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An appeal for a code of conduct for marine conservation

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ABSTRACT

Marine conservation actions are promoted to conserve natural values and support human wellbeing. Yet the quality of governance processes and the social consequences of some marine conservation initiatives have been the subject of critique and even human rights complaints. These types of governance and social issues may jeopardize the legitimacy of, support for and long-term effectiveness of marine conservation. Thus, we argue that a clearly articulated and comprehensive set of social standards - a code of conduct - is needed to guide marine conservation. In this paper, we draw on the results of an expert meeting and scoping review to present key principles that might be taken into account in a code of conduct, to propose a draft set of foundational elements for inclusion in a code of conduct, to discuss the benefits and challenges of such a document, and to propose next steps to develop and facilitate the uptake of a broadly applicable code of conduct within the marine conservation community. The objectives of developing such a code of conduct are to promote fair conservation governance and decision-making, socially just conservation actions and outcomes, and accountable conservation practi-

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tioners and organizations. The uptake and implementation of a code of conduct would enable marine conservation to be both socially acceptable and ecologically effective, thereby contributing to a truly sustainable ocean.

1. Marine conservation: In need of a social standard

Action is needed to conserve and manage the marine environment in order to maintain healthy ecosystems and human wellbeing. This is particularly true in a world with mounting anthropogenic threats, including overfishing, pollution, coastal population growth, biodiversity loss, habitat destruction and climate change [1–3]. The international community has responded by pushing for increased marine conservation and management. Notable examples include the Convention on Biological Diversity (Aichi Target 11) and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 14) [4,5]. Both platforms articulate targets of 10% protection of marine and coastal areas in marine protected areas (MPAs) by 2020. In a motion approved at the recent 2016 World Conservation Congress in Honolulu, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is advocating for an even more ambitious goal of 30% coverage in MPAs (See: https://portals.iucn.org/congress/motion/053). Some conservation organizations are even promoting a goal of 50% through the Nature Needs Half movement [6,7]. Indeed, marine conservation targets, supported by regional initiatives and national efforts, have led to a significant increase in the scope and scale of marine conservation efforts globally [8]. Further, MPAs are just one tool in a suite of marine conservation and management actions – e.g., fisheries management, ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning, nature-based adaptation measures, blue carbon projects, etc. - that are being promoted and implemented around the world in response to resource degradation, climate change and scarcity.

Yet in the push to rapidly increase marine management and conservation interventions with the aim of reversing downward environmental trends [8,9], there is a real danger that the marine conservation community may promote actions that are socially unjust or inappropriate. Past research has demonstrated unsatisfactory governance and decision-making processes and unintended negative social consequences that can occur in the creation of terrestrial protected areas in a variety of different settings [10–12]. Such critical reviews of conservation practice have documented a lack of consultation, physical displacement, perpetration of violence, cultural disruption, social marginalization, loss of livelihoods, and increased poverty. Recently, the UN Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council recently released a report on human rights violations related to conservation of terrestrial biodiversity [13].

While these types of issues have been long recognized in terrestrial conservation, there is evidence of similar problems occurring in some marine conservation initiatives. For example, recent accounts have documented marine conservation initiatives that lack consultation or consent prior to implementation [14–16], fail to account for the rights and needs of local people [17–19], physically displace communities [20,21], produce inequitable social impacts [22–24], disempower local communities [25,26] and undermine traditional and functioning resource management regimes [27]. These issues have led some scholars and practitioners to question whether some marine conservation initiatives should be labeled as a form of “ocean grabbing” when governance processes are poor or when rights and resources are taken from small-scale fishers, indigenous peoples, and/or coastal communities [28,29].

Issues such as these can produce several well-documented challenges for conservation. First, some actions might be deemed unjust or unlawful, which might lead to complaints to human rights bodies or lengthy court battles [13,17]. Actions that contravene fundamental human rights or ignore indigenous rights in the name of marine conservation are not only unacceptable, they are also counter-productive. Second, for conservation funders and NGOs, these critiques also pose a significant risk to the “brand” of organizations and the social license of conservation [12,30]. This can lead to justifiable activism against individual NGOs or conservation by local communities, indigenous groups or small-scale fisheries organizations, or in global conservation fora [29,31–33]. Third, there is the risk that unacceptable governance, actions or impacts will produce local opposition, slow progress towards targets, and, ultimately, undermine the effectiveness and success of marine conservation [14,23].

