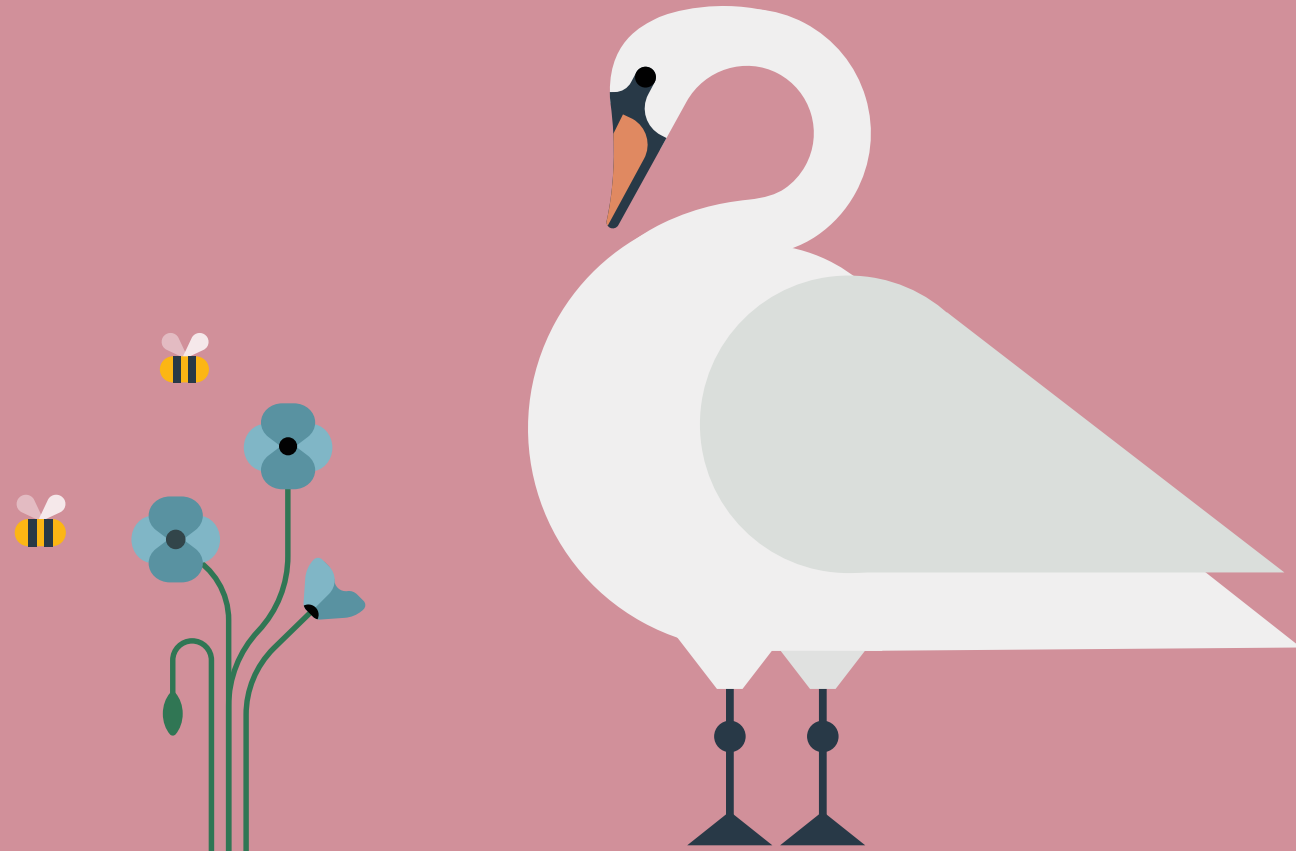
A BIODIVERSIFY SERIES

Procurement as Leverage

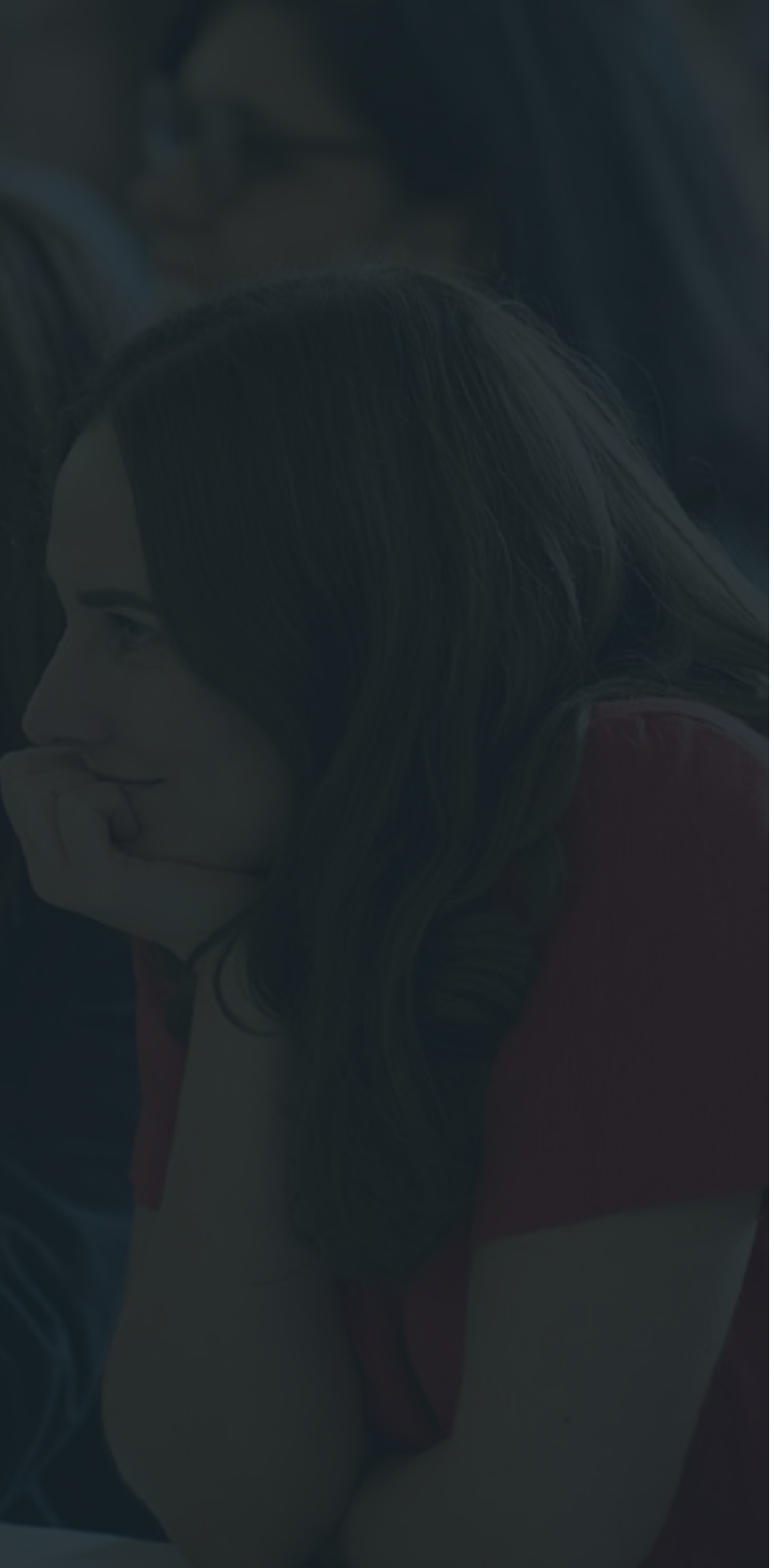
Embedding Nature into Supply Chains





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NATURE STRATEGIES RARELY SCALE THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY TEAMS ALONE.



PROCUREMENT AS LEVERAGE

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FOREWORD

Nature strategies become real where sourcing decisions are made. Yet for many businesses, procurement is still asked to deliver nature ambitions without the incentives or data to do so.

