

1. Introduction

The oceans play an integral part in the mitigation of climate change through carbon transport and sequestration (Elsler et al., 2022; Honegger et al., 2021; Turley et al., 2021). This happens through the multiple food webs and ecosystems present in the oceans, which are affected by changes in Earth's climate (Elsler et al., 2022).

Additionally, increasing greenhouse gases concentrations in the atmosphere cause ocean acidification, which further impacts marine ecosystems and their ability to function (Albright et al., 2023). Due to this, climate change and oceans are inherently intertwined (Elsler et al., 2022). On top of this, the oceans are responsible for providing jobs and resources for millions of people globally (Oral, 2023). As such, protecting our oceans is important to help mitigate climate change and allow people who rely on the oceans for their livelihoods to continue to do so sustainably.

The ocean's importance in regards to climate change was mentioned in the Paris Agreement of 2015, however it was mentioned just once in recital 13 of the preamble (Klerk, 2021). This is not to say that the Paris Agreement was the first mention of oceans in relation to climate change, as mentions of protecting seas and oceans go back to Principle 7 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration and Action Plan, however little overall attention was paid to marine issues (Oral, 2023). The Paris Agreement, however, was arguably the first major step towards including oceans within the scope of the COP meetings. While seemingly insignificant, the preamble provides context for the agreement and how it is positioned in relation to international legal frameworks (Dobush et al., 2022; Klerk, 2021). One of the more significant points of the Paris Agreement was the limiting of global warming to 2°C, which is a general goal that can also aid in the protection of marine ecosystems, particularly ones threatened by changes in temperature. Following the Paris Agreement, more attention was paid towards the oceans and ocean related issues, as the first round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) showed that around 70% of those included marine and ocean issues, with emphasis placed on adaptation strategies rather than mitigation (Dobush et al., 2022). Therefore, the Paris Agreement did have a significant impact on the place of the oceans within climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts internationally, despite only a brief initial mention.

The role of oceans was strengthened when the 'Ocean Pathway' was launched during COP 23 (Oral, 2023). However, around 4 years after the 2015 Paris Agreement, in 2019 during COP 25, is when the first Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue took place. It was during COP 25 that the ocean and marine issues had a dedicated event at a COP meeting for the first time, and is the reason that COP 25 was deemed the *Blue COP*. During COP 26 in Glasgow, is when governments cemented oceans as part of the multilateral process of the UNFCCC (UNFCCC, 2023). The resulting Glasgow Climate Pact contained multiple mentions of the oceans, and subsequent COP meetings were aimed to strengthen strategies relating to the oceans (Klerk, 2021). At COP 27 in 2022 continued to strengthen ocean related actions under the UNFCCC, and developments were made regarding the process of organising future dialogues (UNFCCC, 2023).

2. Previous COP meetings and the Ocean

2.1 COP 25

As stated before, COP 25 was the first to include the Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue, setting a milestone for ocean orientated goals within the UNFCCC. COP 25 was also the last COP to take place before the global COVID pandemic, and aimed to build societal and political momentum to include the oceans in the global debate concerning climate change in a way that synergised better with the climate dialogue (Dobush et al., 2022). The conference hosted over 100 extra conferences and events related to the ocean, covering a wide array of topics ranging from ocean management and governance, to fisheries and marine transport solutions (Dobush et al., 2022). As a result of these efforts, themes of oceans, coastal areas and marine ecosystems were all discussed in regards to adaptation and mitigation strategies, as well as impacts of climate change on those areas (Dobush et al., 2022). Additionally, as result of these discussions, there was further progress made towards climate change solutions including the ocean. A number of sectoral Climate Action Pathways were developed for various areas of focus, including oceans and coastal zones (Oberghassel et al., 2020). These pathways consisted of an executive summary and an action table, which contained good practices that were gathered and put together from participating actors, and could be used as a source of information for national

governments (Obergassel et al., 2020). These were overall very positive impacts, and a move in the right direction for ocean-based climate solutions.

