Article

Blue Economy and Competing Discourses in International Oceans Governance

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Abstract

In this article, we track a relatively new term in global environmental governance: "blue economy." Analyzing preparatory documentation and data collected at the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (i.e., Rio + 20), we show how the term entered into use and how it was articulated within four competing discourses regarding human–ocean relations: (a) oceans as natural capital, (b) oceans as good business, (c) oceans as integral to Pacific Small Island Developing States, and (d) oceans as small-scale fisheries livelihoods. Blue economy was consistently invoked to connect oceans with Rio + 20's "green economy" theme; however, different actors worked to further define the term in ways that prioritized particular oceans problems, solutions, and participants. It is not clear whether blue economy will eventually be understood singularly or as the domain of a particular actor or discourse. We explore possibilities as well as discuss discourse in global environmental governance as powerful *and* precarious.

Keywords

global environmental governance, green economy, natural capital, oceans, Rio + 20, small island developing states, small-scale fisheries

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Oceans have been characterized as the common heritage of mankind (Pardo, 1984), as vulnerable to the tragedy of the commons (Berkes et al., 2006), and as a significant ecological frontier (Steinberg, 2008). These constructions help to reinforce United Nations (UN) leadership in oceans governance (Steinberg, 2001). At the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD; herafter Rio + 20 or the summit), ocean issues and questions of oceans governance were formally negotiated and less formally discussed in side events. The interest in and attention to oceans at Rio + 20 was described by many as broad and unprecedented relative to previous international meetings (Campbell, Gray, Fairbanks, Silver, & Gruby, 2013). Catalysts include ocean acidification and sea-level rise, overfishing and marine biodiversity loss, a growing consensus regarding the conservation and development potential of the high seas, and, interest from some countries in territorializing more ocean space (Ban et al., 2014; Suárez-de Vivero, 2013; Veitch et al., 2012; Zalik, 2015). During Rio + 20, we tracked oceans negotiations and side events with particular attention to the use of a relatively new term in the global environmental governance arena: "blue economy."[1]

International events and meetings are critical to global governance. They draw together people, making time and space for negotiations, side events, and networking. Formally, they offer a sanctioned setting for the (re)configuration of social relations and structures and the (re)codification of positions and perspectives (Campbell, Corson, Gray, MacDonald, & Brosius, 2014; Clémençon, 2012; MacDonald & Corson, 2012). Participants and activists often adopt one or more discourse—comprised of key terms, compelling images, and structural devices such as metaphor (Dryzek, 2005)—to frame and communicate their priority problems and favored solutions (Espinosa, 2014; Suarez & Corson, 2013). Even if a binding agreement is not produced, terms (such as blue economy) and broader discourses may evolve, permeate, or be reinforced in ways that influence future funding, programs, policies, and activism (e.g., Clémençon, 2012; Suarez & Corson, 2013). Therefore, employing qualitative research methods at large international meetings allows study of the relationship between discourse, policies, practices, and transformation in governance institutions and approaches (Brosius & Campbell, 2010). We used a methodology called "Collaborative Event Ethnography" (CEE) to observe and systematically gather data regarding ocean negotiations and discussions across Rio + 20.[2]

Our attention to oceans governance and the term blue economy is motivated by three factors. First, sheer extent and significance of oceans for development: oceans cover 70% of the earth's surface; fish provide a critical source of protein for international markets and coastal communities; and, new sectors like deep-sea mining and aquaculture are developing rapidly (Campbell et al., forthcoming). Second, most ocean space lies beyond national jurisdiction, where many resources are held in common and where

UN-led governance is fragmented. Third, state and private interest in oceans conservation and development is currently high, as reflected, for example, by the recently launched World Bank *Global Partnership for Oceans* (Abbott et al., 2014; Campbell et al., 2013). As our analysis demonstrates, a range of actors employed the term blue economy at Rio + 20 to bring oceans conservation and development to the attention of the broader global environmental governance community *and* to advocate priority problems as well as preferred solutions and participants.

First, we examine evidence from Rio + 20 preparatory documents and events that reveals key actors and motivations behind initial uses of the term blue economy. Second, drawing on data gathered via CEE at the summit, we demonstrate how blue economy was employed within four broader discourses regarding human–ocean relations: (a) oceans as natural capital, (b) oceans as good business, (c) oceans as integral to Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and (d) oceans as small-scale fisheries (SSF) livelihoods. Across each, blue economy was consistently used to draw attention to oceans and connect them to Rio + 20's green economy theme. However, when arguing for particular oceans problems, solutions, and participants, many speakers worked to bring more specific meaning to the term, often in ways that were inconsistent or incompatible. As we will discuss, it is not clear whether the term blue economy will come to be singularly understood as the domain of a particular set of actors (e.g., SIDS) or as a short-hand reference to particular sets of governance mechanisms (e.g., market based) or ideologies (e.g., the "green economy"). To conclude the article, we consider various possibilities; address how more marginal actors, organizations, and countries have employed the term blue economy; and offer comments on the powerful-but-precarious nature of discourse in global environmental governance.

From Green Economy to Blue Economy

The term "green economy" has already ascended in global environmental governance (Brand, 2012; Onesti, 2012). Green economy proponents espouse a conservation and development vision organized around "new environmentally friendly technologies" and "a global policy network of private and public actors" (Haas, 2012, p. 95). More critically, however, the prominence of this term, and the apparent popularity of governance practices and mechanisms associated with it, can be read as part of a longer process, whereby the scientific and social justice underpinnings of global ecology have given way to a managerial ontology of natural capital (McAfee, 1999, 2012).

