



Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy
Male', Republic of Maldives

Unofficial English Translation- South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)
Management Plan (Consolidated Version up to 3rd Amendment) – 6th September 2026

Introduction	1.	a)	This is the management plan for the protection and preservation of South Ari Marine Protected Area, an area extending '1 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between southwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef', protected on 5 th June 2009, under Article 4 of Law No. 4/93 (Environmental Protection and Preservation Act).
		b)	This Management plan has been prepared pursuant to Article 12 of the Regulation No. R-78/2018 (Protected Areas Regulation), to detail out the management and conservation of this area.
Name	2.	This management plan must be referred to as 'The Management Plan for the Protection and Conservation of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).	
Purpose	3.	The purpose of this management plan is to ensure the long-term protection and conservation of the natural resources and species within the South Ari Marine Protected Area, while providing a safe environment for visitors and ensuring that resource users gain social and economic benefits in a sustainable manner.	
Boundary of the Protected Area	4.	a)	The protected area specified under this Plan refers to the area of 1 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between southwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef.
		b)	The details of the boundary mentioned in Clause 1 (a) is provided in Annex 1.
		c)	The Ministry reserves the right to declare zones for various activities conducted within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) without contravening the conservation objectives of this region.
Implementation of the Management Plan	5.	This management plan will be implemented by the Ministry, Authority and Guardians.	
Role of the Ministry	6.	The Ministry shall undertake the following responsibilities of management of the area for the implementation of this management plan.	



		a)	Establishment of all policies necessary for the management of the area.
		b)	Establishment, repair and maintenance of resources required to manage the area.
		c)	Establishment of human resources, including rangers, to manage the area and providing necessary trainings for them.
		d)	Monitoring, surveillance and patrolling the area.
		e)	Presiding the Advisory Committee of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) and performing the responsibilities of the Secretariat.
		f)	Screening and approval of applicants as Guardians and providing them with the necessary training and compiling and publishing of a register of Guardians. Removing those who violate the policies set out in this management plan from the Guardian register.
		g)	Providing all necessary training for SAMPA guides, guardians, resource users of SAMPA, vessel crew and captains (SAMPA crew) operating vessels within SAMPA.
		h)	Developing, managing and maintaining a portal or website for issuing access permits and other permits under the management plan.
		i)	Develop and manage a hotline for resource users of this area for contacting.
		j)	Increasing awareness about this area.
		k)	Assessing management effectiveness at least once every 5 (five) years.
		l)	Review the management plan based on management effectiveness and if required.
Role of the Authority	7.		The Authority shall undertake the following regulatory and enforcement responsibilities for the purpose of implementing this management plan.
		a)	Ensuring that the objectives of the management plan are met, along with the reason for protecting this area. Assessing whether the protected area is being maintained adequately, while ensuring that an adequate system is in place for the management of the protected area.
		b)	Investigating and taking action against any person committing an act of violation in this area against the guidelines of this management plan.
		c)	Registration of vessels operating within this area for diving and snorkeling purposes and issuing flags for their use while operating in this area. Compiling and publishing a vessel registry for registered vessels.



		d)	Registration, compilation and publication of a registry of captains and crew members (SAMPA crew) engaged in operating snorkel and diving vessels in this area.
		e)	Issuance of certificates to SAMPA guides operating in this area, and facilitating all processes related to the guide examination required for guide certification. Establish and publish a registry of guides who have obtained the SAMPA Guide Certificate.
		f)	Issue permits required for conducting research of this area.
		g)	Issue permits related to conducting restoration and rehabilitation within the area.
		h)	Issue permits related to conducting photography and videography within the area.
Role of the Guardians	8.		For the purpose of implementing this management plan, guardians acting as assistants shall undertake the following reporting responsibilities.
		a)	Advise users within this area to comply with the management plan in the absence of on-site rangers, and assist rangers on-site in situations where such assistance is required.
		b)	Report non-compliance against the Environment Protection and Preservation Act (Law No. 4/93), the Protected Areas Regulation (R-78/2018), and this management plan, to the Authority.
		c)	Reporting any changes to the natural values of the area to the Authority. In this manner, any damage caused unintentionally to the area shall be reported to the Authority.
Requirements of Guardians	9.		Persons meeting the following requirements may serve as guardians within this protected area.
		a)	Must be registered with the Authority as a “SAMPA Guide” and must achieve a minimum score of 90% in the SAMPA Guide Examination conducted by the Authority.
		b)	Must be a frequent user within the area, operating on-site, and be familiar with the management plan.
		c)	Completion of the SAMPA Guardian Training conducted by Ministry.
		d)	Must be a Maldivian
Guardians Registry	10.	a)	Ministry and the Authority shall formulate an agreement with the individuals registered with the Ministry as Guardians and Ministry shall publish the register of Guardians.
		b)	If the person acting as a Guardian violates the guidelines set out in the Management Plan, or if they are convicted of any criminal offense, the person/s will be removed from the Registry of the Guardians.



