



**NOO  
RAAJJE**

## **BRIEFING NOTE**

August 14, 2022

### **UPDATE ON NOO RAAJJE PILLARS OF WORK**

---

#### **Blue Economy**

In February 2021, to support the Government's economic initiatives, as it becomes the *World's First Smart Ocean State*, the Waitt Institute contracted consulting firm City Facilitators to draft approaches to promote the Maldives' Blue Economy. A public servant survey as well as interviews with government agencies, private sector and CSOs were conducted to get a better understanding of potential blue economy avenues and economic diversification. At the first stage, two workshops were held in April with stakeholder groups and government agencies to discuss and identify the most suitable Maldives Blue Economy development strategies and scenarios based on their assessment. At the second stage, a workshop was held in August at a policy and technical level with the government agencies to present and align the Blue Economy Development Strategy with government priorities to position Maldives as a Blue Economy leader and prioritize the strategy's proposed working tracks. To assist in the decision-making, a series of matrices were developed showing job creation, environmental impact, and return on investment compared to minimum investment size needed to start the given projects. Through a vote with the public servants and the ministers, the priorities were decided to focus on the sectors of Nature, Food, Tourism, and Energy. Following the Government prioritization, the Waitt Institute and City Facilitators developed the Trunk & Branch Strategy.

Representatives from both the Waitt Institute and City Facilitators visited Malé in October to meet with Government and private stakeholders. These meetings helped to finalize which projects to focus on and gather the data to build business models that will help make a case as to why people should invest in the Maldives. Moreover, options for finance mechanisms were put forward for the Government's consideration. A Governance Committee meeting was held in February 2022 to seek endorsement of the Trunk & Branch Strategy and present an overview of the strategy and its main components. The presentation highlighted projects which will drive economic development and diversification in the Maldives. Prior to the presentation, a full Blue Economy Strategy report and a tentative prospectus were sent to the government stakeholders. A scoping of potential partners and the preferred financing options is ongoing, with a partnership forum being planned for November. Noo RaaJje's Blue Economy strategy is available online: <https://www.nooraaaje.org/program-materials>.

#### **Ecological Science and Marine Spatial Planning**

In February 2020, a team of Maldivian and international scientists surveyed 127 survey sites across many Maldivian atolls distributed between inhabited and uninhabited areas of the Maldives. The 3-week underwater expedition provided a systematic snapshot of coral reef health, with a focus on spatial gradients and gradients of human resource use. The final report for the first expedition is available online: <https://www.nooraaaje.org/program-materials>. From March – April 2021 the Noo RaaJje program conducted a second scientific expedition to complete the first ever archipelago-wide assessment of the state of Maldivian

reefs. The priority is to continue data processing and analysis for the second expedition and to produce a draft coral reef assessment report with input and feedback from the Maldives Marine Research Institute. The results from both expeditions will provide ecological information to help guide marine spatial planning (MSP) in the Maldives.

Waitt Institute also contracted a local Maldivian team to develop a Compendium of Marine Spatial Planning Targets relevant to the Maldives and to produce a Spatial and Temporal Characterization of Coastal Development and Infrastructure. The Compendium is completed, and available online: <https://www.noorajje.org/program-materials> and the Characterization will be produced by end of 2022.

The MSP Subcommittee is the technical group guiding the development of the Maldives' marine spatial plan and includes members from the Steering Committee (government agencies and NGOs). Since convening for the first time in February 2021, thirteen meetings have been held with the subcommittee to introduce MSP, discuss general topics that are of interest to subcommittee members, provide input on potential goals and objectives, and review a work plan and elements of developing the MSP. To help streamline this work, the 4 MSP subcommittee cochairs began meeting weekly in November to draft the conservation principles, goals, and objectives for the Offshore component of the marine spatial plan (i.e., areas from 12nm to 200nm). The principles were finalized in December 2021, and discussions on the Goals & Objective are ongoing alongside the development of the potential offshore MPA areas for consideration on Seasketch.

The MSP will be complimented by an Ocean Use Survey (OUS) which is identifying areas in the coastal and offshore marine environments that people value or use. In July 2021, a virtual interactive introductory session was held with Local Councils by the Noo Raajje Program and hosted by the President's Office, Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture, Local Government Authority, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Technology and the Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure. The session was held to provide the Local Councilors with information about MSP and the upcoming OUS. A team of 22 Maldivians were onboarded in November and the OUS was launched at the December Fishermen's Day event in Gaafaru. To date, OUS responses represent over 25,000 people across the country who use the ocean for fishing, tourism, recreation, cultural purposes, and more. Apart from a few remaining islands in Gaafu Alifu and Gaafu Dhaalu atolls, each island's individual survey targets were achieved by the June 30<sup>th</sup> close date. The survey will remain open for additional resort and safari vessel engagement. The responses collected will be summarized to produce maps of high use and high value areas. These heat maps will be presented to all local and atoll councils during a period of consultative review and will ultimately allow individuals drafting the MSP to make informed decisions which meet conservation objectives and reduce impacts to ocean user groups, like fishers.

An Offshore MSP stakeholder engagement strategy was developed and approved after presenting to government partners in June, with the idea that input from the Working Group established will take place continuously. Phase 1 of consultations to inform key stakeholders about the program work and MSP process and solicit feedback on the mapping process and plan for protection is planned for August through September 2022. As part of this process the engagement content has been developed and field teams have commenced on engagement with key fishing communities. Phase 2 of the offshore MSP stakeholder engagement plan is to get feedback on the draft offshore MSP beginning once it is created by the MSP CoChairs group and approved for public consultations by the Noo Raajje Governance Committee.

