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Promoting Pacific Islands Nature-based Solutions

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National Policy Framework Assessment on Nature-based Solutions for Coastal Resilience and Forestry Sectors, Vanuatu

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Acronyms

AFD – Agence Française de Développement

CCA – Community Conservation Area

DoCC – Department of Climate Change

DoF – Department of Forestry (DoF)

DUAP – Department of Urban Affairs and Planning

EIA – Environmental Impact Assessment

EPC – Environmental Protection and Conservation

FFEM – French Facility for Global Environment

GEF – Global Environment Facility

LMMA – Locally Managed Marine Area

MFEM – Ministry of Finance and Economic Management

NAP – National Adaptation Plan

NbS – Nature-based Solutions

PACRES – Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change and Resilience Programme

PEBACC – Pacific Ecosystem-based Adaptation to Climate Change

SPC – Secretariat of the Pacific Community

SPREP – Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

TEK - Traditional Ecological Knowledge

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

VCAP – Vanuatu Coastal Adaptation Project

Contents

Executive Summary

This project report is a review of Vanuatu Forestry and Coastal Protection Policy Framework. Vanuatu requires an integrated Forestry and coastal Protection Policy Framework now due to combined impacts from anthropogenic pressures include climate change threatening the ability to coastal ecosystems to protect communities from habitat degradation, development, pollution, overexploitation triggering losses in habitat coverage across numerous coastal ecosystems.

The pressure of future hazard increase from climate change including sea level rising, increasing intensity and longer duration of hurricanes seasons, increasing temperatures and changing precipitations patterns draw alarm to the capacity of natural ecosystems ability to protect communities. Moreover, previously degraded forest coverage and coastal ecosystem are experiencing further degrade, for example, increase in wave height from climate change causing soil erosion to affect mangroves affecting coastal ecosystem.

There is value in the opportunity to combine forest and coastal ecosystem protection under a single NbS-aligned framework. Both are essential to supporting the well-being of the population that relies on them for their livelihood, cultural identity and environmental security.

This forestry and coastal Protection Policy Framework report provides clarity regarding strategy and evidence-based roadmap for resilience from implementation of NbS. The framework aligns with Vanuatu's national priorities under the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy, NSDP, REDD++ Strategy and international commitments such as Paris Agreement, SDGs, and the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Critical intervention areas are identified to direct focused investment to deliver measurable outcomes with high impact.

Priority areas are:

1. Restoration of landscape and reforestation
2. Rehabilitation of Mangroves and coastal vegetation
3. Management of community-based natural resources
4. Climate-resilient livelihoods and ecosystem-based adaption
5. Capacity development for authorities regarding environmental governance and enforcement

This framework highlights its advantages through carbon sequestration, disaster risk reduction, sustainable economic opportunities, biodiversity conservation and food and water security. Moreover, it brings to the forefront the vital governance institutions and systems of customary land tenure with community leadership interventions.

The various financing options include blended finance, donor engagement and public-private partnerships. The framework emphasises transparency, monitoring and alignment with NbS global standards.

Stakeholders will benefit from this policy framework as it provides a coherent platform for Vanuatu's continued trajectory toward resilient nature-based focus.

1. Introduction

This project is a component of the MFAT-funded Promoting Pacific Islands Nature-based Solutions (PPIN) project (Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga). The four major partners include IUCN (standards, coordination), SPREP (policy framework), SPC (capacity building) and GGGI (CBA of NbS, development of Vanuatu NAP).

Nature Based Solutions are defined by the International Union of the Conservation of Nature as:

> 'actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems, which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services and resilience and biodiversity benefits'.[1]

This definition indicates the challenges are not only limited to societal pressures but also from natural disasters, social and economic development, food security, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, human health and climate change.

A key factor of NbS is that it consciously and deliberately involves natural functions of habitats and ecosystems to address problems not limited to loss of biodiversity alone. This report focuses on opportunities for NbS integration into the policy instruments within the Forestry and Coastal legal framework of Vanuatu.

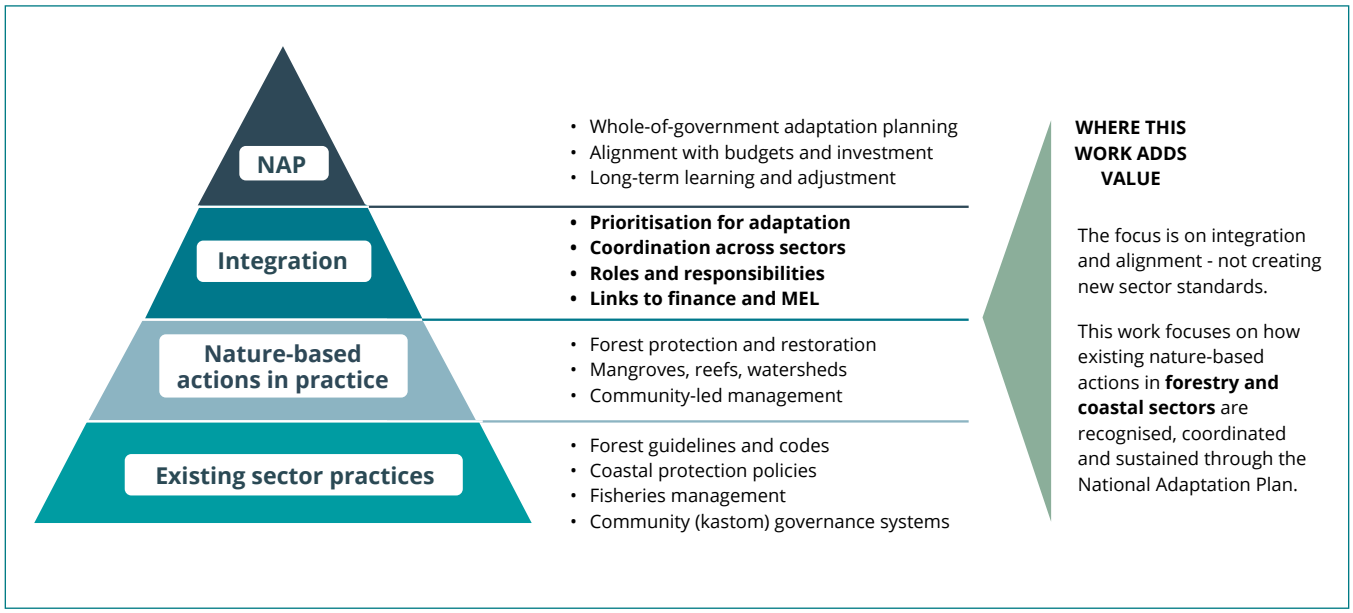

Figure 1. Where this project sits in the NAP process

1 Walters, Gretchen Marie. 2016. Nature-Based Solutions to Address Global Societal Challenges. Nature-Based Solutions to Address Global Societal Challenges. https://doi.org/10.2305/iucn.ch.2016.13.en.

2. Methodology

This review was prepared under the Promoting Pacific Islands Nature-based Solutions (PPIN) project to support implementation of Vanuatu's National Adaptation Plan. Its purpose is straightforward: to examine whether existing forestry and coastal protection policies are fit for purpose when it comes to delivering NbS at scale, and to identify where better alignment is needed.

Rather than proposing new policies, the review works with what already exists. Many NbS are already being implemented on the ground through forestry, coastal management, conservation, and disaster risk reduction initiatives. The task here is to connect these efforts more clearly to national adaptation planning.

The analysis is based on a review of legislation, policies, strategies, and guidelines relevant to forestry, coastal protection, climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, and land-use planning. It also draws on experience from ongoing NbS-related initiatives and lessons from across the Pacific. Scoping reviews and literature reviews were undertaken including community-based approaches to identify NbS gaps and opportunities for forestry and resilience sectors. These also provided a base to identify and map existing relevant documentation. The seven-point NbS integration framework in the NAP is used as the organising lens throughout the report.

Key documents were used to guide the integration framework including the SPREP Pacific NAP Guidelines (2022), SPC (2025) Promoting Nature-based Solutions in the Pacific: Key Insights and Recommendations 2025, Vanuatu's Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), and evaluations from regional programs including Kiwa Initiative, PEBACC+, and MACBLUE.

