

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR BLUE CARBON



Draft Strategic Plan

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Vision: Partners seek to protect and conserve coastal blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses) for climate change mitigation and adaptation and other ecosystems services.

Summary

Over the last five years, researchers, policymakers and others have built a strong foundation of science, policy, finance and coastal management approaches for integrating the conservation and restoration of blue carbon ecosystems into the global effort to address climate change. However, making good on this potential will require a coordinated effort.

The International Partnership for Blue Carbon was announced during the Paris climate change conference in 2015. It aims to bring together governments, non-profit organisations, intergovernmental organisations, and academic institutions to accelerate action towards protecting and conserving coastal blue carbon ecosystems.

Coastal blue carbon ecosystems – mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrass meadows – provide essential mechanisms for climate change mitigation and adaptation. They also provide vital co-benefits for coastal communities, including enhanced food security, support for fish stocks, and protection from erosion and storm surge. In this way, blue carbon ecosystems have the potential to assist in delivering countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Despite their importance, coastal blue carbon ecosystems are some of the most threatened ecosystems on Earth, with up to 1 million hectares being destroyed each year – approximately 1.5 per cent of global coverage. When degraded or lost, blue carbon ecosystems can become significant sources of greenhouse gases. Although the combined global area of mangroves, tidal marshes, and seagrass meadows equates to only 2–6 per cent of the total area of tropical forests, their ongoing losses account for up to 19 per cent of emissions from global deforestation given their high carbon content – a total of 0.5 billion tons of CO₂ emissions annually^{1,2}.

Global mandate for action

Blue carbon ecosystems are increasingly being recognised for their multi-faceted role, including in climate mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, food security and livelihoods. For example, Sustainable Development Goal 14 aims for countries to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development” and a forthcoming special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will focus on oceans for the first time.

Significantly, the IPCC issued guidance in 2013 for reporting emissions and removals from wetlands in national inventories, giving credibility to the use of blue carbon activities in mitigation efforts. The Paris

¹ Pendleton et. al. (2012): Estimating Global “Blue Carbon” Emissions from Conversion and Degradation of Vegetated Coastal Ecosystems. PLoS ONE 7(9).

² Pan et. Al. (2011): A Large and Persistent Carbon Sink in the World's Forests. Science 333

Agreement provides an opportunity to further develop the emissions reduction potential of blue carbon ecosystems, including through NDCs.

The value represented by the International Partnership for Blue Carbon is in multiplying the effects of existing global blue carbon efforts by ensuring they take place within a coherent framework for action.

Building on current blue carbon initiatives

Governments, institutions and communities are building an emerging portfolio of blue carbon science, policy and initiatives. Existing efforts fall into four categories:

Blue Carbon Policy	Incorporating blue carbon into national contributions to international policy frameworks (e.g. integration of coastal wetlands into national greenhouse gas inventories using the 2013 IPCC Wetlands Supplement; integration of mangroves into national REDD+ programs; including coastal ecosystems activities in NDCs)
Science and Technology	Building and enhancing blue carbon databases and data networks (e.g. the Global Science and Data Network for Coastal Blue Carbon; NASA Carbon Monitoring System in the United States and Africa)
Management and Implementation	Integrating blue carbon into ecosystem management and carbon financing (e.g. the Blue Forests Program funded by the GEF; Verified Carbon Standard’s carbon crediting methodology for global wetlands restoration)
Cross-cutting initiatives	Blue carbon partnerships that facilitate knowledge exchange and connect and leverage existing capabilities (e.g. the Blue Carbon Initiative, Sustainable Wetlands Adaptation and Mitigation Program (SWAMP))

Leveraging efforts

Coastal blue carbon activities have generally been concentrated on improving science and research. There have also been considerable efforts to raise the profile of blue carbon in international fora, such as the IPCC.

The collaborative platform of the Partnership brings together governments, a strength and point of difference in the initiative, with academics, international organisations and other sectors.

There remains considerable scope to support science and data collaboration. Countries such as the US, Australia, Indonesia and the UAE have made significant inroads in data collection. This data and scientific understanding has the potential to be transformative if applied to other localities.

There have been fewer efforts to date to collaborate on domestic and more localised policy. Pilot projects have been starting up across the world and government policy, to varying degrees, is developing to reflect the true value of these ecosystems. Lessons learned from these experiences could be shared and built on globally.

Partnering to exchange both science and policy will enhance individual efforts and practical action. Bridging science, policy and practical action will lead collectively to achieving climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as biodiversity, goals through the increased protection and conservation of blue carbon ecosystems.

