In 2015, 194 countries adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 17 aspirational goals with 169 targets promoting global efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, promote education and reduce inequalities, grow economies and protect and restore natural systems (among others). There is a specific goal set for the global oceans named SDG 14: Life Below Water. Over forty-five countries have expressed support for a recent proposal from the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission to call 2021-2030 the International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. The establishment and buy-in of these goals presents an unprecedented opportunity for both positive research programs to study social-ecological systems (e.g. can the goals all be achieved together, and if so under what conditions?) and normative research to establish policy trajectories to actually achieve the SDGs (e.g. what targets should be prioritized to make progress across most goals possible?). However, there is a risk that researchers use the SDGs simply as a vehicle to validate and valorize ideas already held and research already underway regardless of the existence of SDGs.

In this talk, Dr. Singh will outline initial studies undertaken by the Nereus Program to relate ocean sustainability positively and negatively to the SDGs, and plans for future research on oceans and SDGs, partnering with national governments, intergovernmental organizations, and international NGOs. Making progress towards the SDGs will depend in part on relevant research highlighting important ways to promote them while also avoiding mistakes and avoidable tradeoffs in policy.

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