We recognize that there are numerous examples of positive marine conservation initiatives that incorporate participatory planning processes [34–37], that have taken into account social and cultural considerations [38,39], that consider livelihoods and are co-managed [40–43], that recognize local and indigenous community initiatives to conserve local resources [25,35,44], and that have produced positive social outcomes to the benefit of natural resource management efforts [45–48]. Furthermore, generally speaking, there is good will within the international community to consider the concerns and needs of people when designing conservation actions. Marine conservation is often motivated by both ecological and social concerns [49]. There is also increasing attention to good governance [50,51] and the human dimensions of marine conservation [39,42,52,53]. Yet, overall, it is difficult to determine the extent to which past marine conservation processes and actions have been inclusive and just in practice. To improve the quality of governance, the social benefits and the success of marine conservation efforts, we feel it is justified and important for there to be a solid and defensible foundational platform for future action.

Thus, rather than dwell on past mistakes, we issue a call to action and propose a way forward to reduce the occurrence of poor governance and negative impacts in future efforts to achieve marine conservation objectives. Specifically, we argue that there is a well-recognized gap and need for a code of conduct to guide the actions of all members of the marine conservation community. This is exemplified by the increasing number of individuals and organizations – including local communities, practitioners, academics and NGOs - that are calling for a foundational set of guiding principles or social standards to guide conservation practitioners [28,54–56]. Notably, one outcome of a recent global Think Tank on the Human Dimensions of Large Scale Marine Protected Areas – attended by more than 125 scholars, practitioners, funders and managers from around the world - was a call by a group of those present for the development of such a code of conduct for marine conservation [57,58]. Many other professions, including doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants and teachers, have codes of conduct to establish a firm foundation for practice. However, there is no similar social standard or mechanism to guide the actions of individual conservation practitioners, organizations or governments or to hold them accountable. A *Hippocratic Oath* is needed for conservation.

2. Towards a code of conduct for marine conservation

Recognizing this gap and the perceived need for such a social standard, several of this paper's authors initiated a research project and collaborative process to explore and develop these ideas further. This included conducting a scoping review and convening an expert meeting. First, the three lead authors on this paper conducted a preliminary review of the literature and prepared an initial summative list of the principles that we found for further discussion at the expert meeting.

Table 1
Review of key principles, guiding questions and reference documents for a code of conduct for conservation.

