

The background of the cover is an aerial photograph of a tropical island. The island is surrounded by clear, turquoise water with visible coral reefs. The land is covered in dense green vegetation, with a small cluster of buildings and a path in the center. The sky is a deep blue.

ADVANCING LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES (OECMs): GLOBAL LESSONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The world has four years left to achieve the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3, which calls for the conservation of at least 30% of planet Earth by 2030 (the 30×30 target). This global effort requires countries to acknowledge and support a wide range of governance systems that deliver sustained biodiversity outcomes within and beyond protected areas. In addition to Indigenous and traditional territories, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) have emerged as a critical mechanism to identify and support diverse conservation practices led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, private landholders, sectoral bodies, and subnational authorities.

This report provides the first comprehensive, comparative assessment of the legal and policy mechanisms that countries are using to give effect to OECM identification and reporting. Drawing on detailed analysis of the 16 countries and territories that have reported OECMs, and others that are developing OECM frameworks, it identifies five categories of mechanisms through which national authorities operationalise OECMs. These encompass ministerial and departmental legal instruments, national guidelines and policy frameworks, administrative procedures, sector-based recognition under existing designations, and mechanisms for OECMs in areas beyond national jurisdiction. Across these categories, most national systems demonstrate strong alignment with the terminology, definition and criteria set out in CBD Decision 14/8, indicating a growing global convergence toward common standards while still enabling flexibility suited to different governance contexts.

The report further examines emerging trends in OECM implementation, including the growing use of non-binding policy guidance, integration of community and cultural landscapes, sector-based recognition in fisheries and marine planning, and the first OECM identification in areas beyond national jurisdiction. By synthesising lessons from early implementers, the study offers practical insights for policymakers to enable the design of robust and context-appropriate OECM systems. It highlights how countries are adapting CBD guidance to domestic legal contexts, strengthening governance arrangements, and building transparent procedures for documentation, evaluation and reporting. The findings aim to support governments, legislators, practitioners and partners as they expand equitable and effective area-based conservation and accelerate progress toward the global 30×30 target.



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INTRODUCTION

The global biodiversity crisis demands bold and inclusive approaches. Under the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) committed to conserving at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine areas by 2030 (Target 3, also referred to as the 30×30 target).

Achieving this target requires more than expanding protected areas. It requires identifying and supporting a broader range of governance systems and management practices where biodiversity outcomes are being delivered. Alongside protected areas, other effective area based conservation measures (OECMs) and Indigenous and traditional territories are also included as means of achieving Target 3. This report focuses on OECMs.

An OECM is defined under the CBD as “a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.” The OECM framework provides a mechanism to honour the conservation role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, private landholders, sectoral actors, municipalities, and other government agencies that are not traditionally associated with conservation.

The momentum behind OECMs is real and accelerating. As of November 2025, 16 countries and territories have formally reported OECMs to the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas (World Database) and many others are developing dedicated legal, regulatory or policy instruments to identify and report OECMs. This report provides a global overview of how countries are developing legal and policy frameworks to identify and report OECMs. It describes the steps countries have taken to implement the OECM framework, categorises the different legal and administrative approaches, and identifies

common structural elements. It provides an opportunity for policymakers, legislators and practitioners to learn from these first examples, understand diverse institutional pathways, and promote the development of robust national-level OECM frameworks that are aligned with the CBD criteria, inclusive of a range of interests, and advance equitable and effective conservation.



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GLOBAL SURVEY: OECM IDENTIFICATION AND REPORTING



1.1. TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL OECM REPORTING

Global reporting of OECMs has expanded rapidly since 2021. In just four years, the number of jurisdictions reporting to the World Database on Protected and Conserved Areas has increased from 4 to 16, while the number of reported sites has risen from fewer than 50 to more than 6,500. Most of this growth occurred between 2022 and 2024, when several countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa submitted their first national datasets; however, the sharp increase in the number of reported sites is driven in significant part by reporting practices in a small number of jurisdictions, most notably Sweden, where large numbers of relatively small sites are recorded as individual OECM entries. This surge nonetheless reflects a broader shift in global conservation practice, as governments increasingly develop procedures to identify and report conserved areas beyond formal protected areas.

Figure 1 below shows the growth in OECM reporting, both in terms of the number of sites and the number of jurisdictions, between 2021 and 2025.

Map 1 on the facing page presents a global overview of the jurisdictions currently engaged in OECM implementation. It distinguishes between countries that have reported OECMs to the World Database, those that have adopted national OECM frameworks, and those that are in the process of developing them. The map also highlights where reporting and framework development overlap or diverge, providing a snapshot of the evolving international landscape as of November 2025.

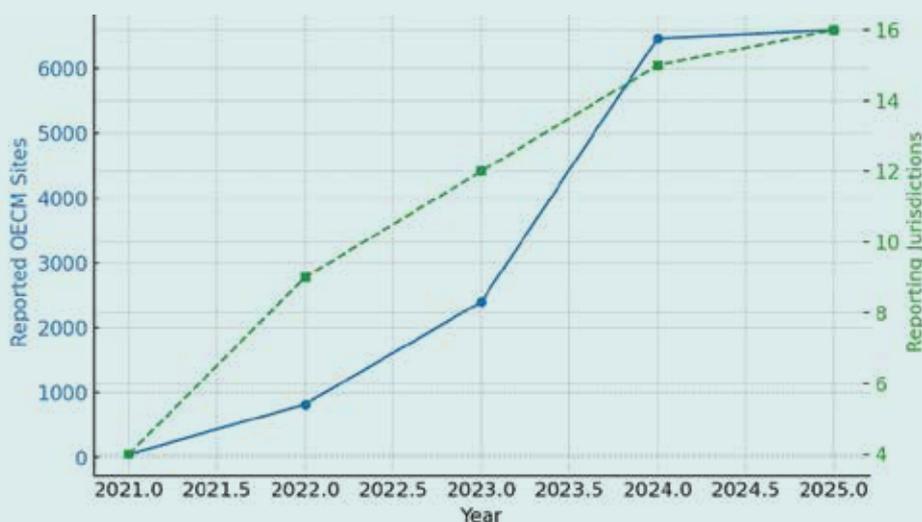
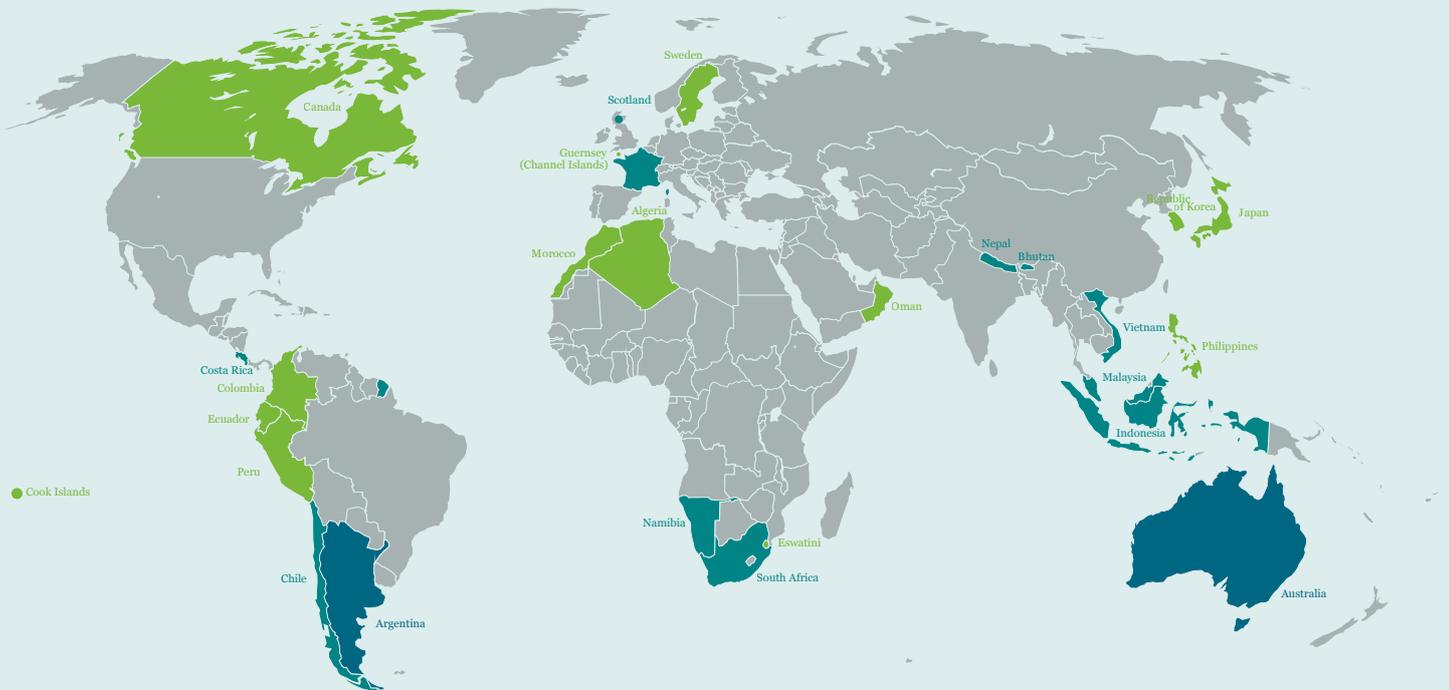


Figure 1. Growth in OECM reporting: sites and jurisdictions (2021-2025)¹

¹The figure uses separate vertical axes for OECM sites and reporting jurisdictions, shown on different scales for readability. Each reporting jurisdiction has reported at least one OECM site.

Map 1. Status of OECM reporting and framework development across jurisdictions (2025)



- Jurisdictions that have OECM frameworks AND have reported internationally
Canada, Colombia, Cook Islands, Ecuador, Eswatini, Guernsey, Japan, Morocco, Oman, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sweden
- Jurisdictions that have OECM frameworks but have NOT reported internationally
Argentina, Australia
- Jurisdictions that have reported OECM internationally but do NOT yet have approved OECM frameworks
(none in this dataset)
- Jurisdictions that have NOT yet reported OECM but are working on OECMs frameworks
Bhutan, Chile, Costa Rica, France, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, Vietnam, Scotland

As of November 2025, 16 countries and territories have formally reported OECMs to the World Database: Algeria, Bhutan, Canada, Colombia, Cook Islands, Ecuador, Eswatini, Guernsey (Channel Islands), Japan, Morocco, Oman, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sweden, and areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) through Regional Fisheries Management Organisations. In addition, Argentina and Australia have adopted OECM-specific instruments but have not yet reported any sites to the World Database. Furthermore, more than ten additional jurisdictions are in the process of developing national

OECM frameworks, with the total number expected to increase as global implementation advances. Table 1 presents the number of OECMs reported by each country or territory as of November 2025, showing the wide variation in levels of reporting across jurisdictions.

In the context of the marked growth of global OECM reporting, the next section unpacks how countries are enabling this through their domestic legal and policy systems.

Country / Territory	OECM count
Sweden	5,365
Morocco	338
Canada	313
Japan	282
Philippines	178
Colombia	46
Bhutan	11
Guernsey (Channel Islands)	10
Eswatini	8
Republic of Korea	7
Algeria	5
Ecuador	5
Peru	5
Oman	2
Cook Islands	1
ABNJ – Regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) sites	~20

Table 1. OECMs internationally reported as of November 2025

LEGAL AND POLICY PATHWAYS FOR IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING OECMs



The 16 countries and territories that have reported OECMs to the World Database have each developed nationally specific legal and policy pathways to advance OECM implementation (see Table 3, Annex II).

