

Enhancing Biodiversity Conservation and Sustenance of Ecosystem Services in Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) Project

MINUTES OF THE SIXTH NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: 11. 10. 2021

Time: 2.00 p.m. -4.30 p.m.

Venue: Ministry of Environment (MoE), Conference Room-Second Floor, Sobadam Piyasa, 416/ C/ 1, Robert Gunawardena Mawatha, Battaramulla

Zoom link: <https://undp.zoom.us/j/88341908309?pwd=c0lISE9EYThDd3pRMWd0MFZsbjl2dz09&from=addon>

Chaired by Dr. Anil Jasinghe, Secretary, Ministry of Environment (MoE)

Members of the Committee:

1. Secretary, Ministry of Land
2. Secretary, Ministry of Wildlife & Forest Conservation
3. Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
4. Director Agri Technology for Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture
5. Maj. Gen. (Retd) Sudantha Ranasinghe, Director General ,Disaster Management Center
6. Ms. Anoja Herath, Director , Environment for Secretary, State Ministry of Urban Development, Waste Disposal, and Community Cleanliness
7. Mr. Uduwawala, Addl. Sec for Secretary, Ministry of Public Services, Provincial Councils & Local Government
8. Dr. Premakantha for Conservator General of Forest
9. Mr. Prasantha, Deputy Director for Director General, Department of Wildlife
10. Mr. Sisira Hapuarachi, A/D, Land Use Policy Planning Department for Director General, Department of Land Use Policy Planning
11. Mr. Rajarathnam, Director for Director General, Department of Coastal Conservation,
12. Mr. Gamage, DDG for Director General of Central Environmental Authority
13. Director General, Mahaweli Development Authority
14. Director, National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency
15. General Manager, Marine Environment Protection Authority
16. Mr. M.W.T.B. Dissanayake, Addl. Secretary (Environment Policy & Planning), MoE
17. Ms. Pathma Abeykoon, Director, Biodiversity Secretariat (BDS), MoE
18. Ms. Kulani H.W. Karunarathne, Project Director (ESA Project)/Director (Environment Planning & Economics Division), MoE
19. Ms. Kumudini Vidyalkara, Director, Climate Change Secretariat, MoE

Absentees:

1. Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration
2. Secretary, Ministry of Mahaweli Development
3. Secretary, Ministry of Irrigation

4. Secretary, Ministry of Plantation
5. Secretary, Ministry of Finance
6. Director General, Department of Irrigation,
7. Director General, Department of Archaeology
8. Director General, Department of National Physical Planning
9. Department of Attorney General
10. Department of Commissioner General of Land
11. Commissioner General of Agrarian
12. Director General, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority
13. Director General, Urban Development Authority,
14. Chairman, Land Reform Commission
15. Director of Natural Resources Management Centre
16. General Manager of Sri Lanka Land Development Cooperation

Other Attendees/ Invitees:

1. Ms. Sureka Perera, Programme Quality and Design Analyst, UNDP
2. Dr. Sevvandi Jayakody, Senior Lecturer, University of Wayamba
3. Dr. D.M.S.B. Dissanayake, ESA Policy Consultant
4. Mr. Indika Senavirathne, Deputy Director – Tourism, Wayamba Development Authority
5. Mr. Neelakantha Wanninayake, Industrial Services Bureau
6. Mr. Samantha Pathirathna, Lead Consultant, PASS Asia
7. Mr. Leel Randeni, Deputy Project Director- ESA Project /Asst. Director (EP&E Division), MoE
8. Ms. Nirosha Kumari, Deputy Manager-ESA Project /Environment Management Officer (EMO),
9. MS. Kema Kasthuriarachchi, Deputy Manager-ESA Project / EMO , (EP&E Division), MoE
10. Ms. Nandanee Jayasooriya, Accountant, ESA Project Management Unit (PMU)
11. Ms. Hasini Prabodha, PA-ESA Project/ DO, MoE
12. Ms. Sugandhi Samarasinghe, Technical Coordinator cum Project Manager, PMU
13. Mr. Manjula Bandara, Field Coordinator, ESA PMU

1.0 Secretary's Introduction and Welcome Remarks:

Dr. Anil Jasinghe, Secretary, MoE, chaired the meeting and welcomed all the members of the National ESA Committee (NEASC) and other invitees who joined the meeting both virtually and physically. He explained that NESAC holds the uppermost powers, responsibilities, and accountabilities on the management of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas of Sri Lanka. It was mentioned the objective of the Committee is to coordinate all human, technical and technological, informational and institutional, and financial resources and capitalize to uplift the environmental values and services of the Environmentally Sensitive Areas, and socioeconomic lives associated with Environmentally Sensitive Areas. This area-based distinct conservation and management approach is proposed for filling the gaps in the conservation of Environmentally Sensitive Areas that are encountered outside the Protected Areas. Then he remarked on ESA identification process happened at national level and noted we have identified more than 200 ESAs by now.

