



# **Rough Seas: Looming Dangers of the Blue Economy**





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## Acronyms

<b>ACP</b>	African Caribbean Pacific Group
<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>AOSIS</b>	Alliance of Small Island Developing States
<b>BGI</b>	Blue Growth Initiative
<b>CCZ</b>	Clarion Clipperton Zone
<b>EEZ</b>	Exclusive Economic Zone
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FPIC</b>	Free Prior Informed Consent
<b>P-ACP</b>	Pacific African Caribbean Pacific
<b>PIFS</b>	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
<b>PSIDS</b>	Pacific Small Island Developing States
<b>SPC</b>	Secretariat of the Pacific Community

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## Overview

The ocean's health is increasingly under threat as a result of human exploitation of its resources, destruction of biodiversity, and pollution from land-based sources, while the situation of climate change has further exacerbated efforts to protect the ocean. Once considered out of reach economically and technologically, new developments and advancements in technology are making it more feasible to exploit deep-sea resources, with global powers and Pacific Island governments rushing to carve up the ocean.

In 2012, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio, and in the wake of the green economy discourse, oceans became a global priority for the Alliance of Small Island Developing States (AOSIS), which includes the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS). AOSIS and PSIDS launched the Blue Economy concept that made oceans central to their discussions on sustainable development. Although, AOSIS and PSIDS may have initially spearheaded the concept and notion of the Blue Economy, the spirit and hopes underpinning it are already obscured by the industrial ambitions of the region's colonial powers, as well as new powers who are competing to carve up the Pacific Ocean – the final frontier for a resource grab.

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## Introduction

The Blue Economy concept was initially driven by Gunter Pauli in 2004 but the circulation of and the development aspect of the term emerged from the Rio+20 summit under the wider remit of the green economy agenda. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) supported by the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) questioned the applicability of the green economy to their context as large ocean states.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to the conference, the Blue Economy concept has gained international momentum, but more importantly taken on an agenda that reflects a neoliberal dimension aiming to privatize and commodify the life-giving services of the oceans, creating market-based financing, financing oceans infrastructure under the pretext of the sustainable management of ocean resources.

The Blue Growth Initiative (BGI), borne out of the blue economy concept, is the European Union's

(EU) long-term strategy to support sustainable growth in the marine and maritime sectors. The BGI strategy recognizes that seas and oceans are central to the European economy and have great potential for innovation, economic growth and job creation.<sup>2</sup> Implementation of this initiative is not only taking place in European waters but also in the Pacific Islands through the current negotiation of the Post-Cotonou Agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group.

In addition to their BGI, the EU has partnered with the World Bank to set up a Blue Economy Framework Development Program. The World Bank also has a Blue Economy portfolio and a PROBLUE program, which covers areas similar to the EU's BGI and will be mentioned in the following section.

This paper will concentrate on the impact of the EU's Blue Growth concept within the Post-Cotonou Agreement of Pacific ACP (P-ACP) Group Regional Protocol.

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## Proliferation of Blue Economy Agendas

The takeover of the Blue Economy agenda is forming convergences among different stakeholders generating national, regional and global attempts to shape principles, frameworks, guidelines and decisions to implement policies that are "blue growth" related.

As recently as May 2019, the Asian Development Bank (ADB)<sup>1</sup> formally announced its US\$5 billion Action Plan<sup>11</sup> for Healthy Oceans and Sustainable Blue Economies for the period 2019 -2024, which includes an Ocean Financing Initiative. The Oceans Financing Initiatives supports an enabling environment for private sector to engage

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**I** Held in Fiji from May 1-5, 2019, the 52nd ADB Annual Meeting welcomed 3,582 attendees from 76 countries. More than 30 seminars, debates, and other events brought together stakeholders to discuss key development issues in Asia and the Pacific. Also featured in this publication is the "Action Plan for Healthy Oceans and Sustainable Blue Economies," a \$5 billion initiative launched during the annual meeting.