Governance and Decision-Making Principles		
Principles	Guiding Questions	Relevant Policies and Guidelines
Recognition	Are the presence and rights of local groups, including minorities, marginalized groups, traditional resource users and indigenous groups, duly acknowledged in conservation plans and policies? Are pre-existing national and local laws, governance arrangements and management processes recognized?	[5,51,57,65–88]
Participation	Are there clear processes for identifying and engaging all stakeholders (with differentiation of rights holders) in decision-making and action-taking?	[4,28,44,57,59,61,62,67,68,70–75,77–79, 84–86,88–102]
Inclusivity	Are there governance structures that include and equitably represent all implicated stakeholders, rights-holders and relevant groups in decision-making processes?	[4,5,28,44,51,57,59,61,63–65,69–71,77,79, 80,83–87,89,92,94–97,100,101,103–105]
Voice	Are there processes to ensure the perspectives and different worldviews of all relevant stakeholders, rights-holders and relevant groups are taken into account, and equitably represented throughout the process?	[5,28,57,59,61,64,65,73,74,77,79–81,83–85, 87,89,91,97,101,103–106]
Due process	Are the legal obligations, customary rules, and informal regulations adequately respected and followed to ensure the legitimacy of the process?	[4,5,44,57,60–62,67,69,70,72,74,76,77, 79–81,84,85,87,89,96,98,100–104,107,108]
Self-determination	Are sovereignty and autonomy issues recognized? Are steps taken to ensure recognized authorities and constituents have control over decision-making processes and outcomes? Are nationally and democratically defined social and environmental priorities understood and respected?	[28,63,66,72,74,79,82,83,87,105,109]
Free, prior, and informed consent	Are steps taken to inform communities and stakeholders of the short and long-term costs and benefits associated with conservation interventions and policies? Are there mutually agreed terms for conservation processes? Is consent obtained through an informed, fair and legal process? Has consent (written or verbal) been properly documented?	[44,51,55,60–64,66,67,70,72,73,79,82,84, 85,88,90,93,98,103,110,111]
Capacity	Is support provided to ensure constituents and communities possess the capacity (skills, knowledge, time, resources) to fully participate in all stages of participatory planning, decision-making and action-taking? Are adequate resources provided to enable all parties to carry out their agreed upon roles and management responsibilities after implementation?	[5,57,59–61,63,65,67,69–71,74,78,84,86, 88,91,94–101,106,110,112,113]
Social Justice Principles		
Principles	Guiding Questions	Relevant Policies and Guidelines
Human rights	Are measures in place to protect human rights, dignity, and freedoms of all groups? Are there processes to respond to complaints about violations?	[5,51,55,61,65,66,71,74,76,79–84,86,87, 89,90,92,96,97,103–110,114–116]
Tenure	Are pre-existing and customary claims to access, use and harvest marine areas resources recognized, respected and incorporated into planning?	[44,57,61,64–67,69–72,74,79,87,90,92,93, 99,100,103,109–111]
Indigenous rights	Are indigenous rights recognized and respected? Are indigenous rights and values not infringed upon? Do conservation processes strengthen cooperation around resolving issues faced by indigenous peoples?	[4,44,51,57,59,64,66,67,69–72,74,77,79, 80,87–89,97,99–101,103,109,110,117]
Intellectual property	Are proprietary information and traditional knowledge systems safeguarded for the integrity of knowledge holders? Are policies in place to ensure that communities are fairly credited for their knowledge and contribution to scientific research, that researchers return to share and discuss knowledge and research products with communities and that ownership of data and research products are clarified?	[60,63,64,70,76,79,84,87,98,100–102]
Cultural diversity and heritage	Are cultural practices, artifacts, places, values and activities – both historical and present – incorporated into conservation planning and management?	[4,44,51,57,59,60,62–81,83,85–94,96–99, 101,103,106,110]
Social well-being	Are programs in place to maintain or improve the quality of life and standard of living of local people? Are social well-being considerations being monitored?	[5,28,51,57,59,65,67,70,73,75,77–79,81, 82,86,87,91,92,96,101,103,105,110]
Food and livelihood security	Are measures in place to ensure that food and livelihood security are not compromised by the conservation intervention? Are mechanisms in place to ensure access to income and resources are adequate to meet basic needs?	[5,28,57,62,65–67,70,71,74,78,79,81–84, 87,92,96,101,103–106,109,112,117]
Equitable distribution	Are actions taken to ensure present and future costs and benefits of conservation are distributed among stakeholders and rights holders, so that outcomes are considered to be acceptable by all parties?	[28,51,59–61,67,69,71,79,82,85–89,95–100, 103,105]
Access and benefit sharing	Are access and benefit sharing agreements in place to ensure that access and benefits are equitably distributed and flow to those who will be impacted?	[28,44,60,62–64,67,69,71,76,82,84,85,87, 88,91,92,96–100,103,106,109,110]
Environmentally sustainable	Are adequate management actions being taken to ensure marine ecosystems remain healthy so as to generate the goods and services required by resource dependent communities?	[4,5,28,61,62,64,66–71,73,74,77–79,87, 90–92,96,97,99,101,103,110,116,117]
Accountability Principles		
Principles	Guiding Questions	Relevant Policies and Guidelines
Learning	Are there iterative processes and an organizational culture to enable learning about social considerations and performance, including both successes and failures, and to ensure past mistakes are not repeated in future conservation policies and initiatives? Are there adequate spaces and processes to support reflection and deliberation?	[67,77,87]
Adaptive management	Are social impact monitoring and evaluation protocols being used and results communicated? Are conservation initiatives being adaptively managed based on monitoring and evaluation of social impacts?	[44,51,57,63–65,67,69–71,73,88–90,93]
Transparency	Is open communication encouraged and effective in avoiding mis-reporting or concealment of information, costs and benefits? Are active steps being taken to communicate about how decisions are made, the rationale for decisions, and the results of conservation actions? Is information provided in an accessible, understandable, useful and timely manner?	[5,28,51,57,61,63,64,71,73,77,79,85,87–90, 92–96,98,100,102,106,108,109,112,116]
Accountability	Is there an independent process (e.g., third party audits) to evaluate and verify conservation performance? Is there a mechanism to ensure that parties are held responsible (e.g., sanctions) for their actions and transgressions?	[28,44,51,57,61,62,65,67,69–71,73,79,87, 89,90,92,95,96,98,106,116,117]
Conflict resolution	Are efficient and accessible conflict and dispute resolution mechanisms available to negotiate and resolve emerging and outstanding issues?	[44,57,61,65,67,69,70,73,79,83,85,87,89, 92,93,98,100,102–104,106,107,110,117]
Remediation or redress mechanisms	Have processes been set up to seek remedial action (e.g., compensation or structural readjustment) for past infringements of rights or to find solutions to emerging issues?	[57,66,70,72,73,79,81,83,84,98,100, 102–104,107]

