

Marine & Coastal OECM

Accelerating Action in the East Asian Seas

A Guidance Document for COBSEA Participating Countries



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The **Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)** is a regional intergovernmental mechanism and one of 18 Regional Seas programmes. It is the decision-making body for the East Asian Seas Action Plan, bringing together nine countries – Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Republic of the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam – in protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment. COBSEA focuses on marine plastic and pollution, marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity, and climate action. The COBSEA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, Thailand and administered by UNEP. www.cobsea.org



Editorial design and layout: Janissa Ng



List of Abbreviations

APAP	Asian Protected Areas Partnership
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ACB	ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CTI-CFF	Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
COP	Conference of Parties
EBSA	Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas
ICCA	Territories and Areas Conserved by Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities or “Territories of Life”
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
IP	Indigenous Peoples
IMMA	Important Marine Mammal Area
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
KM-GBF	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Areas
MMA	Marine Managed Areas
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans
OECD	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measure
PA	Protected Areas
PEMSEA	Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organizations
RSP	Regional Seas Programmes
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-WCMC	UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre
VME	Vulnerable Marine Area
WCPFC	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
WDPA	World Database on Protected Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conservation Beyond Protected Areas

What is an OECM?

- Not a Protected Area
- Equitably governed & effectively managed
- Long-term biodiversity outcomes
- Provides ecological & social value

Types of OECMs

- Primary: biodiversity is main goal
- Secondary: conservation is secondary
- Ancillary: biodiversity as co-benefit

Why OECMs Matter



**Complement
Protected Areas**



**Strengthen
Connectivity**



**Safeguard Ecosystem
Services**



**Integrate Biodiversity
in Planning**

Governance Models

- Government
- Shared
- Private
- Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities

Country-Level Understanding and Site-Level Assessment

- ✓ Apply CBD Criteria
- ✓ Customise based on regional and national context
- ✓ Assess site on a case by case basis

PRACTICAL STEPS

1. Identify

Identify biodiverse areas that have already achieved long term biodiversity outcomes.

2. Secure Consent

Obtain free, prior, and informed consent especially from Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

3. Assess Against Criteria

Evaluate demonstrated sustained and effective in situ biodiversity conservation.

4. Recognise and Report

Support, strengthen and monitor after recognising and reporting

OECMs are recognitions of areas that demonstrably achieve **measurable biodiversity outcomes** over the **long term** through **sustained governance and management**. Such outcome based recognition scales up conservation and supports sustainable use to attain national and global biodiversity goals.



Overview

Practical guidance to strengthen marine biodiversity and resilience, underpinning a sustainable blue economy in the East Asian Seas



The East Asian Seas are among the world's most biodiverse marine areas and a vital sustainable blue economy asset, yet face mounting pressures from human activity and climate change.¹

Meeting global, regional, and national biodiversity targets requires addressing current pressures while anticipating future change. Policy and management responses are critical to supporting global, regional and national ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation targets.²⁻³

The **Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)** is a regional intergovernmental mechanism and the sole decision-making body for the Action Plan for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the East Asian Region. As a UNEP Regional Seas Programme, COBSEA promotes integrated marine and coastal management to conserve biodiversity and sustain productivity. While progress has been made on protected areas, accelerating other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) is critical for the region.⁴

This **Guidance Document** elaborates on the criteria, processes, good practices, lessons learned, and relevant resources in a practical toolkit to help COBSEA members and stakeholders identify, recognise, report, support and monitor marine and coastal OECMs more effectively.



01 Introduction



Introduction to OECMs

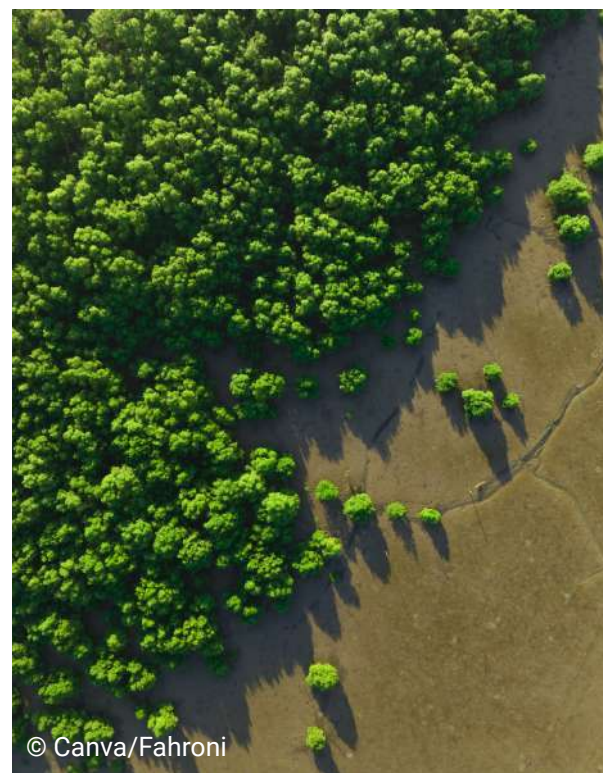
Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) emerged through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as part of the global effort to protect biodiversity. They recognise that important conservation outcomes can also be achieved outside formal protected areas⁵⁻⁸.

OECM is not a new mechanism, instead it recognises existing conservation measures already in place for the long term in defined areas outside of formal protected areas, which conservation measures already demonstrate effective, sustained and positive biodiversity outcomes.

From the Aichi Targets to today's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, OECMs have become a key tool to help countries meet global goals to safeguard ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity.



© Getty Images/SeanPavonnePhoto



© Canva/Fahroni



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20%

To reach the global target, an additional 20% of marine and coastal areas globally need to be secured within networks of protected and conserved areas, as of 2026⁹.

Global Marine and Coastal Protection

Globally, 78 million square kilometres or 20% of marine and coastal areas are needed to be secured in networks of protected and conserved areas globally.

This is even more crucial in East Asia. Known for their rich biodiversity, including significant coral reefs (30%), mangroves (31%), seagrass beds (33%), the East Asian Seas are a vital ecosystem that supports large populations and high fish catches^{1,3}.



Useful Links

- Guidance to Advance OECM in Asia, 2024
- Roadmap for OECMs/Workshop Report, 2024
- Status of OECMs in Asia, 2023

Find out more!

Protected Planet
Report 2024





Timeline

Aichi Biodiversity Targets announced



© InforMEA

2010

CBD COP10, Nagoya Target 11

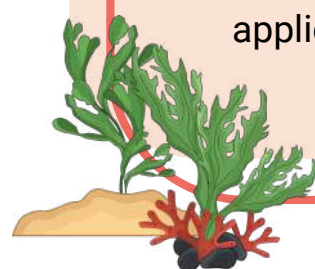
Target 11 is established to increase and improve protected areas, including:

- 17% of land and inland water
- 10% of coastal and marine areas

For the first time, OECMs are formally considered as a complement to Protected Areas.

What is an OECM?

A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values⁶.



2018

CBD COP14, Sharm El-Sheikh OECMs Defined

OECMs are formally defined as geographically distinct areas other than Protected Areas.

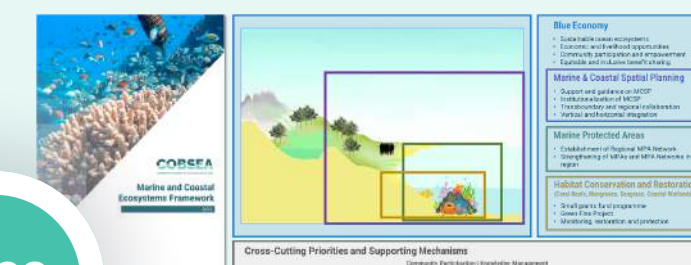
2022

CBD COP15, Montreal Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

The framework builds on Aichi Targets, with stronger ambition.

- Target 3 established: 30% of land, and of waters and seas conserved by 2030.
- Explicitly recognises OECMs (including indigenous and traditional territories) as part of this 30x30 goal.

COBSEA MCE Framework adopted to recognise the importance of OECMs



2023



Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: Target 3

Ensure and enable that **by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas**, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognising Indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognising and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.

[Find out more](#)[CBD COP15](#)

OECMs are recognised only when they achieve, or expected to achieve, positive and sustained outcomes for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, through long-term governance and management, regardless of primary management objective⁶.