These approaches fall into five categories and are described in the following sub-sections:

1. Ministerial and departmental legal instruments
2. National OECM guidelines and policy frameworks
3. Administrative procedures
4. Sector-based recognition under existing legal designations
5. OECMs in areas beyond national jurisdiction

2.1. MINISTERIAL AND DEPARTMENTAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

In several jurisdictions, OECM systems have been formalised through ministerial or departmental decisions issued under existing legal mandates. These instruments establish the rules, responsibilities and procedures for identifying and reporting OECMs, allowing governments to operationalise the concept without the need for new legislation. This approach enables countries to introduce OECM procedures efficiently, while maintaining legal certainty and administrative clarity.

Recent national examples illustrate how this approach has been implemented in practice, reflecting different levels of formality and legal force within executive systems:

- **Ecuador – Ministerial Agreement No. MAATE-2023-130:** A legally binding ministerial regulation that sets out the national procedure for the formal legal recognition, registration and reporting of OECMs under the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (MAATE). It provides a clear and enforceable framework that aligns national practice with CBD

Decision 14/8 and establishes the institutional responsibilities for OECM implementation (see Case study 1, Annex I).

- **Peru – Ministerial Resolution No. 339-2023-MINAM:** An official ministerial decision adopting the Lineamientos para el reporte de Otras Medidas Efectivas de Conservación basadas en Áreas (OMECA). While its content is primarily technical guidance aligned with CBD Decision 14/8, it is issued through a formal ministerial act, giving it administrative authority within Peru’s environmental governance system.
- **Argentina – Resolution No. 446-2025-APN-STAYD#JGM:** A Secretariat-level resolution issued under the Office of the Chief of Cabinet of Ministers, which formalises internal administrative procedures for OECM identification and coordination. Although sub-ministerial in hierarchy, it represents an important step toward operational implementation. Note that Argentina has not yet reported OECMs to the World Database.

These examples show how countries are using executive authority, from fully binding ministerial regulations to ministerial resolutions, secretariat decisions and departmental frameworks, to integrate the formal legal recognition of OECMs into their national biodiversity governance systems according to their legal and institutional contexts.

2.2. NATIONAL GUIDELINES AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

OECM identification and reporting has progressed in many countries through the adoption of national guidance documents and policy frameworks. These instruments provide definitions, criteria and procedures for identifying and reporting OECMs within existing environmental mandates. Although they do not create new legal obligations, they serve as au-

² These pathways are not mutually exclusive. In practice, many jurisdictions combine multiple legal and policy mechanisms at different stages of OECM identification, confirmation, formal recognition and international reporting.

³ In some jurisdictions, OECM procedures are established through binding norms and standards issued under framework biodiversity legislation, which function as enforceable regulatory instruments without creating new protected-area categories.

thoritative direction for agencies and stakeholders, enabling countries to translate the CBD definition into practice, harmonise reporting, and build institutional capacity.

Recent national examples illustrate how this approach has been implemented in practice:

- **Canada – Pan-Canadian Terrestrial Guidance and Federal Marine Guidance for OECMs:** Canada has established two complementary guidance instruments for operationalising the identification, assessment and reporting of OECMs across terrestrial/inland water and marine environments. The Guidance for Recognizing Marine Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (DFO, 2022) was developed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) as a federal policy tool, reflecting federal jurisdiction over marine areas. In contrast, the Guidance on Recognizing Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (2019) for terrestrial and inland water environments was developed as pan-Canadian guidance through the Pathway to Canada Target 1 initiative – a collaborative process involving federal, provincial and territorial governments, Indigenous representative organisations, municipalities, and other partners. Although non-binding, both instruments provide authoritative, CBD-aligned criteria and procedures to support the consistent and transparent identification and reporting of OECMs. Together, these guidance tools harmonise approaches across governance levels and underpin Canada’s contributions to the World Database (see Case study 2, Annex I).
- **Colombia – National Guide for OECM Recognition and Reporting:** The Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (Ministerio de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sostenible) issued the Guía Nacional para el Reconocimiento de OMEC (2022) to standardise national procedures for the identification, assessment and formal recognition of OECMs. The guide outlines national criteria, documentation requirements, and step-by-step assessment methods consistent with CBD Decision 14/8, providing a unified methodology for competent authorities and supporting the integration of OECMs into Colombia’s national conservation system.

- **Australia – National OECM Framework Across Jurisdictions:** The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) developed the National OECM Framework (2024), endorsed by environment ministers from all Australian states and territories, to provide a coordinated national approach for identifying and recognising OECMs. The framework sets out CBD-consistent criteria, clarifies governance roles, and supports procedural consistency across jurisdictions. Australia has confirmed its first OECM domestically but has not yet reported any sites to the World Database.

These examples show how countries can institutionalise the identification, assessment and reporting of OECMs through non-binding but authoritative policy instruments, ensuring coherence across institutions without requiring new legal regulations.

2.3. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

In several jurisdictions, OECMs are identified and reported through administrative procedures carried out by competent authorities under existing statutory mandates. In these cases, government agencies apply national conservation laws and institutional powers to assess candidate sites against OECM criteria and formally confirm qualifying areas. This approach enables OECM implementation to advance using existing governance tools and decision-making processes, without requiring new regulations or national guidelines.

- **Japan – Administrative Certification of OECM-Equivalent Areas under Biodiversity Legislation:** The Ministry of the Environment (MOE) operates a national certification mechanism that certifies sustainably managed natural areas outside formal protected areas. Through this procedure, the MOE confirms sites that meet OECM-equivalent criteria and records them within Japan’s biodiversity policy framework. Certification is based on administrative authority under the Act on Promotion of Biodiversity Conservation (1992, amended 2019), and certified areas are incorporated into Japan’s official reporting to the World Database (see Case study 3, Annex I).

- **Cook Islands – Administrative Confirmation under Environmental Legislation:** The National Environment Service (NES) implements an internal process to assess and confirm areas contributing to biodiversity conservation beyond the formal protected area system. Operating under existing environmental legislation and institutional powers, the NES evaluates candidate sites against national and CBD-aligned OECM criteria. Once validated, areas are confirmed administratively and integrated into national biodiversity planning and reporting, including submissions to the World Database.
- **Guernsey (United Kingdom Channel Islands) – Administrative Confirmation under Statutory Biodiversity Functions:** The States of Guernsey, through the Committee for the Environment and Infrastructure, applies an administrative procedure to identify and confirm OECM-eligible areas under its statutory biodiversity management responsibilities. This process builds on existing land-use and environmental planning frameworks to acknowledge and document conservation outcomes delivered outside formal protected areas.

Administrative approaches such as these demonstrate that OECMs can be integrated into existing conservation and land-management systems, enabling institutions to use their current mandates to deliver measurable biodiversity outcomes without requiring new legal instruments.

2.4. SECTOR-BASED RECOGNITION UNDER EXISTING LEGAL DESIGNATIONS

OECM identification and reporting has also been carried out by applying OECM criteria to areas already governed under sector-specific legal or administrative frameworks. These cases involve long-standing fisheries, cultural landscape or resource-management regimes that deliver sustained biodiversity outcomes and are therefore confirmed as OECMs following assessment (that is, recognition is based on confirming that existing rules already achieve conservation outcomes, rather than creating new protection measures). Identification is achieved by documenting

how these existing measures meet CBD Decision 14/8 criteria and transmitting them to the World Database through the competent national authority.

This pathway demonstrates that OECMs can be operationalised without issuing new environmental regulations when sectoral legal tools already ensure durable area-based conservation outcomes.

- **Algeria – Cultural Parks recognised as OECMs:** Under Algeria’s cultural heritage and environmental management framework, certain ‘Parcs Culturels’ have been recognised as OECMs. Key instruments include Executive Decree No. 87-231, establishing the Ahaggar Cultural Park, and Executive Decree No. 09-408, defining the organisation and competencies of the Tindouf Cultural Park Office. These Cultural Parks combine long-term land-use regulation with biodiversity management functions. Sites meeting OECM criteria are assessed and submitted for inclusion in the World Database.
- **Morocco – Sites of Biological and Ecological Interest (SIBEs) and hunting reserves recognised as OECMs:** Under Morocco’s Plan Directeur des Aires Protégées du Maroc (1996) and related sectoral instruments, Sites of Biological and Ecological Interest (SIBEs) and hunting reserves are managed for biodiversity conservation alongside other land uses. These areas are evaluated against OECM criteria, and those demonstrating long-term conservation outcomes and governance stability are confirmed as OECMs for reporting purposes.
- **Oman – Fisheries and marine spatial measures recognised as OECMs:** Under the Law on Aquatic Living Resources (Royal Decree 20/2019) and Royal Decree 92/2020 on ministerial restructuring, spatial management areas established for fisheries and marine ecosystem protection may be recognised as OECMs. These areas are assessed by the Environment Authority in coordination with relevant sectoral bodies to determine compliance with CBD OECM criteria. Sites demonstrating effective, long-term biodiversity outcomes are confirmed and submitted for national and international reporting (see Case study 4, Annex I).

- **Philippines – Sector-based conservation areas recognised as OECMs:** The Philippines identifies OECMs by applying CBD criteria to a wide range of existing sectoral and customary governance regimes. Areas such as Indigenous ancestral domains and ICCAs (under the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act), Local Conservation Areas managed by local governments, fisheries management zones, and various Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) administered conservation sites including wetlands, caves, peatlands and watershed forests, are assessed for their biodiversity outcomes and governance durability. Sites that demonstrate long-term, effective in-situ conservation are confirmed as OECMs and reported to the World Database through the DENR Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB) as the competent national authority.

For many countries, this model may be particularly relevant where resource-management frameworks already deliver durable conservation outcomes or where legislative reform processes are lengthy. This pathway illustrates that:

- Formal assessment against CBD criteria remains the foundation for formal OECM confirmation.
- OECM implementation can build upon existing sectoral legal and management tools.
- OECM recognition can proceed even in the absence of new environmental legislation.
- Sectoral systems, especially fisheries and cultural-landscape mechanisms, can serve as significant contributors to biodiversity conservation.

2.5. OECMs IN AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

Beyond national jurisdictions, emerging practice shows that OECM identification and reporting can also be achieved through international sectoral governance, demonstrating the applicability of CBD criteria in high-seas contexts.

- **Areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ): High-seas Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs):** In marine areas beyond national jurisdiction, certain fisheries closures

have been recognised as OECMs where they meet CBD criteria for long-term biodiversity outcomes. These include VMEs designated through decisions of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, such as the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, and implemented in coordination with the Collective Arrangement between the Commission established under the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic and the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission. These are the first confirmed ABNJ OECMs.

The emergence of OECMs in the high seas is closely aligned with the objectives of the new Agreement under UNCLOS on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). The Agreement strengthens the international legal framework for area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, and institutional cooperation. While the BBNJ Agreement does not reference OECMs directly, its provisions create an enabling environment for expanding OECM identification in areas beyond national jurisdiction through:

- enhanced regional coordination mechanisms;
- improved scientific data sharing; and
- strengthened obligations for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity.

As the BBNJ Agreement enters into force, more ABNJ OECMs are likely to be identified, providing a strategic pathway for high-seas contributions to the global 30×30 target.

2.6. TRENDS IN LEGAL AND POLICY PATHWAYS FOR IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING OECMs

As countries work towards the global 30×30 target, they are finding different ways to identify and report OECMs. Figure 2 shows the distribution of pathways (ministerial and departmental legal instruments, national guidelines, administrative procedures, sector-based recognition under existing legal designations, and OECMs in areas beyond national jurisdiction).