Second, we convened meeting of experts as a side event at the IUCN 2016 World Conservation Congress in Honolulu, Hawaii to discuss acceptable and unacceptable processes and practices in the context of marine conservation. Our overall sample (n =18) for the meeting was opportunistic. We identified and invited scholars (n =12) and practitioners (n =6) involved in marine conservation and management who were already going to be present at the IUCN congress. During the meeting, which was facilitated by the lead author of this paper, we clarified the rationale for a code of conduct and the parties to whom the code would apply, brainstormed other relevant codes and international policy documents, discussed the aims and principles that might be included in a code of conduct, examined the potential benefits and challenges of a code of conduct, and explored next steps in the development and promotion of a code of conduct within the marine conservation community. Notes were taken during the workshop and later analyzed for key themes by the lead author of this paper. Third, to arrive at a summative list of principles, we conducted an inductive review of conservation policies and standards, foundational international policy documents from organizations such as the FAO, the United Nations, the CBD and the IUCN, and peer-reviewed literature as identified by the authors and workshop participants. This paper presents the results from both the expert meeting and scoping review.

2.1. Key principles and objectives

In convening this discussion, we recognized that there already exists a diverse set of codes of conduct or similar documents related to conservation that have emerged from different international policy contexts [59,60,61], that pertain to different scales from local to global [62,63] and that deal with specific concerns such as rights or culture [55,64]. However, a broadly applicable guidance document that identifies key responsibilities and accountabilities does not exist for marine conservation. Such a document would need to be relevant to the diverse parties engaged in marine conservation – including researchers, governments, NGOs, private sector and local organizations – and to different types and scales of initiatives. It would need to consider distinct societal perceptions of and aspirations for the ocean, unique access regimes and ways that people interact with the ocean in various contexts, the trans-boundary nature of many marine resources, and the shared legacy and common responsibility associated with areas beyond national jurisdiction. The guiding responsibilities and accountabilities identified in the document would also need to apply to different processes associated with marine conservation (e.g., research, policy development, decision-making, management, public outreach/engagement), including at different stages within the process (e.g., prior to entry, during entry, in the planning phase, during implementation, in ongoing management and in monitoring and adaptation).

It was agreed that a primary focus of such a code of conduct is the key principles that should guide marine conservation actions. Key considerations that emerged from this policy and literature review ranged from fundamental concerns such as protection of basic *human rights* [65,66] to more aspirational goals related to *equity* in the distribution of costs and benefits [4,60]. Drawing on the results of the expert meeting and the scoping review, we present a comprehensive list of the key principles that both experts and policy documents suggested ought to guide conservation. We present these principles along with a set of guiding questions and supporting references to key policy and guidance documents (Table 1). Most of the principles are well-recognized and developed concepts in international conventions and agreements, that many countries are signatory to, as well as in conservation policy documents (Appendix A).

Based on this review of principles and our discussions at the expert meeting at the World Conservation Congress, we also propose a draft set of objectives and recommendations that should be considered in the development of a marine conservation code of conduct (Box 1). Our draft proposal for a code of conduct includes three broad objectives –

Box 1

– Draft proposal of objectives and recommendations for a code of conduct for marine conservation, which will need to be reviewed, tested and refined by a broader group of stakeholders and practitioners.

Towards a Code of Conduct for Marine Conservation.
(Draft Objectives and Recommendations for Further Discussion and Development).

I. Fair conservation governance and decision-making processes
- Ensure *recognition* of and respect for the presence and rights of local communities, indigenous people, traditional users and marginalized populations.
- Facilitate decisions through *participatory* processes, which are *inclusive* of stakeholders and rights-holders and give equal *voice* – irrespective of gender, ethnicity, ability, age, language, religion, socioeconomic status or nationality.
- Follow *due process* and respect the right of *self-determination* for sovereign nations and autonomous groups.
- Document *free, prior and informed consent.*
- Ensure availability of adequate *resources and capacity* to support collaboration during planning stages and in effective management.

