



1st Steering Committee Meeting ***Noo Raajje* Program** **Summary Minutes**

Date: Tuesday, 24th November 2020

Time: 09:00 am – 10:30 am (Maldives Time)

Venue: (Virtual)

Attendees: *The Noo Raajje Program's 1st Steering Committee Meeting was held with the presence of participants from various sectors including technical staffs from Government ministries and institutions, stakeholders from marine research, environmental and conservation organizations, representatives from surfing and diving communities, representatives from tourism sector as well as academics. Please see annex for the attendees list.*

Meeting Co-Chaired by: Mr. Adam Ziyad, Director General of Fisheries Department at Ministry of Fisheries Marine Resources and Agriculture & Ms. Sabra Noordeen, Foreign Relations Secretary at President's Office

Welcome Remarks & Introduction

The Director General of Fisheries Department at Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture, Mr. Adam Ziyad extended a warm welcome to the Steering Committee members and thanked all for their presence and participation in the first Steering Committee meeting of *Noo Raajje* Program. He also extended a warm welcome to the project team from Waitt Institute.

Mr. Adam Ziyad briefly explained that *Noo Raajje* partnership program between the Government of Maldives and the Blue Prosperity Coalition, spanning over a period of five years with a three-phased approach is expected to explore the diverse marine habitats of the Maldives and support the Blue Economy initiatives while the research would aid in policy decision making towards sustainable utilization of our ocean's resources, developing marine spatial plans, and subsequently helping the local communities. Extending his welcome, he elaborated that all of the participants of the Steering Committee meeting comprising of technical staffs from government ministries and agencies, representatives from non-governmental organizations, private sector and academia are now a part of a diverse advisory group of the *Noo Raajje* team who will be providing technical support to the program.

The Co-chair then handed over to Waitt Institute and *Noo Raajje* team to provide an overview of the program, outline of the committee structures and program updates.

Noo Raajje Program Coordinator Mr. Moosa Zameer Hassan briefly introduced the steering committee members.

Presentation on Overview of the Program by Waitt Institute

Ms. Robin Ramdeen, the Program Manager on behalf of the Waitt Institute made a presentation with her colleagues providing an overview of the program, its key principles and update on the *Noo Raajje* activities. The highlights of this overview are;

1. The goal of *Noo Raajje* 5-year partnership program between the Government of Maldives and the Blue Prosperity (BPC) Coalition is focused on building a vibrant blue economy to achieve sustainable use of ocean resources in order to sustainably grow the economies, improve livelihoods and protect and restore the ecosystem health in the Maldives
2. The members of Steering Committee are the ocean stakeholders who are very important for the program to provide technical input and guide the Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Blue Economy and the biodiversity conservation processes.
3. Introduction to Waitt Institute, its founding members and the organizing body of the BPC, Partners and engagements with governments in developing and establishing Blue Prosperity plans.
4. Blue Prosperity Coalition has partnered with the Governments of Bermuda, Barbuda, Curacao, Montserrat, The Azores, The Federated States of Micronesia, Tonga and recently the Maldives.
5. She highlighted that Government of Maldives commitment to protect 20% of marine area as per the MoU signed between the Government and BPC. Informing that the core aspects of the program include MSP, promote Blue Economy and establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).
6. Further, the Waitt Institute's team was introduced and its network of collaborators including SeaSketch conducting GIS aspects, emLab providing fisheries scientific expertise, Scripps Institute that works closely on expeditions and UCLA as well working in the field of blue economy.
7. Ms. Robin explained that the meeting between HE the President of Maldives, Mr. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Mr. Ted Waitt's in 2019 during the UN General Assembly led to the partnership and signing of the MoU between the two parties in September 2019.
8. She highlighted that *Noo Raajje* program is now running at year 1 during which the assessment of the existing environment are to take place. This includes ecological assessments, socio-economic and stakeholder surveys. Currently, legal assessments are being conducted through local lawyers to understand and evaluate the existing laws and regulations and mandates of the different authorities. Additionally, economic valuation as well as habitat mapping are expected during this assessments phase.
9. In year 2-3 the focus is on policy design and planning aspects. As such, in parallel to the zoning analysis and marine spatial planning it was explained that it will involve legal drafting and drafting of the sustainable financial and implementation plans.

