INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR

BLUE CARBON

Blue Carbon Policy Assessment Activity

A template for undertaking an assessment of the policy conditions impacting the health and resilience of coastal blue carbon ecosystems, and identifying pathways to ensure their long-term conservation for climate action.

www.BlueCarbonPartnership.org

Printing instructions: this booklet works best when printed on A3, landscape, with pages set to 'book fold' under page setup in the print dialogue. The main Worksheet (pg. 6 – 9 of this booklet) is also provided as a separate PDF for printing in A3, if preferred.

Front cover photo
Mangroves Krabi Thailand iStock 68255601
Page 2 photo
Green turtle iStock 77893907
Page 12 photo
Lush marshlands on the Bay of Fundy
Seagrass meadow iStock 104301617
Back cover photo
Seagrass Adriatic iStock 98279567

Blue Carbon Policy Assessment Activity

Coastal blue carbon ecosystems – mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses – are globally significant carbon sinks. They are important for addressing climate change while at the same time securing social, economic and environmental outcomes. This Blue Carbon Policy Assessment Activity guides policy makers, conservationists and individuals to conduct an independent assessment of the policy conditions impacting the health and resilience of coastal ecosystems, and identify pathways to ensure their long-term conservation.

'Blue carbon' is the carbon stored, sequestered or released by the biomass or sediments of coastal ecosystems. Despite their many benefits, mangrove, tidal marsh and seagrass ecosystems are some of the most threatened ecosystems on earth, by climate change and other human-induced threats. When damaged or removed, they can become significant sources of greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions. In the case of mangroves, they are estimated to contribute as much as 10 per cent of emissions from deforestation globally.

There is an urgent need to implement targeted policy measures, develop technical capacity and deliver on-ground projects, so we can better manage coastal blue carbon ecosystems, enhancing food security, securing livelihoods, increasing resilience and accelerating climate action.

Introduction

This Activity proposes a simple template for new or experienced blue carbon practitioners (policy makers, scientists, conservationists and others) to undertake a broad but insightful assessment of policy conditions (or a lack thereof) supporting blue carbon action. It is designed to inspire you to question norms and identify new approaches for managing valuable blue carbon assets. When completed with a team, it can prompt lively debate and encourage collaboration.

The Activity provides guidance for identifying priority policy options or strategies and channelling attention to areas that are most prospective, given your unique operating context. This guidance is flexible and can be adapted to address a range of policy objectives beyond blue carbon, including other ecosystem services and environmental topics, or almost any complex policy issue.

You can also consider synergies with a range of international and national commitments that impact policy making, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Aichi Targets and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPS), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and locally derived targets or objectives.

> ### *Activity Length:* flexible
> *We recommend allowing 1.5 – 4 hrs. Consider the level of detail that will be useful to you. You may choose to supplement your knowledge with desktop research or by consulting with others.*

Background

The guidance in this activity is adapted from the *National Blue Carbon Policy Assessment Framework and Tool* by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (2016, Herr.D et al.). The Framework provides countries with a straightforward, structured and easy-to-apply five-step process for identifying targeted climate and carbon policies for coastal blue carbon ecosystems, alongside other coastal priorities, challenges and demands.

The International Partnership for Blue Carbon (IPBC) developed the new 'Blue Carbon Policy Assessment Activity' as a workshop resource or desktop activity that can be completed by an individual or small team, in a reduced time frame or where resources do not allow for a full assessment using the IUCN Framework. The IPBC trialled the activity with international delegates at a regional conference in March 2018, then refined it based on feedback from participants and input from curriculum specialists. It was published as an open public resource in December 2018.

We hope that the information your gather and solutions you identify in this activity will inspire you and your team to dive deeper into the prospect of sustainable management of coastal blue carbon. Share your findings and reflections with the global network of blue carbon practitioners in the International Partnership for Blue Carbon and help to accelerate action around the world.

www.BlueCarbonPartnership.org

INSTRUCTIONS

Recommended pre-reading

- Herr, D., Himes-Cornell, A. and Laffoley, D. (2016). **National Blue Carbon Policy Assessment Framework: Towards effective management of coastal carbon ecosystems**. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN: https://www.iucn.org/content/national-blue-carbon-policy-assessment-framework

- IPBC (2017). **Coastal blue carbon: an introduction for policy makers**: https://bluecarbonpartnership.org/resources/introduction-policy-makers/

