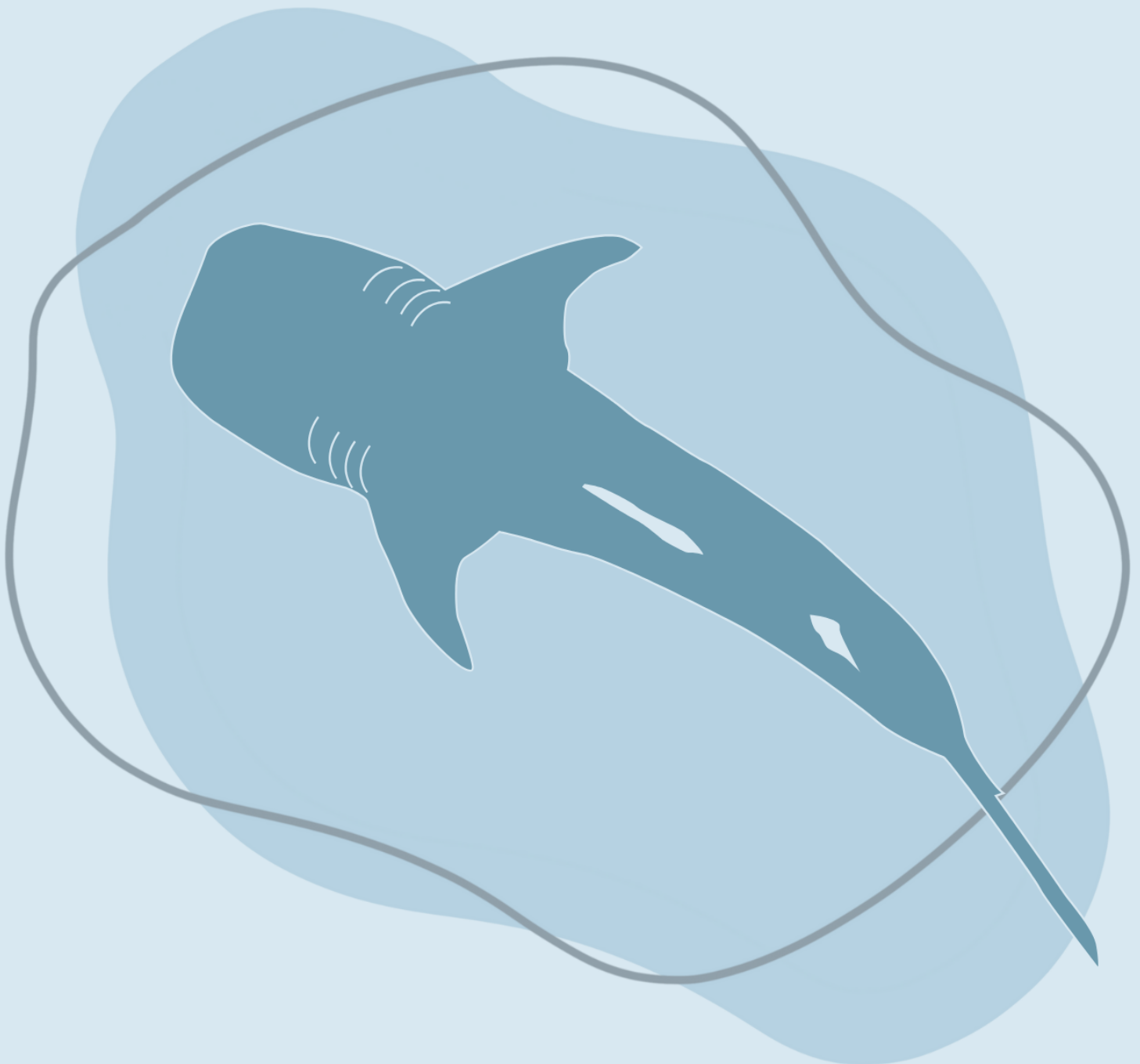




SOUTH ARI MARINE PROTECTED AREA: GUIDE EXAMINATION STUDY MATERIAL

Version 1
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Section 1: Introduction to the document

This document is a summarized compilation of unofficial translation of the following documents:

1. The decree of Protection of South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA),
2. The SAMPA management plan developed under the Protected Area Regulation (2018/R-78).
3. Whale Shark Protection Guideline under the Protected Species Regulation (2021/R-25), amendment 7 (2024/R-96).

The document also includes some information about whale shark biology and ecological features of SAMPA that will help guides to better deliver the information about the whale sharks and SAMPA to the guests.

This is a document prepared to help the SAMPA Guides prepare for the licensing exam of the Environmental Protection Agency, as per the SAMPA management plan.

Section 2: Decree of protection

Year of Protection

The Government of the Maldives declared the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) on June 5, 2009 by Directive Number 138- EE/2009/19 of the Ministry of Environment and Energy, pursuant to Article 4 of Law no. 4/93 (Environmental Protection and Preservation Act).