3. Mapping of existing policy instruments

3.1 Overview of Forestry and Coastal Protection Sectors in Vanuatu

Forests play a central role in Vanuatu's environmental and social systems. They regulate water flows, reduce erosion, protect soils, and support food security and rural livelihoods. For many communities, forests are also closely tied to kastom, identity, and social organisation. These functions make forests one of the country's most important natural assets for climate adaptation.

Most forests are held under customary ownership, which shapes how they are managed and protected. Community forestry, agroforestry, and traditional stewardship practices already reflect many NbS principles, even if they are not described in those terms. At the same time, pressures from logging, agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, and climate extremes are increasing.

Coastal ecosystems are equally critical. Mangroves, reefs, seagrasses, beaches, and coastal forests protect shorelines, reduce wave energy, and sustain fisheries and tourism. With much of the population living close to the coast, climate impacts such as sea-level rise, erosion, and storm surge pose direct risks to lives and infrastructure.

While hard engineering solutions have often been used to address these risks, there is growing recognition that ecosystem-based and hybrid approaches are often more effective and sustainable over the long term. These approaches also align closely with customary marine tenure systems, tabu areas, and community-based management.

3.2 Policy and Legal Framework for Forestry and Coastal Protection

3.2.1 Forestry Sector

The Forestry Act no. 31 of 2019 establishes the requirements and other explanatory material for the roles and responsibilities of Forestry Development Committee, forest protection, harvesting controls and importantly, compliance and controls. The Act is designed to "provide for the protection, development and sustainable management of forests in Vanuatu and for related purposes". The Act is supported by the National Forestry Policy (2013–2023), which places strong emphasis on community participation, conservation, and climate resilience. Together with the REDD+ Readiness Strategy, these instruments provide a solid legal and policy basis for NbS in the forestry sector. However, gaps remain, particularly around long-term monitoring, carbon accounting, and consistent integration with climate adaptation planning.

Environment Protection and Conservation Act [CAP 283] is the umbrella environment law and, similar to the Forestry Act, it provides for biodiversity conservation, permits, compliance and enforcement – however its critical feature for NbS monitoring is the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Community Conservation Areas. Environmental impact assessment is well established at the project level, but strategic planning tools such as Strategic Environmental Assessment are not yet systematically applied.

Vanuatu National Forestry Policy (2013-2023) encapsulates the protection of biodiversity and forest cover and responds to climate change while elevating the importance of community contribution to its implementation. It establishes a standard for strong commitment to ecological sustainability, participatory governance and resilience. The strength and uniqueness of this policy is that it categorises by short term, medium term or long-term urgency with timelines for implementation.

The table below shows a comparative alignment table for how the National Forest Policy (2013-2023) aligns with UN REDD+ and FAO principles.

Table 1. National Forest Policy alignment

	Vanuatu National Forest Policy (2013–2023)	UN REDD+ Framework	FAO Sustainable Forest Management Guidelines
Principles & Objectives	Forestry management for future sustainable use	Overall aim to reduce emissions by discouraging deforestation and degradation through finance incentives of carbon trading	Enhance economic, social and environmental values for forests sustainable use
Climate Change	Has guidelines that align to climate adaptation, mitigation and conservation of habitat.	Focus on carbon credits to climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience.	Promotion of forest regeneration as pivotal for climate adaptation and resilience
Community Participation	Features customary land owners and community participation through traditional governance systems	Address competing land use interests from stakeholders – engages customary land owners	Emphasises customary land owner participation and use of traditional knowledge for forest management
Conservation & Biodiversity	Engagement with custom owners for preservation of taboo reserved areas for future sustainable use	Emphasis on reduction of deforestation and promotes biodiversity.	Stresses ecosystem focus through biodiversity conservation in management of forest
Economic & Rural Development	Focus on nature conservation for both economic and ecological gains targeting rural areas	Addresses poverty alleviation to enhance livelihoods	Promotes social and economic development through addressing ecological sustainability
Implementation Strategy	Prioritised by urgency featuring short, medium and long-term strategies	Timelines and stakeholder responsibility identified in National Plans to be phased and monitored	Needs good policy frameworks and monitoring guidelines with clear responsibilities
Integration with Other Policies	Integrated with national development & environment policies	Should be integrated with other climate action plans and policies	Linked to other National policies to achieve systemic deforestation and food production goals
Focus Area	Vanuatu National Forest Policy (2013–2023)	UN REDD+ Framework	FAO Sustainable Forest Management Guidelines
Vision & Principles	Forests managed sustainably, equitably, and profitably for national well-being	Reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, enhance carbon stocks	Promote sustainable use, conservation, and equitable benefit-sharing
Climate Change	Explicit strategies for adaptation & mitigation	Central focus: carbon sequestration, climate mitigation	Recognises forests as key for climate resilience
Community Participation	Strong emphasis on landowner & community involvement	Requires stakeholder engagement, safeguards for indigenous rights	Encourages participatory forest management
Conservation & Biodiversity	Protection of conservation sites with full landowner participation	Supports biodiversity through reduced deforestation	Calls for biodiversity conservation as part of forest management
Economic & Rural Development	Forest-based rural development to improve livelihoods	Promotes co-benefits like sustainable livelihoods	Balances economic growth with ecological sustainability
Implementation Strategy	Prioritised by urgency (short, medium, long-term)	National strategies must be phased and monitored	Requires clear policy frameworks and monitoring systems
Integration with Other Policies	Harmonised with national development & environment policies	Integrated with national climate strategies	Linked to broader sustainable development goals

Source: Government of Vanuatu Forestry Policy, SPREP Vanuatu Policy Portal, UNEP/FAOLEX Policy Summary

A potential gap identified from the table above is carbon accounting. Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forestry Degradation (REDD++) is a mechanism for developing countries to reduce deforestation and increase their carbon stocks for financial incentives. This is carbon accounting in summary, however, this forestry policy is broad and does not go into technical details about monitoring of carbon levels. Thus, this space is an opportunity for international funding initiatives.

Another issue preventing carbon projects is land ownership type. Only leased land (9.3% of total) allows for structuring of carbon projects as it allows for a separate property right which allows for carbon trading, however, unleased or customary land (89.7%) in Vanuatu is difficult to perform this contract arrangement.[2] In contrast, the Forest Policy places critical emphasis on landowner rights and development in rural areas compared to other Pacific Island countries and this efficiently aligns to FAO's participatory principles of recognising the land tenure system of Vanuatu.

Currently Vanuatu has been developing its own REDD+ readiness program through REDD+ Strategy (2017) which is ongoing and the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2016-2030, updated 2022-2030). A challenge for REDD++ is that the Forestry Rights Registration and Timber Harvest Guarantee Act 2000 is not a framework that permits customary landowners from entering into contracts to transact for carbon rights from their forests. This is because the Forestry Rights Registration and Timber Harvest Guarantee (FRRTHG) Act (2000) recognises only leased land not non-leased customary land and thus prevents creation of a separate property right for carbon credits being recognised for trade.[2] The REDD+ Readiness Strategy further strengthens the policy landscape by linking forest management to carbon, biodiversity and climate objectives. Collectively, these instruments create a strong enabling environment for forestry-based NbS, particularly reforestation, agroforestry, watershed protection and conservation.

3.2.2 Coastal Resilience Sector

Coastal protection is governed through a mix of disaster risk, fisheries, environment, and climate legislation, including the **Disaster Risk Management Act (2019**), the Vanuatu Fisheries Act (2014), and the Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act. **The Fisheries Act (No.10 of 2014)** underpins management of marine reserves and sustainable fishing practices. Policy instruments such as the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy and the draft National Ocean Policy promote integrated and ecosystem-based approaches, though implementation remains uneven.

The implementation of NbS coastal sector resilience landscape is further guided by the framework through legislations: Meteorology, Geological Hazards and Climate Change Act 2016 (MGH&CC Act) and Disaster Risk Management Act (DRMA) (2019). The MGH&CC Act (2016) is integral for establishing scientific and institutional basis for climate and hazard monitoring while the DRMA (2019) embraces community governance structures for disaster preparedness with specific practice on response and recovery. These frameworks provide legality to NbS activities listed prior and can respond to a multitude of environmental and socioeconomic challenges beyond adaptation and climate change. The legislation is an entry point for funding and are opportunities for integration into national adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies.