The desire to know nature in economic terms has "reverberated through environmental policy, funding and program implementation" over the last 10 to 15 years (Suarez & Corson, 2013, p. 65), and though valuation methodologies are debated (Dempsey & Robertson, 2012), nature is now embraced as a

solution to socioeconomic crises. Protected areas, payments for ecosystem services, biodiversity derivatives, and so on are seen as remedies to environmental problems *and* flagship opportunities for accumulation (MacDonald & Corson, 2012; McAfee, 2012). Rather than needing to pay their way amidst competing political–economic priorities (as in McAfee, 1999), species, resources, and ecosystems are recast as "the driver for the global economic recovery" (Corson, MacDonald, & Neimbark, 2013, p. 3). A core difference between green economy and sustainable development is the former's grounding in the logics of capitalist growth rather than in recognition of its contradictions and inequalities (Corson & MacDonald, 2012; Onesti, 2012).

However, through several publications, Corson and MacDonald have demonstrated the contingent nature of green economy (Corson et al., 2013; MacDonald, 2010; MacDonald & Corson, 2012). Critically tracing the words and interactions of governance actors, and relating this to institutional change over time, their work reveals how the performance and circulation of market ideas (e.g., about valuing nature) fertilize real opportunities for the adoption of neoliberal governance practices (e.g., carbon banking). In other words, they show that "the green economy" is produced as diverse actors claim and use particular words, concepts and metaphors, and incrementally, shift priorities and practices (i.e., "grabbing green"; cf. Corson et al., 2013).

Related criticism is growing that the international adoption of green language (e.g., green economy as a formal theme of Rio + 20) has helped to create the conditions for "green grabbing," a specific form of land grab whereby land and resources are enclosed for development projects premised on global environmental improvement (cf. Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012). With nature recognized as valuable to production (e.g., of ecosystem services) and accumulation (e.g., via markets for ecosystem services), the private sector sees and seeks opportunity in conservation, credit, biofuel, sustainable agriculture ventures, and so on (Leach, Fairhead, & Fraser, 2012). For example, Leach et al. (2012) trace the discursive construction of a carbon-rich soil substance "biochar" by scientists, venture capitalists, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as a novel green commodity, noting the quick emergence of for-profit consultancies and pilot projects in Africa that require smallholders to "modify and re-imagine their farming and everyday practices" (p. 298). As interest in the conservation and development potential of oceans grows (Abbott et al., 2014; Campbell et al., 2013), scholarly attention to institutional contexts, discourses, and possible place-based cases relevant to "blue grabbing" is warranted (Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012; Steinberg, 2008).

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, est., 1982) formalizes the right of coastal states to claim, access, and manage resources within 200-mile exclusive economic zones (EEZs). It is through this arrangement that nation-states have enclosed and (re)allocated coastal seas and in-EEZ marine resources over the last 50 to 60 years (Mansfield, 2001; Steinberg, 2008). Yet, EEZs account for only 42% of total ocean space (Suárez-de Vivero, 2013).

The remaining 58%, known as the "high seas," is also regulated via numerous UN-led sector-specific agreements (e.g. shipping via the International Maritime Organization (IMO), fisheries via the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, and mining via the International Seabed Authority).[3] The narrow nature of these arrangements has drawn criticism that global oceans governance is too fragmented, with some suggesting that high seas spaces and resources are at risk for ecological decline and inequitable allocation (Ban et al., 2014; Veitch et al., 2012; Zalik, 2015).

As our analysis shows, many actors currently advocate new or increased international attention to oceans and oceans governance institutions; a good number suggest the need for further investment in oceans conservation and development, and some see new opportunity for accumulation. In this sense the emergence and circulation of the term blue economy might simply be counted as an example of "grabbing green," whereby ocean spaces and resources are being discursively enrolled within the broader green economy agenda and particular, neoliberal, ideals are ascending within global oceans governance. We argue that it is more complicated than this, however, because our analysis reveals that meaning was made of blue economy in many contradictory ways at Rio + 20, and in some prominent and uncontested instances, that articulations diverged altogether from the "nature-as-capital" ontology. Our discussion examines important points of divergence across discourses and consider possibilities for blue economy to be defined by one set of actors in ways that reflect their preferred governance practices and participants.

Methodological Approach

With more than 45,000 attendees participating in concurrent events and negotiations, Rio + 20 would be difficult for a lone researcher to cover. We therefore engaged in CEE, a methodology wherein a coordinated group of researchers disperses to gain insights into the social dynamics and processes at play (Brosius & Campbell, 2010; Campbell et al., 2014; Corson, Campbell, & MacDonald, 2014). Fourteen affiliated academic researchers participated in a CEE at Rio + 20 and related sites throughout Rio de Janeiro between June 11 and 23, 2012. This article stems from the work of five team members (i.e., the authors) who focused on oceans negotiations and events. It also builds on and was informed by our past experience working together, including previous projects that used CEE (e.g., Gray, Gruby, & Campbell, 2014; Gruby & Campbell, 2013). While author Gruby participated as an official delegate of the Marshall Islands (with their informed consent), and we all research and publish on various topics related to oceans governance, we acted as observers rather than participants in the negotiations and side events. For example, we did not contribute to discussions that frequently followed formal presentations in side events.

As a team, we observed and recorded all four open negotiating meetings on the oceans text of the Outcome Document (UN General Assembly, 2012) and 34 of the 35 scheduled ocean side events at Rio + 20. This amounts to 58 recorded hours explicitly about oceans, and an additional 14 hr at seven events where ocean issues were included in a broader agenda. In addition, we gathered key preparatory documents related to oceans released in the two years prior to Rio + 20. Each author is familiar with the full data set; in many cases, multiple authors observed the same events. CEE is thus not merely an exercise in using more people to collect more data; the approach seeks to maximize the benefits of working together, extending the collaborative approach through to data analysis and interpretation in ways that are both collective and reflexive (Campbell et al., 2014; see also Mauthner & Doucet 2008). Using categories developed by Dryzek (2005), our analysis began with collective discussion and coding focused on how oceans were represented.[4] As four discernible discourses of human–ocean relations emerged, we narrowed in on oceans problems, causes and solutions, and on how the term blue economy was employed within each.

