



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

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Disclaimer

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Purpose

This briefing paper summarises the findings and strategic implications of the Vanuatu Forestry and Coastal Protection Policy Framework Review, prepared under the Promoting Pacific Islands Nature based Solutions (PPIN) programme. It is intended to inform policy makers and other stakeholders of the policy context, key challenges, opportunities, and recommended actions to strengthen climate resilience through integrated forestry and coastal protection.

Key Messages

- Forests, mangroves and coastal ecosystems are essential national infrastructure for climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, food security and livelihoods.
- Nature based Solutions (NbS) are already widely practised in Vanuatu through customary governance and community management, but are not yet consistently recognised or embedded in policy and investment systems.
- Existing forestry and coastal protection laws provide a strong foundation, but gaps in coordination, financing, monitoring and policy integration limit impact at scale.
- Customary land and marine tenure systems are central to success; NbS works best where community leadership and kastom governance are respected.
- The review does not recommend new policy frameworks, but rather strengthening and aligning existing ones, particularly through the National Adaptation Plan (NAP).
- Clear ministerial leadership can unlock long term climate finance, reduce reliance on short term projects, and improve delivery across sectors.

Why This Review Matters

Vanuatu faces increasing climate risks, including sea level rise and coastal erosion; stronger and more frequent cyclones; flooding, landslides and water insecurity; and degradation of forests, reefs and mangroves. These pressures threaten communities, infrastructure, economic activity and cultural heritage, particularly in coastal and rural areas.

Forests and coastal ecosystems provide many benefits, including:

- Reducing storm surge and wave energy
- Stabilising shorelines and riverbanks
- Protecting water catchments
- Supporting fisheries, agriculture and tourism
- Storing carbon and support biodiversity

The review finds that **investing in ecosystem protection and restoration is often more cost effective and sustainable than hard engineering alone**, particularly in the long term.

Nature based Solutions: The Core Concept

Nature based Solutions are defined as actions that protect, restore and manage ecosystems to address social, economic and environmental challenges, while delivering benefits for:

- Climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction
- Biodiversity conservation
- Livelihoods and food security
- Cultural and social wellbeing

In Vanuatu, NbS are not new. They are embedded in Kastom conservation and tabu areas, Community forestry and agroforestry, Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), and Ridge to reef and catchment management. The challenge is **not adoption**, but **recognition, coordination and scaling**.

Current Policy Landscape

Coastal Protection Sector

Technical Officers

- Vanuatu National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Planning 2018-2030
- Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy
- Disaster Risk Management Act (2019)
- Fisheries Act (2014)
- Foreshore Development Act
- Environment Protection and Conservation Act
- Oceans Act (2025)
- National Water Policy (2017)
- National Sustainable Development Plan (Vanuatu 2030)

Strengths

- Growing recognition of ecosystem based and community led approaches
- Strong customary marine governance and tabu systems
- Oceans Act reinforces cultural custodianship of marine resources

Key Gaps

- NbS not consistently prioritised in coastal planning and development approvals
- Heavy reliance on hard engineering solutions
- Weak integration of catchment and coastal planning
- Limited use of strategic environmental assessment

Forestry Sector

Key instruments

- Forestry Act (2019)
- National Forest Policy (2013–2023) (now lapsed)
- REDD+ Readiness Strategy
- Environment Protection and Conservation Act

Strengths

- Strong recognition of community participation and customary land ownership
- Alignment with climate adaptation and conservation objectives
- Legal basis for sustainable forest management and enforcement

Key Gaps

- The National Forest Policy requires urgent updating
- Carbon accounting and long term monitoring systems are underdeveloped
- Customary land tenure limits participation in carbon markets under current legal arrangements
- Fragmented coordination across agencies

What Is Working Well





The review highlights several successful NbS initiatives, including:

- **Tagabe catchment restoration** (riparian reforestation and water security)
- **Agroforestry and community forestry** across multiple islands
- **Mangrove and coastal ecosystem restoration** under VCAP II and Kiwa Initiative
- **Ridge to reef and marine spatial planning initiatives**

These initiatives demonstrate that community led NbS delivers multiple benefits when adequately supported, long term engagement and clear institutional roles are critical, and donor and climate finance can be mobilised when NbS outcomes are explicit.