The Coastal and Climate Policy Framework is legislated by the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018-2030), the National Ocean Policy (VNOP2) and the Vanuatu Marine Spatial Plan. The purpose of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018-2030) was to "articulate Vanuatu's vision, principles, strategic goals, priorities and strategies for climate change and disaster risk reduction; provide the framework for mainstreaming climate change and disaster risk reduction into sustainable development processes."[3] It promotes integrated EbAs to resilience. Coastal zoning and foreshore development is regulated by the Foreshore Development Act [Cap 90] however NbS still need to be integrated explicitly into these processes. The National Ocean Policy is oriented to link coastal governance and establishes a marine spatial plan for managing tourism, fisheries and conservation.

[2] Background analysis of REDD+ and carbon rights in Vanuatu (2012)

[3] Government of Vanuatu. (2015). Vanuatu climate change and disaster risk reduction policy 2016-2030. Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

Recently, the Oceans Act 2025 was passed by the legislature and gazetted on November 18th 2025. This framework is significant for recognising traditional cultural practices and recognises the cultural governance of community chiefs in managing and protecting marine resources – effectively returning custodianship of coast and ocean back to traditional communities. The Act also sets up a National Ocean Council that oversees Vanuatu's Ocean space, co-ordinate plans and marine governance. It is evident this Act seeks to place cultural knowledge and traditional coastal management back to customary landowners. This is evident by the establishment of Taboo areas where fishing rights are restricted. In-effect, this Act contains elements of the united National Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples by recognising that "indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contribute to sustainable and equitable and proper management of the environment."[4]

The Environment Protection and Conservation Act [Cap283] establishes safeguards for ecosystems and provides the framework for environmental impact assessment. It also provides legal backing for Community Conservation Areas to protect natural resources.

4 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, preamble.

4. Assessment of NbS integration

4.1 How Nature-based Solutions are already working in practice

In Vanuatu, Nature-based Solutions are not new or externally imposed ideas. They are already being applied through a range of programmes and initiatives that combine customary practice, community leadership, government support and development partner financing. What is often missing is explicit recognition of these efforts as NbS, and clearer linkage to national policy frameworks, including forestry and coastal protection.
NbS principles are already embedded across both the forestry and coastal sectors although not termed explicitly. Kastom conservation, agroforestry and community conservation areas all seek to protect restore and sustainably manage natural resources. These, all reflect core NbS types for land or terrestrial systems, while coral reef conservation, marine protected areas, mangrove protection and reforestation, as well as hybrid coastal protection are typical of the coastal NbS.

4.2 Governance and NbS

Three main aspects have been identified to influence the governance, shaping, framing and implementation of NbS. Framing of NbS is important because it can be defined and thus, be measured.

Firstly, there is the interplay between the priority of focus for Donors/Partners and the complexity by the techno-market methods or introduction of technology into marketing to get better results. Secondly, the perception of risk and uncertainty and sustainability of the project when faced with challenges. Thirdly, whether participation and roles of different parties involved in the implementation of NbS are understood.

4.2.1 Technoscientific and market-oriented approaches (Top-down)

Over the last decade, it can be seen that the primary driver by international organisations for implementation of NbS in informal settlements in the Pacific region addressing the effects of climate change.[5] [6] There is a market for creating assets like carbon and biodiversity which includes "green finance" initiatives that aim to place economic value on natural resources.[7] Framing NbS to align to technocentric and market-oriented objectives is "putting a price on nature".[8] International organisations providing finance are invested in measurable outcomes and will secure investments tied to green finance. There is therefore a conflict in values, whether prioritising measurable financial returns, i.e., Carbon and biodiversity, or agreeing to community-based approaches that come with inherent risks. When sustainability efforts focus mainly on targets and indicators, the wider links between climate change can be overlooked, while attention shifts towards new climate models and technological solutions.[9] This approach emphasises a top-down approach and neglects the perspectives and opinions of what is actually needed on the ground from community participants who are usually marginalised.[10]

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[5] SPREP, 2018. 'Planning for Ecosystem-Based Adaptation in Port Vila, Vanuatu'. Synthesis Report. Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme,, Apia, Samoa. ⟨https://www.international-climate-initiative.com/fileadmin/Dokumente /2018/180801_Synthesis_Report_EbA_Vanuatu.pdf⟩

[6] Satterthwaite, David, Archer, Diane, Colenbrander, Sasrah, Dodman, David, Hardoy, Jorgelina, Mitlin, Diana, Patel, Sheela, 2020. Building resilience to climate change in informal settlements. One Earth 2 (2), 143–156. https://doi.org/10.1016/ j.oneear.2020.02.002.

[7] UNEP. 2023. State of Finance for Nature. United Nations Environment Programme. Online at: ⟨https://www.unep.org/resources/report/state-finance-nature

[8] Costanza, R., d'Arge, R., De Groot, R., Farber, S., Grasso, M., Hannon, B., Limburg, K., Naeem, S., O'neill, R.V., Paruelo, J., Raskin, R.G., 1997. The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital. nature 387 (6630), 253–260.

[9] Devine-Wright, P., Whitmarsh, L., Gatersleben, B., O'Neill, S., Hartley, S., Burningham, K., Sovacool, B., Barr, S., Anable, J., 2022. Placing people at the heart of climate action. PLOS Clim. 1 (5), e0000035.

[10] Martin, A., Fischer, A., McMorran, R., 2023. Who decides? The governance of rewilding in Scotland 'between the cracks': Community participation, public engagement, and partnerships. J. Rural Stud. 98, 80–91.

4.2.2. Infrastructure and Technology

Published IPCC reports suggest that NbS projects should also consider cultural processes, individual choices and infrastructure design choices.[11] Adaptation models considered should be informed by indigenous knowledge and local knowledge. Policy mixes that include contingent finance and reserve funds and integrating climate adaptation into societal protection programs such as cash transfers and public works programs will increase resilience and indicate willingness for integrating top-down and bottom-up approach.

4.2.3. Regulatory/Legal: Risk and Uncertainty - Social dimension – bottom-up approach

Managing risks and uncertainty in land ownership for projects remains a critical factor in Vanuatu. Time pressure to meet funding requirements and for delivering outcomes usually clashes with timings of local Land ownership disputes which can take up to 10 years. Issues affecting land Cases are internal conflicts within parties, chiefly title disputes and external parties claiming lease benefits.[12] Not only does Vanuatu have a three-tier hierarchy of common law courts but there is also the customary dispute resolution mechanisms that follow customary laws and procedures.[13] This gives rise to the issue of control and who should lead the project – whether there should be centralised or decentralised approaches? There is growing consensus that bottom-up governance is more appropriate than a top-down approach.

The table below shows relationship between customary sanctions and coastal ecosystem protection:

Table 2. Relationship between customary sanctions and coastal ecosystem protection

Type of Rule	Statutory Penalties	Customary Sanctions	Future Plans
Fishing without a license / illegal fishing in EEZ	Heavy fines (up to millions of vatu), imprisonment, vessel confiscation	Chiefs may ban offender from fishing grounds, enforce restitution	Plans to strengthen monitoring, integrate kastom sanctions into national law
Use of prohibited gear (e.g., dynamite, poison, fine nets)	Monetary fines, seizure of gear, possible imprisonment	Loss of reputation in community, exclusion from fishing, obligation to repair damage	Expand community-based surveillance, increase penalties for destructive gear
Violation of conservation zones / marine reserves	License suspension or revocation, fines, prosecution	Enforcement of tabu areas, offenders barred from ceremonies	Formal recognition of tabu areas in national law, joint enforcement with chiefs
Repeat offenses / commercial-scale violations	Escalating fines, longer imprisonment, blacklisting from licenses	Stronger social sanctions, permanent exclusion from resource use	Regional cooperation through FFA/WCPFC, harsher penalties for IUU fishing
General disrespect of fisheries rules	Administrative penalties, court action	Customary reconciliation ceremonies (nakamal), offenders provide pigs/ kava	Strengthen education and awareness, integrate kastom reconciliation with formal enforcement

[11] IPCC Summary for Policymakers

[12] Land Disputation in Vanuatu

[13] Conflict Management and Access to Justice in Rural Vanuatu Report (Canberra, 2016) 6: Conflict Management and Access to Justice in Rural Vanuatu | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

4.3 Community-Centred Approaches

In Vanuatu, NbS is centered on local customary resource management. This places primary responsibility with traditional governance called "kastom" to protect the ecosystem. An example of this bottom-up approach from the grass roots level is the Santo Sunset environment Network (SSEN). It is described as an indigenous led project with a multi-pronged approach to climate adaptation across 42 villages on the west coast of Santo – with community-based solutions such as restoring ecosystems and reviving traditional agriculture to expanding Digicel connectivity and building disaster preparedness.[14] It is supported by UNDP-Adaptation Fund climate Innovation Accelerator (AFCIA).