This fifth report in the guide series focuses on how to embed nature into procurement and supply chains. Across the series, we explore how businesses can make the business case for nature, move beyond carbon tunnel vision, strengthen decision-grade data, and shift from fragmented initiatives towards landscape-level resilience.

This report is shaped by sustainability professionals working through these challenges. Biodiversify was proud to co-host the event "Accelerating Corporate Nature Positive Journeys" with the Corporate Partnerships team at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, where sustainability managers shared practical barriers and opportunities for embedding nature in business strategy. We are also grateful to members of the Nature and Biodiversity Peer Group, whose perspectives have contributed further insights.

This guide series has been made possible through the support of the Porticus Foundation.

Dr Sam Sinclair,
Co-Founder & Director, Biodiversify
Chair, Nature & Biodiversity Peer Group

PROCUREMENT AS LEVERAGE

Embedding Nature into Supply Chains

For most organisations, the supply chain is where a nature strategy stops being a document and starts being a set of decisions.

The largest impacts and dependencies usually sit upstream, in agricultural commodities, forestry, fisheries and raw materials. McKinsey has estimated that for a typical consumer company, more than 90% of the impact on air, land, water and biodiversity sits in the supply chain rather than in its own operations.

That gives procurement unusual influence.

Sourcing choices do more to determine whether nature ambitions lead to real change than almost anything a sustainability team can do on its own.

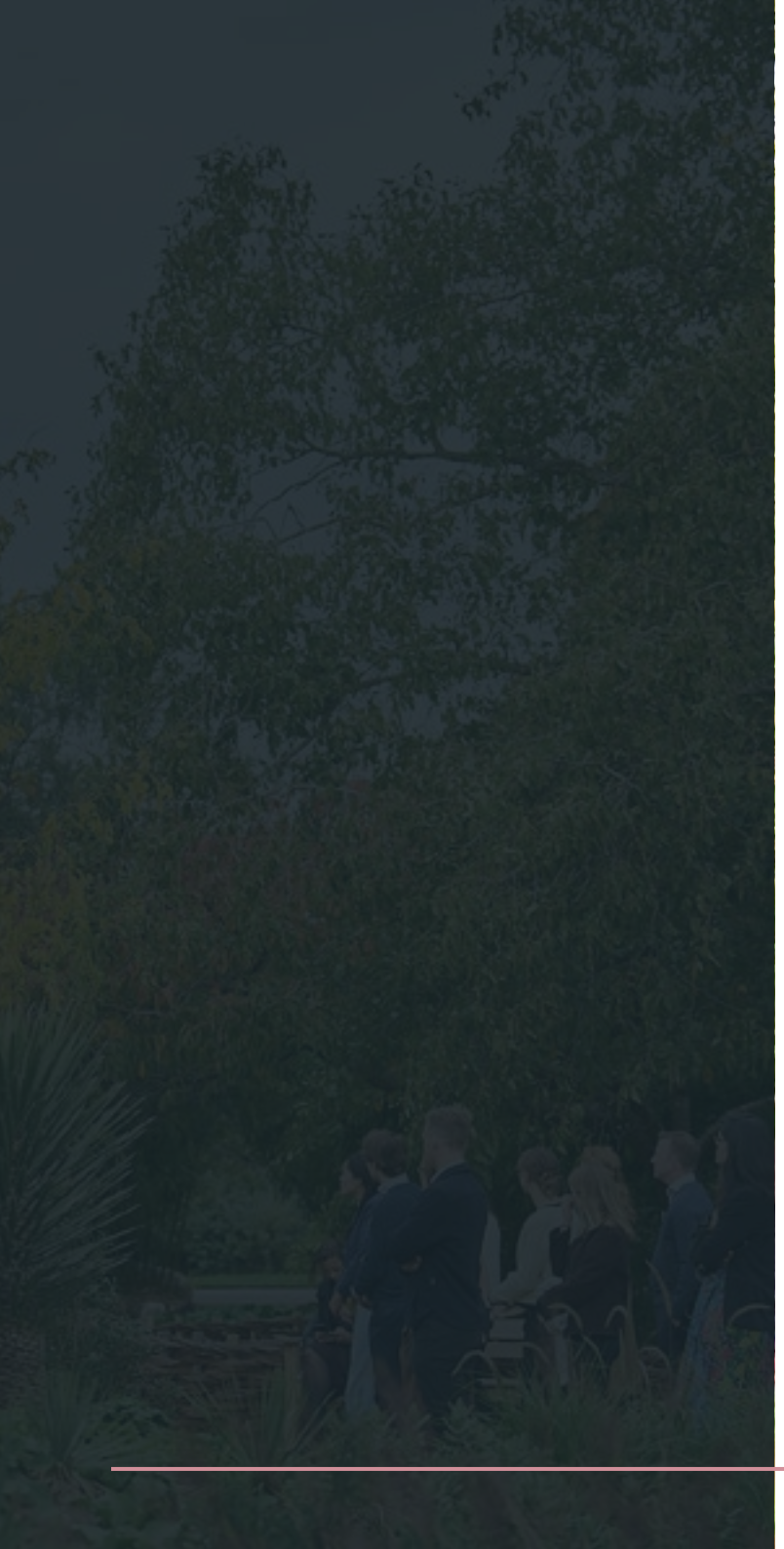
Sustainability leaders at our joint event with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and members of the Nature & Biodiversity Peer Group see procurement as one of the strongest levers they have. They are also clear about the catch. Procurement teams are often handed sustainability targets without the incentives or data needed to deliver them.

