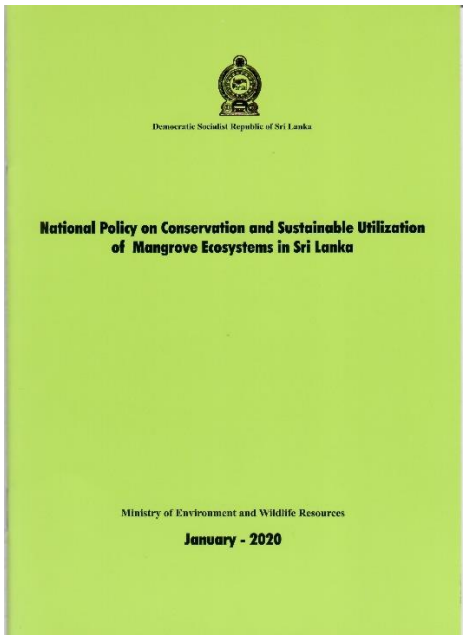
Launching of the National Policy on Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Mangrove Ecosystems in Sri Lanka

Amongst the different ecosystems in Sri Lanka, mangroves represent a unique collection of specialized fauna and flora adopted to survive in brackish water conditions and intertidal zones. As per the estimates of Department of Forests (2010), 15,669 ha of Sri Lanka is covered with mangroves. In Sri Lanka, around 21 true mangrove and several mangrove associated flora have been identified. Most importantly, this represents one third of the world mangrove species diversity.



Mangroves play a crucial role in maintaining the ecological integrity of the coastal zone. Mangroves contribute towards all ecosystem services - provisioning, regulatory, supportive and cultural services. Due to their position, at the boundary between land and sea, mangroves receive extensive amounts of particles emitted from rivers through estuaries; as such mangroves act as a buffer zone between the coastal and inland ecosystems and survive as a natural filter from both sides. From the landward side, upland sediment and other organic and inorganic matter are deposited within mangrove ecosystems preventing direct release of sediments and nutrients to sensitive coastal ecosystems such as sea grass beds and coral reefs. From seaward side, effects of tides, storm surges, tsunamis and salt wedges to fresh water ecosystems are ameliorated, hence, salt water sensitive ecosystems, lives of people and their properties are protected. The role played by mangrove ecosystems as carbon sinks mitigate climate change which is globally highlighted as a prime need for conserving mangroves. Biologically, mangrove ecosystems provide feeding and breeding habitats for species that permanently inhabit such ecosystems and also for those temporarily migrate for nesting and survival purposes.

Economically, mangroves provide livelihood opportunities for the coastal communities through fisheries and ecotourism opportunities for the coastal communities through fisheries and ecotourism opportunities. Fish, shellfish and other food items obtained from mangroves play a vital role in the food and nutritional requirements of the coastal communities.

Though there are several policies such as National Forest Policy, National Environment policy, National Wetland Policy, they are inadequate to cover all required policy needs. Similarly, if the current management measures fail to protect the mangrove ecosystems in Sri Lanka, the resilience of the mangrove system, well-being of the communities and their future survival will be challenged. Therefore with vision of "*A healthy mangrove ecosystem with rich biodiversity supporting the nation with direct and indirect services"* National Policy for conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Mangrove Ecosystems in Sri Lanka prepared and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers. It was launched on 08th September 2020 at the Ministry of Environment under the patronage of Hon. Minister of Environment, Mr. Mahinda Amaraweera.

Chapter 8 of the reconstructed country with a future "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour" is clearly mentioned that "action will be taken to control human impact on marshy lands and mangrove ecosystems and to conserve them" is ensure through this policy.

National Policy on Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Mangrove Ecosystems in Sri Lanka is consists of 4 policy goals and 19 statements with six strategies.

The policy will direct and strengthen the regulations, goals, objectives, strategies, actions and roles of all government and non-governmental organizations working directly or indirectly on mangrove ecosystems and will have applicable provisions in this policy. The national policy for conservation and sustainable utilization of mangrove ecosystems in Sri Lanka is to be adopted by all agencies that have a stake in mangrove ecosystems both in already protected mangrove habitats and mangroves outside protected areas.