Another community led approach in Vanuatu, including a select few Pacific countries is Kiwa Initiative Projects(2020-present). Partners of the project include France, European Union, Canada, New Zealand and Australia and implementing partners include SPC, SPREP and IUCN-ORO. Its focus in Vanuatu is on Shefa and Sanma Province for mangrove and coastal ecosystem restoration and establishing community-managed agroforestry and sustainable fishing networks, replanting 18 hectares of mangroves and restoring 10 hectares of coral reef. Integration of customary governance is also a key factor in this project.[15]

4.3.1 Community Based Adaptation

The emphasis on indigenous participation, use of traditional knowledge and use of cultural governance systems to monitor and maintain NbS implementation projects is prominent in the Pacific Region. Climate adaption choices based on geographical and context-specific innovation are desired however the challenges of institutional silos and donor funding cycle and duration are prominent.

4.4 Current Applications of NbS Principles in Vanuatu

Although publications for NbS and EbA activities in Vanuatu are limited, this assessment identified several activities reflecting NbS occurring on islands of Vanuatu. The examples below are consistent with those referenced in the NbS–NAP Integration Guidance and illustrate how NbS is already being delivered on the ground.

4.4.1. Tagabe Catchment and Riparian Restoration (Efate)

Restoration activities in the Tagabe catchment provide one of the clearest examples of NbS in practice. These initiatives have been implemented through successive programmes, including PACRES and PEBACC/PEBACC+, coordinated by SPREP with strong involvement from the Department of Forestry (DoF), communities and local authorities. Funding has been provided through the Kiwa Initiative, supported by the European Union, AFD, FFEM, Global Affairs Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Work in the Tagabe area has focused on riparian reforestation, nursery establishment and agroforestry practices to stabilise riverbanks, reduce erosion and flooding, improve water quality, and strengthen water security for Port Vila. These interventions demonstrate how restoring ecosystem function can deliver tangible climate adaptation outcomes while supporting livelihoods.

Key lessons include the importance of long-term community engagement, sustained technical support, and clear institutional roles to maintain momentum beyond individual project cycles.

4.4.2. Agroforestry and Community Forestry Approaches

Agroforestry initiatives promoted through PEBACC+ and forestry extension services illustrate how NbS can be embedded within everyday land-use practices. By integrating trees into farming systems, communities improve soil stability, reduce runoff and diversify livelihoods, while also contributing to climate resilience and forest conservation objectives.

These approaches align directly with the Forestry Act's provisions for community forest areas and demonstrate how forestry policy can serve as a delivery mechanism for NbS when implementation guidance is aligned with adaptation outcomes.

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[14] How climate adaptation in Vanuatu is protecting forests, oceans and communities | UNDP Climate Change Adaptation

[15] Fifteen new local projects launched under the Kiwa Initiative to strengthen Pacific resilience through Nature-based Solution - News | IUCN

4.4.3. Coastal Ecosystem Restoration and Protection under VCAP II

The Vanuatu Coastal Adaptation Project Phase II (VCAP II), led by the Department of Climate Change and supported by UNDP with funding from the Global Environment Facility and the Least Developed Countries Fund, provides further examples of NbS in coastal settings. The project supports community-led conservation and restoration of coastal and nearshore ecosystems, including mangroves and reef-associated habitats, while strengthening institutional capacity for integrated coastal management.
VCAP II reinforces the role of ecosystems as protective infrastructure, complementing physical adaptation measures and reducing long-term exposure to coastal hazards.

4.4.4. Ridge-to-Reef and Marine Ecosystem Management Initiatives

Ridge-to-reef approaches supported through initiatives such as MACBIO/MACBLUE and the By-catch and Integrated Ecosystem Management (BIEM) programme under the Pacific-EU Marine Partnership illustrate how marine and coastal NbS are already being applied. These initiatives support mangrove and seagrass management, marine protected areas, blue carbon assessments and fisheries co-management, contributing to coastal resilience, food security and biodiversity conservation.
Across these examples, NbS delivery has been enabled by a combination of customary governance, sector legislation, donor support and inter-agency collaboration. Recognising these initiatives explicitly as NbS strengthens their policy relevance and supports scaling and replication.
Efate and Tanna islands were also beneficiaries of SPREP's coastal management and riparian restoration approach through the PEBACC+ project (SPC & SPREP, 2024). Below is a summary table of NbS projects within the forestry and coastal protection sector in Vanuatu.

Table 3. Summary of forestry and coastal protection NbS projects

Project Name	Island	Key NbS Activities	Community Groups Leading
1. Kiwa Initiative – Coastal Ecosystem Restoration	Efate and outer islands	Mangrove planting, coral reef protection, women-led eco-enterprises	Women's groups, local councils, village leaders
2. SPREP PEBACC+ Learning Exchange (Port Vila)	Efate, Tagabe River	Sharing NbS practices, strengthening ecosystem-based adaptation	Community reps from Port Vila, NGOs
3. Kiwa Initiative – Forest & Agroforestry Resilience Project	Santo	Forest conservation, agroforestry, watershed management	Village councils, youth groups, farmers
4. Community Watershed Management Program (local councils)	Santo	Flood prevention, reforestation	Local councils, farmers
5. PEBACC+ Community NbS	Tanna (Lenakel & Port Resolution)	Tabu marine zones, reforestation on volcanic soils	Chiefs, customary leaders, local NGOs
6. Kiwa Initiative – Marine Resource Management	Torres Islands	Community marine reserves, coastal protection	Remote island communities, traditional governance
7. Agroforestry & Biodiversity Restoration Project (SPC/FAO)	Malekula, Ambrym, Paama	Agroforestry blending food crops with native trees, biodiversity restoration	Farmers, cooperatives, village committees
8. SPREP: PEUMP BIEM project	Malekula, Pentecost, Tongoa	Sustainable use of coastal and marine biodiversity through management of ridge to reef ecosystems and fisheries by-catch	Village Communities

4.5 General Gaps and Opportunities in NbS

Key gaps in NbS are linked to visibility and coordination. This creates challenges in tracking contributions to adaptive outcomes and even to obtaining sustainable financing. Government agencies operate in parallel rather than collaboratively, which creates overlaps, duplication of activities, uncertainty around coordination and fragmented monitoring systems. NbS is not explicitly mainstreamed in all sector policies, financing is project-based and not programmatic and there are weak MEL systems.

Opportunities exist, as the existing legislation provides a sufficient mandate to strengthen NbS. Intent needs to be clarified, guidance requires strengthening and links between sector planning, budgeting and implementation can be improved. There is also opportunity to align NbS with Vanuatu's Climate Change Policy, develop an NbS financing strategy and build government capacity in NbS project development.

4.5.1 Sector Specific Gaps and Opportunities for NbS

4.5.1.1 Forestry Sector

The forestry sector offers multiple entry points for NbS, including reforestation, agroforestry, watershed protection, and conservation. Key challenges include land tenure disputes, limited financing, capacity constraints, and fragmented monitoring systems. Addressing these challenges requires treating forestry NbS as long-term investments rather than short-term projects, strengthening coordination across agencies, and embedding NbS maintenance within provincial and community planning.

The aim of NbS in Forestry is to address the challenges of deforestation, water quality and access, and soil erosion. Other threats identified by SPC (2025) include climate change, urbanisation, plantation expansions, customary land ownership, technical capacity and financing for scaling community-based NbS projects.

