

**PRACTITIONER SUMMARY I**

**ETHICS, VALUES AND SOCIAL LICENCE  
IN THE BLUE ECONOMY**

**Blue Economy Ethical Values and Principles**

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## Project Partners



## Research Team

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# Introduction

**This Practitioner Summary identifies and examines the ethical values and principles that underpin the Blue Economy.**

Ethical values and principles refer to types of acts or qualities of outcomes that are morally important. Ethical values and principles are relevant to practitioners because they can:

- » **guide** operations to better achieve benefits while avoiding wrongdoing.
- » **inform** government policy, law and regulation.
- » **help justify and explain** decisions and actions.
- » **shape expectations**, ensuring that government, industry and community have shared standards.

Different ethical principles can be important to different industries. This project identified nineteen specific ethical values relevant to the Blue Economy, and from these derived six overarching ethical principles that should guide Blue Economy activities.

## Blue Economy ethical principles

- I. Environmental Protection:** Blue Economy activities should protect sustainability, biodiversity, and ecosystem function.
- II. Stakeholder Participation:** Community knowledge and engagement should play a role in Blue Economy decision-making.
- III. Fairness:** Opportunities, risks, impacts, costs, and benefits should be fairly distributed across stakeholders.
- IV. Harm Prevention:** Human rights and animal welfare should be protected and respected.
- V. Beneficence:** Blue Economy activities should deliver good outcomes, including food, safety, prosperity, and employment.
- VI. Trustworthiness & Accountability:** Blue Economy activities and systems must demonstrate their trustworthiness.

# The Blue Economy

**The Blue Economy refers to economic activity in the marine environment, that sustains that environment, and that pays heed to social and cultural priorities (see Voyer et al. 2018; Breakey 2022).**

As such, the Blue Economy has the potential to deliver a range of important benefits, such as increased food security and nutrition, more sustainable seafood stocks, renewable energy, and poverty reduction. However, the potentially negative consequences of the marine economy can include environmental degradation, animal suffering, inequitable distribution of benefits, and lack of consultation with local communities (Bennett et al. 2019).

Adding to the ethical challenge, marine economy activities are often highly complex, covering an ever-increasing multitude of overlapping activities, some with long supply chains and many with significant social and ecological impacts.

Blue Economy activities can occur in challenging and dynamic environments, often hidden from the view of communities and regulators, and by industries expanding rapidly in scale and technology (Breakey 2022).

Navigating this complexity requires being clear about the ethical values and principles applicable to the Blue Economy.

## Ethical Principles

**Our research (see Cooper et al. 2023) reviewed 238 scholarly articles to determine what values were informing Blue Economy decisions, discussions, and practices.**

From there, the Project Team examined these specific values to determine what broader principles were Blue Economy ethical priorities. The team identified six Blue Economy Ethical Principles to guide marine economy activities.

Utilising these principles in every aspect of Blue Economy activities from ‘on ocean’ operations to regulation and governance ensures that the Blue Economy meets its purported aims of securing the ‘improvement of human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities’ (Voyer et al. 2018).