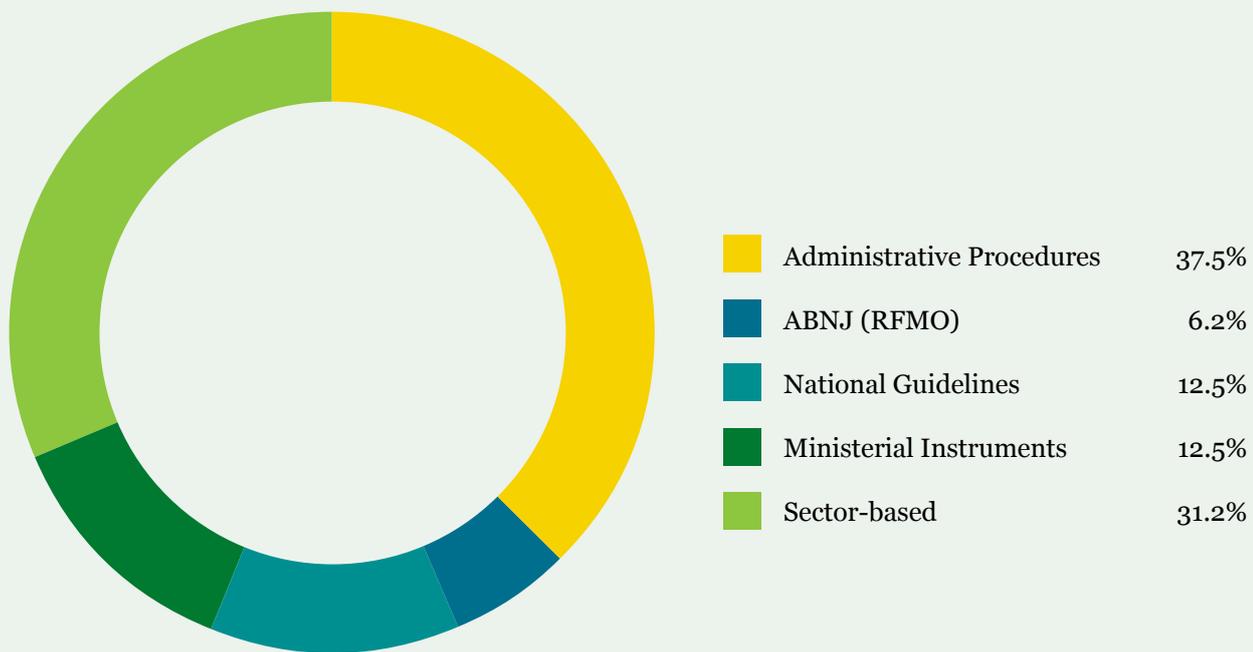


Figure 2. Pathways used by OECM-reporting jurisdictions

As seen in Figure 2, one of the most common approaches to identify and report OECMs is through administrative procedures. This pathway is used in Bhutan, the Cook Islands, Guernsey (Channel Islands), Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Eswatini. In these jurisdictions, government agencies apply existing environmental and natural-resource laws to screen potential OECMs, assess whether they meet the CBD criteria, and confirm them for reporting. This approach is flexible and efficient, as it builds on procedures already used for managing forests, coastlines, rangelands, or marine areas. In the Republic of Korea, for example, national OECM guidance is still under development, yet the country has already reported seven OECMs using its current administrative processes.

A second group of countries identifies OECMs through sector-based recognition under existing legal destinations. Algeria, Morocco, Oman, the Philippines and Sweden rely on long-standing systems – such as cultural landscapes, fisheries closures, hunting reserves, ICCAs, and forest management regimes – that already deliver durable conservation outcomes. A third group relies on ministerial or departmental legal instruments. Ecuador and Peru have adopted ministerial resolutions that define OECM procedures, outline institutional responsibilities, and specify doc-

umentation requirements. Argentina has also adopted a ministerial legal instrument, although it has not yet reported any OECMs internationally.

Other countries have chosen to develop national guidelines and policy frameworks which provide structured but non-binding guidance for screening, evaluating and documenting OECMs. Canada and Colombia have taken this approach. Australia has also adopted a national policy framework but has not yet reported any OECMs to the World Database. National guidelines are particularly valuable in countries where conservation responsibilities are shared across multiple institutions or regions; they create a common methodological baseline, support capacity-building, and allow piloting before more formal regulations are adopted.

Finally, in the high seas, OECMs are identified and reported through the decisions of regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs). These bodies establish long-term spatial measures, such as closures and gear restrictions, to protect vulnerable marine ecosystems. When these measures satisfy the CBD criteria, they can be confirmed and reported as ABNJ OECMs. This pathway demonstrates how OECMs can contribute to conservation beyond national boundaries.

It is also worth noting that several jurisdictions are now developing or refining their national OECM frameworks, and the pattern that emerges differs in important ways from the pathways used by countries that have already reported OECMs. Figure 3 shows the distribution of pathways chosen to identify and report OECMs in jurisdictions currently developing OECM frameworks.

The most common pathway is to use national guidelines and policy frameworks. This pathway is used by Chile, France, India, Malaysia, Scotland and Viet Nam. These jurisdictions are preparing structured, CBD-aligned guidance to clarify national criteria, documentation requirements, and procedural steps. This stands in contrast to the reporting jurisdictions, where guidelines represent only a small proportion of pathways.

A second group – Bhutan, Namibia, Nepal and Lebanon – is advancing through administrative procedures. These countries are relying on their existing environmental, forestry and land-use legislation to guide the identification and assessment of potential OECMs. Bhutan has reported an initial set of OECMs using its existing administrative screening process under the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS), but a dedicated OECM framework is under development.

Two jurisdictions – Costa Rica and Indonesia – are developing their frameworks through ministerial legal instruments, preparing dedicated decrees or regulations to formalise national OECM procedures. This pathway provides strong legal authority and clear institutional responsibilities from the outset, which may help support rapid national implementation once adopted.

Finally, South Africa is advancing through sector-based pathways, grounding its OECM work in long-standing conservation regimes such as stewardship agreements, responsible land-use systems, and landscape-level biodiversity frameworks. Figure 3. Pathways in OECM frameworks under development

In summary, there is no single model for identifying and reporting OECMs (see Table 4, Annex II). Instead, governments are using a range of practical approaches that fit their legal systems, governance traditions and conservation priorities. Despite these differences, however, the analysis of the various pathways shows their clear alignment with the shared terminology, definition and criteria outlined in CBD Decision 14/8. The next section examines this alignment.

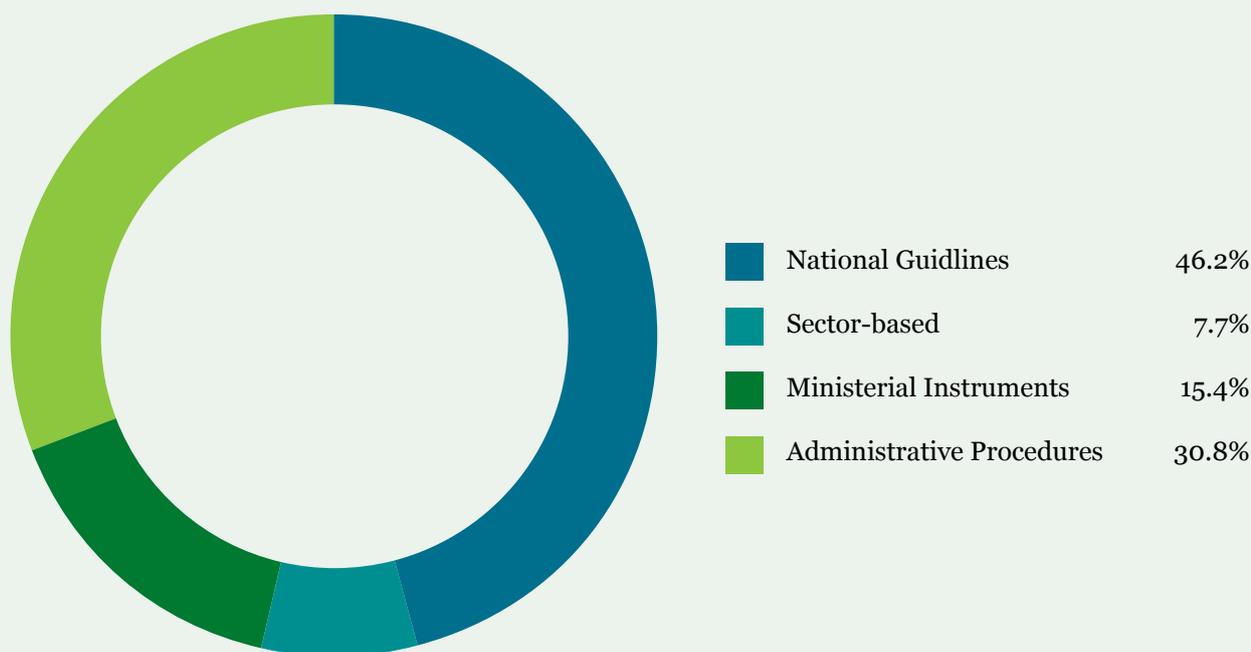


Figure 3. Pathways in OECM frameworks under development



ALIGNMENT WITH CBD TERMINOLOGY, DEFINITION AND CRITERIA



3

This section assesses the extent to which national OECM frameworks reflect the terminology, definition and criteria outlined in CBD Decision 14/8.

3.1. TERMINOLOGY

Across jurisdictions, the term OECM is widely used. Several countries also apply functionally equivalent national terms that fit their legal or administrative contexts. Japan uses the designation ‘Sustainably Managed Natural Areas’ through its national certification system; Bhutan refers to ‘Other Effective Conservation Areas’ in its emerging framework; and Australia classifies qualifying sites as ‘Conserved Areas’ under its national OECM framework.

In many jurisdictions, OECM status has been applied post-hoc to long-standing conservation categories rather than through creating new legal terms. This includes Algeria’s ‘Cultural Parks’, Morocco’s ‘Sites of Biological and Ecological Interest’ (SIBEs), and Oman’s fisheries management zones and marine closures.

Whatever the differences in the terminology they employ, the underlying purpose of national OECM frameworks remains the same in all cases. Each approach aims to identify and recognise effective, long-term, area-based conservation measures outside protected areas, consistent with the intent of CBD Decision 14/8.

3.2. DEFINITION

Most jurisdictions closely follow the CBD definition of an OECM. Countries including Canada, Ecuador, the Philippines, Eswatini, the Cook Islands and Argentina reproduce the CBD definition directly or with only minor wording changes. These cases represent direct alignment.

Other jurisdictions – Bhutan, Chile, India, Malaysia, Namibia, Nepal, France and Viet Nam – use distinct national terminology that is nevertheless fully aligned with the CBD definition. Although the exact wording differs, these frameworks include all the essential components: long-term biodiversity outcomes, governance arrangements, management measures and durability.

Some countries introduce slight adaptations to reflect national priorities or legal systems. Colombia incorporates elements on social participation and territorial rights; Japan uses national indicators for biodiversity value and management continuity; and Peru highlights that OECMs complement the national protected-area system (SINANPE). These additions adjust the national application of the CBD definition without altering its core intent.

In sector-based systems, notably Algeria, Morocco and Oman, alignment is partial or implicit. These jurisdictions evaluate long-standing designations such as Cultural Parks, SIBEs or fisheries closures against the CBD definition. While these areas can meet key elements of the definition, they were not originally created with OECM concepts in mind and therefore do not fully incorporate all CBD requirements.

3.3. CRITERIA

Decision 14/8 of the Convention on Biological Diversity identifies four core criteria for recognising OECMs:

1. Positive and sustained in-situ biodiversity conservation outcomes
2. Governance and management arrangements that are effective in delivering those outcomes
3. Long-term intent and reasonable assurance of the durability of conservation outcomes
4. Maintenance of associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic and other locally relevant values

Most jurisdictions apply these criteria either directly or through national equivalents that maintain the same intent. Ecuador, Peru, Eswatini, the Philippines, the Cook Islands and Argentina follow the CBD criteria almost exactly, embedding them into national evaluation templates, reporting systems or administrative procedures. These countries demonstrate direct alignment with the CBD framework. Recent draft statutory frameworks, such as South Africa’s Norms and Standards for OECMs, reinforce that OECM recognition is voluntary, consent-based, and complementary to protected areas rather than a substitute for them.