Activity Contents

- Instructions (A4 – 3 pages)
- Worksheet (A3 – 2 pages)
- Hints and Tips Page (A4 – 3 pages)
- Links to additional resources

Materials

- Pen/pencil
- Quiet space to think and reflect (if completing individually)
- Comfortable space to discuss and collaborate (if completing as a team)
- *(optional)* copies of existing policy documents/strategies
- *(optional)* computer to undertake additional research, or access to colleague/s whose knowledge can help to fill information gaps

Some thoughts before you begin…

- It's a good idea to identify your objectives before you begin this activity. Are you:

    → building your own awareness/ gathering information to pass on to others/ exploring the contextual environment for implementing a new policy measure/ defining the scope of legislation or a review/ preparing to submit a funding proposal / other objectives ?

- Reflect on past experience and consider national circumstances to define the operating environment, including:

    → development and economic pressures / changes in government and governance / existing international commitments or targets / existing partnerships or priorities.

- Before suggesting new policy measures or a change to the status quo, consider:

    → indirect outcomes from policy change or effects on third parties / human and financial resources required to implement and maintain a new strategy / implementation timelines / who should be consulted / any examples or case studies to learn from.

How to complete the Activity

The activity addresses five (5) categories of management and policy conditions related to the management of coastal blue carbon ecosystems. Depending on national (or sub-national) circumstances, some categories may be more or less relevant to your interest areas or your organisation's responsibility:

1. **Data and mapping:** start by assessing the state of basic scientific data on coastal blue carbon ecosystems (mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses) including geographical, ecological and carbon data. In a broader assessment, this category could include socio-economic data, such as on human settlements and relevant economic activities, and scientific and technical capacity – the knowledge, skills and resources needed to capture and interpret science to inform policy making.

   The 'Data and mapping' row in the Worksheet is intentionally smaller. Data capability is an important but potentially extensive topic, and time may be better spent on the following categories.

2. **Policy conditions:** this includes assessing existing national plans, strategies, programmes and initiatives that enhance the protection and restoration of coastal ecosystems or possibly contribute to their threats, as well as international targets or commitments and how they are pursued.

3. **Legal conditions:** this includes assessing existing laws, regulations, regulating bodies or enforcement measures that affect how coastal ecosystems are managed or impacts addressed.

4. **Governance and institutional conditions:** assess the state of ministries, councils, task forces, land tenure/use rights and other governance arrangements that influence coastal zone decision making.

5. **Finance and market conditions:** finally, consider funding sources for action (existing and potential; innovative, charitable, multilateral; carbon and other market opportunities) and economic drivers and pressures that impact on the health or abundancy of ecosystems.

Worksheet

The Worksheet is the main document in this activity, found in the middle of this booklet. It is where you will record information. For each category above, the Worksheet contains six (6) columns to capture different information. There are no right or wrong answers, although the most useful assessments will be specific, e.g. rather than listing 'mangrove laws', identify the specific legislation in the Worksheet.

Depending on time and objectives, you may prefer to list fewer measures in greater detail (and assess their effectiveness, scope, strengths and weaknesses etc.) or a greater number of measures in less detail.

This table shows the headings of the six columns in the Worksheet, which you will populate for each category. The required information is described under each heading:

Existing measures	Assessment of measures	Missing information	Context	Possible strategies	Stakeholders
List measures already in place under each category	Comment on the effectiveness and known limitations of existing measures	What further information is needed to complete this assessment? Who could provide this (person, organisation)?	Comment on the contextual environment and considerations for selecting a strategy based on current conditions, e.g. conflicting policy drivers	Suggest new policies, measures or actions to address gaps. It may also be necessary to raise awareness of existing measures, or simply continue the status quo.	Who would be responsible for implementing your proposed strategies? Who would be affected? How could they be consulted?

