# MID TERM REVIEW OF BUNA RIVER VELIPOJE PROTECTED LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN

## Assessing management effectiveness using

## The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool


**December 2021**

# Table of content



## List of Tables



## List of graphs

# 1 Background

The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) is designed to be a simple tool that gives a quick overview of management effectiveness of protected areas. The fourth version of the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT-4) has been revised following discussions around the need to develop some new questions, raised in the first edition of the METT Handbook, feedback from recent site applications, and the opportunity to build on an Excel version developed by KfW, the German state development bank. Whereas the original METT contains 30 questions, the METT-4 used in this assessment has additional questions that have been added to strengthen the usefulness of the tool and look at threats to values, climate change adaptation and conservation status of key indicator species and habitats.

The use of METT can strike a good balance between limited PA resources and the need to set directions for management. The METT Handbook points out that an effective application of the METT should not focus on the scores attached to the questions but on the discussions with stakeholders, the documentation of why a certain score was given and how the PA intends to improve or maintain it. METT is a tool for self-assessment and not for external evaluation. Scores should not be over evaluated and used for external evaluation or comparison with other protected areas.

The Regional Administration for Protected Areas of Shkodra region has been using METT almost regularly for the assessment of management effectiveness using the online format developed by NAPA with the support of UNDP. However, considering that the implementation of the management plan for the Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape involves a number of stakeholders, ANPA has organized a meeting in December 2021, with representatives of RAPA Shkoder and various stakeholders to assess the management effectives for Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape using the METT-4 (see attached excel for detailed scores). Due to Covid 19 situation and restriction measures the number of participants to this meeting was limited.

# 2 The assesment

## 2.1 Values and threats

The participants at the meeting for the assessment of the management effectiveness of Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape, using METT, have agreed on the following key conservation values for the area:

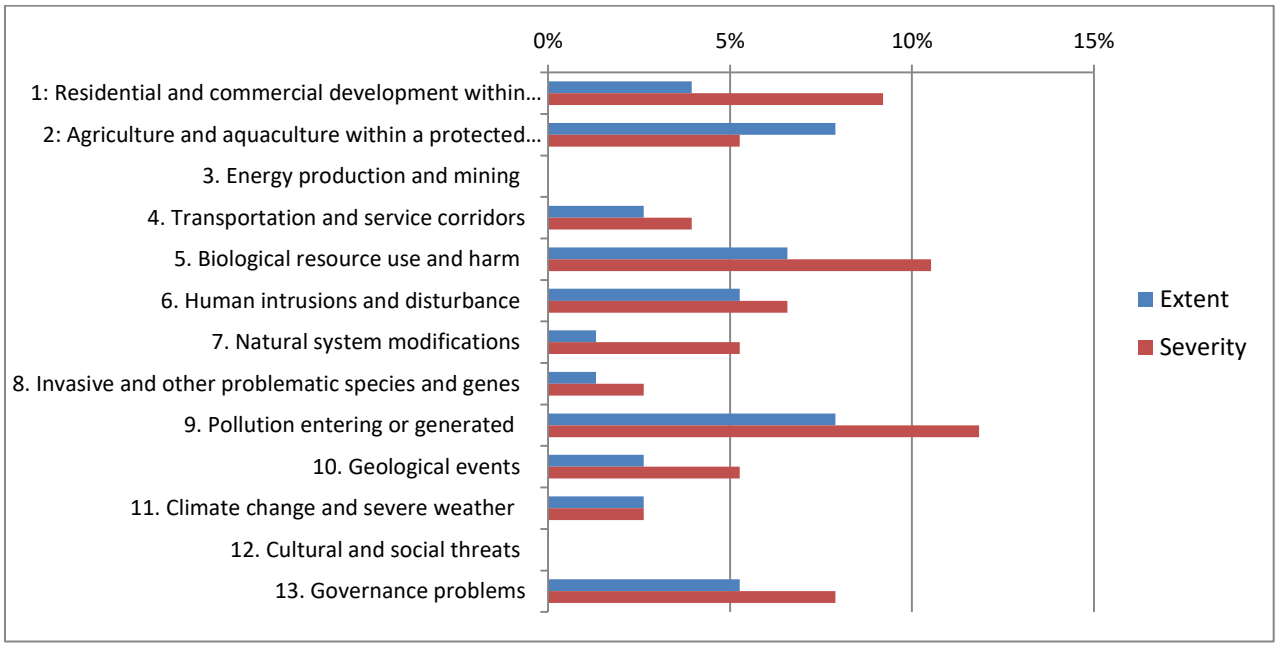
- Presence of Priority habitats of high conservation interest for the European Community, as listed in EU Habitat Directive;
- Occurrence of a number of Threatened/endemic species that are important at both national and international level;
- Maintenance of relevant Ecological processes important for the provision of several ecosystem services useful to local communities and beyond;
- Diversity of Water resources important for sustaining the rich biodiversity and local livelihoods;

- Vital sites for Recreational use and development of a variety of tourism related activities.