2.0 Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of the fifth NESAC meeting held on 21st December 2017 had been shared earlier and considering the time span between two meetings resulted in change of representatives of NESAC membership, the minutes were not discussed with the committee members.

3.0 Major Achievements of ESA Project by Ms. Kulani H.W. Karunaratne, Project Director (ESA Project)/Director (Environment Planning & Economics Division), MoE

Ms. Karunaratne presented the project overview and physical progress of ESA project highlighting major achievements from 2016-2021 .

- **National ESA Policy & Strategy:** ESA Policy & Strategy – The national level consultations were held, The ESA policy was validated and opened for public comments in August 2021. National dialogue was created on policy via print, social and mass media and finalized policy is ready for cabinet submission.
- **National ESA Scaleup Plan :** Team of Experts representing Wayamba University of Sri Lanka (WUSL) developed the methodology to identify ESAs in Sri Lanka and, as per pre-determined criteria, the data were gathered in 1km*1km grids and GIS maps were developed. Furthermore, 328, 000ha of ESAs were identified outside existing Protected Area Network and separate maps for different scenarios were developed and are currently being validated with relevant agencies. Around 200 ESAs have been identified.
- **Capacity Building:** Printed ESA Resource Book in English, Sinhala & Tamil. Additionally, an E-Learning Platform was created in Learning Management System of the WUSL in partnership with the Land use Policy Planning Department (LUPPD) in 2021 to provide knowledge to land use planners on ESA Identification, ground truthing and land use governance, and launched focusing government officers engaged in national level ESA identification and management process and Institutionalized a training module in SLIDA to train officers of administrative services on ESA governance. Furthermore, a self- paced online certificate course hosted on the Ministry of Environment’s website, on ESA governance was developed. A partnership was established with the Wayamba Development Authority (WDA) attached to the North Western Provincial Council to integrate ESA trainings through regular training programmes conducted by WDA.
- **Tools & Guidelines:** Developed the Online Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool titled, ‘Biodiversity Environment Sensitive Areas Sri Lanka (BESASL) and ESA information is being updated for the whole country in line with the ESA National Scaleup Plan. Guidelines were developed on ESA identification and management, mainstreaming biodiversity into Agriculture and Tourism sectors and biodiversity conservation mainstreaming into land use mapping.
- **Governance:** Completed scheduled Local Management Committees (LMCs) in Ipalogama, Galnewa and Wanathawilluwa Divisional Secretariat Divisions and District Facilitation Committees (DFCs) in Anuradhapura & Puttalam Districts, while final DFCs are scheduled for October last week.
- Implemented Communication strategy of the final year.
- **Field Implementation:** (Finalized implementation work scheduled for ESA Co-Management Plans of Gangewadiya, Manawekanda, Villu, Wewalkale, Habarawatte and Riverine ESA with LMCs.)
 - ✓ Developed Business Plan of Manawekanda and finalized architectural designs for future adherence and capacitated Wanashakthi CBO and members from community with Industrial Service Beuro.
 - ✓ Trained 30 community members from Gangewadiya for twenty days on Eco Tourism in Gangewadiya ESA with the agencies of Wayamba Development Authority and Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority.
 - ✓ Restored Habarawatte cascade system and established micro land uses.

