



Version 1.0

# High-level Principles Assessment Matrix: Guidance Note

JULY 2025

# A new market in nature credits needs the best possible start

The Biodiversity Credit Alliance (BCA) exists to guide the development of a credible and scalable biodiversity credit market capable of earning the trust and confidence of a broad spectrum of market participants. Key among them are Indigenous Peoples and local communities who live at the frontline of the nature crisis and are represented by International Environmental Guardianship (IEG), an independent member-based organization of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Afro-Descendants. Together we are working to ensure strong foundations and principles exist and can be applied by all entrants to the market.

## Our Mission

BCA is a voluntary international alliance that brings together diverse stakeholders to support the realization of the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, in particular Targets 19(c) and (d), which “encourage the private sector to invest in biodiversity” utilizing, amongst others “biodiversity credits ... with social safeguards.”

### Our mission is twofold:



Help steer the development of a biodiversity credit market by building a framework of high-level, science-based principles.



Provide guidance and encourage best practice for market participants on the application of these principles, empowering them to achieve and maintain equitable, high-quality transactions that meet strict integrity criteria.

BCA was launched during the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP 15) in December 2022, in Montreal. Initially BCA was launched as an informal working group of field-based conservation practitioners, researchers, academics, and standard setters. It has grown to include representatives of Indigenous Peoples, local communities and Afro-Descendants in the form of the independent member-based International Environmental Guardianship (IEG), formerly the Communities Advisory Panel (CAP), as well as representatives of the private sector, with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) as a key partner.

The BCA Secretariat is facilitated by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the European Commission (EC).



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# How the High-level Principles Assessment Matrix was produced

The **Assessment Matrix** was developed by the BCA Secretariat with deliberate attention to ensuring consistency with the language and intent of the jointly led BCA-IAPB-WEF **High-level Principles to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market**. These Principles were designed to serve as a unified foundation for different types of biodiversity credits across both regulatory and voluntary contexts.

Development of the High-level Principles followed a rigorous and inclusive process. It began with a comparative analysis of more than twenty existing carbon and biodiversity standards and frameworks. This was followed by targeted stakeholder discussions, giving priority to the voices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, along with several rounds of public consultation. The consultative process to develop the High-level Principles aimed to build consensus by striking a careful balance between practical implementation and the need for high integrity.



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# Introduction

As the market for biodiversity credits evolves, the need for transparency, integrity, fairness and consistency across crediting standards and methodologies is increasingly urgent. **High-level Principles to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market** is a joint collaboration between BCA, the International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits (IAPB), and the World Economic Forum (WEF). It presents a unified set of High-level Principles (HLPs) to help build a high-integrity market that delivers positive outcomes for nature, while also ensuring that Indigenous and local communities are supported in their efforts to maintain and restore biodiversity, with full respect for their rights.

## Why this Assessment Matrix has been developed

The **High-level Principles Assessment Matrix Version 1.0** has been created to provide a tool for biodiversity credit market participants to gauge the alignment of biodiversity credits with principles of integrity and quality, as outlined in the High-level Principles paper. This also promotes consistency in how the HLPs are interpreted and applied under varying credit projects and schemes. Its purpose is to provide a structured yet practical tool that helps avoid unsubstantiated claims, and guards against the risk of poor outcomes for both nature and people. A transparent, principles-based assessment process can serve as an early signal of credit quality, and is therefore an important step toward building confidence among buyers and investors in the credibility of biodiversity credits.

## Who has it been created for?

This Assessment Matrix is created for biodiversity credit market participants who would like to assess credit methodologies and projects against the HLPs. It can serve as a due diligence tool for potential buyers, or as a self-assessment tool for credit suppliers who want to ensure alignment with the HLPs. From any perspective, assessing biodiversity credits' alignment with the HLPs will build confidence in the market, providing a common point of reference across a range of crediting approaches. Recognizing the validity of diverse approaches to biodiversity conservation, and the importance of innovation, the Assessment Matrix has been tailored for flexibility, allowing variable weightings in the assessment process.

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## Why should market participants use this Assessment Matrix?

The Assessment Matrix provides a way for projects and methodologies to clearly communicate how they apply and align with the High-level Principles, providing a basis for comparability and trust.

