

# Developing pathways to a flourishing blue economy

The seas are central to our wellbeing. Aotearoa New Zealand has a large marine territory, which puts the oceans at the forefront for economic growth, international opportunities, and New Zealand's future. Using our marine resources sustainably can help restore and protect the long-term health of the ocean and secure intergenerational prosperity for all.

To achieve this, we need to act now, and shift the way we interact with our ocean. We need to transition to a blue economy that delivers economic value and contributes positively to social, cultural, and ecological wellbeing.

## About this document

This document summarises how Aotearoa New Zealand can build effective pathways towards a vibrant blue economy by adopting the blue economy principles - based on research from the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.



## Recommendations

These recommendations centre on adopting blue economy principles that embrace a te mana o te moana approach (where the wellbeing needs of the ocean are prioritised), support and restore marine ecosystem health, enhance livelihoods, and deliver prosperity and social and cultural values for all New Zealanders.

- » Adopt the blue economy principles to guide national, sectoral, and regional economic development strategies (figure 1).
- » Embed the blue economy principles in economic development, business activities, and resource management policy and budgets.
- » Enable Māori to build a Māori blue economy and lead development directions in the wider blue economy that align with Māori aspirations and institutions.
- » Prioritise place-based investment and environmental management in blue economy development policy and practice.
- » Provide core funding for a specialist and independent blue economy development organisation(s), for example, Moananui. Funding a specialist, independent blue economy development organisation will:
  - » support national and regional economic development agencies
  - » catalyse business and investor interests
  - » foster collaboration among investors, businesses (including iwi/hapu businesses), and community and science organisations.
- » Reform and redirect environmental management regulations and oceans governance to enshrine the blue economy principles - the heart of an adaptive and opportunities-focused management and development regime.

# What is a blue economy?

A blue economy for Aotearoa New Zealand means marine activities that generate economic value and contribute positively to social, cultural, and ecological well-being.

Growing pressures exist for blue economy commitments and practices in financial markets, global supply chain relationships, and final consumer markets, as well from domestic and international regulators, international treaty obligations, and biophysical limits and changing environments. Our seas are essential for New Zealand to grow its economy, and we need to do it according to blue economy principles to enable long-term gains.

Our research revealed that a blue economy is an aspiration. It needs to be principles-based and have a collective investment strategy directed to ensuring our oceans are managed sustainably.

Māori are key players in building a national blue economy – as well as Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners, Māori are major rights holders, users and leaders in blue economy thought and practice, and are actively building a specifically Māori blue economy. A blue economy is inextricably bound up with regional and Māori economic development.

A blue economy needs to be brought into existence through a transitions approach to economic development – an approach that’s principles-based, open-ended, organic, shared, and adaptive. This approach will support government agencies, businesses, iwi, hapū, and whānau, and communities to identify immediate and future economic objectives and directions.

## About the blue economy principles

Many of the recommendations in this guidance document centre on the blue economy principles. Our researchers and partners developed these principles after reviewing international examples and established a set of blue economy principles (figure 1) through a uniquely Aotearoa lens.

- The principles support inclusive and accountable decision-making that’s intergenerational in scale, and regenerative in orientation.



Figure 1 The blue economy principles

## How do we transition to a blue economy?

Shifting to a blue economy is a journey that needs facilitation and nurturing. Our research identified three crucial pillars that support a shift to a successful blue economy.

1. Blue economy business models and novel value propositions
2. A place-based development approach
3. An adaptive blue economy rules regime that mandates the blue economy principles as criteria in all reform initiatives

Figure 2 below shows these pillars and how the principles can guide policy setting, investment, and regulation to be translated into a future blue economy. The vision is a holistic economy that's consistent with, supported by, and integrated into an ecosystem-based resource management framework and an indigenised blue economy framework. Figure 2 identifies specific interventions that will enable this - these interventions are outlined in the recommendations.

The shift to a blue economy will not happen by itself - it must be socialised and made investable. Our research identified what's needed to enable a flourishing blue economy that meets community expectations, indigenises the use and management of marine resources, and restores the health of the oceans.

With the blue economy principles at the heart, we identified the following pathways to a thriving blue economy.

- Place-based regional development
- Collective catalysation, for example Moananui, an independent blue economy agency
- Nature-based corporate reporting
- Restoration finance
- Collective sector-building
- Māori-led economy

## We still need to overcome barriers

While multiple initiatives at different scales are underway towards a blue economy, choke points still exist, including lobbying by established interests, government agencies with conflicting agendas, locked-in patterns of thought and action, and historically established priorities.