**II** Ocean Plan looks at four key areas: creating inclusive livelihoods and business opportunities in sustainable tourism and fisheries; protecting and restoring coastal and marine ecosystems and key rivers; reducing land-based sources of marine pollution, which includes plastics, wastewater and agricultural runoff; and improving sustainability in port and coastal infrastructure. <https://www.adb.org/publications/highlights-2019-annual-meeting>



Pacific Islanders are now dealing with the consequences of the Blue Economy concept takeover. Foto: Adobe Stock

the sustainable blue economy. This requires government to create attractive bankable projects, generate mechanisms for private sector to capitalize on projects that improve ocean health and stimulate the Blue Economy, in line with SDG 14 (life below water).<sup>3</sup>

The Action Plan will be rolled out in the South-eastern Asia region with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) designing and implementing the Blue Economy pilot project.

The World Bank, in a similar vein, has an active Blue Economy portfolio of US\$3.7 billion with a further US\$1.5 billion<sup>4</sup> in the pipeline. In November 2018, the World Bank launched its PROBLUE<sup>5</sup> program – a trust fund supported by various donors to aid the implementation of SDG 14 (integrated, sustainable and healthy marine and coastal resources). It includes implementing large fisheries programs in Africa and the Pacific. PROBLUE focuses on similar key areas as ADB.

Besides their PROBLUE program, the World Bank, together with the EU, developed a Blue Economy Development Program. This program targets developing coastal states<sup>6</sup>, encouraging movement towards diverse and sustainable blue economies while building resilience to climate change. Three developing coastal states have been selected to pilot this program, including Kiribati. Although this program illustrates that

the pilot countries will yield results for donors of the Blue Economy, the question remains as to what diverse and sustain-able blue economies look like and mean in practice? What are the requirements needed to make the Blue Economy work and produce the results necessary for developing coastal states and blue donors? And how much debt burden will that leave an island such as Kiribati?

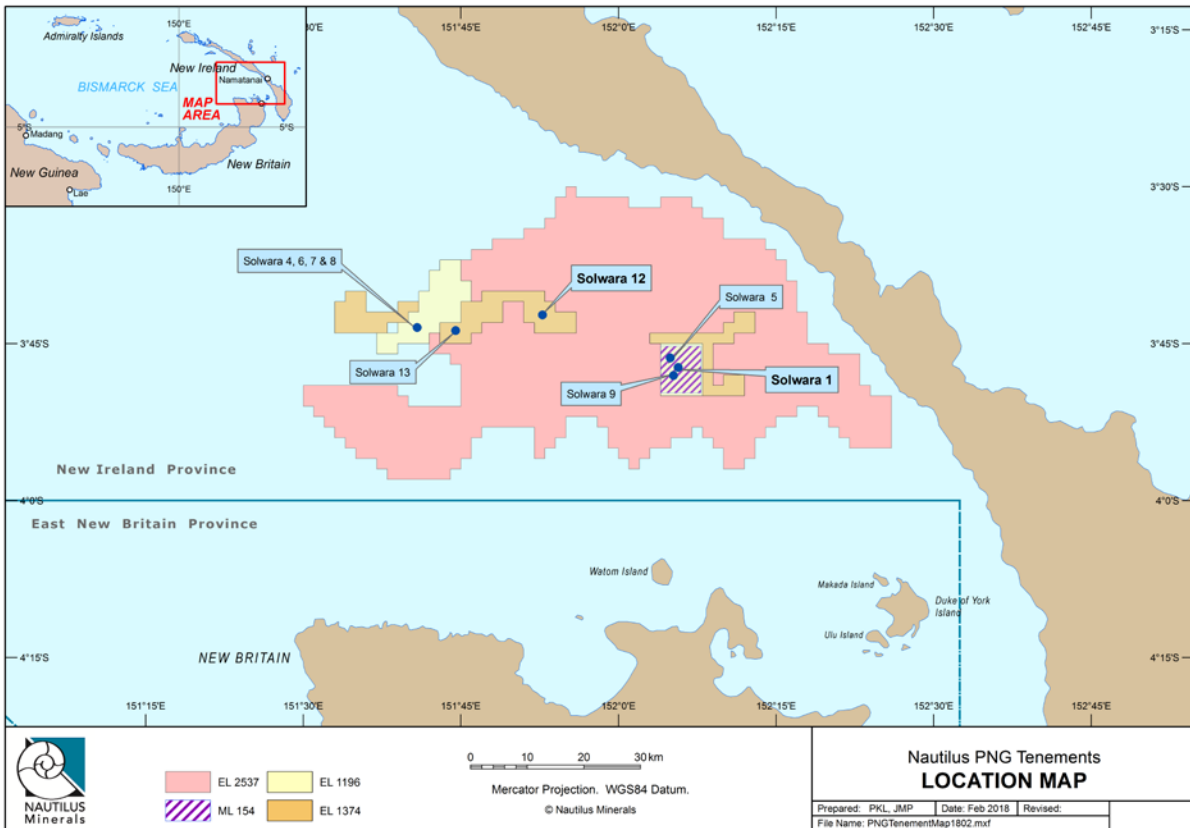
Not to be left out of this “blue” narrative, the United Kingdom has also launched a Commonwealth Blue Charter.<sup>7</sup> Signed by all 53 members, the aim is to fill the gap in transnational marine policy to actively solve ocean-related problems and meet commitments for sustainable ocean development goal 14. Two Pacific Islands are championing action groups, with Vanuatu leading a group to tackle marine plastic pollution together with the United Kingdom, and Fiji championing the Ocean and Climate Change Action Group.

