



**Stakeholder Consultation Meeting with Maldives Whale Shark  
Research Programme to discuss the Proposed Regulations and  
Zonation for South Ari Marine Protected Area**

April 2019



**Date:** 29 April 2019

**Time:** 18:20 – 19:30

**Venue:** Lobby, Sun Island Resort & Spa

**Attendees**

**International Union for Conservation of**

- Ms. Najfa Shaheem Razee – Chief Technical Officer, IUCN
- Ms. Fathimath Shihany Habeeb – Social Science Officer (Socio Economic), IUCN
- Ms. Ifham Hassan Zareer – Communications Associate, IUCN
- Ms. Josephine Langley – Consultant, IUCN

**Environment Protection Agency**

- Ms. Farhath Ali-Assistant Director, EPA
- Dr. Ibrahim Mohamed- Deputy Director General, EPA
- Mr. Maahid Abdul Rahman-Senior GIS Officer, EPA

**Ministry of Environment**

- Mr. Saaif Mohamed Rasheed-Assistant Environmental Officer, Ministry of Environment

**Maldives Whale Shark Research Programme**

- Ms. Irthisham Hassan Zareer – Lead In Field Coordinator, MWSRP
- Mr. Basith Mohamed – In Field Coordinator, MWSRP
- Mr. Ibrahim Shameel – Coordinator, MWSRP

**Areas discussed:**

1. Discussion of the proposed regulations and zonation of South Ari Marine Protected Area
2. Questions by IUCN regarding the data collected by MWSRP

1. Discussion of the proposed regulations and zonation of South Ari Marine Protected Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IUCN presented the key details of the proposed regulations and zonation to MWSRP</li><li>• It was also explained that the draft management plan was in line with the existing Maldives Whale Shark Interaction Guideline, global best practice guidelines on protected area management, Green Fins code of conduct and manta ray guidelines.</li><li>• When asked if MWSRP was familiar with the guidelines stated above, they stated the Lead In-Field Coordinator, Irthisham is a Green Fins Assessor, and they follow the existing whale shark guidelines</li></ul>
2. Questions by IUCN regarding the data collected by MWSRP on vessels entering SAMPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• IUCN asked MWSRP if it is possible to get the data of the vessel usage of SAMPA, to which MWSRP responded, stating that the vessel logs have already been shared with EPA, and that some of the data are annually shared along with the annual report as well.</li><li>• When asked what kind of data the vessel logs contain, MWSRP shared that they collect data on the number of vessels that enter</li></ul>

	<p>SAMPA, the type of vessel, and the vessel name.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MWSRP shared graphs and data from 2015 - 2018, showing total vessel number, vessel type, and vessel usage.</li> <li>• MWSRP stated that on average, there are about 60 vessels entering SAMPA every day. It was also stated that they do not double count vessels in one day, unless it is obvious that they are in SAMPA for a different excursion the second time. For example if the vessel was seen with snorkelers earlier and then with dive gear later.</li> <li>• MWSRP also stated that liveboards are likely to stick around more than 3 hours until they spot whale sharks.</li> <li>• MWSRP also shared that vessels from Baa, Faafu, Dhaalu, Alif Alif and Alif Dhaalu use SAMPA.</li> <li>• When asked what the peak hours and peak days for SAMPA are, MWSRP responded that guesthouses usually use SAMPA from 09:00 – 12:00, and that Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are peak days now, as liveboards come in then.</li> <li>• It was also shared by MWSRP that there is a hike in the amount of speedboats and excursion dhonis when compared to data collected previously.</li> </ul>
<p>3. Questions by IUCN regarding how the operations are run by MWSRP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When asked about the daily operations, it was stated by MWSRP that they operate 5 days a week.</li> <li>• When asked details about the type of vessel that MWSRP uses and the speed, to which MWSRP responded that they use a dhoni, and that their speed is 5 knots usually, and never over 10 knots.</li> <li>• When asked about the number of passengers on the vessel, MWSRP stated there would be 3 staff and a maximum of 8 volunteers on the vessel, and the number will not exceed 15 people. Including the boat crew, the number of people on the vessel would be 17. There is always one staff monitoring how the encounter is going and collecting data from the boat, while the others jump in during whale shark encounters.</li> <li>• When asked about how the operation is funded, MWSRP stated it is completely funded by volunteers' contributions, and that on an average they have about 4 – 5 volunteers, and they stay for two weeks, and sometimes a maximum of 4 weeks.</li> <li>• When asked about the research permit, MWSRP stated that is renewed annually.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Questions by IUCN regarding the data collected on whale sharks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When asked how long it takes to measure a shark and collect data, MWSRP responded that the ID shots would take about 5 minutes, and together with tape measure and other data, it takes about 10 – 15 minutes. It can also take around 20 – 30 minutes depending on the depth, where the shark is and the behaviour of the shark.</li> <li>• If it is a busy encounter, MWSRP collects data as quickly as</li> </ul>

