

# Special Section in Ambio

## “Oceania: A Sea of Connections”

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### INTRODUCTION

This Special Section proposes to superimpose on Epeli Hau'ofa's view of Oceania as 'a sea of islands' a conceptualisation of Oceania as 'a sea of connections', highlighting the multiple meanings and expressions of ocean connectivity from/in Oceania, with case studies from Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Vanuatu. This 'sea of connections' shapes (and, in turn, is shaped by) a land-sea continuum, to be considered from both the surface and depths of the Pacific Ocean, and whose health and sustainability are essential to the well-being and future(s) of Oceanians. This land-sea continuum is home to 'ecological and cultural keystone' places and species that should be considered through inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to tackle their multi-faceted character. The very use of this expression, 'a sea of connections', is intended to emphasize the need for an expanded notion of 'ocean connectivity', one that is all at once what we might think of as geo-physical, biological, ecological, cultural, social, political, etc. The various contributions to this Special Section also reveal, via their different themes and empirical approaches, the need to move beyond a narrow understanding of both 'connectivity' and 'sovereignty', and to explore the relationships between these two interrelated and continually unfolding processes.

### LIST OF CONTRIBUTIONS

#### **A Sea of Connections: Reflections on connectivity from/in Oceania**

E. Fache, J. Kon Kam King, L. Riera, A. Breckwoldt  
DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01789-x

Introduces the notion of 'a sea of connections' and how it is dealt with in the following contributions, where inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to ocean connectivity are highlighted.

#### **Crafting the success and failure of decentralized marine management**

J. Wencélius, M. Lauer, T. Bambridge  
DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01763-7

Explores how on Moorea, French Polynesia, community-based fisheries management endeavours have given momentum to the definition and then revision of the contested local marine spatial management plan.

#### **Tracing innovation pathways behind fisheries co-management in Vanuatu**

D.J. Steenbergen, J. Raubani, S. Gereva, W. Naviti, C. Arthur, A. Arudere, J. Ham, L. Joy, W. Lalavanua, P. Neihapi, A. Seko, H. Terashima, N.L. Andrew

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01788-y

Highlights community-based fisheries management innovations promoted by the Vanuatu Fisheries Department, and how these are accepted or rejected in daily practices and across scaling phases.

#### **The ridge-to-reef approach on Cicia, Fiji**

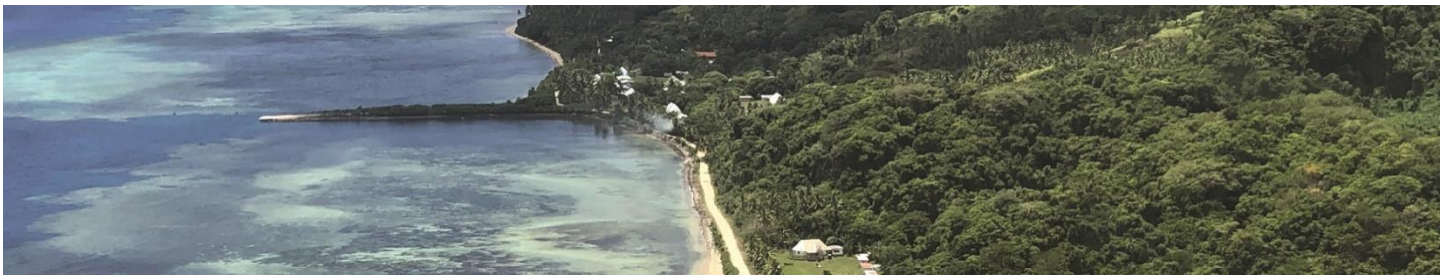
E. Fache, S. Pauwels

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-021-01669-w

Gives an overview of an informal, community-led, island-level, ridge-to-reef scheme in Fiji, involving the combination of marine closures and certified organic agriculture.



