

Commissioned by



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

BLUE PAPER

Summary for Decision-Makers

The Human Relationship with Our Ocean Planet

The human relationship with the ocean is built on values that are both monetary and non-monetary and which contribute to both material and non-material dimensions of well-being. These diverse relationships and values are essential to broader human flourishing.

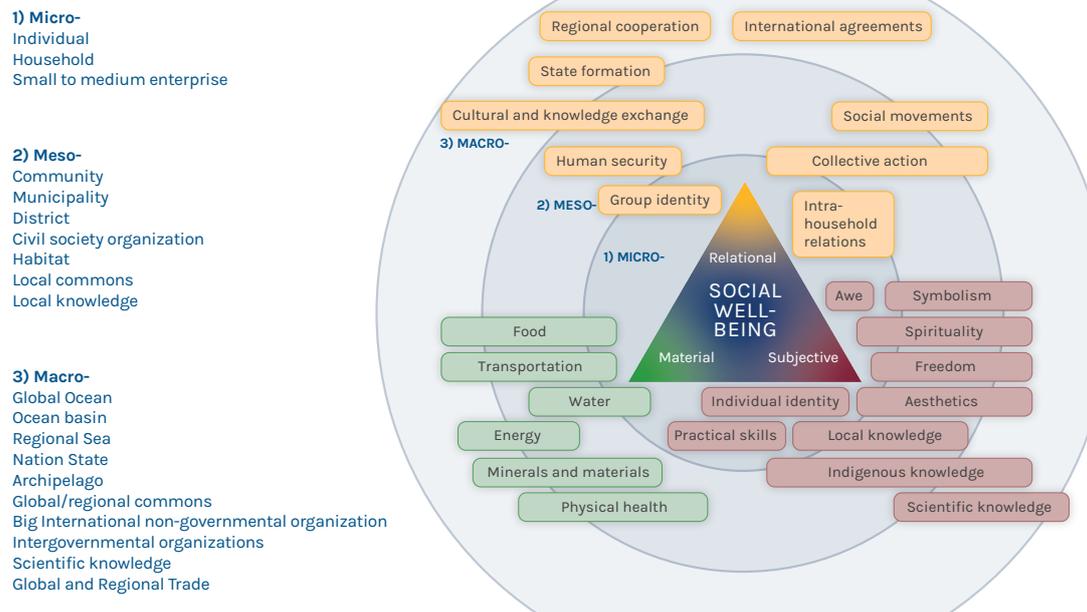
They include contributions to cultural and social-legal identity, sense of place, occupational pride and self-respect, spirituality, mental and bodily health, and human security (see Figure S-1). These values and interests matter to individuals and collectives and could be more strongly represented in ocean policy discussions.

Governing the ocean is a ‘collective responsibility of humanity’ and can only be achieved by ensuring that those who have lived in, worked on and stewarded coastal and continental waters for centuries or millennia are included in decisions on its future governance. Coasts and ocean basins are cultural seascapes and have been peopled and governed by a multitude of tenure systems designed, contested and embodied by coastal peoples themselves. These ‘ocean citizens’ and the institutions they have forged are pivotal to achieving a sustainable ocean economy. Thus, maintaining ocean health and maintaining people’s ocean access should be the dual aims of governing the future ocean.

In proposing pathways towards an equitable and sustainable ocean economy, we must account for the historical and cultural differences among and within nation-states and coastal Indigenous Peoples’ relationships with the ocean. Each nation and coastal people will have its own vision, and different priorities and capacities to invest in and benefit from the sustainable ocean economy. Recognising these diverse visions and values will help adapt global ocean governance initiatives to the local context, while also complying with global agreements—including those on land and sea tenure, small-scale fisheries and rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This paper,¹ commissioned by the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, identifies and focuses on the relationships with the ocean that contribute to human well-being. The paper suggests that understanding and supporting these relationships will help

Figure S-1: Framework to Identify Human Relationships with the Ocean



Note: Scales at which these relationships take place range from the micro (individual, community, local place or small enterprise) to the macro (nation, citizenry, region, ocean basin or whole ocean, large domestic or multinational firm).

Source: Modified from Weeratunge et al. 2014.

ensure that a sustainable ocean economy includes traditional ocean users and provides the gains in human welfare and well-being needed to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Drawing on brief overviews of some of the socio-legal institutions that have developed in different maritime societies, the paper identifies how different societies have governed ocean spaces and volumes and how these governance mechanisms reflect the diversity of ‘ocean values’ held by different peoples. With that in mind, the paper shows how to ensure that this plurality of ‘ocean values’ is represented in the planning and implementation of a sustainable ocean economy.

Opportunities for Action

The paper identifies five key actions to assist states and international organisations in supporting and improving humanity's diverse relationships with the ocean:

- 1. Humanise the new ocean narrative by focusing economic development on the objective of increasing human well-being.** Including cultural, historical, ethical, spiritual and aesthetic perspectives will ensure that technical, economic and legal developments are culturally and socially embedded and guided by the moral principles upheld in different societies, as well as by scientific advice. These perspectives should be embedded in all high-level dialogues on ocean futures.
- 2. Foster diversity and inclusion in the sustainable ocean economy.** Accounting for social differences—for example, in gender, age, class, ethnicity and race—among those potentially affected by new plans for ocean economic development will help ensure greater inclusivity and equity in sustainable ocean economy outcomes, supporting achievement of SDG 5 (gender equity), SDG 8 (youth employment) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).
- 3. Engage in partnerships with a broad constituency of ocean supporters, including small-scale fisherfolk, community elders and next-generation social and environmental activists, Indigenous Peoples and women who work in the maritime economy and who steward marine environments.** Include them in shaping visions and implementing ocean governance reform strategies and economic development plans. Recognise the rights of existing ocean users when considering the addition of new entrants to the ocean economy. This will help ensure that the sustainable ocean economy is diverse and inclusive, supporting achievement of SDGs 5, 8, 10 and 17 (partnerships).
- 4. Build the capacity of meso-level institutions, that is, those below the level of the national government, transnational corporations or international non-governmental organisations, and above the level of the individual citizen-consumer.** These institutions include local and municipal authorities, grassroots civil society organisations, trade unions, small-business associations, and traditional community leadership and associations. Many of these organisations are already active in securing citizens' individual and communal rights in various ways, including tenure rights and rights to decent work. This will entail mobilising social-legal, cultural and political capital in shaping the sustainable ocean economy, as well as modulating financial capital.
- 5. Ensure that responses to COVID-19 include consideration of the well-being of ocean-dependent people and economic sectors.** The pandemic has affected seafood supply systems, impeded maritime trade and halted cruise-tourism, as part of a wider economic impact that has led to mass unemployment and threatens the world with deep recession. Consequently, policy attention has been diverted away from ocean sustainability and economic development and towards public health and economic restoration. It is too soon to say how COVID-19 will ultimately influence progress towards a sustainable ocean economy and the achievement of flourishing societies, but the ocean will certainly play an important role in restoring both material and non-material dimensions of human well-being in the coming years.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to pause and carefully consider our complex relationship with the ocean, and to rethink it and reshape it while ensuring that future generations can meet the challenges they will face. Achieving this will require humanity to have a rich, diverse, engaged and evolving relationship with our ocean planet. The actions proposed by this paper aim to support the creation of this relationship.

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 Allison, E.H., J. Kurien, Y. Ota et al. 2020. *The Human Relationship with Our Ocean Planet*. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. <https://oceanpanel.org/blue-papers/HumanRelationshipwithOurOceanPlanet>.

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