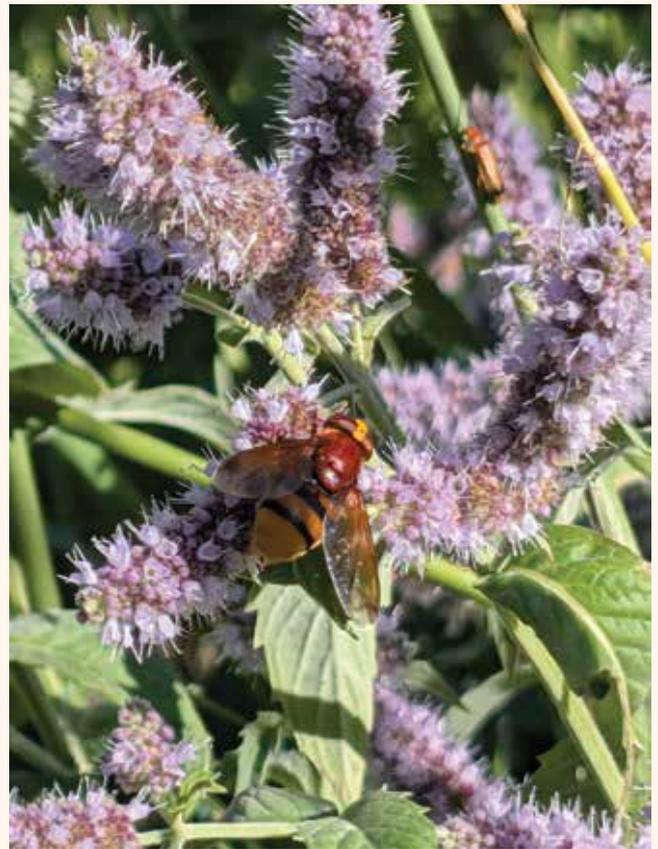
A larger group – including Bhutan, Chile, India, Malaysia, Namibia, Nepal, Scotland and Viet Nam – apply criteria that are fully aligned with the CBD structure. Although the language varies, their frameworks clearly address governance, management, biodiversity outcomes and long-term durability in ways that match the CBD’s conceptual approach.

Several jurisdictions make slight adaptations to meet national needs or sectoral contexts. Sweden includes marine ecological integrity indicators; Canada incorporates ecological condition thresholds and Indigenous stewardship criteria; Japan uses national indicators for governance stability and management continuity; and Oman applies fisheries-specific ecosystem performance measures. These additions refine how sites are assessed without changing the underlying meaning of the CBD criteria.

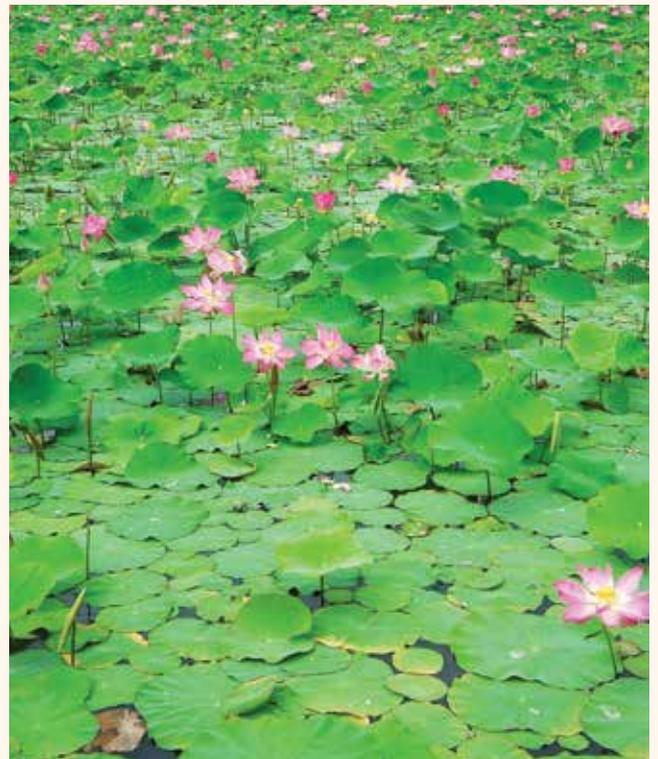
Where OECM recognition is applied to legacy or sector-based designations, as in Algeria, Morocco and Oman, the criteria are only partially or implicitly met. These areas provide sustained biodiversity benefits, but their governance or management arrangements do not always correspond fully to the structure envisioned in Decision 14/8, mainly because they pre-date the OECM concept.

Table 2 summarises these differences using four standard categories:

- **Direct** – CBD criteria reproduced with minimal changes.
- **Aligned** – Criteria expressed in national phrasing but fully consistent with CBD intent.
- **Slight adaptation** – CBD framework followed closely with additional national indicators.
- **Partial/Implicit** – Only some CBD criteria reflected, often in post-hoc sector-based systems.



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Lotus flowers in bloom, Vietnam © IngImage

Table 2. Alignment of national OECM frameworks with CBD definition and criteria

Country/ jurisdiction	Framework	Terminology used	Alignment with CBD definition	Alignment with CBD criteria	Notes
Algeria	Cultural Parks designation (sector-based/ post-hoc)	OECM (post-hoc)	Implicit	Partial	Cultural Parks assessed against OECM logic; criteria rely on cultural-landscape mandates, not CBD structure.
Argentina	National OMEC Resolution (446/2025)	OMEC	Direct	Direct	CBD definition and Decision 14/8 criteria reproduced in national OMEC regulation.
Australia	National OECM Framework (2024)	Conserved Areas	Direct	Direct	Framework incorporates CBD wording nearly verbatim; first OECM confirmed domestically but not yet reported to the World Database. Recognition is based on confirmation against framework criteria with landholder consent; informal MOUs may support implementation but do not constitute the legal basis for recognition.
Bhutan	Draft national OECA framework (in development)	OECA	Aligned	Aligned	Draft OECA closely follows CBD structure; reported OECMs assessed against CBD-consistent criteria.
Canada	National terrestrial and marine guidance	OECM	Direct	Direct	CBD definition and criteria applied directly through national marine guidance and pan-Canadian terrestrial guidance (Pathway initiative). The Pathway Decision Support Tool provides clarifying questions to support interpretation but does not introduce additional national criteria.
Chile	National OECM guidelines (in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Draft guidelines reflect CBD definition and criteria directly with national phrasing.

Colombia	National OMEC Guide (2022)	OMEC	Slight adaptation	Slight adaptation	CBD basis retained; adds constitutional emphasis on participation and territorial rights.
Cook Islands	Administrative recognition under NES	OECM	Direct	Direct	Administrative guidelines mirror CBD text with no substantive additions.
Costa Rica	Draft OMEC decree (SINAC–INCOPESCA) (in development)	OMEC	Aligned	Aligned	Draft decree applies the CBD definition and criteria as its core structure; parallel technical work and pilot initiatives under existing sectoral regimes have supported methodological development, but formal OMEC recognition will depend on adoption of the decree.
Ecuador	Ministerial Agreement MAATE-2023-130	OMEC	Direct	Direct	OMEC regulation reproduces CBD definition and criteria verbatim.
Eswatini	Sector-based/post-hoc assessment	OECM (post-hoc)	Implicit	Partial	Eight OECMs derived from community-managed forests and cultural-use areas; no dedicated OECM regulation.
France	National OECM guidelines (in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Draft guidance follows CBD language closely; adapted to Natura 2000 and MSP context.
Guernsey (Channel Islands)	Administrative procedure	OECM	Direct	Direct	Uses CBD wording for both definition and criteria in administrative recognition.
India	National OECM Identification Guidelines (in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Draft guidelines use CBD definition and criteria as evaluative basis with national language.
Indonesia	Draft ministerial regulation (KLHK) (in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Draft regulation uses CBD definition and criteria directly as the recognition basis.
Japan	MOE national certification system (SMNAs)	Sustainably Managed Natural Areas	Equivalent	Slight adaptation	Equivalent to CBD definition; national indicators assess biodiversity value, governance stability, management continuity.

Lebanon	Framework in early development	OECM	Implicit	Partial	Early consultations; links OECMs to cultural heritage and marine/coastal governance.
Malaysia	National OECM framework (NRECC, in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Framework uses CBD definition and criteria as core reference within national biodiversity policy language.
Morocco	SIBE and hunting reserve designations (sector-based)	OECM (post-hoc)	Implicit	Partial	Sectoral ecological criteria applied; governance via SIBE and hunting regulations, not CBD text.
Namibia	Emerging national OECM guidance (in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Draft guidance grounded in CBD text; adapted to conservancy and stewardship regimes.
Nepal	National OECM policy framework (in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Framework reflects CBD 14/8; applies community-based governance models.
Oman	Fisheries closures and spatial zones (sector-based)	OECM	Implicit	Slight adaptation	Fisheries legislation provides ecosystem-based criteria mapping to CBD outcomes, not full structure.
Peru	OMECE Lineamientos (2023)	OMECE	Slight adaptation	Direct	CBD definition reproduced with SINANPE reference; criteria applied exactly.
Philippines	DENR-BMB assessment process	OECM	Direct	Direct	Definition and criteria applied directly through DENR-BMB procedures.
Republic of Korea	National OECM framework emerging (in development)	OECM	Direct	Direct	Reporting uses CBD definition and criteria fully; formal framework under development.
Scotland (UK)	National OECM Guidance (NatureScot, in development)	Nature30 sites	Aligned	Aligned	Guidance mirrors CBD wording and structure for terrestrial and marine areas.
South Africa	Revised National Norms and Standards (NEMBA, in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	National norms integrate CBD definition and criteria within stewardship governance structures.

Sweden	National marine/terrestrial OECM framework	OECM	Direct	Slight adaptation	Uses CBD wording; adds marine integrity indicators and monitoring requirements.
Viet Nam	National OECM guidelines (MONRE, in development)	OECM	Aligned	Aligned	Draft guidelines adopt CBD definition and criteria directly as evaluative structure.



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3.4. COMMENTARY

The evidence presented in Table 2 reveals a high degree of international coherence in how countries and regions are operationalising the CBD’s framework for recognising OECMs. Although national pathways differ, from ministerial regulations and decrees to administrative procedures and post-hoc sectoral assessments, the underlying interpretation of Decision 14/8 shows consistent application across legal systems, governance traditions and conservation models.

One of the clearest patterns is the broad commitment to applying the CBD definition and criteria as the common reference point, regardless of whether countries have adopted a dedicated OECM regulation. Jurisdictions such as Ecuador, Eswatini, Argentina, the Cook Islands and the Philippines demonstrate that direct use of CBD text is now standard practice. Even where the CBD language is not reproduced verbatim, as in Bhutan, Chile, India or Viet Nam, the national frameworks remain fully consistent with the key elements of governance, management, long-term conservation intent and positive biodiversity outcomes.

Variation emerges primarily where national circumstances require additional contextualisation. Several jurisdictions incorporate nationally specific metrics, such as Canada’s and Sweden’s ecosystem integrity indicators, Japan’s governance stability and management continuity assessments, or Colombia’s emphasis on social participation and territorial rights. These refinements improve national relevance while remaining faithful to the CBD structure. Similarly, sector-based approaches in Oman, Morocco and Algeria show that long-standing fisheries, ecological or cultural designations can function as OECMs when assessed against the CBD criteria, even if they were not originally designed with OECM intent.