Stakeholders: this section of the Worksheet requires you to identify stakeholders who would be affected or consulted to implement a new policy strategy in each category. These are likely to be many and varied depending on national context, and the level or type of strategy proposed (e.g. policies at the national or local level, small or large scale). There may be repetition across categories. Some examples include:

- Ministries of: environment, forestry, planning, energy, economy, foreign affairs, maritime affairs, marine or fisheries

- coastal communities

- land owners

- conservation groups

- international partners

- intergovernmental and regional organisations

- private companies

- industry sectors

- research organisations

- partnerships and committees

- others relevant to your area

Hints and Tips Page

The Hints and Tips Page (A4, 3 pgs.) at the end of this document contains a table like below for each of the five policy categories, with suggestions to assist with your assessment. It provides guidance on three areas:

1. DATA AND MAPPING	
A. Existing measures – E.g. Ecosystem maps at national level, including species, extent, carbon estimations	**B. Assessment questions** – Is the existing data and information of the required scale, spatial spread and quality (reliability; resolution) to inform evidence-based policy?
C. Examples strategies to address gaps – Conduct a review of existing data holdings; identify gaps; review capacity to manage, interpret and share data	

A. **'Existing measures'** broadly refers to all formal and informal policies, data, tools, guidance, laws, actions, projects, activities or standard norms that are already in place, related to this policy category.

B. **'Assessment questions'** are intended to prompt reflection on the effectiveness of existing policy measures.

C. **'Example strategies'** provides just a few examples of the many ways gaps could be addressed. Consider what is appropriate or realistic in the particular national context, but don't let this limit ideas. Think about immediate next steps and future goals.

You may like to try filling out the Worksheet without looking at the Hints and Tips page, and only refer to it when you need a prompt.

OK, let's begin!

Existing measures	Assessment of measures	Missing information
List measures already in place under each category	Comment on the effectiveness and known limitations of existing measures	What further information is needed to complete this assessment? Who could provide this (person, organisation)?
1. DATA AND MAPPING *Refer Box A. on Hints and Tips Page - Existing measures*	*Refer Box B. - Assessment questions*	
2. POLICY CONDITIONS		
3. LEGAL CONDITIONS		

Context	Possible strategies	Stakeholders
Comment on the contextual environment and considerations for selecting a strategy based on current conditions	Suggest new policies, measures or actions to address gaps, raise awareness, or continue the status quo.	Who would be responsible for and affected by the proposed strategies? How could they be consulted?
	Refer Box C. - Examples strategies	

Context	Possible strategies	Stakeholders
Comment on the contextual environment and considerations for selecting a strategy based on current conditions	Suggest new policies, measures or actions to address gaps, raise awareness, or continue the status quo.	Who would be responsible for and affected by the proposed strategies? How could they be consulted?

Existing measures	Assessment of measures	Missing information
List measures already in place under each category	Comment on the effectiveness and known limitations of existing measures	What further information is needed to complete this assessment? Who could provide this (person, organisation)?
4. GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS		
5. FINANCE AND MARKET CONDITIONS		

Reflections

What has this exercise revealed about your national blue carbon policy settings and options?

Context	Possible strategies	Stakeholders
Comment on the contextual environment and considerations for selecting a strategy based on current conditions	Suggest new policies, measures or actions to address gaps, raise awareness, or continue the status quo.	Who would be responsible for and affected by the proposed strategies? How could they be consulted?

Next steps

What will you do with this information tomorrow/next month/ 1 year from now? E.g. Seek information from others; discuss your findings with a colleague; repeat the exercise at an organisational level; implement a major policy change?

National Blue Carbon Policy Assessment
HINTS AND TIPS PAGE

1. DATA AND MAPPING

A. Existing measures

- Ecosystem maps at national level, including species, extent, carbon estimations

- Data holdings managed over time, ability to track ecosystem change

- Coastal vulnerability maps, or information on hotspots and threats; nearby activities, developments, protected areas

B. Assessment questions

- Is the existing data and information of the required scale, spatial spread and quality (reliability; resolution) to inform evidence-based policy?

- Have hotspots been defined and identified? (e.g. areas of greatest threat/ highest carbon stocks/commercial value)

- Are different data sets complimentary (can they be compared or combined to allow interpretation)? Is data shared or easily accessible between contributors and users?

C. Examples strategies to address gaps

- Conduct a review of existing data holdings; identify gaps; review capacity to manage, interpret and share data

- Conduct additional surveys /carbon assessments, involving research institutes or citizen science

- Map hotspots or priority areas for conservation, biodiversity and productivity; or rehabilitation opportunity

- Support policy makers to engage with international experts and climate science organisations to address knowledge gaps

2. LEGAL CONDITIONS

A. Existing measures

- Constitution, mandates

- Conservation, biodiversity, fisheries, development, energy, pollution or forest laws or regulations (on use or protection)

- Land reserves or protected areas

- Enforcement or incentive measures

- Land ownership systems

B. Assessment questions

- Do existing laws establish management obligations (e.g. restoration) or restrictions (e.g. on use)?