Doing nothing to release these choke points and secure and extend the initiatives launched would be an opportunity lost. New Zealand has established the foundational knowledge and working models to lead the world. We have created a global exemplar for living in a new era in which sustainable seas are central to global futures. We must now shape these into widely accepted pathways forward. If we do nothing to overcome these barriers, there are significant risks of slipping back into being a commodity producer from the oceans.

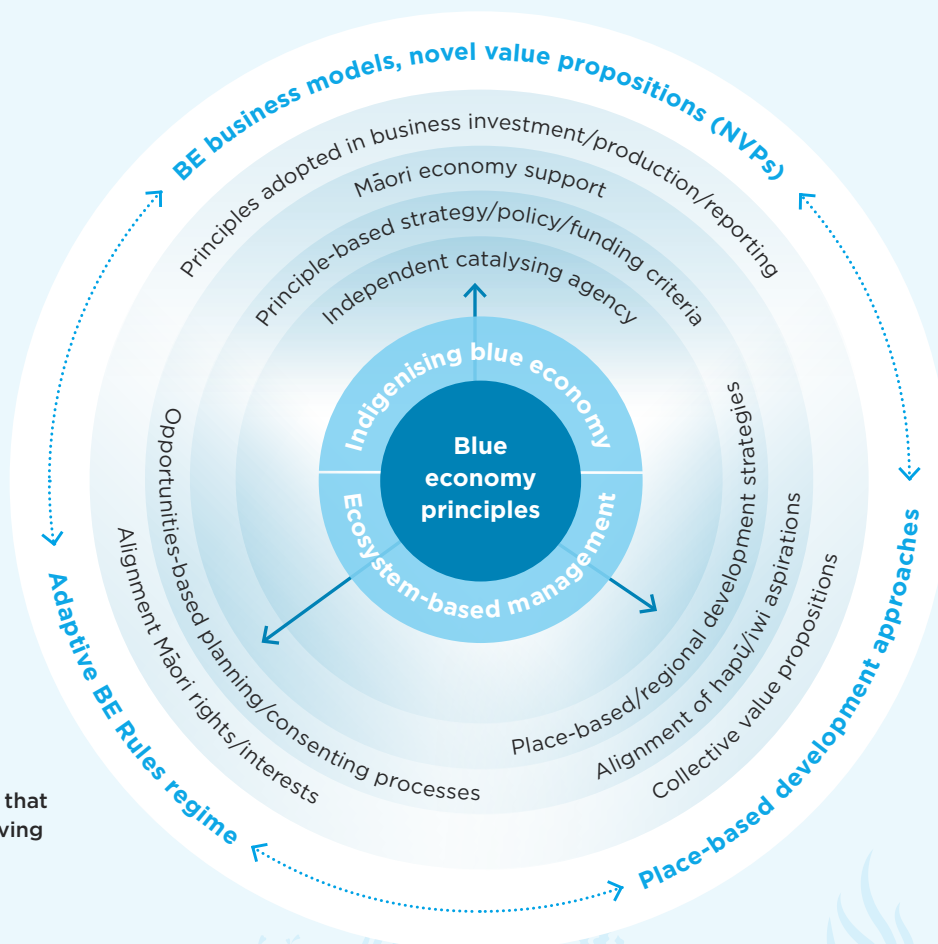


Figure 2 Pillars that underpin a thriving blue economy

## References

- Envirostrat (2019). **Transitioning to a Blue Economy: Scoping and horizon scanning**. Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.
- Ferretti E, Lewis N, Thrush S, Lucrezi S, & Hillman J (2023). **Making a place special—The development of Restorative Marine Ecotourism at a dive destination village**. *Frontiers in Sustainable Tourism* 2: 1282392.
- Hikuroa D, Le Heron R, & Le Heron E (2020). **Re-commoning in the spirit of Ki Uta Ki Tai (mountains to the sea): towards generative economic-environment transitionings**. In Prince R, Henry M, Gallagher A, Morris C, & Fitzherbert S (eds.), *Markets in their place* (pp. 82–101). Routledge.
- Le Heron E, Allen W, Le Heron R, Logie J, et al (2021). **What does success look like? An indicative rubric to assess and guide the performance of marine participatory processes**. *Ecology and Society*, 26(1):29.
- Le Heron E, Logie J, Allen W, Le Heron R, Blackett P, Davies K, Greenaway A, Glavovic B, & Hikuroa D (2019). **Diversity, contestation, participation in Aotearoa New Zealand's multi-use/user marine spaces**. *Marine Policy* 106: 103536.
- Lewis N (2018). **Cultivating diverse values by rethinking blue economy in New Zealand**. In *Towards Coastal Resilience and Sustainability* (pp. 94–108).
- Lewis N, Le Heron R, Hikuroa D, & Le Heron E (2024). **Rent as a regional asset: rent platforms and regional development in Kaikōura, Aotearoa New Zealand**. *Regional Studies*, 58(1), 151–163.
- Lewis N, Le Heron R, Hikuroa D & Le Heron E (2021). **Making a blue economy in Kaikoura: A participatory processes approach**. Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.
- Lewis N, Le Heron R, Hikuroa D, Le Heron E, Davies K, Fitzherbert S, James G, Wynd D, McLellan G, Dowell A, Petersen I, Barrett J, Sharp E, Ribeiro R, Catley S, Baldoni M, & Le Heron K (2020). **Creating value from a blue economy**. Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.
- Lima S, Stancu C, Cortés Acosta S, Bridger T, & Peacocke L (2023). **Report for Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge project 2.2 Encouraging restorative economies in NZ marine spaces** (MBIE Contract Number: C01X1901)
- Peacocke L, Stancu C, Diplock J, & Short K, (2022). **Sustainability Disclosures in the Blue Economy**. Report for Sustainable Seas National Science Challenges Project BE 1: Sustainability Disclosures and BE 2: Applying BE Principles (MBIE Contract Number: C01X1901)