	<p>possible and leaves the encounter, but if it is not, they stay back to observe the shark’s behaviour and any other details they might detect, if for example the shark is cruising, evasive, relaxed or leaving the reef. They also collect poo samples whenever possible to conduct further research.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was also stated by MWSRP that they maintain a record of improper conduct during an encounter, whether it is by others or by themselves.</li> <li>• When asked about the number of encounters, MWSRP stated that encounters have gone down by 52% in comparison to previous data collected.</li> </ul>
<p>5. Additional comments by MWSRP and IUCN</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MWSRP agreed with restrictions on number of vessels into SAMPA, and also agreed with the limitation on the number of passengers per vessel. They stated that it was important to do so, as people often get excited when they see a whale shark, and jump in on the encounter and put themselves and the whale shark at risk.</li> <li>• MWSRP also stated that certain key factors such as speed limitations, restriction on number of vessels, improving whale shark briefings and following whale shark guidelines should be incorporated in the management plan.</li> <li>• They also stated that as part of the Big Fish Network, MWSRP offers training for guides on best practices, whale shark biology and ecology and how to contribute data to the Big Fish Network.</li> <li>• MWSRP asked if the restrictions on number of vessels in SAMPA will apply to them as well, and IUCN responded stating that there will be certain limitations and research standards in SAMPA will be developed</li> <li>• It was then shared by MWSRP that they published a paper in 2013, giving details of the usage and evaluation of the value of SAMPA and the economical value was 9.3 million USD, and they are in the process of measuring it again, and it is likely to be much higher now, given the surge in vessels.</li> <li>• It was also shared by MWSRP that they have data on vessels outside of SAMPA as well as seasonal observations on vessels. They also stated that there is a drop in the data collected during the month of Ramadan, as their operations stop during the month, but they do get data from other contributors to the Big Fish Network.</li> <li>• MWSRP also stated that field-monitoring documents could be shared with EPA, which can be useful when training rangers and guides.</li> <li>• IUCN shared the goals of the management plan, the first goal being the protection of whale sharks, the second one being the conservation of the ecology of SAMPA and the third goal being community benefits.</li> <li>• IUCN also shared that the management plan will create a</li> </ul>

	<p>conservation fund, which can be used for more research on whale sharks such as chlorophyll concentration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MWSRP suggested that the Big Fish Network too could perhaps be included in the management plan for data collection, and that the users will need proper training for quality control.</li> <li>• IUCN and MSWRP also stated that a buffer zone is important for SAMPA, as whale sharks are often sighted in the lagoon too.</li> <li>• It was also suggested by MWSRP that the channels are not within SAMPA, but that whale sharks are frequently sighted in the area, and therefore those are also important areas to consider.</li> <li>• MWSRP also suggested that the Advisory Board should ideally have someone from a scientific background. IUCN stated that the plan is to include an independent environmental expert on the Advisory Board.</li> <li>• IUCN also asked MWSRP if they notice reef damage due to divers, to which MWSRP responded that it is a possibility as these are heavily used sites.</li> </ul>
6. Questions regarding rangers in SAMPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IUCN highlighted that there will be rangers stationed in SAMPA, and that there will be 1 vessel for the 4 rangers for now. They will primarily be collecting field data on number of vessels and people to begin with and will also identify and document misconduct in SAMPA</li> </ul>
11. Key areas agreed upon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MWSRP will share the vessel logs with EPA.</li> <li>• EPA will reach out to MSWRP if logistical help and training is needed for dive guides and rangers.</li> <li>• EPA will email the presentation and the draft management plan to MWSRP once the plan is ready.</li> </ul>
12. Attachments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation on the proposed new regulations and zonation for SAMPA</li> </ul>



South Ari Marine Protected Area management plan meeting

29 April 2019

MWSP

Conference Room

venue: Sun Island Resort & Spa

#	Name	Organization	Designation	Contact	Email	Signature
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