



BRIEFING NOTE

February 28, 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 June.

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 the Characterization will be produced by mid 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.

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 20 facilitators and 2 survey coordinators were onboarded in November and the OUS was launched at the Fishermen's Day event in Gaafaru. So far responses representing close to 6,000 people in 16 Atolls utilizing the ocean for fishing, tourism, community, cultural, maritime, shipping, and construction uses have been captured. The survey period will continue until June and resulting

heat maps of ocean use will help the group drafting the MSP to minimize impacts to ocean users like fishers.

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.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.

In December 2021, A Legal and Policy Committee representing President's Office, Ministries of National Planning, Environment, Fisheries, Tourism, Transport and Economic Development along with 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 finalize the National MSP Act is being planned for March.

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 will be ready in March 2022.

To further support sustainable tuna market priorities, Waitt Institute will be travelling with the Minister of Fisheries to the Boston Seafood Expo North America in March to meet global fisheries sustainability experts at 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.

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 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

The project website was also launched prior to the launch event: <https://www.nooraaajje.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 41st 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 role of Maldivian women in marine science. Videos from the OUS launch have been finalized and will soon be released on social media and the Noo Raajje website.

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 was administered to 128 locals by University of California San Diego Extension and included five courses on the topics of coral survey science, marine spatial planning, and blue economy, as well as sustainable fisheries and marine protected areas. In March 2022, the Minister and Deputy General of Fisheries will travel to California to visit emLab for marine protected area science and fisheries enforcement discussions.