There were drawbacks however, as many of these results including the sectoral action events, were not placed main stage during the COP 25, and as such these pathways with high potential did not attract much international media coverage or the attention of many national governments (Obergassel et al., 2020). This resulted in potentially very useful framework being under-utilised or missed, due to a general lack of awareness and coverage. Additionally, topics such as rising sea levels, ocean warming and ocean acidification did not receive any form of formal action taking place during COP25 (Oral, 2023). These are significant issues which failed to be fully addressed and acted upon, limiting the general scope and impact that COP25 could have had if these issues were fully addressed. In the case of ocean acidification for example, a delayed response could have further negative impacts on the oceans due to continually rising greenhouse gases concentrations in the atmosphere (Albright et al., 2023).

Following COP25, a lot of momentum built up by the meeting was lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Dialogues had to be held online due to social distancing, however the dialogues still went ahead and during climate negotiations, provided the first opportunity for both Party and non-Party stakeholders to have a say in regards to issues regarding the oceans (Dobush et al., 2022). In contrast, the pandemic presented a new issue for the management of coastal environments in the form of plastic waste from masks and other disposable PPE (Patrício Silva et al., 2020). The majority of PPE which was disposed of incorrectly would end up in the oceans, where they would degrade into smaller microplastics, further exacerbating the issues of plastic pollution (Patrício Silva et al., 2020). This was a new challenge presented by an unexpected circumstance, and certain countries were not able to deal with the volume of increased waste, forcing them to resort to inappropriate disposal methods (Patrício Silva et al., 2020). While this was not a direct failure of the COP 25, the pandemic did create problems that future conferences would have to address and deal with. However, if previous COP meetings addressed the issues of waste disposal in developing countries prior to the pandemic, the issue might have had a smaller impact on the increasing amount of microplastics polluting the oceans. This is an example of a seemingly minor area of focus having unexpected significant

impacts on other focus areas, demonstrating how intertwined and significant all areas of climate change mitigation and adaptation are.

2.2 COP 26

The next COP meeting took place in Glasgow in 2021, delayed by a year due to the COVID pandemic. The UNFCCC took further steps forward in protecting marine ecosystems for the purposes of them acting as carbon sinks and supporting livelihoods, amongst other reasons (UNFCCC, 2023). This was one part of the Glasgow Climate Pact 2021, which resulted from COP 26. Furthermore, additional meetings and talks were organised to further discuss funding needs and arrangements for implementation (Herr and Hamilton, 2022). There were several agreements proposed during the conference, and they had positive impacts on climate. An example of one of these was the Clydebank Declaration, which planned to develop at least six Green Corridors by 2025 (Jeong et al., 2022). Initially supported by 19 member countries, this number rose to 24 by September 2022 (Jeong et al., 2022). Some of the countries supporting the declaration included United Kingdom, France, the United States, Germany, and Japan, among others. The aim of this declaration was to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in the marine shipping sector by the year 2050. The original goal set out in 2008 was 50% by 2050, so this increase of the goal was seen as a positive step in the right direction, and an increased effort to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions (Jeong et al., 2022). The inclusion of more developed countries in the declaration meant funding and planning would be less of a challenge, and could provide benefits to countries globally (Jeong et al., 2022).

A major step towards mitigating climate change was the expectation for countries to revise their climate goals under the Paris Agreement to be more ambitious in terms of their positive impacts. An example of these goals being revised was India, where the pledge during COP 26 was to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030 (Youdo and Bajaj, 2022). This was a very ambitious goal, as reducing carbon emissions will have a major impact on the Indian Ocean and seas surrounding India. India has been impacted by rising sea levels and increases in extreme weather events for the past decade, so such goals are mostly aimed to mitigate the likelihood of such events in

the future (Loureiro et al., 2022; Youdo and Bajaj, 2022). Additionally, the destruction of marine and coastal habitats in India has led to issues in food and water security on Indian coasts (Loureiro et al., 2022; Youdo and Bajaj, 2022). While trying to tackle the core issue of greenhouse gas emissions is a step in the right direction by India, no adjustments or revisions were made specifically to marine and coastal environments. So while core issues were being tackled, more immediate issues of habitat protection were overlooked. India's renewable infrastructure is one of the fastest growing in the world among large economies, however if immediate issues of habitat destruction are not tackled quickly, there might be very little of mangrove forests and coral reefs left by 2030 (Youdo and Bajaj, 2022). Additionally, the funding required to fulfil these goals is extremely high, and as such the reality of achieving such goals remains questionable (van den Berg et al., 2022; UN Climate Change High-Level Champions, 2022). So, while India's approach is definitely ambitious, it's oversight of immediate action in the marine sector was a drawback in its contribution during COP 26.

