14. The sustainable development goals for the ocean

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A universal agenda for sustainable oceans

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda are intended to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all humans live in peace and prosperity over the next decade. As is the case for terrestrial environments (SDG 15), the ocean and marine environments have been assigned their own specific goal (SDG 14), which aims to '*conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*'.

SDG 14 provides an opportunity to tackle some of the complex challenges of ocean sustainability through coordinated international cooperation across industries, involving a wide range of stakeholders. Seven targets have been devised for the sustainable use of the oceans, coastal areas and their biodiversity. Target 1 concerns the adoption of measures to reduce stress factors and restore the structure and functions of marine ecosystems, to ensure the marine environment is healthy and therefore productive. Target 2 seeks to adopt measures to promote 'blue growth', focusing attention on further efforts to support responsible fishing and aquaculture, using political, regulatory and economic means to encourage efficiency and the recovery of fishing discards. The aim of Target 3 is to adopt measures leading to political, legal and institutional reforms to support effective ocean governance. These measures will create a legal and institutional framework that protects inhabitants and biodiversity beyond national jurisdictions, reform the regional organisations responsible for managing the oceans, and improve the coordination, consistency and effectiveness of the United Nations' system for ocean issues. Target 4 sets out to effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing by 2020. For target 5, the goal is to conserve at least 10% of marine and coastal areas by 2020; for target 6, it is to eliminate fishing subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. Lastly, target 7 aims to extend the economic benefits of the sustainable use of marine resources to Small Island Developing States and the least developed countries.

Multiple goals for investigation

No matter how ambitious SDG 14 may be in regard to maintaining the health of the oceans, it is not possible to separate it from the other, interdependent goals of the 2030 Agenda. They will need to be achieved simultaneously: ensuring the good health of the oceans cannot be divorced from food security, eradicating poverty, reducing inequality or from patterns of consumption, or indeed from the preservation of biodiversity and the fight against climate change (Fig. 1). The challenges we face are global and our responses to them must consider international dynamics and in particular, the balances between North and South. New areas such as equitable fishing and access to renewable resources are thus emerging as these goals are achieved. Today, more than two-thirds of the marine resources consumed in Europe are produced primarily in the Southern countries. Of the 30 countries where fish is the main source of animal protein, 26 are developing countries where 47 million people earn their living directly from the seas. Illegal fishing, which accounts for around one-third of the world's fish catch (cf. V.8), makes employment less stable.

Advances in research are a *sine qua non* for achieving the sustainable development goals, given the complex nature of the dynamics

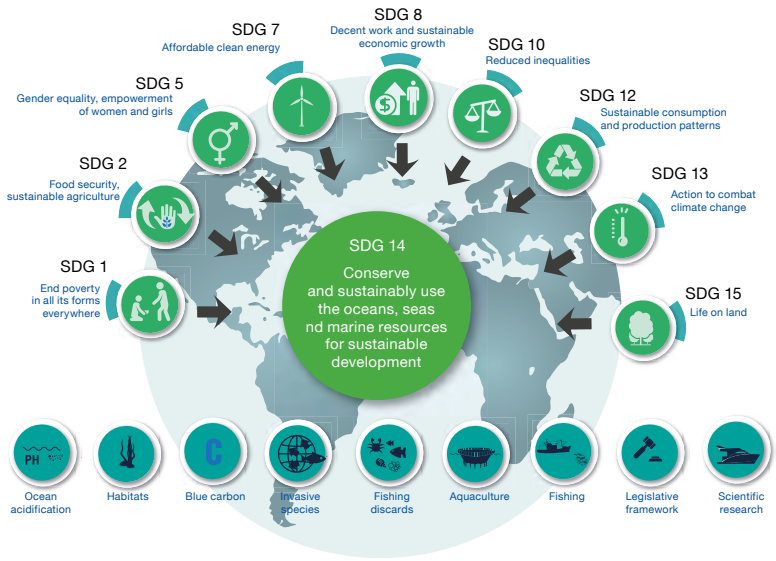
and interactions. The ecosystem approach to fishing, which aims to reconcile conservation with biodiversity and exploitation, has shaped the approach to the marine environment for the last decade. Today, a more ambitious, inclusive framework is emerging with the 2030 Agenda. This new approach is redefining the aims and themes of scientific research by broadening their scope and factoring them into public policies (developing socio-ecosystem scenarios such as those of the IBPES).

Within this overall context and in the face of increasing demand, the scientific community must make every effort to explore the future of marine ecosystems, as well as the possible trajectories for socio-ecosystems leading to environmentally, economically and socially desirable outcomes. It also needs to develop a long-term scientific strategy which will improve its ability to provide inclusive multidisciplinary expertise that links global challenges with local requirements.