- ✓ **Protected Areas:** Management Plans were prepared with the leadership of Department of Wildlife Conservation, other stakeholders including the community for Integrating - (i) 131,667 ha of Wilpattu NP; (ii) 21,690 ha of Kahalla pallle kale; (iii) 1528 ha of Ritigala; and (iv) 30,600 ha of BarReef with wider landscapes/ seascapes to minimize threats from outside the PA and to mitigate land and resource use conflicts at ESAs and lobbied implementation process.
- ✓ Human Elephant conflict was identified as a core issue in the landscapes outside PAs and it was required to pilot test an early warning system for the community on Elephant movements. Accordingly, a virtual automated early warning system of wild elephants was pilot tested in Theva Nuwara, Puttalam district during 2019 & 2020, to reduce wild elephant-human conflict, with the objective of replication of succeeded model across landscape in selected ESAs.
- ✓ Facilitation & oversight of co-management efforts on the restoration of the Bar Reef Marine Sanctuary (BRMS) continued and the community monitoring system was strengthened through the capacity development of male and female divers in the Kalpitiya communities.
- ✓ In addition, the monitoring of restoration efforts and minimizing threats to the live coral patches within BRMS was further strengthened through the partnership with Ocean Resource Conservation Association (ORCA) and government stakeholders led by the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC), Marine Environment Protection Authority (MEPA), and Coastal Conservation Department (CCD). During the assessment year, improvement in the Bar Reef Coral regeneration process was observed.
- ✓ Recognizing the role played by the 47 ha of forest habitat in the Wewelkele area in biodiversity and sustenance of ecosystem services, and its potential threats, the Wanathavilluwa Divisional Secretariat (DS) and the community members joined hands to safeguard it, and this was formalized.
- ✓ The project facilitated implementation of Co-management plan during reporting period while providing scientific evidence of biodiversity profile of Wewalkale ESA by completion of a biodiversity survey and demarcating the forest habitat with community to control encroachment by external parties and on incentivizing the surrounding community to conserve the ESA, while sustaining the economic benefits derived from it by transforming their existing natural resource usage to green jobs by enhancing their skills, facilitating stable market linkages and ultimately promoting the cane industry further.
- ✓ To ensure the sustainability of the community livelihoods, the project also worked towards setting up cane nurseries along with the required replanting facilities. The Divisional Secretariat exerted an enormous effort to support the village craftsmen to develop craftsmanship on value added products and to link them with marketing networks.
- ✓ Completed the construction of the monitoring center at Eluwankulama to facilitate joint monitoring to manage unsustainable tourism in critical coastal and freshwater habitats and established visitor facilities at Eluwankulama to minimise threats to the natural ecosystem and facilitate green livelihoods through tourism.
- ✓ Developed a training module on destination management and eco-tourism for community members interested in engaging in ecotourism
- ✓ Developed draft guidelines on destination management (tour boat operations, health & safety, eco-tourism) and minimum standards to promote sustainable tourism in Gangewadiya and training modules in local languages were developed accordingly.
- ✓ Identified issues within the Manawekanda Eco Park and amicable solutions were reached with Department of Archaeology—with consent of the Local Management Committee and landowners. An

action plan to enhance the Manewa Kanda Eco-park as a sustainable and viable business model was developed and being rolled out.

- ✓ Capacitated 22 women of Sithamu Women CBO via knowledge transfer and facilitation on compost production using IAS in village irrigation systems. These women groups were also supported to engage in handicraft (handbags, hats) production using IAS in their irrigation systems, which provided additional income for the women, while controlling the IAS. Market linkages for these products of the women organizations were facilitated through private outlets, garment factories and Military camps
- ✓ Cumulative target in Area of interest in Puttalam district was 10,000 ha & 15,000 ha in Anuradhapura district respectively and both brought 23,763 ha under biodiversity compatible agricultural production practices by the end of the June 2020 and had pilot tested innovative agriculture models across 168 ha suitable for Environmentally Sensitive Areas in area of interest in Puttalam & Anuradhapura districts.

4.0 Consent for specific assignments/ reports:

- 4.1 Validated National Policy on Environment Sensitive Areas (ESAs) in Sri Lanka was presented by Dr. D.M.S.B. Dissanayake (Annex 01)
- 4.2 (i) National ESA Scale up Plan and identified ESAs (ii) Integrated Biodiversity Assessment tool was presented by Prof. Sevvandi Jayakody (Annex 02)
- 4.3 Ecotourism management and operational guidelines with minimum standards prepared for Gangewadiya ESA was presented by Prof. Mohamed Aslam (Annex 03)
- 4.4 Business plan for Manewa kanda Ecotourism Project was presented by Mr. Neelakanth Wanninayake (Annex 04)
- 4.5: Co-management plan of Habarawatte cascade ESA, Galnewa was Presented by Mr. Leel Randeni, Asst. Director, MoE (Annex 05)
- 4.6: ESA e-learning online course was presented by Mr. Samantha Pathirathna, Lead Consultant, PASS Asia (Annex 06)

5.0 Monitoring & Evaluation: Ms. Perera, Programme Quality and Design Analyst, UNDP remarked on Quality Assurance of ESA Project based on Project Implementation Review (2021) and Terminal Evaluation and way forward actions for sustainability of the ESA concept. GEF TE covers, Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E); Implementation/oversight/Risk Management; Overall Project Outcome; and Sustainability. The ratings of TA were satisfactory and Highly Satisfactory. She highlighted that strengthen/re-view/establish the role of the National Steering Committee, to be involved not only in policy actions but also in touch with ground implementation is important.

6.0 Discussion - next steps of the National ESA Policy implementation & Scale- up

- i. The ESA Policy will be submitted for cabinet approval during October 2021.
- ii. The guidelines of the ESA policy will be issued by Ministry of Environment upon approval of the ESA policy
- iii. The ESAs identified under ESA scaleup assignment will be managed as per ESA policy
- iv. This NESAC could be used as a common platform for GEF VI & GEF VII implementations also. EPE division will integrate ESA scale up into NEAP at a post project scenario to ensure sustainability.

7.0 Conclusion:

The meeting was adjourned at 4.30 p. m. upon final remarks of Ms. Karunaratne, extending appreciation to all the participants for their time and cooperation in all endeavors.

The NESAC will be conducted in regular intervals and the date of next NESAC will be notified in due course. The revised ToR to be adopted at the next NESAC.