A green new deal for the oceans must prioritize social justice beyond infrastructure

In a recent and very timely contribution, Dundas et al. (2020) highlight the importance of extending the values and proposed strategies of the Green New Deal (GND) proposed in the U.S. Congress (https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/109/text) to the oceans. Dundas et al. (2020) convincingly argue that investing in infrastructure, renewable energy, food security, and habitat restoration is essential for ocean spaces (which are inextricably linked to terrestrial systems) experiencing rapid climate change. Ocean development is furthermore at a crossroads, with emerging visions of economic expansion that must integrate environmental sustainability and social equity concerns (Cisneros-Montemayor, Moreno-Báez, et al., 2019).

We agree that investments proposed under the GND are needed to enable future sustainable and equitable development by acknowledging climate change, anticipating future challenges, and proactively transforming the U.S. economy (Dundas et al., 2020). However, one important theme of the GND that received little emphasis in Dundas et al. (2020) is that of justice and equity in the oceans. The GND is specifically intended to promote social justice and to address historical and continuing inequities experienced by “frontline and vulnerable communities” while mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. The vast majority of ocean users around the world indeed form part of such communities, including artisanal fisherfolk who constitute 90% of employment in ocean sectors (Cisneros-Montemayor, Moreno-Báez, et al., 2019), and the 27 million coastal Indigenous peoples across the world’s coastlines and seas (Cisneros-Montemayor, Pauly, Weatherdon, & Ota, 2016). Thus, capitalizing on investment in a way that realizes the vision of the GND requires us to consider and stress the importance of “ocean equity” during discussions on necessary industrial transitions.

The principles of the GND are globally relevant and highly pertinent for addressing equity and justice in oceans. The world’s oceans are affected by complex economic and cultural connections; governing them sustainably requires careful policy and planning. Solutions must recognize complex political dynamics and focus on the needs and preferences of the less powerful, rather than relying on processes that allow the powerful to claim progress while shifting costs to those with less opportunity to meaningfully object. In the United States and beyond, national and multilateral ocean governance can make a difference by applying the guidelines of the GND and prioritizing the livelihoods, experiences, and voices of frontline ocean communities. This entails addressing historical and current inequities both between and within nations and sectors (Bennett, Blythe, Cisneros-Montemayor, Singh, & Sumaila, 2019), recognizing diversity in human and natural ocean systems (Cisneros-Montemayor, Cheung & Ota, 2019), and reconciling multiple development goals (Singh et al., 2018). Mitigating and adapting to climate change requires deep transformations of our industrial and economic systems, but directly addressing issues of social justice and equity is key for advancing sustainability and well-being in coastal communities and beyond.

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All authors contributed equally to the conception and writing of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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There are no data related to this manuscript and therefore not ethics review process was applicable.

DATA ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT
There are no data related to this manuscript.
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