The momentum that the Blue Economy has gained is drawing interest to the Pacific Ocean, with countless documents released supporting the concept of profiting from Pacific Ocean resources and outlining strategies for developed partners.

Following the Rio+20 Summit, the EU pursued a Blue Growth Initiative during the same year, defining it as an initiative to harness the untapped potential of Europe’s oceans, seas and coasts for jobs and growth.<sup>8</sup> Europe’s maritime sector employs over 5 million people, generating almost €500 billion a year, with the potential to create many more jobs<sup>9</sup> in the areas of deep-seabed mining, offshore oil and gas production, ocean renewable energy, marine and coastal tourism, and fisheries.

The Pacific Island’s “Blue Pacific” calls for leaders to reaffirm the connections of Pacific people with their natural resources, environment, culture and livelihoods.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, it is critical for the leaders to also recognize and acknowledge their collective peoples’ role as custodians of the biggest ocean space and, as such, move beyond the guardian rhetoric to ensure Pacific peoples’ engagement. They should also ensure that free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) is sought around questions of resource use and exploitation.

Pacific Islanders are now dealing with the consequences of the Blue Economy concept takeover,



Nautilus Minerals Inc. Seabed Mining Map of PNG. Foto: Nautilus Minerals Inc.

an issue they will also have to contend with in the future. This takeover has led to aggressive policies designed to profit from the ocean, its services and its resources. Assessments of ocean services and resources are not valued in accordance with the critical ecological services they provide – not only to the ocean but to the planet – but rather in monetary terms to fit the Blue Economy framework. This turns the ocean into a space for the development of industrialization and once again forgets the communities that depend on these important ecological services for their food security, cultural wellbeing and livelihood.


### Plundering of Ocean Resources under a Blue Economy Narrative

Technology and infrastructure are driving the demand for more minerals, and the increased difficulty with which land-based deposits can be found is prompting a quest to secure unhindered access to exploit and extract the potentially rich resources of the ocean floor.<sup>11</sup>

In 2011, the European Union/Commission committed €4.4 million to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)-EU Deep Sea Minerals Project as part of its initiative to obtain access to new markets for raw materials. Raw materials are critical to the goods, applications and modern technologies used every day in the EU. Reliable and unhindered access to certain raw materials is a growing concern within the EU<sup>12</sup> to ensure the bloc maintains its global competitive position. The €4.4 million initiative has yielded enabling legislations in Pacific Island states to proceed with DSM exploration and exploitation.<sup>13</sup>

Through the Post-Cotonou Agreement, the European Union has a strong interest in accessing minerals and other resources from the ocean floor or seabed, including within the national jurisdictions (i.e. Exclusive Economic Zone, EEZ) of Pacific states.