In many organisations, commitments have moved faster than supplier engagement and internal capability. Global Canopy's 2025 Forest 500 assessment found that only 3% of the companies with most influence over forest-risk commodities were taking adequate action on deforestation, while almost two-thirds had partial commitments or weak implementation.

The 2026 survey of sustainability practitioners that Biodiversify ran with Little Blue Research points the same way. More than half of respondents (56%) had developed or were developing a nature strategy, but only 34% were working with suppliers on nature-related impacts or dependencies. Companies know the outcomes they want. What they are less sure of is how to build those expectations into sourcing decisions consistently.

Whatever the sector, the conclusion was much the same.

Nature strategies rarely scale through sustainability teams alone. They scale when procurement and commercial systems start to change behaviour.



PROCUREMENT AS AN OPERATIONAL LEVERAGE POINT

Procurement is often where the practical difficulty of a nature strategy first becomes visible. A high-level commitment can sit comfortably above commercial pressures. A sourcing decision cannot. It has to balance cost, supplier availability, contracts, quality and timelines, often in volatile markets, and nature arrives as one more priority competing for attention.

The analysis behind those decisions is hard too. In the 2026 Biodiversify and Little Blue Research survey, supply chain analysis was among the three most commonly cited challenges in integrating nature into decision-making, selected by 42% of respondents and 49% of organisations.

Sustainability teams can underestimate just how operational procurement is. Buyers are measured on price, continuity and supplier performance. Unless nature is clearly tied to sourcing resilience or commercial risk, it will look like a secondary concern.

Framing makes a real difference. Engagement tends to be stronger when nature is presented as part of supplier resilience and long-term continuity, and weaker when it lands as an extra sustainability obligation. One nature lead put it simply:

"Procurement teams don't want sustainability training. They want help doing their jobs better."

The practical lesson is to build nature into the priorities procurement already holds, rather than layering it on top.

SUPPLIER FATIGUE AND FRAGMENTED DEMANDS

Suppliers are tired. Many are already fielding requests on carbon, traceability, human rights, water, certification and disclosure, and biodiversity assessments are now joining the queue. Often several buyers want slightly different versions of the same information.