The Government has amended the decree of protection thrice and the most recent decree of protection is dated 01 February 2025 with reference to the decree number (IUL)438-ENV/437/2025/16

Boundary of SAMPA

The boundary of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) extends 1 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between Northwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef.

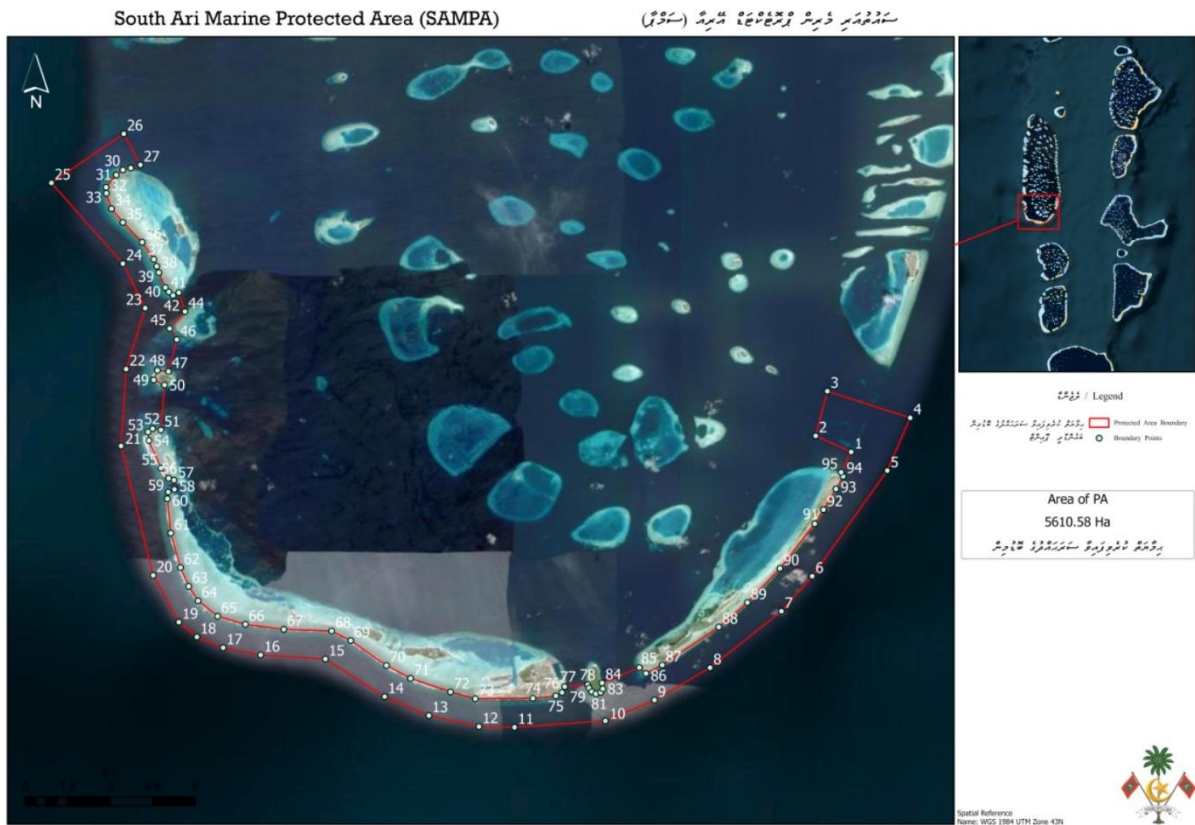


Figure 1 Boundary of South Ari Marine Protected Area

Protection Category

There are 7 Categories of Protection under the Protected Area Regulation.

- Category 1: Internationally recognized areas
- Category 2: Strict nature reserve
- Category 3: Wilderness Areas
- Category 4: National Protected Area
- Category 5: Natural Monument
- Category 6: Habitat/Species Managed area
- Category 7: Protected area with sustainable use

SAMPA is protected under the Category 7: Protected area with sustainable use

Purpose of Protecting SAMPA

SAMPA is the largest protected area in the Maldives representing one of the world's most significant sites for whale sharks. Whale sharks in SAMPA are present all-year round, and to date, more than 726 individual whale sharks have been sighted within the Marine Protected Area (MPA) with more than 8000 encounters, with many returning frequently to the area (Big Fish Network. 2024). Most sightings in the areas are male juveniles (72.5%) male sex bias. This makes it probable that this area has the highest re-sighting rate of individual whale sharks in the world.

SAMPA is likely a 'secondary nursery' location for whale sharks which have grown above the juvenile period. In addition, whale sharks in this region are not seen again once they grow beyond 8m (and so corresponding to sexual maturity). It therefore appears SAMPA offers a critical habitat in this post-juvenile-pre-mature stage

The estimated value of whale shark tourism only from the MPA is US\$9.4 million (Cagua et al. 2014) per year, and over 65,000 tourists visit SAMPA for whale sharks every year (Cagua et al. 2014)

The Gentle Giants of SAMPA

The most important mega fauna in South Ari Marine Protected Area is Whale Sharks. The Whale Shark (*Rhincodon typus*), the world's largest living fish, is a cosmopolitan tropical and warm temperate species



Figure 2 Whale Shark (*Rhincodon typus*)

Common Name: Whale Shark

Scientific Name : *Rhincodon typus*

Dhivehi Name: ފަހުރިހީ (Fehurihi)

According to the IUCN Redlist Global Assessment , whale sharks are Endangered and the population of whale sharks are largely depleted.

