Whale song in a village hall.

Last night the ocean came to Narara Ecovillage, in the hush of our Village Hall, as River, my eleven-year-old, leaned into my shoulder and twenty-five neighbours settled into a shared breath.

For a moment the blue world breathed through us, and I felt the old knowing return: we are not *beside* the ocean; we *are* the ocean, dreaming itself as people. Sir David Attenborough's "Ocean" documentary sings elegy and uprising in the same breath, tracing coral cathedrals and kelp meadows, but also the cruel rake of trawl net chains across living seafloors. He lets the sea speak, and when we listen, something inside loosens. Deep ecology begins there: not as resources to manage, but kin to stand with. Not stewardship delegated from above, but participation that emerges from within. When the narrator of the documentary whispers that the ocean can heal itself if we let it, I hear Arne Naess, the grandfather of deep ecology nodding. In his wise words, the world is a web, and our task is to stop cutting strands and trust life's self-organising intelligence. Wonder is not indulgence; it is a compass.

"Ocean" brings us Attenborough at ninety-nine, but it also gives us so much more than that: the sea speaking through an elder who has listened long enough to become its envoy. The movie opens like a hymn and lands like a vow. Coral cathedrals flare with the stained glass of parrotfish and polyps, kelp meadows sway like the slow lungs of Mother Earth, and out across the pelagic zone the great ones pass in the distance; sharks and whales and shimmering galaxies of tuna, like constellations freed from the night and poured into the sea. The images are ravishing, but it is the patience behind them that undoes me: the camera waits and waits until the biological relationship emerges. Plankton blooms, krill rises up, a shearwater's arc closes the loop, and suddenly the biology lesson is complete. The sea is not scenery. She is the beating heart, and we are her pulse.

At last Attenborough is free to speak his mind without the spineless self-censorship of the BBC preventing criticism of the fishing industry, the principle cause of marine destruction, as

they did in his 2001 Blue Planet series. That was the same year that he presented and narrated my film "On The Brink" pro bono. As well as the script that we wrote for him, we asked him for a message, in his own words, delivered to the Australian people. The 30 seconds (from 29'07" if you'd like to check it out) reveal that his dedication to conservation was as strong then as it is in Ocean – once his hands are not tied by the entities that back such mega-movie ventures.

Attenborough's voice carries that intimate urgency only elders can muster. Always calm, almost conversational, flicking a hidden flint when outing sources of harm. Bottom trawlers kill living seafloors; heat bleaches and beats photosynthetic partners out of coral. He never averts his gaze, and neither can we. Yet he refuses the soothing narcotic of despair. We are shown scars, yes, but also skin knitting: marine sanctuaries bright with returning life, fisheries reborn under responsible guardianship, communities relearning how to live with the tide instead of fighting against it. When he says the ocean can heal herself if we only let her, I hear a statement grounded both in science and in sacrament.

Deep ecology has always asked us to shift our purview from managers to members, from owners to kin. Ocean makes that move feel inevitable. It does not scold us into action; it invites us to take that life changing step. Wonder is not used merely as decoration here; it is a method of knowing. Gratitude is not a mood; it is a metabolism that makes noble, just, and essential action possible. I notice River's fingers unconsciously matching the slow sway of kelp on the screen, and I think: this is how culture changes, one nervous system at a time, remembering its marine ancestry. The salt in our blood is a clue, a tide chart is etched in our bodies.

If there is a soft anthropocentrism in places, Attenborough keeps leaning beyond it, toward kinship. He lets silence work. The credits end and the whale song keeps going, untranslatable, like a Council of All Beings where we finally shut up and listen. Sitting in the dark hall among friends who all live within a few hundred metres of one another, I felt the circle widen to include encrusting barnacles and pulsing moon jellies, submarine canyons and cyanobacteria. Art and activism are not separate here; they braid into a single rope we can all hold and steer as one. Ocean is both poetic and benediction, a lantern held high over dark water, and a simple instruction to those of us on shore: fall in love again, then behave like lovers. If we do, 30 by 30 stops being a statistic and becomes what it truly is, a promise to our the larger collective to protect and preserve our precious seas. And the sea, patient as ever, will meet us halfway.

Now to the work: 30 by 30 is not a technocratic box-tick. It is a moral and spiritual promise to our earth and oceans.

In Australia, the government has set a national target to protect and conserve 30 percent of land and 30 percent of marine estate by 2030. A January 2025 statement by then Australian Minister for the Environment and Water Tanya Plibersek trumpets that 52 percent of our ocean territory is protected, more so than any other country[1]. That scale matters, and so do the muscles beneath the numbers: the Sustainable Ocean Plan, scheduled statutory reviews of marine park management plans, Indigenous-led Sea Country initiatives, membership in the

[1] Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (8 October 2024), "Australia now protects more ocean than any other country".