Despite all the positive effort concerning oceans during COP 26, there isn't enough progress to meet the Paris Agreement goals of global temperatures, according to reports provided prior to COP 27 (van den Berg et al., 2022). The core goal of limiting the rise in temperatures is estimated to require around US\$1-US\$1.3 trillion in finance for India and African member countries alone (Wilson and Vandenabeele, 2012). The fact remained that the core targets of the Paris agreement were unmet, and as such the likelihood of further and required funding being provided to marine sectors became lower (van den Berg et al., 2022; Coulson-Thomas, 2022). This is a challenge that remained present from previous COP meetings and was still an issue by the end of COP 26 and leading up to COP 27, ultimately limiting the action that could take place to solve ocean and marine issues.

2.3 COP 27

The most recent COP 27 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt took place in November 2022. COP 27 essentially built on top of previous policies and strategies, continuing to strengthen ocean-based action (UNFCCC, 2023). Additionally, ocean and climate change dialogues would continue to occur prior to future COP meetings and would

dictate topics that would be presented and discussed during subsequent COP sessions (UNFCCC, 2023). This was a positive outcome for the organisation of COP sessions in regard to ocean-based actions and can have positive impacts on the cohesiveness and results of future COP sessions.

One of the major developments from COP 27 was the 'loss and damage fund'. The fund came about from years of pressure on the UNFCCC from less developed nations which are more susceptible to damage caused by climate change (Herr and Hamilton, 2022; Muigua, 2023). The fund itself aims to provide relief to countries affected by climate change due to rising sea levels, acidification of the oceans, heat waves, and other extreme weather events (UNEP, 2022). This fund did not specifically cover damage done due to ocean-based issues, however a large part of the fund referred to such circumstances. Therefore, it can still be counted as a positive development in mitigating damage caused by the degrading state of the oceans, however the fund itself does not actively prevent impacts on the oceans and coastal environments. Another limitation of the fund is that some major economies, including China, have opposed the fund and contributing towards it (Harris, 2023). The fund has potential and provides new possibilities, however it is vulnerable to being delayed or stonewalled by opposing countries, which has been an issue with previous COP sessions (Arora and Arora, 2023; Harris, 2023).

COP 27 has also received criticism for its attempt to include more ocean-based actions and goals, however the progress of these attempts are not supported by recent data (Arora and Arora, 2023). Greenhouse gas emissions remain high, and with current trends in reductions of emission rates, issues such as ocean acidification, ocean warming, and rising sea levels are going to continue to destroy marine environments (Albright et al., 2023; Arora and Arora, 2023). The current trends in progress are simply not enough to guarantee the preservation of the marine environment, and as such goals set out during COP 27 can be considered unsatisfactory.

3. Future prospects for the Ocean following COP 27

One of the more significant results of COP 27 was the clear organisation and preservation of ocean and climate change dialogues prior to COP sessions. A clearer structure and progression were set out, potentially aiding the impact future dialogues may have on the decision-making process during conferences if the process is utilised properly. There were previously issues, where the ocean dialogue has not been reported to COP in a timely manner, which can limit the effect these dialogues have (Dobush et al., 2022). A clearer structure and order of progression can aid in avoidance of such situations following COP 27.

Ocean acidification remains one of the more prominent issues that marine environments face, being responsible for habitat loss and damage to fragile ecosystems. Following COP 27 however, the development of new framework into policy adaptation to mitigate ocean acidification can allow for this issue to be tackled (Albright et al., 2023). Ocean acidification policies are relatively new, and as such there are few examples to follow. An advantage of this however is the possibility for framework to be developed which co-benefits and harmonises with already existing policy frameworks (Albright et al., 2023). This is possible due to the fact that efforts to mitigate ocean acidification will also help targets concerning greenhouse gas emissions, sustainable developments goals, and aiding new industries and innovation, amongst others (Albright et al., 2023). New policy framework preparing for the effects of ocean acidification has great potential to aid multiple sectors, while also tackling a significant yet long overlooked issue. A good example of where this could be applied is Australia. Australia has successful framework to prepare it for ocean acidification and protect its coral reefs, however there is a lack in coherence between these policies and overall climate change mitigation (Albright et al., 2023). Due to this Australia is not wholistically prepared for climate change action, however new suggested policy framework could benefit the country's approach and effectiveness of other policies already in place. These efforts into policy framework were initially launched following COP 26, however it was after COP 27 that more global effort was made to develop and potentially utilise these new frameworks.