The site also has key ecosystems such as manta cleaning stations harbouring the megafauna, manta rays.



Common Name: Reef Manta Ray

Scientific Name : *Mobula Alfredi*

Dhivehi Name: ރުސަފަލަ (En-madi)

According to the IUCN Redlist Global Assessment , manta rays are Vulnerable and the population shows a declining population trends

Figure 3 Reef Manta Ray (*Mobula alfredi*)

What activities are prohibited in the area?

The following activities are prohibited in the SAMPA area

1. Mining for oil, gas, or any type of mineral
2. Disposal or dumping of any kind of material such as garbage into the area
3. Reclamation and dredging
4. Extraction of rock, sand, coral, or gravel
5. Anchoring in the contact zone
6. Carrying out urban development work or establishing infrastructure
7. Releasing any "pollutant" and/or installing outfalls for discharge
8. Conducting aquaculture or mariculture activities
9. Light pooling for bait or other types of fisheries
10. Collecting eggs of any species and/or damaging nests
11. Introduction of non-native species to the area
12. Feeding or providing food to any living creatures, including fish and birds
13. Capturing, taking and killing of birds from the area
14. Touching or harassing protected species in this area
15. Making loud noises that disrupt the habits of the species in this area
16. Using lights that attract marine species such as whale sharks
17. Underwater flash photography/videography
18. Any activity that can harm or alter the natural state of the protected area or the underlying environmental/ecological structure of the protected area

Section 3: Management Plan General information

What is the purpose of a management plan?

The purpose of a management plan is to ensure the long-term protection and conservation of the ecologically significant natural resources found within the South Ari Marine Protected Area, pursuant to Article 4 of Law no. 4/93 (Environmental Protection and Preservation Act), to ensure a safe environment for the visitors of the area while ensuring resource users gain social and economic benefits from the area in a sustainable manner.

Management plans are prepared pursuant to article 12 of Regulation No. R-78/2018 (Protected Areas Regulation).

What is the governance and enforcement mechanism for SAMPA?

The SAMPA management plan will be co-managed by the Ministry of Environment (Rangers and management team) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) together with SAMPA Guardians. As part of the management, SAMPA also has an Advisory Committee (AC); consisting of stakeholders of the area.

Responsibilities of the Ministry:

1. Managing the area and determining the policies for the management of the protected area
2. Establishment, repair and maintenance of the facilities required to manage the protected area.
3. Recruiting and training the human resources needed to manage the area including rangers
4. Monitoring, surveillance and patrolling the SAMPA region.
5. Chair the Advisory Committee and perform the responsibilities of the Secretariat of the South Ari Marine Protected Area Advisory Committee.
6. Screening the SAMPA Guardians and providing the necessary training to these individuals. Compiling and publishing a registry of SAMPA Guardians and removing the individuals that violate the principles of the management plan from the SAMPA Guardians registry.
7. Providing all necessary training and capacity building of "SAMPA Guides" and "SAMPA Crew" involved in vessel operations such as captains and crew members
8. Developing, managing, and maintaining a portal or website for issuing access permits and other authorizations under the management plan.
9. Establish and maintain a hotline for users of this area to contact.
10. Awareness and outreach regarding the protected area
11. Assessing management plan effectiveness of the protected areas at least once every 5 years
12. Revising the management plan based on management effectiveness

Responsibilities of EPA:

1. Ensure that the objectives of the management plan are achieved in accordance with the objectives of protecting this area. Also, ensure that there is an appropriate mechanism in place for managing the protected area, and evaluate whether the protected area is being managed adequately.
2. Investigating and taking action against any person who violates the rules and management plans in the protected area.
3. Registration of vessels engaged in snorkelling and diving activities in this area, and issue flags for use by these parties when operating in this area. Also, compile and publish a registry of registered vessels.

4. Register, compile, and publicize a directory of captains and crew members (SAMPA Crew) operating vessels engaged in snorkelling and diving activities in the area
5. Facilitating necessary examinations required for the guides operating in the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) and issuing certificates for the guides. Additionally, compile and publicize a list of certified guides.
6. Issuing permits for research in the are.
7. Issue permits related to restoration and rehabilitation activities conducted in this area.
8. Issue permits for photography and videography in this area.

SAMPA Rangers

Rangers will be patrolling the site and advising on compliance and take action and report to EPA regarding non-compliance.

Maldives Police Service and the Maldives National Defence Force (Marine Police and/or) Coast Guard may be active on site together with the rangers, to uphold the protection of the area as per the management plan and ensure the compliance with the laws and regulation.

