



BRIEFING NOTE

October 15, 2021

UPDATE ON NOO RAAJJE PILLARS OF WORK

Blue Economy

To support the Government's economic initiatives, in February 2021 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 in February 2021 to get a better understanding of potential blue economy avenues and economic diversification. At the first stage, two workshops were conducted in April 2021 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 conducted in August 2021 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 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 be the sectors of Nature, Food, Tourism, and Energy. Following the Government prioritization, Waitt Institute and City Facilitators developed the Trunk & Branch strategy. Representatives from both Waitt Institute and City Facilitators are in Malé this month meeting with Government and private stakeholders to finalize which projects to focus on and gather the data to build business models that will help make a case for why people should invest in the Maldives.

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. From March – April 2021 the Noo Raaaje program conducted a second scientific expedition to complete an 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 final report for the first expedition is available online: <https://www.nooraaaje.org/program-materials>

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 the Characterization will be produced by early 2022.

The MSP subcommittee is the technical group which guides drafting the Maldives' marine spatial plan includes members from the steering committee i.e. government agencies and NGOs. Since convening for the first time in February 2021, thirteen meetings have been held with the subcommittee to introduce MSP, review the compendium, and compile principles, goals and objectives for the Offshore component of the marine spatial plan (i.e. area from 12nm to 200nm). Next steps will be for the Governance committee to provide input and final approvals on principles, goals and objectives for the Offshore MSP. The Offshore MSP is expected to be drafted by the subcommittee by January, and be approved by the Governance committee then go out for broad public stakeholder consultations early next year.

The MSP will be complimented by an Ocean Use Survey (OUS) which will identify 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 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. Later, in September 2021, positions for OUS coordinators and facilitators were announced, and the interviewing and hiring process is currently ongoing. Successful applicants will undergo training on conducting the OUS and are expected to begin surveys in November 2021.

Legal

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. The final report is available at <https://www.noorajje.org/program-materials>.

This legal assessment represents the first stage of legal and policy work and will be used to inform a broader conversations on how the existing legal framework can support Noo Raajje objectives and help to identify necessary legal reforms.

Fisheries

In July 2020, Noo Raajje team worked with Environmental Markets Laboratory (emLab) at University of California, Santa Barbara to review the Fisheries Management Plans that were developed under the new Fisheries Act of the Maldives. emLab is currently 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 this is to improve understanding of fisheries sector, identify key fisheries objectives, and highlight potential opportunities to improve sustainable fisheries engagement.

To assist with 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 will be ready in January 2022.

Communications

In December 2020, Noo RaaJJE program launched to the public via a virtual and broadcasted event featuring President Solih, representatives from the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources, and Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Economic Development, Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI) and stakeholders. You can view the public launch here: <https://fb.watch/4gXdLHP44C/>

The project website was also launched prior to the event: <https://www.nooraaJJE.org/>
Twitter, Facebook and Instagram: @NooRaaJJE. Dhivehi version of the Noo RaaJJE Logo was completed in April 2020. Work is underway to create Dhivehi website for the program to allow dissemination of information to a wider Maldivian audience.

Noo RaaJJE expedition videos are being finalized for release later this year, and the program's blue economy work was recently showcased at the Dubai World Expo happening now.

Capacity Building

In order to advance Maldivian ocean science through education, a free online Blue Prosperity Maldives Training Program was launched in June 2021. The program is being administered by University of California San Diego Extension and includes five courses on the topics of coral survey science, marine spatial planning, blue economy, as well as sustainable fisheries and marine protected areas. The final course is being executed online this month.