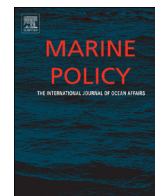




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Ocean grabbing

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ABSTRACT

The term “ocean grabbing” has been used to describe actions, policies or initiatives that deprive small-scale fishers of resources, dispossess vulnerable populations of coastal lands, and/or undermine historical access to areas of the sea. Rights and access to marine resources and spaces are frequently reallocated through government or private sector initiatives to achieve conservation, management or development objectives with a variety of outcomes for different sectors of society. This paper provides a definition and gives examples of reallocations of marine resources or spaces that might constitute “ocean grabbing”. It offers a tentative framework for evaluating whether marine conservation, management or development is ocean grabbing and proposes an agenda for future research. For a reallocation to be considered ocean grabbing, it must: (1) occur by means of inadequate governance, and (2) be implemented using actions that undermine human security and livelihoods, or (3) produce impacts that reduce social–ecological well-being. Future research on ocean grabbing will: document case studies, drivers and consequences; conduct spatial and historical analyses; and investigate solutions. The intent is to stimulate rigorous discussion and promote systematic inquiry into the phenomenon of ocean grabbing.

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1. Introduction

Ocean grabbing is a relatively new term that is increasingly applied to a wide variety of development, conservation and fisheries management initiatives and transactions [1–6]. The term has emerged following a growing body of literature on land grabbing, which has been used to reference the purchase or expropriation of land (often in distant countries) by transnational or national corporations, governments, individuals or NGOs. These can include ‘grabs’ of land for fuel, food production, investment, conservation or other purposes e.g., [7,8–14]. In the past few years, the term ‘ocean grabbing’ has come to broadly reference similar concerns as they pertain to the rights and livelihoods of small-scale fishers and vulnerable coastal peoples. Notably, in 2012, Olivier De Schutter, UN special rapporteur on the right to food, warned: “‘Ocean-grabbing’ – in the shape of shady access agreements that harm small-scale fishers, unreported catch, incursions into protected waters, and the diversion of resources away from local populations – can be as serious a threat as ‘land-grabbing’” [3]. More recently, several NGOs and the World Forum of Fisher People wrote a report titled “The Global Ocean Grab,” which aimed to explore processes

of dispossession that are negatively affecting coastal communities and small-scale fishers [5]. The authors suggest that ocean grabbing occurs through “mechanisms as diverse as (inter)national fisheries governance and trade and investment policies, designated terrestrial, coastal and marine ‘no-take’ conservation areas, (eco)tourism and energy policies, finance speculation, and the expanding operations of the global food and fish industry, including large-scale aquaculture, among others” [5].

Ocean grabbing may well be occurring via these initiatives. For individuals and communities who inhabit coastal regions or rely on marine resources for livelihoods or subsistence, the loss of ocean space or marine resources is a very real and present concern. However, the labeling of all conservation (e.g., marine protected areas) or development (e.g., eco-tourism) initiatives that involve a re-allocation of space or resources as “ocean grabbing” may also be counterproductive. While the term ‘ocean grabbing’ has seen some use in popular literatures, it has received no focused academic attention and remains poorly defined. It is thus important to provide some basis upon which to judge such initiatives and distinguish detrimental ocean grabbing from initiatives that employ appropriate governance processes and that are considered beneficial by and for local people, society and ecosystems. In what follows, the authors define the term ocean-grabbing, characterize initiatives that might be so labeled and present an analytical framework for judging conservation or development initiatives that involve the re-allocation of marine and coastal spaces or resources. In conclusion, the paper proposes an agenda for future

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research on ocean grabbing. The intent is to stimulate a rigorous discussion and promote systematic inquiry into the phenomenon of ocean grabbing.

2. What is ocean grabbing?

Changes in the allocation of ocean territories and resources have occurred throughout human history. Likewise, all forms of development or environmental management in the marine or coastal environs necessarily involve the allocation or re-allocation of rights to control, access, or use ocean space or resources. What then defines an initiative, policy or action as ocean grabbing? What forms might it take? What is being grabbed and driven by what? Who is doing the grabbing? Who is being impacted and how? Who is benefiting? How or what are the processes and actions through which ocean grabbing is occurring?