SAMPA Guardian

SAMPA Guardians are resource users of SAMPA that are registered as guides at the EPA. They are volunteers helping rangers on site and guardians are responsible for reminding the people regarding the code of conduct in the absence of rangers. Guardians are also expected to report non-compliance to EPA. Guardians will be trained by the Ministry and EPA regarding their responsibilities and will be screened by the Ministry.

Responsibilities of SAMPA guardians:

1. Support rangers on the field and in the absence of rangers to patrol the area, advice to comply as per the rules set for SAMPA area
2. Report any violation of this Management Plan and specifically the Regulation No. R-78/2018 (Protected Areas Regulation) to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the management plan.
3. Notify the agency regarding any changes or activity that alters the natural environment of the Marine Protected Area (MPA), including any unintentional detrimental impacts to the MPA must be reported to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

SAMPA Advisory Committee

The advisory committee is composed of key stakeholders of South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).

Composition of the advisory committee:

1. Ministry of Environment
2. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
3. Ministry of Tourism
4. Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources
5. Ministry of Defence
6. South Ari Atoll Council
7. A Dh. Maamigili Council
8. A Dh. Dhigurah Council
9. A Dh. Fenfushi Council

10. A Dh. Dhihdhoo Council
11. National Boating Association of Maldives (NBAM)
12. Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI)
13. Divers Association of Maldives
14. NGO operating within the area
15. An individual representing resorts and/or guesthouses within the area.

Role of SAMPA advisory committee:

1. Advising on the management of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
2. Advising on possible solutions for the conflicts and problems associated with management of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
3. Advising on special events held in the region.
4. Advising if a fee is implemented for resource users of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).

Section 4: Vessels

Vessel registration

The first phase of the management plan will regulate vessels used for snorkelling and diving only. Therefore, all vessels operating in SAMPA for snorkelling and diving should register at EPA before 30th April 2025.

The link for vessel registration is given below:

<https://one.gov.mv/services/679b6069-d8e3-f472-6156-74072fe4cb83>

Registered vessels will receive a flag from EPA to identify and organise themselves in the contact zone. Vessel operators are required to stencil the vessel registration number (provided by EPA) on to the back of the flag.

Sample of the flag:



Figure 5 Flag provided by EPA for diving vessels registered for SAMPA.



Figure 4 Flag provided by EPA for snorkeling vessels registered for SAMPA

Propeller guard

Propeller guards are mandatory for **ALL** vessels operating within SAMPA for snorkelling and diving.

Speed boats should install propeller guards before 30th April 2025.

Vessels other than speed boats should install propeller guards before 1st February 2026.

Speed limits for vessels operating in SAMPA

Speed limits for vessels operating in SAMPA are different according to the proximity of megafauna such as whale sharks and manta rays. In this regard, the speed limits are detailed below:

Distance / Area (Meters (m))	Maximum Speed	
	Nautical mile (knots) per hour (knots/hr)	Kilometre per hour (km/hr)
Within the SAMPA boundary	10	18.5
Within a contact zone 250 m around megafauna	5	9.3
Within 50m of a megafauna	2	3.7
Megafauna closer than 15m	Gear neutral	Gear neutral

Table 1 Speed limits for vessels operating in SAMPA.

Contact Zone

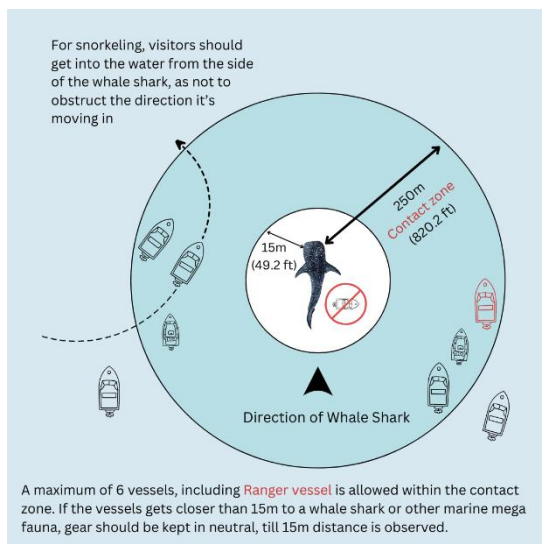


Figure 6 Description a contact zone within SAMPA.

A 250 metres (820.2 feet) radius around megafauna, such as whale sharks and manta rays, is called a contact zone.

Operating vessels within a contact zone

Only 6 vessels (including the ranger vessel) are allowed within the contact zone. Therefore, it would be 5 vessels using the area for whale shark watching.

Monitoring and organizing vessels within a contact zone

Step 1: The FIRST vessel to observe a whale shark or other megafauna should inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300,

Step 2: The FIRST vessel to observe a whale shark or other megafauna should indicate their sighting by displaying the flag issued by EPA, and

Step 3: The 4 vessels closest to the FIRST vessel can inform the ranger hotline and display their flags.

Rangers on site will monitor the queue order. In the absence of rangers, SAMPA Guardians will monitor this. Ranger will, however, observe the vessels through Telegram Live location shared by vessels when they are not on site.