From the outset, Blue Growth is about promoting market forces and foreign investment through removing any government regulations or policies that prevent mechanisms of market economies to



prosper. Through the legally binding Post-Cotonou Agreement<sup>III</sup>, which is currently being negotiated between the EU and the ACP, the EU is very clear in its mandate, which is to “ensure fair, responsible and undistorted access to the extractive sector, including seabed mining”.<sup>14</sup>

With the rising demand of consumer goods and geopolitical challenges, i.e. China’s quest to store rare earth materials and also become a major supplier to Europe<sup>15</sup>, the EU is now ensuring that Europe’s access to and sustainability of raw materials and rare earth minerals is not hindered by any political shifts.

Much of Europe’s intent is outlined in the current text of the Post-Cotonou negotiations that is currently underway with the ACP. In the negotiations, the EU has three different regional protocols for each ACP. In the Pacific regional protocol for instance, the notion of land includes both land and ocean. Pacific Island leaders have an obligation to protect the natural resources – including ocean resources – that their peoples and economies depend on. Pacific Island trade negotiators should not allow any free trade agreement to undermine any governance structures (customary or government legislations) that are already in place to safeguard Pacific peoples.

Deep-sea mining is still at an exploratory stage and remains experimental. A report released by Greenpeace in July 2019 stated that deep-sea mining causes “severe and potentially irreversible environmental harm”.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, seabed mining could aggravate the negative impacts of climate change on ocean health by potentially releasing “carbon stored in deep sea sediments or disrupting the processes which help scavenge carbon and deliver it to those sediments”.<sup>17</sup>

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## Pacific Islands and Deep-Sea Mining

In September 2019, at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders<sup>18</sup> meeting in Tuvalu, Fiji’s Prime Minister announced a ten-year moratorium on seabed mining within Fiji’s EEZ from 2020 to 2030,

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**III** The Post-Cotonou Agreement takes over from the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group. This agreement will govern the political, economic relations between the EU and ACP Group. The EU directive was agreed in June 2018 while the ACP mandate for negotiations was agreed in May 2018.

which would allow for a decade of proper scientific research.<sup>19</sup> This call has been supported by Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.<sup>20</sup>

Enabling legislations in the Pacific Islands to allow deep-sea mining to progress have led to developed countries such as France, Belgium, Germany, Canada and China securing licenses in the Pacific Ocean: ready to explore and with the intent to exploit. At least 1.5 million square kilometers of Pacific Ocean floor is held under exploratory licenses by foreign entities.

The race between corporations and developed states to mine the Pacific Ocean makes it incumbent on Pacific Island governments to protect and safeguard the ocean that Pacific peoples depend on for their livelihood. Numerous scientific reports and research examining regulatory frameworks<sup>IV</sup> in the Pacific Islands have revealed devastating impacts seabed mining has on ocean ecosystems. This should be sufficient for technical agencies such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in the Pacific who are responsible for research, technology and deep-sea mining to provide sound advice to Pacific Leaders and to apply the precautionary principle rather than promoting a pro-industry exploitative environment.

Adding complexity to this is the issue of maritime boundaries in the region. Pacific Island Countries, with technical assistance from SPC, are still in the process of negotiating maritime boundaries between the independent states as well as with colonial powers that have territorial interest in the region. France, a colonial power, is a member of the SPC and a Dialogue Partner of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), has three territories in the Pacific Islands: Wallis and Futuna, which has an exclusive economic zone of 250,000 km<sup>221</sup>, New Caledonia with an EEZ of 1,740,000 km<sup>222</sup> and French Polynesia with an EEZ of 5,030,000 km<sup>223</sup>, making it the largest ocean power in the world by virtue of its territories in the Pacific Ocean. With the largest EEZ in the world, France is currently negotiating to

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**IV** A report written by the Blue Ocean Law and the Pacific Network on Globalisation called *Resource Roulette* reveals that the Bismarck Sea is the home, breeding ground and spawning area for tuna, sharks and large marine mammals. The Bismarck Sea is also a migratory path for whales and tuna. At the time this report was written, the Bismarck Sea accounts for 18 % of the world’s tuna stock.



