



# Verified Conservation Areas

## Mainstreaming conservation into productive landscapes, hectare by hectare

Under SDG 12, we have committed to sustainable production and consumption. Under SDGs 14 and 15, we have committed to conserving and sustainably using marine and terrestrial ecosystems. And under SDG17, we have committed to significantly increasing the exports of developing countries.

Hence, the SDGs aim for sustainable production and consumption patterns which conserve ecosystems and promote increase exports from developing countries. To accomplish this, we need to expand our conservation efforts across the planet and across supply chains. We need to mainstream biodiversity conservation into areas managed for agriculture, fisheries, forestry, tourism and other uses.

The area-based **VCA Approach** mainstreams conservation efforts by encouraging new stakeholders to engage, enabling collective social action, channelling new financing towards conservation, and providing the assurance that money invested is well spent.

## Core elements of the VCA Approach

1. A **Verified Conservation Area (VCA)** is a geographically-defined area listed on the VCA Registry and managed to conserve nature.
2. The **VCA Registry** is a voluntary listing of area-based conservation and a public platform for demonstrating conservation efforts to stakeholders.
3. The VCA Approach is inclusive. VCAs can be managed by public, private or community organisations. they may be managed for profit or not-for-profit.
4. VCA registration requires submission of a verified conservation management plan. Alternatively, an area can be listed with a proposal to submit a verified plan within two years.
5. To stay registered, VCAs must submit verified performance reports annually.
6. Audits of plans and reports are undertaken by Board-approved **VCA Auditors**.
7. VCA management plans, performance reports and verification audits are published on the Registry providing accountability and assurance.
8. Requirements for plans, reports and audits are set out in the **VCA Standard**. These are aligned with the **IFC Performance Standard** on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.
9. The **VCA Toolkit** recommends best available guidance for conservation management planning and reporting.
10. The **VCA Approach** is hosted by Earthmind and the Global Footprint Network. It also offers conservation planning and financing advice to VCAs and their supporters.





## The development benefits of the VCA Approach

1. The VCA Approach recognises and encourages the efforts of committed individuals, communities, local governments, NGOs, and companies to conserve and restore our natural capital.
2. It provides an effective mechanism for innovative conservation initiatives beyond legally protected areas to be recognised, celebrated and supported.
3. VCAs enable companies, public agencies, NGOs, foundations, and individuals to invest directly in verified conservation by providing standardised, transparent, monitored, and effective conservation management.
4. The VCA Approach enables conservation to be visible and gives assurance that money invested in conservation is well spent.
5. It provides transparency and public accountability in recognising management plans, which address the biodiversity mitigation hierarchy - avoid, minimize, restore and offset.
6. The VCA Approach establishes a new, SDG-focused platform for verified sustainable land management which connects to the demands of stakeholders including local communities and public authorities.
7. It encourages voluntary action and creates new and exciting opportunities to connect conservation area owners and managers with impact investors.
8. The VCA Approach addresses SDGs 12, 14, 15 and 17. In so doing, it also addresses CBD Aichi Targets including 4 on sustainable consumption and production, 7 on mainstreaming biodiversity, and 11 on area-based conservation.



## UNEA and the VCA Approach

As voluntary measure to recognise and encourage restoration and conservation beyond protected areas, the VCA Approach aims to create an inclusive alliance of stakeholders who are caring for our planet, hectare by hectare.

Today, the VCA Approach includes core partners, supporting organisations, conservation auditors, a governing board, a management team, and a growing network of friends of verified conservation. It is fully operational with several pilot VCA listings.

UNEA recognition, however, is now needed to strengthen credibility and to scale up. UNEA has the opportunity to recognise innovative conservation mainstreaming measures, such as the VCA Approach, which encourage broader voluntary stakeholder engagement in sustainable consumption and production at the landscape level.

## Recognise the VCA Approach & join the Coalition