Step 4: Number of visitors entering the water from a contact vessel is limited to a maximum of 60 visitors in total. Guides are included in this number of visitors.

Step 5: Visitors in the water must not exceed a duration of 15 minutes, if there are other vessels queuing near the contact zone.

Permit for visiting SAMPA

Step 1:

- Inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300 or book a time slot via the protected and conserved areas website page linked below:

<https://protectedareas.environment.gov.mv/en/protected-areas/south-ari-marine-park-sampa>

- Bookings should be made 1 day in advance and is available for both snorkelling and diving.

Step 2:

- Share live location with the ranger hotline, using Telegram while travelling in SAMPA boundary

Code of conduct for operating a vessel in SAMPA

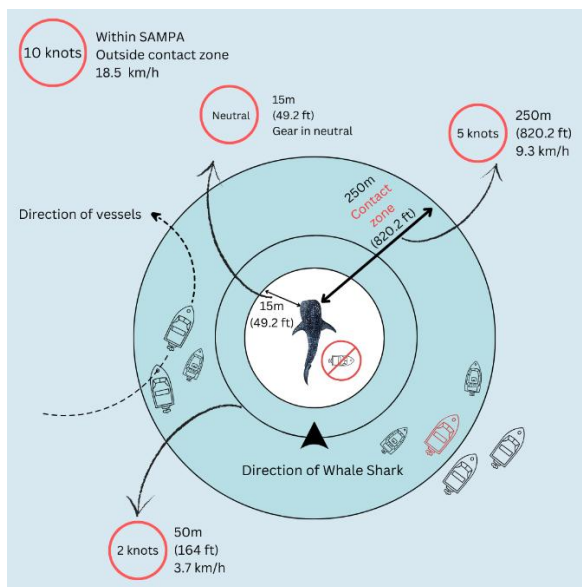


Figure 7 Description of how vessels should be operated within SAMPA.

Vessels operating in SAMPA should follow the following code of conduct:

- Vessels should not go above a whale shark under any circumstance.

- When a vessel encounters a whale shark, the vessel should not block the direction of travel of the whale shark.
- As whale sharks are sensitive to light, it is prohibited to use any lights within areas where whale sharks are commonly sighted, unless for safety purposes. Light pooling to attract whale sharks is also prohibited.
- Contact vessels must maintain a distance of at least 15 m from the nearest whale shark. Should a whale shark swim towards a vessel, to within 15 m, all engines should be in neutral until the whale shark moves more than 15 m away from the vessel.
- Vessels should maintain 25 m between other vessels.
- Vessels less than 10 ft in size should not operate in a contact zone.

Section 5: Captain and Crew

Requirements for captain and crew operating a vessel in SAMPA for snorkeling and diving

Captain and crew operating a vessel in SAMPA for snorkelling and diving are called “SAMPA Crew” in the management plan. SAMPA Crew should be registered at EPA and should fulfil the following requirements.

1. Vessel captains must be licenced to operate a vessel, and
2. Participate in an awareness session conducted by the Ministry. The dates and location of awareness sessions will be announced on social media pages (@pcamaldives Instagram).

SAMPA Crew are not required to take an exam. Participation in an awareness session is sufficient for SAMPA crew registration.

Section 6: Guides

Guides taking visitors to SAMPA for snorkelling and diving are called “SAMPA Guides” in the management plan

Requirements for SAMPA Guides

SAMPA Guides should be certified by EPA and should fulfil the following requirements.

- Pass the SAMPA Guide exam provided by EPA. The dates and location of exam will be announced on social media pages (@pcamaldives Instagram)
- Certified in Emergency and First Aid Response
- Certified by PADI, SSI or equivalent organisation as a Snorkelling Guide
- Certified by PADI, SSI or equivalent organisation as a Rescue Diver. Guides without rescue dive certification can be “Probationary SAMPA Guides” and should complete Rescue Dive certification before 1st February 2026.

SAMPA Guide Exam

Guides must pass the exam to be certified as a SAMPA Guide. The exam will be based on the content in this Study material, that is a simplified compilation of all formal documents such as the SAMPA management plan, the decree of protection of SAMPA, and Whale shark guideline under the protected species regulation.

Awareness sessions for SAMPA Guides

It is not mandatory for SAMPA Guides to complete awareness sessions. But as awareness sessions and Guide exams will be held on the same dates and locations, it will be helpful to those preparing for the SAMPA Guides exam.

Expiry date of a SAMPA Guide certificate

Three years.

Guides must redo the exam after three years and submit valid certifications forEFR, snorkeling guide and rescue diver when renewing the Guide certificate.

Visitors per SAMPA Guide

The guide to visitor ratio is 1:6

Rangers have the authority to change this ratio on site based on the weather conditions.

Responsibility of a SAMPA Guide

Briefing visitors on the management plan and safety and ensuring compliance to the management plan and ensuring the safety of the visitors in the water.

Section 7: Whale Shark interaction Guidelines

General code of conduct while watching whale sharks anywhere in the Maldives

The following guidelines should be followed when encountering a whale shark in their natural environment.