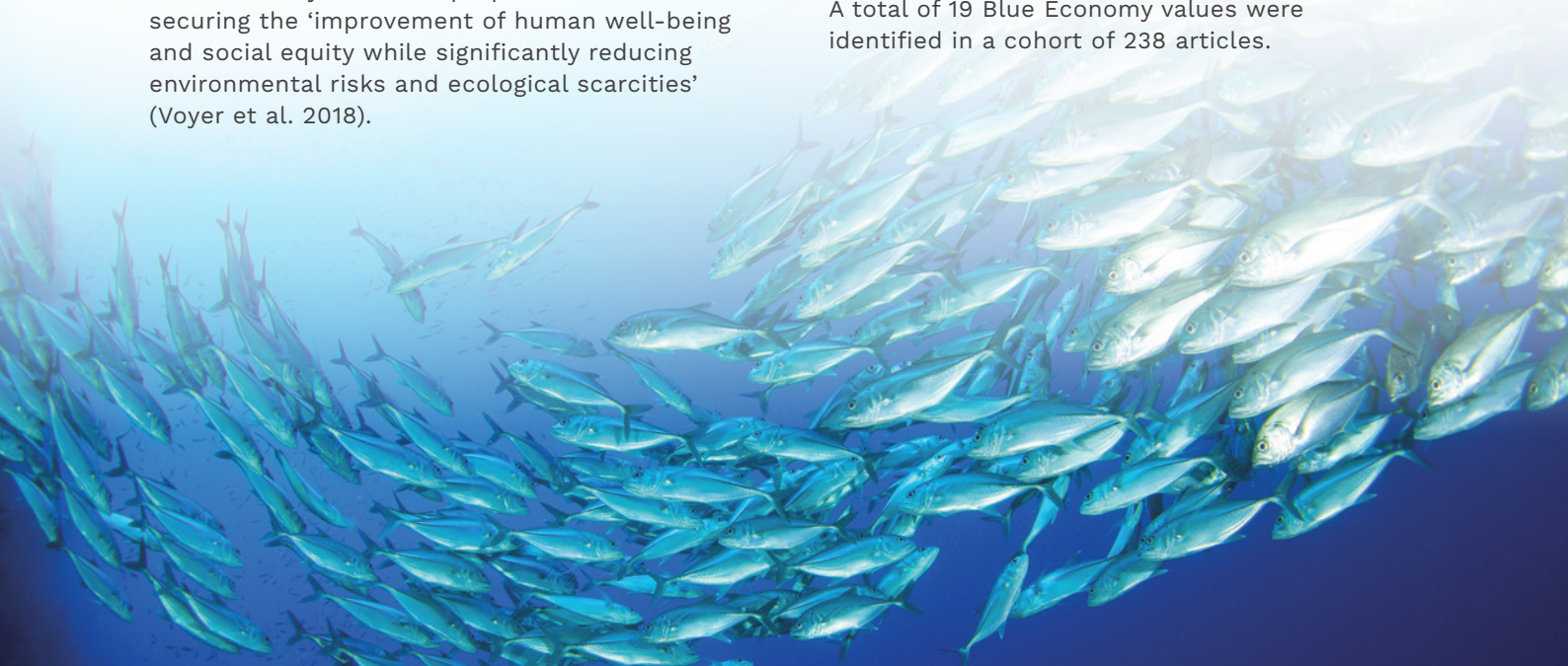
## Methodology

**The Project asked: what ethical values should be considered in ethical decision-making about the Blue Economy?**

To answer this question, the Project Team conducted a systematic quantitative review of existing scholarship on the ethics of the Blue Economy, and a critical analysis of the results (Cooper et al. 2023).

This involved creating a database that collated all the ethical values that were found within the scholarly literature on ethics in the Blue Economy.

A total of 19 Blue Economy values were identified in a cohort of 238 articles.



# Identifying Ethical Values

Ethical values refer to the specific moral concepts invoked by practitioners, activists, scholars and commentators.

*Figure 1* shows that the most frequently invoked values in the Blue Economy, and the number of times they appeared in the literature. The three most frequently invoked ethical values are sustainability (56%), equity/distributive justice (44%) and stakeholder participation (38.5%)