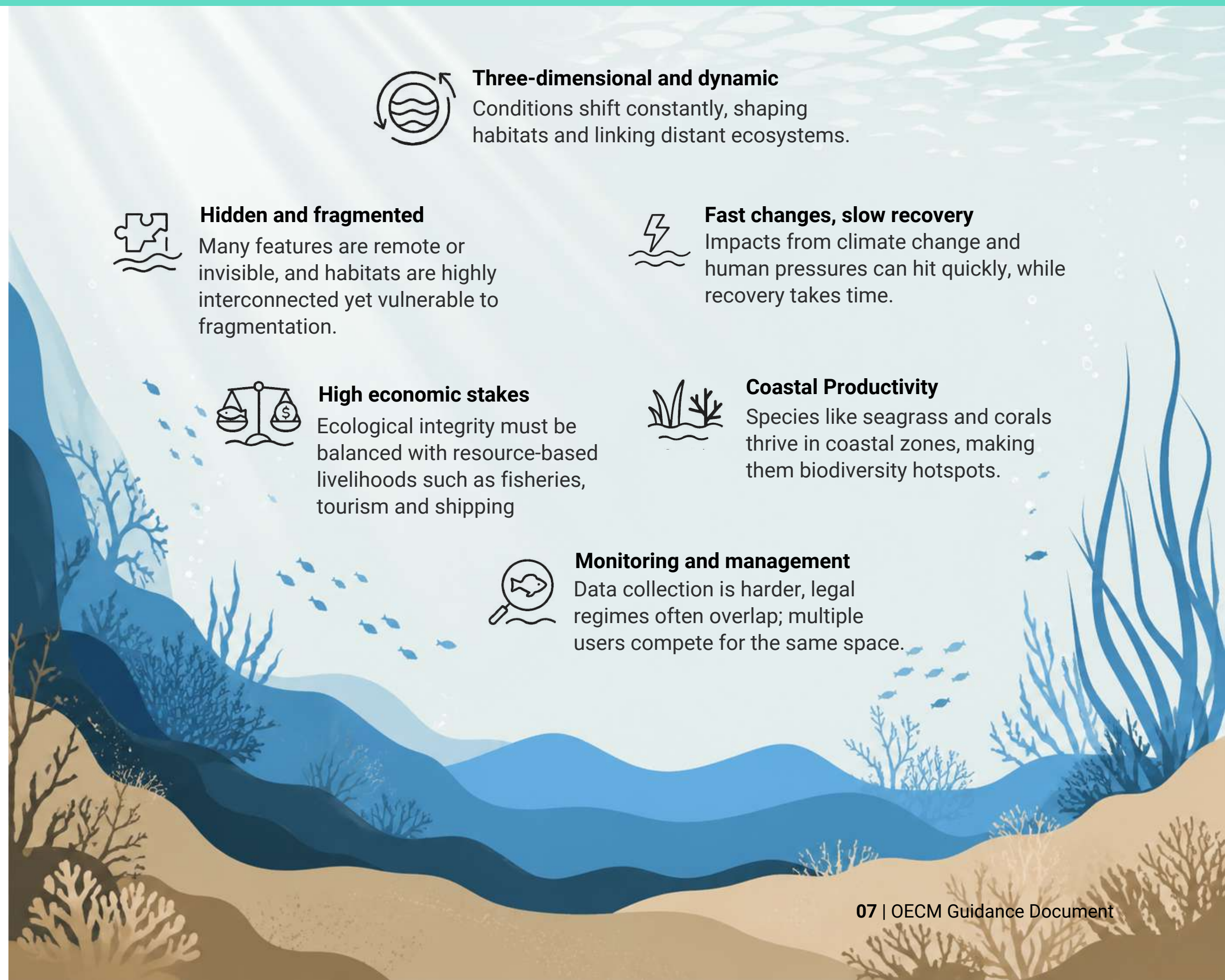


Why OECMs Matter in Marine and Coastal Areas

Marine and coastal areas have unique dynamics that make conservation and management more complex⁶ (refer to diagram on right).

OECMs are essential because they recognise and support conservation outcomes in spaces not formally designated as protected areas.

By capturing these diverse efforts, OECMs help ensure that conservation extends across the full seascape where pressures and stakeholders overlap.





What Defines an OECM

In 2018, the CBD set out the **four fold criteria** and the **26 sub-criteria** for identifying OECMs applicable to terrestrial, inland, and in marine and coastal areas⁶.

OECMs complement protected areas by strengthening ecological connectivity, safeguarding ecosystem services, and embedding biodiversity into broader land- and sea-use planning and across sectors.

The defining criterion of an OECM is the **biodiversity conservation outcome** regardless of the objective of the site¹⁰.



Useful Links

- CBD COP Dec/14/8, Annex III for Definition & Criteria
- CBD COP Decision 15/4 on KMGBF

When an area meets all these criteria, national governments, together with stakeholders, may consider such area for recognition and reporting as an OECM.

Criterion A	Area is not currently recognised as a protected area.
Criterion B	Area is governed and managed: • a geographically defined space; • governed by legitimate authorities; • managed to achieve positive and sustained conservation outcomes.
Criterion C	Achieves sustained and effective contribution to <i>in situ</i> conservation of biodiversity: • effective, i.e, threats to biodiversity are prevented, reduced or eliminated & degraded ecosystems are restored; • sustained, in terms of continuity of governance and management, and over long term, as it pertains to biodiversity outcome; • supports in situ conservation of a range of identified biodiversity attributes from communities of rare, threatened or endangered species, representative natural ecosystems, range restricted species, key biodiversity areas, areas providing critical ecosystem functions and services, areas for ecological connectivity • involves information and monitoring, with baselines documenting known biodiversity attributes and with monitoring systems to assess effectiveness of measures with respect to biodiversity including ecosystem health, and of governance and management including equity.
Criterion D	Associated ecosystem functions and services are supported, and cultural, spiritual, socio-economic and other locally relevant, including gender-differentiated values, are upheld by governance and management measures taking into account trade-offs, ensures positive biodiversity outcome and equity management of one particular ecosystem function or service does not impact the site’s over-all biodiversity.



02 Criteria & Definition



A Common Understanding of OECMs

Because OECM is still a relatively new concept, it is important that all actors – within a country and within a given site – share clarity and a common understanding of what marine and coastal OECMs are.

Areas that meet the CBD's global definition, four-fold criteria and 26 sub-criteria may have governance structures and primary management objectives that may typically differ from Protected Areas. What is key is biodiversity conservation is achieved, or expected to be achieved, in a way that is comparable and complementary to protected areas. See spectrum of management approaches¹⁰.

Regardless of primary management objectives, areas are recognised as OECMs only when biodiversity outcomes are achieved over the long term through sustained governance and management^{6,11}.

Areas where conservation is incidental, temporary, unstable, or undermined by significant extractive pressures do not qualify¹².



Useful Links

- IUCN's Guidance on OECMs
- IUCN and WWF's 30x30: A Guide to Inclusive, Equitable, and Effective Implementation of Target 3
- Nature Conservancy's Best Practice in Delivering the 30x30 Target
- Cook Island's Barriers and Opportunities in OECMs Workshop Report
- IUCN's Recognising and Reporting OECM
- UNDP Self-Paced Online Course Introduction to OECM



PRIMARY CONSERVATION

A site where biodiversity conservation is the primary management objective, but the governing authority does not wish the area to be classified as a protected area.

E.g. ICCAs-Territories of Life, Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), private conservation lands.

SECONDARY CONSERVATION

Conservation is an explicit but secondary goal.
E.g. watershed zones, military reserves.

ANCILLARY CONSERVATION

Biodiversity benefits occur as a by-product of other uses. E.g. shipwreck sites, sacred areas.



Localising OECMs at Country-Level

A key strength of OECMs is the **flexibility**, for as long as CBD criteria are met.

Countries may apply them in different ways. In practice, understanding and applying the concept remains a challenge for many governments and stakeholders.

Having a clear, shared approach at country-level helps build recognition and mobilise participation across sectors.



Useful Links

- OECMs in Canada
- OSPAR's Adoption of CBD Definition
- Helcom's Common Understanding



CBD FRAMEWORK

The CBD framework directly guides countries in recognising and supporting OECMs in the coastal and marine areas.

APPLYING THE CRITERIA

Applying the CBD criteria may be clear in some sites, based on available information on a potential area for OECM recognition.

Oftentimes, criteria may not be clear and countries may need to interpret the CBD criteria vis-a-vis a potential site within their regional, national or sub-national context.

CASE-BY-CASE ASSESSMENT

Guided by the CBD criteria and aided by available toolkits and handbooks, a case-by-case assessment is valuable and is particularly relevant for areas with site-specific high biodiversity values, as the existence of a measure or regulation does not in itself guarantee positive biodiversity outcomes unless it addresses the site's specific natural values and pressures.

Applying a case-by-case approach strengthens the overall quality and credibility of the protected area/OECM network by ensuring that conservation impact is demonstrable and that recognition delivers tangible added value.

Country Examples



© UNESCO

Surrounding areas of the Jeju Biosphere Reserve is considered an OECM.



© CROSSROADS Maldives

CROSSROADS Maldives received recognition as an OECM candidate in 2025.

OECM Guidelines for Areas
Leased for Tourism

[Find out more!](#)



Republic of Korea: Customised National Term for OECMs

In the Republic of Korea, the Ministry of Environment has localised the OECM concept by adopting the term “Nature Coexistence Area” in its 5th National Biodiversity Strategy, developed with multiple ministries. While the Korea Forest Service still uses the CBD term “OECMs,” the new localised term is expected to be formally reflected in amendments to the Biodiversity Act.

For marine environments, the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries is still conducting research before selecting an official term. This demonstrates how the Republic of Korea is adapting global language to resonate nationally while aligning with CBD criteria¹³.

Maldives: National Criteria for OECMs in Tourism Leases

The Maldives has developed national criteria for OECMs that currently apply to islands leased for tourism.

To qualify, areas must (1) not already be protected under national law, (2) hold high biodiversity value and be under management, (3) ensure all activities contribute to biodiversity protection and sustainable use, (4) provide cultural, economic, or social benefits, and (5) avoid negative impacts on biodiversity or ecosystem services¹⁴.

Country Example: Japan



© Visit Okinawa Japan

14% of Japan's total marine and coastal regions are protected area or OECMs.

Certification of Private Sector Conservation Areas

Japan has established a certification scheme called “Nationally Certified Sustainably Managed Natural Sites,” which recognises biodiversity conservation by private entities and other groups.

Sites are certified as OECMs for as long as they meet CBD-aligned criteria. Japan has already reported its first certified OECMs to the WD-OECMs, covering 48,000 hectares. This process highlights how certification can incentivise and formalise conservation by non-government actors, while ensuring alignment with international standards¹⁵⁻¹⁶.

[Find out more!](#)



Certification Process for Areas
Conserved by Private Sector and
Related Policy



03 Concepts & Principles



Coordinated Governance

Strong coordination among all actors is essential for conservation success, especially where sites have multiple governance layers.



CBD guidance

The CBD encourages coordination across sites with different governance types to achieve conservation outcomes at the landscape and seascape scale⁶.



Diverse actors

Sites may also be managed by fisheries, tourism, ports, military, or other sectors not traditionally linked to biodiversity.



Flexibility

As long as the CBD OECM criteria are met, these sites can contribute meaningfully to conservation.



Decentralised

Localised, context-specific management often ensures conservation is relevant, effective, and sustainable.



Functional and Clear Governance Structures

Different governance structures allow diverse actors to contribute, recognise and sustain conservation outcomes (see types on the right). Regardless of governance type, continuity of governance and management is key⁶.

