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COMMENTARY AND CORRESPONDENCE ARTICLE

WILEY

Response to Ota, Allison and Fabinyi on 'Evolving the narrative for protecting a rapidly changing ocean, post COVID-19'

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In responding to Laffoley et al. (2020) on 'Evolving the narrative for protecting a rapidly changing ocean, post COVID-19', Ota, Allison & Fabinyi (2021) raise three risks that the 'One Ocean' concept may convey: (1) it could undermine the adaptability to local contexts in solutions to sustainability problems; (2) it might give the false impression that benefits from the ocean are equitably shared by all; and (3) it potentially overlooks the diversity of knowledge systems and values. We fully agree that local adaptation, equity and recognition of local knowledge and values are key for pathways towards sustainability transformations.

We present the 'One Ocean' concept as an important underpinning for these efforts, not as being mutually exclusive with their realization. We state that the 'One Ocean' concept is needed to 'address the whole Earth–Ocean system for better and more equitable social, cultural, economic, and environmental outcomes' (Laffoley et al., 2020). The wholescale impacts that we are having on the ocean from climate change and biodiversity loss are having synergistic and overarching effects that encompass local, regional and global issues and affect all people on Earth, especially those who are most marginalized.

Just as with carbon dioxide emissions that spread from the northern hemisphere to the entire atmosphere, the damage done to one part of the ocean often affects other regions and their peoples. Thus, as with climate change itself, the responsibility for high-income nations is disproportionately large when it comes to funding and implementing global to local solutions (Sterling et al., 2020), which must focus on those most impacted. Put simply, strong ocean connections, achieved through mixing, circulation, animal migrations and human activities, mean that perturbations in one place will affect distant waters and distant peoples. This is emphasized in our paper, as is the need to work across all scales of society and governance.

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Since equity and justice are clearly lacking in the distribution of benefits from the ocean (Bennett et al., 2021), the 'One Ocean' concept can help in the recognition of the ocean as a common good, not just one for the privileged few. This would support the need for the preservation and expression of local values, the protection of traditional and indigenous uses of the ocean and the need to create better instruments for benefits-sharing at multiple scales. The recognition that we share a single planet does not intrinsically overlook the existence of the diversity of local knowledge systems, values and lifeways, just as for the 'One Ocean' concept. Centralized governance and power relationships can undermine such expression, which is why polycentric governance that involves a wider range of actors participating in decision making is increasingly adopted (Rudolph et al., 2020). Further, the recognition that we all share a single ocean can help in the preservation and expression of local values.

The pace of ocean change is accelerating. The need to identify and implement sustainable pathways is urgent, across all scales. Increased levels of ambition are strongly needed to counter the growing impact of ongoing climate disruption and biodiversity loss. The 'One Ocean' concept and narrative can help engage stakeholders at all organizational scales. If we wait for too long, even all of our ambitions will not be enough to overcome the problems. If we do not have a predominant focus on a single ocean and ensure that there is a clear narrative as a pathway to deliver the necessary actions, then history shows that those problems simply will not be prioritized and addressed. To meet our collective goals, there is therefore an imperative to drop the 's' and embrace the one ocean view.

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