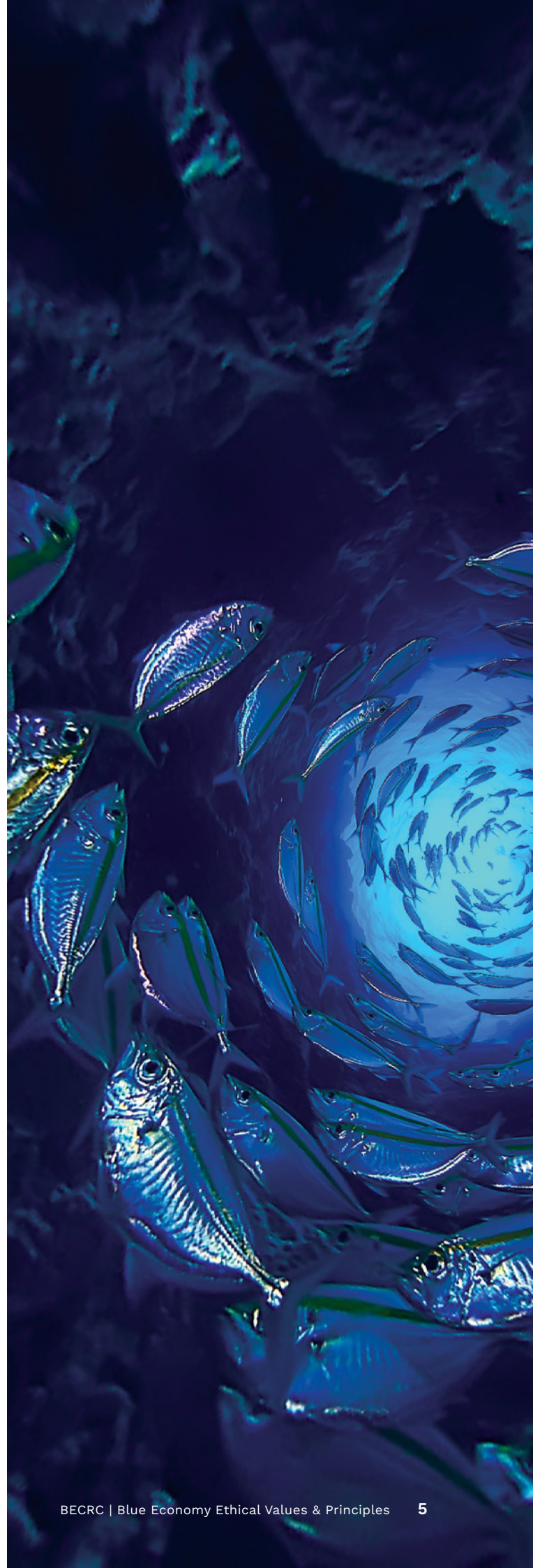
**The strong emphasis on sustainability is unsurprising given that the Blue Economy's very definition highlights the importance of balancing economic, environmental and social considerations to protect both the long-term efficacy of the industry and the many stakeholders that comprise it.**

**Sustainability as an ethical value has become more multifaceted over time.**

Early definitions of sustainable development referred to 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. In recent times, sustainability increasingly recognises the importance of social, environmental and economic sustainability.

The second-most invoked value, **equity**, refers to whether costs, benefits, risks and opportunities are fairly distributed across all stakeholders and that local communities and vulnerable groups (e.g. women, artisanal fishermen, native peoples) are not disadvantaged by large-scale activities and projects.

Finally, the importance that is placed on both **stakeholder participation** (38.5%) and **stakeholder analysis** (28.5%) reflects the wide array of stakeholders who have legitimate and overlapping interests in Blue Economy.