A defining feature of OECMs is their effective long-term conservation of biodiversity through sustained governance and management. Governance of the area must already be in place - stable and durable - to be recognised and reported as an OECM. It must already be functional over time, with structures, systems and processes in place for governance and management of the site.

When governance weakens or becomes inexistent, area may be reassessed and may no longer qualify as an OECM¹².



Useful Links

- CBD COP Dec/14/8, Annex II.A on Governance
- CBD COP Decision 15/4 on KMGBF

Government



Managed by a national, subnational, or local authority. Examples:

- subnational government from province, city/town, district/village;
- national government agencies in charge of environment, fisheries, defense, culture, tourism, ports or planning
- at regional scale for transboundary OECMs across participating countries.

Shared Governance



Multiple actors jointly make and enforce decisions. Ensure the meaningful and safe participation of women, men, youth, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and marginalised groups, including through gender-responsive consultation methods and appropriate representation.

Examples: Local government with a local community, national government with local government, private entity with government.

Private



Managed by individuals, companies, NGOs, or landowners (e.g. private protected areas (PPAs)).

Examples: private island owners, aquaculture owners, coastal tourism site owner, industrial companies such as in India's mangrove areas & wet marshland within industrial townships.

Indigenous Peoples and local communities



Territories and areas conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities, including women's groups (e.g. ICCAs-Territories of Life, Indigenous Protected Areas).

Examples: over their ancestral waters, sacred sites, women's organisations, fisherfolk organisation managed mangrove areas

Securing Buy-in

Support from governing bodies is essential for identifying, recognising, and managing marine and coastal OECMs¹⁷. Without it, implementation stalls – a major obstacle that has been identified by many governments. Likewise, the buy-in within and across government agencies facilitate the coordinated work within the public sector, leading the work on marine and coastal OECMs.

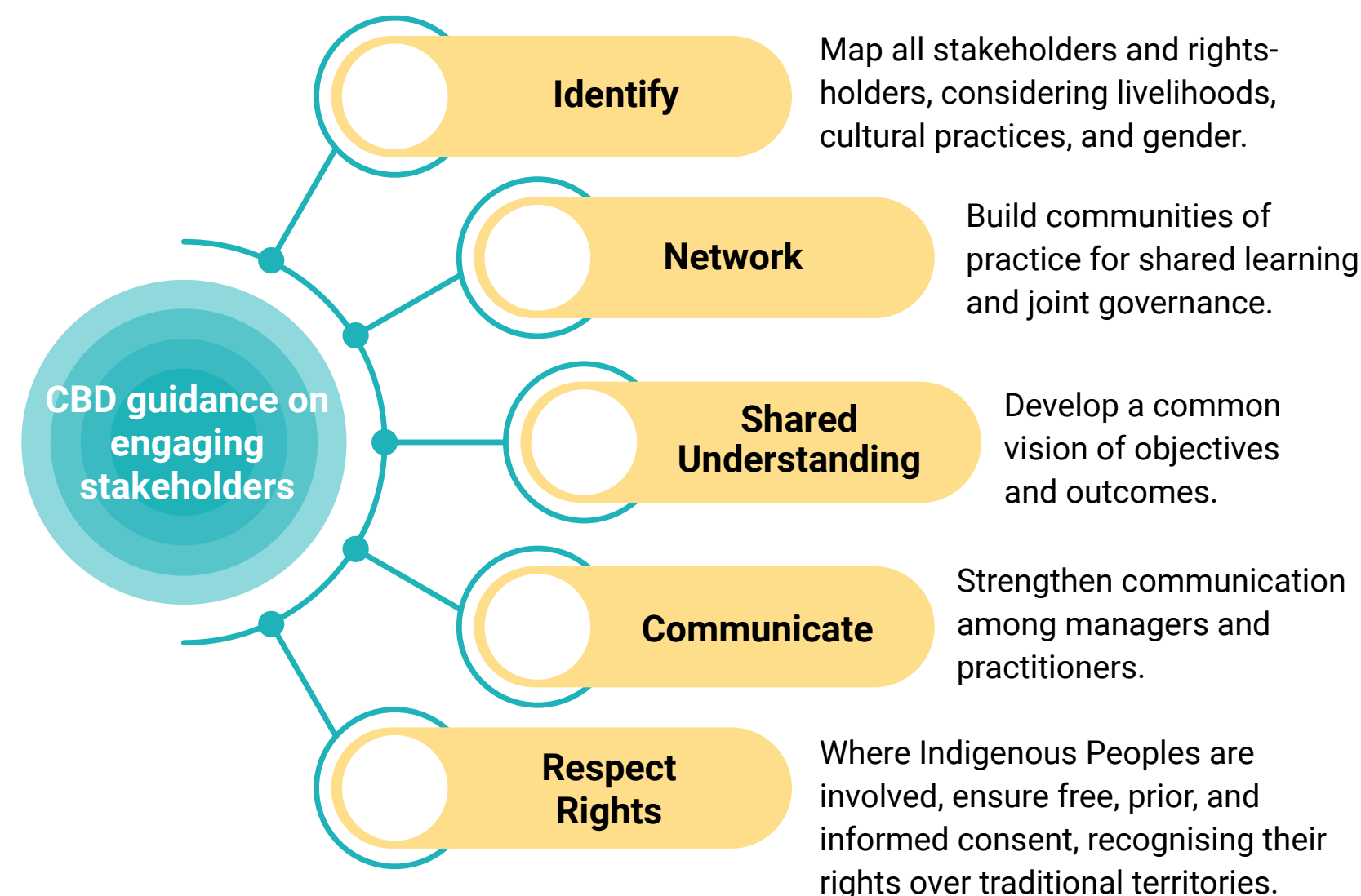
Engagement must align with the mandates and interests of each authority.

- Fisheries agencies may focus on sustainable stocks and livelihoods.
- Tourism agencies may prioritise eco-tourism opportunities.
- Local governments may emphasise coastal protection or community benefits.
- Women's groups may caution gender-specific impact on OECM recognition.



Women fisherfolk spearhead the activities of a mangrove forest conservation project in key marine biodiversity areas in northern Palawan and the Calamianes Island Group (CIG) bioregions.

CBD Guidance on Engaging Rights-holders Stakeholders⁶



Find out more!



Tiaki Moana Summit Report,
2025



Getting Started

Stakeholder Mapping for OECMs

PRINCE Analysis (Probe, Rank, Interact, Network, Calculate, Execute)

Developed by Coplin and O'Leary, it is a robust framework that can be used to assess the likelihood of stakeholders supporting the recognition of an area as an OECM and to identify how to engage and influence them¹⁸.

Define the issue

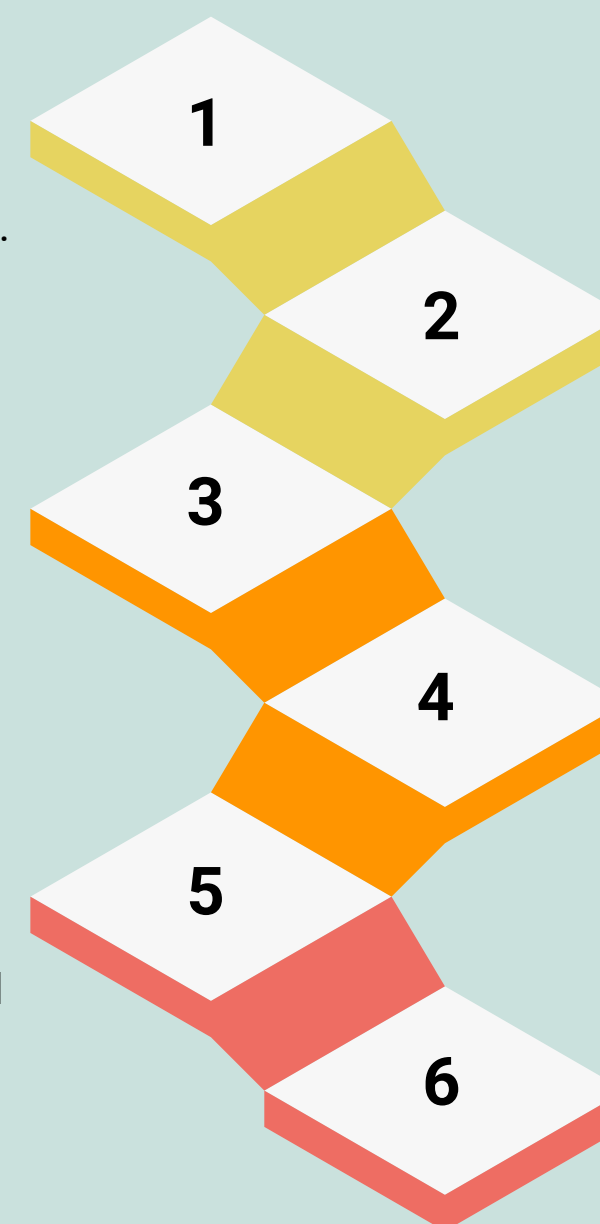
State clearly what is being considered (e.g., recognition of a site as an OECM).

Assess P³ (Position, Power, Priority)

For each actor, note their stance, influence, and level of interest.

Estimate outcomes

Use the weights to gauge the likelihood of approval or rejection.



Identify actors

List all rights-holders and stakeholders who are affected or can influence the decision.

Weigh influence

Convert P³ into scores to see each actor's overall impact, and the system's balance of support vs opposition.

Plan strategies

Target engagement to win support, address opposition, and build coalitions for success.



Sample P³ Assessment

Questions to Ask

- **Position/Issue Position:** Do they support or oppose the recognition and reporting of their area as a marine and coastal OECM?
- **Power:** Do they have the ability to make their preference with respect to the OECM happen?
- **Priority (Salience):** How strong is the support or opposition to the recognition and reporting of their area as a marine and coastal OECM?

