

Commissioned by



HIGH LEVEL PANEL for
**A SUSTAINABLE
OCEAN ECONOMY**

BLUE PAPER

Summary for Decision-Makers

The Ocean Transition: What to Learn from System Transitions

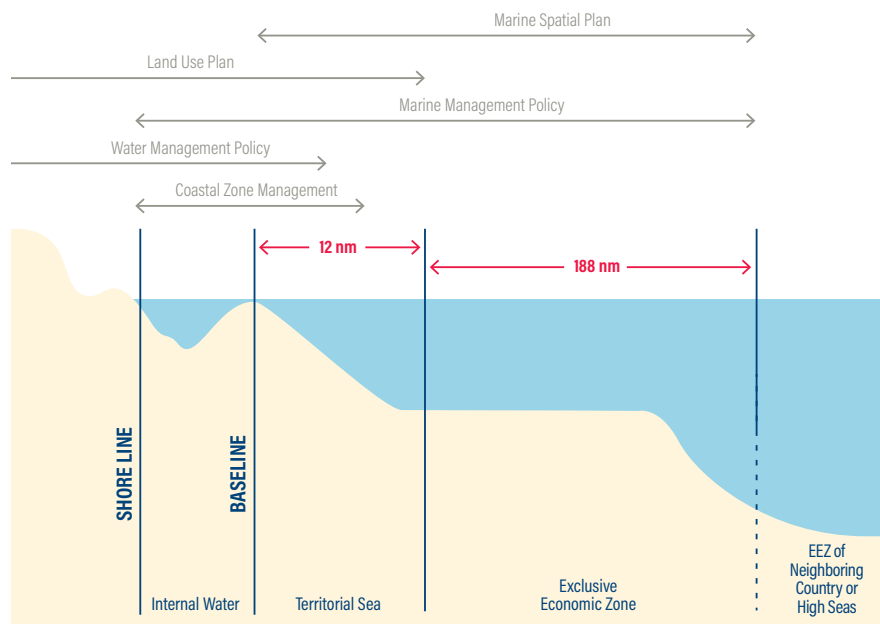
Critical indicators reveal that business as usual is going to result in the collapse of key biophysical ocean functions with major implications for the global economy and societies. A new relationship between humanity and the ocean is required in order to secure the continuity of the diverse life support roles provided by the ocean.

New insights into the complex interconnections between different ecosystems have contributed to a growing realisation that a more holistic approach to ocean governance is needed. The current ocean governance system is fragmented across different administrative boundaries and sectors, preventing the integrated response that is needed to tackle the increasing and cascading risks caused by human activities such as over-fishing and plastic pollution, and climate-related changes in the ocean (Figure 1).

The transformation to a sustainable ocean economy will require the creation of new governance structures that allow for holistic ocean management.

A new paper,¹ commissioned by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, responds directly to this challenge by considering what governance configurations would facilitate the better management of the ocean as a global commons. The paper analyses the conditions that have facilitated societal transitions in the past, and the governance arrangements that have enabled them. It also considers the systems transitions that are already occurring at the local, regional and global levels.

Figure 1: Independent and Overlapping Management Frameworks in the Source-to-Sea System in Sweden