A second notable trend is the growing number of countries – such as the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Bhutan, as well as Nepal and Namibia – that are advancing OECM work even while their national frameworks remain under development. This includes jurisdictions that have already begun identifying and reporting OECMs (Philippines, Republic of Korea, Bhutan) and those undertaking preliminary assessment and scoping exercises to prepare for future identification (Nepal, Namibia). In these cases,

sectoral agencies or interim guidance apply the CBD criteria in practice, demonstrating that implementation can advance even before a formal recognition mechanism is finalised.

Finally, the experience of areas beyond national jurisdiction, particularly through NEAFC and OSPAR decisions, shows that CBD Decision 14/8 can be applied effectively in complex governance environments. High-seas fisheries closures and VME protections align directly with CBD criteria, underscoring the framework’s adaptability across diverse legal and ecological contexts.

Taken together, these patterns reflect a global practice characterised by coherence in principle and flexibility in implementation. Countries share a common interpretation of what constitutes an OECM, while tailoring mechanisms, indicators and governance arrangements to their national circumstances. This combination of international standardisation and domestic adaptation is helping to establish a robust, scalable and context-sensitive global OECM system aligned with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.



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GLOBAL TRENDS IN OECM FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL REPORTING



4

Early reporting to the World Database was concentrated in North America and Asia-Pacific but the most recent submissions have come from Africa, Latin America and Small Island Developing States showing that implementation is now a global phenomenon.

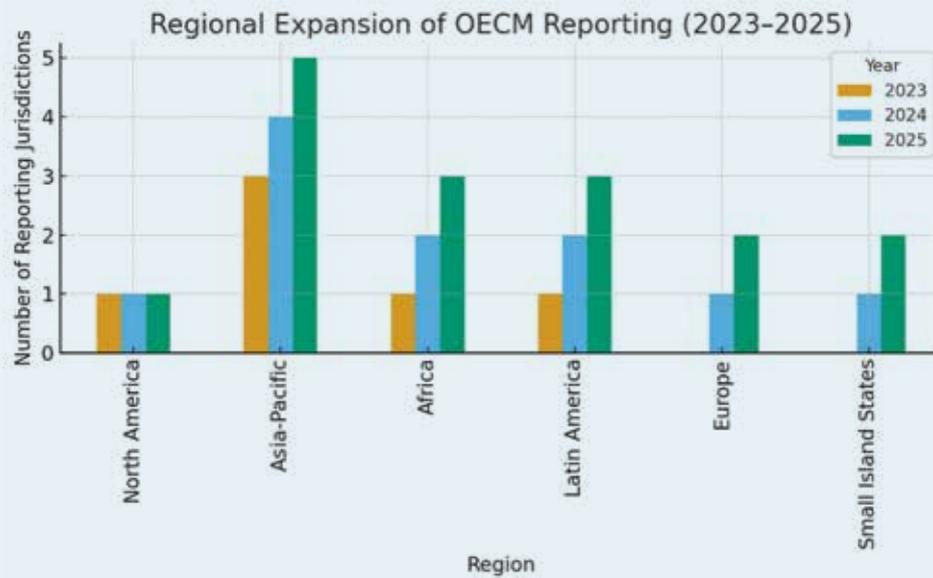


Figure 4. Regional expansion of OECM reporting (2023-2025)



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AFRICA

Africa is demonstrating leadership in linking OECMs to cultural, ecological and community-governed landscapes. Countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Eswatini have identified OECMs through sector-based or post-hoc mechanisms, using long-standing legal designations such as cultural parks, Sites of Biological and Ecological Interest (SIBEs), hunting reserves, and community-managed forests. These cases highlight the region's ability to leverage existing governance systems rather than create new legal categories.

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

The region includes several of the jurisdictions most active in developing OECM frameworks. Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines and the Cook Islands have already adopted administrative or policy instruments that allow OECMs to be identified and reported.

Meanwhile, countries such as India, Viet Nam, Malaysia and Indonesia are finalising national frameworks, signalling strong policy momentum aligned with the GBF Target 3 (30×30). Bhutan has also advanced OECM reporting while its OECA framework is being finalised.

LATIN AMERICA

Latin America is advancing rapidly through ministerial instruments and formal policy acts. Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Argentina have each issued ministerial agreements or national resolutions that establish procedures for assessing and reporting OECMs. These instruments create clear administrative processes, reflecting a regional preference for formal but flexible legal tools grounded in existing biodiversity, protected areas, and land-use legislation.

EUROPE

Europe remains at an early stage, but with targeted progress in both EU and non-EU jurisdictions. Only Sweden and Guernsey have formally reported OECMs to date, but several European countries are developing national guidance. These draft frameworks often articulate how OECMs will complement Natura 2000, marine spatial planning (MSP), and national conservation instruments. Scotland, in particular, is advancing OECM procedures through NatureScot, reflecting its domestic 30×30 commitments. The IUCN's report on OECMs in Europe (2024) confirms that regional interest is growing, with multiple countries integrating OECM considerations into national biodiversity strategies.

AREAS BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION (ABNJ)

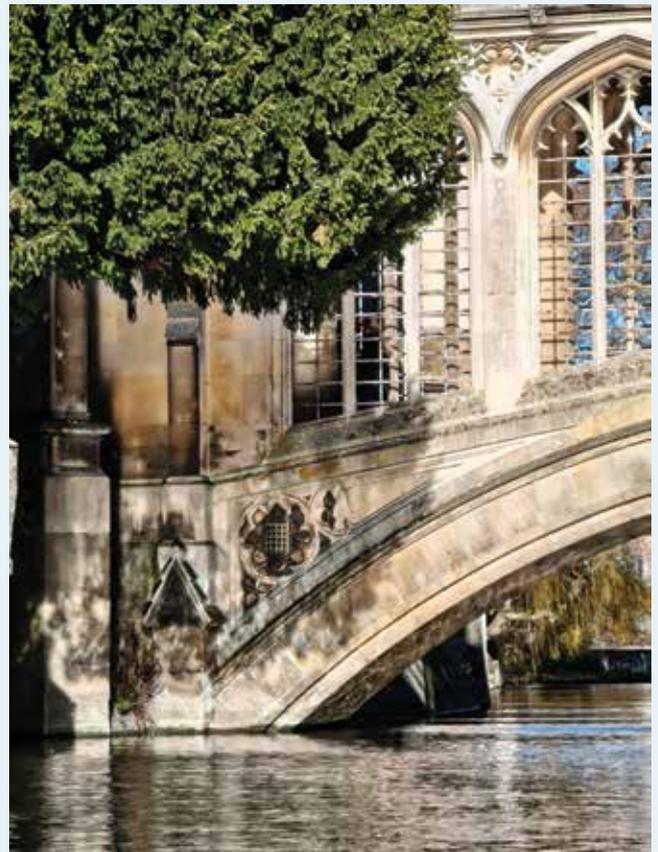
OECMs in ABNJ represent a global milestone. The recognition of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) by regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs), including NEAFC and OSPAR, constitutes the first confirmed OECMs in the high seas. These cases demonstrate that OECMs can be recognised within international sectoral regimes, setting an important precedent for future BBNJ (High Seas Treaty) implementation.

EMERGING GLOBAL PICTURE

Most countries are choosing to develop national OECM guidelines or policy frameworks rather than introduce new legislation. Among jurisdictions that have already reported OECMs, the dominant pathways remain non-legislative tools, particularly national guidelines and administrative procedures (see Figure 2). This pattern suggests that governments view policy instruments as the most practical and adaptable means of identifying and reporting OECMs. Additionally, in contexts where authorities already possess the power to designate or certify conservation areas,

administrative procedures are becoming a particularly effective route. Examples from Japan, the Cook Islands and Guernsey illustrate how OECM identification can be embedded directly into pre-existing assessment and approval processes, relying on internal evaluation rather than new regulations.

Despite these patterns, there is no single model for operationalising OECMs. Countries are selecting the tools that best align with their legal systems, institutional arrangements and conservation priorities. As more countries move toward identifying and reporting OECMs, there is a growing need for coherent guidance, institutional alignment and practical support to strengthen national systems and ensure consistency with global biodiversity commitments. The following section sets out practical recommendations to guide this work.



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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING OECSs



As countries accelerate efforts to identify and report OECMs, there is a growing need for structured learning, shared experience, and practical tools to guide implementation. Although significant progress has been made, national frameworks are developing at different speeds and through diverse legal pathways. This creates an important opportunity for deeper cooperation and knowledge exchange among policymakers, legislators and practitioners. This section outlines the key policy priorities and practical steps required to advance national OECM legal frameworks.

MORE SYSTEMATIC SHARING OF LESSONS IS NEEDED.

Countries would benefit from more systematic sharing of lessons. Early implementers have used a wide spectrum of approaches, from ministerial resolutions and administrative procedures to formal guidelines and amendments to protected-area legislation. Sharing the emerging examples and lessons set out in this report to highlight the varied pathways can help other jurisdictions understand the range of viable options, adapt successful models, and avoid common bottlenecks.

DEVELOPMENT OF PRACTICAL, USER-FRIENDLY GUIDANCE IS ESSENTIAL.

Policymakers and legislators require clear tools that translate CBD criteria into operational steps, including templates for documentation, checklists for assessing durability and governance, and examples of acceptable evidence for demonstrating “effective long-term conservation.” Such resources can support countries that are beginning to shape their OECM frameworks and ensure consistency in reporting to the World Database.

REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY.

Bodies such as the African Union, ASEAN, the European Union, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPRE) can facilitate peer learning, coordinate training and technical assistance, and promote regionally tailored approaches to OECM identification and reporting. In addition, the CBD’s sub-regional Technical and Scientific Support Centres can provide dedicated technical support and capacity building. Because biodiversity governance challenges are often shared across borders, regional platforms are well placed to support harmonised methodologies, encourage uptake among neighbouring countries, and help integrate OECMs into trans-boundary conservation initiatives.

THE TIME IS NOW FOR ROBUST OECM LAWS AND POLICIES.

It is seven years since international agreement was reached about the definition and criteria of an OECM. Sixteen countries and territories have reported OECMs internationally, and many more have begun to develop legal and policy frameworks to advance OECMs in their jurisdictions. Supporting countries to develop frameworks that clearly integrate the CBD’s guidance and provide clear procedures for identifying, reporting and monitoring OECMs is now a global priority. If this is done well, those frameworks will deliver OECMs that are rights-based and that achieve the effective conservation of biodiversity over the long term, delivering for people and the planet.



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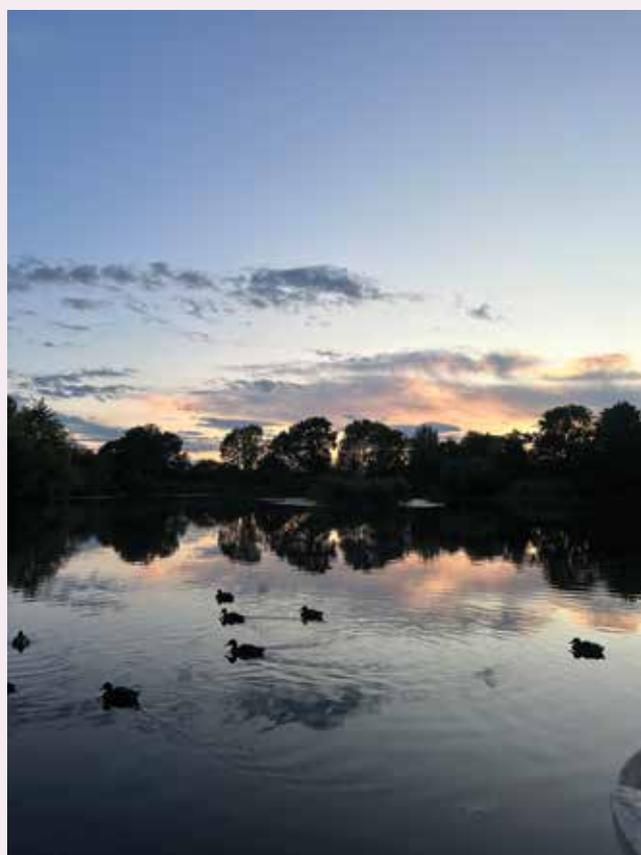
CONCLUSION

The global expansion of OECM practice over the past four years demonstrates that countries are rapidly diversifying the legal and policy tools used to advance the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework’s 30×30 target. The comparative analysis presented in this report shows that, despite differences in legal systems and governance traditions, national approaches are converging around a shared interpretation of CBD Decision 14/8. Whether through ministerial regulations, national guidelines, administrative procedures, sector-based regimes, or emerging mechanisms in areas beyond national jurisdiction, governments are finding pragmatic pathways to identify, document and report effective area-based conservation outside protected areas.