Who to Consider

Typical stakeholders, depending on the site, type and scale of the proposed marine or coastal OECMs:

- **Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples:** Coastal residents, women's groups, traditional and indigenous communities/peoples, fishers and farmers, and youth.
- **Resource Users and Economic Sectors:** Fisheries, Tourism and Recreation, Energy and Industry, Shipping and Ports, Coastal Real Estate Development, Agriculture and Forestry (insofar as they impact water quality and aquatic resources).
- **Government and Regulatory Bodies:** National/federal agencies responsible for policy, planning, environmental protection and conservation, fisheries, internal waters protection/coast guard, maritime police, defense/national maritime security, ports, culture and heritage, regional/state/provincial agencies, local/municipal governments, international bodies.
- **Non-Government and Civil Society Organisations:** Environmental/conservation NGOs, community groups-local association, civic organisations, citizen science group academic and research institutions.
- **Other Key Entities:** Media and communication outlets, financial institutions- bankers and investors, general public and consumers.

Sample Scoring

Score	Position*	Power	Priority (Salience)
3	Strong support	Strong power	High priority
2	Moderate support	Moderate power	Moderate priority
1	Weak support	Weak power	Low priority
0	Neutrality		
-1	Weak opposition		
-2	Moderate opposition		
-3	Strong opposition		

Sample Calculation

Actors	Issue Position (IP)	Power (PO)	Priority (PR)	IP x PO x PR
A	2	2	1	4
B	2	3	1	9
C	2	1	3	-6
D	2	2	2	12
E	2	1	3	(3)

Adapted from BFAR Training Materials: Science-Policy Interface in Fisheries Management¹⁹



Country Example: Indonesia

Mapping of Governance Types of Potential OECMs

A study of 382 potential OECMs in Indonesia found that most mid-sized sites (10,000-50,000 hectares, 53% of the total) were managed by customary communities.

Larger sites over 50,000 ha, often outer islands important for national sovereignty, were government-led. A smaller share of sites under 50 hectares (12%) were privately managed, typically under permits for activities such as aquaculture or resorts²⁰.

By Size of Area (ha)	Typical Governance (& Purpose)	Percentage of Total Potential Site
Very small Less than 50	Private sector (for sustainable agriculture & private resorts)	12%
Small 50-10,000	Mainly customary community-led managers	53%
Medium 10,000-50,000	Diverse management entities and purposes	19%
Large Over 50,000	Government	16%



© Konservasi Indonesia

Sahul Papua, Indonesia.

In 2025, the Indonesian government reports the following proportion of site level agencies working on OECMs¹³:

Potential OECM Authorities	Total Area	(%)
Traditional Community	320	49.23
Local Community	178	27.38
Customary Community	31	4.77
Government	81	12.46
Privates	40	6.15
Total	650	100



© Min Maung Maung Myo for ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity

Identification of OECMs

Marine and coastal OECMs can take many forms, as long as they meet CBD criteria.

Apart from the conventional blue ecosystems, these can include sacred sites, military sites, cultural and heritage areas¹⁷, or even the 50-metre radius safety zones around oil and gas platforms being considered in Thailand, among others¹³.

They may also include sites recognised under other frameworks, such as Ramsar wetlands or certain area-based measures in fisheries, among others.

Countries in East Asian Seas are also developing their own typologies to reflect local contexts. Recognising and reporting these diverse types helps strengthen conservation outcomes across seascapes.



Varied Potential Types of Marine and Coastal OECMs

These are some types of areas that could have the potential to be an OECM, provided they meet the CBD criteria, as further elaborated by the CBD, FAO and the Ramsar Convention.



General Categories^{6,21}

1. Territories and areas governed and managed by Indigenous Peoples and/or local communities
2. Area-based fisheries management measures
3. Other sectoral area-based management
 - Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas
 - Areas of Particular Environmental Interest



Fisheries OECMs²²

1. Vulnerable marine ecosystems
2. Area-based fishery closures (fisheries reserves and no-take areas)
3. Community-based fisheries management areas including marine managed areas (MMAs), locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) prevalent in the South Pacific and responsible fishing areas (RFAs) common in Latin America
4. Rotational closures and seasonal closures
5. Gear-restricted areas
6. Areas covered by marine conservation agreements



Wetlands OECMs²³

1. Ramsar Sites(s) nested within a broader wetland OECM
2. Ramsar Site and wetland OECM adjacent to each other, joined together with a partial common border
3. Ramsar Site(s) and wetland OECM geographically separated from each other but could be contributing to in situ conservation of and wise use of functionally-linked wetland biodiversity and hydrology
4. Ramsar Site formed partly as a protected area and partly as an OECM

Click on these links to find out how and when these type of sites could qualify as OECMs



- FAO's handbook for identifying, evaluating and reporting OECMs in marine fisheries
- Ramsar Convention's Scientific and Technical Review Panel's Briefing Note on OECMs
- Tiaki Moana Summit Report, 2025
- IUCN's FAQ on Establishing Marine OECMs under the CBD

Regardless of type, each of the sites could qualify as an OECM only if it satisfies the CBD criteria for OECMs, especially the requirement of demonstrating **evidence-based and positive long-term biodiversity conservation outcomes**.¹⁰

For example, rotational and seasonal closures would only qualify where they fulfill the long-term conservation element of the CBD criteria on OECMs²².

Country Examples

[Click to find out more!](#)

IUCN Stocktaking Report of
OECMs in China



© China Daily

Sanjiangyuan National Park in Qinghai province, northwest China.

China: Ecological Conservation Red Lines

To better prioritise biodiversity conservation, China has delineated Ecological Conservation Red Lines (ECRL)²⁴ - areas where ecological functions are extremely important and fragile, with significant ecological value. Biodiversity was identified as key factor in determining whether an area should be included. Once delineated, these areas must be strictly protected. Currently, the area of marine ECRLs in China is approximately 150,000 square kilometres. These areas are closely related to identifying potential OECMs in China.

Apart from these ECRLs, China also identifies through its relevant policies fishing closure areas, marine ranches, integrated multi-tropic areas, national tourism areas, and areas of special uses as potential OECMs.

Philippines: Draft Department Administrative Order

In its draft administrative order, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of the Philippines identifies Critical Habitats - managed either by DENR or the Palawan Council for Sustainable Development - as the country's initially recognised OECMs¹³. Beyond these, the order provides broad criteria under which a wide range of areas may be screened as potential OECMs, provided they are not nationally declared protected areas with existing management regimes and they demonstrably support important biodiversity values.

In the marine and coastal realm, this opens the door for various site types to undergo screening, such as wetlands, fisheries management areas, coastal greenbelts, internationally recognised sites (e.g. Ramsar sites, UNESCO designations and ASEAN Heritage Parks) privately managed conservation areas, and areas governed by ICCAs, NGOs, or other entities. Additional areas such as culturally significant sites, archaeological areas, or restricted access zones like military areas may also qualify if they meet the ecological and governance criteria set by the order. Meanwhile, locally managed MPAs, which have been in place since 1974, remain excluded from OECM consideration as they are consistently reported as protected areas under national legislation.



© KAJUANDER

Libertad Mangrove Forest and Aquasilviculture Park in the Philippines combines aquaculture with mangrove forestry.

Country Examples

OECM Types in Viet Nam

Viet Nam has adopted several types of marine and coastal OECMs that could complement its formal protected areas and contribute to broader marine conservation goals.

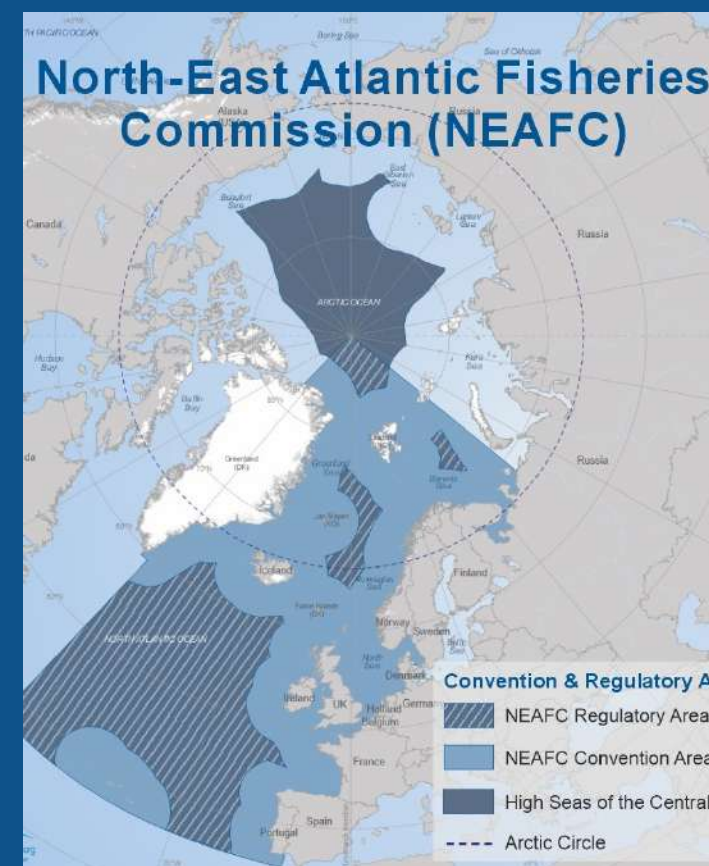
These include community-managed areas where local communities lead conservation while sustaining livelihoods; fisheries refugia that regulate fishing to protect habitats and species; mangrove restoration sites that rebuild ecosystems and strengthen coastal resilience; marine biodiversity zones managed outside protected areas; and traditional or indigenous sites where customary practices safeguard marine and coastal ecosystems¹³.

Consistent with the CBD Decision 14/8, Annex II, OECMs could play a complementary role to protected areas and should strengthen protected area networks, as appropriate, including by enhancing their coherence and connectivity.



© IUCN

Flood-based lotus models in the Mekong Delta can be recognised as OECMs.