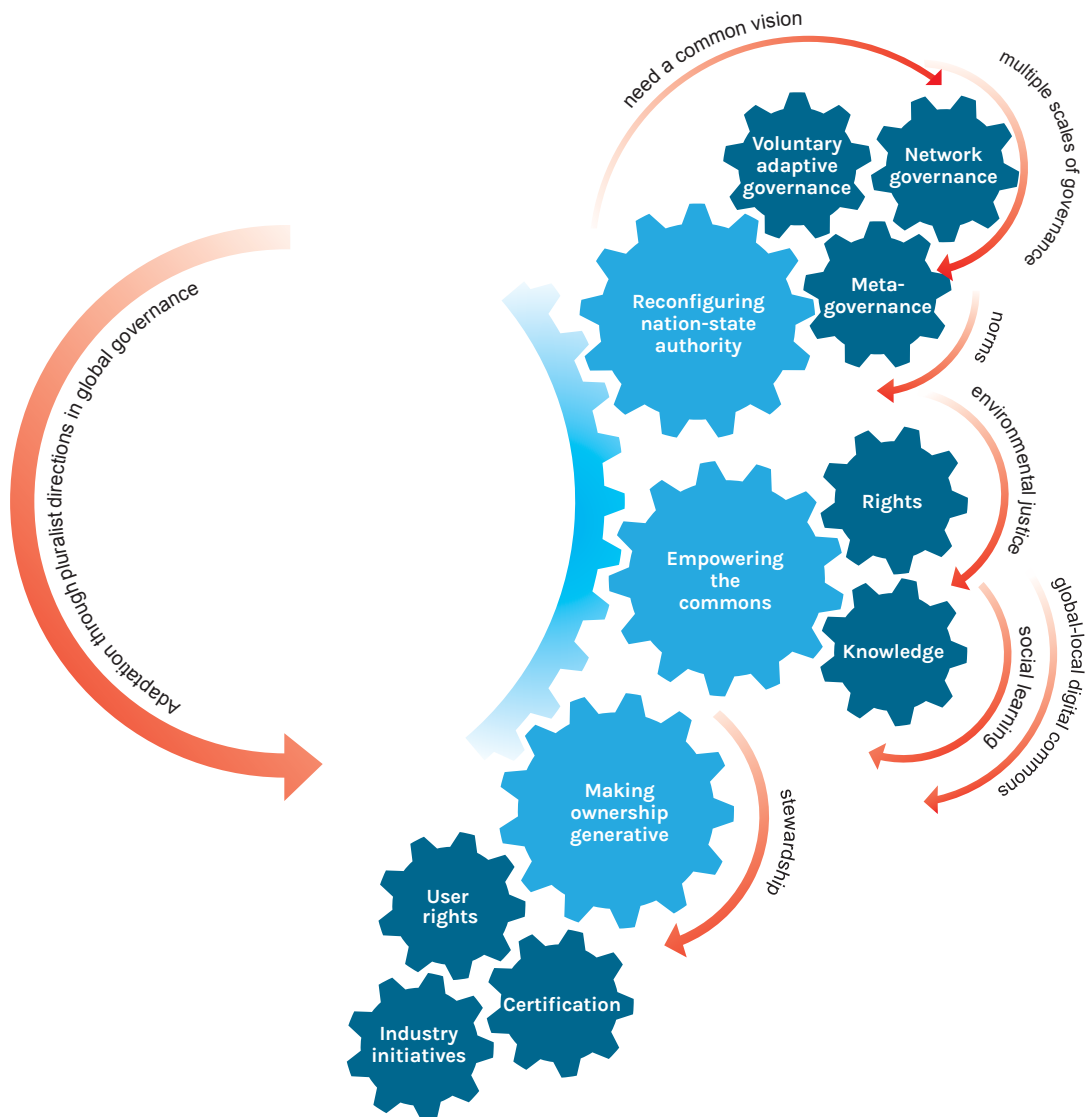
Source: From Mathews et al. 2019.

To create a theory of change for ocean governance, a framework was adapted to consider the following elements:

- **Governance baseline:** Outlines the current governance regime for the ocean.
- **Ocean dynamics:** Identifies stakeholders by sector and describes the dynamics at play in key sectors of the ocean economy.
- **Drivers of change:** Identifies the nature of changes that are destabilising the system (greenhouse gas emissions, overfishing, seabed and land use and weak governance).
- **Niche innovations:** Outlines how the ocean system has evolved by drawing attention to current trends applied in ocean governance (such as ecosystem-based management for development planning and disaster risk management, rights-based fisheries management, shared stewardship in business, monitoring innovations for illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries, supply chain transparency and justice in marine sustainability).
- **Transition dynamics:** Suggests a clear path forward, with examples of actions taken at local, national, regional and global levels which demonstrate successful transitions.