*In Oceania, ocean connectivity [...] does not only exist between parts that would otherwise be separate, but also between parts that together are core to a larger unit(y).* (Fache, Kon Kam King, Riera, Breckwoldt)



### Marine conservation in Vanuatu: Local conceptualisation and 'assemblage'

A. Pascht

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01767-3

Shows that, in contrast to how the State or NGOs understand the term 'conservation', in a coastal village of Vanuatu, 'conservation' is regarded by local stakeholders as a way to creatively secure for future generations their engagement with the sea and world-making with fish.

### A social-ecological engagement with reef passages in New Caledonia: Connectors between coastal and oceanic spaces and species

A. Breckwoldt, Y. Dombal, C. Sabinot, G. David, L. Riera, S. Ferse, E. Fache

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01762-8

Draws attention to the interrelated, multi-faceted, ecological and socio-cultural connectivity that reef passages – i.e. breaks and channels in fringing and barrier reefs – meet within land-sea territories.

### Marine resources and their value in Kadavu, Fiji

S. Harding, K. Marama, A. Breckwoldt, U. Matairakula, E. Fache

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01794-0

Provides estimates of the annual catch and monetary value of marine resources harvested by local communities in Fiji at both the district and provincial levels, while highlighting the importance of integrating the sociocultural significance of marine resources into future value assessments.



### Conservation status and cultural values of sea turtles leading to (un)written parallel management systems in Fiji

S. Kitololei, A. Soderberg, N. Qaqara, S.S. Prakash, M. Tuiono, J. Veitayaki, S. Piovano

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01766-4

Focuses on sea turtle conservation in Fiji, leading to the recommendation that both governmental and customary ways and structures should work together for the recovery of these emblematic marine animals.

### "Draw the sea...": Children's representations of ocean connectivity in Fiji and New Caledonia

E. Fache, S. Piovano, A. Soderberg, M. Tuiono, L. Riera, G. David, M. Kowasch, S. Pauwels, A. Breckwoldt, S.M. Carrière, C. Sabinot

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01777-1

Explores the connections with and within the sea revealed by 290 children's drawings, revealing representations of the sea: (1) beyond a land-sea compartmentation, (2) as a locus of both exploitation and conservation of marine life, and (3) as a 'place-full' space connecting human and more-than-human realms.

### Epilogue: Immanence, relationality, connectivity

F. McCormack, A. Mawyer

DOI: 10.1007/s13280-022-01796-y

Concludes the Special Section by providing a reflection on its main contributions, especially to the understanding of interspecies relations in marine environments, and on "the pulse of hope" it provides.







## TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

**Inter- and transdisciplinary approaches and methodologies are necessary to:**

- gain a comprehensive view of ocean connectivity and thus a better understanding of fisheries and other phenomena around human-ocean relations;
- explore both ecological and socio-cultural values of fisheries and their implications for management and conservation; and
- improve participation in, and ownership of, research activities by members of local and Indigenous communities.

**Specific attention should also be paid to:**

- interactions and negotiations between the various stakeholders of fisheries and the potential culture and power reconfigurations they create;
- translation mechanisms of international statuses, norms and regulations at the local level, as well as of customary norms in policy frameworks;
- ecological and cultural keystone species and places within the land-sea continuum, and their potential crucial contribution to coastal value assessments and (co-)management strategies.

**Oceanian knowledges, cosmologies, socialities, spiritualities and sovereignties are central to ensuring the health of marine environments and of both the people and biodiversity that depend on them.**



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*This is what the presence of hope woven across the collection reminds us—we are all perched on the rim of time, peering over the maw of possible tomorrows and confronted with the existential challenge of choice, of knowing that our individual and collective actions matter towards the sustainable wellbeing of not only marine spaces and resources but of us all.* (McCormack and Mawyer)



# SOCPacific

## A Sea of Connections

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Credits:

Photos by Tom Vierus (<https://www.pacificmediahouse.com>) and Elodie Fache;

Map by Léa Riera;

Drawing made by an 11 year-old boy in Nouméa, New Caledonia.