Children from Duke of York Islands in PNG making a firm message against experimental seabed mining.

Foto: PANG

resolve the maritime boundary with Vanuatu on the Matthew and Hunter Islands. However, it is also reported<sup>24</sup> that France is unlikely to cede Matthew Island or Hunter Island to Vanuatu, or to relinquish any of its territories easily, in a bid to maintain its ocean power status.

According to the Enduring Colonization report<sup>25</sup>, France is one of the main investors involved in the race to carve up the Pacific Ocean: the country has secured licenses to exploit new deposits of valuable seabed minerals and holds contracts with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) to explore the Clarion Clipperton Zone.<sup>26</sup> France also played a key role both in shaping the EU Raw Materials Initiative, intended to ease Europe's dependence on China and other countries for the supply of rare earths and other materials, and in the design of the SPC- EU Deep Sea Minerals Project, which propelled the design and adoption<sup>27</sup> of regulatory frameworks for seabed mining in the region. France remains in control of the oceans and of the natural resources in French Polynesia.

The European nation's ongoing control over French Polynesia's natural resources is causing tension between the territory's self-determination agenda and France. French Polynesia has an EEZ of approximately 5 million square kilometers (almost half of France's total EEZ, which includes territories comprising 11 million square kilometers) and offers France potential seabed and ocean resources as well as the opportunity to access, control and own the economic benefits gained from industrializing the ocean. France's constitutional court has also ruled that rare earths can be classified as "strategic metals", which come under the control of the French State rather than the Government of French Polynesia.<sup>28</sup> The spillover effect is that any benefit to France benefits the EU directly.

There are 29 exploration licenses issued from the ISA covering a total of 1.3 million square kilometers that encompass areas of the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Twenty - two of those licenses are located in the Pacific Ocean, 16 of them in the Clarion Clipperton Zone (CCZ).



In the Pacific, Papua New Guinea has already issued the world's first commercial license to begin exploitation by 2019, but the company, Nautilus Minerals Inc., has run into financial trouble for its Solwara 1 project in the Bismarck Sea. An attempt by PNG in a Canadian court to recover assets in the company was unsuccessful.

Nauru, Tonga, Kiribati and the Cook Islands are keen to mine the seabed within their EEZs and/or in areas beyond their national jurisdiction.

While little progress has been made at the ISA for a mining code to be developed, that has not stopped corporations such as Lockheed Martin or Deep Green Metals Inc. from exploring the deep seabed in the hope that the mining code will be the enabling instrument to exploit and extract seabed resources.

Despite concerns raised by indigenous communities, civil society and faith-based organizations in the region regarding the impact seabed mining will have on their livelihoods, cultural and traditional links to the ocean and the environment, some Pacific Island governments are eagerly pursuing this type of industry.

The collapse of Nautilus Minerals Inc., a Canadian company that was supposed to be the first company to commercially exploit and extract seabed resources in Papua New Guinea, sparked a call for Pacific Island leaders to issue a moratorium on seabed mining. This call is welcomed by civil society but there needs to be an outright ban on seabed mining to protect the Pacific Ocean from any more exploitation.

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## Fisheries

Oceans ecosystems are fragile and damaged; fisheries resources are being overexploited. The viability and sustainability of Pacific fisheries are identified as a priority in the Post-Cotonou negotiations, with the EU unable to secure access through the failed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The EU is keen on unrestricted access to international maritime markets and trade<sup>29</sup>, and renewed sustainable fisheries partnership agreements and promotion of best practices in fisheries management<sup>30</sup>, implying that the Pacific Islands do not know how to govern and/or manage their own resources.