Common gaps to address include - as for coastal resilience - land tenure, governance coordination, funding access and reliability and technical expertise and capacity. There is also deforestation pressures from agriculture; invasive species; lack of reforestation skills and unclear carbon rights.

Opportunities include - Agroforestry for food and climate resilience; community forest carbon projects; ridge-to-reef watershed restoration. Examples of NbS projects include community led reforestation (with focus on ecosystems over timber production) and afforestation projects, forest conservation including protecting mangroves.

4.5.1.2 Coastal Protection Sector

Coastal protection faces unique pressures, particularly from tourism and infrastructure development. Hard engineering solutions can provide short-term protection but often create new problems over time. Nature-based and hybrid approaches offer more flexible solutions, but their effectiveness depends on good planning, strong safeguards, and community support. Strengthening the role of strategic environmental assessment would help ensure that NbS are considered early in decision-making.

The SPC (2025) report identified that the current threats to coastal ecosystems are climate change, unsustainable coastal infrastructure, coastal erosion, pollution, sedimentation, overfishing, invasive species, loss of tradition management knowledge and unsustainable tourism.

Gaps include resolving land disputes and conflicts, governance coordination, establishing reliable funding mechanisms, limited technical capacity, mangrove and coastal restoration initiatives implemented in silos, and hard infrastructure dominance.

Opportunities identified include scaling successful community led restoration projects, developing blue carbon projects, and integrating mangrove protection into regulations and DRR strategies.

The tables below summarise the gaps (Table 4) and opportunities (Table 5) identified in NbS.

Table 4. Summary of Gaps in NbS

Gap	Details	Impact	Priority Ranking
Financing	Reliance on donors, lack of private sector	Projects remain small scale	High
Policy Integration	Weak Mainstreaming into national plans	Fragmented efforts	High
Capacity	Limited local technical expertise	Dependance on external actors -specialists' departure at end f project leaves a gap of knowledge to tap into	Medium
Community Engagement	Customary land/ resources systems	Risk of inequitable outcomes	Medium
Monitoring	Few standardised indicators	Hard to measure success	Medium
Understanding of climate Variability	Cyclones, sea-level rise	Threatens NbS effectiveness	High
Addressing Food Security concerns	Climate shocks undermine agriculture	Risk to livelihoods	High
Addressing urban challenges	Land-use conflicts, shortage of space, zoning and foreshore development conflicts	Limits NbS in cities	Medium
Promoting long-term sustainability of projects	Prominence of short-term funding	Projects may collapse	High

Table 5. Summary of Opportunities in NbS

Opportunity	NbS Example in Action	Potential Benefit
Community Management	Tabu areas, local governance	Stronger resilience, cultural alignment
Coastal Restoration	Mangrove planting, reef rehabilitation	Disaster Risk reduction, fisheries support
Address food security	Agroforestry, climate-smart agriculture	Resilient livelihoods, soil health
Address urban adaptation	Wetlands, green corridors	Flood control, wellbeing
Disaster Risk Reduction	Forest buffers, mangroves	Lower cyclone damage costs
Climate Finance	GCF, eco-tourism partnerships	Long-term funding, private sector engagement

5. Stakeholder insights

This section provides a summary of perspectives gathered during consultation visits, highlighting priorities, challenges, and recommendations.

NGOs - A common theme is capacity building at the local governance level and the need for a mandatory element for central government sectors to conduct training and financial support after project duration ends. Currently the use of Community Based Organisations (CBO) and primary and junior secondary schools by organisations such as VANGO provide an entry point into communities to operate nurseries for native resilience plants such as mangroves, Vetiva grass, and ornamental plants. These CBOs function as businesses that are established to sell the plants for continual operations. VANGO and forestry department collaborate for capacity building and agriculture education.[16]

Currently a reporting template is being formalised so CBOs and civil society Organisation/ NGO' s can report their activities to VANGO who then pass it on to the Department of Strategic Planning, Policy and Aid Coordination (DSPPAC).

Overall, both practitioners and policy makers believe people-centred frameworks have more chance of being embraced by communities resulting in wide scale systemic implementation compared to top-down, technocratic or bureaucratic models. However, a concern highlighted is that if too much focus in is on livelihoods the NbS focus can be lost among "other" livelihood projects.

Forestry Sector – NbS principles are not new and form the backbone of Vanuatu's traditional natural resource management systems. The main component highlighted in NbS that the Forestry sector seeks to support is community participation and strengthening the role of local traditional governance systems and custom ownership. The enabling tool for this is the Kastom Conservation Areas, where traditional owners of resources are supported to take the lead in managing their resources though the application of Kastom principles and by-laws.

Fisheries Sector – Marine Protected Areas are regulated under the Fisheries Act and govern the protection of marine ecosystems. One of the main challenges highlighted is the lack of coordination and coherence among the government departments on projects with similar objectives, resulting in duplication of efforts and fragmented knowledge databases.

The Department of Local Authorities are not directly involved in NbS project implementation however they are the crucial mediators between central government implementing agencies and the local communities at the project site. They provide the necessary tools and human resources for communication and take on the role of overseeing the continuation of the projects, through their local area councils and administration. A key issue identified is the need for more coordination and involvement of the provincial and area councils in management of NbS projects from the early conception stages right through to the end of project funding and beyond.

DEPC reports the need for NbS to include livelihood components that seek to maintain or enhance the wellbeing of local communities when designing, developing and implementing NbS projects. A common occurrence during resource conservation projects in communities, is the lack of alternative income sources and incentives for the local communities to sustain livelihoods financially. If not managed well, this can create conflict and imbalance within community structures. Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) are a potential entry point for the integration of NbS and are also covered in the EPC Act. They are intended to primarily empower local communities to take ownership of the management of their resources and access government support for enforcement and compliance. While there has already been 16 officially declared CCAs, some communities are hesitant to register as CCAs due to misunderstanding of the purpose and objectives of CCAs. There is a need for greater awareness of the purpose, role and process of CCAs and capacity to support communities on the ground is often a challenge. Another entry point for NbS is through Environmental Impact

[16] Home - VANGO

Assessment (EIA) regulations under the EPC Act. Preliminary Environmental Assessments (PEAs) undertaken by the government agencies can include an assessment of NbS principles applied or which need to be taken into consideration.

The Foreshore Development Act administered by the DUAP, requires ministerial consent for any foreshore development. The processes for decision-making by the minister rely heavily upon the assessment and advice of the respective permitting authorities. This places responsibility on the authorities to strengthen regulations and explicitly mention and integrate NbS into relevant legislation and policy.

A stakeholder validation workshop was held on the 5th of February 2026 to validate the findings from the Forestry and Coastal Protection Policy Review as well as gather insights from stakeholders on the current status and progress of NbS integration into policy frameworks.

Figure 2. Stakeholder validation workshop

5.1 Emerging Overarching Themes

The overarching themes recurring during discussions included:

5.1.1. Policy Gaps

NbS cannot be scaled if the undergirding policy instruments are outdated, inconsistent or unclear. The National Forest Policy has lapsed in 2023 and requires an urgent review. Overlapping legislation in forestry, environment, foreshore development, urban planning and water need to be harmonised and a unified NbS framing to be embedded across departmental frameworks.

5.1.2. Governance Gaps

Vertical coordination from national to provincial to area councils to nakamals / communities / custom landowners is weak.

5.1.3. NbS Success is strongly linked to Customary Land Ownership and Leadership

Where there is strong and impartial leadership, NbS implementation is successful. However, if land ownership is unclear or bypassed, projects often fail. NbS success also depends on women, youth and chief collaboration and engagement, clear land ownership and governance legitimacy. Technical design alone cannot guarantee NbS success.

5.1.4. Complex Processes in accessing Funding (Bottlenecks and Red Tape)

Often the institutional structures for financing projects undermine adaptation delivery. Stakeholders expressed concerns and frustrations regarding the complex and bureaucratic systems for accessing funding.

5.1.5. The need for transitioning from 'Projects' to 'Delivery Systems'

NbS needs to be framed as climate resilience initiatives, rather than simply conservation activity. This is important because it changes the way NbS is valued in national planning, strengthens cross sector integration, improves access to funding and investment and supports long term maintenance and management.

