

# **GOVERNING COASTAL RESOURCES**

IMPLICATIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

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### **FOREWORD**

Our shared ocean is at risk.

Two thirds of our planet is covered by the ocean, a system that not only supports life on Earth and human well-being but also regulates the climate. The ocean provides oxygen, food, energy, water and raw materials. It offers remarkable cultural services and is a source of jobs and economic activity across our planet.

Despite its importance, the future of our world's ocean is at a critical point. Over-exploitation, pollution and climate change are causing a serious loss of marine biodiversity. Without a healthy ocean all the services it provides will be disrupted and the consequences will be dire.

The 2030 Agenda dedicates Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water to "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources". As we enter the decade for achieving the 2030 Agenda, we need urgent action to mitigate the detrimental effects human activities are triggering, from those undertaken at sea or in coastal areas, to those occurring inland, hundreds of kilometres away from the coast.

A wide range of initiatives across the planet are working in this direction. This includes UNEP's ecosystem-based marine and coastal management and ocean governance work: the Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative, the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, and efforts of the Regional Seas programmes. In addition, scientific findings continue to strengthen our knowledge-base for ocean policy-making and management solutions, a focus of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), and the UN Decade for Action on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) which UNEP is proud to co-lead with numerous partners.

This International Resource Panel report, "Governing coastal resources: implications for a sustainable blue economy", outlines key pathways through which land-based activities influence coastal resources, across land-sea boundaries and at multiple spatial scales. This report also stresses the need for a holistic governance approach that accounts for the connections between land-based activities and coastal resources. The report provides practical options to strengthen existing land-sea governance practices and presents new governance

structures to reduce the impact of land-based activities on coastal resources and support the transition to a sustainable blue economy. We have a significant opportunity and responsibility to mitigate human impacts.

It is time to act and save our Blue Planet for humanity to thrive. I believe this important report of the International Resource Panel will make valuable contributions to an urgently needed shift towards more comprehensive and effective ocean stewardship, placing us on a sustainable ocean trajectory that we are all relying on. Business as usual is no longer an option. COVID-19 has demonstrated that humanity can respond collectively to a shared global challenge – let's build on this to create an unstoppable movement for sustainable oceans for All.

#### Ligia Noronha

Director, Economy Division UN Environment Programme (April 2021)

#### **PREFACE**

Historically the management of our ocean has been fragmented by natural, legal and administrative boundaries. Land-based and ocean-based activities have been governed independently creating a disconnect between where impacts are experienced and where they originate.

It is widely recognised that land-based human activities significantly impact the marine environment. For instance, estimates suggest that 80 per cent of marine pollution originates on land. Still, there are very few, if any, truly effective governance mechanisms that take account of land-ocean interactions.

Since 2007 the International Resource Panel has provided independent, authoritative and policy-relevant scientific assessments on the status, trends and future state of natural resources. In this report, our focus is on coastal resources, specifically how land-based human activities affect the quality and availability of coastal and marine resources.

This report identifies the numerous pathways through which land-based activities generate impacts on coastal resources, acknowledging that they can differ, depending on the location, type, condition and resilience of the local ecosystems. It also identifies implications for the sustainable blue economy of changes to the coastal resource base caused by land-based activities. This is further explored in detailed assessments of shrimp aquaculture and coastal mining.

Based on its scientific findings, the report calls for vastly improved governance approaches to reduce the negative impacts of land-based activities on coastal resources as well as supporting the transition to a sustainable blue economy. We have a significant opportunity and responsibility to reverse human impacts on our shared ocean.

We thank the lead authors and their team for their dedicated efforts to draw together an evidence base that demonstrates beyond question the need for enhanced governance coordination between terrestrial activities and marine resources. As the report advocates, future governance systems should not be constrained by existing boundaries which often disconnect causes from effects. Instead greater emphasis should be placed on safeguarding our natural resources, advancing the sustainable development goals of the Agenda 2030 and breaking away from current unsustainable resource use patterns.



**Izabella Teixeira** Co-Chair International Resource Panel



**Janez Potočnik**Co-Chair
International Resource Panel

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Coastal resources - including fish, minerals and energy - are critical to people, nature and the economy, and are a focus for the emerging sustainable blue economy agenda. Whilst there is no globally agreed definition of a Sustainable Blue Economy, the working definition in this report is an ocean-based economy that provides equitably distributed social and economic benefits for current and future generations, while restoring and protecting the intrinsic value and functionality of coastal and marine ecosystems and is based on clean technologies and circular material flows (adapted from WWF, 2018). It has long been recognized that a particular challenge in coastal areas is the management of land-based activities that generate detrimental impacts on coastal resources in the marine environment. Many of these pressures are negative externalities of land-based human activities that are not taken into account within existing resource-governance frameworks. While a range of market-based, non-market and other interventions are worthy of consideration, the development of improved approaches to landsea governance that take account of how land-based activities affect the quality and availability of coastal resources is the focus of this report.

The primary purpose of the study was to determine appropriate governance approaches to reduce the effects of land-based activities on coastal resources and to support the transition to a sustainable blue economy. A secondary purpose of the study was to test a new method to identify the pathways through which land-based activities affect coastal resources. This global study used a Drivers, Pressures, State,

based activities on coastal resources. In total, over 1,000 separate pieces of evidence were reviewed, supported by three workshops to validate and refine the analysis.

We found that land-based activities generate multiple impacts of different strength on coastal resources and that biotic coastal resources are more impacted by land-based activities than abiotic coastal resources (however, this could in part be due to fewer studies focusing on abiotic resources). There is comparatively strong evidence that all biotic coastal resources are highly impacted by land-based activities, with agriculture, ports/harbours and aquaculture being particularly impactful land-based activities. Biodiversity was the coastal resource most impacted by landbased activities. By examining the dependency of sustainable blue economy sectors on coastal resources, we found that aquaculture, fishing and tourism were most vulnerable to changes in the coastal resource base arising from land-based activities. In comparison, sectors dependent on abiotic coastal resources, such as aggregate extraction, were somewhat isolated from the effects of land-based activities.

The results clearly showed that coastal resources, particularly living resources, are negatively affected by stressors generated by land-based activities that may take place at great distances from the coast. Land-based activities, however, are currently managed through sector-specific arrangements with limited, if any, regard for their effects on coastal resources. An additional barrier is that terrestrial and marine areas typically operate within separate governance frameworks with no means of coordination.

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