Whitaker Institute Policy Brief Series

Further Reading:
McHugh, P., Domegan, C., McCauley, V., & Davison, K. (2016). *Our Irish Ocean Conversations—Sea Change Irish Conversations Report.* EU Sea Change Project, Whitaker Institute, NUI Galway, Ireland.

McHugh, P., Domegan, C., McCauley, V., Davison, K., Burke, N. & Dromgool-Regan, C. (2016). *Ireland's National Report on the Consultation Protocol—Sea Change: Our Irish Ocean Conversations Report.* EU Sea Change Project, Whitaker Institute, NUI Galway, Ireland.

McHugh, P., Domegan, C., Gotensparre, S., Fauville, S., Copejans, E., Friis Møller, L., Papathanassiou, M., Batista, V., Chicote, C., & Lincoln, S. (2016). *D3.2 – National Reports on the Consultation Protocol.* EU Sea Change Project, Whitaker Institute, NUI Galway, Ireland.

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Read More About: SIPPs research cluster within the Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change

Irish Ocean Conversations: Co-Creating an Ocean-Literate Society

The Irish Government's *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth Strategy* sets out a roadmap for integrated actions across policy, governance and business to enable our marine potential to be realised (Inter–Departmental Marine Coordination Group, 2012). Specifically, Action 29 aims to embed knowledge and consider options for the inclusion of marine studies in the secondary school curriculum. Research from Sea Change—a Horizon 2020 project—recognises that environmental behaviour change rarely occurs as a result of simply providing information, but through initiatives generated at community/local levels. In Sea Change, Irish Ocean Conversations were held with stakeholder groups involved in teaching, education, outreach, curriculum, media, regulation and policy. These conversations went significantly beyond asking people for their individual opinions. Instead, it gave groups a collective voice in identifying barriers and designing options to influence teaching ocean literacy to 12–19 year olds.

Research Findings
To identify barriers to teaching 12–19 year olds about the ocean, a Collective Intelligence (CI) approach was employed. CI facilitates group discussion and consensus building, allowing stakeholders to synthesise contributions from individuals with diverse views, backgrounds and perspectives and co-develop outcomes. 25 participants were involved. They generated a structural barrier map, showing how 15 of the top-voted for barriers to teaching 12–19 year olds about the ocean were connected and interrelated. The map also highlighted how some barriers aggravated other barriers, illustrating stakeholders' perceptions of the influence that a 'lack of political will – Ireland's government is slow to act and implement on marine-related issues and marine education' has across the system. In addition, through reflective discussions, negotiations and a voting process, stakeholders identified options for the successful integration of ocean knowledge into the education and outreach curricula. The top three most voted for options included:

1. *Making World Ocean Day a community event/linking in with a national one day school event;*
2. *National media campaign for all aquatic interests and activities–commercial and leisure; and*
3. *A dedicated self-funded Marine Department.*

Policy Implications
Policy makers recognise complex environmental and sustainable societal problems do not occur in a vacuum. They incorporate multiple stakeholder groups at multiple levels of influence (McLeroy et al., 1988). Without dialogue forums to debate and discuss complex policy issues, we run the risk of multiple and uncoordinated attempts at addressing the issue. If policy deliberations do not engage a multiplicity of macro–micro stakeholders that can contribute different insights and expertise towards meaningful strategies for change, this can result in many false starts. CI is one of many valuable inclusivity tools for policy forums. It's integrative and systems approach facilitates top-down and bottom-up thinking. CI also considers pathways and priorities for future actions, allowing groups to come together to co-design and co-create change.