5.1.6. Legal and regulatory Gaps

Compliance and regulatory enforcement mechanisms are often not sufficient to protect implemented NbS.

5.1.7. Need for Holistic thinking and Approaches in NbS (e.g., Ridge to Reef Approach)

NbS must be embedded in catchment to reef and ridge to reef frameworks. It is important to look at the comprehensive ecosystem because of the interlink and interactions between all ecosystems.

5.1.8. Need for Continued Dialogue and Open Forum for NbS

Stakeholders highlighted the need for political and social consensus-building, and the inclusion of the Lands Department, Malvautmauri Council of Chiefs, and Private Sector who are involved in real estate, particularly in developments along the foreshore.

5.2 Sector Specific Themes

5.2.1 Forestry Sector

1. Urgent review of the National Forest Policy is needed
2. Clarification of Mangrove mandates and authority to legally administer and enforce regulations
3. Develop alternative Finance Pathways for Community Forestry
4. Multi-level Governance integration

5.2.2 Coastal Protection Sector

1. Institutionalisation of Coastal NbS by embedding NbS into formal systems that guide coastal planning, governance and investment. Policy and legal recognition, integration into planning frameworks, clear mandates and coordination are important to ensure this.
2. Strengthening EIA systems such as regulating EIA consultant accountability through reviewing and vetting of EIA processes, codes of conduct and ethical standards which can help to avoid conflict of interest and corrupt practices which undermine the law
3. Clarify legal Buffer Zones
4. Coastal Planning must also include river and catchment management

Suggestions and recommendations from the participants' feedback included the following:

- Institutionalise NbS Open Forums for ongoing multistakeholder dialogue to clarify how NbS can extend to climate adaptation strategies beyond just management of resources.
- Strengthen national recognition of village fisheries officers within policy frameworks by framing the role as reviving a crucial role previously played by Vanuatu ancestors. This connects them back to their cultural and historical identity. This has proved significant for overcoming Kastom governance issues when issues arise after land sales. The successful case study of Mangaliliu Roawia Marine Conservation project called Grace of the Sea Project highlights this. An opportunity would be to legislate this role into regulation so the responsibilities are not diminished if the land is sold by either the kastom owner or the chief.

- Replicate ecotourism adaptation pathways in other communities following the example case study of Mangaliliu Roawia Marine Conservation project, on Efate.
- Enhance coordination mechanisms across forestry, fisheries, and coastal protection sectors – and clarifying the overlaps especially the definitions from different agencies for “buffers” and “high-water mark.”
- Leadership ethical training at the village and community level should be a priority
- Setting up a regulatory body to regulate EIA consultants is crucial
- Awareness is paramount at the planning stage and consultations must extend beyond the Area Administrator level

6. Strategic recommendations

6.1 Practical Pathways for Strengthening NbS in Forestry and Coastal Protection

This section seeks to align NbS integration with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) (2025) *Promoting Nature-based Solutions in the Pacific: Key Insights and Recommendations while also taking into account Vanuatu stakeholder insights*. The pathways outlined below reflect SPC's core recommendations for Pacific Island countries, including the need to build on existing governance systems, prioritise community leadership, integrate NbS into sector planning and investment, and treat ecosystems as essential infrastructure for resilience.

Strengthening the role of Nature-based Solutions in forestry and coastal protection does not require creating new policy frameworks from scratch. The most effective entry points are already embedded within existing sector policies, planning processes, and institutional arrangements. The task is to make NbS more explicit, more intentional, and more consistently applied.

This approach is consistent with SPC (2025), which emphases that NbS in Pacific Island countries must build on existing governance systems, customary land and marine tenure, and community-led resource management, rather than introducing parallel structures. For Vanuatu, forestry and coastal protection represent precisely the kinds of sectors SPC identifies as practical and politically feasible entry points for scaling NbS.

One clear entry point is **sector policy review and updating cycles**. Forestry and coastal protection policies already reference sustainability, ecosystem protection, and climate resilience. These references can be sharpened by explicitly naming NbS as a preferred approach, in line with SPC's recommendation to move NbS from implicit practice to explicit policy recognition. This can be achieved through targeted amendments to policy objectives and implementation guidance rather than full policy rewrites.

A second entry point lies in **sector planning and investment processes**. Forestry management plans, coastal protection guidelines, and provincial development plans determine how resources are allocated and how risks are addressed. Requiring these instruments to demonstrate consideration of NbS options reflects SPC's emphasis on mainstreaming NbS into everyday planning and budgeting processes, rather than treating them as pilot projects.

Environmental assessment and development approval processes also offer important leverage points. Environmental Impact Assessment already shapes project design in forestry, coastal development and infrastructure. Strengthening EIA guidance to require explicit consideration of NbS alternatives for coastal protection and erosion control aligns with SPC's recommendation to prioritise preventative, ecosystem-based measures before resorting to hard engineering solutions.

Institutional arrangements provide further opportunities. SPC highlights the importance of clear leadership and coordination across agencies involved in land, sea and climate governance. In the Vanuatu context, this means clarifying the respective roles of forestry, environment, fisheries, planning and climate agencies in enabling NbS, while avoiding the creation of new coordination bodies where existing mechanisms can be used more effectively.

At the local level, **community-based mechanisms** remain central. Community forestry agreements, locally managed marine areas, and conservation areas already embody NbS principles. Strengthening technical support, ensuring respect for Free, Prior and Informed Consent, and linking these mechanisms more clearly to sector policy objectives reflects SPC's emphasis on community leadership as the foundation of successful NbS in the Pacific.

Protected areas represent another under-recognised entry point. SPC's regional analysis highlights the role

of protected areas as long-term adaptation assets when they are designed and managed with climate risks in mind. Framing terrestrial and marine protected areas explicitly as NbS within forestry and coastal protection policies helps align conservation objectives with adaptation outcomes and strengthens the case for sustained financing.

Financing and budgeting processes determine whether NbS move beyond intent. Consistent with SPC's recommendations, embedding NbS priorities within sector budgets, public investment plans and donor proposals is essential. Forestry and coastal NbS are well positioned to attract climate finance, biodiversity funding and emerging carbon and blue carbon investments when adaptation and co-benefits are clearly articulated.

Together, these pathways demonstrate that NbS integration in Vanuatu is not about adopting new concepts, but about using existing systems more deliberately. This is fully aligned with regional guidance for Pacific Island countries and reflects how NbS can be scaled in ways that are practical, culturally grounded and institutionally sustainable.

6.2 NbS in Sectoral Planning

The popular consensus is that the prerequisite for effective integration is a positive policy environment at the sectoral level.

Vanuatu's latest National planning shows six strategic sectors: Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Water Management, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Tourism. These sectors are highly dependent on natural ecosystems and therefore they are vulnerable to climate change and natural hazards. Each sector has developed its own policies to meet its requirements to address its objectives. Therefore, individual entry design has to be mapped using a sector specific approach. Coastal Protection sector is cross-sectoral across, Fisheries, DRR and Forestry. The focus of this chapter will be on the vulnerable sectors of Forestry and Coastal Protection

6.2.1 Coastal protection Sector

Key recommendations for the coastal protection sector are:

- Upscaling of demonstrable pilots
- Promoting similar pilot projects in other areas
- Mainstreaming adaptation approaches into sectoral planning process
- Amend existing policies to integrate above recommendations
- Establishing synergies or working groups comprising of different departments

Table 6 shows the comprehensive way in which key policy instruments are identified and how they address key issues, the challenges faced and opportunities.