Partnership Goals

The Partnership aims to provide a voluntary forum for countries and organizations to benefit from the experience and expertise of the global community and develop an enabling environment for high quality, locally-relevant approaches to protecting and restoring blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses).

Organization of Work

The Partnership intends to be focused around three core activities:

- **Building awareness** of the importance coastal blue carbon ecosystems for climate change adaptation and mitigation in the international community;
- **Exchanging knowledge**, expertise and experience to build capacity in blue carbon related policy, science and practical action; and
- **Accelerating practical action** to protect and restore blue carbon ecosystems in identified priority regional 'hot-spots'.

The Partnership will work to catalyze action in these three areas through a roadmap of priority activities.

Support of Work

The Partnership is not a funding body but seeks to build a stronger enabling environment for blue carbon projects to be conceived to attract funding and support and to be successfully implemented.

Each Partner is responsible for the costs of its participation in the work of the Partnership, drawing on its own financial, human, technical or other resources. Where appropriate and by mutual decision, Partners may collaborate in an effort to obtain funding for proposed joint projects. Nothing in this document however is to be construed or interpreted as a commitment by any Partner to provide financial, human or other resources.

Framework and operations

This plan sets out the purpose of the Partnership and its governance arrangements. The plan also establishes an approach to operationalise the initiative through its three focus areas of: building awareness; exchanging knowledge and accelerating practical action. Finally, the plan lays out a roadmap of practical and concrete actions to achieve the objectives of the Partnership. A one-page roadmap is set out at [Annex I](#).

Governance

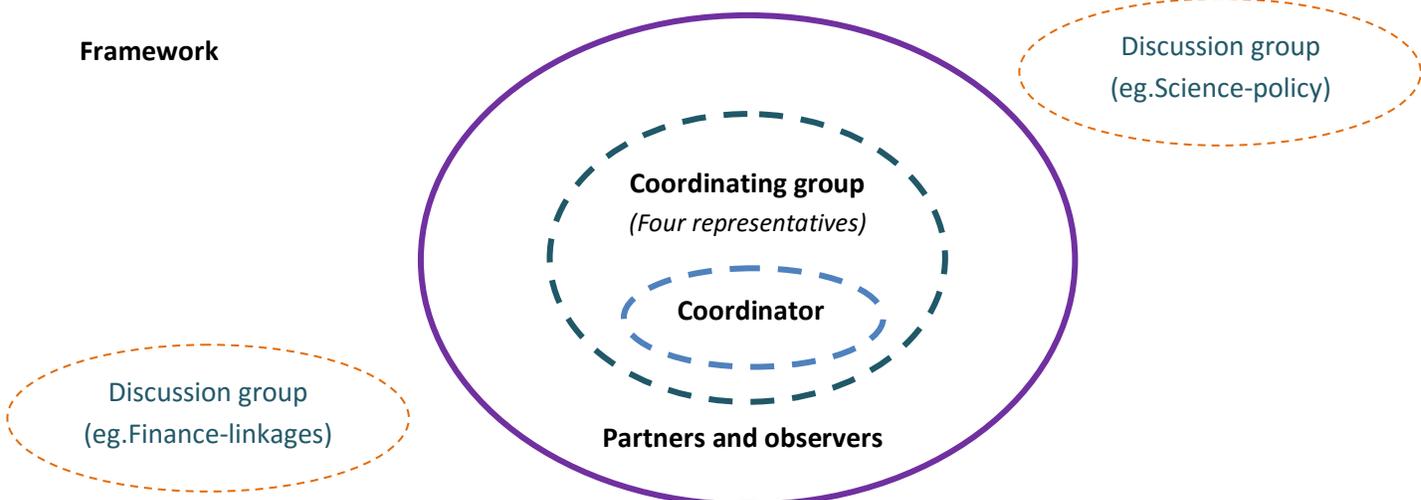
For the initial establishment phase (expected to be around 12 – 18 months), the governance structure is expected to be comprised of a coordinator and a coordination group composed of up to four members, with an effort to reflect the geographic and sectoral diversity of membership (for example, governments, non-government organisations and research institutions). The membership of the coordinating group is contained on the Partnership’s website.

The coordination group is expected to be responsible for guiding the development and implementation of the strategic direction of the Partnership. The coordinator intends to work closely with the coordination group and be responsible for day-to-day management of the Partnership, including logistical support for Partnership activities and communication with Partners and other stakeholders.