A clear lesson emerging from the experience of early implementers is the value of having flexible yet credible frameworks that align closely with the CBD definition and criteria while remaining adaptable to domestic contexts. Countries are increasingly using existing environmental, fisheries, cultural landscape and land-use legislation as a foundation for OECM recognition, and several are advancing implementation even as national frameworks continue to evolve. This demonstrates that progress toward Target 3 does not depend on a single model, but rather on clear procedures, transparent assessment, and strong governance arrangements that ensure sustained biodiversity outcomes.

At the same time, the analysis highlights the need for continued cooperation and practical support. Many jurisdictions are developing new national guidelines, refining sectoral systems or preparing legislative instruments, and would benefit from shared methodologies, technical guidance and regional platforms for learning. The experiences synthesised in this report underscore the fact that OECMs are now an integral part of global conservation practice, offering a means to acknowledge the contributions of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, private landholders, and diverse sectors whose stewardship delivers long-term conservation results.

As implementation accelerates toward 2030, robust and inclusive OECM frameworks will be essential for countries seeking to meet their commitments under the Global Biodiversity Framework. By strengthening legal clarity, institutional coordination and reporting systems, governments can ensure that OECMs contribute effectively, equitably and at scale to global biodiversity goals.



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NamibRand (candidate OECM), Namibia. © Martin Harvey / WWF

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The individuals acknowledged above contributed in their professional capacity. Their review and input do not imply endorsement of the findings, interpretations, or conclusions expressed in this report.

ANNEX I CASE STUDIES



CASE STUDY 1

ECUADOR – MINISTERIAL PROCEDURE FOR IDENTIFYING AND REGISTERING OECSs

- **Type of instrument:** Ministerial Agreement No. MAATE-2023-130
- **Authority:** Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (MAATE)
- **Adopted:** 22 November 2023 (published 12 December 2023)
- **Legal nature:** Legally binding ministerial agreement issued under MAATE's environmental powers



Tiger-Striped Leaf Frog, *Callimedusa tomopterna*, Tropical Rainforest, Napo River Basin, Amazonia, Ecuador, America, © IngImage

Context

Ecuador is a regional leader in biodiversity governance and rights-based conservation. Ministerial Agreement MAATE-2023-130 establishes the national procedure for recognising, registering and reporting Otras Medidas Eficaces de Conservación Basadas en Áreas (OMECSs), the Spanish-language equivalent of OECSs. The agreement translates the standards of CBD Decision 14/8 into domestic administrative rules and enables legally binding approval of OMECSs without requiring new legislation. It provides a structured pathway for voluntary conservation initiatives to be formally recognised outside the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP).

Key rules

- Applies to conservation initiatives outside SNAP, including community-based, private, Indigenous and subnational governance arrangements.
- Requires clearly defined boundaries, documented governance and tenure, and management systems demonstrating sustained biodiversity outcomes.
- Approval is voluntary but legally binding once granted; MAATE may suspend or revoke the designation if conservation conditions are not maintained.
- Establishes a structured administrative procedure aligned with CBD criteria and reporting requirements.

Institutional responsibilities

Actor	Role
MAATE (central level)	Leads the national OMEC process, verifies applications, issues approval resolutions, maintains the National OMEC Registry, and reports to the CBD Secretariat.
Subnational governments (GADs)	Support identification of potential OMECs, assist with preparation of technical dossiers, and integrate approved areas into territorial and land-use plans.
Communities, NGOs, private owners	Submit applications, demonstrate effective governance and management, and implement conservation actions.
Technical partners (WWF, UNEP, academia)	Provide technical support for baselines, mapping and monitoring.

Procedural steps

- 1. Application:** Proponents submit a technical dossier including boundaries, governance and tenure documentation, and biodiversity baselines.
- 2. Screening:** MAATE verifies eligibility and completeness.
- 3. Technical evaluation:** Governance stability, ecological significance and management effectiveness are assessed; field verification is conducted where required.
- 4. Approval and registration:** MAATE issues an approval resolution; the site is entered into the National OMEC Registry and reported to the World Database.
- 5. Monitoring and review:** Sites undergo periodic evaluations using field and remote-sensing data; status may be reaffirmed, suspended or revoked.

Results and significance

- Five OMECs were formally approved and registered in the World Database by mid-2025.
- The framework provides legal certainty, administrative efficiency and accountability through structured monitoring.
- Demonstrates how ministerial instruments can operationalise OMECs within existing legal and administrative systems.
- Offers a scalable and replicable model for countries advancing Target 3 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.



Waterfall in Ecuador © IngImage

CASE STUDY 2

CANADA – NATIONAL GUIDANCE FOR IDENTIFYING, ASSESSING AND REPORTING OECMs

- **Type of instrument:** National Guidance for Terrestrial and Marine OECMs (ECCC 2019; DFO 2022)
- **Authority:** Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC); Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO)
- **Adopted:** 2019 (terrestrial), 2022 (marine)
- **Legal nature:** Non-binding national guidance under existing federal environmental mandates

Context

Canada has been a global pioneer in operationalising the OECM concept through policy guidance rather than regulation. To interpret and apply CBD Decision 14/8 domestically, the federal departments responsible for terrestrial and marine conservation – Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) – developed detailed national guidance documents that outline a common approach for identifying, assessing and reporting OECMs.

Although the guidance is non-binding, it is widely recognised as authoritative across federal, provincial, municipal, private, territorial and Indigenous governance systems. It provides a coherent national framework within a highly decentralised conservation system, enabling consistent assessment of candidate areas with different governance, tenure and management arrangements.

Key rules

- Defines OECMs as geographically defined areas outside protected areas that achieve effective, long-term biodiversity outcomes.
- Establishes screening and assessment criteria aligned with CBD Decision 14/8, including governance quality, sustained and effective management, ecological significance and durability of conservation results.
- Recognises a range of governance types – such as Indigenous-governed areas, fisheries management zones and privately conserved lands – when they demonstrate measurable biodiversity benefits.
- Requires documentation of boundaries, management objectives, governance arrangements, monitoring mechanisms and evidence of ecological integrity.
- Clarifies that the national guidance is advisory in nature: it ensures reporting consistency but does not create new legal designations or obligations.



Beautiful turquoise waters of the Joffre lake in Canada © IngImage

Institutional responsibilities

Actor	Role
ECCC (Federal)	Coordinates terrestrial and inland-water OECM processes; maintains pan-Canadian guidance developed under the Pathway initiative; receives submissions from provincial/territorial authorities and directly from eligible Indigenous, municipal and private/ENGO land stewards; compiles national datasets and reports to the CBD Secretariat.
DFO (Federal)	Oversees marine OECM identification and validation using the 2022 Marine Guidance; manages the national marine OECM database; reports marine OECMs to the CBD Secretariat.
Provincial and territorial governments	Identify and assess candidate areas within their jurisdiction; coordinate submissions from regional authorities and land stewards; provide validated information to ECCC for national reporting.
Indigenous governments and Indigenous organisations	Nominate Indigenous-governed or co-managed areas that meet OECM criteria; may submit directly to ECCC or work through provincial/territorial channels, depending on governance arrangements and preference.
Municipal governments	Identify municipally governed conservation areas that may qualify as OECMs; submit through provincial/territorial pathways or directly to ECCC when appropriate.
Private and ENGO land stewards (e.g. Nature Conservancy of Canada)	Nominate privately protected or privately managed areas meeting OECM criteria; may submit information via provinces/territories or directly to ECCC for national reporting.
NGOs and technical experts	Provide technical data, ecological assessments, mapping support and expert review during identification and evaluation.



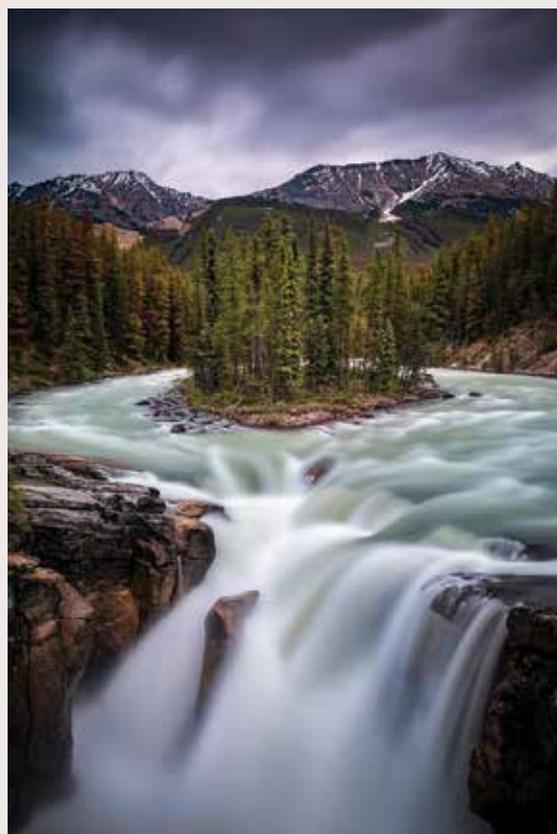
Canola fields in Saskatchewan, Canada © IngImage

Procedural steps

- 1. Identification: Candidate areas may be nominated by** federal, provincial or territorial authorities, Indigenous governments, municipal or private governing authorities, or technical partners. Nominations can be submitted directly to ECCC or through provincial/territorial pathways, depending on governance arrangements.
- 2. Assessment:** Governing authorities assess candidate areas using the pan-Canadian terrestrial guidance (Pathway DST) or the federal marine guidance (DFO, 2022). Technical experts may provide review and support to ensure consistent interpretation of CBD-aligned criteria across jurisdictions.
- 3. Collaborative review:** In the terrestrial realm, assessment results are reviewed collaboratively rather than through a formal federal validation process. ECCC provides support, clarification and quality assurance as needed, but does not act as a gatekeeper requiring full documentation in every case. For marine areas, DFO applies its national guidance to confirm that criteria are met.
- 4. Reporting:** Once assessments are complete, information is submitted to ECCC for inclusion in the national OECM database. ECCC compiles and reports Canada's terrestrial and marine OECMs to the World Database.
- 5. Review and update:** Ongoing responsibility for reviewing and updating OECM status rests primarily with the governing authority. While no federal re-assessment mechanism currently exists for terrestrial OECMs, Canada is exploring options for a national audit function to strengthen long-term confidence in OECM reporting.

Results and significance

- **Canada has reported 313 OECMs** to the World Database (as of 2025), representing one of the largest national contributions globally.
- The dual terrestrial–marine guidance system ensures procedural consistency across diverse governance arrangements and ecological contexts.
- Demonstrates how strong institutional coordination and non-binding instruments can enable national-scale implementation of OECMs within existing legal systems.
- Offers a replicable model for federal or decentralised countries seeking to implement Target 3 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework through policy tools rather than legislation.



