

„The Women and the Sea“

World Oceans Day 2019: United Nations celebrate the oceans through the gender lens, paying tribute to outstanding people who work to protect the sea. Women like Sigrid Lüber from Switzerland who founded OceanCare 30 years ago.

Wädenswil, 6 June 2019. Coinciding with OceanCare’s 30th anniversary, the motto of this year’s “World Oceans Day” on 8 June, a day for the international community to celebrate the importance of the oceans, is “Gender & the Ocean”. “This will shed light on the gender roles in ocean issues, and, especially on women who live with and from the sea, but also women who are committed to protect marine wildlife worldwide.” These are the words of someone who has driven marine conservation for 30 years: Sigrid Lüber, 64, founded OceanCare in 1989 (see interview below). Since then, she has presided over the organisation and employs nine women at its headquarters in Wädenswil, Switzerland. And one man.

The long journey began in the Swiss Alps – with dolphins that actually weren’t there: Within the “Working Group for the Protection of Marine Mammals (ASMS)”, as the newly founded association was called at the time, Sigrid Lüber spearheaded the protests against a dolphinarium project in Martigny – with success: The dolphinarium could be prevented.

For Sigrid Lüber this was the beginning of the mission of her life. A few months earlier she had spent her holidays in the Maldives. “During a dive I suddenly was surrounded by dolphins,” she remembers. “At that moment I knew what I have to do for the rest of my life!”

ASMS soon turned into the non-governmental organisation (NGO) OceanCare. The focus was no longer exclusively on marine mammals; in addition to whales and dolphins, the focus was on the big picture – the oceans as a habitat, marine life and coastal communities.

OceanCare quickly gained recognition and respect at all levels – nationally through the closure of the two Swiss dolphinariums as well as a parliamentary initiative that led to a ban on dolphin imports; globally through the establishment of conservation projects for endangered species from the wildest coasts to the deepest seas. River dolphins in the Peruvian Amazon, monk seals and sperm whales in the Mediterranean or common dolphins in the Ionian Sea are examples of dozens of species whose survival depends on scientific research programmes, diplomatic interventions in international bodies and consistent campaign work.

From the very beginning, Sigrid Lüber participated in international fora, UN conferences and meetings of the IWC (International Whaling Commission) – raising her often warning, always solution-oriented voice. She has addressed the vote buying issue as well as the cetacean/human health issue at the IWC. Respect for differing opinions is more important than controversy and searching for consensus is the priority for her. “We remain consistent



in our attitude and do not compromise," President Lüber stresses. "But we are always open to dialogue and recognise that often different paths lead to the same goal."

It was not least this consistency in approach that earned the organisation the highest recognition that an NGO can receive: in 2011, the OceanCare was granted United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Consultative Status, through a UN endorsement process which is one of the most stringent and difficult to achieve. "This gives us access to important bodies at the top level," says President Lüber. "We take part in expert commission meetings and in the plenary, we are listened to, respected and repeatedly consulted for our input." Not only in New York and Nairobi – also in Switzerland.

Last month, the Basel electorate voted on the project for an ozeaneum. In cooperation with Fondation Franz Weber and other nature conservation organisations, OceanCare complained about the project's scandalous information policy until a list of which animal species were to be exhibited was finally leaked, including species of the open and deep seas such as sharks, rays and octopuses.

On 19th May, the voters rejected the project – exactly 30 years after the dolphinarium in Martigny was prevented from being built.

A circle has been completed. But the journey is far from over.

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Further links and information

- interview with Sigrid Lüber, founder and president OceanCare
- further information about OceanCare: www.oceancare.org

About OceanCare

OceanCare is a Swiss non-profit organisation. It was founded in 1989 and has a strong commitment to realistic and cooperative initiatives. The organisation works at national and international level in the areas of marine pollution, environmental changes, fisheries, whaling, sealing, captivity of marine mammals and public education. OceanCare holds Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and is a partner of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and the UNEP/CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Cetaceans in the Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea and Contiguous Atlantic Area (ACCOBAMS). OceanCare has also been accredited as a Major Group to the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), which is the governing body of UNEP and is a part of the UNEP Global Partnership on Marine Litter. www.oceancare.org