During the initial establishment phase, all Partnership decisions are expected to be made by the full set of Partners. To facilitate timely implementation, decisions affecting governance, budget, staffing or implementation of activities are to be put forth on a “no objection” basis, with Partners having at least two weeks to react unless there are significant extenuating circumstances.

Following the initial establishment phase the governance structure is intended to be reviewed in light of the results of the stocktake and the refinement of the roadmap of activities. Should the coordination group continue, a rotational membership is expected to be considered with members selected to reflect the different stakeholder groups within the Partnership. Smaller task-groups may support implementation of activities. Additional principles for governance may be developed during the initial phase, for approval by all Partners.

Framework



Resources

- The Partnership is not a funding body for blue carbon protection and restoration projects.
- Members will not be required to pay a joining or membership fee.
- Any contributions from Partners towards the operating costs of the Partnership will be voluntary in nature.
- Resourcing for additional tasks (e.g. communication products, workshops and conferences, side-events, studies and analysis) will be determined on a case-by-case basis and subject to the discretion of the coordinating group.

Three pillars: building awareness, exchanging knowledge, practical action

1. Building awareness

Blue carbon ecosystems are increasingly becoming a part of the international dialogue in adaptation, mitigation, wetlands preservation and biodiversity conservation discussions. More needs to be done to ensure the role of these important coastal ecosystems is recognised in broader discussions about the blue economy, fisheries, reef health and anthropogenic impacts on oceans. This focus area captures the Partnership's potential to elevate the profile of blue carbon internationally, in the private sector and on national government agendas.

A key issue that has been raised has been the need for coordination and awareness at a government level. Policy responsibility for blue carbon is often held in multiple government agencies, such as forestry and fisheries. Connections can be drawn between the relevant agencies to enhance management and implementation.

2. Exchanging knowledge

There is an extensive range and depth of knowledge and expertise on blue carbon among members of the Partnership. The multi-stakeholder nature of the Partnership is a fundamental strength and offers an opportunity to establish networks across different actors – including from both the technical and policy side. This pillar aims to advance our global understanding of these ecosystems and leverage the scientific knowledge that exists in various fora. It builds on the Partnership's ability to catalyse action by bringing the 'right players' to the table to discuss barriers to action and lessons learned on how to overcome challenges. These lessons could support enhanced management of blue carbon ecosystems.

3. Accelerating practical action

Leveraging the expertise held within the Partnership, this pillar aims to develop and share approaches to protect and enhance coastal blue carbon. Drawing from the other pillars, the Partnership aims to share knowledge, expertise, and experience in implementing blue carbon-relevant management strategies. The Partnership also plans to seek to identify opportunities for synergies with existing projects and programs. In particular, it intends to seek to identify opportunities for scaling blue carbon solutions.

The range of activities under this pillar may range from sharing best practices to promoting and facilitating project development and identifying potential sources of finance. The Partnership's strengths stem from its convening platform and collaboration. There can be significant gains from sharing experiences and knowledge to enhance management and implementation of projects and policies.

Annex I - Roadmap

Objective: *To provide a forum for countries and organizations to benefit from the experience and expertise of the global community and develop an enabling environment for high quality, locally-relevant approaches to protecting and restoring blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses).*

Strengths/Principles: *Diverse and inclusive, collaborative and coordinated, open, credible, action oriented*

Develop communication and policy products for the Partnership and on blue carbon

- Fact sheets and policy briefs (eg. blue carbon and NDCs)
- Case-studies / snapshot of global action and benefits
- Standard presentation for use of members
- Infographic and map
- Partnership website phase one

Identify and coordinate participation in fora and events as opportunities to raise awareness of blue carbon and collaborate with partners

- Strengthen consideration of blue carbon in existing knowledge-sharing networks and capacity-building initiatives

Undertake stocktake and analysis

- Regional and geographic priorities for the Partnership
- Scope existing blue carbon information, resources and databases, and gaps
- Scope existing policy information, material and gaps

Develop a website for the Partnership to provide communication products and a platform for exchange of technical and implementation knowledge

- Provide a 'clearing house' for key resources
- Support online exchanges between technical experts and policy makers (eg. National GHG Inventory experts).
- Presentations and side-events at conferences providing updates on recent developments and research.
- Promote and contribute to the Global Science and Data Network for Coastal Blue Carbon
- Share financial coordination mechanisms understanding and expertise.
- Links to databases and other websites

Develop feedback forums and workshops for science-policy-finance discussions

- Provide forum for science-policy discussions
- Identify multilateral bodies and the private sector for discussions on linking to finance
- Leverage existing workshops and coordinate partners

