



**Stakeholder Consultation Meeting with Divers Association of
Maldives to discuss the proposed regulations and zonation for
South Ari Marine Protected Area**

April 2019



Date: 02 May 2019

Time: 16:00 – 18:00

Venue: Meeting Room, IUCN office

Attendees

IUCN

Ms. Najfa Shaheem Razee – Chief Technical Officer, IUCN
Ms. Fathimath Shihany Habeeb – Social Science Officer (Socio Economic), IUCN
Ms. Josephine Langley – Consultant, IUCN

Environment Protection Agency

Ms. Farhath Ali – Assistant Director, EPA
Ms. Mariyam Rifga – Assistant Director, EPA
Mr. Maahid Abdul Rahman – Senior GIS Officer, EPA

Divers Association of Maldives (DAM)

Mr. Ahmed Ashraf – President, Divers Association of Maldives
Ms. Shaziya Saeed – Vice President, Divers Association of Maldives
Mr. Hussain Sharif – Treasurer, Divers Association of Maldives
Mr. Mohamed Seeneen – Divers Association of Maldives

Areas discussed:

2. Concerns from Divers Association of Maldives regarding the proposed management measures and zonation of South Ari Marine Protected Area
3. Additional discussions by IUCN and EPA to help formulate a comprehensive management plan

1. concerns on the proposed regulations and zonation of South Ari Marine Protected Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DAM commenced the meeting with a few words stressing on their concerns on the proposed regulations and zonation and opened the floor up for discussion.• They agreed that SAMPA needs to be managed and number of vessels and people need to be regulated
2. Concerns over the number of passengers allowed per vessel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They disagreed with the number of people per vessel (10 people excluding crew). They highlighted that this sudden change will impact on small and medium businesses and in the long run will not be practical. It is important to implement a system that works for everyone.• There is concern that reducing access will lead to smaller commissions for the dive centres and guides• EPA responded stating that this is the best practice in many marine protected areas across the world and based on the existing Maldives Whale Shark Interaction Guideline.• EPA and IUCN stated that this is a preliminary approach, and that the number of vessels and the number of people per vessel can be negotiated. The main aim here is so that the whale sharks and

	<p>the people are safe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They stated that there are many boats coming from Male' and other atolls (estimated 4-6 atolls) for whale shark excursions and it is important for the numbers to reflect this as well. • EPA responded that all users and vessels that enter SAMPA must be registered and they will open registration in a month or so. • They agreed on having tracking device installed on vessels for effective monitoring.
3. Concerns over the fee charged for entry into SAMPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fee was heavily disagreed upon and they are against a system which imposes an additional fee • Questions were asked why the money collected from green tax and GST cannot be used to fund this. It was also suggested to explore other project funding opportunities to manage this area rather than imposing costs on the user groups. • EPA also explained that the money collected through fees would go into a conservation fund, which will then be used to finance projects within the region. It was also explained it is important to have sustainable financing in place for the protected area management to be effective. • There was a general disagreement that what has worked for other parts of the world might not necessarily work for the Maldives.
4. Concerns over the establishment of rangers in SAMPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was unanimously suggested that Marine Police be stationed in SAMPA instead of rangers, given the experience in Hanifaru Bay. • EPA responded stating that they explored the option of Marine Police and the cost are much higher than implementing a ranger system for protected area management. EPA stated that rangers will be trained both in-field in Hanifaru Bay, Addu and Fuvahmulah nature parks and at EPA. Also, a training specific for rangers will be conducted to train on data collection, existing legislations and regulations, protected area management and enforcement mechanisms • It was suggested that EPA imposes a higher penalty and fine system for users who breach the regulations
5. Concerns over the number of hours a vessel is permitted to use SAMPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was stated that 3 hours inside SAMPA will not be sufficient • Questions were asked about the alternate days proposed in the draft. IUCN answered that this measure was suggested by users in the stakeholder meetings held in January 2019 to manage the number of vessels in SAMPA at a given time, and that it only applies to whale shark zones. • General consensus on limiting the duration per dive
6. Use of flags during whale shark encounter, snorkeling and diving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They unanimously agreed to use designated flags during whale shark encounter, diving and snorkeling.
7. Speed control and keeping distance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They agreed on restricting the speed inside SAMPA • They highlighted that it is not possible to stop the engine when 10 meters from a whale shark given the strong currents as the