Sustainable fisheries partnerships with the EU need to take into consideration the special requirements of Pacific Islands. Existing measurements and instruments in any Pacific state's EEZ should not be undermined by the introduction of this sustainable partnership.<sup>31</sup>

With tuna overexploited, major fishing nations such as China, Japan, South Korea and the United States, as well as Europe, are increasingly looking to fish in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). The WCPO is the world's largest fishery, producing nearly 60 per cent of the globe's entire tuna harvest and with a catch value estimated at US\$4.7 billion in 2015.<sup>32</sup>

The EU's proposals at the WTO see it advancing an offensive interest to bring management measures under the control of the WTO as well as ensure market dominance by undermining the ability for developing countries, including Pacific Island WTO members, to develop their industries and manage their resources. By making subsidies contingent upon management measures, the EU will benefit from the WTO being able to overrule measures negotiated in other forums where the EU has not been successful. The disciplines on subsidies for capacity of vessels will also benefit the EU, which has shifted from direct capacity subsidies towards capacity to the indirect subsidizing of their fleets, leaving them less bound by the prohibitions but still with significant fleet capacity. Negotiations have seen proposals that would implicate the "global sourcing" rule, a concession gained as part of the iEPA negotiations that grants the Pacific Island nations preferential treatment in exporting canned tuna to the EU market however these appear to not be finding much support.<sup>33</sup>

Prior to the Post-Cotonou negotiations, the EU attempted to negotiate an Economic Partnership Agreement with the ACP countries, but negotiations in the Pacific came to a halt when Pacific Island nations did not agree to the terms set out. Only Fiji and PNG signed an interim agreement in 2007, their sugar and fisheries industries respectively hanging in the balance. Negotiations for a comprehensive agreement also ended in failure after the EU wanted the Pacific Islands to include a guaranteed amount of access to fisheries resources, an arrangement usually reserved for different fora. To date, Samoa has joined Fiji and PNG in the interim EPA while the Solomon Islands





and Tonga have formally requested<sup>34</sup> to join the EPA. All of these countries are members of the World Trade Organization.

P-ACP countries should ensure that all regional fisheries arrangements and institutions are not undermined in the Post-Cotonou negotiations. Institutions such as the Party to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) have demonstrated the Pacific Islands' ability to determine the management and governing of their resources on their own terms. In current negotiations, P-ACP states are being asked to accept broad, generalist disciplines on fisheries subsidies without strong, clear provision for "special and differential treatment", which is mandated. Despite the vast differences in interests at the WTO on fisheries subsidies negotiations, the EU is attempting to bind the Pacific and EU common positions on these issues by cooperating "at the relevant international fora to advocate for prohibition of harmful incentives and subsidies, and for a special and differential treatment to PACP States" through commitments made in the Post-Cotonou negotiations.<sup>35</sup> It is important that P-ACP negotiators learn from the experiences of the EPA negotiations and do not fall into divide-and-conquer rule by the colonial powers. P-ACP countries that are members of the WTO should also be wary of how the Post-Cotonou and WTO negotiations are progressing so as not to put them in harm's way.

Aside from renewed partnership, the EU also has a system of issuing yellow cards to countries outside the EU. The yellow card procedure is an EU warning system that focuses attention on any country exporting fish and/or fisheries products to the EU, placing it under careful watch. It affects any state that the EU perceives to be practicing illegal fishing, but the bloc also looks for ways for the state to resolve the fishing anomalies perceived by the EU as illegal. If the countries implement the required standards that the EU requests, the state will be issued a green card. If not, that state is issued a red card, i.e. they are banned from exporting to the EU.

Countries in the Pacific Islands that have been issued yellow cards include PNG, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu. In relation to population and development status, more yellow cards have been issued in the Pacific Island region than any other region in the world.<sup>36</sup> It is also critical that while the EU is issuing yellow cards to

the region, with the region responding positively and upgrading their facilities with the assistance and support of the bloc, the EU should check its flagged vessels to ensure they are scrutinized the same way as the region.