A two-fold challenge: integrating knowledge and governance

'Sustainability' has often been something of a mantra, and this has not helped to reverse the long-standing patterns of global warming, biodiversity erosion, overexploitation of resources or increasing inequality. Today's ambitions are global in scope and new proposals for governance are emerging. Recommendations for a central register of ocean commitments as a transparent basis for monitoring national efforts, the development of coordinated policies for regional ocean measurements and partnerships and consideration of an integrated thematic appraisal of the implementation of SDG 14 offer new and innovative options in terms of governance. A thematic review of oceans and coasts worldwide would underscore the central role of the oceans in sustainable development and provide a platform for tackling the key links with the other SDGs relevant to the oceans.

SDG 14 represents a unique opportunity to help us redefine development, combining it with the supporting research that is necessary for this transformation. It is time to introduce a different way of framing and formulating questions to arrive at joined-up strategic environmental, economic and social recommendations. The interdependencies and compromises coming out of the 2030 Agenda must be painstakingly reviewed. This necessitates a shared effort to move the world's oceans towards not just ecological, environmental or social sustainability, but to all three at once.



SDG 14 occupies a central position in the 2030 Agenda, with links between its objectives and many of the Agenda's other goals. Such interdependencies provide opportunities to develop synergies and require finely balanced compromise from stakeholders. This new conceptual framework considerably broadens the prospects for ocean research and governance. ■

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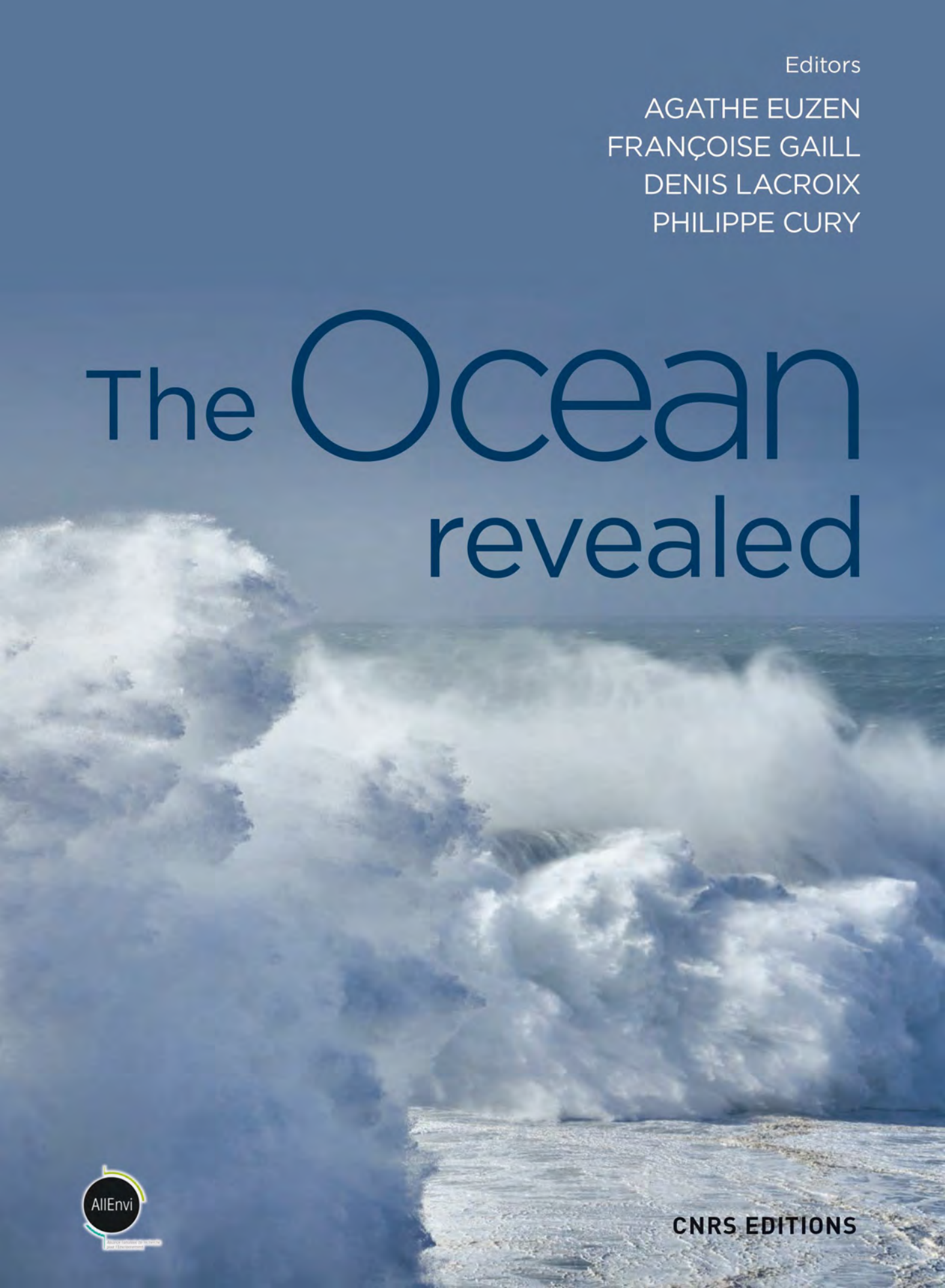
The Ocean revealed



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