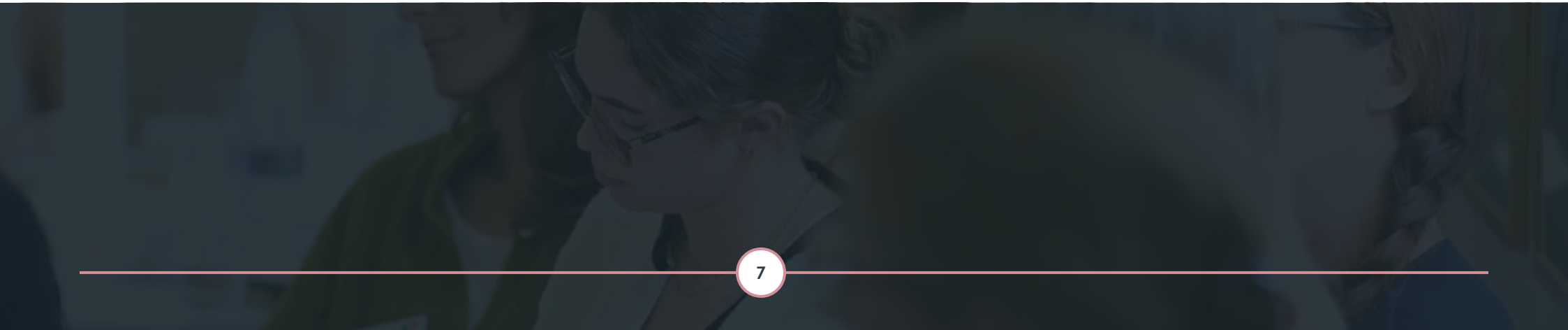
As one person described it, suppliers are being

"asked the same question fifteen different ways."

The strain is greatest for smaller suppliers, where expectations are rising faster than their capacity to respond. Some buyers have, without meaning to, pushed the work of implementation upstream without the support or incentives to go with it.

That leaves organisations in a bind. They rely on suppliers for visibility into sourcing practices and ecosystem conditions, yet those same suppliers are being stretched thin by requests arriving through different frameworks on different timelines. More questionnaires do not automatically mean better visibility. If suppliers lack the capacity or the incentive to respond properly, each new request adds less than the one before.

Most nature leads saw coordination as the way through, with fewer and better-prioritised requests that line up with what other buyers are already asking for.



CATEGORY-LEVEL UNDERSTANDING

Working category by category is one of the most effective ways to make nature-related procurement practical. Risks and dependencies differ sharply between commodities. Crops, livestock, fisheries, forestry and extractive materials each carry a different kind of ecosystem exposure, and a generic approach tends to miss the differences that matter most. The Forest 500 data shows how this plays out. Beef is the single biggest driver of deforestation, yet only 37% of the companies assessed for it had made any commitment to address it, compared with 76% for palm oil. Attention tends to go to the most visible commodities first.

Getting specific means answering questions such as:

Where is ecosystem pressure concentrated?

Which sourcing regions face the highest exposure?

Which commodities create the greatest dependency risk?

Where do we have real influence over suppliers?

Where is intervention operationally feasible?

This specificity pays off internally as well. Buyers engage more readily with a conversation about a category they manage than with a broad corporate sustainability narrative, and linking nature risk to their own categories and suppliers makes the work feel tangible.

It also makes prioritisation realistic. Few organisations have the resources or supplier influence to change every sourcing system at once. Starting where leverage is strongest or exposure highest gives teams a credible place to begin. Uptake of the supporting frameworks is growing fast. The TNFD's 2026 Status Report counted 1,154 organisations making TNFD-aligned disclosures, more than double the 542 a year earlier. Frameworks such as TNFD and SBTN are increasingly useful here, helping teams see where ecosystem dependencies and supply chain risk overlap and where deeper supplier engagement is likely to pay off.

