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Organization Spotlight: OceanElders, a Catalyst for Ocean Conservation

Launched in 2010, the nongovernmental organization OceanElders is a group of experienced global leaders who use their collective influence to promote ocean conservation. The first Ocean Elder appointed was oceanographer and explorer Sylvia Earle. Now there are twelve, including Virgin Group CEO Sir Richard Branson, Queen Noor of Jordan, Jean-Michel Cousteau, billionaire Ted Turner, and former Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority chairman Graeme Kelleher.

"OceanElders' members are from many different areas of human activity," says Kelleher. "Its members hold the potential to influence government, industry, and societal policy in relation to the oceans." The organization drew original inspiration from The Elders, a group convened in 2007 by Nelson Mandela to advance global peace and human rights.

The OceanElders organization, whose members and staff work on a voluntary basis, aims to work catalytically with other organizations. "OceanElders was created to be collaborative," says Gigi Brisson, a US-based investor and philanthropist who founded and now manages the organization. "There are wonderful ocean organizations run by amazing and passionate people, but the structure of the nonprofit world often causes them to compete for awareness and for funding. OceanElders is set up to avoid replicating the great work that is being done by others. We wish to support that work and elevate its visibility and impact by using our personal connections, our business networks, our combined experience, and media."

Ten years from now, Brisson would like the organization to have played a role in multiple ocean management advances, from eliminating bycatch in fisheries to setting aside more than 20% of world oceans in MPAs, and more. She says the organization is open to adding more Ocean Elders over time. The OceanElders website is www.oceanelders.org.

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