- Are laws understood by all relevant stakeholders? Are they enforced in a visible, credible, and fair manner?

- Should measures be more or less flexible?

- What pathways exist to improve ecosystem protection in areas outside national management zones?

C. Examples strategies to address gaps

- Establish government law (or industry policy) that requires coastal managers to actively pursue sustainable ecosystem management

- Conduct communication campaign to raise awareness of sustainable coastal management rules

- Introduce incentive mechanisms or targets to promote restoration or protection

- Develop monitoring mechanisms including capacity building for monitoring agencies and reasonable response measures for rule breakers

3. POLICY CONDITIONS

A. Existing measures	B. Assessment questions
– National climate change or biodiversity action plans/strategies – Emissions reduction targets – National incentive schemes – Finance initiatives such REDD+, NAMAs, NAPAs/NAPs, voluntary carbon markets	– Do those who manage the coastal areas have clear and secure rights to the benefits that would accrue from sustainable management of coastal ecosystems? – Have all available policies been explored to drive sustainable management of coastal carbon ecosystems? – Where there are many relevant policies, what is the role of each and how do they interact?

C. Examples strategies to address gaps

– Raise awareness among coastal managers of their role in implementing national strategies laws

– Reform policies to ensure coastal managers have clear and secure rights to land and natural resources; consider new policies to incentivize sustainable management by others stakeholders

– Conduct an assessment of the effectiveness of policies on sustainable coastal management; review whether they are interdependent or complimentary; recommend policy reforms to achieve clarity and efficiency

– Gather data and scientific information to inform policy decision making

– Develop a consultation and review mechanism to ensure management plans are locally appropriate

– Address policy conflicts, e.g. competing use of resources for aquaculture

4. FINANCE AND MARKET CONDITIONS

A. Existing measures	B. Assessment questions
– Processes for assessing and managing competing demands on coastal resources: logging; aquaculture; tourism – LNG development, or port development projects, plans or restrictions – Economic conditions or market incentives for coastal conservation, e.g. corporate social responsibility investment – Public-private partnerships	– What is the pattern of demand for products from coastal ecosystems (declining due to productivity improvements or increasing due to limited alternative resources)? – Are processes in place to connect products and services from sustainably managed coastal areas with sustainability-conscious consumers? – How do potential investors perceive the opportunities and risks of investing in restoration or innovation projects in the coastal zone? What information is available on risk?

C. Examples strategies to address gaps

– Encourage growth of markets (both supply and demand) for products sustainably derived from restored and/or sustainably managed areas, possibly through a certification scheme or small business loans.

– Explore pathways to introduce market mechanisms for coastal carbon offsets and Payments for (non-carbon) Ecosystem Services (PES)

– Develop a public-private partnership for coastal ecosystem management

5. GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS

A. Existing policy measures	B. Assessment questions
– Institutional coordination mechanisms in place – Clear roles and responsibilities between agencies – Collaborative management including community participation; national working group or management committee – NGOs, experts and business interests are engaged	– Are the roles and responsibilities for management clearly defined, understood and reinforced? – Are relevant stakeholders in government, civil society, and the private sector coordinated in management and monitoring? – How does management capacity vary across different areas? Are resources allocated equitably?

C. Examples strategies to address gaps

– Create a national, state, or coastal zone management plan that articulates roles and responsibilities and establishes a shared vision of all stakeholders

– Within government, create an inter-ministerial task force/ working group to coordinate activities

– Streamline institutional responsibility; strengthen role or capacity of a more capable few

– Develop a public-private partnership for coastal ecosystem management

Notes

Find out more

- Crooks, S., von Unger, M., Schile, L., Allen, C. & Whisnant, R. (2017) **Understanding Strategic Blue Carbon Opportunities in the Seas of East Asia**.

- Fortes, MD. (2017). **A Policy Brief: Mainstreaming Blue Carbon Into Natural Coastal Ecosystems Regulatory Frameworks.**

- Herr, D. T. Agardy, D. Benzaken, F. Hicks, J. Howard, E. Landis, A. Soles and T. Vegh (2015). **Coastal "blue" carbon. A revised guide to supporting coastal wetland programs and projects using climate finance and other financial mechanisms**. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

Get in touch, share your experience

www.BlueCarbonPartnership.org