- a. A person in the sea must always maintain a distance of at least 3 metres from the head or body of the whale shark, when approaching a whale 4 metres from the tail of the whale shark
- b. A person must not touch or ride on, or attempt to touch or ride, a whale shark under any circumstance
- c. Must not deliberately cross in front of the whale shark's direction of travel or impede its movement.
- d. Must not deliberately cross in front of the whale shark's direction of travel or impede its movement.
- e. When approaching a whale shark a person must approach slowly and from the sides of the whale shark so that the whale shark can see the person approaching. A person must not impede the direction of the whale shark
- f. If a person encounters a whale shark from below, while in the water, a person must maintain a distance of at least 20 meters. It is not allowed to swim closer than this to a whale shark from above. This is to allow the whale shark to swim upwards and to not hinder its thermoregulation process. In this case when a person wants to observe the whale shark, the person must step back and follow the distances described in (a) and from behind the whale shark.
- g. Feeding of whale sharks is not allowed. Feeding of whale sharks will have negative impacts on its natural filter feeding behaviour.
- h. Since whale sharks are sensitive to light, use of flash photography or other sorts of lights near its head is not allowed. Lights such as this could result in startling behaviour and for whale sharks to disorient and lose its sense of direction
- i. Light pooling is not allowed to attract whale sharks
- j. A person in the sea must not use a motorized or otherwise powered device capable of towing or carrying a person while snorkelling or swimming near whale sharks
- k. Feeding whale sharks is prohibited as feeding them can disrupt their natural filter feeding behavior.
- l. All activities should be conducted as quietly as possible in proximity of a whale shark. Care should be taken to reduce noise levels when entering the water and when engaging in activities in the water. Aggressive flapping motions and loud movements should be avoided.
- m. If entering the water by jumping into the water from a boat, care should be taken to avoid doing so in a way that is noisy.
- n. Using a motorized or otherwise powered swimming or diving aid in a contact zone is prohibited. The use of any device capable of towing or carrying a person, that is towed behind a vessel, in a contact zone.



Figure 8 Graphical summary of whale shark encounter guideline.

Additional code of conduct while watching megafauna such as whale sharks in SAMPA

The following guidelines should be followed while watching megafauna such as whale shark in SAMPA

- a. Permission should be obtained before visiting the area for snorkeling and diving.
 - Step 1: Inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300 or book in advance on protected and conserved areas website page linked below:

<https://protectedareas.environment.gov.mv/en/protected-areas/south-ari-marine-park-sampa>

Bookings should be done for snorkelling and diving in the area

- Step 2: Share live location with the ranger hotline using Telegram while travelling in SAMPA boundary
- b. Snorkeling and free diving activities can only be carried from 6 AM to 6 PM
- c. Snorkeling and free diving activities must not exceed a duration of 15 minutes, if there are other vessels queuing to view the megafauna such as whale shark
- d. The number of visitors entering the water from a contact vessel to view a megafauna such as whale shark is limited to a maximum of 60 persons in total (including guides).

Section 8: Scuba Diving

What are the rules of procedure for using the SAMPA area for scuba diving?

The following rules of procedure should be followed while using SAMPA area for scuba diving purposes.

- a. Permission should be obtained before visiting the area for scuba diving.
 - Step 1: Inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300 or book in advance on protected and conserved areas website page linked below:
<https://protectedareas.environment.gov.mv/en/protected-areas/south-ari-marine-park-sampa>
 - Step 2: Inform in the rangers on the estimated time and planned zones for scuba diving
 - Step 3: Share live location with the ranger hotline using Telegram while travelling in SAMPA boundary
- b. For the safety of scuba divers, planned scuba diving zones should not coincide with the general seasonal zones used for snorkeling and free diving activities and zones where vessels are actively engaging in to snorkel and free diving should be avoided.
- c. If a megafauna such as whale shark is sighted within the planned scuba dive zone, it shall be considered as an “opportunistic sighting”. Scuba divers shall not chase after the megafauna in such cases and shall maintain distances of 20 m form the mega fauna, as identified above for whale shark interactions.
- d. Scuba divers should inform rangers regarding megafauna sightings after the dive. This data will be used for ecological monitoring of SAMPA.
- e. Night diving activities should not use flash photography or lights with intensity that can attract whale sharks.

Section 9: Guidelines for when an injured or sick whale shark is encountered.

- a. If a live whale shark is caught in fishing gear, ropes, mooring lines or ghost nets, report this to the vessel immediately and note the location of the incident.
- b. Two people could work together to free any whale shark caught in fishing gear or other such debris or gear, using a knife or sharp instrument. Care should be taken to not harm the whale shark while freeing it.
- c. The drifting object should be brought to land. And where possible, should be taken to a waste management centre.
- d. A whale shark injured due to a boat strike or due to natural circumstances should be left alone to heal on its own in its natural environment. Injured whale sharks should not be touched or taken to any facilities.
- e. Any incidences should be reported to EPA as soon as possible. The location of the incident and information about the whale shark should be relayed (along with photos and videos where possible).
- f. If a whale shark is seen trapped on the reef, in the lagoon or near the harbour of an island for more than two (2) hours, this should be reported to EPA. In such situations, it is not allowed for individuals or groups to go in the water to rescue the whale shark. It is also recommended to limit the movement of vessels in the area and give way for the whale shark to move.