The following section overviews uses of blue economy prior to Rio + 20. This review is not exhaustive but provides important context regarding who promoted or debated the term and, in turn, how it began to be associated with various oceans actors, issues, and approaches. Documentation from formal UN preparatory meetings and from three UN reports is particularly informative. The latter include the following: *A Blueprint for Ocean and Coastal Sustainability* (hereafter Blueprint or the International Oceanographic Commission of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [IOC/UNESCO], IMO, FAO, and UN Development Programme [UNDP], 2011), *Green Economy in a Blue World* (UN Environment Programme [UNEP], FAO, IMO, UNDP, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), WorldFish Center, & GRID-Arendal, 2012), and *Why Value the Oceans?* (UNEP/GRID-Arendal, Duke University Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, UNEP TEEB Office and UNEP Regional Seas Programme, 2012). We also highlight two prominent events that purposefully brought together an array of actors to discuss oceans outside of the formal UN preparatory process.

Blue Economy in the Build Up to Rio + 20

Sustained use of the term blue economy among governance actors became evident during the second of the three UNCSD preparatory meetings in March 2011. *Blueprint* quotes the UNCSD Secretary-General as saying that "a blue economy approach was emphasized during the second session of the UNCSD Preparatory Committee" and that this was welcome because it works "with the twin focus [the green economy and institutional frameworks] of Rio + 20" (IOC/UNESCO, IMO, FAO, & UNDP, 2011, p. 4). At the same meeting, Pacific

SIDS delegates suggested that the alliance of global SIDS would adopt blue economy to frame their interests at Rio + 20 (IISD Reporting Services, 2011b). This strategy was debated internally, as questions circulated about what the term implied. In June 2011, for example, Caribbean SIDS suggested that "the terminology 'Blue Economy' was not required," noting that it may not adequately capture concerns about sea level rise and cautioning against "too many colour economies" (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011, p. 10). Similarly, participants in a September 2011 small-island developing states preparatory meeting "did not agree" (IISD Reporting Services, 2011a) whether adopting the term would benefit or detract from their interests at the summit and beyond.

A submission by the Pacific SIDS to the November 1, 2011 round of submissions to the draft UNCSD outcome document (also known during the preparatory period as the "zero draft") contained a section titled "Proposed Text on the Blue Economy." Suggested additions highlight the relationship between oceans, food security, and economic well-being globally and for small-island developing states (Pacific SIDS, 2011, p. 3). At least 15 non-state members of the UN's "major groups" also referenced the term blue economy in zero draft submissions.[5] The International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSF, 2012, p. 4) comments, later published under the title *Green, Blue and True*, expressed support for the Rio + 20 green economy theme, "assuming" it recognizes "'Blue Economy', or sustainable and equitable distribution of ocean resources," the value of SSF, and the need to protect fisher rights. At a late November 2011 informal preparatory oceans workshop convened by Prince Albert II of Monaco, small-island developing states were commended by other attendees for their promotion of blue economy.[6]

January and February 2012 brought two additional oceans-focused UN preparatory reports (UNEP et al., 2012; UNEP/GRID-Arendal et al., 2012). Like *Blueprint*, *Green Economy in a Blue World* works to articulate the connections between land-based society and the oceans. Using the term blue economy only once, chapters highlight fisheries and aquaculture, maritime transport, marine-based renewable energy, ocean nutrient pollution, coastal tourism, deep-sea minerals, and SIDS as central to the green economy. In this sense, the report serves as a catch-all into which many ocean sectors, problems, and users were placed and tagged as relevant to Rio + 20. *Why Value the Oceans* proposes greater attention to marine ecosystem services and offers discussion and possible methodological starting points for "mainstream[ing] ocean and coastal ecosystems into national budgetary and planning processes" (UNEP/GRID-Arendal, Duke University Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, UNEP TEEB Office and UNEP Regional Seas Programme, 2012, p. 2). Together, these reports illustrate UN interest in "bringing oceans in" to the green economy. However, that they avoid extensive use of the term blue economy suggests a lack of

consensus on its meaning, and perhaps, hesitance to distinguish blue economy from green.

In February 2012, *The Economist* Magazine hosted its first "World Oceans Summit." The 300 participants included business elites, elected leaders, NGO representatives, and senior UN executives. Two instances warrant attention for their invocation of Rio + 20 and attention to the perceived untapped economic potential of oceans: a session hosted by Pavan Sukhdev and a keynote address announcing the World Bank's plans for its "Global Partnership for the Oceans" (GPO). Sukhdev, notable for his leadership of The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) initiative, headlined a session intended to "examine the continued undervaluing of natural resources, particularly in the oceans."[7] A press release summarizes:

> [i]n the year of the Rio+20 Summit, the World Oceans Summit will highlight the urgent need for improved information regarding systems and [ecosystem] services such as ocean fisheries, coastal ecosystems and coral reefs, oceanic carbon processes and polar seas.[8]

The next day, in his speech announcing the GPO, then World Bank President, Robert Zoellick (2012), asserted that the

> [o]ceans are the home of an under-recognized and under-appreciated "blue economy." At a time when the world is looking for sources of growth, there is huge potential for "blue growth"—wisely preserving and investing in the value of ocean ecosystems to fight poverty and improve lives. (Zoellick, 2012)

Drawing parallels to green economy and green growth, Zoellick (2012) suggested that "catalytic finance" needs to be mobilized to encourage "investment in oceans."

A wide range of actors sought to connect oceans with the green economy prior to Rio + 20; some made the term blue economy central to their arguments, while others debated its utility or avoided it altogether. *Blueprint* uses the term while other UN preparatory reports focus on connecting a variety of ocean problems, users, and activities to the green economy. SIDS debated whether to use blue economy, and eventually, Pacific SIDS chose it as a subtitle in a zero draft submission. Non-state major group members also began to use blue economy in ways that highlighted their particular interests, some of which do not align with dominant articulations of green economy (e.g., affirming the collective rights of small-scale fishers). Meetings outside of the formal UN system brought together various actors, including those from the private sector, who asserted the significance of oceans to the international economy and announced initiatives that might drive future "blue growth."

