

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION:

Blue Carbon Policy Framework

Accelerating conservation and restoration of coastal blue carbon ecosystems through aligned international policies

Coastal blue carbon ecosystems, including mangroves, seagrasses and tidal marshes, are critically important for coastal biodiversity and provide essential services to communities globally, including coastal protection, food, livelihoods and climate mitigation and adaptation. Conservation International and IUCN, with governments and other partners, are working to accelerate the conservation and restoration of blue carbon ecosystems globally through the alignment of international policy opportunities for the conservation and restoration of coastal habitats. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the 2030 Agenda and related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are the key policy processes relevant to accelerating the conservation and restoration of blue carbon ecosystems and are the focus of this framework.¹ Shifting from traditionally siloed approaches to integrated approaches across policy processes (including UNFCCC, CBD, SDGs and Ramsar) holds the potential to enhance ambition, accelerate implementation and deliver high-quality outcomes for blue carbon ecosystems, and is the goal of this framework.

This policy brief provides an overview of the policy intersections and opportunities in the above-mentioned international policy processes for blue carbon ecosystems² and how nations can capitalize on these intersections to accelerate restoration and conservation efforts. Governments can work to align actions across international policy processes to 1) enhance ambition, 2) accelerate implementation and 3) measure results (Figure 1). This policy brief identifies entry points to strengthen commitments, build capacity and provide robust financing for blue carbon conservation and restoration, and provides recommended actions countries can take to leverage synergies across international policy processes to accelerate ambition, implementation, and high-quality outcomes for blue carbon ecosystems.

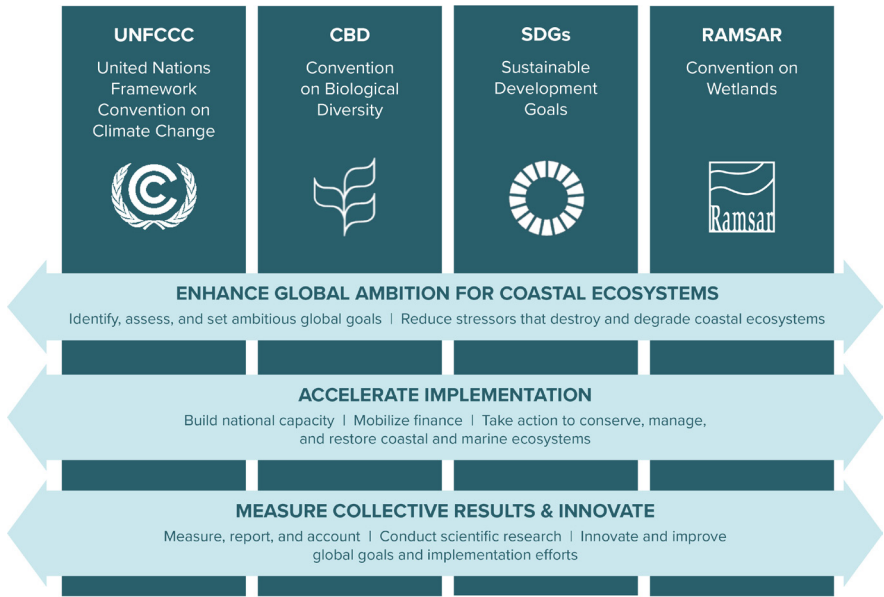


Figure 1. Opportunities to align actions across policy processes to enhance ambition, accelerate implementation, and measure collective results for the conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal ecosystems..

¹ The international policy processes included in this brief do not represent an exhaustive list of potential opportunities to accelerate action for blue carbon.
² The term 'blue carbon ecosystems' will be used throughout this policy brief for consistency, however the policy processes discussed in this paper may reference these ecosystems using different terminology (e.g., 'coastal wetlands').

1. Enhancing Global Ambition for Coastal Ecosystem Conservation

Identify, assess and set ambitious global goals | Reduce stressors that degrade coastal ecosystems

Aligning commitments for blue carbon ecosystem conservation and restoration across relevant international policies and national plans can promote streamlined implementation, increase national ambition and strengthen future commitments. This can also help address potential trade-offs to ensure consistency and avoid contradictory incentives. Capitalizing on synergies across international policy processes can enable the creation of more ambitious targets while simultaneously accelerating the achievement of targets across processes. Incorporating blue carbon into future commitments and increasing ambition across policy processes and national implementation tools can leverage more successful outcomes for achieving targets and streamline the reporting process. Entry points to set ambitious goals for coastal blue carbon ecosystems vary across policy processes (Table 1).

