



Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Subcommittee

Meeting no: 4

Noo Raajje Program

Summary Minutes

Date: Tuesday, 30th March 2021

Time: 09:00 am – 10:00 am (Maldives Time)

Venue: (*Virtual*)

Attendees: 32 participants (*Refer annex for the virtual attendees list*).

Meeting Chaired by: Ilham Atho Mohamed, Ministry of the Environment

(MSP Subcommittee meetings are co-chaired by the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture on a rotating basis).

Welcome Remarks & Meeting Minutes Recap

The Chair, Ilham Atho Mohamed commenced the meeting at 9:03 am Maldives time, welcomed the members for the fourth MSP Subcommittee, gave a brief overview of the meeting agenda, and gave a few more minutes for additional participants to join.

Noo Raajje Site Manager, Nistharan (Nisthu) provided additional information that previous meeting minutes have been emailed and if any comments and feedback are there to send in by next Tuesday, 6th April 2021.

Presentation on MSP

Nisthu, Site Manager for the *Noo Raajje* program, presented on the general process of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), the activities involved, the outputs from those activities, and the general timeline for the process. She detailed that the MSP process is to take place within 30-months of the signing of the MoU for this program, which indicates a deadline for submission of the final MSP to cabinet in June of 2022.

This presentation built upon the presentation by Will McClintock at the previous subcommittee meeting that introduced the high-level process for MSP and introduced participants to the SeaSketch platform. In her presentation, Nisthu outlined the *Noo Raajje* MoU goals and commitments to officially adopt a legally binding EEZ-wide MSP designating at least 20% of the Maldives' water as fully protected marine protected areas, as well as the commitment to ensure all area designation in the MSP process are based on best available science and meaningful

community and stakeholder consultations. Nisthu further explained which activities and outputs occur during which phases of the MSP process and presented a timeline of those activities. *(presentation attached)*

Q&A and Discussion

One question was raised during the presentation by Muhsina from the Ministry of Environment, in which she asked about the management of protected areas once they are designated. Andy Estep, Science Director for the Waitt Institute, explained that the presentation only discussed the first 30-months of the MSP process and creation of the plan, however, the project will entail later phases of implementation and sustainable financing

After the presentation, Ilham opened the floor for discussion and questions for which answers were provided by the Program and Government representatives.

Q1. How should the general MSP process be tailored to fit MSP for the Maldives?

Dr. Charles Anderson commented on traditional rights of use and how consultations with fishermen are going to progress, as they are one of the key groups in this process.

Nisthu explained that the MSP process as well as other pillars of the program will engage with fishers, this has just been made difficult with COVID restrictions. Andy Estep also emphasized that stakeholder consultation is an essential part of MSP and that the legal framework assessment will address legal and traditional rights to areas. This information will be considered in developing the goals and objectives of the MSP. The program hopes to achieve a high-level of consultation with fishers and will rely on the MSP subcommittee to help inform the consultation strategy.

Hawwa Nizar from Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture mentioned the need to keep in mind the diversity of fishers and the different approaches that may be needed for engagement. Muhsina mentioned the importance of thinking about how the 30% no-take will be planned under the particular criteria of the Maldives and the need to finalize messaging prior to consultations. Also, the need to use the experience of other pacific countries with large marine protected areas and apply it to the Maldivian context, recognizing the importance that remote monitoring and technologies might play in enforcement, once these protected areas are in place.

In response, Andy mentioned the importance of the MSP subcommittee's role in developing the MSP principles, goals, and objectives (the subject of the next meeting) and how this will impact our consultations and communication about the program. Additionally, if there are topics that the subcommittee would like to learn about, the Waitt Institute can set up briefing calls and share materials about the subject. Muhsina replied that she would like this briefing opportunity surrounding lessons learned from large marine protected area management.

Q2. How is the legal adoption of MSP planned? Is there a legal arrangement proposed for this?

Rifath Naeem from the Environmental Protection Agency asked about how the legal adoption process will proceed. Nisthu briefly explained that the legal assessment is happening now, and under this, we are working to identify a policy pathway for MSP legislation.

Q3. Where are the coastal and offshore planning areas? 0-12 nm for coastal? 12-24 nm for offshore?

Rifath asked about the current government plans and policy for 12-24 miles and the planning difficulty due to limited information for the area. And addressed how to plan in a data-limited context and using the best-available data. He explained there are globally available data sets that they are gathering to fill some data gaps but that there are limitations to the amount of data available. Andy and Nisthu commented that they would be happy to receive any available data sets that participants may know of to help in the MSP process. Hawwa mentioned that MoFMRA may have some data but with the caveat that data quality should be considered.

Q4. What is needed to achieve the suggested timeline for MSP?

Charles Anderson mentioned the ambitiousness of the timeline, especially with the amount of consultation that is necessary (if we want to engage with every fishing island), but with more limited engagement it is more achievable. Shaahina Ali from Parley Maldives and Mohamed Shimal from Maldives Marine Research Institute agreed with this comment on the timeline. Shimal also commented that consultation on the fisheries components is essential and recommended covering as much as possible. Adjustments in the timeline may need to be made in order to complete a full consultation. Nisthu and Andy addressed this concern using Tonga as an example of broad engagement across geographically distributed islands. Andy explained there are a lot of different ways to engage through fishers' groups, forums, or individual outreach among other options. He reiterated the commitment to honor the needs and rights of fishers, and the role that the government and MSP subcommittee play in determining the best path forward for these consultations.

Q5. All resort house reefs are basically protected areas that are managed. Are they being considered to be included in the list of MPAs?

Nisthu informed that some works were previously done by ME on that earlier to which Muhusina from ME confirmed that several works were done as part of the effort to declare the whole country as Biosphere Reserve. Since then, there are some policy changes but carried out ecological surveys for the resort house reefs to serve the purpose of protected areas. Under the Convention on Biological Diversity, there is a category for such sites to be designated as OECMs or Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures. Ilham from ME further elaborated on the OECM, its aims and use of the OECM as an opportunity and plans to adopt in the national protected areas guidelines.

Nisthu highlighted that existing information will be compiled and used in this MSP work. It was explained that guidance from the MSP sub-committee will be required if there are any gaps or need for improvements and then it will be raised during draft planning work and implementation activities identified.

Philippa Roe from Maldives Underwater Initiative commented that not all resort house reefs are managed. Although, they are utilized for a purpose they are not managed in the interest of biodiversity. Responding to that, Ilham explained that as mentioned earlier, the resort house reefs are not protected for the purpose of conservation but rather tourism purposes. Similarly, heritage sites are protected for heritage purposes. However, due to the restricted usages and regulations that

they follow, there are less intrusive activities and thereby gives a secondary benefit which is conservation.

Shaziya Saeed (Saazu) from Diver's Association of Maldives/Save Our Waves asked if there is a process for popular diving reefs (e.g., resort house reefs) and easily accessible reefs (due to weather condition etc) that are often used for the purpose of teaching dive courses be marked as protected areas. Ilham explained that resort boundaries may make this difficult and it may need to be determined with the resorts. However, she further emphasized on the work that ME is carrying out to designate certain sites as OECMs or Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures.

Action Points & Closing Remarks

The next meeting was agreed to be held in a fortnight.

The meeting was concluded at 10:04 am with short remarks by Nisthu and Ilham who thanked everyone for their attendance and good discussion.

Annexes:

1. Attendee's list
2. 4th MSP Subcommittee Meeting Presentation Slides
3. Final meeting minutes of the 3rd MSP Subcommittee meeting

Noo Raajje Program Secretariat

11/04/2021