Sunwapta Falls in Jasper National Park, Canada, © IngImage

CASE STUDY 3

JAPAN – ADMINISTRATIVE CERTIFICATION OF OECM-EQUIVALENT AREAS

- **Type of instrument:** Administrative certification procedure for Sustainably Managed Natural Areas (Jizoku Kanō na Shizen Chiiki)
- **Authority:** Ministry of the Environment (MOEJ), Government of Japan
- **Adopted:** Strengthened in 2019 under the Act on the Promotion of Biodiversity Conservation (1992)
- **Legal nature:** Administrative procedure under existing statutory authority

Context

Japan maintains a robust biodiversity governance framework that recognises the value of conservation areas outside the formal protected-area system. Under the Act on the Promotion of Biodiversity Conservation, the Ministry of the Environment (MOEJ) operates a national certification scheme for Sustainably Managed Natural Areas – a mechanism that enables voluntary, community-based, private and locally governed sites to demonstrate long-term biodiversity outcomes.

This certification system functions as Japan’s practical pathway for identifying and reporting OECM-equivalent areas in alignment with CBD Decision 14/8. It is embedded within Japan’s broader environmental legislation – including the Natural Parks Act, Nature Conservation Act, and Biodiversity Basic Act – and reinforces the principles of human–nature coexistence central to ‘satoyama’ (rural landscape mosaics) and ‘satoumi’ (coastal socio-ecological systems). **Japan’s 30×30 Roadmap (2023)** positions OECMs alongside protected areas as a key mechanism for achieving Target 3 of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, emphasising locally governed, culturally significant and multi-functional landscapes.

Key rules and criteria

- Certification applies to areas **outside protected areas** that achieve sustained biodiversity outcomes through conservation-compatible land or sea management.
- Candidate sites must demonstrate:
 - Clearly defined boundaries
 - Effective and enduring governance structures
 - Management plans aligned with biodiversity objectives
- Eligible governance types include:
 - Local governments
 - Private landowners
 - Religious institutions (e.g. temple and shrine forests)
 - Fisheries cooperatives
 - Community groups and corporations
- Applications may be submitted by local governments, NGOs or landholders, subject to ministerial evaluation.
- Certification is **voluntary and non-regulatory** – it does not alter ownership or land-use rights but provides official acknowledgement of sustained conservation contributions.
- Certified sites are recorded in Japan’s National Biodiversity Database and reported internationally to the World Database.

Institutional responsibilities

Actor	Role
Ministry of the Environment (MOEJ)	Administers the certification system; evaluates applications; maintains the national registry; reports certified sites to the CBD Secretariat.
Forestry and Fisheries Agencies	Provide technical expertise for forests, satoyama systems and coastal ecosystems; support coordination with cooperatives and local management bodies.
Prefectural and municipal governments	Identify candidate sites; support application preparation; facilitate stakeholder participation and management agreements.
Landowners, communities, NGOs	Initiate applications; implement management actions; monitor biodiversity outcomes.
Academic and technical partners	Conduct ecological assessments, mapping and long-term monitoring.



Japanese farmer tending to a rice paddy © InglImage.

Procedural steps

- 1. Nomination:** Local governments, communities, cooperatives, private landholders or NGOs propose candidate areas meeting biodiversity and governance criteria.
- 2. Evaluation:** MOEJ reviews ecological data, management plans and governance arrangements against certification standards; field verification performed as needed.
- 3. Certification:** Eligible sites are formally certified as Sustainably Managed Natural Areas under MOEJ authority.
- 4. Recording and reporting:** Certified sites are added to Japan's national biodiversity registry and reported internationally as OECM-equivalent sites to the World Database.
- 5. Monitoring and renewal:** Periodic assessments verify that biodiversity outcomes are maintained; certification may be withdrawn or not renewed if standards are not met.

Results and significance

- **Japan has reported 282 OECM-equivalent sites** to the World Database (as of 2025), making it one of the largest contributors in Asia.
- Reported sites include:
 - *Satoyama* agricultural–forest mosaics
 - *Chinju no mori* (temple and shrine forests)
 - *Satoumi* coastal areas managed by fisheries cooperatives
 - Corporate and educational forests managed for biodiversity and environmental learning
- Japan is one of the few Asian countries with a formalised OECM reporting system, ensuring transparency and accountability in global biodiversity monitoring.
- The approach empowers community, private and faith-based conservation actors to contribute to Target 3 without new legislation, leveraging long-standing traditions of stewardship.

Innovations and best practices

- A national certification and labelling scheme that enhances visibility and prestige for participating sites.
- Introduction of a “**Certificate of Support for OECMs**” to mobilise private companies, citizen groups and NGOs in supporting certified areas.
- Strong integration of **citizen science**, school-based monitoring and eco-labelling initiatives.
- Use of OECMs in **disaster-risk reduction**, cultural heritage conservation and green tourism planning.
- Demonstration of how multifunctional landscapes can deliver biodiversity outcomes while sustaining rural livelihoods, cultural identity and traditional practices.

Summary

Japan's administrative certification system illustrates how a country can operationalise OECMs effectively **without new legislation**, using existing biodiversity laws, community institutions and traditional stewardship practices. By combining ministerial authority with participatory governance, Japan offers a scalable model for recognising OECM-equivalent sites within diverse socioecological landscapes.

CASE STUDY 4

OMAN – SECTOR-BASED RECOGNITION THROUGH FISHERIES AND MARINE SPATIAL MANAGEMENT

- **Type of instrument:** Sectoral fisheries and marine spatial management measures under existing legal designations
- **Authority:** Environment Authority, in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR)
- **Adopted:** Royal Decree No. 20/2019 (Law on Aquatic Living Resources); Royal Decree No. 92/2020 (ministerial restructuring)
- **Legal nature:** Statutory sectoral management measures applied under existing marine and fisheries legislation

Context

Oman's pathway for identifying OECMs builds on its well-established marine and fisheries management framework rather than creating a new biodiversity-specific designation. The Law on Aquatic Living Resources (Royal Decree 20/2019) authorises a wide range of spatial management measures, including seasonal closures, spawning aggregation zones, no-take areas and gear restrictions, designed to ensure sustainable fisheries and protect marine ecosystems.

Many of these areas deliver sustained biodiversity outcomes even when conservation is not their primary purpose. When these sites meet the criteria of CBD Decision 14/8, they are confirmed as OECMs through coordination between the Environment Authority and MAFWR. This model demonstrates how sectoral mandates can serve as a legal and operational basis for OECM implementation without the need for new environmental legislation.

Key rules and criteria

- Spatial management areas are designated under the Law on Aquatic Living Resources to ensure ecological sustainability and protect marine habitats.
- Measures may include seasonal restrictions, gear prohibitions, spawning protection zones, reef and seagrass conservation areas, and species-specific closures.
- The Environment Authority, working with MAFWR, evaluates whether these areas meet CBD OECM criteria regarding long-term biodiversity outcomes, governance effectiveness and durability of management.
- Sites that fulfil these criteria are recorded nationally and reported to the World Database.
- OECM confirmation does not alter a site's underlying legal designation; instead, it acknowledges biodiversity outcomes generated through existing fisheries law.



Palm grove, Oman © Ingimage

Institutional responsibilities

Actor	Role
Environment Authority	Leads OECM evaluation and CBD alignment; assesses compliance with CBD Decision 14/8; reports confirmed sites internationally.
MAFWR	Establishes and manages spatial fisheries areas; ensures compliance with fisheries law; coordinates ecological assessments.
Local fishing communities and cooperatives	Participate in monitoring, enforcement and adaptive management through co-management arrangements.
Research institutes and universities	Conduct ecological surveys, species monitoring and habitat assessments to support OECM evaluation.

Procedural steps

- 1. Identification:** Fisheries and marine management zones established under the Law on Aquatic Living Resources are screened for potential OECM eligibility.
- 2. Assessment:** The Environment Authority and MAFWR jointly assess ecological significance, effectiveness of governance arrangements and long-term security.
- 3. Validation:** Areas meeting CBD OECM criteria are confirmed through an inter-ministerial administrative process.
- 4. Reporting:** Confirmed sites are added to Oman's national biodiversity registry and submitted to the World Database.
- 5. Monitoring:** Ongoing ecological monitoring and compliance checks ensure continued delivery of biodiversity outcomes.

Results and significance

- Oman has reported **two OECMs** to the World Database, both derived from fisheries management zones under existing sectoral legislation.
- The process has strengthened collaboration between environmental, fisheries and planning authorities.
- Recognised sites include reef habitats, seagrass beds, and spawning aggregation areas protected primarily for fisheries productivity but delivering measurable biodiversity benefits.
- Demonstrates how sectoral frameworks – particularly fisheries law – can achieve dual objectives: sustainable resource use and biodiversity conservation.
- Provides a practical model for countries with strong sectoral management regimes seeking to identify OECMs in multi-use landscapes or seascapes.

Innovations and best practices

- Integration of marine spatial planning tools for mapping and monitoring OECM-eligible areas.
- Active participation of fishing cooperatives in co-management and compliance.
- Introduction of biodiversity indicators into fisheries and marine planning.
- Alignment of sector-based measures with the Kunming–Montreal GBF 30×30 target.

Summary

Oman’s fisheries-based approach to OECMs shows how resource management regimes can support biodiversity outcomes without new legislation. By confirming sectoral marine management areas as OECMs when they meet CBD criteria, Oman provides a replicable model for coastal nations integrating sustainable-use governance with global biodiversity commitments under Target 3.



Coastline in Oman © IngImage

ANNEX II TABLES



Table 3 provides a structured overview of the diverse legal and policy approaches currently used to operationalise OECMs worldwide. This typology helps clarify the institutional choices available to countries and

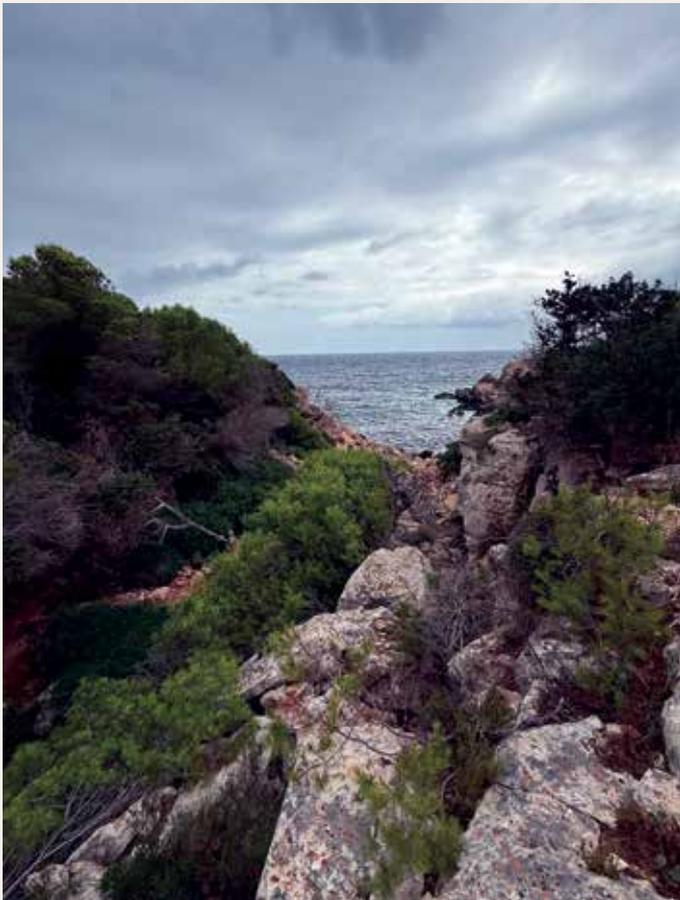
illustrates how OECM identification and reporting has advanced. Note: for countries that have not yet completed their legal and policy process with respect to OECMs, please see Table 4.