II. Socially-just conservation actions and outcomes
- Protect inherent and fundamental *human rights*, dignity and freedoms.
- Recognize and respect local *tenure* and *indigenous rights* to resources, traditional and cultural practices, including affirming existing areas and territories conserved and sustainably used by indigenous peoples and local communities.
- Protect *intellectual property* and *cultural diversity and heritage.*
- Consider the needs and aspirations of stakeholders and rights holders to maintain and make efforts to increase *social wellbeing*.
- Maintain *food and livelihood security* for local people and communities.
- Promote *equitable distribution* of benefits and costs, including fair *access and benefit sharing agreements.*
- Ensure that actions taken increase *environmental sustainability* and the provisioning of ecosystem goods and services.

III. Accountable conservation initiatives and organizations.
- Employ a process of planning, iterative *learning* and *adaptive management* based on social considerations, including incorporating lessons from past mistakes in future initiatives.
- Commit to adhering to these principles and adopt a policy of *transparency* and *accountability* that includes a system of downward accountability, independent auditing and graduated sanctions for transgressions.
- Enable access to fair mechanisms for *conflict resolution* and *remediation or redress* where needed.

fair governance and decision-making, socially just actions and outcomes, and accountable organizations and initiatives. These three central objectives are supported by a set of recommendation statements that contain the principles (underlined terms) from the scoping review. We emphasize that this draft set of objectives, recommendations and principles should be further tested and refined by a community of practice through time.

2.2. The benefits and challenges of a code of conduct

We propose three primary benefits or applications for this set of objectives and guiding principles. First, as an educational or capacity building tool, the code can familiarize emerging conservation professionals with the issues and inspire the next generation of conservationists to engage with conservation in ways that are appropriate and mindful of differing social, cultural, economic and institutional contexts to facilitate more effective outcomes. Second, as a guidance document, the code would serve as a reference or set of guidelines for conservation organizations in order to promote more just and equitable conservation policies and practice. This would enable early and proactive engagement with appropriate actions rather than waiting and reacting when conflict arises. It might also serve as a reference for developing more context, project or organization specific codes of conduct. Finally, as an accountability mechanism, the code might form the basis of a set of measurable performance indicators that could be used to hold members (i.e., donors, NGOs, governments, researchers, individual practitioners) of the marine conservation community accountable for their actions. On this last point, we emphasize that there is currently a lack of reliable accountability mechanisms in conservation – in particular, for international conservation funders and NGOs who may lack sufficient oversight [56,118]. Clear accountability is necessary to ensure legitimacy and social license. In short, the code of conduct might function as either "a carrot" (an incentive mechanism to encourage and reward good performance) or "a stick" (an enforcement mechanism to deter bad performance) depending on how it is operationalized. For example, communities might use a code of conduct as a reference either to proactively inspire appropriate conservation or reactively to hold conservation agencies and organizations accountable who are working in their area.

While there are clear benefits, we also recognize that there are some potential challenges. A code of conduct runs the risk of becoming a simple checklist that enables a "lowest common denominator" effect, whereby individuals or organizations only complete the minimum requirements. There is also the risk that conservation professionals will only abide by the outlined principles in the short term, instead of the sustained and continuous engagement that is required to build improved relations and increase the likelihood of conservation success. Finally, while a high-level code can provide generic guidance, conservation professionals will likely need to test and validate or reconfigure these principles in different locales and sites. A result could be negotiation of local or regional codes that are mutually agreed with those implicated. Cognizant of these challenges, we emphasize that adapting these principles and ongoing monitoring is needed to ensure such a code of conduct is developed and applied in a way that is both legitimate and effective for different socio-political contexts.

2.3. The way forward: Developing, promoting and implementing a code of conduct

The initial workshop on the code of conduct and this scoping paper are the first steps in what we hope will be a longer process of developing, promoting and implementing a broadly applicable code of conduct for marine conservation. While we present a review of principles in Table 1 and a draft set of objectives and recommendations in Box 1, the development of a legitimate and recognized code of conduct will require a longer process of engagement, development, and negotiation with a broader constituency and more diverse group of stakeholders at different scales. An essential next step is to develop an understanding of what enables a code to be effective in application – for example, through reviewing and evaluating the impacts of past processes and codes to determine what has worked or has not worked to foster change in conservation practice or encourage accountability.