North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission: First RFMO-reported OECM

In early 2025, the NEAFC, the RFMO responsible for managing the North-East Atlantic, reported the first fisheries OECM in areas beyond national jurisdiction and the first submitted by an RFMO.

This pertains specifically to vulnerable marine ecosystems for deep-sea sponges and corals comprising 20 sites individually managed and protected from bottom fishing since 2004 and collectively identified as an OECM²⁵⁻²⁹.

Click to find out more!



NEAFC Submission to the CBD

NEAFC Press Notice



Leadership Oversight

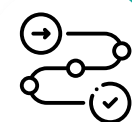
To expedite actions, providing national leadership guided by a comprehensive national framework for marine and coastal OECMs may be crucial. Such leadership could encompass the following four key elements.



INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

The CBD (Decision 14/8) calls on countries to **clarify institutional mandates, roles, and responsibilities** of all relevant State and non-State actors. Effective arrangements often involve **multi-stakeholder mechanisms** such as OECM Expert Working Groups (China and Thailand), a National Technical Advisory Committee (Bangladesh), among others³⁰⁻³¹.

Because multiple ministries and agencies are involved in ocean governance (e.g. fisheries, environment, heritage, energy, trade, transport, security), countries are encouraged to designate a **lead institution** to coordinate national OECM efforts. This agency can provide leadership for identifying, recognising, reporting and monitoring OECMs to ensure they deliver net positive outcomes for biodiversity. It can also coordinate regional or transboundary collaboration. In many cases, the CBD national focal point may be best placed to serve as lead.



NATIONAL STRATEGY/ROADMAP

Developing a **national OECM strategy** or **roadmap** helps align stakeholders, deepen understanding, and mobilise action. A **consultative process** ensures ownership of the vision, enables coordinated assessment and recognition, and guides strengthening efforts.

The strategy can be a **stand-alone document** or integrated into a country's National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (NBSAP).



NATIONAL LEGAL OR POLICY FRAMEWORK

As per CBD decision 14/8, countries are encouraged to develop a **national or subnational policy statement** on conservation, created through stakeholder consultation. A participatory **review of current frameworks** helps determine the extent of legal support for OECMs and identify opportunities for collaboration and role clarification.

Following review, countries can:

- Work around or amend **existing laws**, policies, or regulations^{13,30-31}.
- Adopt **interim "soft" policies** or administrative measures.
- Develop **dedicated OECM legislation** once lessons from early implementation are available.



NATIONAL LIST OR REGISTRY & DATABASE

While OECMs are reported globally to the World Database on OECMs (WD-OECM), countries can also create a **national registry**^{13,29}, whether in **simple list** or with **spatial visualisation**, to:

- Track progress on marine and coastal OECMs.
- Store data in simple or advanced GIS systems.
- Provide transparency and public access for stakeholders to understand, vet, and support OECMs.



[Learn more](#)

Republic of Korea's GIS Database



04 Process



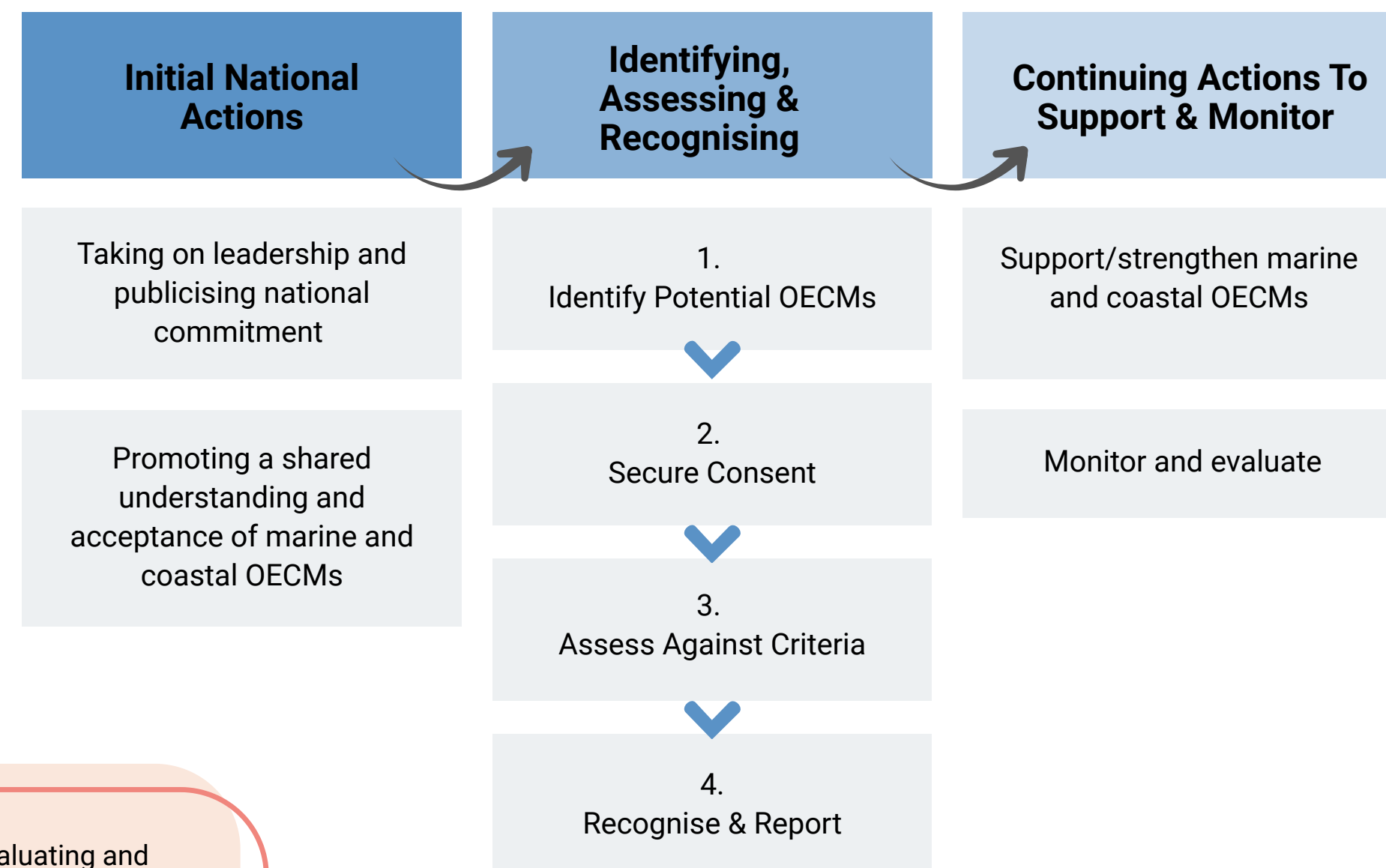
Implementing Marine and Coastal OECM in the East Asian Seas

After taking on the **political leadership** by the national government with support from partners in advancing marine and coastal OECMs and promoting a **shared understanding and acceptance** of their importance to nature and people, the next steps are **identifying, evaluating, recognising and reporting** OECMs.

Simultaneously, national governments together with partners and stakeholders can continue **supporting and strengthening** marine and coastal OECMs.

Thereafter, they can periodically monitor and evaluate towards effective management and equitable governance, so marine and coastal OECMs deliver positive biodiversity outcomes.

Practical Steps: Identification to Reporting^{12,22}



Useful Links

FAO

- Handbook for identifying, evaluating and reporting OECMs
- Documenting biodiversity outcomes in marine fisheries management

IUCN

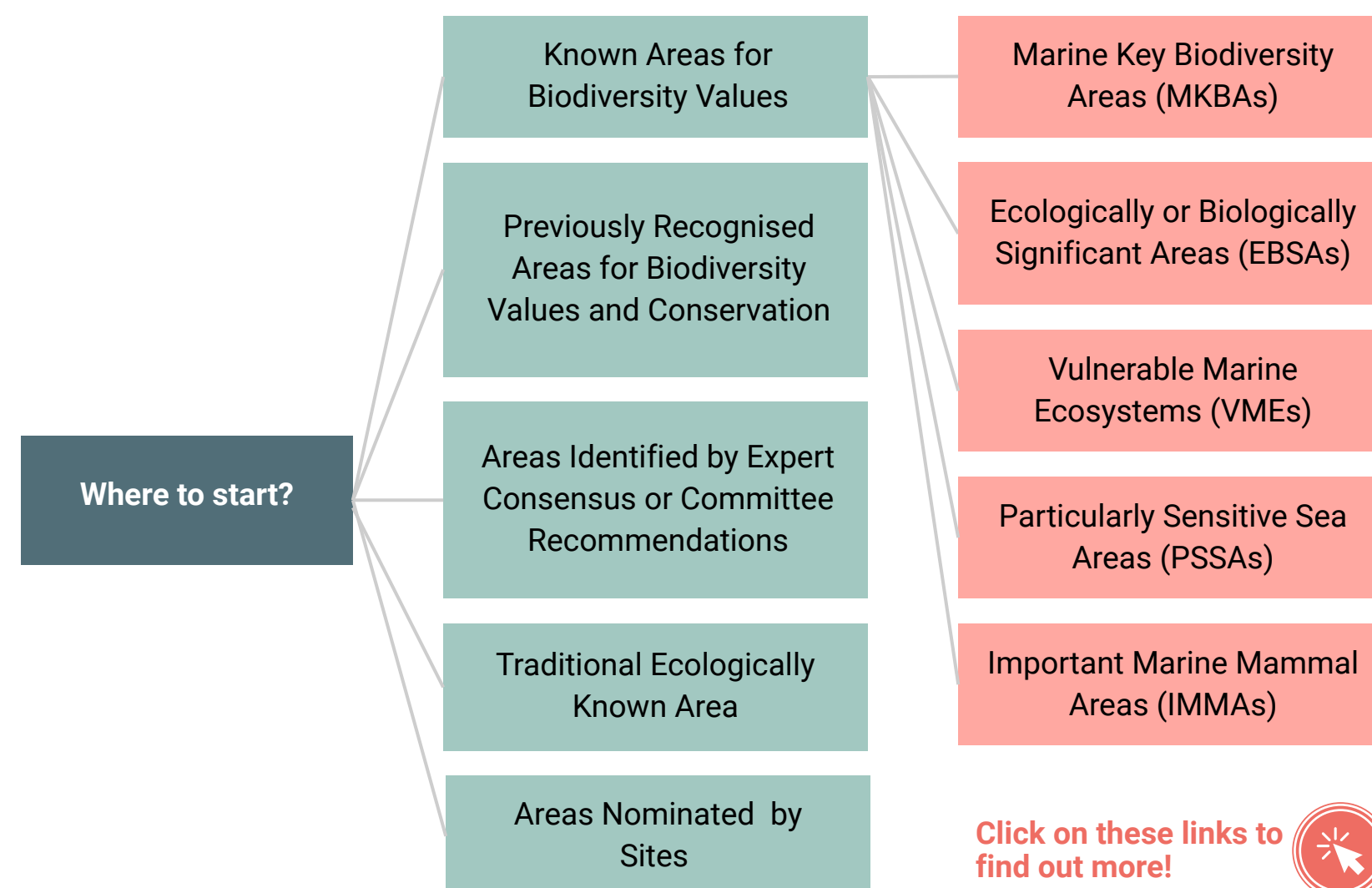
- Site-Level Tool for Identifying OECMs



Identify Potential OECMs

Which areas do we start with?