The oceans are the largest carbon sink on the planet, and on top of this absorb around 90% of heat caused by changes in climate (Arora and Arora, 2023). One of

the ways that oceans are able to absorb so much carbon is through habitats such as mangrove forests. The decline of mangrove forests each year has decreased to 0.04%, which is a great achievement in terms of preventing further climate change, and this has been discussed during COP 27 (Arora and Arora, 2023; Muigua, 2023). Not all areas of marine environments have seen such success, however. For example, rising sea levels due to melting ice caps is an observable impact, however the addressing of it was limited with no concrete policies (Arora and Arora, 2023). Following COP 27, it was concluded that countries were to act regarding ocean and water systems issues according to their current situations. While this may seem like a good approach due to countries being able to create policies and react to situations in ways that are specific to their circumstances, the lack of global cohesiveness and a committed path in regard to these issues will limit the impact that a country's policies may have (Arora and Arora, 2023). A possible solution to this can be the development of a policy framework similar in aim and process of the aforementioned ocean acidification framework. A framework that could potentially co-benefit other areas of concern while ensuring that each country takes similar action in response to certain situations could help ensure that global progress remains steady and on route to reach climate change goals previously set out. Alternatively, the new ocean acidification framework could be adapted globally to provide cohesiveness to the actions of countries globally. Regardless of the approach taken, it is important for global efforts to be cohesive, and for countries to employ similar actions and responses to climate change impacts on the oceans due to their importance. This is an example of COP 27 lacking in effectiveness in regard to controlling policies, which can be seen as a lack of pressure on member countries.

4. Conclusion

This report aimed to assess to what extent oceans were covered during COP since becoming an official topic. The future prospects following COP 27 were also assessed, to try and provide some clarity on steps moving forward.

Firstly, since the Paris Agreement 2015, oceans have received increased attention in regards to their role in climate change during COP. COP 25 was the first COP to introduce oceans as an official and standalone panel, allowing for greater attention

and effort to be dedicated to the oceans and their ability to help mitigate climate change. COP 25 was recognised as the 'blue COP' due to its attempt to engage and inform member parties in the oceans importance and potential in achieving the goals set out in 2015. The attempts were partially successful, with more policies and funding being designated to the topic, however the actual effects of policies and global involvement remained limited. Following COP 26, further efforts have resulted in projects being agreed upon and funded, which will help to reach the Paris goals. Furthermore, countries were expected to adjust their goals set out in 2015 in an attempt to encourage more action to take place by creating newer, more ambitious goals. These attempts were successful and had a positive impact on the efforts made to protect the oceans. There were limitations however, as some new goals set out were potentially unrealistic, and despite that still might not be enough to mitigate climate change even if they are achieved in the timeframes provided. COP 27 managed to highlight some positives that were being achieved in regards to oceans and climate change, however it also showcased the weakness and lack of enforcement of some policies, with some questionable decisions in regards to global policy and cohesiveness. Positives still came from COP 27 in the form of new framework and further awareness of the oceans' importance.

Secondly, future prospects following COP 27 are mixed. There has been improvement in organisation and planning of future COPs in the form of the ocean and climate change dialogues, with a clear process being set in place. This will aid the effectiveness of further COPs and their cohesiveness in addressing the topic. COP 27 has also encouraged the development of new policy framework in regard to the oceans, which when adapted, can potentially improve the cohesiveness of policies and their benefits in achieving the Paris goals. COP 27 was not without its drawbacks, as certain policies are still left to countries to decide on their own, which can lead to uneven action among party members. This can lead to a lack of effort by some countries, which will lead to gaps in general global effort.

The oceans have relatively recently risen to prominence in discussions concerning climate change. Many developments have been made since then, however there are still significant gaps in effort, funding, and policy. Only with a cohesive and holistic approach can the oceans be fully adapted and utilised to help reach the goals set out by the Paris Agreement. Future COPs need to continue to involve the ocean in

discussion, and greater global cooperation is required to protect the oceans and successfully utilise them to mitigate climate change.