10. Year 3-5 is planned for monitoring and enforcement aspects and is expected to involve such tasks as demarcating the marine areas using buoys, etc and enforcement of marine spatial plans and monitoring of the sites to assess impacts.
11. It was informed that Waitt Institute will support the program throughout the 5-year period.

Ms. Fathimath Nistharan (Nisthu), *Noo Raajje* Site Manager then took over to give a brief introduction to the *Noo Raajje* local staffs – herself, Mr. Moosa Zameer Hassan and Ms. Maesha Mohamed.

She then gave an overview of the program governance structure explaining the four levels of engagement including;

1. **Principals** - HEP Mr. Ibrahim Mohamed Solih on behalf of the Government of the Maldives, and Mr. Ted Waitt on behalf of the Blue Prosperity Coalition.
2. Program oversight undertaken by the members of **Governance Committee** (representative from each Ministry. This member could be the minister, or an alternative representative of the Ministry approved by the Chair. **Program Leadership** (Executive Director Dr. Kathryn Mengerink from Waitt Institute, Minister Zaha Waheed from MoFMRA and Senior Policy Advisor Ms. Sabra Noordeen from the President’s Office) and **Blue Prosperity Coalition Partners**.
3. Technical support to be provided by the *Noo Raajje* **Steering Committee** and **Technical Subcommittees**. The Steering Committee and the Subcommittees will contain technical input from government ministries as well as other institutions, local councils, academics, NGO’s and private sector.
4. **Program Administration** which is the operational arm of the program is formed by the Waitt Institute’s Program Manager Ms. Robin Ramdeen, Senior Representative of MoFMRA Ms. Munshidha Ibrahim, President’s Office’s Policy Secretary Ms. Jauza Khaleel, Site Manager Ms. Fathimath Nistharan, the Program Secretariat represented by Program Coordinator Mr. Moosa Zameer Hassan and Administrative Coordinator Ms. Maesha Mohamed.

Update on the ongoing Program Activities in the Maldives

Ms. Fathimath Nistharan and members from Waitt Institute provided an update of the ongoing program activities in the Maldives. These include;

1. An underwater research expedition conducted earlier in 2020 for the assessment of existing environment.
2. Program work planning carried out onsite by Waitt Institute with Policy Advisors from PO and development of Terms of Reference (ToR) for *Noo Raajje* Governance structure.
3. Blue Economy priorities discussion with President’s Office, economists and fisheries scientists from UCLA and the Blue Economy framework is being developed.
4. Seven out eleven fisheries management plan works have been completed with MoFMRA together with emLab.
5. Hiring of local lawyers who commenced work in July 2020 on legal assessments as well as hiring of 3 new program local staffs.

6. She highlighted that the program digital and online launch is planned for December 2020.
7. It was also noted that the marine science and stewardship training programs are being developed and planned to be held in January 2021.

Mr. Andy Estep, Science & Field Director from Waitt Institute then gave an update on the *Noo Raajje* Expedition undertaken in February 2020.

1. It was explained that the month-long expedition visited 16 atolls and conducted a total of 978 dives during which coral reef composition and health, fish populations, water quality and benthic communities were studied. The Expedition findings scientific report from 1st and 2nd lag is now being reviewed and the final report would be available in early 2021.
2. The 3rd and 4th lags to visit North and South Male' atolls as well as Southern atolls of Maldives are underway and will hopefully be conducted in March 2021.
3. The ongoing tasks seeks to understand the goals of MSP in the Maldives and the data collected will be used to analyze the priority areas. The MSP working group within the steering committee will be reviewing the available data layers, defining the zoning criteria, and creating draft plans.
4. The stakeholders will be given opportunity to provide feedback on draft plan and then the Governance Committee will be responsible for putting a final plan forward for legal adoption. The Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture and Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure will be responsible to chair this working group.
5. He then briefly explained the roles and responsibilities of the *Noo Raajje* Sustainable Fisheries subcommittee as well who will help identify the fisheries, work on improving the sustainability of ocean resources and coastal livelihoods. Fisheries scientists at UCSB emLab are to work as the lead collaborators and will reach out to local and regional experts as necessary.