In sum, this section has shown that the use of blue economy increased prior to Rio + 20, but consensus regarding its meaning and utility did not. As the summit approached, debate spread, and during an informal preparatory meeting held in April 2012, the Group of 77 actually called to remove blue economy from the zero draft. However, as shown next, these events, documents, and negotiations did help to popularize oceans issues going into Rio + 20.

Blue Economy and Human–Ocean Discourses at Rio + 20

On the second to last day of the summit, we were among a crowd of people seeking entry into a side event hosted by the Principality of Monaco, the Republic of Kiribati, and the World Bank.[9] Billed as the official launch of the World Bank's GPO, admission was initially limited. Author Gruby's delegate status garnered us early entrance. Others were eventually permitted, and after the approximately 150 seats filled a standing crowd overflowed into the hallway. Unlike most oceans events we attended, journalists and camera people lined the back wall.

The session began when Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary General of the UN, entered. Introducing him, vice president (VP) of Sustainable Development at the World Bank, Rachel Kyte, quipped: "this is a lesson for you Secretary General, you cannot put oceans events in small rooms anymore!"[10] Congratulatory statements that oceans were "on the Rio agenda" flowed freely. Speeches included many mentions of the blue or green economy, and each of the four human–ocean discourses evident in our data was invoked. However, little concern was expressed that some suggested governance mechanisms and practices (e.g., marine protected areas [MPAs]) sat in tension with others (e.g., rights for small-scale or subsistence fishers). Like many other less dramatic events we observed, visions for human–oceans relations (and those who advocated them) appeared to rest easily with one another. It is only through discourse analysis that contradictions and contestations are revealed.

Oceans as Natural Capital

Speakers at several oceans side events, often representing NGOs, suggested that "nature's infrastructure" (e.g., coral reefs and mangroves) and ecosystem services (e.g., climate regulation) offer important, but underrecognized, benefits. These discussions focused on the challenge of measuring and accounting the economic value of oceans, in effect framing their governance as technical rather than a challenge of reconciling diverse perspectives and objectives.

In a session subtitled "Knowing Our Ocean, Protecting our Marine Treasures," one presenter said, "[w]e know biodiversity, but [we need to

understand] ecosystem services and functions."[11] In another, a speaker from the Nature Conservancy (TNC) noted that

> here is a picture of a restored oyster reef where [a]gain nature's infrastructure is providing some of these services and typically one would run to hard infrastructure to provide [. . .] We need to get very precise and develop the kinds of economic and engineering information so these kinds of natural solutions can hold their own.[12]

The invocation of economic metaphors was striking and is evidence of the transformation described by MacDonald and Corson (2012), whereby natural capital is presented as an ontological entity; in this case, the oceans *are* the economy. In a session on implementing Rio + 20 commitments, one presenter said,

> You almost think of them [oceans] as a business enterprise with the amount of goods and services, and the value they provide [. . .] you can put your money in the oceans and become a shareholder and treat them differently.[13]

Blue economy was used frequently during a panel regarding the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI), a multilateral marine conservation and development effort. The chair introduced the session as focused on "building sustainable blue economies,"[14] and over the following hour, the term was uttered another 20 times. Some panelists clearly defined blue economy in terms of natural capital. Describing Conservation International's "efforts to achieve a blue economy,"[15] one speaker noted: "valuing ecosystem services is fundamental to the approach that CI brings to its work in [the Coral Triangle] countries."[16] However, where CTI donors suggested that this program was an important example of how natural capital can contribute to blue economy, participating states seemed to use the term in ways more comparable to other human–ocean discourses (especially Pacific SIDS and SSF). The Minister of Economy and Development from Timor Leste emphasized "the importance of the marine and coastal biological diversity that our people have depended on to sustain their livelihoods" and suggested that "a blue economy can be made if all activities are about people-centered biodiversity conservation."[17] During the panel, there was little recognition of these differences or their potential incompatibilities.

Speakers across a variety of events emphasized need for methods to quantify the value of ecosystem services and, once determined, to protect or restore them (often through MPAs or other enclosures). Some proponents further advocated markets to commoditize and exchange services. In the UNEP-hosted event "Eye on Earth: Eye on Oceans and Blue Carbon,"[18] panelists discussed the potential of "blue" carbon sequestered by coastal ecosystems, including mangroves and salt marsh grasses, endorsing the idea of markets as a climate change mitigation mechanism. They emphasized the need to develop methods for measuring blue carbon because, as one delegate suggested, "blue carbon may one day bring a

premium to local communities who conserve marine resources."[19] Also speaking at "Eye on Earth," celebrated marine scientist and oceans advocate, Sylvia Earle, indicated her concern for dominant perceptions and values of fish: "we think of them with lemon and butter on our plates; we think of them as commodities." As she continued, she urged the audience to think of fish as a different kind of commodity: "a carbon-based unit."[20]

Yet, markets were not universally understood or agreed upon as a solution. In another session focused on establishing high seas MPAs, an audience member asked whether payments for ecosystem services have any relevance for the high seas.[21] The panelists paused, clearly unprepared to answer this query, then acknowledged that it is "an important question"[22] and one "worth looking at."[23] The panel moderator finally suggested that the challenge on the high seas is that "there is no one to pay."[24]

Oceans as Good Business

The strongest promoters of "oceans as good business" were representatives of marine sectors like fishing and shipping and actors from UN agencies such as UNEP, IOC-UNESCO, and the IMO. In this discourse, oceans and coastal zones were described as the foundation of a proud and long-standing ocean-based economy, one that makes important contributions internationally. This discourse generally accepted that existing sectors have contributed to the degradation of oceans but suggested that public pressure and economic incentives now motivate their substantive participation in governance, marine science, and monitoring.