Table 1: Condition of main values of Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape

| Condition of values | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Main value** | **Condition** | **Trend** |
| Priority habitats | Good | Deteriorating |
| Threatened/endemic species | Good | Stable |
| Ecological processes | Fair | Deteriorating |
| Recreational use | Good | Improving |
| Water resources | Fair | Don't know |

The overall condition of the above mentioned values is assessed as good, with few problems with ecological processes and water resources. However, the sustainability of some of these values in the future is greatly jeopardised by a number of threats that have to be carefully addressed. The graph below shows the main threats identified including an assessment of their extent in coverage and severity in impacting the important values of the area.




Graph 1: Assessment of threats to protected area values

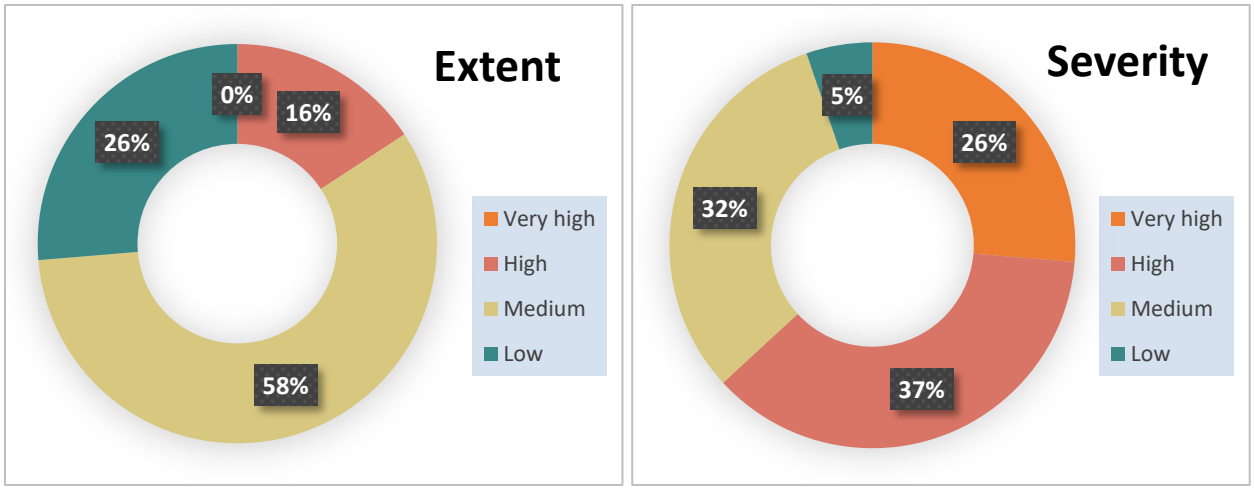
The graph shows that the most relevant threats, both in terms of extent and severity, are those related to pollution entering or generated within the protected areas. These include the impact of household waste water and garbage and solid waste management issues. Threats from

consumptive use of "wild" biological resources are also relevant. These include impacts from poaching, collection of medicinal plants (sage) and fishing activities.

Although having a limited extent, threats from human settlements or other non-agricultural land uses with a substantial footprint have a significant impact on the natural values of the area. Threats from farming and grazing as a result of agricultural expansion and intensification, show a limited impact although extending over quite a large portion of the protected area.

It is interesting to see that governance problems related to conflicting policies across sectors and confusion about government roles and responsibilities are rated high in terms of severity of impact. Similarly, threats from human activities that alter, destroy or disturb habitats and species associated with non-consumptive uses of biological resources (tourism and recreational activities) have scored high in terms of impact severity.

The assessment shows limited threats from long-term climatic changes which may be linked to global warming and other severe climatic/ weather events outside of the natural range of variation. It is not clear if this is because there is actually limited impact or there is limited monitoring data and knowledge about these phenomena.




Graph 2: Extent and severity of identified threats

In general, most of the identified threats have a medium (11) or low (5) extent over the protected area territory, with only three threats having a high extent. In terms of severity of impact, there are 5 threats that have a very high impact and 7 threats having a high impact on the values of the area.