	<p>boat crew might need to rescue someone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the vessel's engine is off, with the current, it is also possible for it to hit the reef. • IUCN and EPA stated that this is a requirement in the existing whale shark interaction guideline. • No issues maintaining a certain distance from each other when in SAMPA, keeping distance from the reef, or keeping distance with whale sharks during a whale shark encounter. However, they suggested that 500m is a high and asked to revise it.
8. Concerns zonation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAM presented a map with all dive sites marked on the map. Only in SAMPA is diving possible all year round, there are always sights that can be found with the right conditions in all monsoons. • There was concern over how the zonation was done. The area proposed for fishing is a known shark point so it was suggested by DAM that it needs to be revised. • IUCN stated that the proposed zonation was based on information collected through a social survey, ecological assessment of SAMPA, and MWSRP's whale shark sighting data of over 6 years. • General agreement on whale shark zones • EPA and IUCN requested to send in their comments on zones so that this information can be used when revising the zonation
9. Additional discussions to help formulate a comprehensive management plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was requested if DAM could provide data on the dive sites that are in frequent use, the number of vessels that enter SAMPA for diving, and the number of tourists per vessel so these things could be taken into account when formulating the management plan.
10. Advisory Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was stated by EPA that the Advisory Board will have yearly rotations, and one member to represent divers will be present. • At the moment, this seat is given to a dive center, EPA proposed that divers could be represented by DAM, to that they responded saying that they will discuss internally and get back to EPA on the way forward.
11. Additional issues/comments discussed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA highlighted that they have a hotline for complaints regarding environmental issues, and that complaints can be submitted via Viber, Twitter, Facebook or email • It was highlighted that safety training is required for captains as well as crews. They suggested guides to have Dive Master training which includes rescue diver training and physiological aspects of assessing tourists' status. Dive Master training is very comprehensive and would build local capacity. They also proposed to build a training programme that is equivalent to rescue. • Questions were asked regarding having an EPA certified dive guide on board. EPA responded by stating that exams will be

	<p>conducted once a month, a fee will be charged for the license, and the license will be valid for 3 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAM responded by expressing their interest to provide technical support to EPA for guides and boat captain training • Concern over the feasibility of the proposed measures were discussed. EPA responded to this by stating that all the measures will be tested in the transition phase before it is finalized. • Guidelines (Whale Shark, Manta Ray and Green Fins) need to be circulated
12. Points agreed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcrowding is a problem in SAMPA • Agreed to use designated flags during whale shark encounter, diving and snorkeling. • Agreed to use whale shark guidelines except to turn off engines within 10m of a shark due to proximity to reef crest. Proposed a 50m offset from reef crest • Agreed to use certified guides (must include safety e.g. psychology of stress and training on panic) • Agreed on registration of users and vessels • Agreed to make propeller guards mandatory for all vessels (with grace period for vessels to purchase and install) • Agreed to speed control within the MPA • Agreed to make it mandatory for vessels to install a tracking device • Safety training for captains, crews and guides. E.g: video clips in Dhivehi.
13. Questions for consideration by DAM (no immediate agreement or disagreement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration for dive flag and whale shark flag • Area with no snorkelers • Minimum distance between all vessels • Identifying dive entry points in SAMPA • Time restriction blocks. E.g: 6am to 9 am diving, 9am to 2pm whale shark excursions and 2pm to 6 pm diving • Number of vessels per dive site or per dive zone • Number of tourist in total per dive • Number of divers per vessel • Number of divers and snorkelers on the same vessel • Number of snorkelers per whale shark encounter at a given time
14. Action points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulate zones and regulations for comments in writing • Circulate guidelines and regulations to DAM • EPA to respond to concerns regarding rangers of Hanifaru Bay, and the preferential treatment for certain operators
15. Attachments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on the proposed new regulations and zonation for SAMPA



South Ari Marine Protected Area management plan meeting
02 May 2019
Divers Association of Maldives

Venue: Meeting Room
IUCN office

#	Name	Organization	Designation	Contact	Email	Signature
1	ADAM ASHRAF	DIVERS ASSOCIATION OF MALDIVES	PRESIDENT	7937738	adam@divedesk.mv	
2						
3	HUSAIN SHARIF	DAM	Treasurer	7784515	chaalihabeeb@gmail.com	
4	SHAZLYA SAIED	Divers Association of Maldives	Vice President	7785992	thuniya@gmail.com	
5	Mohamed Seeneen		Dive Centre	7788964	mohamedseeneen@	
6	JOSEPHINE LANGLEY	IUCN CONSULTANT	CONSULTANT		direct@iucn.org	
7						
8	Fathimath Shihany Habeeb	IUCN	Socio-Economic	7704565	shihany.habeeb@iucn.org	
9	Mahid Abdulrahman	EPA	senior GIS Officer	9997011	mahid.abdulrahman@epa.gov.mv	
10	Mariyam Rifqa	EPA	Asst Director	7199374	mariyam.rifqa@epa.gov.mv	
11	Farhath Farhath	EPA	A. Director	999818	farhath.f@epa.gov.mv	
12	Najfa Shaheen Razeq	IUCN	CTO	7783865	najfa.razeq@iucn.org	
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