

Commissioned by



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

BLUE PAPER

Summary for Decision-Makers

Towards Ocean Equity

The ocean is important for everyone—it produces oxygen and food, stores carbon and heat, offers space for economic activities and recreation, and continues to inspire and support culture and well-being. Globally, the value of key ocean assets has been estimated at US\$24 trillion and the value of derived services at between \$1.5 trillion and \$6 trillion per year.¹

However, access to ocean resources and sectors is rarely equitably distributed. Many of their benefits are accumulated by a few, while most harms from development are borne by the most vulnerable. Inequity is a systemic feature of the current ocean economy. It is embedded in existing political and economic systems, the result of historical legacies and prevailing norms. This has brought global environmental challenges and negative effects on human well-being. Although legal frameworks partially exist to support equity, they are not sufficiently developed. In practice, ocean policies are largely equity-blind, contributing to current patterns of inequity.

Addressing existing inequalities, preventing the widening of ocean inequities, and promoting equity, both within and between countries, is integral to a sustainable ocean economy. Designing new strategies and policies that offer a more integrated and holistic view of our ocean resources and a more just inclusion of their diverse users also offers the opportunity to secure a more equitable and stable future development trajectory.

What is Ocean Equity?

Ocean equity includes a focus on the provision of social, cultural and economic benefits and spans a variety of ocean-related sectors and equity dimensions. This Blue Paper highlights several ways in which inequity can manifest and/or actions that can be taken to support equity:



Fisheries: The effective implementation of existing international guiding policies may help redress the inequitable distribution of global commercial fish catches. At the local scale, small-scale fishing communities, particularly indigenous, women and other minority subgroups, often have relatively limited political power, are less likely to be included in decision-making processes and suffer disproportionately from depleted ecosystems.



High Seas: Limited engagement of developing nations in high seas activities and associated decision-making—in terms of fisheries, rare minerals, genetic resources and scientific advances—raises questions of justice, fairness and equity.



Coastal Infrastructure: Coastal and offshore infrastructure and development projects should be designed to minimise costs and enhance benefits for vulnerable communities.



Transnational Corporations: Responsible operation of transnational corporations in global supply chains can advance equity through better practice and reporting (including greater transparency and exposure of human rights abuses) as well as through active engagement with policymakers.



Climate Change: Climate change will create and worsen challenges of fairness and equity faced by already vulnerable nations. It is therefore urgent that justice be considered in all sectors and at all political levels and that equity-activating policies be quickly implemented.

A sustainable ocean economy should respect the environment, protect human rights, improve human well-being, stimulate inclusion and gender equity, and prioritise recognition, diversity and equal access to resources to provide fair opportunities consistent with sustainable development. It should also address corruption and tax evasion, demand responsible and transparent business practices and create a shared economy that facilitates a fair redistribution of wealth and benefits. A sustainable ocean economy should be aware of environmental and social limits on growth and consider degrowth where appropriate.



New research in support of the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy assesses the fairness of the current global ocean economy and outlines an approach for the just inclusion of diverse actors in the sustainable blue economy agenda and the equitable distribution of ocean benefits and insulation from harms for the most vulnerable.² This Blue Paper addresses issues of ocean equity and fairness that exist at and across multiple scales (from the global and national levels to those of communities and subgroups) and involve relationships (bilateral or otherwise) among multiple types of actors (governments, civil society, international agencies and private corporations) with different levels of power, capacities and incentives to address ocean equity.

Shifting the current trajectory of persistent and increasing inequities will require strong leadership, inclusive governance as well as intentional and long-term planning that starts with a clear commitment to equity as integral to a sustainable ocean economy and relationships within and across nations.

Table 1 lists a series of opportunities for action along a spectrum of ambitions, from basic to transformative. These opportunities for action are intended as complementary and reinforcing actions to support future ocean equity.

Table 1. Overview of Opportunities for Action for Achieving Equity in a Sustainable Ocean Economy

SUSTAINABLE OCEAN ECONOMY EQUITY 		
SAFEGUARDS <i>No Regrets</i>	MAINSTREAMING EQUITY <i>Doing What's Right</i>	TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES <i>The Bold Policies</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ In development activities and conservation initiatives, engage and include developing states and local populations in decision-making processes. ■ Recognise the rights, roles and needs of women, indigenous groups, small-scale fishers, individuals with disabilities, and other minority groups and lift existing access barriers. ■ Protect human rights and the rights of indigenous groups. ■ Address corruption and tax evasion. Investigate and pilot approaches to limits on growth and degrowth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recognise, protect and operationalise equity and access rights. ■ Build local capacity—including access to low-cost and accessible technologies—to establish equality of opportunity. ■ Understand social-ecological causality in ocean environments to assign responsibility and liability, and secure an equitable distribution of social gains. ■ Demand, require and stimulate transparent, responsible business practices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create a shared ocean economy that facilitates redistribution of wealth and benefits. ■ Democratise ocean knowledge. ■ Create inclusive governance processes by incorporating local voices and visions into plans for the ocean economy, at all scales. ■ Be aware of environmental and social limits on growth and consider degrowth.

Taken together these opportunities for action aim to inform a pathway to a sustainable and just ocean economy.

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

Endnotes

- 1 Cicin-Sain, B. 2015. "Goal 14—Conserve and Sustainably Use Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development"; Hoegh-Guldberg, O. 2015. *Reviving the Oceans Economy: The Case for Action—2015*. Gland, Switzerland: World Wide Fund for Nature; Lillebo, A.I., C. Pita, J. Garcia Rodrigues, S. Ramos and S. Villasante. 2017. "How Can Marine Ecosystem Services Support the Blue Growth Agenda?" *Marine Policy* 81: 132–42; OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016. *The Ocean Economy in 2030*. Paris: OECD.
- 2 Österblom, H., C.C.C. Wabnitz, D. Tladi et al. 2020. *Towards Ocean Equity*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Available online at www.oceanpanel.org/blue-papers/how-distribute-benefits-ocean-equitably.