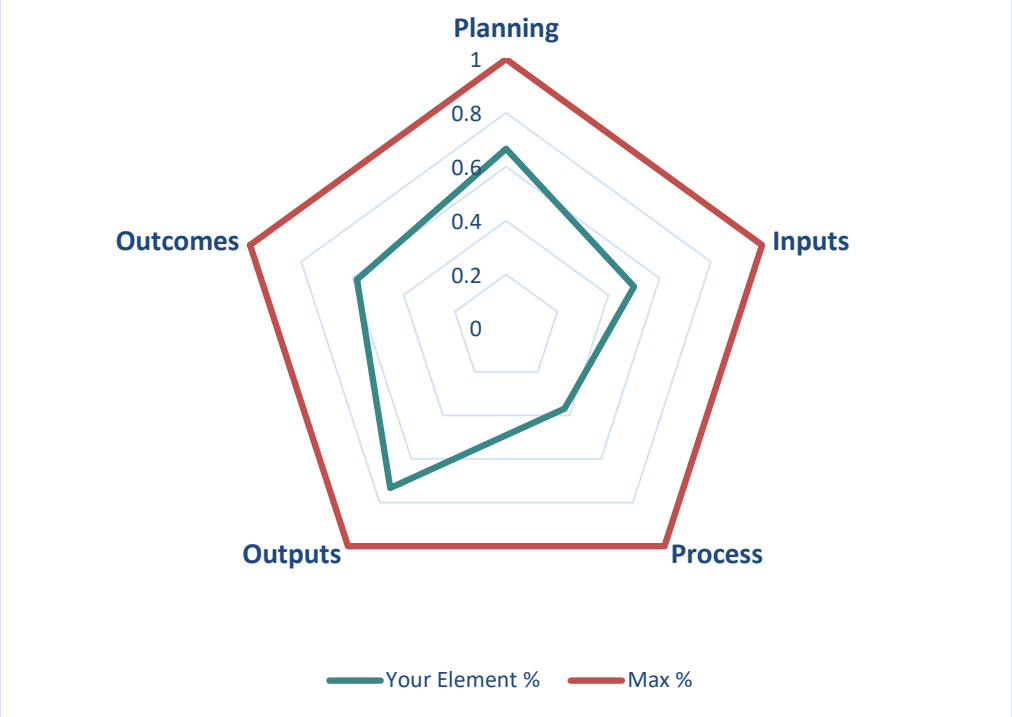
## 2.2 METT score

The overall score of the METT analysis for Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape is 62 (50.4% of the maximum score). It is worth noting that scores are far from the maximum scores in all management elements, with the largest gaps found in Processes and Inputs.

Processes is the weakest management element with a score of only 37%. This is related to a number of issues, but the most relevant ones include:

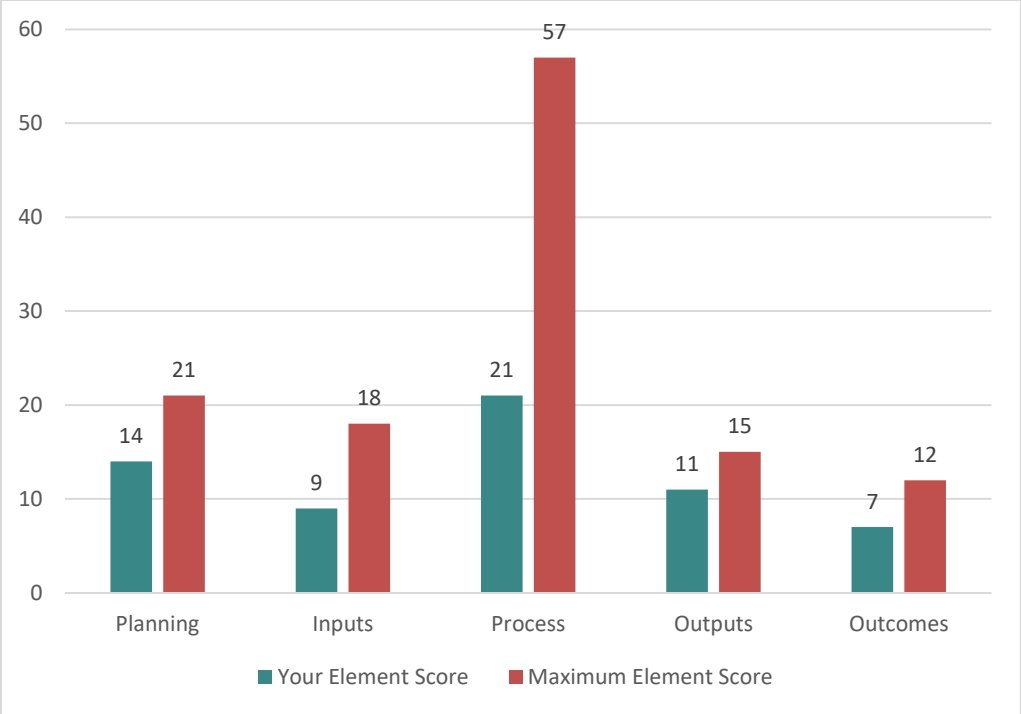
- There is little active resource management and limited adaptive management.