Perhaps a more important question is how small island developing states that depend so much on their fisheries exports to the EU market are targeted and scrutinized by the European Union. Surely there are other countries who are sponsors of these IUUs that are on the EU radar and the IUU watch list.


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## Climate Change

The latest report released in September 2019 by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>37</sup> should be a warning to the Pacific Islands and world leaders of the stress man-made climate change is putting on the ocean. Climate change is impacting ocean health and functions; it is altering the chemistry of the ocean, affecting the food security of millions of people, intensifying cyclones, inundating coastlines and causing profound risks to the millions of coastal communities.

Pacific Ocean health declined in the early 1990s, with deep-sea trawling destroying ocean ecosystems critical to marine animals. Adding to this complex situation is the emergence of the deep-seabed mining industry. Seabed mining research will impact on natural processes that store hydro-carbons, such as methane.<sup>38</sup> Deep-sea sediments are known to be an important long-term store of "blue carbon", the carbon that is naturally absorbed by marine life, a proportion of which is carried down to the sea floor as those creatures die.

The recent IPCC report on oceans and cryosphere delivers a dire forecast for the future of Pacific Island states. Global warming is heating up our oceans at an unprecedented rate, leading them to absorb more than 90 % of the excess heat in our climate system, which could cause the warming rate to double. If the ocean absorbs more heat than it releases, it will transfer the heat (by ocean currents, waves and tides) from warmer to cooler places and to deeper levels. This will lead to the melting of glaciers and ice from Antarctica and Greenland, resulting in increasing sea level rise.<sup>39</sup>



The IPCC report on ocean warming and sea level rise should be taken into account when the P-ACP group negotiates the provision on climate change in the Post-Cotonou negotiations with the EU. Indeed, it is important for the P-ACP group to be given support to help them adapt to and mitigate against sea level rise and the associated climate induced risks.<sup>40</sup> But what does that mean when all developed partners and financial institutions want to scale up their investment in climate resilient projects that include financing their development aspirations through concessional loans?

Obtaining funding for climate -proofing projects in the Pacific from the EU and its partners is not enough to stop climate change in the region. What is needed is for the EU to stop funding activities such as DSM in order to satisfy their consumer demands under the pretext of supporting green, clean technology. DSM, as mentioned above, will distort the deep - seabed ecosystems, contribute to the release of carbon and, much worse, exacerbate the ongoing climate crisis.

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## Protecting the Pacific Ocean Means Protecting the Peoples of the Pacific Islands

The threat of Pacific Ocean exploitation looms large once more, this time in the shape of a neo-liberal agenda. The Blue Economy agenda, led by the SIDS at the Rio+20 Summit, which placed the oceans central to their sustainable development path, has been taken over by developed countries, corporations and international financial institutions. The scaling up of investments in ocean pro-jects is the new order of things.

The race to the bottom of the ocean to extract seabed mineral resources is one example. The speedy process of drawing up national legislation to enable seabed mining that is supported by the EU ignores the impact this industry will have on the region and on ocean ecosystems. Fast-tracked legislation and consultations largely ignored indigenous peoples' voices, their spiritual connection to the ocean and civil society arguments to err on the side of caution when industrializing the ocean.

Ocean and fisheries resources are being overexploited. Tuna, a migratory species, will be impacted by climate change. Regional fisheries management

organizations in the Pacific have existing mechanisms to govern and manage their resources. The EU is already funding a renewed sustainable fisheries program<sup>41</sup> with the Pacific that will scrutinize the fisheries management systems in the region. The P-ACP group needs to look at the existing instruments that govern their fisheries, including the WTO proposals on subsidies that the EU has submitted. Any proposal that is approved by the WTO will govern trade rules between the EU and their partners. This will undermine any existing measures or instruments that already safeguard the interests of the Pacific Islands. In a sense, the EU is seeking unhindered access to all resources in order to sustain its economy. Despite the exploitative onslaught on the Pacific Ocean, indigenous communities, along with civil society and faith-based organizations, continue to be resilient in their strength to stand up against the industrialization of the Pacific Ocean and to colonial powers. The collapse of Nautilus Minerals Inc. and its deep-sea mining venture in Papua New Guinea demonstrated the challenge but more importantly the success that can be achieved when people unite in solidarity with the common understanding that the peoples of the Pacific, whose long history of voyaging and navigation was informed by intimate knowledge of an ocean that is also central to their economic, social and cultural ways of life, should assert primary custodianship over this vast area we call the Pacific Ocean.<sup>42</sup>