Section 10: Guideline for encountering a dead whale shark or a whale shark that has been killed

- a. In situations, where a person encounters a dead or suspect case of killing of a whale shark, the person who saw the whale shark should report to EPA with photos as soon as possible.
- b. If the whale shark is suspected to be dead due to any other cause other than a natural death, and the whale shark is required to be moved to another location, this should be done with EPA's guidance and after collecting enough evidence for the necessary investigation.
- c. If there is observed mortality of several whale sharks, or if the mortality is suspected to be of extraordinary circumstance, this should be brought to the attention of EPA.
- d. In cases where mass mortality is observed, or there is suspicion that the mortality was due to a natural disaster or due to an extraordinary circumstance, the necessary assessments to understand the situation should be conducted by EPA.
- e. If the agency decides that the mortality was due to natural circumstances, the whale shark should be left to the natural processes in the sea.

Section 11: Fishing

Fishing in SAMPA

Bait fishing or other types of fisheries can be undertaken with the following considerations.

- Anchoring in the contact zone is prohibited
- Using light that could attract mega fauna is prohibited
- If a whale shark is attracted to a light being used for the purpose of fishing, the light must be turned off and bait fishing activities should be moved to a different location

Section 12: Research

What is the procedure for conducting research in SAMPA?

- Research in the area shall be carried out with the written permit from the Environmental Protection Agency.
- No research in this area shall be used for commercial gain.
- The research permit to conduct research, is not exempt from all laws and regulations of the Maldives.
- This permit can only be used for research in the South Ari Marine Protected Area. The research party must obtain a separate permit to take photography and videography in the area.
- After completing the research, the results of the research shall be submitted to EPA within 1 (one) month. Further permits will not be granted to those who do not submit the research findings. EPA will only issue further permits after the results of the research conducted under the previous permit is submitted to the agency.
- Parties who have been granted permission to conduct research in this area must have the permit issued to them visible at all times.
- Only those individuals whose names are written on the permit issued by the EPA can participate in conducting research activities in this area.
- If the purpose of the research in this area is violated, the research permit will be revoked.

Section 13: Restoration and Rehabilitation

Procedure for conducting restoration and rehabilitation activities in SAMPA

- Restoration and rehabilitation in the area shall be carried out with a written permit from EPA.
- Parties who have been granted permission to conduct restoration and rehabilitation in this area must have the permit issued to them visible at all times.
- Restoration or rehabilitation efforts must not negatively alter the natural state of the protected area or the underlying environmental/ecological structure of the protected area.

Section 14: Photography and Videography

Procedure for undertaking photography and videography in SAMPA

- A permit from EPA is required for commercial use photography and/or videography within SAMPA.
- The drone permit from Ministry of Defence shall be submitted while applying for the commercial photography and/or videography permit from EPA.
- Parties who have been granted permission to undertake commercial photography and videography in this area must have the permit issued to them visible at all times.
- Only individuals who have their names mentioned on the permit issued by EPA may engage in photography and/or videography in this area.
- The party with commercial photography and/or videography permit is not exempt from obtaining visiting permit and/or research permits

What will be considered as commercial photography and videography?

Photos and/or videos for the purpose of selling or advertising a product, service, or brand will be considered as commercial photography and/or videography. This does not include photos and/or videos taken for personal use or those taken by or for a visitor for their own personal use.

Maximum number of drones that can be operated in the area

A maximum of 5 drones can be operated in the area excluding the ranger drone.

General code of conduct for operating drones in the area

- When photography and/or videography is carried out using an unmanned aerial vehicle or drone in this area, it shall be flown at a distance of not less than 30 (thirty) meters above sea level.
- A maximum of 1 (one) hour may be spent on a photography and/or videography session using an unmanned aerial vehicle or drone within this area.
- The operator of the unmanned aerial vehicle or drone shall bear full responsibility for any damage caused to any person or property in the use of the unmanned aerial vehicle or drone in this area.
- If using Unmanned Aerial Vehicle or Drones for photography and/or videography, the drone should always be within the line of sight of the person operating the drone.

Selfie sticks allowed in whale shark watching

Use of selfie sticks and/or other similar products that could disturb or distress the whale sharks are prohibited.

Section 15: Closure of the area

- The Ministry and EPA have the authority to temporarily prohibit public access, entry, exit, and/or use of this area due to accidents that occur in this region or for research purposes. If such a closure of the area is implemented, it must be publicly announced with reason. Additionally, the restricted zone must be clearly and specifically defined.

Section 16: Fees

Fees for accessing SAMPA

For the time being, there are no fees for accessing the area.