- Management activities are not regularly monitored against performance;
- There is lack of management-orientated survey and research work.
- The protected area administration has no authority on budget management and the budget is not properly managed to meet critical management needs.
- The fees are not regularly collected and do not directly contribute to protected area management.
- The area is not consciously managed to adapt to climate change and/or to prevent carbon loss and to encourage further carbon capture.
- Local communities living in or near the protected area have limited to no input on management decisions.
- Although tourism in an important activity in the area, There is limited cooperation with local tourism related businesses/operators and they provide no contribution to support the protected area management
- The boundary of the area is not properly demarcated and know to all stakeholders.




Graph 3: METT scores per management element

Inputs is yet another management element scoring low (50%). This low score is mainly related to the low level and insecurity of the budget necessary for proper management of the area as well as numbers, capacities, skills and working conditions of the staff responsible for managing the site. Additionally, the staff is not regularly trained to fulfill management objectives.




Graph 4: Comparison of scores to the maximum score per management element

Other critical issues that are hindering effective management of the Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape include:

- Weak coordination of protected are management activities with other land and water planning activities at regional level and limited cooperation with adjacent land and water users;
- No regular assessment of the status of key habitats and species;
- Threats to the main values of the protected area are not adequately identified, classified and addressed.

## 2.3 Habitats and Species

The METT provides for the assessment of the conservation status of key habitats and species. The definition of key habitats and species is based on the indications provided in the management plan for the Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape. It should be noted that the assessment is not based on any monitoring data (since there isn't any) but only on the perception and overall knowledge of RAPA staff participating in the evaluation meeting.

The analysis shows that the most fragile habitat are the sand dunes whose range and area of habitat is decreasing and are under continuous threat from tourism infrastructure development projects. The dry oak forests and alluvial/riverine forests are also suffering due to pressures from illegal cutting and fires. The other habitats are also under some pressure although their range, structure and function and area of habitat are mostly stable.

According to RAPA, shrubland/grasslands habitats are showing some improvement in their structure and function may be due to reduce threat from grazing.

Table 2: Status and trends of key habitats in Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape

| Status and trend in habitats | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Key habitats** | **Range** | **Area of habitat** | **Structure and function** | **Extent of threats** |
| Alluvial/riverine forests | Stable | Decreasing | Stable | Increasing |
| Wetlands | Stable | Stable | Stable | Increasing |
| Dry oak forests | Stable | Decreasing | Declining | Increasing |
| Sand dunes | Decreasing | Decreasing | Stable | Increasing |
| Shrublands/grasslands | Stable | Stable | Improving | Stable |

The definition of key indicator species is also based on information provided by the management plan for Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape. Similarly as for the habitats, the assessment of the status and trends of key indicator species is based on perception and general knowledge of RAPA staff participating in the meeting, since there are very few monitoring data for these species. This is not true only for the Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), which is part of the regular monitoring efforts of RAPA Shkoder.

According to RAPA, otter (*Lutra lutra*) and Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) are in stabilized conditions. The other three species are showing a decreasing/declining trends on all the attributes of the assessment table.

Table 3: Status and trends in key indicator species of Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape

| Status and trend in key indicator species | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Species** | **Range** | **Population size** | **Population process** | **Habitat area** | **Habitat quality** | **Extent of threats** |
| *Quercus robur* | Decreasing | Decreasing | Declining | Decreasing | Declining | Increasing |
| *Lutra lutra* | Stable | Stable | Stable | Stable | Stable | Stable |
| *Pelecanus crispus* | Stable | Stable | Stable | Stable | Stable | Stable |
| *Acipenser nacarri* | Stable | Decreasing | Declining | Stable | Declining | Increasing |
| *Pancratium maritimum* | Decreasing | Decreasing | Declining | Decreasing | Declining | Increasing |

The METT results highlight the need for a careful assessment of the key habitats and species of the Buna River Velipoje protected Landscape and relevant threats to these values. Knowledge on range and status of relevant habitats and distribution of key species are of vital importance

to assess effectiveness of implemented management measures in addressing threats and achievement of management plan objectives.

