SCALING PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

A shared language for ocean action

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1. Opening: the ocean is economic infrastructure

Good morning, to everyone here in the room and to those of you online. I am delighted to be with you today.

I would like to begin with three simple observations.

The ocean carries **more than 80 per cent** of global trade. It supports food security, providing around 20 per cent of animal protein intake for **more than three billion people**. It also generates **half of the oxygen we need**, absorbs around 30 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions and captures most of the excess heat generated by those emissions.

The ocean is not a backdrop to our global economy. It is part of the infrastructure of our global economy.

Yet, despite years of discussion across government, industry, investment, civil society and academia, barriers to action remain and it is a struggle to scale the public/private partnerships. So, what is really holding us back and stopping progress?

It is not technology.
It is not funding.
It is not even political will.
It is language.

We do not travel to Japan and expect them to speak our language or have the same culture as ours. I use this example as I lived in Japan for three years. It is a similar experience when shifting between public and private sectors and we need to apply the same cross-cultural considerations as we do between places.

2. The language gap: the same challenge, different conversations

Public, voluntary and private-sector organisations are often trying to solve the same challenges while speaking entirely different languages.

Public sector, academic and research organisations often talk about ecosystem health, resilience, biodiversity and societal outcomes. Private sector leaders more often talk about investment, growth, risk, competitiveness and return on capital.

Neither language is wrong, it is just different. The problem is that we struggle to recognise ourselves, and our priorities, in the other's conversation.

When that happens, investment is delayed. Partnerships fail to scale. And good ideas remain exactly that: good ideas.

Let's use coastal resilience as an example. When a public official speaks about sustainability and ecosystem protection, some business leaders hear a cost, but do not immediately see the return.

But if we broaden the proposition. Talk about protecting infrastructure, reducing operational and financial risk, strengthening long-term business resilience and safeguarding future growth.

The outcome has not changed. But the route to a decision has.

What looked like a discretionary environmental cost now becomes an investment that can be evidenced, tested and justified to boards, shareholders and other stakeholders.

The same is true in reverse. When businesses talk about return on investment, policymakers may hear "short-term profit". Yet many businesses are actually talking about confidence: confidence to invest, confidence to innovate and confidence to scale.

Change the language, and you change what people can see. Change what they see, and you change behaviour and decisions.

3. From goodwill to value: measure what matters

Make no mistake, many private sector organisations see the challenge and are ready to play their part. At BMT we apply our skills and expertise through a sustainability lens. The World Ocean Council would not exist without the many private sector organisations who understand the importance of a health ocean ecosystem.

I recently took part in an Ocean Return on Investment discussion during New York Climate Week, bringing together private-sector organisations, investors and policymakers.

The message from the group was clear: ocean leadership must be positioned as a **business imperative**, **not as a niche environmental sustainability issue**.

If ocean action is presented only as an environmental agenda, we will not attract the scale of involvement, investment and commitment required. We need to tell a better story. Not because facts or science are unimportant, but because people support what they value, and they act when they can see relevance.

For the private sector, that means making the value of ocean action visible. It is an investment in economic resilience. It reduces risk. It protects infrastructure. It strengthens supply chains. And it supports long-term prosperity.

There is, however, a practical challenge. Traditional return-on-investment calculations often fail to capture the full value of ocean action. We need stronger data, metrics and valuation frameworks that can demonstrate economic value and inform real decisions.

This is where the Ocean Decade has a critical opportunity: to help all of us become better at measuring what matters.

Because what gets measured gets managed. And what gets managed gets funded.

If we can demonstrate how healthy oceans contribute to economic resilience, national prosperity, climate adaptation and business performance, then investment becomes a rational decision, rather than an act of goodwill.

That reframes ocean health. It moves from being treated as a specialist environmental issue to becoming a boardroom issue, a balance-sheet issue, an economic-development issue and a national-resilience issue.

Metrics and science also help us move beyond a narrative centred only on crisis and responsibility. They allow us to make opportunity tangible: opportunity for innovation, investment and communities; opportunity for future generations; and opportunity for businesses to endure and prosper.

4. The partnership ask: create confidence to act

The language must lead to a shared proposition that recognizes and supports everyone's outcomes. The private sector is asking for clear policy signals, regulatory certainty and coherent frameworks. These create the confidence for investors and businesses to seize opportunities at scale.

Businesses will take risks, and they are willing to work differently, but they will be calculated risks. Those calculations depend on credible data, predictable policy and a compelling account of value.

The public and research sectors can provide evidence, long-term outcomes and legitimacy.

Business can bring investment, innovation and the capability to scale.

Investors can test whether the proposition is credible and financeable.

Communities can ensure that the value created is relevant, equitable and durable.

Partnership is not simply about bringing different organisations into the same room. It is about coming together, understanding each other's outcomes, and developing a proposition that everyone can recognise, trust and act upon.

5. Close: one ocean, one shared proposition

Let me leave you with one final thought.

The ocean does not recognise the boundaries we create. It does not distinguish between the public and private sectors, between investor and policymaker, or between scientist and business leader.

Those distinctions are ours.

If we are serious about achieving the ambitions of the Ocean Decade, our task is not simply to work together. Our task is to learn to speak, to listen and to understand one another.

That means translating ecosystem health into economic resilience, investment into long-term public value, and scientific evidence into decisions that leaders can defend and deliver.

Because when public value and private value become part of the same conversation, ocean leadership stops being treated as an environmental obligation and becomes what it truly is:

An investment in resilience.
An investment in prosperity.
And an investment in our shared future.

Thank you.