SCALING BEYOND PILOT PROJECTS

Pilots are a sensible place to start. They let organisations test supplier engagement and traceability approaches while building confidence inside the business. **The hard part is what comes next.**

Several nature leads spoke of "pilot fatigue". Small projects earn positive attention internally, but extending them across regions, suppliers and procurement systems is a different order of difficulty. Too often a pilot is run well by the sustainability team while contracts and commercial incentives carry on unchanged. At that point the pilot risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

The Biodiversify and Little Blue Research survey also suggests the capacity to go further is often missing.

72%
leaned on external specialists or upskilling

39%
had secured additional budget

26%
had expanded their team

The answer is to design pilots with scale in mind from day one. That means thinking early about:

1. how procurement will adopt the approach
2. what suppliers will need in order to take part
3. who owns it internally and is accountable for it
4. how it will be governed and financed

Progress will rarely be even. An organisation may be well advanced in one commodity and only beginning in another, and nature leads generally saw this as normal. Supply chains differ too much in visibility and influence for maturity to develop at the same pace everywhere.



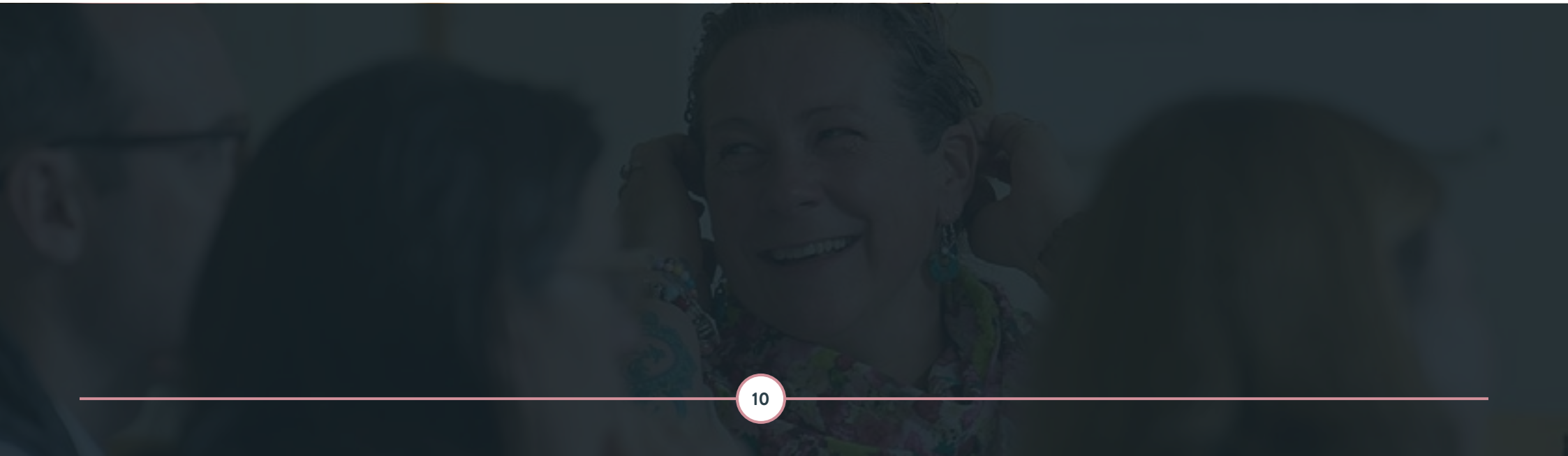
FLEXIBILITY, COMMITMENT AND SUPPLIER LOCK-IN

Long-term ecosystem investment sits uneasily with supply chains that keep changing. An organisation might invest heavily in supplier relationships, landscape initiatives or restoration in one sourcing region, knowing that commercial conditions or geopolitics could move its sourcing elsewhere within a few years.

Understandably, organisations are wary of commitments that limit future flexibility. Yet short-term sourcing models can undermine the very relationships that ecosystem resilience depends on.

Procurement is usually designed to keep options open, while nature outcomes depend on continuity and coordination over many years.

There is no neat resolution. Most of the organisations we heard from are looking for a workable balance between operational flexibility and longer-term partnership, and getting that balance right matters most in sectors exposed to geopolitical volatility or commodity price swings.



