



South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) Stakeholder meeting report

(30 December 2018 to 07 January 2019)

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Key stakeholders

Ministries: Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture

Other government agencies: Maldives Transport Authority, Marine Research Centre

Resorts: Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, Holiday Island Resort, Sun Island Resort and Spa (LUX* Resorts and Hotels cancelled due to problems with airline)

South Ari Island Councils

Meetings organised by Environmental Protection Agency and accompanied by Director of Baa Atoll Conservation Fund, IUCN REGENERATE.

Note: No stakeholder meetings on 1.01.2019

Annexes

Annex 1: List of stakeholders

Background

SAMPA was gazetted in 2009 but has never had any management plan, staff or budget to support the communication, implementation, monitoring or enforcement of regulations. In fact, the regulations listed in the Gazette document had not been made available in English and systematically communicated to all stakeholders until recently. EPA is developing the management plan for the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) with technical support from IUCN, funded by the USAID project REGENERATE. To ensure the management of whale shark encounters, effective implementation and enforcement of regulations on safety and best practice, and promote the sustainable financing of SAMPA through the introduction of fees, ticketing and other conservation finance mechanisms by building on experience from Baa Atoll and Hanifaru Bay MPA.

The goal of the stakeholder meetings was to communicate the project, goals and processes to develop and implement the management plan and the supporting work on regulations, enforcement and sustainable financing.

In response to concerns about safety inside SAMPA, EPA is developing a management plan in consultation with relevant stakeholders. While some meetings and discussions have taken place since 2009, in December 2018 and January 2019 specific and tailored meetings were arranged to discuss the development of the management plan and its implementation. IUCN Maldives is providing support to this work including through the engagement of a consultant who attended the stakeholder meetings in December 2018 and January 2019 during 1 week.

Summary

The key issues covered and findings are summarised below:

1. The broad objective of the stakeholder meetings was to:

- a. Meet key stakeholder groups to assess level of support for SAMPA;
 - b. Give historical context to SAMPA and the project;
 - c. Provide the IUCN consultant with an overview of governance and management issues; and
 - d. Receive feedback and input from stakeholders
2. The key findings highlighted a range of issues including:
 - a. priorities, obstacles, opportunities, governance arrangements, previous relevant experience in Maldives (e.g. from Baa Atoll and Hanifaru MPA), actions, unknowns (gaps in available data) and differences in perception.
 3. Meetings were held with key Ministries and sectors (see full list in Annex):
 - a. Ministries: Environment, Tourism and Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture
 - b. Other government agencies: Maldives Transport Authority, Marine Research Centre
 - c. Resorts: Conrad Maldives Rangali Island, Holiday Island Resort, Sun Island Resort and Spa (meeting with LUX* Resorts and Hotels had to be cancelled due to complications with a local airline)
 - d. South Ari Island Councils
 4. Zoning
 - a. Establish alternate day access for different groups
 - b. Spatially separate divers and snorkelers
 - c. Identify dive sites and dive site boundaries
 - d. Incorporate seasonal, tide and current issues into zoning
 - e. Separate whale shark snorkelling, dive sites and any other uses
 5. Key requirements for regulations and enforcement in SAMPA include:
 - a. Number of visitors
 - b. Number of vessels
 - c. Speed of vessels
 - d. Banning the use of lights to attract whale sharks.
 - e. Alternating access to groups by day of the week
 - f. Having enforcement carried out by rangers supplied with vessels
 6. Support for sustainable financing including on:
 - a. Fees for entry
 - b. Establishing a ticketing/queueing system
 - c. Paid licenses for vessels
 - d. Partnership agreements
 - e. Certification of guides (through paid professional training workshops)
 - f. Establishment of a sub-account within a Conservation/Green fund
 7. Suggestions for improved implementation:
 - a. Ban use of lights 1. To attract whale sharks, 2. Entirely
 - b. Use a phased approach in for zoning (not entire 40 km at same time)
 8. Suggestions and questions relating to the governance arrangements:
 - a. SAMPA will need an Advisory Council (as used in Baa Atoll)
 - b. Stakeholders will need to take the time to be involved in or appoint representatives to be involved in the council
 9. A variety of data, documents and materials were identified as key inputs into the plan including:

- a. Whale Shark Guidelines
 - b. Boundaries of tourism resort island concessions
 - c. MWSRP whale shark database
10. Key risks have been identified and need to be managed and addressed in the plan
- a. Tourist and guide safety in the water
 - b. Boat safety and collision risk
 - c. Whale shark safety and disturbance inside and outside SAMPA
 - d. Various pollution sources for sewage and solid waste
 - e. Airport and port traffic
11. Safety practice opportunities
- a. Limit distance between vessels
 - b. Enforce speed limits (in accordance with Whale Shark Guidelines)
 - c. Prohibit large vessels, and v small vessels jet skis and dinghies
 - d. Ensure all vessels have registration permits and communication equipment
 - e. Require qualified guides with training (life-saving/first aid skills etc)
 - f. Require minimum fitness and swimming skills for all visitors
 - g. Require signing of code of conduct and briefings on guidelines and safety
 - h. Specify permitted lifejackets for swimming (or wet suits)
 - i. Restrict number of swimmers, divers, snorkelers etc at one time/ per day in each zone/dive site
12. Communication, training and codes of conduct/guidelines
- a. All guides must be trained
 - b. Training must include safety, codes of conduct and best practice for whale shark and manta ray encounters (including Green Fins)
13. Unknowns remains including related to data and statistics:
- a. Actual number of tourists (or range per day/per week/per month)
 - b. Actual number of vessels (or range per day/per week/per month)
 - c. Total number of stakeholders (particularly not from off South Ari Atoll):
 - i. Resorts
 - ii. Liveboards
 - iii. Dive centres
 - iv. Guest Houses
 - v. Tour operators
 - vi. Boat captains
 - vii. Guides
14. Key gaps that will need to be addressed in the plan include:
- a. Confusion on the boundaries/lack of buffer zone (between resort boundaries, lagoon and reef crest boundary of SAMPA)
 - b. Managing, protecting and enforcing activities that threaten whale sharks (and manta rays) outside SAMPA
15. Next steps (some are illustrated in the table below), stakeholders agree that it is necessary to
- a. Develop the management plan in iterative steps
 - b. Implement the management plan with the help of rangers, stakeholders and an Advisory Council (soon to be established)
 - c. Introduce a phased approach particularly fee access fees
 - d. Establish on the ground enforcement as soon as possible

Commitments/ offer of assistance from specific stakeholder groups

Stakeholder	Support	Next Steps
Ministry of Environment	Prioritise budget allocation and support for hiring rangers, implementing management plan and establishing Conservation Fund sub-account for SAMPA	Approve hiring of rangers Establish Conservation Fund sub-account for SAMPA
Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture	Review fisheries activities in and surrounding SAMPA Share information on whale shark encounters recorded by MWSRP	Clarify authority for implementing regulations enforcement related to whale sharks, manta rays and other protected species.
Ministry of Tourism	Circulate SAMPA Gazette announcement to Resorts	Develop full contact list of tourism stakeholders
Maldives Transport Authority	Appointed a focal point for rangers to exchange on vessel regulations	Determine procedure to identify/track vessels, and to monitor and enforce vessel compliance with regulations
Dhigurah Island Council	Support hosting rangers – offer of office space	Request more support from EPA on island council staffing (and budget?)
Mamigili Island Council	Support hosting rangers	
Conrad Maldives Rangali Island	Willing to exchange information between dive centres. Willing to contribute to incident reporting.	EPA to mediate workshop between dive centres (and whale shark guides) Record incidents on safety and harm to whale sharks
Holiday Island Resort	Willing to collaborate with rangers	As above
LUX* Resorts and Hotels	Meeting postponed	
Sun Island Resort and Spa	Willing to host workshops	As above

Conclusion

There is a universal interest in seeing the SAMPA Management Plan completed, implemented and enforced. Concerns about safety to people and vessels during whale shark encounters was seen as a big risk to the tourism operators and to the Tourism Industry with potential consequences for the reputation of the Maldives.

A concern relates to the costs of introducing the sustainable financing particularly how the entrance fees/ticketing system could affect profits. Stakeholders are willing to contribute to a safer and more sustainable SAMPA, however, they expect more support and on the ground staff, particularly rangers, in South Ari.