5. References

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6. Appendices

Appendix 1. COP presentation script

The ocean and climate change; The ocean and climate change.

Why is the ocean important in the context of climate change?

Background. The Paris agreement was the first agreement to recognise the importance of all ecosystems and their integrity.

At COP 25 in 2019 was when governments recognized the importance of action in terms of the ocean during the first Ocean and climate change dialogue.

COP 26 emphasised the importance of protecting marine ecosystems, and the carbon sinks in the ocean were recognised as a way of helping to reach global goals of the convention.

The ocean and climate change dialogue in June 2022 formed a basis of the topics and highlights that would be presented at cop 27.

Was the ocean underestimated in its potential of helping climate change goals, due to only being recognised in 2019?

COP 27 summit. Parties partaking were encouraged to include ocean-based goals within national climate change goals using long-term strategies and adaptations discussed during the summit.

The key messages outlined during the ocean and climate change dialogue 2022 were welcomed and formed a basis of the panels.

From 2023, the ocean summit will be facilitated by two co-facilitators selected by parties biennially, who are responsible with deciding on topics and conducting the dialogues in the future.

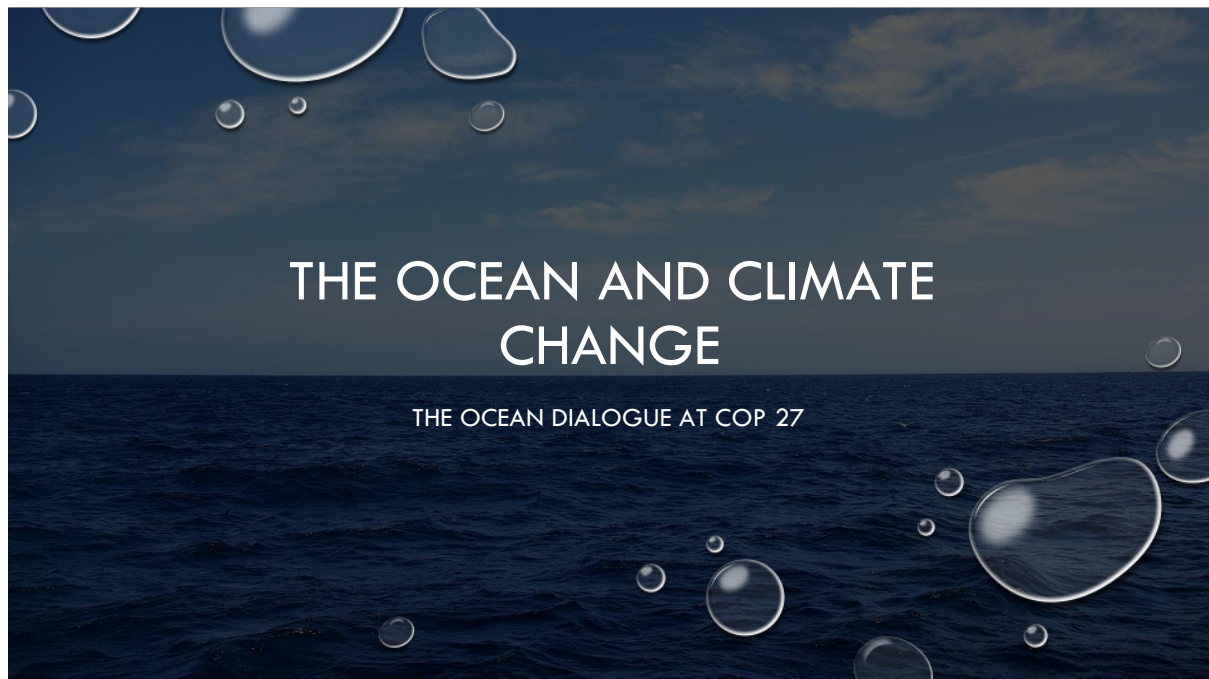
Cop 27 schedule. All events on schedule were based on the key messages outlined during the ocean and climate change dialogue 2022.