A common refrain was that existing ocean sectors are ideally positioned to lead the advance of "the green economy in the blue world" (as in UNEP et al., 2012).[25] For example, Paul Holthus, Executive Director of the business forum World Ocean Council, argued,

> the world community has no hope of securing the future health and productivity of the global ocean ecosystem without harnessing the proactive, constructive involvement—the leadership and collaboration—of the private sector.[26]

For Holthus and others advocating this view, human–ocean relations, and blue economy more narrowly, ought to be structured through market relationships and incentives and overseen by cooperative regulatory and monitoring activity.

Governance partnerships (state-firm, UN-firm, etc.) were particularly prominent. For example, Wendy Watson-Wright, Assistant Director General of the IOC-UNESCO, said,

> [p]rivate sector use of the ocean is increasing rapidly in occurrence and diversity of activities. As the primary user of the ocean, industry is well placed to take a lead.[27]

She continued that public–private partnerships are a good way to reduce the regulatory, financial, and even scientific burden of ocean governance shouldered by state and UN agencies.

High seas tuna fisheries, the focus of one side event and highlighted in several others, were offered as a guiding example. Since approximately 2009, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, an organization of tuna firms, NGOs, and fisheries scientists, has collaborated in management with UN agencies. Describing the logic of a partnership approach, and the role of Global Environment Facility (GEF) and FAO funding, a GEF representative highlighted that member firms "avoid tuna from any boat listed by a RFMO [UN-led Regional Fisheries Management Organisation] as being involved in illegal or unregulated activity and share catch and purchase data with the RFMO to prevent overfishing."[28] Later in the session Arni Mathieson, Assistant Director General of fisheries and aquaculture with the FAO, offered congratulations to those working in this partnership:

> [t]his is a program and project that are not just changing the part of the sector that they are intended to change, but they are also a guiding light for other changes in my department and in the [fishing] industry as a whole.[29]

Here, we see that a strong industry role, including leadership in the provision of fisheries data, is viewed favorably by at least some at the FAO.

However, questions about the legitimacy and implications of such partnerships were raised. At the high seas tuna session, and noting that she was speaking in her "private capacity" rather than as a representative of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Kristina Gjierde asked,

> I'm curious how you are justifying the rights-based approached [allocating high seas tuna to private firms] on legal grounds with respect to a high seas resource [. . .] also wondering how this is going to be applied with respect to the needs of small island developing states who really don't have the capital to compete with many of the larger tuna industries.[30]

As we will now see, references to open-access ocean space and lucrative mobile resources raise questions of equity, especially for SIDS and small-scale fishers.

Oceans as Integral to Pacific SIDS

A report from a July 2011 Pacific SIDS preparatory meeting related three of their ocean priorities to blue economy: increasing benefits from their EEZs; reducing overfishing, destructive fishing practices, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing; and building marine resource and ecosystem resilience to

climate change (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, 2011). At the summit, Pacific SIDS often worked to align these priorities with the green economy theme. For example, President Tong of Kiribati explained, "ours is a green economy in the blue world [. . .] without a healthy ocean there would be no places for our lives and livelihoods."[31]

Pacific SIDS' assertions about oceans priorities were often coupled with signals to organizations that might be inclined to assist

> [o]ur ocean territory is 3000 times our land territory. This is why we are forced to think big and look for partners who understand what we are doing. This is why we reach out to NGOs.[32]

Although Pacific SIDS generally did not use the language of natural capital, they did assert marine ecosystems as integral to their economy. In some settings, international NGOs and other supportive governments and institutions (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, and the World Bank) also did so. At an event with many small island states delegates, a representative of TNC went so far as to assert that "the marine environment is an important bedrock of the economy. It is not an extra, it is the very reason why ocean nations can survive and thrive."[33]

In framing oceans as integral to small island life and economy, Pacific SIDS and their partners strongly advocated ending illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in territorial waters, particularly by foreign tuna vessels. This argument was often connected to calls for benefit-sharing agreements and other governance mechanisms by which Pacific SIDS may capture more revenue from territorial marine resources. The Deputy Secretary of International Development for New Zealand announced a US$23 million project to support Pacific fisheries management, reasoning that

> [t]he Pacific tuna fishery for example accounts for close to two thirds of the value of the global tuna catch—some $4.3 billion. Yet the returns from their resource to Pacific islands is only around 2% of the catch value. The message is clear: these are Pacific island states' resources, and we must recognize and accept the rights, interests and aspirations of Pacific SIDS.[34]

In sum, Pacific SIDS' use of blue economy at Rio + 20 was about framing and aligning their livelihoods and development priorities, strongly asserting connections to ocean territory, and identifying partners and funds to pursue their objectives.

Oceans as Small-Scale Fisheries Livelihoods

The Commonwealth Human Ecology Council, the World Fishermen Forum, the Icelandic National Association of Small Boat Owners, and the ICSF

were clear advocates for SSF and promoted oceans as central to the livelihoods and well-being of all coastal people and communities (i.e., not just SIDS). In this discourse, which articulates human–ocean relations in terms of poverty reduction and development, data regarding the ecological condition of marine environments received minimal attention. Advocates of these ideas were not often in sessions related to the previous three discourses. Representatives from the FAO, World Bank, UNEP, and SIDS did occasionally espouse its key themes, although often with important differences in emphasis.

Many presentations about SSF, like those during the "Oceans Day" fisheries panel, began with a listing of statistics compiled by the FAO and WorldFish Center (2008) that describe SSF as central to providing protein to the poor, work and income for women, and employment for fishers worldwide. Small-scale fishers were portrayed as embedded in community, and blue economy was thus concerned with meaningful development:

> we see fisher folks as key to the blue economy in the green economy, working to provide decent work in context of a just transition, that is with policy being transparent, evidence based, and seen as fair.[35]

It would often follow that industrial, foreign, or illegal fishing threatens SSF, as reflected in the words of a presenter from the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council:

> [o]ne of the lessons from the Commonwealth fisheries program was that decisions were made frequently to grant industrial fishing licenses without a good understanding of impact when trawlers come into coastal communities, what that does to social cohesion and livelihoods.[36]

Here, we see how the marine environment was raised within the livelihood discourse: if degradation or crisis was acknowledged, it was associated with large-scale industrial fishing.

