

OPINION > COMMENTARY

Opinion: We are students who are tired of living with pollution and closed beaches

It's time for the adults to listen and act



Eric Camberos (15 years old) at California's 2024 Ocean Day in Sacramento advocating to "Heal Our Coast." (Institute for Public Strategies)



By **ERIC CAMBEROS**

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As a high school freshman and a proud member of the Clean Coast Collaborative, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in Ocean Day on May 7 in Sacramento. Alongside three other dedicated students from our group, supported by Institute for Public Strategies staff through the Youth in Action program, we traveled to our state capital to raise awareness about the environmental issue of the Tijuana River Valley sewage pollution and advocate for solutions to protect our ocean and community.

Ocean Day is a significant event that brings together individuals from all over California to learn about critical environmental challenges and take action to preserve our marine ecosystems. It serves as a platform for advocates, including youth like us, to engage with legislators and push for support on crucial bills aimed at conserving the Pacific Ocean and addressing environmental threats.

We brought our knowledge, passion and a shared commitment to making a difference. While we were well-versed in various environmental issues, such as plastic consumption and water pollution, our primary focus was on shedding light on the grave environmental and public health crisis affecting our community in Imperial Beach from Tijuana River Valley sewage pollution.

The crisis has kept local beaches closed for 450 days or more. There is an urgent need for action, and our visit to Sacramento aimed to amplify this message to those who can drive change.

During Ocean Day, each of us shared our personal experiences and insights into living in a community plagued by sewage pollution. We painted a vivid picture of the challenges we face on a daily basis, from the heartbreaking sight of constant beach closures to the very real health risks posed by contaminated water. In a recent [article](#), the Surfrider Foundation stated that “some toxins are aerosolizing and contaminating the air in Imperial Beach and other nearby border communities.”

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People are [getting sick](#) just by [breathing the air](#) as they go to work or school and even when trying to enjoy their own backyards. We emphasized the importance of immediate attention and action on sustainable solutions to address this pressing issue affecting our health and environment.

Our participation in Ocean Day was not just about raising awareness of the challenges facing our ocean. It was also about bringing attention to a local environmental justice issue that demands immediate action. By speaking up and sharing our stories, we highlighted the importance of youth involvement in environmental and public health advocacy and underscored the ongoing need to safeguard our environment and communities for future generations.

The experience of advocating for solutions to Tijuana River Valley sewage pollution on Ocean Day was transformative. We felt empowered to stand before decision-makers and lawmakers, voice our concerns and advocate for the changes we wish to see in our community. I felt a sense of pride and determination in addressing the conditions of our community and the impact of border pollution on our lives. Our words reflected the group’s sentiment: We are determined to tackle the environmental challenges that threaten our home.

As high school students, we understand the gravity of the environmental issues we face today and the critical role that young people must play in addressing them. Our involvement in Ocean Day and our advocacy for solutions to sewage pollution reaffirmed our belief in the power of youth activism and the impact it can have on driving positive change.

We are immensely proud to have represented our community, our school and the Clean Coast Collaborative at Ocean Day. Our voices were heard, our message was delivered and our commitment to protecting our environment remains unwavering. As we continue our journey as youth advocates for a cleaner, healthier planet, we are inspired by the progress we have made and motivated by the work that lies ahead. We have done what we can. Now it's time for the adults to listen and act. Together, we can make a difference. One voice, one action, one step at a time.

Camberos is a member of the Clean Coast Collaborative and a student at Chula Vista Learning Community Charter High School. He lives in Otay Mesa.

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