Table 6. Key policy instruments for Coastal protection sector

Key Policy Instruments (Policies/ Missions/Plans/ Guidelines)	Policy Instrument Type	Key Objectives	Key Issues Addressed	Opportunities for Integration of NbS	Example Projects	Challenges faced in NbS
Environmental Protection and Conservation Act [CAP 283]	Regulatory	- Enforce Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for coastal projects - Protect biodiversity in coastal ecosystems - Prevent marine pollution through regulation - Reduce habitat degradation via conservation measures	Coastal erosion, marine pollution, habitat degradation	Mangrove restoration, coral reef protection, buffer zones	Enforcement of EIA for Port Vila foreshore developments	Limited enforcement capacity, lack of technical expertise, community resistance to restrictions.
Foreshore Development Act	Regulatory	- Regulate construction along foreshore areas - Maintain public access to coastal zones - Prevent unregulated development that causes erosion - Protect natural foreshore assets	Unregulated construction, loss of foreshore	Setback zones, green infrastructure, living shorelines	Regulation of hotel construction along Erakor Lagoon	Pressure from tourism development, weak monitoring, conflicts with landowners.
National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)	Strategic Planning	- Strengthen community resilience to sea level rise - Reduce risks from cyclones and extreme weather - Support vulnerable communities with adaptation strategies - Promote ridge-to-reef approaches for integrated coastal protection	Sea level rise, cyclone impacts, vulnerable communities	Community mangrove planting, ridge-to-reef approaches	Coastal adaptation planning in Tafea Province	Funding constraints, limited local capacity, climate variability impacts.

Key Policy Instruments (Policies/ Missions/Plans/ Guidelines)	Policy Instrument Type	Key Objectives	Key Issues Addressed	Opportunities for Integration of NbS	Example Projects	Challenges faced in NbS
Vanuatu Climate Resilient Infrastructure Project (VCRP)	Financial/ Project-Based	- Upgrade coastal infrastructure to withstand flooding - Reduce vulnerability of roads and bridges to erosion - Integrate climate resilience into national infrastructure planning - Use vegetation buffers and NbS for flood control	Infrastructure failure, coastal flooding	Nature-based flood barriers, coastal vegetation buffers	Coastal road upgrades with erosion control in Efate	High costs, maintenance difficulties, balancing infrastructure with ecosystem protection.
Local Marine Managed Areas (LMMA) Network Guidelines	Community-Based/ Regulatory	- Empower communities to manage marine resources - Establish customary closures to reduce overfishing - Monitor reef health and prevent degradation - Strengthen enforcement of local conservation rules	Overfishing, reef degradation, weak enforcement	Customary closures, reef monitoring	LMMA implementation in Nguna-Pele Marine Protected Area	Enforcement of customary rules, overfishing pressures, need for sustained community engagement.
Coastal Regulations Toolkit (SPC, Fisheries Department)	Educational/ Guidance	- Provide training on sustainable coastal practices - Build awareness of erosion and climate impacts - Support compliance with national regulations - Map erosion hotspots for targeted interventions	Lack of awareness, poor planning	Training on NbS, erosion hotspot mapping	Toolkit training sessions in Malekula	Limited outreach, language barriers, difficulty in sustaining awareness programs.
Vanuatu National Ocean Policy	Strategic/ Regulatory	- Integrate governance of land and sea use - Promote sustainable coastal development - Resolve conflicts between marine and land management - Implement ecosystem-based management and marine spatial planning	Fragmented management, land-sea conflicts	Marine spatial planning, ecosystem-based management	Policy rollout with stakeholder consultations in Shefa Province	Coordination across sectors, limited resources, balancing traditional practices with modern governance.

6.2.2 Forestry Sector

The flow from Policy instrument to challenges in application of NbS in the Forestry sector is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Key policy instruments for forestry sector

Key Policy Instruments	Policy Instrument Type	Key Objectives (detailed lists)	Key Issues Addressed	Opportunities for Integration of Nature-based Solutions (NbS)	Current Example Projects in Vanuatu	Challenges Faced by NbS Projects
Vanuatu National Forest Policy 2013–2023	Strategic Policy	- Promote sustainable forest management - Enhance climate change adaptation and mitigation through forestry - Strengthen community participation in forest stewardship - Support reforestation and afforestation programs - Integrate forestry into national development planning	Deforestation, unsustainable logging, weak community involvement, climate vulnerability	Reforestation, agroforestry, watershed protection	Community reforestation in Santo and Malekula	Limited funding, land tenure conflicts, weak enforcement
Forestry Act No. 31 of 2019	Regulatory	- Establish Forestry Development Committee - Regulate logging and timber exports - Protect indigenous forests - Promote sustainable harvesting practices - Strengthen penalties for illegal logging	Illegal logging, weak regulation, biodiversity loss	Sustainable harvesting, forest conservation, ecosystem-based management	Enforcement of logging permits in Efate	Limited monitoring capacity, corruption risks, lack of technical expertise
REDD+ Readiness Program (Vanuatu)	International/ Strategic Program	- Prepare Vanuatu for REDD+ implementation - Build capacity for carbon accounting - Promote community-based forest conservation - Integrate REDD+ into climate policy	Carbon emissions from deforestation, lack of monitoring systems	Carbon sequestration through reforestation, community forest conservation	Pilot REDD+ sites in Shefa Province	Technical complexity, need for sustained donor support, community awareness gaps

Key Policy Instruments	Policy Instrument Type	Key Objectives (detailed lists)	Key Issues Addressed	Opportunities for Integration of Nature-based Solutions (NbS)	Current Example Projects in Vanuatu	Challenges Faced by NbS Projects
National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)	Strategic / Conservation Policy	- Conserve forest biodiversity - Protect endangered species habitats - Integrate biodiversity into forestry planning - Strengthen protected area networks	Habitat loss, biodiversity decline, weak integration of conservation	Forest reserves, habitat corridors, ecosystem restoration	Protected forest areas in Torba Province	Limited resources, enforcement difficulties, balancing development with conservation
Community Forestry Initiatives	Community-Based / Programmatic	- Empower local communities to manage forests - Promote traditional knowledge in forest stewardship - Support livelihood diversification through agroforestry - Enhance resilience to climate change	Lack of community ownership, livelihood insecurity, climate vulnerability	Agroforestry, community forest reserves, ridge-to-reef approaches	Agroforestry projects in Tafea Province	Land tenure disputes, limited technical support, need for long-term funding

Challenges in implementation highlighted in Table 7 above can be addressed by looking at applicable examples from the Pacific region and the globe. Some solutions are provided in Table 8 which shows challenging aspects identified in implementing NbS in Vanuatu and possible solutions recommended from pilot prtojects in the region:

Table 8. Summary of solutions to overcome NbS implementation challenges for forestry sector

Solution to shortfalls identified in Forestry NbS implementation in Vanuatu Projects	Specific Recommendation	Source Country Example	Description/Justification
Capacity Building	Train forestry officers and communities in NbS practices (agroforestry, reforestation, carbon accounting)	Fiji (Kiwa Initiative forestry projects)	Fiji used regional training to upskill forestry teams, improving reforestation design and monitoring.
Governance and Policy Integration	Establish a national forestry NbS coordination platform linking environment, agriculture, and land agencies	Tonga (Forestry & Coastal Policy Review)	Tonga mainstreamed NbS into forestry and coastal policies, improving cross-sector coordination.
Sustainable Financing	Access blended finance (GEF Small Grants, Kiwa, REDD+) for long-term forestry NbS	Timor-Leste (UNDP shoreline & forest resilience)	Timor-Leste leveraged UNDP and REDD+ readiness funds to sustain forest conservation and carbon projects.
Community Engagement	Co-design forestry NbS with customary landowners and local communities	Solomon Islands (Community mangrove & forest reserves)	Community-led forestry projects achieved higher compliance and long-term stewardship of forest resources.
Technical Design and Resilience	Use climate-resilient species (salt/drought tolerant) and diversify agroforestry systems	Maldives (climate-resilient species in NbS)	Projects selected resilient species and diversified planting to reduce failure under climate stress.
Outreach and Awareness	Develop forestry NbS awareness campaigns (radio, schools, visual guides in Bislama)	Caribbean nations (community forestry outreach)	Tailored outreach improved public understanding and uptake of NbS forestry practices.
Monitoring and Maintenance	Embed forestry NbS maintenance (replanting, fire prevention, monitoring) into provincial budgets	Solomon Islands (community forest committees)	Village committees included replanting and monitoring, ensuring sustainability of forest NbS projects.