Table 1. Entry points for identifying, assessing and setting ambitious global goals for coastal ecosystems (non-exhaustive list).

UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	CBD Convention on Biological Diversity	SDGs Sustainable Development Goals	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
ENHANCING AMBITION			
Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs): Set ambitious, quantifiable targets for blue carbon ecosystem restoration and conservation as part of mitigation and adaptation goals. Submit a NAP as part of NDCs to maximize cross-cutting climate solutions that deliver mitigation and adaptation benefits. Long-term strategies: Include ambitious blue carbon mitigation and adaptation goals in long-term national climate mitigation strategies.	Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) goals and targets (under negotiation): Ensure that goals, targets and the monitoring framework account for marine and coastal conservation, restoration and sustainable use including the provision of adequate means of implementation. National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs): Include marine and coastal biodiversity in the national targets as part of updated NBSAPs. Coastal and Marine Programme of Work: Design the new programme of work so that it supports the implementation of the post-2020 GBF.	National frameworks and strategies for achieving SDGs: Include blue carbon ecosystem restoration and conservation actions within national strategies for achieving the SDGs, including, but not limited to SDG-1 (No Poverty), SDG-5 (Gender Equality), SDG-13 (Climate Action) and SDG-14 (Life Below Water). Reference and account for SDG contributions in national blue carbon project planning and implementation. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Incorporate blue carbon and climate change related targets into national development plans, blue carbon policies, wetland management and project design and implementation.	Designating and managing wetlands of importance: Recognize and consider the climate mitigation and adaptation potential of blue carbon ecosystems in current and future Ramsar sites. Wise-use of wetlands: Develop ambitious national goals to conserve and restore blue carbon ecosystems and integrate the socioeconomic needs and circumstances in national planning. International cooperation on transboundary issues: Identify transboundary blue carbon ecosystems and urge neighboring nations to cooperate to conserve and restore these ecosystems.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEVERAGE SYNERGIES ACROSS POLICY PROCESSES TO ENHANCE AMBITION (NON-EXHAUSTIVE LIST):

1. Incorporate the co-benefits of blue carbon ecosystems, including climate mitigation, adaptation, biodiversity and sustainable development in commitments and global and national goals. Where feasible, align goals and targets across policy processes for blue carbon conservation and restoration.
2. When preparing NDCs for the 2025 update cycle, take into account the agreed upon goals and targets of the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and include new or updated national biodiversity targets in NDCs as a way to enhance ambition. The global goals and targets of the GBF, once agreed upon, can guide the creation of new NDC targets through joint objectives and goals.
3. Additionally, when preparing NDCs for the 2025 revision cycle, include plans and opportunities to designate wetlands of international importance through Ramsar to meet carbon mitigation and adaptation targets. Existing wetland inventories can be used to identify priority areas of wetland restoration and the potential to advance adaptation needs.

4. Conservation and sustainable use of blue carbon ecosystems directly contribute to SDG-1, SDG-6, SDG-13 and SDG-14, among others. When revising national frameworks and strategies for achieving the SDGs, include planned or potential Ramsar sites to meet overlapping targets. Positioning environmental, social, economic and equitable practices in wetland designation planning can strengthen national development and planning to achieve SDGs.
5. Furthermore, when designing and implementing national development plans, fully mainstream biodiversity and climate goals into policies, regulations, planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and across all sectors of the economy.

2. Accelerating Implementation

Build national capacity | Mobilize finance | Take action to conserve, manage and restore coastal ecosystems

Implementing actions to achieve ambitious goals, including those outlined in NDCs, NBSAPs and National Development Plans requires robust national capacity and financial flows. Aligning targets across policy processes can also ease capacity and financial limitations by facilitating easier pathways to implementation. Implementation is often hindered by a lack of information, understanding and technical capacity to effectively conserve and restore blue carbon ecosystems. Information and guidance provided by policy processes can be leveraged to supplement, inform, and build capacity to implement coastal restoration and conservation national policies, programs and projects. Similarly, guidance and work conducted by programs, expert groups and thematic groups across policy processes can be integrated into blue carbon projects. There are multiple opportunities to enhance action through Work Programmes and Thematic Groups including across processes to mobilize finance, integrate traditional Indigenous knowledge and build capacity (Table 2).

Table 2. Actions countries can take to build national capacity, mobilize finance and conserve, sustainably use, manage and restore coastal and marine ecosystems within existing international policy processes (non-exhaustive list).

UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	CBD Convention on Biological Diversity	SDGs Sustainable Development Goals	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
WORK PROGRAMMES, AGENDA ITEMS AND THEMATIC GROUPS GUIDANCE			
Nairobi Work Programme (NWP): Request the NWP to provide specific assistance and advice on blue carbon restoration and conservation. Additionally, utilize NWP guidance and support on adaptation and mitigation actions for blue carbon ecosystems. Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM): Request the Executive Committee of the WIM to integrate expertise and guidance on the role of blue carbon ecosystems to prevent loss and damage. Utilize WIM guidance support and data on risk reduction from blue carbon ecosystems.	Coastal and Marine Programme of Work: Support the implementation of the post-2020 GBF through the provision of tools and guidelines for conservation, restoration and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity (Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Marine protected areas (MPAs) and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) and capacity-building (Sustainable Ocean Initiative).	Interactive Dialogues: Submit suggested dialogue topics on integrating SDGs into blue carbon ecosystem implementation plans and how to maximize co-benefits. Participate in regional dialogues and discussions on pathways to raise awareness of and implement blue carbon-related SDGs.	Wetland Inventories: Use inventory guidance and expertise to accelerate scientific research and understanding of blue carbon ecosystems. 2016–2024 Strategic Work Plan: Incorporate goals and targets from the Strategic Work Plan into national policies and projects for blue carbon ecosystems. Programme on communication, capacity building, education, participation and awareness (CEPA): Use CEPA guidance to disseminate knowledge and understanding on the importance of blue carbon ecosystems to coastal communities and adaptation to climate change.

Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG): Request the LEG to provide technical guidance on NAP formulation to include blue carbon ecosystems. Utilize guidance on NAP formulation to integrate blue carbon and utilize assistance in financing blue carbon projects. Research and Systematic Observation (RSO): Within the RSO, encourage other Parties to include research and data on blue carbon ecosystems in their national communications. Exchange information, research and observation data with other Parties on blue carbon ecosystems.	Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI): Request the SBI to incorporate blue carbon ecosystems into the assessment of the Conventions implementation and pathways to enhance implementation. Use expertise, frameworks and guidance on building national capacity to implement blue carbon projects. Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) agenda item on marine and coastal biodiversity: Request the SBSTTA develop technical series on blue carbon ecosystems, provide guidance on marine OECMs and continue its work on criteria to describe Ecologically and Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs)		Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP): Request further guidance to identify carbon-rich coastal ecosystems and measure above and belowground carbon stores in blue carbon ecosystems. Mobilize guidance and recommendations on scientific research and blue carbon project design, implementation and management.
MOBILIZING FINANCE			
GCF and GEF: Through the annual COP guidance to the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism, encourage the GEF and GCF to scale up blue carbon project funding and provide further guidance on accessing funding. Mobilize finance for blue carbon ecosystem restoration and conservation with integrated biodiversity conservation objectives. Article 6: Operationalize Article 6 at the national level to facilitate non-market- and market-based cooperation for nature-based solutions, including blue carbon ecosystems.	Global Environment Facility (GEF): Encourage the GEF to scale up blue carbon project funding and provide further guidance on accessing funding. Mobilize finance for blue carbon ecosystem restoration and conservation with integrated biodiversity conservation objectives.	Financing for Sustainable Development Forum: Request future forum meetings to discuss the theme of coastal adaptation, mitigation and scaling up the conservation of blue carbon ecosystems. Use recent guidance and discussion on finance, international development and relevant information on sustainability for blue carbon ecosystems. Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation (RPTC):³ Urge the programme to prioritize blue carbon ecosystems in policy development and capacity building for coastal nations. Access funding to develop national policies and programmes to catalyze implementation of blue carbon and SDG enabling conditions. Sub-Fund of the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund: Access funding to accelerate the implementation of blue carbon related SDGs.	Grant Program, Funding Database, Finance guidance: Use the funding database and wetland-specific financing guidance to access an array of finance sources to implement blue carbon projects. COP and Standing Committee identify needs and actions: Urge the COP and Standing Committee of the Convention on Wetlands to synthesize and expand on guidance and recommendations for Ramsar projects to integrate blue carbon into project design and policy requirements. Use existing guidance and recommendations on project creation and blue carbon to direct implementation actions and inform project creation.

³ Available for developing countries, least developed countries, and countries in economic transitions/emerging from conflict.