- Mika J, Rout M, Reid J, Bodwitch H, Gillies A, Lythberg B, Hikuroa D, Mackey L, Awatere S, Wiremu F, Rakena M, Davies K, & Robertson N (2022). **Whai rawa, whai mana, whai oranga: Māori marine economy: It's definition, principles, and structure**. Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.
- NZIER (2023). **Building an interconnected blue economy in place: creating restorative surpluses**. Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.
- NZIER (2024). **How to develop the Blue Economy: a summary report**. Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.
- Rout M, Reid J, Mika J, Whitehead J, Gillies A, Wiremu F, McLellan G, & Ruha C (2024). **Indigenising the blue economy in Aotearoa New Zealand**. *Marine Policy* 161: 105987.
- Šunde C, Sinner J, Tadaki M, Stephenson J, Glavovic B, Awatere S, Giorgetti A, Lewis N, Young A, & Chan K (2018). **Valuation as destruction? The social effects of valuation processes in contested marine spaces**. *Marine Policy* 97: 170–178.
- Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge (2022). **Aotearoa New Zealand's Seaweed Sector Framework**.
- Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge (2024). **Marine governance – sustaining ocean outcomes for future generations!**. [sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/marine-governance-sustaining-ocean-outcomes-for-future-generations](https://sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/marine-governance-sustaining-ocean-outcomes-for-future-generations)
- Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge (2024). **Enabling ecosystem-based management in Aotearoa New Zealand's marine law and policy?**. [sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/enabling-ecosystem-based-management-in-aotearoa](https://sustainableseaschallenge.co.nz/tools-and-resources/enabling-ecosystem-based-management-in-aotearoa)
- Tadaki M, Sinner J, Šunde C, Giorgetti A, Glavovic B, Awatere S, Lewis N, & Stephenson J (2020). **Four propositions about how valuation intervenes in local environmental politics**. *People and Nature* 3(1): 190–203.
- Whitehead J, Rout M, Mika J, Reid J, Wiremu F, Gillies A, McLellan G, Ruha C, & Tainui R (2023). **Auahatanga from Authenticity: Maximising opportunities for Akaroa Salmon and Ōnuku Rūnanga**. Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge.

## Contact information

Nick Lewis / [n.lewis@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:n.lewis@auckland.ac.nz)

This document was prepared by Richard L Heron, Maru Samuels, Johnny O'Donnell, Jodie Kuntzsch, John Reid and Nigel Bradly. We thank Challenge researchers and co-development partners for participating in workshops and reviewing drafts that informed the content.

For more information and support with marine management decisions, please see our other synthesis project summaries and guidance documents in this series.