A "rights-based" approach was frequently advocated, and it is here that differences emerge. For some SSF advocates, particularly civil society and worker groups, rights implied human and collective rights. With this interpretation, tradition and justice are invoked to argue that small-scale fishers should have rights to fish and to participate in fisheries management. The rights demanded are broad and include recognition of knowledge, participation in decision-making processes, and territorial access to ocean spaces. For other agencies, particularly the World Bank and some representatives of the FAO, a rights-based approach implied individual property rights. For these SSF advocates, assigning individual private rights to fish is necessary to solve uncertainty, overcapacity, and inefficiency.

While protests targeting the relationship between privatization, dispossession, and the green economy occurred during Rio + 20, we did not observe any that raised ocean privatization specifically. One scathing interpretation was offered during a side event by Vassen Kauppaymuthoo of the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council:

> whatever was before common heritage, common good, public property, is now slowly becoming privatized, and this is having a large impact on societies and the way the world will be tomorrow [. . .] We talk about land grabbing but there is also ocean grabbing. The frontier today . . . is the high water mark [. . .] we have to give a deep reflection on what is going to happen to our oceans in near future, because today we have to decide what is going to happen with this common property.[37]

However, while Kauppaymuthoo spoke clearly against "ocean grabbing," he did not explicitly link it to the blue or green economy.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our analysis demonstrates that the term blue economy emerged and circulated before Rio + 20 and that it was employed at the summit by a variety of actors. We highlighted four prominent discourses of human–ocean relations and showed that, despite advocating different ocean problems, solutions, and participants, blue economy was defined and employed in support of each. Most broadly, these findings agree with Corson et al. (2013) who argue that global conservation and development discourses are "cultivated through, and coordinated by international environmental policy institutions, organizations, activists, academics, and transnational capitalist and managerial classes" (p. 3).

Evidence from the preparatory period showed that blue economy was used sparingly by agencies of the United Nations. While agencies sought to highlight oceans, this was often done in ways that connected them to the green economy (e.g., *Green Economy in a Blue World*). Simultaneously, SIDS debated the potential of the term to advance their objectives; Pacific SIDS chose to use blue economy as a subtitle to frame text in a zero draft submission. Although their proposed text did not survive into the final UNCSD outcome document (United Nations General Assembly, 2012), Pacific SIDS' embrace of the term appears to have encouraged even wider circulation (e.g., by ICSF and at the workshop hosted by Prince Albert II of Monaco). The term blue economy was also used at *The Economist* magazine's first World Oceans Summit 4 months before Rio + 20; here, participants lauded the untapped "blue growth" potential of oceans.

Where green economy was the focus of visible protest and disagreement both inside and outside Rio + 20 (Corson, Brady, Zuber, Lord, & Kim, in 2015), blue economy was not overtly contested and actors espousing quite different

human–ocean relationships freely used the term. For example, those highlighting the relationship between human rights and collective ocean access/benefit used and defined blue economy, as did representatives of UN agencies listed as authors on preparatory reports that seemed to avoid it. Others still equated blue economy with enclosure and market-based mechanisms. In sum, we observed diverse uses of the term within single summit events, and in some cases, representatives of the same organization using it in different ways across events. Table 1 demonstrates how deeply contradictions run by summarizing how the four discourses differed in terms of the problems identified, preferred solutions, and governance actors.

To elaborate, proponents of oceans as natural capital framed oceans and marine species as significant to ecological integrity and human well-being and prioritized marine conservation (often via enclosure, valuation, and marketization) as important development cornerstones. Though economic value resonates with oceans as good business and oceans as integral to Pacific SIDS, the natural capital discourse most clearly called for the development of new accounting methods (e.g., to quantify fish as carbon storage units) and restoring "nature's infrastructure" (often through MPAs). On the other hand, enclosure was viewed suspiciously by many proponents of oceans as SSF livelihoods. Most specifically, the property and economic relations underlying enclosure (and marketization) sit in tension with the cultural values and collective access/benefits emphasized by SSF advocates and those who argued oceans as integral to Pacific SIDS. There are, however, important differences between the Pacific SIDS and SSF discourses. While both frame oceans as being for local benefit, Pacific SIDS do not necessarily exclude large conservation enclosures or extractive activities like industrial fishing or mining. Whereas the SSF livelihoods discourse emphasizes small-scale fishers and coastal communities as critical participants or leaders in management, the Pacific SIDS discourse identifies national governments, supported by large NGOs, as key actors.

To a degree, the structure of the summit helps to explain the apparent lack of contestation regarding blue economy that we observed: side events regularly featured "like-minded" speakers and attracted "like-minded" audience members (Campbell et al., 2013). However, we suggest that the ease with which advocates of different human–oceans discourses, and their articulations of the term blue economy, appeared to rest with each other is more accurately understood in terms of (a) differences between the histories and broader understandings of green and blue economy, (b) attention to fragmented governance arrangements and the high seas, and (c) the role of international meetings in global environmental governance.

First, a core objective for Rio + 20 was to achieve (the appearance of) international consensus regarding green economy ideals and implementation (MacDonald & Corson, 2012; Onesti, 2012). Thus, disparate interpretations of and outright objections to green economy had much more time and space to be

Table 1. Summary of Oceans Problems, Solutions, and Leading Actors Advocated Within Each Human–Oceans Discourse.