6.3.1 Overlaps of Policies – Policy Integration Challenges – Cross Sectoral Collaborations

A study by Agrawala and van Aalst (2008) has shown for Fiji and other countries where interaction and synergy between policies can be found for integrating climate change action plans into areas of disaster risk reduction and other community-based approaches. However, overlaps in policy wording can cause issues such as duplications of institutional roles. This is supported by Schipper and Pelling (2006) who state that differences in language in policy drafting can cause institutional conflict.[17] Cross-sector dialog and clear mandates supported by legal instruments can ensure policy integration is successful.

The barriers for policy integration in the region are institutional silos, uneven local capacity and short political cycles.[18] The key recurring pathway to overcome or mitigate these challenges is to have collaborative approaches across sectors of health, forestry, tourism, fisheries, infrastructure and disaster risk reduction.

[17] Schipper, L. and M. Pelling, 2006: Disaster risk, climate change and international development: scope for, and challenges to, integration. Disasters, 30(1 SI), 19-38

[18] Majlingova, A.; Kádár, T.S. From Risk to Resilience: Integrating Climate Adaptation and Disaster Reduction in the Pursuit of Sustainable Development. Sustainability 2025, 17, 5447. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17125447

Strategic recommendations for both the forestry and coastal sectors focus on strengthening, rather than replacing existing systems:

1. Explicitly recognise NbS within forestry and coastal protection policy objectives.
2. Clarify institutional roles for NbS planning, implementation and monitoring.
3. Embed NbS considerations into sector planning, investment and approval processes.
4. Strengthen support for community-led mechanisms, including community forestry, CCAs and LMMAs.
5. Treat forests, mangroves and reefs as essential infrastructure for adaptation.

These recommendations reflect SPC's guidance that NbS should be mainstreamed into everyday decision-making, rather than treated as stand-alone projects.[8] This project does not recommend rewriting forestry or coastal protection policies, nor re-labelling existing good practice as NbS.

It recommends addressing key system-level gaps that limit climate adaptation outcomes.

1. Treating forests, mangroves and reefs as essential assets for climate adaptation, alongside built infrastructure
2. Focusing NbS integration on where it strengthens adaptation outcomes, rather than restating existing forestry or coastal standards
3. Using the National Adaptation Plan to coordinate and sustain NbS, linking ecosystem-based actions to planning, finance and monitoring
4. Improving coordination and role clarity across institutions, working within existing mandates
5. Incorporating NbS into community-led and customary governance planning
6. Planning for long-term ecosystem maintenance and adaptive management, beyond short project cycles

7. Roadmap for integration

Table 9 demonstrates how the actions proposed in this sector review align with the key recommendations of SPC (2025) for scaling NbS in Pacific Island countries, while remaining grounded in Vanuatu's institutional and legal context.

Table 9. SPC (2025) recommendations for scaling NbS in Pacific Island countries

SPC (2025) Recommendation	Application in Forestry and Coastal Protection	Vanuatu-specific Example
Build on existing governance systems	Use Forestry Act, EPC Act and Fisheries Act as NbS delivery tools	Community forestry areas; LMMAs
Prioritise community-led NbS	Strengthen CCAs, community forestry and coastal stewardship	Tagabe catchment restoration
Mainstream NbS into sector planning	Integrate NbS into forestry and coastal guidelines	Forestry management plans
Treat ecosystems as infrastructure	Recognise mangroves and forests as protective assets	VCAP II coastal protection
Mobilise sustainable finance	Align NbS with climate and biodiversity finance	Kiwa Initiative; GEF

This chapter sets out practical actions to integrate Nature-based Solutions into the Forestry and Coastal Protection Policy Framework itself. The focus is on ensuring that forestry and coastal protection policies, regulations and implementation mechanisms actively enable NbS as a core approach.

The first step towards effective policy integration is to recognise NbS, both existing and planned, more explicitly in policy documents. This will mainstream NbS as a concept and also recognise that the idea and principles of NbS already exist and just need to be identified as such.

The second priority is to update sector guidelines to include NbS criteria ensuring that sector policies, planning processes and project development systematically consider NbS and their co-benefits for climate adaptation, biodiversity and community resilience.

The third priority is to focus on the importance of NbS initiatives being community-based, and to strengthen the means for NbS to be led, and succeed at, the local level. This priority recognises the critical role that local communities and traditional knowledge play in successful NbS.

The alignment of financing streams and opportunities with NbS initiatives is the fourth priority. This can be done by integrating NbS into national budget and planning processes, aligning with climate financing mechanisms, using existing funding streams or encouraging blended finance schemes, strengthening project pipeline for NbS and linking finance to monitoring and results. This will be aided by the mainstreaming of NbS through explicit recognition and updated sector guidelines, as well as the articulation of the full suite of co-benefits relevant to particular NbS scenarios, to make the idea of investing in NbS as attractive as possible for donors and funding sources.

The fifth priority is to improve monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) regimes, including building awareness of the importance of long-term monitoring for NbS and the fact that NbS take time to reach their full potential – monitoring is a critical means for ensuring that NbS are successful into the future. Long-term monitoring must also be incorporated into funding and grant agreements to ensure that there is budget for it.

These priority actions for NbS Integration and Implementation are summarised in Table 10.

Table 10. Priority Actions for NbS integration and implementation

Priority Action	Purpose within Sector Policy	Policy / Regulatory Entry Point	Lead Agency	Supporting Actors	Practical Indicators	Timeframe
1. Explicitly recognise NbS in forestry and coastal protection policy objectives	Establish NbS as a preferred approach for resilience and protection	Forestry policy instruments; coastal protection policy statements	DoF; DUAP; DEPC	DoCC; DEPC DoF	NbS referenced in policy objectives and principles	6-12 months
2. Integrate NbS criteria into forestry management and coastal protection guidelines	Translate policy intent into operational practice	Forestry management plans; coastal protection guidelines	DoF; DEPC; DUAP	VFD	Guidance documents updated	1-2 years
3. Require assessment of ecosystem-based options for coastal protection works	Ensure NbS is considered before hard engineering	Physical Planning Act; Foreshore Development Act permitting	DUAP	DEPC; DoCC; MIPU	Permits include NbS conditions	1-2 years
4. Strengthen mangrove and coastal vegetation protection through regulation	Safeguard critical coastal NbS assets	EPC Act; Fisheries Act	DEPC, DoF, VFD	Depts, Local Authorities	Mangrove areas protected or restored	1-2 years
5. Formalise community forestry, CCAs and LMMAs as NbS delivery mechanisms	Anchor NbS in community-led systems	Forestry Act; CCA Regulations; Fisheries Act	DoF; DEPC; VFD	Communities; NGOs	Community sites reporting NbS outcomes	Ongoing
6. Build sector capacity to plan, implement and monitor NbS	Improve consistency and quality of NbS delivery	Sector training and technical support programmes	DoCC	Line ministries	Staff trained; tools developed	1-2 years
7. Mobilise and align financing for sector-based NbS	Ensure implementation is resourced	Sector budgets; donor programmes	MFEM	DoCC; line ministries	Funding allocated to NbS actions	1-3 years

8. Conclusion and Way Forward

This review seeks to align Vanuatu's NbS frameworks with existing forestry and coastal sector policies in order to recognise and operationalise NbS in ways that are both effective and locally grounded. Forestry and coastal protection are not peripheral to climate adaptation in Vanuatu. They are central to it. The country's forests, mangroves, reefs and coastal ecosystems already play a crucial role in buffering communities from climate impacts. By making NbS explicit within sector policies, strengthening implementation tools, and recognising existing practice as adaptation infrastructure, Vanuatu can move toward a more coherent and resilient system that delivers long-term benefits for communities and ecosystems alike.

Integrating NbS into the Forestry and Coastal Protection Sector, requires:

- Reforming of governance structures
- Strengthening legal and regulatory framework
- Financing reform and delivery systems
- Developing a community-based framework
- Strengthening of provincial capacity
- Dialogue from multi-stakeholders

All these actions can be prioritised and phased into short, medium and long-term alongside ongoing efforts to build institutional capacity, strengthen partnerships, and embed NbS approaches across both sectors.

The challenge ahead is not one of policy intent, but of sustained implementation. Clear leadership, adequate financing, and continued support for community-led approaches will determine whether NbS can fulfil their potential as a cornerstone of climate resilience in Vanuatu.

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