

PAYEMENT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MARINE SERVICES MANAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF COSTA RICA

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During the Third Conference of United Nations on the Oceans UNOC3, Costa Rica and the United Kingdom presented a pioneering global initiative: the Payment for Marine Environmental Services, for the conservation of fish through economic incentives and sustainable shellfish extraction practices. During World Ocean Day,



both countries shared an audiovisual production that showcased the work of sustainable fishing in the Gulf of Nicoya in mangrove forests.

Since 2024, the Government of Costa Rica has set a global precedent for the implementation of the first [Payment for Marine Environmental Services](#), a unique program of its kind that economically incentivizes the conservation of mangroves in the Gulf of Nicoya with the collaboration of local communities.

This project emerged from the experience achieved by the Government of Costa Rica over 28 years with the development of the Environmental Services Payment Program, applied to the management of marine resources and aligned with the priorities defined for sustainable conservation.

Since 1997, the Government of Costa Rica has been managing the [Payment Programme for Environmental Services PSA](#), a pioneering global initiative. Through a specific Fund managed by the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE), the programme provides financial incentives for owners of farms that establish forest plantations, agroforestry systems and/or carry out projects for natural regeneration, protection and management of forests. The programme makes direct cash transfers to private landowners and associations through five or ten-year contracts, depending on specific projects.

The project applies to the management of marine resources the innovative modality of the Environmental Services Payment Program PSA, following the joint effort of the Ministerio de Ambiente y Energía (MINAE), the Sistema Nacional de Áreas de Conservación (SINAC), the Fondo Nacional de Financiamiento Forestal (FONAFIFO), the Instituto Costarricense de Pesca y Acuicultura (Incopesca) and the Fundación Banco Ambiental (FUNBAM). These institutions have joined forces to formalize the initiative through a multi-institutional cooperation agreement. This understanding, supported by Executive Decree 44558-MINAE, provides the legal and institutional bases for recognizing and compensating for sustainable practices in mangroves ecosystems. Specifically, it allows groups of rural communities that



participate in the regulated collection of shellfish to be realized and supports their daily subsistence and food security.

The project is based on the technical tools developed by these institutions, such as the Mangrove Management Plans and their diagnostics, as well as the Mollusk Testing Plans, which help determine the health of the shellfish populations and their volumes permissible for extraction. With the aim of strengthening the institutional frameworks and enhancing the capabilities of the communities, the pilot initiative includes a comprehensive operations Manual. In this document all the details relating to the economic recognition mechanisms are described and introduces specialized field biologists to guarantee technical supervision and alignment with the national biodiversity plans. A solid management structure, supported by the Interinstitutional Coordination Committee, guarantees uninterrupted collaboration, continuous follow-up and a high level of accountability and transparency throughout the implementation of the pilot model.

For the implementation of the first pilot phase of the project, the Gulf of Nicoya was chosen, considering the richness of its mangrove ecosystems and the commitment to its conservation manifested by the local communities. The pilot initiative includes six community associations representing 157 shellfish collectors in the fishing zones of Nicaoya, such as Corozal, Jicaral, Puerto Pochote, Puerto Jesús, Puerto Thiel, San Pablo and Isla Chira. The beneficiary associations that jointly manage more than 6000 hectares of mangrove forests are:

- Asociación de Molusqueros de Puerto Pochote.
- Asociación de Molusqueros Cerro Sombrero de Copal de Nicoya.
- Asociación Comité Local de Fishermen de Corozal de Jicaral.
- Asociación Mixta de Montero, Isla de Chira.
- Asociación de Molusqueros de Puerto Jesús de Nicoya.
- Asociación de Molusqueros Grupos Unidos de Puerto Jesús, Puerto San Pablo y Acoyapa.

Participants receive an annual payment of USD 2698.85, distributed quarterly and subject to the verified fulfillment of conservation activities. Among these actions are the aquaculture and shellfish recovery, the management of ecosystems, the control of illegal activities and sustainable harvesting practices that are aligned with approved management plans. This financial contribution represents approximately twice the income that participants typically earn from their work, which makes it an important incentive that supports both conservation and the means of subsistence. Each participating association signs an annual contract, with the possibility of renewing it according to its good performance and available resources.

At this stage approximately 157 people are eligible for the “Use Permit for Shellfish Extraction” from SINAC and the “Commerce Permit” from INCOPESCA. As part of the obligations acquired, the participating associations are committed to not carrying out any unauthorized extraction, damage, or alteration of the mangrove forests and their wetland zones, except for activities specifically authorized by respective permissions.

In 2021 the [Payment for Environmental Services Programme PSA](#) was one of the winners of the [Earthshot Prize](#), financed and managed by the Prince William of the United Kingdom and in the proposal the Government of Costa Rica indicated its intention to use part of the funds to design a new Payment for marine ecosystem services model, taking what has worked for forests and applying it to the marine areas that make up 92% of the national territory. The pilot project to pay for marine environmental services is being developed with the support of the Earthshot Prize funds of the United Kingdom.



In an article published by [the World Bank](#) it is highlighted that “this pilot project marks a fundamental step on the path of Costa Rica to create a National Payment for Marine Environmental Services Program which not only promotes environmental innovation, but also responds to the current urgent global issues in terms of inequality and economic vulnerability. By directly linking conservation with income generation, it offers an expandable model to generate decent employment opportunities, strengthen local economies and position coastal communities as essential members in the creation of resilient and inclusive development paths.

By adapting the PES approach to marine contexts, Costa Rica is demonstrating how blue carbon ecosystems, including mangroves, can be leveraged to create sustainable livelihoods and employment opportunities for disadvantaged communities. This approach not only supports environmental conservation but also fosters economic development by empowering local populations to engage in activities that improve their well-being and financial stability. At its core, the program recognizes and rewards the daily efforts of coastal communities whose sustainable practices protect vital ecosystems. With dedicated funding mechanisms and a clear operational framework, the pilot project lays the groundwork for long-term support and replication of this type of initiative.”

To know more

[Proyecto de Pago por Servicios ambientales Marinos en minae.go.cr](#)

[Proyecto de Pago de Servicios ambientales Marinos en Instagram.com](#)

[Noticia en sitio web Ministerio Ambiente y Economia minae.go.cr](#)

[News en periodicomensaje.com](#)

[Programa PSA premiado al Earthshot Prize 2021](#)

[Programa PSA en Fonnafifo.go.cr sitio web](#)

[Programa Pago Servicios Ambientales Marinos en sitio web bancomundial.org](#)

[Articulo en delfino.cr](#)

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[Tercera Conferencia de las Naciones Unidas sobre los Océanos UNOC3](#)

[Resultados Conferencia UNOC3](#)

[Articulo en semanariouniversidad .com](#)

[Articulo en larepublica.net](#)

[Documento Incopesca Programa pago de servicios ecosistemicos marinos 2019](#)

