Paul Holthus is the Founding President & CEO of the World Ocean Council (WOC), a non-profit organisation responsible for industry leadership and collaboration in ocean sustainable development, science and stewardship. Paul draws on a background working with the global industry associations or directors of UN agencies to working with fishermen in small island villages, and has been involved in coastal and marine resource sustainable development and conservation work in over 30 countries.

What is the WOC main focus in terms of shipping?

Overall, the main focus of the WOC is to engage the shipping industry with other ocean industries on areas of common concern, risk and opportunity. “Corporate Ocean Responsibility,” for the shipping industry, the most important of these cross-cutting issues are the WOC programs on: ocean policy, marine spatial planning, operational issues of environmental impact (e.g. marine sound, ship strikes on marine mammals), fisher interests and invasive species, port reception facilities for waste disposal), data collection from ships of opportunity, and ensuring ports are resilient and adapting to sea level rise and extreme weather events.

What are the benefits for WOC members?
The WOC brings together CEOs and other high level representatives from leadership companies from across the sectors and around the world. Members benefit from the opportunity to interact with like-minded peers from other companies in joint program efforts to tackle these cross-cutting issues which are affecting the future business. The benefits from information, analysis and intelligence on ocean industry challenges and the potential to shape the agenda, developing synergies, and creating economies of scale in reducing risk and accessing opportunities. Related to this we have launched the Young Ocean Professionals initiative, which is bringing together us and forming generation of ocean industry leaders from around the world to focus on sustainable development.

What would you say is a competitive advantage of WOC?
Our competitive advantage is, first, that the WOC is a unique, unparalleled high level and cross-sectoral forum on ocean sustainable development science and stewardship. Our competitive advantage is, first, that the WOC is a unique, unprecedented high level and cross-sectoral forum on ocean sustainable development science and stewardship. Our competitive advantage is, first, that the WOC is a unique, unprecedented high level and cross-sectoral forum on ocean sustainable development science and stewardship. Our competitive advantage is, first, that the WOC is a unique, unprecedented high level and cross-sectoral forum on ocean sustainable development science and stewardship.

What three changes would you recommend in shipping that would help improve the marine environment:
The shipping industry is a formidable effort and progressing in addressing its marine environmental footprint. Moving forward there are several areas where attention can be focused.

First, there is work to be done in addressing a biofouling and the transfer of invasive species. The shipping industry can work with other sectors which are affected by biofouling to advance a common R & D agenda on coatings, hull cleaning, etc.

Secondly, the issue of marine sound (ocean noise) is rising fast on the environment agenda. Here again, shipping can and must work together with other industries, which are the collective sources of marine sound, to understand the problem, the impact, and the risks - and to collaborate in developing and implementing the necessary solutions.

Thirdly, there is a tremendous need for the shipping industry to work with other sectors in tackling the issue of marine debris, including plastics. Specifically a global multi-stakeholder effort is needed from the ocean business community to develop and push forward a strategy for ensuring there is a network of adequate port reception facilities.

What are the challenges relating to Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)?

A round of preparatory discussions is taking place in 2017. The WOC has been providing the only consistent ocean industry presence in the process over the last many years, working closely with the International Chamber of Shipping.

What is Blue Action project about?
The WOC has been selected, as one of only international business organisations to participate in the European Commission Project Blue Action. The project aims to improve understanding of the processes and impacts of climate change in the Arctic, and to construct better long-term forecast systems for the increasingly extreme weather of the Arctic and the wider northern hemisphere.

Blue Action is a four-year research and innovation project funded by the European Commission Horizon 2020 program. It brings together 116 experts from 40 organisations in 17 countries on three continents working in academia, local authorities and industry. The project will be working to improve long range forecast skill for hazardous weather and climate events, enhance the ocean predictive capacity in the Arctic and the northern hemisphere, quantify the impact of recent rapid changes in the Arctic on northern hemisphere climate and weather extremes, optimise observation of Arctic conditions and trends, reduce uncertainty in predictions, foster the capacity of key stakeholders to adapt and respond to climate change and boosting their economic growth and trade to a wide range of interest to stakeholders.

PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING ITS MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

The shipping industry is making considerable effort and progress in addressing its marine environmental footprint. In 2018, the draft treaty will be put to the UN General Assembly for formal negotiations. It is critical that the shipping industry engages in this process.

The WOC will continue to develop and lead a coalition of industry leadership companies and organizations in participating in the development of the new legally binding instrument. In 2020, it is agreed that the World Ocean Council (WOC) will continue to develop a coalition of industry leadership companies and organizations in participating in the development of the new legally binding instrument, the Blue Action agreement.

What are the Blue Action project outcomes?
The WOC Sustainable Ocean Summit (SOS) will continue to develop and lead a coalition of industry leadership companies and organizations in participating in the development of the new legally binding instrument. The SOS 2017 theme will focus on ocean business community leadership in achieving the UN “Clean” Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The shipping industry presence in this process is important due to the environmental footprint, and the need to work with other industries, which are the collective sources of marine sound, to understand the problem, the impact, and the risks - and to collaborate in developing and implementing the necessary solutions.

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What are the common challenges relating to Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)?
MSP is designed to create a framework for multiple use of marine areas, including use that are associated with environment and conservation. However the MSP process is largely defined, driven and implemented by governments with a lot input from the ocean environment and science community. It is critical that shipping and other ocean economic activities participate actively in the design of the MSP process where it is proposed and in the implementation of the planning. Without comprehensive industry input, the probability is reduced that MSP will result in an output and plans that integrate the current and future needs for responsible, economic activity in the ocean.

Please tell us more about the “Sustainable Ocean Summit (SOS)” scheduled to take place later this year?
Since 2010, the WOC Sustainable Ocean Summit (SOS) has been the unique gathering of the world’s ocean industries focused on sustainable development, science and stewardship of the global ocean. The international ocean business community will gather again this year to advance leadership and collaboration in developing industry-driven solutions to ocean sustainability challenges. The SOS 2017 (Nov 12-18, 2017) will focus on ocean business community leadership in achieving the UN “Clean” Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The shipping industry presence in this process is important due to the environmental footprint, and the need to work with other industries, which are the collective sources of marine sound, to understand the problem, the impact, and the risks - and to collaborate in developing and implementing the necessary solutions.

What can you name a memorable shipping experience and your favourite ship?
I grew up on several navy bases mostly overseas, and have quite a few great memories running around the ships when they came into port at Salado Bay in the states. That being said, my favourite ship memory would also have to be when I was young and we sailed on the “US Liberty” when we moved from Iowa to California in the late sixties, and had a wonderful time on that trip.

Paul Holthus, CEO

INTERVIEW By Gibraltar Shipping