Global Ocean Alliance, preparation to ratify the High Seas Biodiversity Treaty, and Pacific partnerships. This is the scaffolding supporting a national promise.

But the depth of the infrastructure is the test, not just its extent. Protection must mean sanctuary for all that lives and breathes, not just notional boundaries on maps. Sceptics at the Australian Marine Conservation Society rightly point out that only around 24 percent of our waters are true sanctuaries, meaning highly protected, no-take zones where extractive activities are prohibited. That gap is the difference between fanciful poetry and practice. It is possible to boast about 52 percent protection in the headlines while our seabeds are scoured, partnered with paper tiger enforcement and loopholes as big as canyons that make the word protected sound like a polite cough. The 2024 Bloomberg Ocean Fund report warns that at the current pace, we risk pushing true, high-quality 30 by 30 targets decades beyond 2030[2]. So yes, please applaud what is real, but also prepare to roll up your sleeves and get dirty.

What can we, ordinary ocean-beings in human form, do to hasten and deepen the promise?

First, hold the moral frame. Write, speak, sing and vote as if the ocean had standing, because it does. In letters to MPs and Ministers, ask them to name the ocean's intrinsic right to flourish in policy language. Request that the Sustainable Ocean Plan and marine park reviews adopt the highest standard of protection as default: fully protected no-take sanctuaries, with enforcement, monitoring, and ecological connectivity designed for species' actual life cycles, not administrative convenience. Ask plainly: what proportion of each marine park is fully no-take? How is compliance monitored? What enforcement actions occurred last year, if any?

Second, insist on honest definitions and transparent scorecards. Back the NGOs and researchers publishing clear comparisons of protection levels. Bring those charts to electorate offices and town halls. Where a protected park is 80 percent a paper park and 20 percent a real park, say so. Where trawling still chews up critical nursery grounds, ask for a timeline to end it.

Third, stand behind Indigenous-led sea governance. Amplify Traditional Owners' Sea Country proposals, advocate for long-term funding that allows stability and capacity building in the form of on-going Indigenous ranger jobs and creating co-governance structures that put knowledge holders at the table, not at the door. When governments cite Sea Country as a facet of their protection policies, invite them to expand it and transfer real decision-making power to those boots on the ground and folks with local knowledge.

Fourth, weave feeling into action. Host Ocean screenings[3], then hold a short Council of All Beings. Let someone speak as a blue groper, another as *Posidonia* seagrass, another as a trawl-scarred sponge. Let the grief and love surface, then move immediately into civic acts: coordinated emails to MPs that same night; a shared calendar for submissions to marine park reviews; a delegation visit date set before people leave the room. This rhythm matters: feeling, then a concrete step.

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[2] For example, a report by Greenpeace International (via its Australian office) states: *"At the current rate of progress, the 30×30 ocean target … won't be achieved at sea until 2107."*

[3] The Narara Ecovillage screening was a gift from the National Geographic Society, Other not for profit organisations can request their own free screenings here: OCEAN With David Attenborough – Revive Our Ocean . Otherwise, watch it for a $16, 1-month subscription to Disney plus.

Fifth, time your pressure to milestones. Each federal Budget, each Environment Ministers' meeting, each UN biodiversity or ocean summit is a drumbeat. In the fortnight before, flood local offices with calls for measurable increases in highly protected marine sanctuaries, specific trawl phase-outs, and budget lines for enforcement and Sea Country stewardship. Media op-eds and social posts can make those asks visible, but the quiet, repeated conversations in electorate offices often move the needle.

Sixth, connect the sea to the rest of the body. Ocean protection is climate protection is cultural survival. Ask for bottom trawling phase-out timelines, for blue-carbon habitat restoration targets, for shipping noise and strike mitigation in whale corridors, for cumulative impact limits across fisheries, mining, and ports. Systems change lives at the junctions.

Seventh, sign up to receive free newsletter from the Australian Marine Conservation Society so as to be part of co-ordinated responses to events in this space. Support them financially if you are able.

Finally, keep the long memory alive. In my life I've seen governments shift when public conscience ripened, when communities stood together, when we married theatre with strategy. We learned at Terania Creek that once a society recognises the sacredness of a living place, and thus ties that value to the majority, legislation can follow quickly. We learned through boycott campaigns that power yields to pressure more than persuasion. And we learned through deep ecology practice that duty alone is brittle; joy and kinship sustain us for the long haul.

So let us work for 30 by 30 as a vow made to family, not a quota. Celebrate Australia's progress where it is genuine. Then ask, week by week, for deeper protection, truer sanctuaries, and governance that listens to Sea Country. After the credits roll and whale song fades, step outside and listen for the ocean inside your body. That music is your mandate.