Ms. Vanessa Dick, Program and Legal Director at Waitt Institute briefly updated on the legal assessment work that has been undertaken with the assistance of hired two local lawyers working with Waitt Institute team in the evaluation of the Maldivian laws and institutional mandates to support the design of policy pathways and implementation of a comprehensive MSP and blue economy process. The Legal Assessment Report findings will be shared with the Steering Committee members in March 2021.

Ms. Shayna Brody, Communications Director for Waitt Institute presented an update on the Program Communications and upcoming plans. Some of these included;

1. Development of "*Noo Raajje*" program name and logo
2. Program communication objectives and roles of Communications Subcommittee.
3. Upcoming video of the expedition that summarizes the expedition works and findings which will be released around the same time as the Expedition scientific report.
4. Update on the upcoming program digital and virtual launch in December 2020.

Dr. Angus Friday, Blue Economy Director at the Waitt Institute presented an update on the *Noo Raajje* Blue Economy aspects. He briefly explained the roles of Blue Economy & Sustainable

Finance Subcommittee who will be helping to identify the blue economy priorities in keeping with the Maldives National Strategic Action Plan, review research and provide guidance on the appropriate stakeholder consultation processes. This working group meetings will be chaired by the President's Office and the economists and UCLA Institute of Environmental Sustainability will work as the lead collaborators. He further gave an overview of the work timeline in terms of blue economy works.

Ms. Robin Ramdeen, on behalf Waitt Institute's Program & Social Sciences Director Ute Zichka, gave an update on *Noo Raajje* capacity building aspects which focuses on advancement of ocean science and stewardship through research, education and outreach in the Maldives. She highlighted on the free online 5-course training program that are now in the process of development along with input from various ministries on key audiences, training needs and course design. University of California San Diego Extension is providing support with these online training programs.

An overview of the *Noo Raajje* Steering Committee ToR and Sub-Committees by the Program Secretariat

Mr. Moosa Zameer presented the rules of engagement, roles and responsibilities of the Committees as described in the *Noo Raajje* Program ToR and the presentation that was shared with Steering Committee members ahead of this meeting. These include;

1. The Governance Committee - acting as the **ambassadors of the Government and liaisons** for *Noo Raajje* providing final approvals for the actions that lead to program objectives throughout the program and identifying necessary technical experts from relevant Ministries, NGOs, and the private sector to serve in the Steering Committee.
2. He went onto explain the **roles and responsibilities** of the Steering Committee and Subcommittees, the members of committees as organizational representatives and **rules of engagements**.
3. The **four levels of decision making** were highlighted, indicating the arrangement for decision making, membership, proxy participation and decision making through consensus.

He further emphasized on the “**Volunteer for Subcommittee**” google form link that was shared in the presentation and requested the participants to fill this form to indicate their areas of work and the subcommittee(s) they would like to join as well as suggest any other additional members that maybe relevant to be included in the Steering Committee and Subcommittees/ technical working groups.

Q&A and Discussion

The floor was then opened for questions and discussions. Following are the questions that were asked by the participants and the responses by the team;

Q1: 20-30% marine protection was mentioned in the MoU. Is this a formal commitment by the government of the Maldives and if so, what is the target date to reach this goal?

Ms. Robin explained that the MoU signed between the Government of Maldives and Blue Prosperity Coalition speaks of 20% marine protected areas and the program is targeting to have an enforceable Marine Spatial Plan within 2-2.5 years into the program. Further to that, Ms. Sabra Noordeen highlighted that the 20% of marine protection is in the MoU with the Blue Prosperity Coalition and 30% of protecting global oceans is a commitment that the Government of Maldives has made to the Clean Oceans Alliance earlier this year.

Q2: How is it possible to officially be part of the project?

Ms. Robin explained that the Steering Committee participation is quite official as anyone who is part of the Steering Committee is part of the technical advisory group to the program. The Steering Committee and Subcommittee members will have a lot of say in the decision making on resource use, management and conservation, development of conservation strategies as well as development of blue economy strategies. The final decision will eventually be signed off by the Government of Maldives.

Q3: You mentioned coral reef surveys but will you be conducting surveys of connected habitats seagrasses and mangroves?