Demand for undistorted access to resources as part of the EU's vision of a Blue Economy and their renewed partnership in sustainable fisheries continue the colonial mindset of the EU in the treatment of their colonies to plunder resources.

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## Conclusion

To set a path towards sustainable development which seeks to prioritize the protection of oceans as life-giving source and ensure a living common heritage for human kind, the existing Blue Economy frameworks (often competing) needs to be approached with caution and slowed down to allow for further scrutiny.

The initial analysis presented here shows that the Blue Economy is an enabling framework for accelerating industrialization of the oceans as the next frontier for economic domination. It is clear how powerful governments, multilateral financial

institutions and industry are working hand in glove, to secure unhindered access to marine resources, including through legally binding instruments such as the Post Cotonou Negotiations, to maintain global economic positioning at a time of oceans health being in crises.

The frameworks to accelerate industrialization of oceans as the new frontier for economic growth must be considered against a backdrop of:

- The oceans are home to the greatest level of biodiversity and ecosystems in the world. Human activities including climate change are already leading to biodiversity collapse and destruction with an urgent call to halt or reverse damage to safe guard the long term health of our oceans.
- There is a clear link that deep-sea mining, a new area for exploitation of minerals within the blue economy frame framework, will result in destruction of biodiversity with little possibilities for recovery of ecosystems. In addition there is growing evidence that deep-sea mining can aggravate the impacts of climate change. As such the global community should move to support a moratorium on deep-sea mining.
- The need to understand the cumulative impacts of human activities and stressors on the health of the ocean today to establish a baseline on the health of our ocean even before we can permit the acceleration of industrialization of an ocean economy;
- The need to build on current ocean knowledge including indigenous knowledge, systems and ecosystems and related social sciences as foundation to assist with the sustainable development agenda and the UN Decade of Ocean Science 2021-2030
- Coastal communities particularly indigenous communities across the world are faced with the real threat to their livelihoods, food security, and well-being;
- Lack of engagement mechanisms at national and regional levels to ensure full participation and in particular for indigenous communities whose Free Prior Informed Consent is necessary in the exploitation of marine resources



Climate Change and rising sea levels in Kiribati Islands in the Pacific ocean. Foto: Justin McManus

(fisheries, deep sea minerals, coastal tourism, renewable energy, genetic resources etc.). Indigenous communities have long-standing historical and spiritual connections and responsibilities to the protection of the ocean and its resources.

Competing Blue Economy frameworks leaves the Pacific Ocean, its people, cultures, livelihoods vulnerable to industrialization. The expression of a Blue Pacific/Blue Identity that places the ocean as the center of development in the region is a good start but remains vague. The notion of stewardship and guardianship while noble is not sufficient unless there is full participation as well as the requirement for free prior informed consent by indigenous Pacific Island coastal communities will be necessary as guardians of the oceans. Ocean ecosystems are increasingly facing environmental and human-induced damaging activities. Pacific Island nations and indigenous communities in particular need to ensure they maintain jurisdiction and sovereign control over regulations in order to prevent corporate profit-seeking activities from prevailing and reigning free in the Pacific Ocean to ensure the protection of the largest ocean in the world.

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**The time to unite to save the Pacific Ocean is now!**

**The time to assert custodianship over the Pacific Ocean is now!**

**The time to say NO to seabed mining is now!**

**The time to say NO to further exploitation of the Pacific Ocean is now!**

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