However, the Ministry has the authority to charge a fee from those visiting this area. The fee will be determined in consultation with and upon the advice of the South Ari Marine Protected Area Advisory Committee

Section 17: Penalties

Relevant action will be taken against those who violate the Management Plan for the Protection and Conservation of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) under Law No. 4/93 (Environmental Protection and Preservation Act) and Regulation No. 2018/R-78 (Protected Areas Regulation).

Section 18: References

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Section 19: SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS

SAMPLE Questions for Guide

1. When was the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) declared as a Protected Area?
 - a. 5th June 2009
 - b. 5th June 2008
 - c. 5th July 2009
 - d. 5th July 2019
2. Can whale shark-related tourism activities be conducted during which time?
 - a. 6 am to 12 pm
 - b. 6 am to 6 pm
 - c. 12 pm to 6 pm
 - d. 8 am to 6 pm
3. What is the contact zone around a whale shark?
 - a. 200m around the whale shark
 - b. 250m around the whale shark
 - c. 150m around the whale shark
 - d. 50m around the whale shark
4. What is the minimum distance that should be kept from the tail of the whale shark?
 - a. 2m
 - b. 3m
 - c. 4m
 - d. 5m
5. What is the minimum distance that should be kept from the body of the whale shark?
 - a. 2m
 - b. 3m
 - c. 4m
 - d. 5m
6. What is the scientific name of the whale shark?
 - a. *Rhincodon typus*
 - b. *Galeocerdo cuvier*
 - c. *Physeter macrocephalus*
 - d. *Alopias vulpinus*
7. Is the whale shark a shark or a whale?
 - a. A whale
 - b. A shark
 - c. Both
 - d. None of the above
8. Vessels operating within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) shall not exceed above:
 - a. 5 knots
 - b. 10 knots
 - c. 20 knots
 - d. 30 knots

9. Vessels within contact zone shall not exceed the speed of:
 - a. 5 knots
 - b. 10 knots
 - c. 15 knots
 - d. 20 knots
10. Within 50m around a whale shark, vessels shall not exceed the speed of:
 - a. 1 knot
 - b. 2 knots
 - c. 5 knots
 - d. 6 knots
11. Tour guides have the authority to touch the whale shark as part of the excursions.
 - a. True
 - b. False
12. What is the biggest Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Maldives?
 - a. AA. Rasdhoo-Madivaru Area
 - b. South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)
 - c. B. Hanifaru Region
 - d. K. Thanburudhoo Region
13. What is the area of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)?
 - a. 40 km²
 - b. 41 km²
 - c. 42 km²
 - d. 50 km²
14. Light pooling to attract marine species such as whale sharks are prohibited within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
 - a. True
 - b. False
15. Vessels less than 10ft with engines can operate in the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
 - a. True
 - b. False
16. Introduction of non-native species is allowed within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
 - a. True
 - b. False
17. What are the four local islands next to the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) Boundary?
 - a. Maamigili, Dhithdoo, Mahibadhoo, Dhigurah
 - b. Fenfushi, Maamigili, Dhangeth~~ie~~, Dhigurah
 - c. Dhithdoo, Fenfushi, Maamigili, Dhigurah
 - d. Mandhoo, Fenfushi, Dhithdoo, Dhigurah
18. Underwater flash photography is allowed within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
 - a. True
 - b. False

19. Research in the area shall be carried out without the written permit from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- True
 - False
20. How many National Protected Area Categories are there?
- 6
 - 7
 - 8
 - 9
21. What is the Protected Area Category of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)?
- Category 1- Internationally recognized areas
 - Category 2- Strict Nature Reserve
 - Category 6- Habitat/Species Management Area
 - Category 7- Protected areas with Sustainable Use
22. What is the correct boundary of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) from below:
- 3 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between Northwest corner of Rangali Island reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef
 - 2 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between Northwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef
 - 1 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between Northwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef
 - 1 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between Northwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhidhoo Island reef
23. How many protected areas are located in South Ari Atoll?
- 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
24. Currently, how many South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) Rangers are there?
- 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
25. What is the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) globally and nationally significant for?
- Year-round whale shark aggregation
 - Year-round manta aggregation
 - Both
 - None of the above
26. Contact vessels must maintain a distance of at least ____ metres from the nearest whale shark.
- 5m
 - 10m
 - 15m
 - 20m

27. Should a whale shark swim towards a vessel, to within 15 metres, all engines should not be in neutral or switched off until the shark has moved more than 15 metres away from the vessel.
- True
 - False
28. Certified guides for the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) are responsible for:
- Taking as many visitors as possible in water to swim with the whale shark in any circumstance.
 - Making sure the visitors get to touch the whale shark to provide a good experience for the visitor.
 - Make sure the visitors can get closer than 2m to the whale shark to view the whale shark properly.
 - Informing users of the area regarding the wildlife within the area and the rules for using the area, to give proper briefing regarding the code of conduct and the whale shark conservation guidelines.
29. How many vessels are allowed within the contact zone at once.
- 6
 - 4
 - 10
 - 8
30. Propeller guards are mandatory for vessels operating within SAMPA for snorkeling and diving
- True
 - False