The transition to an ocean governance regime that considers the complexity of the ocean system will require a combination of governance styles, including supranational policy and normative guidelines, a framework which is adaptive and flexible, and bottom-up stewardship. The paper proposes a set of governance components and processes that would deliver global ocean governance framework to facilitate a sustainable transition in the complex ocean system (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Elements Informing a Transition to Effective Global Ocean Governance



Source: Authors, conceptual elements drawn from Bollier 2016.

Opportunities for Action

To catalyse the transition, the paper suggests four broad opportunities for action that could contribute to transitions in process, and instigate new sets of processes and dynamics appropriate to the complexity of ocean management and governance:

1. SUPPORT UN OCEAN PROCESSES

Advocate for the ratification by non-party states of the UNCLOS agreement

Encourage the ratification, implementation and operationalisation, at the national level, of the BBNJ as soon as possible but by no later than 2025

Ratify, implement and localise the Global Pact (or similar UN Convention) as soon as possible, but no later than 2025

Support other UN initiatives such as UNEP, Communities of Ocean Action, Ocean Conference Voluntary Commitments

2. USE AND BUILD ON THE EXISTING INTERNATIONALLY AGREED FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL ACCOUNTING

Establish a new supranational 'ocean agency' to support transition processes and dynamics, develop norms to guide the transition process, design flexible and adaptive frameworks which take account of local contextual issues with sufficient capacity for adaptation to variations in drivers of the systems, and allow iterative development

Strengthen voluntary reflexive governance by improving reporting on national voluntary commitments, monitoring and coordinating commitments

Encourage nation-states to facilitate polycentric governance models, which are guided by general top-down principles but powered by bottom-up decision-making on resource usage

3. CONTRIBUTE TO SOVEREIGN COMMUNITIES

Global recognition of a human right to an ecologically sound environment

Capacity building for an increasing diversity of leaders from local to global scales, so they learn to develop and hold their visions and aspirations, and also develop the ability for generative dialogue

Create a digital ocean knowledge and learning commons

4. DEVELOP THE CONCEPT OF OCEAN STEWARDSHIP

Integrate property rights with stewardship responsibilities through local user rights programs, certifications and recognition of industry initiatives

Only the balance between civil society rights and stronger government leadership can avoid the risk of overburdening citizens with securing their future in the ocean system, or with inequitable access opportunities and distribution of benefits resulting from inconsiderate policy interventions. The achievement of such a balance will require greater willingness and cooperation, from local communities to national and international action. Stronger accountability, transparency and participation mechanisms will also be required to clear conflicts and enable equitable sharing between different users, particularly in areas beyond national jurisdiction.



The High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (Ocean Panel) is a unique initiative by 14 world leaders who are building momentum for a sustainable ocean economy in which effective protection, sustainable production and equitable prosperity go hand in hand.

Co-chaired by Norway and Palau, the Ocean Panel comprises members from Australia, Canada, Chile, Fiji, Ghana, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Namibia, Norway, Palau and Portugal and is supported by the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean.

The Ocean Panel gathers input from a wide array of stakeholders, including an Expert Group and an Advisory Network. The Secretariat, based at World Resources Institute, assists with analytical work, communications and stakeholder engagement.

The Blue Paper that this brief summarises is an independent input to the Ocean Panel process and does not necessarily represent the thinking of the Ocean Panel, Sherpas or Secretariat.

For more information, including the full report, visit www.oceanpanel.org

Endnote

- 1 Swilling, M., M. Ruckelshaus, T. Brodie Rudolph et al. 2020. *The Ocean Transition: What to Learn from System Transitions*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. www.oceanpanel.org/blue-papers/ocean-transition-what-learn-system-transitions