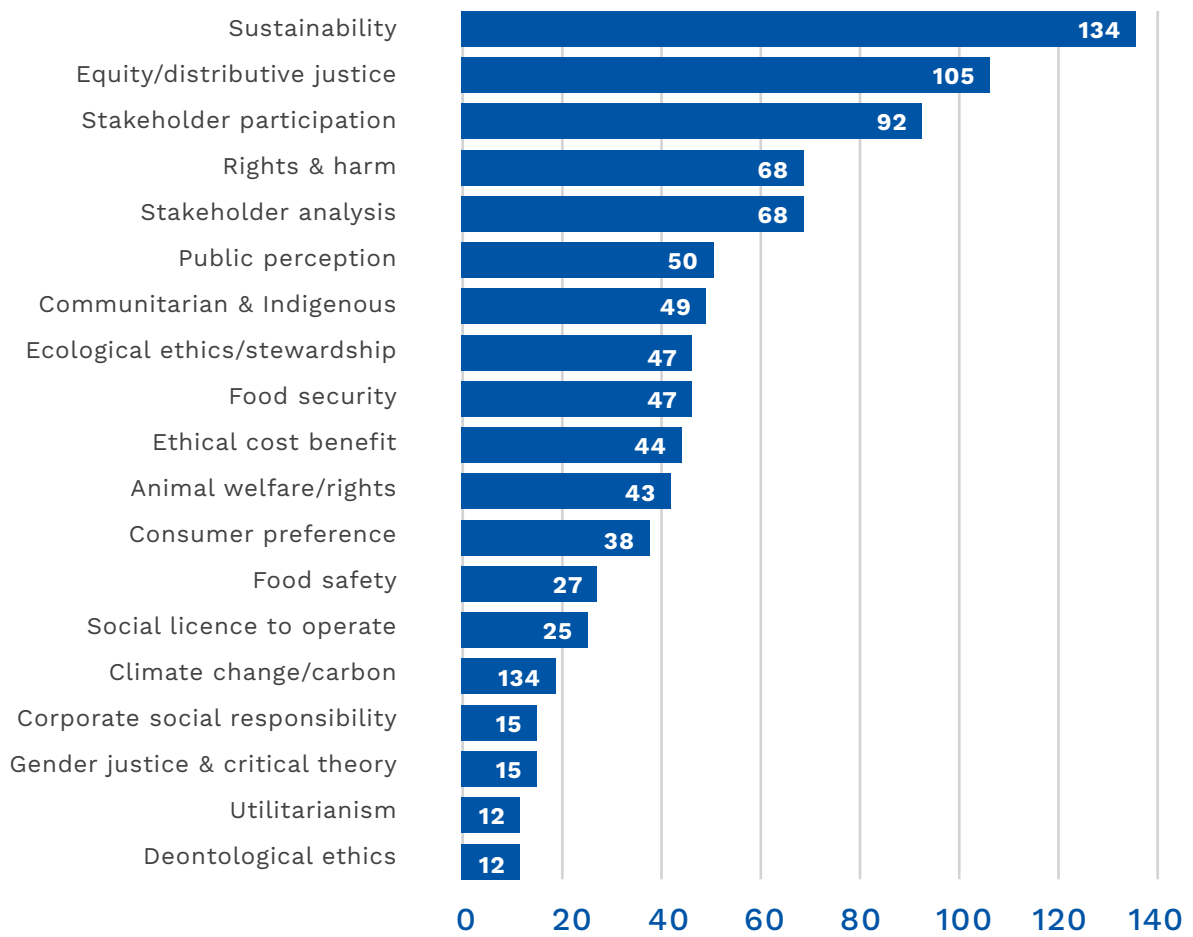


Figure 1. Ethical Values in Blue Economy Literature.



## Identifying Ethical Principles

The Project Team considered how the specific values identified in *Figure 1* could be grouped together to reflect broader Blue Economy ethical principles.

For example, the ethical principle of *Environmental Protection* covers an array of similar but more specific ethical values, including sustainability, climate justice, ecological ethics and stewardship. *Figure 2* shows how the identified ethical values could be grouped together thematically under the banner of five broad marine economy ethical principles (and also includes the sixth principle derived from our review of practical recommendations).

These Blue Economy ethical principles are also reflected in many applicable public standards, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Principles	Values
<b>Environmental Protection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Sustainability</li> <li>» Ecological ethics &amp; stewardship</li> <li>» Climate justice</li> </ul>
<b>Stakeholder Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Public/stakeholder participation</li> <li>» Social license</li> <li>» Communitarian &amp; Indigenous</li> </ul>
<b>Fairness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Equity</li> <li>» Distributive justice</li> <li>» Gender justice</li> </ul>
<b>Harm Prevention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Respecting rights</li> <li>» Animal welfare &amp; animal rights</li> <li>» Deontology</li> </ul>
<b>Beneficence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Food security &amp; safety</li> <li>» Stakeholder cost/benefit</li> <li>» Utilitarianism</li> </ul>
<b>Trustworthiness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Accountability</li> <li>» Transparency</li> <li>» Honesty &amp; integrity</li> </ul>

**Figure 2.** Broad Ethical Principles and specific ethical values.

## Practical Recommendations

**These ethical values and principles could be meaningfully translated into positive actions to strengthen ethical standards and practices in the Blue Economy.**

Blue Economy scholars have put forward a range of practical recommendations to ensure that the Blue Economy is maximising its benefits and minimising its negative consequences.

As **Figure 3** demonstrates, the literature offers a wide array of recommendations that range from:

1. top-down measures such as improved governance, regulation and certification regimes;
2. institutional reforms including transparent management systems, responsive policy frameworks and more inclusive stakeholder input;
3. more ethical and accountable Blue Economy industry processes driven by advances in education, training, science and technology;
4. promoting more ethically robust policies, standards and practices; and
5. greater engagement with civil society groups and grassroots activists.

**The practical recommendations are clearly informed by the above-noted ethical principles. For example, the prevalent focus on stakeholder decision making shows that inclusive participation is important.**

However, *governance* was the most frequently invoked recommendation (41.5%), while regulation, law and policy reform, and certification also featured heavily.

For this reason, it was clear that being **trustworthy and accountable** also stands as an important Blue Economy ethical principle (Breakey 2022; Cooper et al. 2023).

This rounded out the Six Blue Economy Principles identified in page 1: Environmental Protection, Stakeholder Participation, Fairness, Harm Prevention, Beneficence, and Trustworthiness and Accountability.