As a starting place for this discussion, the authors propose the following definition for ocean grabbing:

Ocean grabbing refers to dispossession or appropriation of use, control or access to ocean space or resources from prior resource users, rights holders or inhabitants. Ocean grabbing occurs through inappropriate governance processes and might employ acts that undermine human security or livelihoods or produce impacts that impair social–ecological well-being. Ocean grabbing can be perpetrated by public institutions or private interests.

Following on this definition and the above questions, two physical entities might be “grabbed”: resources and spaces. Ocean resources can be living or non-living. For example, ocean grabbing was first used to refer to the capture of fish stocks [3]. Individual

species (e.g., whales, seahorses, sea cucumbers) and habitats (e.g., coral reefs, mangroves) might also be taken. Non-living entities might include sand, rocks or substrate minerals and hydrocarbons. Marine and coastal spaces also include zones of the surface of the sea, the sea floor, the water column, beaches, coastal dunes or bluffs, lagoons, coral reefs, mangrove forests or seagrass meadow. These physical spaces can be associated with economic activities or historical use but might also be areas with spiritual or cultural significance [15–17] or resources that are deeply interconnected with customary practices or long-standing governance institutions [18–20].

Grabbing itself might be realized through illegal harvest of resources, the dispossession of lands for tourism, the encroachment into areas for resource extraction, the relocation of communities during the creation of MPAs or the dispossession of community lands after natural disasters. It may also occur as a function of change to or insecurity of tenure [6,21], including undesirable change of ownership, loss of tenure or access rights (in the case of unlawful exclusions), and/or any other associated loss of rights to use, harvest, manage or exclude others. This can take place as a result of re-allocations of space from public to private, from private to private, from private to public or between forms of public space – e.g., from common-access public space to limited access public space. In particular, examples of ocean grabbing via space reallocation can happen as a result of environmental or fisheries management policy, wherein marine resources are privatized, or new resource allocations or uses are assigned (e.g., from commercial or food fish to tourism) [22]. Ocean grabbing may also occur in the form of enclosures of spaces – for single or multiple uses – or changes in property regimes. Privatization initiatives can, for example, increase private allocations of and control over

Table 1

Means and examples of reallocations of marine resources or spaces that might constitute ocean grabbing.

Means of reallocation	Illustrative examples that might constitute ocean grabbing
Single use enclosure of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of marine reserve for conservation leading to exclusion of small scale fishers. • Building of tourist enclaves (e.g., resort, hotel) that exclude local people from accessing areas. • Public to private leases of mangrove areas for carbon sequestration, shrimp farms or charcoal production. • Corporate or individual encroachment on privately held or communal lands. • Private purchases or leases of coastal areas that lead to accumulation and exclusion of previous users or stakeholder groups.
Multiple use enclosure of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of multiple use marine protected areas for conservation or eco-tourism. • Slow enclosure of space through progressive implementation of multiple environmental regulations or development initiatives that overwhelm previous uses and users. • Rapid enclosure of marine spaces through implementing the results of ocean zoning or marine spatial planning processes.
Changing property regime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privatization of previously commonly held coastal lands through land reform processes. • Loss of tenure, management jurisdiction or rights to harvest due to a regulation change. • Regulations that provide limited or preferential access to previous common-property areas. • Post-disaster (e.g., tsunami) dispossessions of lands from previous inhabitants.
Changing resource allocation regime (i.e., Change in who can use the resource and how much can they use.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries policies or fisheries access agreements that re-allocate fisheries resources to foreign fleets thus reducing the catch of local users. • Fisheries policies (e.g., allocation of quotas, reduction in small-scale fishing zones) or government authorized sales or leases that concentrate management or harvesting rights with commercial interests or recreational fishers thus marginalizing subsistence or small-scale fishers. • Progressive cumulative authorized privatization, capitalization and centralized accumulation of resource access and harvest rights by elites or corporations leading to lost harvesting opportunities. • Unauthorized or illegal harvesting of resources by IUU vessels leading to reductions in catch volumes.
Changing resource use regime (i.e., Change in what the resource is used for.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting uses from subsistence or small-scale fishing towards other uses (e.g., diving, bio-harvesting, mining, etc.) that reduce access or harvesting rights. • Changes in markets that drive increases in harvesting or that lead to the harvesting of new marine resources – e.g., sea cucumbers – which move resources from being a local food fish to becoming a commodity.

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