	Problems	Solutions	Governance Actors
"Natural capital"	Decision making does not adequately account for nature and the value of ecosystem services	Identify ecosystem services; develop standards and techniques for measuring and valuation; develop ways to account for them and protect or restore them	Int'l organizations; governments; NGOs; collaborating scientists & experts
"Good Business"	Unsustainable practices by firms in past and continued work needed to incentivize better behavior; failure of government agencies to engage private sector as partners	Private sector leadership and funding; public–private partnerships	Individual firms; sectoral coalitions; Int'l organizations leading partnerships
"Pacific SIDS"	Int'l political–economic system is inequitable; failure to implement int'l management and benefit-sharing agreements; all linked to failure to recognize links between SIDS culture, economy, and livelihoods.	Implement int'l agreements and conservation programs attentive to culture–economy–livelihood interconnection; Benefit-sharing agreements with regard to SIDS share in industrial fisheries and minerals; Partnerships for technology transfer; South–south regional partnerships	SIDS governments; Int'l community, esp. supportive donor states and NGOs
"SSF livelihoods"	IUU fishing by industrial fleets; small-scale fishers lose access and rights through enclosure and privatization; lack of attention to cultural value and collective benefits of SSF	Human rights approach to fisheries; secure access to and rights (sometimes private) for SSF; participatory governance	Fishers and fisher collectives; governments (national other supportive donor states); Int'l agencies for specific tasks (e.g., IUU fishing)

Note. NGOs = nongovernmental organizations; SSF = small-scale fishers; SIDS = small island developing states; IUU = illegal, unreported, and unregulated; Int'l = international.

aired, if not resolved, going into the summit. On the other hand, the term blue economy only began to be used in specific reference to oceans governance during later stages of the preparatory process. Here, we note again that reports like *Green Economy in a Blue World* used blue economy sparingly, while Pacific SIDS overtly claimed the term in a heading title in their negotiating agenda. Not only does this demonstrate the degree to which blue economy remained undefined it also offers an example where efforts to discursively enroll ocean spaces and resources as the domain of green economy (i.e., efforts to "grab green") were hindered by the objectives, actions, and emerging discourses of others (e.g., Pacific SIDS). Here, we begin to see the power *and* precariousness of discourse in global environmental governance (MacDonald & Corson, 2012; Suarez & Corson, 2013).

Second, Rio + 20 occurred amidst questions about UN-led oceans governance, particularly regarding fragmented institutional arrangements and the high seas (Ban et al., 2014; Veitch et al., 2012). A variety of modified and new institutional arrangements and governance mechanisms were (and still are) "on the table." It is therefore likely that many actors wished to have their priorities heard *and* be understood as cooperative and compatible. For example, the choice by SSF advocates to use blue economy seems good strategy at a time when (a) the FAO was developing SSF guidelines, (b) the World Bank's GPO had signaled rights-based fisheries as a priority, and (c) consensus was building that an oceans-specific Sustainable Development Goal should be crafted. Moreover, many states, NGOs, and firms are intently focused on the possibilities of territorial (e.g., extended EEZs), conservation (e.g., MPAs), and development (e.g., seabed mining) enclosures in the high seas (Ban et al., 2014; Suárez-de Vivero, 2013). Earning or maintaining the opportunity to be involved in discussions and negotiations as they unfold may well have been a significant motivator.

Finally, echoing World Bank VP Kyte's quip about no longer putting oceans events in small rooms, many discussions of oceans at Rio + 20 were underlain by a sense of excitement regarding the heightened visibility of oceans at this summit and even among the global citizenry. We have written more about this unprecedented attention elsewhere (Campbell et al., 2013), but note here that it may well be the early stage of a longer, power-laden process whereby one discourse about human–oceans relations (perhaps one of the four our research revealed or perhaps something different) will come to be seen as obvious or logical. In this sense, efforts to claim and define the term blue economy at Rio + 20 reinforce the contention that even when large international meetings fail to produce binding commitments, ideas presented and relationships made can serve to codify ways to think about—and in turn govern—nature and society (MacDonald & Corson, 2012).

The term blue economy has continued to circulate as Rio + 20. Examples, such as in an Executive Summary of *The Economist* magazine's second World Ocean Summit in February 2014[38] or the African Union's embrace of "the Blue

Economy concept as a vital part of Africa's future development" (Republic of Seychelles, 2014), suggest it unlikely that differences summarized in Table 1 are near resolution. The European Union has perhaps most overtly tied the term blue economy to capitalization and accumulation by naming and prioritizing five key "blue growth" sectors of the economy: biotechnology, renewable energy, coastal and marine tourism, aquaculture, and mineral resources (European Commission, 2014). This development reminds that just as discourses shape policies and governance practices, the reverse is also true; specific economic sectors, development initiatives, or conservation programs may need the support that a popular term or discourse can offer. This, by virtue of funds, scientific and managerial capacity, and political influence, is where some actors and organizations have greater potential to condition imaginations, direct project funding, and in turn, narrow the sorts of governance mechanisms, instruments, and techniques seen as most appropriate (cf. Corson et al., 2013). Scholarship on green grabs (e.g., Fairhead et al., 2012) suggests that we must be attentive to the potential for "blue grabs," and thus, continued scholarly and practitioner attention to the broad discourse(s) of ocean finance and capitalization *and* to local case studies of project implementation are warranted (also see call from Franco, Buxton, Vervest, & Feodoroff, 2014).

In closing, however, we return to the precariousness of discourse in global environmental governance. As we have shown, a number of smaller and more marginal actors, organizations, and countries employ the term blue economy and, in so doing, have clearly influenced the direction of high-level debate about oceans. For us, this suggests that opportunity remains to further adopt or subvert the term in ways that advance diverse objectives, progressive politics, and governance practices in the largest remaining contiguous common spaces in the world.