In addition to existing mapped areas, identification can also come through expert or committee recommendations, or applications from subnational governments, agencies beyond conservation, the private sector, Indigenous Peoples, or local communities.

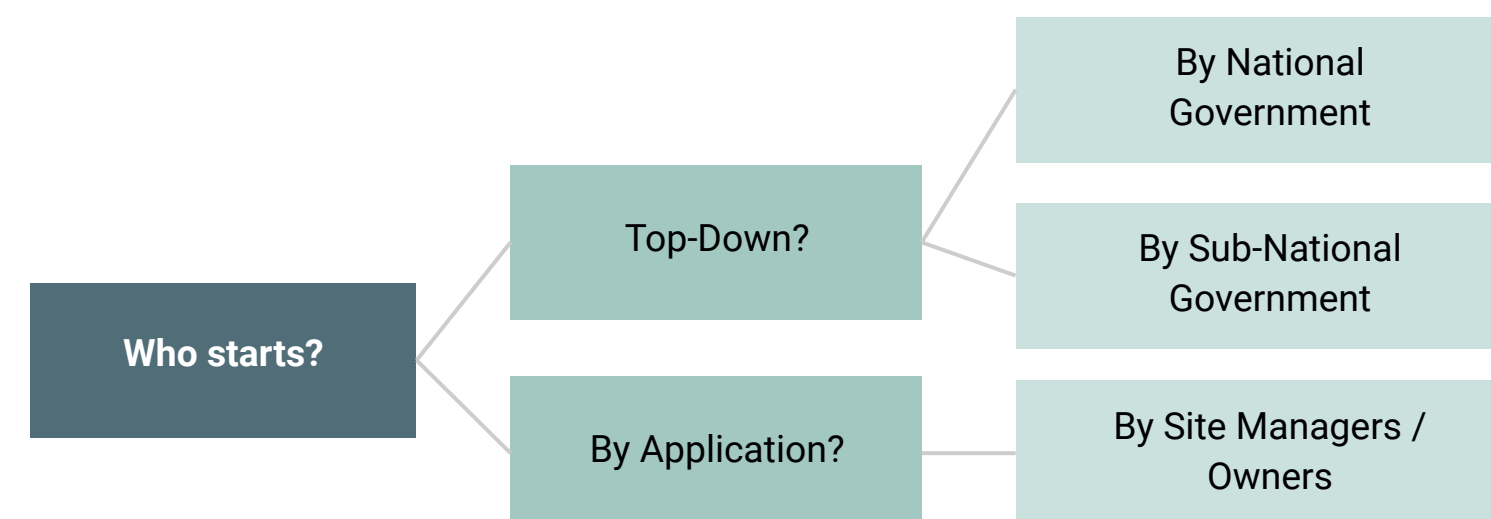


Who initiates the identification of OECMs?

Screening for potential marine and coastal OECMs can take place at either the national or site level.

- **National Level:** Governments may conduct a broad assessment of existing initiatives that already show positive biodiversity outcomes, particularly within MKBAs and EBSAs, to create an initial list of candidate sites.
- **Site Level:** The process may focus on one area at a time, drawing on different entry points.

This process may be top-down through national government or sub-national government efforts, or bottom-up through site-level applications or nominations following national procedures.





Secure Consent

Obtaining **free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC)** from Indigenous Peoples is a **core requirement** under CBD Decision 14/8, which also extends to private landowners conserving biodiversity on their lands as well as women who often have distinct yet unrecognised roles in resources management. Recognition of OECMs must respect the rights, knowledge, and institutions of those who govern and manage the sites^{6,8}.

Although OECMs were expected to gain more support from Indigenous Peoples as well as from local communities than traditional protected areas, skepticism persists due to past experiences with restrictions, displacement, or conflict^{32,33,10}.

This resistance is often a result of:

- **Unfamiliarity:** Stakeholders may not fully understand the OECM concept.
- **Historical Concerns:** Apprehension stems from past negative experiences with PAs.
- **Lack of Clarity:** The purpose and implications of OECMs can be confusing³⁴.

To address these challenges, governments should establish clear policies that define the roles and responsibilities of different managing groups, invest in awareness-building around the benefits of OECMs, and engage with Indigenous Peoples as well as local communities at the outset.



About free, prior, and informed consent

FPIC means there is no coercion, intimidation or manipulation; sought in advance of any assessment, recognition or reporting of the area as an OECM; and provides information on the nature, purpose, implications, risks and processes that OECM recognition and reporting entails.

FPIC should be documented, including capturing steps for accomplishing consent and the essence of agreement reached. Consent agreements must be in writing and should include grievance mechanisms and dispute resolution, among others³⁵.



Assess Against CBD Criteria

Full Assessment: Demonstrating Sustained Conservation and Threat Mitigation

A potential site is assessed against the CBD criteria to confirm its status as a marine and coastal OECM. In particular, it must **demonstrate** that it has **sustained and effective in situ biodiversity conservation**.

To be recognised as an OECM, the documentation must show that the area meets at least one of the following ecological criteria⁶:

- Presence of Important Biodiversity: Rare, threatened, or endangered species/ecosystems.
- Representative Ecosystems: Natural ecosystems that are under-represented in existing protected area networks.
- High Ecological Integrity: Areas with high levels of intactness.
- Key Connectivity: Areas that serve as corridors or habitat for range-restricted species.
- Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs): Sites known to be globally significant.

Additionally, the documentation must show that the continuity of management and governance achieves or is expected to achieve net positive biodiversity conservation outcomes over the long term.

The assessment involves:

- ☒ Positive & sustained outcomes for biodiversity over time.
- ☒ Conservation of rare species in its natural sites, representative ecosystems, and key ecological functions.
- ☒ Continuity of management and governance.
- ☒ Threats to biodiversity being addressed.
- ☒ Associated ecosystem functions and relevant cultural, social, economic and local values are supported.

Evidence is Key

It is important that the area shows sustained conservation and threat mitigation of these important biodiversity attributes.

Otherwise, OECMs may become a re-labelling exercise with no gain - or even loss - to biodiversity^{36,11}.