Mr. Andy Estep answered that currently there are no plans to conduct archipelago wide surveys on seagrasses and mangroves but they will be mapped and considered within marine spatial planning process based on the target goals and objectives developed by the MSP Subcommittee to incorporate them as prime habitats for protection. Adding to that Ms. Robin requested to connect the program team with anyone who might have mangrove and seagrass datasets since there will be works done on coastal characterization and development of an MSP compendium within the project. Therefore, it will be very useful to connect with others and gather as much of existing data as possible.

Q4: What about the surf breaks?

Ms. Robin responded requesting to provide any datasets or information regarding the surf breaks to allow for a robust picture of habitats and conditions of coastal and marine resources. She also highlighted that in addition to the ecological surveys there will be a widespread ocean use survey to capture information on valuable coastal areas and how they are being used.

Mr. Andy further explained the process of MSP. He highlighted, given that Maldives is committed to protect 20% of marine areas, one of the major roles of the MSP Subcommittee, Steering Committee and the Governance Committee are to identify the goals and areas for protection as well as identify what other elements to incorporate into the marine spatial plans and to the

sustainable ocean policies that are developed through the *Noo Raajje* Program. The MSP working group is going to be charged with vetting the data to be used in planning.

Q5: Will you be using expedition data and historical data to identify possible areas of greater coral resilience, with an aim to protect these areas under the MSP zoning process?

Mr. Andy emphasized that it could be a goal established through the MSP process and that particular analytical output could be used to inform or make a recommendation about where to place MPAs designed to protect the most resilient reefs in the Maldives.

Q6: Does the 20% includes existing protected areas or will it be excluded?

As discussed within the Governance Committee members in the meeting held earlier in September, it is considered not to exclude existing protected areas in the 20%. Currently the *Noo Raajje* team is working very closely with Ministry of Environment as well as the Ministry of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to achieve this overall goal.

Q7: What level or type of protection are we working to achieve?

Ms. Robin highlighted that the MoU states 20% fully protected marine areas which means there shall be no extraction within that 20% of the ocean. The idea is to achieve as closely as possible to the scientific recommendation of 30% of marine protected areas and the program is striving towards fully protected 20% of the ocean. However, in the wider marine spatial plan there might be multi-use areas or partial-take areas that also get created during the process.

Q8: Could you give an indication of time commitment required for each subcommittee?

Ms. Robin mentioned that depending on which subcommittee the commitment could be quite intense, for example MSP Subcommittee might need to have weekly meetings at the beginning and then reduce the meetings to fortnightly and eventually to monthly as well. Some of the other subcommittees might not require such heavy involvement at this point and would probably have monthly meetings. Mr. Moosa Zameer also highlighted that some of the meetings might be held in the evenings due to the difference in time zones.

Q9: Strictly speaking Maldives is entirely marine. Will MSP consider the little vegetated areas (islands)?

Mr. Andy responded that the MSP can consider the islands, the vegetated areas or any features that would be a reflection of the objectives that is important for the MSP Subcommittee, Steering Committee or the Governance Committee. If they determine that relationships between islands, use or development are useful at achieving certain MSP goals be they establishing marine protected areas or identifying the areas of highest impacts to target for restoration activities etc, the areas can certainly be considered whether they are islands or otherwise.

Action Points & Closing Remarks by the Co-Chair

1. It was further reminded to the participants to fill out the “Volunteer for Subcommittees” form in the link as it will help to get the program to touch base with even more ocean stakeholders who are key to the process. The members were also encouraged to share the form link with colleagues who might be interested or are relevant to the works of *Noo Raajje* Program.
2. For further information regarding the program the participants are welcomed to contact Ms. Robin, Ms. Nistharan or any of the *Noo Raajje* team members.
3. As the program will be launched soon, it was highlighted to keep an eye on the *Noo Raajje* handle on social media platforms as well as the soon-to-be live *Noo Raajje* website (www.noorraajje.org) for program updates and to keep contact.

Mr. Adam Ziyad concluded the meeting by thanking all the participating members and the program partners for attending the meeting.

Annex:

1. Attendees list link: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1mbvhV_3pFsuZDLr2x6Br-HM71iGbSv8-iTt_URPp1o0/edit?usp=sharing
2. Volunteer for Subcommittees link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSesUXeow6gy1YG2KmuuUZaiVpsQcI3BBO8IGKp2dwIkmmeCNQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

Noo Raajje Program Secretariat
02/12/2020