At least three key stakeholder groups are actively seeking this kind of clarity and consistency:

1. **Donors** who finance incubators and accelerators and want confidence that early stage methodologies and standards meet expectations;
2. **Corporate buyers** who are considering biodiversity credits and seeking credible, principle-aligned approaches; and
3. **Indigenous Peoples and local communities** who are asking for transparency in how methods and standards claim to uphold equity, FPIC and benefit-sharing.

## How this Assessment Matrix will evolve

HLPs Assessment Matrix v 1.0 has been designed to guide internal reflection and support continuous improvement.

Ultimately it will help to build a foundation of trust in high-integrity biodiversity credits, but this early version of the Assessment Matrix is intentionally pragmatic, acknowledging that crediting projects and methodologies are all at different stages of development. By piloting the Assessment Matrix across a range of projects, standards and methodologies in the coming months, BCA aims to gather feedback and identify areas that need refinement. Learnings will be used to build a more robust, user-friendly digital assessment tool.

BCA encourages credit projects and methodologies to use Version 1.0 and to share insights from its application. Through iterative testing and co-learning, and the eventual linking of a third-party validation process, this Assessment Matrix will evolve into a core quality assurance component that helps to embed integrity throughout the biodiversity credit market.



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# Applying High-level Principles Assessment Matrix Version 1.0

- The Assessment Matrix is a **quick, easy-to-use tool** to evaluate crediting projects' and methodologies' compliance with the joint BCA-IAPB-WEF publication titled "High-level Principles to Guide the Biodiversity Credit Market".
- This Assessment Matrix **relies on evaluators to ensure objectivity**. In the case of self-assessment by projects and methodology developers, a degree of subjectivity is inherent. BCA encourages an independent third-party validation of such self-assessment practices.
- This Assessment Matrix offers an option for weights, however, for the prototype version, **all weights are set equally to the value of 1.0 for each principle**. Evaluators may adjust these weights both at the principle and sub-principle level according to their needs. Not all HLPs apply in the same way for all credit projects or methodologies. Therefore, when applying the Assessment Matrix to evaluate a specific context, alternative weighting approaches may be justified.
- **All HLPs should be applied to the evaluated projects and methodologies.** In exceptional circumstances evaluators may decide not to apply specific principles. In such cases please select the weight of the principle as "0", and provide detailed and evidenced reasoning in the "Evidence from documentation" column to justify the decision.
- For the sake of brevity, the HLPs Assessment Matrix uses the term "credit scheme" to refer to the evaluated methodology or standard. At this early stage it's worth noting however, that the tool is better suited for evaluating methodologies than standards.
- Two distinct formats of this Assessment Matrix have been developed, one has been adapted for use at project-level and one for use at methodology-level. Please ensure the correct application, before carrying out an evaluation.



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# Providing feedback

BCA invites all project and methodology developers who pilot Version 1.0 of the Assessment Matrix to share their experience and insights. Your feedback is key in shaping the future evolution of this matrix into a robust, user-friendly digital assessment tool.

Feedback that covers the following aspects of your evaluation will be particularly useful in the ongoing development of future versions of the Assessment Matrix:

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Clarity and usability of the matrix

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Scoring, weighting, and interpretation challenges

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Suggestions for improvement and simplification

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What types of evidence or information could be associated with each HLP to ensure robustness?

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Is there a need for additional guidance and clarification on any of the HLPs to ensure the matrix cannot be gamed? If so, please specify.

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Any contextual adaptations you made

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Overall value and alignment with your quality assurance processes

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Whether the process deepened your understanding of the HLP's and their application

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If you found the tool useful, BCA would also welcome a short endorsement, which may be used (with your permission) to further promote the Assessment Matrix.



Please submit your feedback by filling out the following [form](#).



# BCA Vision

BCA's vision is a transparent, trustworthy and efficient global market in biodiversity credits founded on just and equitable principles, and underpinned by innovation.

BCA works to facilitate the transition to a nature positive economy aided by an integrated, efficient and scaled biodiversity credit market. BCA considers biodiversity credits to be an effective complement to, but not a replacement of, the private sector's supply chain transformation efforts. BCA views biodiversity credits as an effective mechanism for advancing the private sector's participation in ecosystem restoration and transformative landscape approaches in line with science-based principles.

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We invite you to join us in achieving these ambitions

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