COLLABORATION AND SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE

Many of these challenges are too big for any one organisation. Suppliers serve multiple buyers, ecosystem pressures cross corporate boundaries and data requests overlap, so fragmented approaches create inefficiency on all sides.

Done well, collaboration cuts duplication and gives suppliers more consistent expectations. Smaller suppliers stand to gain most, since they are least able to cope with overlapping requests from different buyers.

Collaboration brings its own complications. Commercial sensitivities and competitive dynamics make coordination harder, and organisations do not always share the same priorities.

Even so, many see closer alignment across procurement approaches as increasingly necessary if nature-related implementation is going to scale.

Interest is growing in shared approaches, including:

1. ALIGNED SUPPLIER QUESTIONNAIRES
2. COLLABORATIVE TRACEABILITY SYSTEMS
3. SHARED LANDSCAPE INITIATIVES
4. COMMODITY-LEVEL COORDINATION AND COLLECTIVE SUPPLIER ENGAGEMENT

INSTITUTIONAL MATURITY

STAGE 1

EARLY-STAGE

Early-stage organisations tend to approach procurement through isolated supplier initiatives or exploratory pilots.

STAGE 2

INTERMEDIATE

At an intermediate stage, nature starts to feature in sourcing decisions and category-level risk assessment, though implementation is still patchy.

STAGE 3

MATURE

More mature organisations build nature into procurement systems and supplier governance, so that it shapes long-term sourcing strategy rather than sitting alongside it.

The shift rarely happens quickly. It builds gradually through operational learning and better coordination inside the business.

Maturity, in other words, is not about achieving perfect supplier visibility. It is about making nature part of the systems that shape sourcing behaviour over time.

CONCLUSION: WHERE AMBITION MEETS OPERATIONAL REALITY

A nature strategy only becomes meaningful when it changes how an organisation buys and who it buys from. That is where ambition meets operational reality.

Procurement teams cannot carry this alone. They need clearer incentives and closer alignment between sustainability goals and the commercial systems they work within. Suppliers, for their part, are unlikely to respond well to expectations that are fragmented or constantly shifting.

Embedding nature in supply chains therefore takes more than new reporting requests or another pilot. It means rethinking how sourcing decisions are made and how suppliers are supported over the long term.

That is the point at which a nature strategy stops being aspirational and becomes part of how the organisation works.

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MORE GUIDES IN THIS SERIES

Moving towards a nature-positive future is a journey that goes beyond high-level commitments. This series of guides is designed to help your organisation navigate the path forward, offering the practical frameworks and clear insights needed to turn environmental ambitions into lasting, meaningful change.

EMBEDDING NATURE INTO ENTERPRISE STRATEGY:

How to make the business case for nature

Making the business case for nature is seen as the most significant barrier to progress in corporate nature strategy. This practical guide is written for nature managers working inside large organisations to help build a business case that can win internal traction and buy-in.

BEYOND CARBON TUNNEL VISION:

Integrating Climate and Nature

In many companies, carbon and nature have been treated as parallel agendas. This guide examines why integration is now essential for resilience, how siloed approaches create blind spots, and how building nature work on the foundations laid by carbon can enhance business interests on multiple fronts.

FROM AMBITION TO IMPLEMENTATION:

Building Nature Strategies that Deliver

Many organisations have commitments on paper but struggle with delivery. This guide explores the execution gap: impacts and dependencies, traceability, internal champions and strategic clarity.

DATA:

From Paralysis to Decision-Grade Insight

What to measure, what to ignore, and how to prioritise. A lot of companies begin with data that feels too messy or incomplete to be useful. This guide helps clarify what information is necessary, what should be done first, and how frameworks can strengthen methodological credibility without overwhelming organisations.

LANDSCAPE-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS:

From Fragmented Projects to System Resilience

Commodity-level action alone cannot secure resilience. This final guide examines the move from fragmented supply-chain initiatives to coordinated, landscape-level collaboration and finance models.

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