

The Ocean Health Index as tool of communication in the management of the Colombian marine and coastal areas

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Near half of Colombia's territory is sea (928,660km²) (CCO, 2015). It also has 48 municipalities with coastline and about 40% of its GDP comes from its coastal departments. However, today most Colombians do not recognize this territory, which has led to its detriment and missing opportunities for the country, among other considerable losses. In order to strengthen the integrated management of coastal and marine areas, Colombia adopted and is adapting the Ocean Health Index (OHI); this tool has 10 components (fisheries, biodiversity, economies, etc.) and in an integrated way measure the ocean health (Halpern *et al*, 2012)

The OHI besides being a policy tool, has emerged as a new communication strategy at two levels: among actors related to the management of the sea and those who did not know it in its entirety. The strategy consists in using digital and print media, organizing academic events, workshops and spaces in schools, universities, shopping centers, radio, among others. Thus the OHI has reached more than 100 actors at national and international level such as public and private sectors, academia and society in general, not only by diffusion of the tool but revealing people sea as part of the national territory.

The essence of the OHI is to receive and incorporate feedback from different sectors, making thus a contributor element to the ocean governance. Also, the OHI has established consensus on the ocean health sea among sectors with different interests and visions. Internationally, it has served as a mechanism for dialogue and exchange of best practices with other countries and enabled from the Colombian experience to share knowledge to facilitate their use elsewhere. The OHI Colombia expects to have an interactive portal that encourages interaction with users and provides services such as: news, input of data and prediction of future scenarios in different components and areas. Besides, interaction mechanisms with the regions within Colombia will be implemented for the OHI to reflect the ocean health in each area through a participative scenarios involving stakeholders and regional mechanisms.

The effectiveness of the OHI as a communication tool has impacted in: instruments of decision-making, greater knowledge of the coastal marine territory nationwide, better access to information at other times was scattered, among others. OHI is projected to permeate educational programs and to continue evolving as the marine environment and population do, because a healthy ocean means a healthy country.

References

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