Biocultural Knowledge and Free, Prior and Informed Consent Policy

Forest of Flavours / Seahorse Point Nature Reserve · Isla Bastimentos, Bocas del Toro, Panama · seahorsepoint.org

Purpose

This policy sets out how the Forest of Flavours / Seahorse Point Nature Reserve acknowledges, credits, shares and, where appropriate, protects the biocultural plant knowledge of the Indigenous communities of Bocas del Toro. The knowledge that informs the garden's work is chiefly Ngäbe-Buglé, from the neighbouring communities of the same area — Bahía Honda (Deep Bay), Bahía Roja (Red Bay) and Salt Creek; Guna (Guna Yala) and Emberá peoples are also present in the wider region. It applies to the plant collection, to educational materials, to research outputs, to publications, and to the online presentation of the garden's work on seahorsepoint.org and on partner platforms.

Principles

Attribution. Traditional and Indigenous plant knowledge is always credited to the community and, where they consent to be named, to the individuals who share it. The garden does not present such knowledge as its own.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent. Before any traditional plant knowledge is entered into the collection database, used in an educational or interpretive material, or published in a research output, the consent of the community and individual advisors from whom the knowledge is drawn is sought, in a form the community itself uses. Consent is recorded in the garden's consultation dossier.

Purpose limitation. Traditional knowledge shared under Free, Prior and Informed Consent is used for the purpose it was shared for. It is not repurposed, resold, or reshared without a further round of consent.

Protection where appropriate. Some knowledge, notably around plant preparations with pharmacological or ritual significance, is not appropriate for open publication. Where a community indicates that a specific piece of knowledge should be held in confidence, the garden keeps it out of open materials, including out of the collection database's public view.

Benefit-sharing. The garden's practical benefit-sharing is delivered through the community organic vegetable and herb garden, the school programme, the Bocas del Toro Tropical Herb Viability Research Project and the practical horticulture certificate delivered to community members, and will extend to the seed bank and the community jungle-guide certification course as they are established.

Consistency with the Nagoya Protocol. This policy is written to be consistent with the principles of the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing, adapted to the community realities of Bocas del Toro.

Practical commitments

- The 'Biocultural Significance' field in the plant collection database credits the community from whom knowledge or specimens are drawn (chiefly Ngäbe-Buglé, with Guna and Emberá traditions where relevant) and flags any knowledge a community asks to keep confidential.
- The Botanical & Traditional prep-bench reference includes an explicit Ngäbe-Buglé Botánicos column that names the traditional plant repertoire used in the garden's fertility and plant-protection programme.
- Interpretive materials — the Bocas del Toro Herb Guide, the six Common Tropical Dye Plants pages, self-guided tour sheets, and Instagram posts — will credit the source community wherever traditional knowledge is used.

- Names of individual advisors are to be included only with their own consent. Where such consent is given, it is documented in the supplier and consultation dossier.
- Research outputs, including the Bocas del Toro Tropical Herb Viability Research Project, publish only what the participating advisors have consented to see published, in the form they have consented to.

Attribution — advisors named at the time of application

Dr Caroline Duncan — Director and Free, Prior and Informed Consent lead; her doctoral research was conducted with the Inuit of the Canadian High Arctic, bringing Indigenous-community consultation and FPIC methodology to the garden's work (the specific cultural knowledge of local plants rests with the garden's Ngäbe-Buglé advisors). Dayra Morales (La Huerta Panama) — horticultural training and school-garden design. Carla Black, World President of the International Heliconia Society — heliconia collection advice. Dr Jon Schull, founder of e-NABLE and the EcoRestorationAlliance — restoration and conservation network. Ngäbe-Buglé plant-protection advisor(s): consent to name individuals is being obtained through the garden's FPIC process, led by Dr Caroline Duncan; until it is recorded in the consultation dossier, this knowledge is credited collectively to the Ngäbe-Buglé community of the local villages, and no individual is named without their consent.

Further advisors are recorded, with their consent, in the garden's consultation dossier as the relationship develops.

Governance and review

This policy is authorised by the owner-directors and implemented by the Director of Conservation and Horticulture. It is reviewed annually, and additionally whenever a new consultation, publication or research programme is proposed.

Signed:
Name: Diane Duncan
Role: Owner-director
Institution: Forest of Flavours / Seahorse Point Nature Reserve
Date: 30 September 2026

Signed:
Name: Dr Howard Dryden
Role: Owner-director
Institution: Forest of Flavours / Seahorse Point Nature Reserve
Date: 30 September 2026