Table 3. Typology of pathways for OECM identification and reporting (as of November 2025)

Typology/ pathway	Key characteristics	Representative jurisdictions	Illustrative legal or policy instruments	Notes
1. Ministerial and departmental legal instruments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binding legal acts issued under existing mandates. • Establish procedures, responsibilities and reporting mechanisms. • Allow rapid implementation without new legislation. 	Ecuador, Peru, Argentina	<p>Ecuador: Ministerial Agreement No. MAATE-2023-130 (national procedure for recognition and reporting)</p> <p>Peru: Ministerial Resolution No. 339-2023-MINAM (Lineamientos OMEC)</p> <p>Argentina: Resolution No. 446-2025-APN-STAY-D#JGM (Secretariat-level administrative procedures)</p>	Demonstrate how executive authority enables OECM operationalisation through formal administrative law tools.
2. National guidelines and policy frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-binding but authoritative guidance. • Define criteria, documentation, and reporting procedures. • Support harmonisation and capacity building before legislation. 	Canada, Colombia, Australia	<p>Canada: National Guidance (ECCC 2019; DFO 2022) for terrestrial and marine OECMs</p> <p>Colombia: Guía Nacional para el Reconocimiento de OMEC (2022)</p> <p>Australia: National OECM Framework (2024) endorsed by environment ministers. National framework adopted; first OECM confirmed domestically but not yet reported to the World Database. Confirmation currently relies on bespoke MOU instruments.</p>	Provide consistency and transparency across agencies; often serve as precursors to formal regulations.

<p>3. Administrative procedures</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OECMs recognised directly by competent authorities under existing laws. • Use existing mandates for site assessment and confirmation. • Require no new regulation or national guideline. 	<p>Japan, Cook Islands, Guernsey (Channel Islands)</p>	<p>Japan: Certification mechanism under Act on Promotion of Biodiversity Conservation (1992, am. 2019). Cook Islands: NES administrative procedure under environmental legislation. Guernsey: Administrative confirmation under statutory biodiversity responsibilities.</p>	<p>Enables flexible identification and confirmation using existing governance structures.</p>
<p>4. Sector-based recognition under existing legal designations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies OECM criteria to sectoral regimes (fisheries, cultural landscapes etc.). • Recognition based on existing management delivering biodiversity outcomes. • No new OECM designation needed. 	<p>Algeria, Morocco, Oman, Philippines</p>	<p>Algeria: Parcs Culturels (e.g. Decrees 87-231, 09-408). Morocco: Sites of Biological and Ecological Interest (SIBEs) and hunting reserves. Oman: Fisheries spatial measures under Royal Decrees 20/2019 & 92/2020. --- ABNJ: High-seas VMEs via RFMO decisions (e.g. NEAFC–OSPAR Collective Arrangement). Philippines: Fisheries Management Areas (FMAs) and Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) under the Fisheries Code (RA 10654) and Local Government Code (RA 7160); Indigenous ICCAs under the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (RA 8371). These sectoral and community-based regimes form the basis of the country’s 178 reported OECMs.</p>	<p>Mapping of potential terrestrial and marine sites</p>

<p>5. OECMs in areas beyond national jurisdiction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of biodiversity-conserving areas in the high seas, beyond state jurisdiction. • Implemented through regional fisheries management organisations (RFMOs) or other ocean governance bodies. • Sites qualify when measures ensure durable biodiversity outcomes (e.g. closures, gear restrictions). 	<p>RFMOs in ABNJ (e.g. NEAFC, OSPAR, SEAFO, NAFO, SPRFMO)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High-seas Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) recognised through RFMO conservation and management measures. - Examples include the NEAFC–OSPAR Collective Arrangement, NAFO VME closures, SPRFMO deep-sea conservation measures. 	<p>Highlights an emerging frontier for OECM recognition and demonstrates that OECMs extend beyond national boundaries, aligning with BBNJ and global ocean governance reforms.</p>
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Table 4 provides an overview of countries that are currently developing national OECM frameworks, summarising the status of their processes and the types of legal or policy instruments they are preparing. It highlights jurisdictions where OECM systems

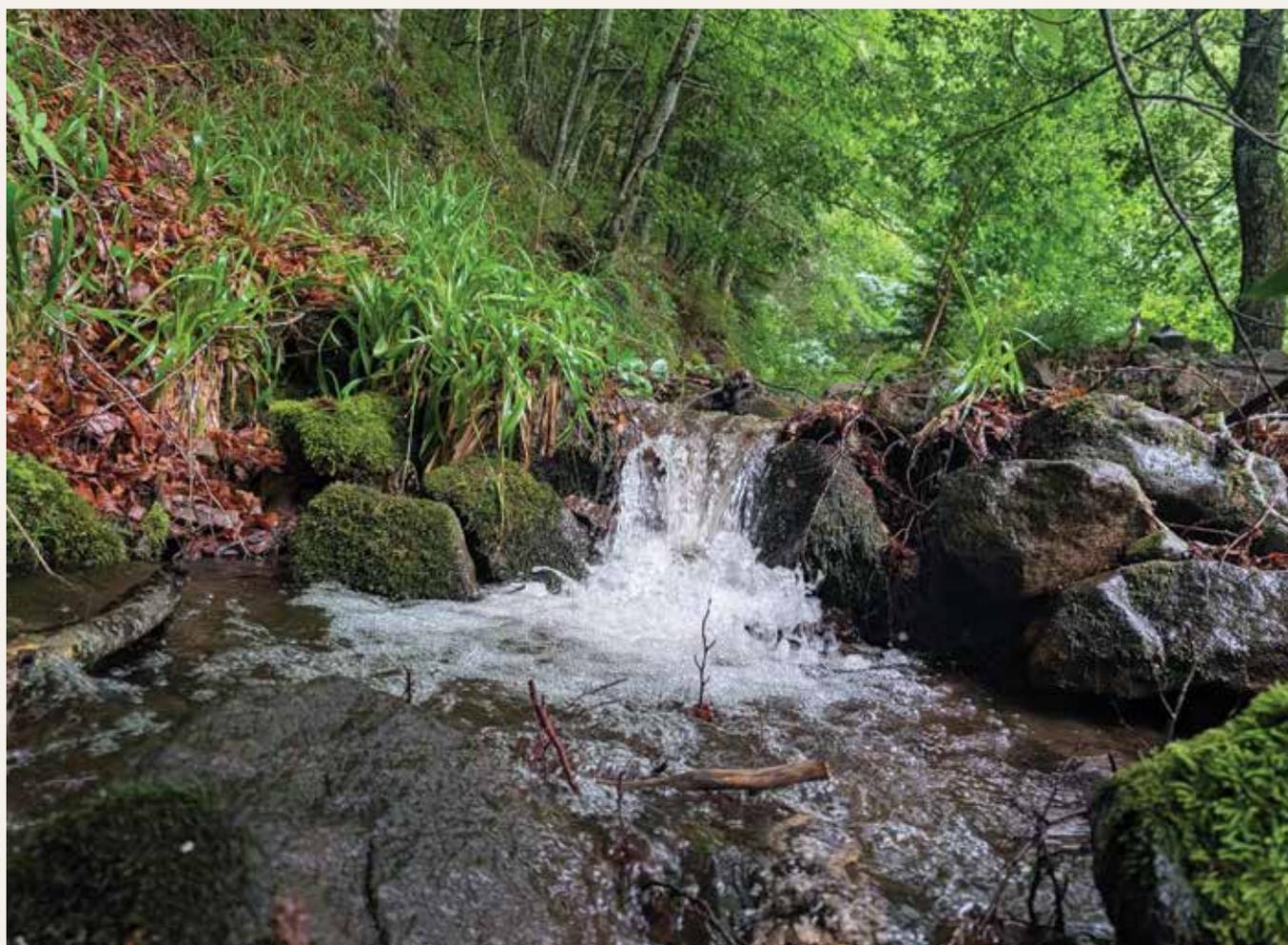
are underway but not yet finalised, offering a snapshot of emerging approaches, institutional arrangements and draft instruments that will shape future reporting.

Table 4. Jurisdictions with OECM frameworks in development

Country/ jurisdiction	WIP status	National OECM guidelines under MoEFCC and NBA	Typology	Pilot sites/ activities	Notes
Bhutan	Early-stage development; initial reporting completed	Draft OECA (“other effective conservation areas”) framework under DoFPS	Administrative procedures (emerging)	Initial set of 11 OECMs reported (mostly KBAs); exploratory work in community-managed forests and biodiversity corridors	OECMs reported to World Database, but no formal national guidelines yet; framework advancing under NBSAP5.
Chile	Conceptual phase	Discussion under Ministry of Environment	National OECM guidelines/	Exploring marine and Indigenous pilots	Early-stage exploration with partner support; no draft issued yet.
Costa Rica	Drafting national OMEC framework	Draft OMEC decree under SINAC and INCOPECSA	Ministerial legal instrument (once decree adopted)	Biological corridors; responsible fishing areas; potential PSA-linked landscapes and Indigenous territories	OMEC identification currently relies on sectoral regimes and technical pilots; discussions are ongoing on PSA schemes and Indigenous territories. Formal recognition and reporting depend on adoption of the draft decree.
France	Draft national framework	Ministry of Ecological Transition guidelines on “mesures contribuant à la conservation”	National OECM guidelines/ policy frameworks	Mapping of potential terrestrial and marine sites	Early-stage; formal guidance pending.

India	Drafting national framework	National OECM guidelines under MoEFCC and NBA	National OECM guidelines/ policy frameworks	Identification of wetlands, community forests, coastal zones	Framework under review; expected adoption 2026.
Indonesia	Legal review and policy design	Draft ministerial regulation under KLHK	Ministerial legal instrument	Pilots in customary territories; marine and multi-use areas	Draft under preparation (2025); expected to reflect CBD criteria.
Lebanon	Very early-stage exploration	No formal instrument; scoping discussions under USEK in collaboration with partners	Exploratory/ conceptual (pre-framework)	Initial case study under development (marine/ coastal governance; cultural landscapes)	Early consultations; no government-led framework yet; potential alignment with Mediterranean marine governance.
Malaysia	Draft national framework	OECM policy under NRECC	National OECM guidelines/ policy frameworks	EFT-linked pilots; potential forest and marine OECMs	National guidance expected 2026; integrated into biodiversity policy.
Namibia	Draft recognition and registry system	Policy and procedural manual under MET and WWF	Administrative procedures	Pilots in conservancies and private reserves	Draft guidelines tested; reporting pending.
Nepal	Conceptual and technical design	Policy framework under Ministry of Forests and Environment	Administrative procedures	Case studies in community forests and buffer zones	Supported by UNDP/IUCN; national framework in progress.
Scotland (UK)	Developing under 30×30 plan	NatureScot guidance for land and marine areas	National OECM guidelines/ policy frameworks	Pilots in multi-use terrestrial and marine zones	Policy-led approach; no new regulation required.

South Africa	Revision of national norms and standards	Statutory norms and standards under NEMBA (s.9), issued by DFFE	Statutory norms and standards (ministerial instrument)	Review of previously listed “conserved areas” and biodiversity stewardship sites	Will be implemented under the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA); reporting via conservation authorities and the South African National Conservation Areas Database (SACAD).
Viet Nam	Government-endorsed roadmap	OECM guidelines under MONRE	National OECM guidelines/policy frameworks	Pilots in forests, wetlands and coastal sites with WWF/IUCN	Draft guidance under national validation.



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