Annex 1: List of stakeholders attending meetings

Date	Name	Position	Institution
30 December 2018	Dr Ibrahim Naeem	Director General	Environmental Protection Agency
30 December 2018	Dr Ibrahim Mohamed	Deputy Director General	Environmental Protection Agency
30 December 2018	Ms Mariyam Rifga	Assistant Director	Environmental Protection Agency
30 December 2018	Mr Ahmed Shan	Senior Surveyor	Environmental Protection Agency
30 December 2018	Ms Mariyam Shidha Afzal	Senior Research Officer	Environmental Protection Agency
30 December 2018	Ms Nashwa Ahmed Manik	Environmental Analyst	Environmental Protection Agency
30 December 2018	Ms Ilham Atho Mohamed	Assistant Director, Environment Department	Ministry of Environment
30 December 2018	Ms Lisama Sabry	Environmental Analyst, Environment Department	Ministry of Environment
31 December 2018	Ms Raufath Nizar	Research Officer	Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture
31 December 2018	Mr Adam Ziyad	Director	Ministry of Fisheries Marine Resources and Agriculture
31 December 2018	Mr Yoosuf Rilwan	Senior Research Officer, Coral Reef Monitoring and Research	Marine Research Centre
31 December 2018	Mr Mohamed Ahsan		Marine Research Centre
02 January 2019	Mr Abdulla Shibau	Managing Director, Baa Atoll Conservation Fund	Ministry of Environment
03 January 2019	Mr Shahid	President	National Boating Association of Maldives
03 January 2019	Mr Ismail Hameed	Vice President	National Boating Association of Maldives
03 January 2019	Mr Ahmed Afrah	Treasurer	National Boating Association of Maldives
03 January 2019	Mr Abdulla Mufeed	Council President	Maamigili Island Council

03 January 2019	Mr Zameer	General Manager	Holiday Island Resort
03 January 2019	Mr Zahir		Holiday Island Resort
03 January 2019		Dive Instructor	Holiday Island Resort
04 January 2019	Mr Usman Easa	Council President	Dhigurah Island Council
04 January 2019	Mr Mohamed Shirhan	Council Vice President	Dhigurah Island Council
04 January 2019	Mr Imran Adam	Councilor	Dhigurah Island Council
04 January 2019	Mr Ahmed Mohamed	Senior Finance Officer	Dhigurah Island Council
04 January 2019	Mr Zaheen	Executive Manager	Sun Island Resort and Spa
04 January 2019	Mr Mohamed Alsan	Executive Manager	Sun Island Resort and Spa
04 January 2019	Mr Abdul Rasheed Mohamed	Deputy General Manager	Sun Island Resort and Spa
04 January 2019	Mr Afzal	Environmental Manager	Sun Island Resort and Spa
04 January 2019	Ms Farzana	Administrator	Sun Island Resort and Spa
05 January 2019	Mr Akinori Ito	Hotel Manager	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
05 January 2019	Mr Michael Audrain	Director of Human Resources	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
05 January 2019	Mr Mark Ratliff	Director of Engineering	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
05 January 2019	Mr Andy Birtles	Dive Manger, Ocean Dive and Sports Manager	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
05 January 2019	Mr Hassan Fayaz Moosa	Sports and Recreation Manager	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
05 January 2019	Mr Ahmed Nashid	Front Office Manager	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
05 January 2019	Mr Abdulla Rasheed	Executive Housekeeper	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island

05 January 2019	Mr Mohamed Shareef	Safety and Security Manager	Conrad Maldives Rangali Island
06 January 2019	Dr Ahmed Salih	Minister of State	Ministry of Tourism
06 January 2019	Mr Ibrahim Fikree	Assistant Director	Ministry of Tourism
06 January 2019	Mr Hussaim Nazeer	Assistant Director	Maldives Transport Authority
07 January 2019	Dr Hussain Rasheed Hassan	Minister of Environment	Ministry of Environment
07 January 2019	Dr Abdulla Naseer	Minister of State	Ministry of Environment
30 January 2019	Mr Ahmed Nasih	EXCO Member	Guesthouse Association of Maldives
30 January 2019	Mr Ibrahim Siyad Qasim	Board Member	Maldives Association of Tourism Industry
30 January 2019	Mr Ismail Siyan	Board Member	Maldives Association of Tourism Industry
30 January 2019	Mr Ibrahim Noordeen	Board Member	Maldives Association of Tourism Industry
30 January 2019	Mr Rafil Mohamed	Executive Director	Maldives Association of Tourism Industry
30 January 2019	Mr Mohamed Shafiu	SIP	Maldives Police Service
30 January 2019	Mr Abdulla Shareef	CSP	Maldives Police Service
30 January 2019	Mr Ahmed Mujthaba	Major	Coast Guard