the latest research to understand the problems and explore solutions. "The ocean is vital to life, but people don't always understand the way it works," says Robinson. We now appreciate that as well as being a highway for transport and a source of food, the oceans store and move immense amounts of heat and carbon. This makes them a key factor in climate change.

## Positive thinking

The situation described at *Dive In* is urgent, particularly in light of climate change. But individuals are powerful, especially when their combined force is more than the sum of their parts. So, the aim is not to leave visitors to *Dive In* feeling overwhelmed. A positive

audience is an engaged audience, and an engaged audience is an empowered audience. While there are plenty reasons to lay bare the stark realities, the organisers want their audience to leave the building with a sense of purpose and a can-do attitude.

Another area where *Dive In* aims to innovate is by greening its own practices. As Robinson explains, museum displays are often produced in a far-from-sustainable manner. "Exhibitions often use a large volume of new materials (for example, graphics). Displays are often bespoke and cannot be reused. And they involve materials that are hard to recycle. There is also a lot of travel involved in transporting loans for display in exhibitions. We are working with exhibition designers to work in a far more reusable and recyclable way."

The exhibition will have an online component, allowing those who cannot travel to St Andrews to engage with the topic. Online events, including a series called Critical Conversations, have already started and will continue throughout the exhibition's run.

The team's ambition is not limited to *Dive In*. Learning from the project will inform future museum practice and programming. The organisers are keen to share their research for the benefit of the wider museum and marine science sectors.

The project is part of the University's response to the UN climate change conference COP26 and it has received funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK and Museums Galleries Scotland.

### **Find out more**

Website: <https://divein.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/>

Marine Alliance for Science & Technology for Scotland (MASTS) Twitter account: [@mastscot](https://twitter.com/mastscot)

People Ocean Planet Twitter account: [@OceanBehaviours](https://twitter.com/OceanBehaviours)

Museums of the University of St Andrews on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter: [@MuseumsUniStA](https://www.facebook.com/MuseumsUniStA)

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The St Andrews Network for Climate, Energy, Environment and Sustainability (STACEES) is an interdisciplinary research-focused initiative launched in April 2021 at The University of St Andrews.

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