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Notes

1. Because of his book entitled *Blue Economy: 10 Years, 100 Innovations, 100 Million Jobs* (2010), entrepreneur and consultant to the Club of Rome, Gunter Pauli, is frequently connected with the term blue economy. While Pauli uses blue economy to describe his vision and suggested paradigms for sustainable business (e.g., sectors and productive processes modeled to mimic ecosystems), his work is not specific to oceans. Moreover, our data did not provide any evidence to suggest that actors closely involved with global oceans governance and/or negotiations and side events at Rio + 20 picked up or used the term blue economy through the influence of Pauli or his work. Therefore, Pauli and his use(s) of the term blue economy fall outside the scope of this research.
2. CEE relies on collaboration in field work, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up results. All authors contributed substantively to each of these activities, and thus, to this article.
3. EEZ and high seas proportions calculated from Figure 5 in Suárez-de Vivero (2013). For simplicity, we counted pending extended continental shelf claims as high seas.
4. Core categories identified by Dryzek: basic entities recognized or constructed, assumptions about natural relationships, agents and their motives, and key metaphors and other rhetorical devices.
5. Comments by all major groups on the November 2011 version of the zero draft have been compiled and are available online at http://www.uncsd2012.org/content/documents/compilationdocument/MajorGroups.pdf
6. The official outcome document from this workshop, "The Monaco Message," calls for the negotiation of a Sustainable Development Goal for the post-2015 (i.e., post-Millennium Development Goal) agenda "focused on the sustainable development of the oceans, and the importance of the blue economy" (UNCSD, 2011).
7. The 2012 TEEB press release titled "The UNEP Hosted TEEB Study Leader Pavan Sukhdev Presents at the World Oceans Summit."
8. The 2012 TEEB press release "The UNEP Hosted TEEB Study Leader Pavan Presents at the World Oceans Summit."
9. Side event: June 21, Global Partnership for Oceans: Coming Together for Healthy and Productive Oceans.
10. Side event: June 21, Global Partnership for Oceans: Coming Together for Healthy and Productive Oceans.
11. Patricia Miloslavich (Census of Marine Life): June 20, One Planet, One Ocean: Knowing Our Ocean, Protecting Our Marine Treasures, Empowering Ocean Citizens.
12. Lynn Hale (The Nature Conservancy): June 19, Oceans at Rio + 20: Toward Implementation of the Rio Ocean Commitments.
13. Richard Delaney (Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies): June19th, Oceans at Rio + 20: Toward Implementation of the Rio Ocean Commitments.
14. Representative of WWF-International: June 21, CTI on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security: Sustaining the Coral Triangle's Extraordinary Marine Biodiversity and Its People.

15. Russ Mittermeier (CI): June 21, CTI on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security: Sustaining the Coral Triangle's Extraordinary Marine Biodiversity and Its People.
16. Russ Mittermeier (CI): June 21, CTI on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security: Sustaining the Coral Triangle's Extraordinary Marine Biodiversity and Its People.
17. Cristiano da Costa: June 21, CTI on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security: Sustaining the Coral Triangle's Extraordinary Marine Biodiversity and Its People.
18. Side event: June 18, Eye on Earth: Eye on Oceans and Blue Carbon.
19. Mary Barton-Dock (Director, Climate Policy and Finance, World Bank): June 18, Eye on Earth: Eye on Oceans and Blue Carbon.
20. Side event: June 18, Eye on Earth: Eye on Oceans and Blue Carbon.
21. Side event: June 13, High Seas Alliance: Towards an Agreement for Protecting the High Seas.
22. Kristina Gjerde (IUCN High Seas Policy Advisor): June 13, High Seas Alliance: Towards an Agreement for Protecting the High Seas.
23. Sophie Mirgaux (legal advisor, Belgian Ministry of Health and Environment): June 13, High Seas Alliance: Towards an Agreement for Protecting the High Seas.
24. Susan Lieberman (Deputy Director of International Environment Policy, Pew): June 13, High Seas Alliance: Towards an Agreement for Protecting the High Seas.
25. These events included Greening the Blue World: Green Economy Approach for Oceans, Coasts and SIDS (side event: June 14); High Stakes on the High Seas: Sustainable Management of Global Tuna Fisheries (side event: June 16); Oceans Day panel 5: Toward the Blue Economy and Society: Perspectives, Experiences and Initiatives (side event: June 16); and, Sustainable Maritime Development—The Contribution of Maritime Transport to Green Growth and Inclusive Development (side event: June 20).
26. Side event: June 16, Oceans Day panel 6: Toward the Blue Economy and Society: Perspectives, Experiences and Initiatives.
27. Side event: June 14, Greening the Blue World: Green Economy Approach for Oceans, Coasts, and SIDS.
28. Side event: June 16, High Stakes on the High Seas: Sustainable Management of Global Tuna Fisheries.
29. Side event: June 16, High Stakes on the High Seas: Sustainable Management of Global Tuna Fisheries.
30. Side event: June 16, High Stakes on the High Seas: Sustainable Management of Global Tuna Fisheries.
31. Side event: June 19, Pacific Islands: Applying the Green Economy in a Blue World.
32. Ronald Jumeau (Representative of the Seychelles to the UN): June 20, Securing the island future we want: enabling steps toward achieving blue/green economy at regional scale.
33. Lynne Hale (TNC): June 22, Blue Economy Leadership Event.
34. Amanda Ellis: June 16, Oceans Day Panel 4, SIDS and Oceans: Building Resilience, Enhancing Social and Economic Benefits.
35. Nicholas Watts (Commonwealth Human Ecology Council): June 16, Oceans Day panel 3, The Living Ocean: Enhancing Fisheries for Food Security, Social and Economic Benefits.

36. Nicholas Watts (Commonwealth Human Ecology Council): June 16, Oceans Day panel 3, the Living Ocean: Enhancing Fisheries for Food Security, Social and Economic Benefits.
37. Side event: June 19, Commonwealth and African Fisheries: Building a Coalition for Sustainable Oceans Governance.
38. Accessed June 6, 2014: http://www.economistinsights.com/sites/default/files/World_Ocean_Summit_Executive_ summary_WEB.pdf

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