Useful Link

IUCN's Site-Level Tool for Identifying OECMs



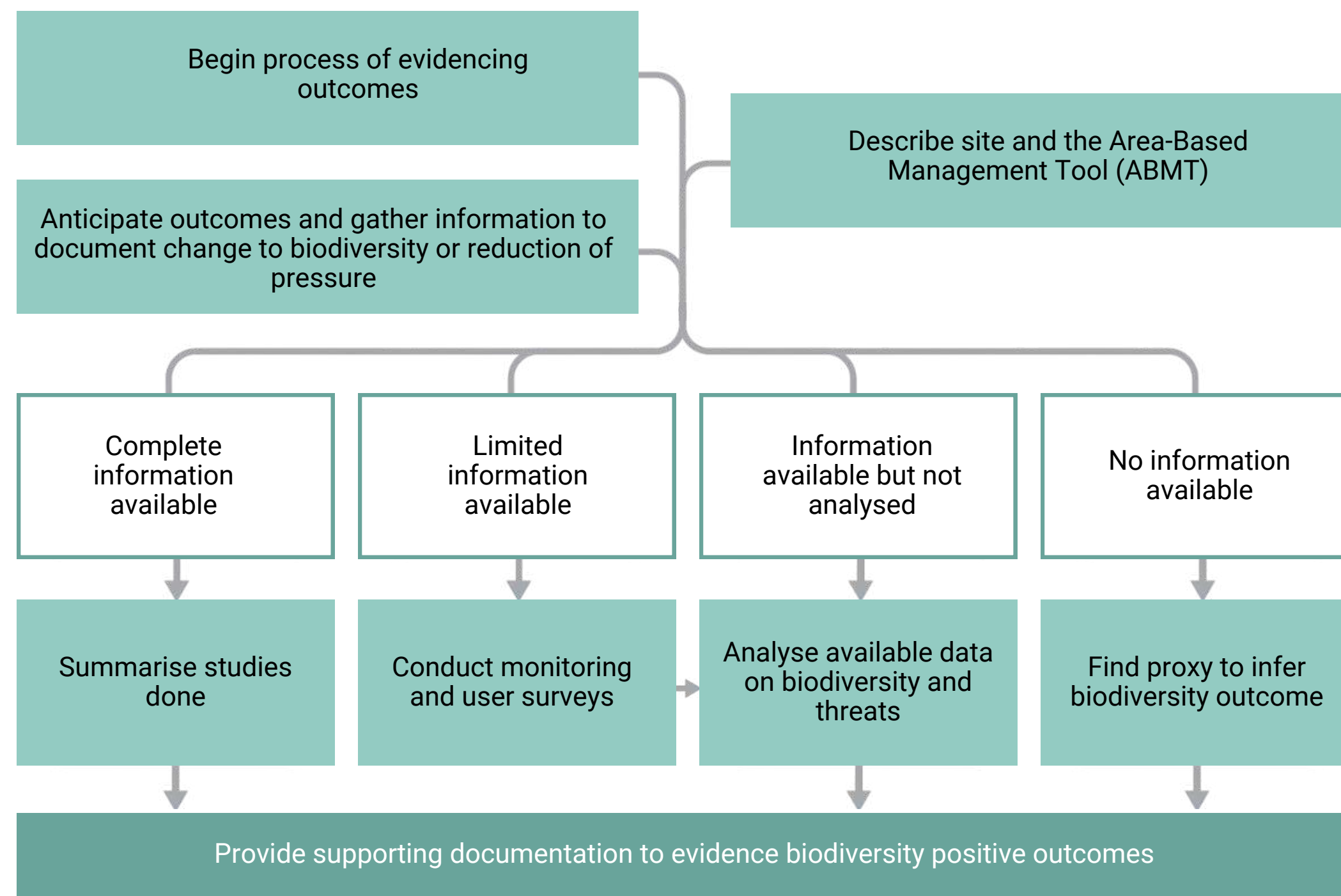
Documenting Biodiversity Outcomes

To meet Criteria C on sustained in situ conservation, sites must provide **evidence** of outcomes, using **diverse sources of knowledge** - from scientific studies of researchers and scientists to knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, and local knowledge, including women-specific experiences.

This may be done by:

- Using existing studies and available information.
- Conducting direct data collection.
- Applying proxy information where direct data is limited.

Refer to the sample diagram from FAO for fisheries OECMs³⁷.



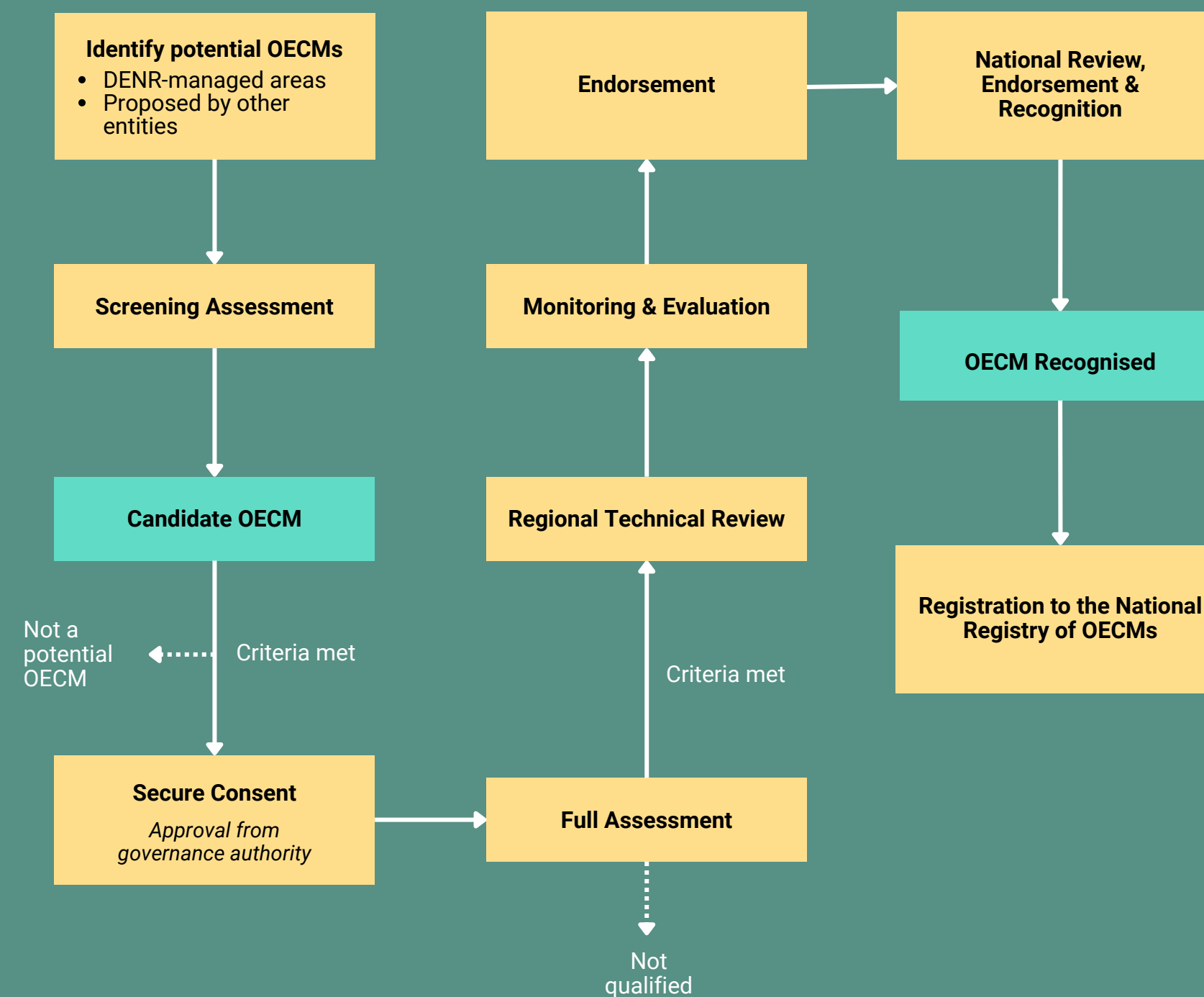


Country Example: Philippines

In its draft administrative order to govern OECMs, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources outlined a process for identifying, evaluating and recognising OECMs¹³.



Proposed Flowchart for the Identification and Recognition of OECMs





Country Example: India

Methodology of Identifying OECMs

In 2022, India, with UNDP, developed a method for identifying, evaluating, and recognising OECMs. Screening begins with cases from its Biodiversity Awards (since 2012) and nominations by a Working Group using the IUCN template. A colour-coded system determines whether sites meet CBD criteria, with a specific step to secure stakeholder consent before sharing information with UNEP-WCMC³⁸.

1

SCREENING

Screening of cases against the IUCN screening template.

2

CATEGORISATION

Categorisation of cases using a color grading system reflecting the extent to which a site meets the CBD criteria.

3

SEEKING INFORMATION

Obtain information from stakeholders via a reporting template.

4

OBTAINING CONSENT

Obtain consent from stakeholders for sharing information with UNEP-WCMC.

5

INFORMATION SUBMISSION

- National Biodiversity Authority
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
- UNEP-WCMC World Database on OECMs



© Godrej Properties

Godrej's Pirojshanagar Mangroves play a vital role in coastal protection while being the "green lungs" of Mumbai, India.

[Learn more](#)

A Compendium of
OECMs in India

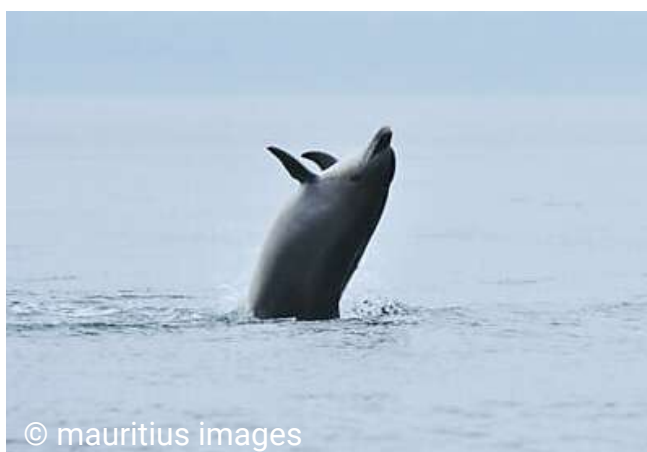


Report to the World Database on OECMs

Recognise

After screening, consent, and full assessment, sites can be formally recognised as OECMs through different approaches.

- **Recognition:** Governments may recognise marine and coastal OECMs either through a formal recognition or certification process, or de facto following a comprehensive site assessment.
- **Considerations:** Governments should also consider whether recognition is time-bound and subject to renewal, and establish a de-listing process to ensure sites continue to meet OECM criteria. Governments may also consider establishing a formal agreement or commitment mechanism through which the responsible governance authority undertakes to manage activities and mitigate pressures in a manner that ensures sustained positive biodiversity outcomes over the long term.



Irrawaddy dolphins of the Malampaya Sound Protected Landscape. In the Philippines, OECMs make up over half of all marine conservation areas.

Report to Protected Planet

Reporting should involve:

- securing the consent of site managers
- ensuring CBD criteria for OECMs are met, and
- formatting data to standards.



After evaluation and consent, marine and coastal OECMs are reported to the WD-OECM on the Protected Planet website, which tracks progress toward global goals like Target 3 of the GBF.

Managed by UNEP-WCMC, the database is both a resource for researchers and a recognition tool for site managers. Reporting is usually the responsibility of national governments, but private landowners, NGOs, research organisations, corporations, Indigenous peoples, and local communities can also submit sites, provided submissions follow UNEP-WCMC guidelines and are verified by government. For sites governed by Indigenous Peoples, free, prior, and informed consent is required³⁹⁻⁴³.



Useful Links

- UNEP-WCMC Protected Planet Methodologies
- WDPA-WDOECM Manual
- Reporting to Protected Planet
- Protected Planet Report 2024



Support and Strengthen

COBSEA participating countries have a crucial role in supporting not only the identification of marine and coastal OECMs, but also in strengthening them. This support can be provided to sites - from those that already meet the criteria to those that require long-term assistance.

The overall support strategy can be aimed at three key objectives:

- **Facilitating interested sites:** Providing resources and guidance to sites with motivated managers to assist them in the site’s OECM recognition.
- **Incentivising hesitant sites:** Encouraging managers who may be skeptical by demonstrating the benefits of OECM recognition.
- **Strengthening well-managed sites:** Supporting managers in achieving positive biodiversity outcomes.