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND ROLE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES			
Facilitative Working Group of the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP FWG): Request the LCIPP FWG to provide resources and information on integrating Indigenous and local communities in blue carbon project engagement, development and implementation. Utilize LCIPP guidance and expertise to streamline policy, capacity and expertise on Indigenous participation and knowledge in national blue carbon policies and projects.	Ad Hoc working group on Article 8(j): Request the working group provide blue carbon ecosystem specific advice and resources on integrating traditional knowledge and participation. Incorporate traditional knowledge and resource management into blue carbon restoration project design, implementation and management.		Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP): Incorporate guidance and recommendations on Indigenous community inclusion and best practices into blue carbon projects.
CAPACITY BUILDING			
Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB): Request the Committee develop blue carbon specific capacity-building guidance. Participate in capacity-building forums, workshops, and activities to strengthen action through technical expertise. Technology Mechanism: Encourage the Mechanism to prioritize coastal ecosystems in policy recommendations and technical assistance. Utilize guidance on national policy gaps and recommendations to implement carbon projects. Use technical assistance to develop national planning on accelerating the creation and implementation of blue carbon projects and enabling policies.	Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI): Use expertise, frameworks and guidance on building national capacity to design and implement blue carbon projects.	SDG Integration: Integrate multiple SDGs into blue carbon projects, policies and funding to implement multiple targets. Technology Facilitation Mechanism: Collaborate with stakeholders, build partnerships and utilize guidance on science and policy to advance the implementation of blue carbon related goals.	

RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEVERAGE SYNERGIES ACROSS POLICY PROCESSES TO ACCELERATE IMPLEMENTATION:

1. When designing and executing national-level implementation plans for climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, incorporate actions and prioritize investments that achieve targets related to blue carbon ecosystem conservation and restoration to meet the national commitments across policy processes.
2. Utilize scientific guidance across policy processes—including from the IPCC Wetlands Supplement and the Ramsar Scientific and Technical Review Panel Handbooks—to synthesize information related to blue carbon ecosystem management to accelerate the implementation of coastal blue carbon restoration and conservation.
3. Use the guidance developed by the LCIPP, the Ramsar STRP and the CBD Ad Hoc Working Group on Article 8(j) to include Indigenous communities in project creation, implementation and monitoring.

3. Measure Collective Results and Innovate

Measure, report and account | Conduct scientific research | Innovate and improve global goals and implementation efforts

Measuring results and accounting for progress and current gaps is essential to inform the process of achieving international goals and targets agreed upon by these policy processes. Assessing enabling national policies, capacity needs and scientific gaps for blue carbon ecosystems is vital to enhancing the implementation process. Reports and requirements across policy processes can be utilized to accelerate the assessment process and identify any requirements to proceed with blue carbon conservation and restoration (Table 3).

Table 3. Actions countries can take to measure, report and account for progress, conduct scientific research and innovate and improve global goals and implementation efforts for blue carbon ecosystems within existing international policy processes (non-exhaustive list).

UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change	CBD Convention on Biological Diversity	SDGs Sustainable Development Goals	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands
MEASURING, REPORTING AND ACCOUNTING			
Global Stocktake: Provide, and advocate for the inclusion of, inputs relevant to blue carbon ecosystems in the Global Stocktake process, including NDCs, NAPs and national reports⁴. Use GST outcomes to inform future NDC revisions to enhance blue carbon mitigation and adaptation⁵. National GHG inventories: Include blue carbon ecosystems in inventories to encourage their formulation in the 2025 NDC revision cycle. Biennial Transparency reports: Include mitigation and adaptation actions achieved by blue carbon ecosystems and future capacity and financial needs to increase implementation. National Communications: Include blue carbon restoration and conservation as national development priorities, including existing national conditions and where support is needed.	National Reports: Assess implementation progress of blue carbon ecosystems and species conservation and restoration initiatives, assess gaps in implementation, further capacity needs, and establish future planning. Global Biodiversity Outlook: Assess global progress towards blue carbon conservation and restoration and utilize recommendations to help achieve future goals and targets. Biodiversity Stocktake (future) and review mechanisms: Establish a stocktake mechanism to inform new national efforts, policies and reports to achieve Post 2020 goals and targets and that appropriately accounts for blue carbon ecosystems. Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) monitoring framework (under negotiation): Ensure that the monitoring framework includes indicators for conservation, restoration and the sustainable use of ocean and coastal ecosystems.	Sustainable Development Goal Report: Identify blue carbon-related goals that need further action and address inequalities in action across international and regional scales. Voluntary National Reviews: Include blue carbon ecosystems in progress reviews of all relevant goals and draw from member submissions to facilitate information exchange, lessons learned and policy recommendations for blue carbon-related goals and targets.	Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP): Request the STRP to provide guidance on integrating mitigation and financing into future Ramsar sites. Use reports, guidance, and recommendations on scientific best practices, scientific needs, and how to accelerate the implementation of Ramsar projects. National Report on Implementation of Ramsar: Assess previous actions to improve on blue carbon action, policies and project generation. National Wetland Inventories: Request the STRP to provide guidance on including carbon in wetland inventories that can be harnessed to improve progress. Use national wetland inventories to identify blue carbon ecosystems needing conservation and restoration. Global Wetland Outlook: Request the Outlook to contain mitigation and adaptation-specific recommendations for nations and stakeholders.