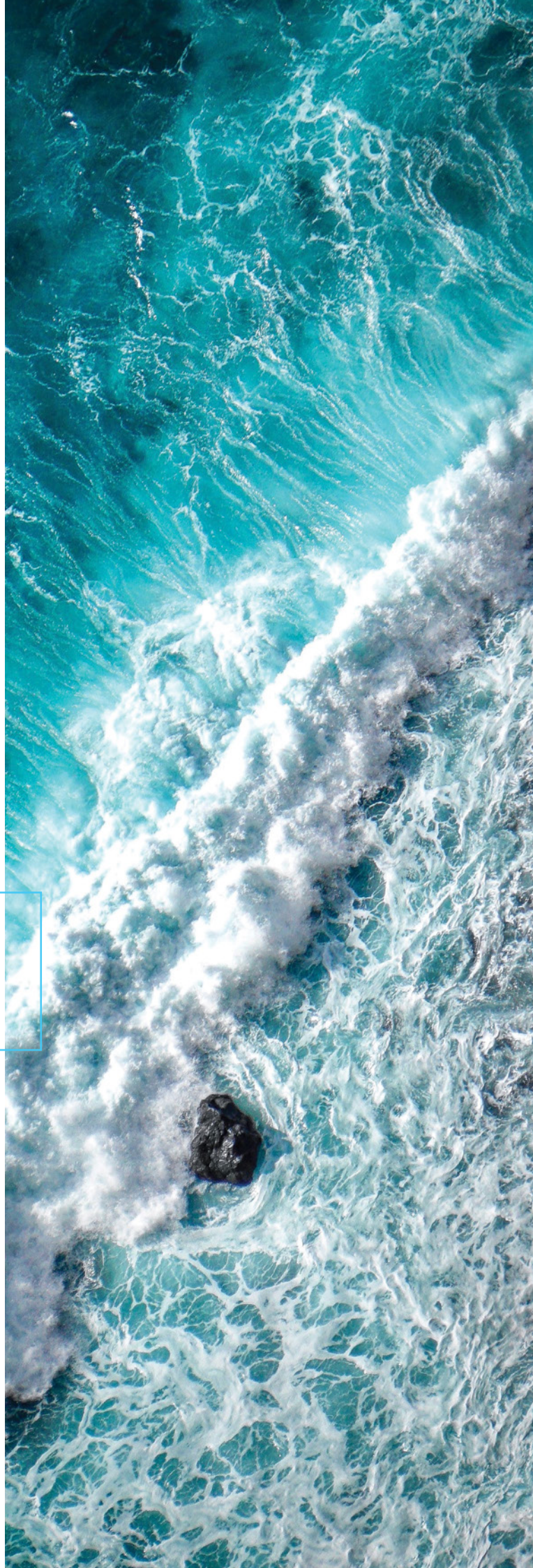






Figure 3. Practical Recommendations

## Conclusion

This Practitioner Summary has delineated six Blue Economy Ethical Principles to guide marine economy activities. Future summaries will present research findings discussing their application to practical settings.

## Further Reading

Bennett, N. J., A. M. Cisneros-Montemayor, J. Blythe, J. J. Silver, G. Singh, N. Andrews, A. Calò, P. Christie, A. Di Franco, E. M. Finkbeiner, S. Gelcich, P. Guidetti, S. Harper, N. Hotte, J. N. Kittinger, P. Le Billon, J. Lister, R. López de la Lama, E. McKinley, J. Scholtens, A.-M. Solàs, M. Sowman, N. Talloni-Álvarez, L. C. L. Teh, M. Voyer and U. R. Sumaila (2019). “Towards a sustainable and equitable blue economy.” [Nature Sustainability](#) 2(11): 991-993.

Breakey, H. (2022). Ethics in the Blue Economy. [De Gruyter Handbook of Sustainable Development and Finance](#). T. Cadman and T. Sarker. Berlin, De Gruyter: 511-542. <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9783110733488-023/html>

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Voyer, M., Quirk, G., McIlgorm, A. & Azmi, K. (2018). Shades of blue: What do competing interpretations of the Blue Economy mean for oceans governance? *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, 20(5), 595-616. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1523908X.2018.1473153>

Further project research, including all four Practitioner Summaries, is available at <https://blueeconomycrc.com.au/project/ethics-values-and-social-license-in-the-blue-economy/>



**BLUE**   
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