Terminology Related to Ocean and Coastal Economic Activity

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Terminology Related to Ocean and Coastal Economic Activity

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INTRODUCTION

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) plays a key role in measuring the scale and scope of U.S. ocean and coastal economic activity, as well as being the nation’s principal source of the core ocean and coastal data, information and knowledge that supports this important component of the wider economy.

To provide consistency in the usage of terminology related to the description of ocean and coastal economic activity, and the provision of the ocean data, information and knowledge needed to support its evolution and development, NOAA has developed internal guidance on the definition of related key terms. The purpose of this short communication paper is to place these NOAA definitions into the public domain as a contribution to moving towards more consistent general usage.

THE OCEAN ECONOMY

NOAA’s use of the term *Ocean Economy* corresponds to that of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016):

*The sum of the economic activities of ocean-based industries, together with the assets, goods and services provided by marine ecosystems.*

This term should be used whenever referencing or describing multi-sector ocean and coastal components of the overall economy.

THE MARINE ECONOMY

NOAA uses the term *Marine Economy* to describe quantitative assessments of the *Ocean Economy* contained in the U.S. Marine Economy Satellite Account (MESA) (BEA, 2023). Originally conceived as the Ocean Economy Satellite Account (OESA), this descriptive term was adopted after NOAA and the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) received stakeholder feedback that reference to the *Marine Economy* would be more inclusive of the U.S. Great Lakes. The MESA
covers a broad geographical scope, including the economic activity of ocean-based industries in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Ocean areas that fall within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (approximately 200 nautical miles off the U.S. coast). It also includes corresponding activities in inland areas connected to major water bodies such as the Gulf of Mexico, Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound, Long Island Sound, San Francisco Bay, and others, as well as the U.S. shoreline directly along these bodies of water and the waters and shoreline of the Great Lakes up to the international boundary with Canada. The MESA comprise national level economic statistics for Ocean Economy activities within these geographical bounds, as well as any inland economic activity directly related to these activities, no matter how far inland they take place. In addition to the MESA provision of national level Ocean Economy statistics, NOAA has also developed Economics National Ocean Watch (ENOW), which measures the U.S. Ocean Economy at the state and county level (NOAA, 2023). Consistent with the definition of the Ocean Economy, U.S. Marine Economy assessments acknowledge the essential value and critical importance of ocean-based natural capital and ecosystem services, but do not currently directly quantify or account for them. NOAA has started the process of expanding the MESA to include accounting for natural capital and ecosystem services consistent with the U.S. national strategy to develop statistics for environmental-economic decisions (OSTP, 2023). This dimension of the Marine Economy will not be quantitatively represented in the MESA statistics in the near term.

THE BLUE ECONOMY

General usage of the term the Blue Economy is fluid in its definition, ranging from being directly equivalent to the definition of the Ocean Economy, to inclusion of aspects of sustainability.

NOAA usage of the term Blue Economy describes an emerging Ocean Economy inclusive of the Great Lakes, that is evolving in response to economic, environmental, and societal challenges. Looking to the future in the Blue Economy, the ocean and ocean resources are utilized in ways that conserve them for future generations, reduce pollution and waste and protect natural ecosystems, at the same time as promoting equity, social justice and responsible business practices. As
such, NOAA adopts a slightly modified version of the World Bank definition of the *Blue Economy* (World Bank, 2017):

The sustainable, equitable and socially inclusive use of ocean and Great Lakes resources to benefit economies, livelihoods, and ecosystem health.

**THE OCEAN ENTERPRISE**

NOAA uses the term *Ocean Enterprise* to describe the provision of the technological means to observe, measure and predict the ocean, and the use of the resulting data and information to help address societal and environmental challenges and support the evolution and development of the *Ocean Economy*. NOAA defines the *Ocean Enterprise* as:

All entities in the public, private, non-profit, research and academic sectors that provide infrastructure and capacity for ocean observation, measurement and forecasting, or who deliver operational ocean information products and services.

This definition is consistent with that used for the *Weather, Water and Climate Enterprise* (usually abbreviated as the *Weather Enterprise*), which was first introduced by the National Academies Fairweather report (National Research Council, 2003).

When used in the context of the U.S. the geographical scope of the Ocean Enterprise is always inclusive of the Great Lakes, consistent with the defined geographical scope of the U.S. *Marine Economy*.

The term *Ocean Enterprise* is often used in association with the concept of the *New Blue Economy*. Usage of the *New Blue Economy* term is intended to add more emphasis to the importance of the *Ocean Enterprise* as the growing knowledge-based component of the overall *Blue Economy*, where data and information serve to address societal challenges and inspire their solutions.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Having clear and concise definition of key terms is essential for effective communication in any field. Clear and concise definitions provide a shared understanding within and between disciplines, helping to ensure the discussion of
sometimes complex concepts without ambiguity. Consistent usage is especially important in the compilation and analysis of economic data; helping to ensure comparability of information gathered for different geographical areas and time periods or for differing purposes.

While terminology may change over time in response to an evolving field of work, it is hoped that these NOAA definitions of key terms relating to ocean and coastal economic activity will contribute to greater consistency in their usage across the ocean community.

The authors welcome comments and suggestions relating to usage of key terms relating to ocean and coastal economic activity now and into the future.

REFERENCES


