

Making a splash about eel

Reeh Line

National Institute of Aquatic Resources, Technical University of Denmark, Charlottenlund Castle, 2920 Charlottenlund, Denmark
E-mail: lre@aqu.dtu.dk

The Danish Eel Expedition 2014 was an international research expedition led by DTU Aqua to investigate climate-related changes in the European eel's spawning grounds in the Sargasso Sea in February-May 2014.

Through a communication strategy focusing on social media, press work and an on-board communication officer, the Danish Eel Expedition 2014 was successful in reaching both print, electronic and social media with the message that ocean research is important to society and that oceanic ecosystems are both necessary, and fun, to study. The objective was to bring the importance of ocean research, the plight of the eel, and the research vessel Dana to the top of the societal agenda through dissemination and outreach to the Danish public, peers and funders.

The communication strategy of the cruise included a strong public outreach component, targeting the Danish public, journalists and funding agencies (good media coverage of the expedition was an explicit goal of the funder The Danish Centre for Marine Research). A communication Officer was in charge of planning and heading the communication effort, supported by the relevant scientists (all interviews included scientists and all information was checked by scientists before being sent out). To aid the communication effort a number of products were produced: An expedition website in Danish and English, a daily updated Facebook site (in Danish), fact-page for journalists, press photos, press releases in Danish and English, press briefing on board at the end of the cruise, continuous contact to a number of journalists and media, as well as contact with communication colleagues at partner institutions. To secure the largest possible impact, the communication plan also included a partnership with a national Danish newspaper, and a close collaboration with the largest aquarium in Denmark. It also involved changing the popular name of the cruise from the project name SARGASSO-EEL to "The Danish Eel Expedition 2014".

The effort resulted in almost 100 articles in the press, among these also non-Danish (e.g Science), 2 Radio/TV-programmes, 1 film about the expedition (shown at Science in the City, ESOF 2014 and available online), participation in an exhibition on eel at the Aquarium Blue Planet, and more than 1000 + people following the expedition on Facebook and sharing comments and posts from it with their network, allowing us to reach a whole new audience – including stakeholders such as fishermen, NGO's, fellow scientists and funding agencies. One example is a 2/3 full page story in a Danish national newspapers Sunday edition, equaling 20.000 Euro if this space would have been sold as an advert.

The impact of the public outreach and media coverage of The Danish Eel Expedition 2014 illustrate that it is possible to engage the public in the basic scientific quest to understand changes in a marine ecosystem and that this in return can benefit and bring new ideas to the research covered.

References

- Bech, R: Overraskende fangst: Åleforskere fanger verdens farligste gopler, Politiken, Viden, 19.04.14
- Bech, R: Topforskere skal genskabe den dejligste buffet for den europæiske ål, Politiken, 27.04.14,8
- Reeh, L: Hvad laver en gopleekspert på en åleekspedition?, 24.03.14, www.facebook.com/aaleekspedition