Key Challenges Identified

Across both sectors, recurring challenges include:

 <p>Policy and Governance</p>	<p>Outdated or inconsistent policies</p>	<p>Weak coordination between national, provincial and community levels</p>	<p>Overlapping mandates and unclear responsibilities</p>
 <p>Financing</p>	<p>Heavy reliance on short term, project based funding</p>	<p>Complex and bureaucratic access to climate finance community levels</p>	<p>Limited private sector and blended finance pathways</p>
 <p>Implementation Capacity</p>	<p>Limited technical expertise for NbS design and monitoring</p>	<p>Weak monitoring, evaluation and learning systems</p>	<p>Insufficient long term maintenance funding</p>
 <p>Land and Marine Tenure</p>	<p>Land disputes delay or derail projects</p>	<p>Projects fail when customary ownership is bypassed</p>	<p>Success depends on chiefs, women and youth working together</p>

Priority actions for NbS integration and implementation

The review proposes system level reforms, not new policies.

1. Make NbS Explicit in Existing Policies

- Clearly recognise NbS as a preferred approach in forestry and coastal protection objectives
- Embed NbS language in sector guidelines, planning and investment frameworks

2. Integrate NbS criteria into forestry management and coastal protection guidelines

- Recognise forests, mangroves and reefs alongside roads, seawalls and buildings
- Translate policy intent into operational practice

3. Require assessment of ecosystem-based options for coastal protection works

- Treat Ecosystems as Essential Infrastructure
- Prioritise ecosystem based options before hard engineering in approvals

4. Strengthen mangrove and coastal vegetation protection through regulation

- Safeguard critical coastal NbS assets

5. Formalise community forestry, CCAs and LMMAs as NbS delivery mechanisms

- Strengthen Community Led Delivery
- Ensure Free, Prior and Informed Consent
- Strengthen provincial and local government roles

6. Build sector capacity to plan, implement and monitor NbS

- Improve Coordination Across Sectors
- Clarify roles of forestry, environment, fisheries, planning and climate agencies
- Use the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) as the central coordination platform
- Develop consistent NbS monitoring indicators
- Fund long term monitoring and maintenance
- Link financing to results and learning

7. Mobilise and align financing for sector-based NbS

- Align NbS with climate, biodiversity and carbon finance
- Move from short term projects to long term delivery systems
- Embed NbS in national budgets and investment planning

Implications for policy makers

Policy leadership is critical to:

- Signal that **NbS is a national resilience priority**, not a niche environmental issue
- Support **policy updates**, particularly the National Forest Policy
- Ensure **development approvals and infrastructure planning** consider NbS first
- Enable access to **long term climate and biodiversity finance**
- Strengthen coordination across portfolios

A seven-point implementation pathway can be used to integrate NbS for systemic change.

1. Identify and formalise existing NbS practices	2. Prioritise coastal and forestry sectors	3. Establish clear institutional roles and coordination	4. Quantify and communicate NbS Co-benefits	5. Embed community-led design and participation	6. Align NbS with protected area expansion	7. Secure diversified and sustainable financing
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Conclusion

Vanuatu already has the foundations needed to scale Nature based Solutions. The challenge is not policy intent, but consistent implementation, financing and coordination. By strengthening existing frameworks, recognising customary governance, and treating ecosystems as essential infrastructure, Vanuatu can reduce climate and disaster risk, protect livelihoods and food security, attract sustainable climate finance, and strengthen resilience for future generations.

Suggested Next Steps

- Note the findings of the review
- Support updating the National Forest Policy
- Endorse NbS as a preferred approach within sector planning
- Direct agencies to align NbS actions through the National Adaptation Plan



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The Promoting Pacific Island Nature-based Solutions (PPIN) project is funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). PPIN seeks to support the development of policy and legislation for Nature-based Solutions (NbS), build regional awareness and capacity, and strengthen regional cooperation amongst Pacific Island countries on NbS. PPIN is managed by IUCN in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC), the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI).



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