## **Legal**

In 2020, the Waitt Institute contracted two local Maldivian lawyers along with a U.S.-based ocean law expert, to support the development of an in-depth legal assessment of the Maldives' existing legal framework as it relates

to ocean management at the national, atoll and island levels. This assessment provides a solid understanding of the legal foundation for developing an enforceable, comprehensive, and sustainably financed marine spatial plan and blue economy strategy. In September 2021 the final report was released and is available at <https://www.nooraijje.org/program-materials>. This legal assessment represents the first stage of legal and policy work and is being used to inform a broader conversations on how the existing legal framework can support Noo Raajje objectives and help to identify necessary legal reforms.

In December 2021, the Noo Raajje Legal and Policy Committee representing the President's Office, Ministries of National Planning, Environment, Fisheries, Tourism, Transport and Economic Development, and the Attorney General's Office, was formed to guide the drafting of a National MSP Act. From December to February 2022 the Legal and Policy Committee met virtually to provide input on the draft. An in-person legal workshop to refine the National MSP Act was held in March. The bill is now being finalised and will be submitted to the President's Office and presented in Parliament at a date to be determined.

## **Fisheries**

In July 2020, Noo Raajje team worked with Environmental Markets Laboratory (emLab) at University of California, Santa Barbara to review 7 Fisheries Management Plans that were developed under the new Fisheries Act of the Maldives. In 2021, emLab began working closely with the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources & Agriculture on a Fisheries Characterization, which is a synthesis on the most up to date information on the country's fisheries sector. The purpose of the characterization is to improve understanding of the fisheries sector, identify key fisheries objectives, and highlight potential opportunities to improve sustainable fisheries engagement.

To illustrate potential impacts of climate change on fish stocks in the Maldives, emLab conducted a modelling study which was presented to the Noo Raajje Program team in February 2022. To support the Government's seafood markets priorities, the Waitt Institute contracted consulting firm Key Traceability to recommend opportunities to promote market access, explore the diversification of current value-added products and suggest potential frameworks for the market development of mariculture resources. A final report of recommendations and a presentation of key findings were completed and presented to Maldives Fisheries Promotion board.

To further support sustainable tuna market priorities, Waitt Institute travelled with the Minister of Fisheries to the Boston Seafood Expo North America in March to meet global fisheries sustainability experts from Monterrey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch, Marine Stewardship Council, Fair Trade USA, Global Tuna Alliance and Fishery Progress, along with large seafood importers in the US and Canada including Walmart, Wholefoods and Amazon.

A Maldivian Tuna Branding and Marketing Strategy is in development together with Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture and is expected to be completed in December 2022.

## **Communications**

In December 2020, the Noo Raajje program hosted a virtual public launch that was broadcasted on television and live on Facebook. The program featured His Excellency President Solih, representatives from the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources, and Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Economic Development, Maldives Marine Research Institute and stakeholders. The launch received more than 40,000 views and can be viewed on Facebook:

[https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch\\_permalink&v=299122888177699](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=299122888177699)

The project website was also launched prior to the launch event: <https://www.nooraijje.org/>.

A Dhivehi version of the website was launched in conjunction with the Ocean Use Survey to allow the dissemination of information to a wider Maldivian audience. Social media channels launched on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and continue to provide regular updates to the public via @NooRaajje. A Dhivehi version of the Noo Raajje Logo was completed in April 2020.

In 2021, Noo Raajje showcased its Blue Economy work at 2020 Expo Dubai. The Ocean Use Survey was officially launched at the 41<sup>st</sup> Fishermen's Day event held in Gaafaru. Since the OUS launch, Noo Raajje social media has been highlighting the survey's progress and showcasing people involved through Facilitator Friday and Stakeholder Sunday features.

In February 2022, 3 videos from the second scientific expedition were released on social media. One video focused on the pivotal role of Maldivian women in marine science.

Videos from the OUS launch were released on social media and the Noo Raajje website. The Noo Raajje team continued to spread the word about the OUS to encourage Maldivians to get involved and make their voices heard. The team released 4 press releases, garnered 39 pieces of media coverage, participated in 12 media interviews, and published 138 social media posts to promote the OUS. Since the OUS launch, Noo Raajje social media has been highlighting the survey's progress and showcasing people involved through Facilitator Friday and Stakeholder Sunday features. OUS statistics are updated weekly on the website and posted regularly on social media.

## **Capacity Building**

To advance Maldivian ocean science through education, a free online Blue Prosperity Maldives Training Program, catering only to Maldivians, was launched in June 2021. The program was administered to 128 individuals by the University of California, San Diego Extension and included five courses on the topics of coral survey science, marine spatial planning, blue economy, sustainable fisheries, and marine protected areas; which were developed in close collaboration with local technical agencies and experts.

In November 2021, a team of Maldivians were hired and trained to implement the Ocean Use Survey (OUS). This team includes 2 coordinators and 20 survey facilitators living in 10 different atolls. For 6 months from December to June, facilitators visited all 189 community islands to meet with residents and assist them in using an online platform to map their most used and valued spaces in the ocean. Over 22,882 shapes were collectively drawn representing the use of nearly 26,000 Maldivians, making the Maldives OUS the largest effort of its kind in the world. The OUS team traveled together to Thulusdhoo in July to celebrate a successful 6 months of survey implementation and to train for the next phase of their work as they transition into MSP engagement officers.

In March 2022, the Minister and Deputy General of Fisheries travelled to California to visit emLab for marine protected area science and fisheries enforcement discussions.

Noo Raajje supported Deputy Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Technology Dr.Naseer's travel to UN Ocean's Conference in Lisbon as well as to the International Coral Reef Symposium in Bremen, Germany.