The following table (right) suggests some examples of types of support that may be provided to the sites in particular or across the country at the national level.

Means of Support

Technical Assistance

- Understanding/socialising concepts, criteria, principles & processes, etc
- Documenting biodiversity attributes and threats/net positive gains
- Access to expertise to determine/monitor/evaluate biodiversity attributes and threats, and net positive biodiversity gains
- Capacity-building for effective & equitable management
- Facilitation of communication and coordination across sectors
- Support for national associations or alliances of OECMs according to governance types to provide peer support mechanism⁶

Financial Incentives

- Grants for documentation, management, monitoring, community-based projects
- Subsidies for area-based management actions
- Tax breaks for actions leading to net positive biodiversity gains
- Carbon credits from mangroves and seagrass meadows based on clear and equitable regulations and protocols

Policy Support

- Clarifying rules to cater to sites’ needs
- Providing legal basis for benefit-sharing, as may be apt
- National recognition/certification as OECM & its publication as a source of pride for the site



Country Example: Philippines



Learn more

MPA Support Network



© Biodiversity Management Bureau (DENR / BMB)



© Zoological Society of London, Philippines Mangrove and Beach Forest Programme

Para El Mar Biennial Recognition⁴³

In the Philippines, a biennial recognition rite Para El Mar, initiated in 2007 by the University of the Philippines - Marine Science Institute organised by the Marine Support Network composed of several government agencies, NGOs and academic institutions, recognises best practices in marine conservation and protection. It has gained traction and popularity among local government units managing MPAs.

Qualifying and being selected becomes a source of pride for these subnational governments and local communities. The recognition programme has seen locally managed MPAs regularly participate and progressively adjust and improve their management, following lessons learned and feedback received during pre-evaluation phase, site visits and presentations of their MPAs.

Likewise, the programme has encouraged the establishment of more MPAs under local governments established under a local ordinance pursuant to the Local Government Code and/or the Fisheries Code or established as locally/indigenous conserved areas under the country’s programme with development partners, in addition to nationally declared Protected Areas under national biodiversity laws.

(Left) Winner of the Best Mangrove Award went to the Balisungan Marine Protected Area and Women-Managed Area (MPA-WMA), a mangrove conservation zone located in Coron, Palawan, Philippines. Managed primarily by the local community, it has gained national recognition for its mangrove protection, food security efforts, and women-led conservation.



Monitoring & Evaluation

Delivering Positive Biodiversity Outcomes

At its core, the effectiveness of OECMs hinges on their ability to deliver tangible conservation outcomes through effective management and equitable governance. This addresses the concern that OECMs might be used for "paper accounting" and focusing on "quantity over quality" rather than genuine conservation - biodiversity is conserved, nature and people benefit from their values⁴⁴⁻⁴⁵.

Are they delivering biodiversity outcomes comparable to and complementary to Protected Areas? This includes their contribution to representativeness, the coverage of areas important for biodiversity and associated ecosystem functions and services, connectivity and integration in wider landscapes and seascapes as well as management effectiveness and equity requirements.

Are they demonstrating positive biodiversity outcomes through successful in situ conservation? This includes successfully conserving in situ species, habitat and ecosystem and associated ecosystem functions in the long-term by preventing, reducing, or eliminating existing or potential threats, and increasing resilience.

Are cultural and social benefits equitably enjoyed, enhancing human well-being?

M&E and its results may be considered at different scales.

Sites, with assistance from sub-national and/or national governments will need to conduct their M&E for adaptive management.

National government may then consolidate for a country-wide picture of the progress of OECMs, and for regional and/or global reporting.

Global / Regional Reporting

National M&E

Site Level M&E



Useful Links

- Accounting for Nature-Human Linkages
- IUCN's Framework for Monitoring Biodiversity in PAs and OECMs



Monitoring and Evaluation

A Framework for Effectively Managed and Equitably Governed OECMs

CBD has developed the Monitoring Framework^{46,47,8} for the implementation of the GBF including Target 3 on OECMs. Ideally, countries go beyond the minimum indicators and document and report on the qualitative aspects from their monitoring and evaluation of marine and coastal OECMs, through:

- (i) baseline data, such as documentation of the biodiversity values and elements; ongoing community-based monitoring, and incorporation of traditional
- (ii) knowledge, where appropriate; monitoring over the long-term, including how to sustain biodiversity and
- (iii) improve in situ conservation; and
- (iv) monitoring of governance, stakeholder involvement and management systems that contribute to the biodiversity outcomes.

Find out more!



- SBSTTA Recommendation 26/1
- CBD's Monitoring Framework for the KM-GBF

Headline Indicators

This focuses on the coverage of OECMs. It is currently the minimum reporting requirements for countries. Countries can also report on various optional disaggregations, which cover (1) coverage of protected areas versus OECMs, (2) coverage of realms, biomes, and ecosystems (3) coverage of areas of particular importance for biodiversity, (4) coverage by protected areas and OECMs with different levels of effectiveness, and (5) coverage by governance type.

Component Indicators

These optional indicators relate to coverage of key biodiversity area, management effectiveness, connectedness index, red list of ecosystems, connectivity indicator, site-level equitable governance assessments, and species protection index.

Complementary Indicators

Likewise, these optional indicators refer to downgrading/downsizing, status of key biodiversity area, IUCN Green List, UNESCO designated heritage sites, Protected Area and OECM management effectiveness.



Monitoring and Evaluation

Marine and coastal OECM managers, together with partners and stakeholders, may consider a framework for monitoring and evaluating socio-economic systems for positive biodiversity outcomes for all.

Given the complexities and dynamics of marine and coastal areas, outcomes may be **differentiated by timeframe** of short, medium and long-term.

Following a **feedback loop**, monitoring results can then inform and **adapt** to management and governance **interventions**.

Click on these links to find out more!



INPUTS & OUTPUTS/
INTERVENTIONS

Feedback loop

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT & EQUITABLE GOVERNANCE

- Management Effectiveness
 - Performance Measure, Progress Evaluation, Needs Evaluation
- Equitable Governance
 - Recognition: Respect for Resource Rights and Human Rights, Respect for All Relevant Actors including women
 - Procedure for Participation, Transparency, Access to Justice, Fair & Effective Law Enforcement
 - Distribution of Benefits and Burdens

METT, IMET, RAPPAM, MEAT, The MPA Score Guide, SAGE



BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY OUTCOMES

- Changes/Improvement to, Reduction of Threats, Increase in Resilience
 - Habitats: Estuaries, Wetlands, Mangroves, Seagrass, Coral Reefs, Deep Water
 - Species: Seagrasses, Seaweeds, Fans, Mangroves, Shorebirds, Fishes, Turtles, Marine Mammals
 - Ecosystems & Other Associated Ecosystem Functions: Provisioning, Supporting, Regulatory, Cultural including representativeness, coverage of areas, connectivity and integration in wider seascapes

Biodiversity Surveys (incl. **Fish & Underwater**), Sampling, Modeling, Remote Sensing-enabled Mapping



CULTURAL, SPIRITUAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC OUTCOMES

- Changes/Improvement to
 - Economic Conditions: Increase in Livelihood Opportunities, Increase in Income, Dependence on Marine Resources
 - Health Benefits
 - Cultural Benefits
 - Social Benefits
 - Other locally relevant values
 - Climate Resilience
 - Socioecological and economic benefits to women and youth

SEAT, Consultations, Surveys, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions

Resources: Technical Expertise incl. Local & Traditional Knowledge, Equipment & Tools, Data/Knowledge Management including Analysis & Reporting



Monitoring and Evaluation

Measuring Effective Management and Equitable Governance

Tools & Methods

There is no single consensus on how to measure OECM effectiveness⁴⁴, but existing tools for Protected Areas (PAs) can be adapted. Several monitoring tools for PAs measure their effectiveness not only in achieving the biological and ecological conservation targets, but also in improving site/local governance capacities and enhancing equitable distribution of socio-economic benefits. In the region, participating countries are familiar and use monitoring tools such METT, IMET, MEAT, and RAPPAM, among others.

These tools can be selectively and analogously applied to marine and coastal OECMs. Ideally, the site managers of the existing and/or candidate OECMs should actively participate from the onset to agree on which indicators are relevant and can be sustainably monitored, preferably by a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral team, in a timely manner given the local technical and financial resources available.

Monitoring and evaluation results can then lead to adaptive management of marine and coastal OECMs towards equitable benefits for both nature and people.

IIED's Site Level Assessment of Governance and Equity (SAGE) Tool for Protected and Conserved Areas

SAGE offers a relatively simple, low-cost method that makes use of excel sheets in order for stakeholders and rightsholders in protected or conserved areas to assess governance and equity, and implement actions to improve equitable governance.

It makes use of IUCN's **ten equitable governance principles**, with each principle further unpacked into five themes that provide a comprehensive and practical understanding of governance.

Find out more!



- Protected Planet's Global Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness (GD-PAME)
- IIFB Marine OECM Guide, 2025 [Under Review]
- IUCN's Framework for Monitoring Biodiversity in PAs and OECMs



Accelerating National Actions



With available resources, experiences, and ongoing knowledge-sharing, COBSEA participating countries are well-positioned to accelerate their national actions on marine and coastal OECMs.

Publicising Commitment and Vision

Governments can start by publicly declaring their commitment and vision for OECMs, demonstrating leadership alongside relevant sectors and stakeholders. They can then establish institutional arrangements and develop a national strategy or roadmap with dedicated resources. By assessing marine key biodiversity areas and species, governing authorities can collaborate with site managers to apply OECM criteria to identify, evaluate, and recognise potential sites, customising the process to their specific context.

Forging Partnerships

As shown by the experiences of many countries in the region, forming strong partnerships with development partners, civil society, academia and local communities can significantly advance OECM implementation.

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