A number of different groups should be engaged throughout the process of developing, promoting and implementing a code of conduct. These groups include international conservation and intergovernmental bodies (e.g., the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), bi-and multi-lateral conservation initiatives, governments and agencies, conservation funders and NGOs, civil society and community-based organizations, and academics. Capacity, financing, and skilled group facilitation will be needed for these parties to meaningfully participate and contribute. Ultimately, the success of such an initiative will rely on central individuals and organizations that are willing to champion and support the cause. Conservation policy focused meetings that would provide an opportunity to move the discussion and initiative forward include, among others, the upcoming United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (New York, June 2017), IUCN International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC4, Chile, September 2017), and future Conferences of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Once developed, further action would be required to present the code in different formats to inspire actions – such as educational manuals for practitioners, or clear practical guidelines for conservation organizations who want to implement the code or adapt it to different contexts. Guidance documents should be developed that articulate clear indicators, metrics and monitoring mechanisms to help organizations identify the level to which different considerations have been implemented, clearly differentiating between unacceptable actions, minimal standards and aspirational higher standards, and to provide guidance on how to achieve standards.

This leads to the challenging question of whether such a code of conduct should be a voluntary mechanism, which would leave oversight to communities, governments, civil society organizations or academics, or whether the conservation community needs independent external auditing. Conservation organizations may need systems of incentives for uptake and rewards for level of implementation – for example, this might take the form of a certification scheme in a similar manner to corporate social responsibility programs or the IUCN Green List [119]. Conversely, sanctions for transgressions or lack of effort may be needed - e.g., published rebukes, prerequisite corrective actions for future funding disbursements, etc. To hold the conservation community accountable, institutions and tangible processes may need to be set up - including methods for monitoring and evaluation, financing and capacity for auditing, an independent body to oversee the process and mechanisms to communicate shortcomings and ensure improvements are made. Indeed, many unresolved questions remain and numerous operational issues would need to continue to be explored and resolved in future discussions in support of the development of a code of conduct. These questions include, for example: How would practitioners claiming to uphold and abide by the code of conduct be independently evaluated and 'verified'? What, if any, sanctions could be levied against proven transgressors of the code? Should funders of conservation require NGOs to submit independent social audits? Who will hold independent foundations to account? How might the proposed objectives, recommendations and principles of the code of conduct be tested and evaluated under diverse field conditions in order to improve accuracy, legitimacy and applicability? Monitoring lessons learned from implementing early drafts of the code of conduct will also help to answer these questions.

3. An appeal for action

The development and implementation of a code of conduct for marine conservation is warranted, urgent and past due. In the 21st century ocean, narratives and realities of scarcity, resource degradation and climate change may be increasingly used to justify actions that might not have been deemed socially acceptable under previously "normal" circumstances [120]. When done for the sake of marine conservation, unacceptable or unlawful actions may undermine legitimacy and support and jeopardize the long-term success and effectiveness of conservation efforts. Given continuing change and uncertainty, ecological rationales alone will not be enough to guide conservation actions. Proactive attention to social considerations will pay dividends and help to avoid costly mistakes for conservation [52]. Both social and natural sciences will play vital and complementary roles in supporting the dual priorities of socially responsible and ecologically effective conservation policies and practice.

Finally, we put forward these ideas and discussion with some humility, cognizant of the limited representation, and thus experiences and perspectives, of those present at the workshop and the authorship team. Yet, there was significant collective knowledge and experience in our group and the principles presented in this paper are well grounded in foundational policy documents and have emerged as lessons learned from numerous past conservation initiatives. As a result we recommend that conservation organizations and practitioners proceed with proactive consideration and application of the foundational elements of a code of conduct that we present here now to different contexts - until such time as a formalized process of development and review has been completed by a relevant international body and through an inclusive process. We also emphasize the importance of educating conservation professionals and organizations about best practices.

In closure, we re-issue the appeal for the development of a comprehensive and broadly accepted code of conduct to facilitate marine conservation processes and actions that are fair, just and accountable, while supporting the achievement of ecological effectiveness. This will help to achieve a truly sustainable approach to ocean conservation.

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Appendix A. Supporting information

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