



## **REVIVE OUR OCEAN PRESS BRIEFING**

### **PANELIST BIOS (IN SPEAKING ORDER)**

**Howard Wood, OBE  
Co-Founder, COAST (Scotland)**



A lifelong diver around the Isle of Arran since 1974, **Howard Wood's** deep connection with the sea inspired his determination to reverse the degradation of the Clyde marine ecosystem. His commitment to low-impact, sustainable fishing practices and community-led action became the cornerstone of a movement for change.

Blending photography, citizen science, and grassroots activism, Wood along with colleagues and the community, spearheaded a 13-year campaign that led to the creation of Scotland's first fully protected marine reserve in 2008, an unprecedented achievement at the time. His work through COAST (**[the Community of Arran Seabed Trust](#)**) -- **a pioneering organization focused on restoring and protecting the island's marine environment** -- not only revitalized local marine habitats but also inspired a **[network of coastal communities across Scotland](#)**, slowly reshaping how the nation manages its seas.

In recognition of his efforts, Wood received the Goldman Environmental Prize for Europe in 2015, one of the world's most prestigious environmental awards. A year later, he was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by HM Queen Elizabeth II for services to the marine environment.

**Áine Purcell-Milton**  
**Executive Director, COAST (Scotland)**



**Áine Purcell-Milton** became Executive Director of COAST in early 2022.

She holds a MRes in Marine Ecosystem Management from the University of St Andrews, and has a background in coastal community engagement and environmental education through her work with NGOs across Ireland and the UK.

A passionate water sports enthusiast, Purcell-Milton is most at home in – or under – the sea.

**Zafer Kızılkaya**  
**President, Marine Conservation Society**  
**(Turkey)**



**Zafer Kızılkaya** is a marine conservationist and award-winning photographer specializing in environmental and marine themes. With degrees in civil engineering and coastal zone management, he has worked on tropical marine projects and National Geographic assignments across the Indo-Pacific for over a decade.

In 2012, he co-founded the Mediterranean Conservation Society, and has since dedicated his career to establishing marine protected areas (MPAs) in Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean region. His Gökova Bay Community Conservation Project has earned several prestigious awards, including the Whitley Fund for Nature Award (2013), the UNDP Equator Prize (2014), the Whitley Gold Award (2017) – also known as the “Green Oscar” – and the UN FAO's Best Co-Management Award for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean (2018).

Kızılkaya continues to lead stakeholder-driven marine resource management and recently helped establish 350 km<sup>2</sup> of new MPAs in Turkey.

**Rocky Sanchez Tirona**  
**Managing Director, Rare Fish Forever**  
**(The Philippines)**



**Rocky Sanchez Tirona** leads Fish Forever, Rare's flagship global program to revitalize coastal fisheries and improve livelihoods in coastal communities. Based in Manila, Tirona oversees a global team of over 100 staff in 8 countries and played a key role in developing Fish Forever from its inception.

Tirona previously served as Rare's Vice President for the Philippines, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia, and helped establish Coastal 500, a 2023 Earthshot Prize finalist. In 2024, she was named one of Fin-Erth's 101 Leading Women in Climate.



**Octavio Aburto Oropeza**  
**Founder & Director, Atlas Aquatica**  
**(Mexico)**



**Dr. Octavio Aburto Oropeza** is a marine ecologist, National Geographic Explorer, and conservation photographer. A Full Professor at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO), his research – particularly on mangrove ecosystems – has earned numerous honors, including the Jean Fort Award for public impact, the WWF's Kathryn Fuller Science for Nature Fellowship (2010), Mexico's Conservation of Nature Prize (2014), a Hellman Fellowship (2015), and a PEW Marine Fellowship (2018).

Aburto's award-winning photography, produced as a fellow of the International League of Conservation Photographers (iLCP), has supported global marine conservation campaigns and helped foster deeper public connection to ocean life.

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