Raising awareness. Apart from panels, the ocean climate summit featured short-film premieres, digital photo exhibitions, sculptures, and musical performances.

Over 275 guests attended the summit. Was this a good way of raising awareness?

Is the ocean as important as terrestrial ecosystems in terms of reaching global climate change goals?

Why or why not?



BACKGROUND

- THE PARIS AGREEMENT WAS THE FIRST AGREEMENT TO RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF ALL ECOSYSTEMS AND THEIR INTEGRITY
- AT COP 25 IN 2019 WAS WHEN GOVERNMENTS RECOGNIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTION IN TERMS OF THE OCEAN DURING THE FIRST OCEAN AND CLIMATE CHANGE DIALOGUE
- COP 26 EMPHASISED THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING MARINE ECOSYSTEMS, AND THE CARBON SINKS IN THE OCEAN WERE RECOGNISED AS A WAY OF HELPING TO REACH GLOBAL GOALS OF THE CONVENTION
- THE OCEAN AND CLIMATE CHANGE DIALOGUE IN JUNE 2022 FORMED A BASIS OF THE TOPICS AND HIGHLIGHTS THAT WOULD BE PRESENTED AT COP 27

<https://unfccc.int/topics/ocean#Theocean-at-COP-27>

**WAS THE OCEAN
UNDERESTIMATED IN ITS
POTENTIAL OF HELPING CLIMATE
CHANGE GOALS, DUE TO ONLY
BEING RECOGNISED IN 2019?**

COP 27 SUMMIT

- PARTIES PARTAKING WERE ENCOURAGED TO INCLUDE OCEAN-BASED GOALS WITHIN NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE GOALS USING LONGTERM STRATEGIES AND ADAPTATIONS DISCUSSED DURING THE SUMMIT
- THE KEY MESSAGES OUTLINED DURING THE OCEAN AND CLIMATE CHANGE DIALOGUE 2022 WERE WELCOMED AND FORMED A BASIS OF THE PANELS.
- FROM 2023, THE OCEAN SUMMIT WILL BE FACILITATED BY TWO CO FACILITATORS SELECTED BY PARTIES BIENNIALY, WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE WITH DECIDING ON TOPICS AND CONDUCTING THE DIALOGUES IN THE FUTURE

COP 27 SCHEDULE

ALL EVENTS ON SCHEDULE WERE
BASED ON THE KEY MESSAGES
OUTLINED DURING THE OCEAN AND
CLIMATE CHANGE DIALOGUE 2022

BLUE HORIZONS: PROMISE & POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR OCEAN	10:30 AM
FIRESIDE CHAT: ISLAND NATIONS TAKING ACTION	11:25 AM
A THING OF THE PAST: IMAGINING A WORLD WITHOUT PLASTIC	11:35 AM
BUILDING RESILIENCE: LOCALIZED ACTION AGAINST A CHANGING CLIMATE	12:00 PM
LUNCH SERVED	1:00 PM
ROUNDTABLE: CREATING A COMMON AGENDA FOR OUR SHARED OCEAN	1:30 PM
THE POWER OF LISTENING	2:30 PM
TIDES ARE CHANGING: A NEW APPROACH TO TOURISM AND LAND MANAGEMENT	3:35 PM
ON THE RISE: HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF THE OCEAN ECONOMY	4:00 PM
THE VALUE OF A LIVING OCEAN TO OUR HEALTH AND ECONOMIC WELL BEING	4:10 PM
THE FUTURE OF BLUE CARBON	4:30 PM

<https://oceanic.global/projects/cop-27-the-ocean-x-climate-summit/#:~:text=On%2011%20November%202022%2C%20Oceanic,ocean%20and%20all%20it%20sustains>



RAISING AWARENESS

- APART FROM PANELS, THE OCEAN CLIMATE SUMMIT FEATURED SHORFILM PREMIERES, DIGITAL PHOTO EXHIBITIONS, SCULPTURES AND MUSICAL PERFORMANCES
- OVER 275 GUESTS ATTENDED THE SUMMIT

WAS THIS A GOOD WAY OF RAISING AWARENESS?



IS THE OCEAN AS IMPORTANT
AS TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS IN
TERMS OF REACHING GLOBAL
CLIMATE CHANGE GOALS?

WHY OR WHY NOT?