It is highly recommended that the next METT analysis should be preceded by a thorough assessment of the status of key habitats and species and challenging threats to their favorable conservation status.

# 3 Way forward

An important component of the METT is the definition of ways forward. Under each question of the METT there is the opportunity to note conclusion of discussions and proposals for addressing actual issues and problems hindering the achievement of higher scores. These suggestions are fundamental in the development of a realistic operational plan for the achievement of the management objectives for Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape.

It is important that the management plan (operational plans, work plans) include more active resource management activities for the management of habitats based on research and monitoring data on the achievement of conservation objectives. Research and monitoring results should provide more information on habitats to ensure better management according to biodiversity conservation objectives of the management plan.

The following is a list of proposed actions suggested during the meeting of December 2021 for assessing the management effectiveness of Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape using the METT.

- Develop list of activities/uses that need to be regulated/controlled and cooperate with NAPA in preparing necessary bylaws and regulations for the implementation of the Law on Protected areas to ensure better control on use and activities;
- Clarify competences and coordinate better with other relevant institutions (municipality, fishing inspectorate, environment inspectorate) to avoid overlapping of competences.
- Follow up the process for the revision of the boundaries of the BRVPL to ensure the protected area is the right size and shape to protect species, habitats, ecological processes and water catchments of key conservation concern;
- Improve border demarcation near the roads, place more frequent demarcation signs, renovate info tables/information at various entry points to the area, provide general information to the local people on the borders;
- Develop a realistic operational plan and regularly monitor its implementation;
- Ensure work plans are in line with the objectives of the management plan;
- Monitor management against performance in achieving management plan conservation objectives (monitoring should cover key values – habitats and species);
- Staff numbers should be increased;
- Develop and implement a consolidated capacity building plan for the RAPA staff.
- Deliver ranger foundation training course.
- Keep records on trainings attended by the staff;
- Identify rangers/staff needs for personal equipment and tools;

- Update inventory of equipment.
- Develop and implement a management-orientated survey and monitoring program
- Formalize management-oriented research needs in cooperation with the university;
- Reporting should be based more on research and regular monitoring results.
- Develop a business plan for the implementation of the management plan that analyses budget needs and resources for achieving management objectives;
- Budget needs should be coordinated with operational plans
- Develop a study on fees that can be collected within the protected area;
- RAPA needs to manage its own budget to ensure effective administration of the protected area
- Build RAPA capacities on financial management
- Strengthen the coordination role and improve functioning of the Management Committee;
- Improve and formalize cooperation with relevant institutions in the area (Municipalities, Environment Inspectorate, local agriculture and fishery authorities).
- Develop a list of touristic operators working within the protected area and establish regular contacts with touristic operators.
- Improve visibility of the tourist attractions of Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape;
- Provide for regular maintenance of visitor facilities and services;
- Improve/extend visitor facilities to cover the while protected area
- Plan joint activities with tour operators for promoting tourism attractions and diversify tourist services
- Identify modalities for commercial tour operators to contribute to protected area management;
- Strengthen cooperation with the local community;
- The scope of educational programs should be geographically enlarged to include communities and users of natural resources in and near the protected area;
- Develop a study on the effects of climate change on the Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape;
- Develop an assessment of the potential carbon sequestration capacities of the natural ecosystems within the protected area
- Develop an assessment of ecosystem services provided by natural ecosystems within the protected area
- Develop a detailed assessment of threats to key values based on results of research and monitoring;
- Conduct detailed research and monitoring on assessing the conservation status of key species;
- Conduct detailed research and monitoring on assessing the conservation status of key habitats.
- Identify and implement conservation activities based on monitoring results on the status of key values;

- Promote organization of local communities living in or near the protected area and support local festivals and fairs promoting the area and its local products
- Develop an assessment of the role of protected area in providing sustained livelihood benefits to local communities.

# 4 Annexes

## 4.1 Annex 1: List of Participants

Agim Dardha, Director RAPA Shkoder

Age Martini, Head Monitoring Department, RAPA Shkoder

Tonin Macaj, Head Management Department, RAPA Shkoder

Festim Broja, Specialist Monitoring Department, RAPA Shkoder

Genci Kacori, SHKPSH

Nihat Dragoti, Protected areas expert

Genti Kromidha, INCA

Emirjeta Adhami, IUCN ECARO

## 4.2 Annex 2: METT-4 excel file

See attached.