



Ministry of Environment

PRESS RELEASE

Launching of National Policy on Environment Sensitive Areas in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is blessed with diverse ecosystems enriched with high biological diversity. The varied ecosystem services provided by these natural treasures bring about immense economic, ecological, and aesthetic values to associated local communities and to the Sri Lankan nation as a whole. However, due to both natural and anthropogenic reasons, the rich biodiversity and ecosystems in the country are faced with immense pressure. As a result, the unique biodiversity, the endemic species in particular, are severely under threat of being extinction. Sri Lanka is one of the 36 global biodiversity hotspots due to its high biodiversity as well as the risks it faces.

Management of the island's existing *Protected Area Network* is made possible by a number of legal instruments, including those that address biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, and the preservation of cultural and archaeological heritage, these are the Forest Ordinance, Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance, National Environment Act and Archaeology Act administered by Forest Department, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Central Environmental Authority and the Department of Archaeology respectively. About 35% of Sri Lanka's total land area is protected by these legal Acts and Ordinances. However, still there are a significant extent of other ecologically and biologically important areas not covered by the existing Protected Area System and such areas are found scattered around the country without an effective conservation and management framework.

In view of this, the National Policy on Environmentally Sensitive Areas (NPESA) was formulated with the aim of proposing a unique conservation and management approach through an area-based; landscape-level land use plan for the conservation of ecologically sensitive areas that are located outside the existing Protected Area Network.

Thus, a landscape-level land use plan provides the opportunity to achieve win-win outcomes for both development activities and biodiversity conservation by maintaining land productivity in a way that benefits the people living in ecologically sensitive areas.

This new National Policy on Environmentally Sensitive Areas in Sri Lanka has been launched on **16th November 2023** at the Ministry of Environment.

This Policy suggests augmenting nature-based solutions to enhance the integrity of conservation, enhance resilience to climate change, and wise use of natural capital in ensuring sustainable development in Sri Lanka.

Our commitment for holistic approach for managing environmentally sensitive areas is one that we should have made decades ago, and it ought to be ingrained in the decision-making process of land governance and all the natural bounties this precious country offers us.

Since we have now accomplished this key milestone towards ensuring the management of all environmentally sensitive area in Sri Lanka, I earnestly hope all Sri Lankans will endorse this approach and look forward for successful implementation to achieve the policy goals with active participation of all stakeholders.

Secretary
Ministry of Environment