4 Schindler Murray, L., Romero, V. and Herr, D. (2021): [Unpacking the UNFCCC Global Stocktake for Ocean-Climate Action](#). IUCN, Rare, Conservation International, WWF, and Ocean & Climate Platform.

5 Ocean & Climate Platform, IUCN, Conservation International, WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Plymouth Marine Laboratory. (2022): [Identifying and accounting for ocean specific topics in the Global Stocktake](#).

	Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI): Request the SBI to incorporate blue carbon ecosystems into the assessment of the Convention's implementation and pathways to enhance implementation.		Use the outlook to identify drivers of change and degradation and integrate report recommendations into national planning and current projects. Ramsar Sites Information: Identify wetland distribution, ecosystem services and threats to regional and national blue carbon ecosystems to integrate into planning.
Science and Innovation			
IPCC Assessments: Call for the IPCC to develop and update GHG inventory guidance for coastal wetland ecosystems based on the best available and most recent peer-reviewed science for the next revision of the Wetlands Supplement, including additional coastal ecosystems currently not included if and when additional scientific evidence demonstrates their role in carbon accounting methodologies. Urge the IPCC to continue to collaborate with the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) to examine the synergies and trade-offs between biodiversity protection and climate change mitigation and adaptation.	The Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical, and Technological Advice (SBSTTA): Use scientific updates and recommendations to inform current actions, drivers of change and implementation strategies for blue carbon ecosystems. Invite IPBES to continue to collaborate with the IPCC examine the synergies and trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation.	Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum): Request the STI Forum in 2023 to include a theme and discussion on SDGs in national action for blue carbon. Use recommendations and actionable steps to utilize science, technology and innovation to inform future policies to build back "blue" with the inclusion of blue carbon ecosystems.	Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP): Request the STRP to provide policy, scientific, economic and social recommendations to include mitigation and adaptation goals in Ramsar site creation. Use scientific guidelines and recommendations to account for progress, identify scientific needs, collect data and pinpoint national limitations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEVERAGE SYNERGIES ACROSS POLICY PROCESSES TO MEASURE COLLECTIVE RESULTS AND INNOVATE:

1. Provide, and advocate for the inclusion of, inputs relevant to blue carbon ecosystems in the Global Stocktake process, including NDCs, NAPs, and national reports; National Reports on Implementation to Ramsar; NBSAPs, and more.⁶
2. When reporting on related indicators across policy processes, use the same datasets and methodologies where possible, as well as global standards, and identify opportunities to enhance synergies for monitoring and reporting. For example, use relevant SDG indicators in the monitoring framework of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework or use information and data from the Ramsar National Report on the 2014–2024 Strategic plan in the SDG Voluntary National Review.
3. Use global assessments from other UN policy processes and scientific bodies to measure, research and improve goals and implementation. Scientific reports or convention reviews inform future targets and capacity needs in upcoming reports for the SDGs, CBD Post Biodiversity Framework and Ramsar.
4. Use designated Ramsar Sites in reporting on national progress, capacity gaps, financial needs and future planning for blue carbon ecosystem conservation and restoration across policy processes. Include reporting in

⁶ Ocean & Climate Platform, IUCN, Conservation International, WWF, The Nature Conservancy, Plymouth Marine Laboratory. (2022): [Identifying and accounting for ocean specific topics in the Global Stocktake](#).

the Sustainable Development Goal Voluntary National Reports, the UNFCCC national communications, biennial transparency reports, the CBD national reports and the SDG reports.

5. Assess targets and respective indicators of other international policy processes identified in the ambition setting stage to determine scientific, legislative, and policy gaps and needs to achieve overlapping targets.

Next steps: This is a consultative paper, and we welcome your feedback on how to increase alignment and support synergies across the UNFCCC, CBD, SDGs and Ramsar for blue carbon ecosystems. We would greatly appreciate your feedback as we continue to refine the framework and guidance.

Please send recommendations to jhamilton@conservation.org and dorothee.herr@iucn.org by August 1, 2022 for incorporation into the final version of the policy framework. A revised paper will be available before UNFCCC COP27.

Contacts:

Dorothee Herr

Manager, Oceans & Climate Change
International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)
Dorothee.HERR@iucn.org

Jill Hamilton

Director, Blue Climate Strategy
Conservation International
jhamilton@conservation.org