Advisory Committee of the South Ari Marine Protected Area	11.	a)	The Ministry shall formulate an advisory committee to advise on the management of this area.	
		b)	The committee shall consist of members from the following 17 parties/bodies.	
		1.	Government body with the Mandate of Environment Protection	
		2.	Environmental Regulatory Authority	
		3.	Government body with the Mandate of Tourism	
		4.	Government body with the Mandate of Fisheries	
		5.	Government body with the Mandate of Defense	
		6.	Maldives Police Service	
		7.	Secretariat of the South Ariatholhu Atoll Council	
		8.	Secretariat of the South Ariatholhu Maamigili Council	
		9.	Secretariat of the South Ariatholhu Dhigurah Council	
		10.	Secretariat of the South Ariatholhu Fenfushi Council	
		11.	Secretariat of the South Ariatholhu Dhidhdhoo Council	
		12.	National Boating Association of Maldives	
		13.	Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI)	
		14.	Guesthouse Association of Maldives	
		15.	1 (one) Representative of a Resort	
		16.	1 (one) Representative of a Guesthouse or Dive Center	
		17.	1 (one) Representative of an NGO operating within the area	
		c)	A minimum of 2 (two) meetings of the Advisory Committee shall be held per year.	
		d)	The Ministry shall chair the meetings of the Advisory Committee and shall oversee the Secretariat.	
		e)	The quorum of the committee shall be established when at least 8 (eight) members are present at the meeting	
		f)	The term of a Committee member shall be 3 (three) years. After 3 (three) years, the Ministry reserves the right, based on the member's attendance and participation in committee meetings, to either extend the term of the appointed member or appoint a replacement.	



		g)	The Ministry reserves the right to appoint a replacement for members who fail to attend three (3) consecutive meetings or 50% (fifty percent) of the meetings (without any excuse) held within the three (3) year term.	
		h)	Decisions of the committee shall be based on a majority vote of the members, excluding the Chair. The Chair shall cast a vote only in the event of equality of votes.	
		i)	Additional individuals from the parties represented on the Committee may participate in Advisory Committee meetings as observers. Observers shall not have the right to vote on decisions.	
		j)	Role of the Advisory Committee in the management of the protected area:	
			1.	Advising on the management of this area.
			2.	Advising on the resolution of issues encountered in the management of this area.
			3.	Providing advice on special events held in this area.
			4.	Providing advice on the fees applied to resource users of this area
		12.	a)	Under this management plan, vessels operating for the following purposes will be managed.
			1.	Snorkelling
Vessels operating within the Protected Area			2.	Diving
		b)	Vessels registered with the Authority shall enter the area for the purposes referred to in (a) of this Article. Vessels registered will have a registration period of 2 (two years) from the date of registration.	
		c)	The Authority shall issue a flag for use when operating within the contact zone, for the vessels referred to in clause (a) of this section. The guideline for issuing flags is outlined below:	
			1.	1 (one) flag set per resort or the dive centre of the resort
			2.	1 (one) flag set per safari
			3.	The flag set consists of one flag designated to be used when diving and another flag for snorkelling.
		d)	Speedboats and other vessels operating for the purpose of snorkelling and diving should install propeller guards when operating within this area.	



		e)	Vessels referred to in subsection (d) of this section must install propeller guards by 31 st December 2026. After this date, only vessels equipped with jet engines or propeller guards may operate within this area for snorkelling or diving purposes.
		f)	Users holding a permit to enter the area must notify the rangers prior to entry. Vessels operating in the area for snorkelling and diving must share their “live location” as directed by the Ministry.
		g)	Speed limits for vessels operating within the area for various purposes are as follows:
			1. Vessels operating in the area for all purposes must maintain a speed limit of below 10 (ten) knots, or 18.5 (eighteen point five) kilometres per hour.
			2. Within the contact zone of megafauna such as whale sharks (250 (two hundred and fifty) metres / 820.2 (eight hundred and twenty point two) feet boundary surrounding the megafauna), vessels must maintain a speed limit of below 5 (five) knots, or 9.3 (nine point three) kilometres per hour.
			3. Within a 50 (fifty) metre / 164 (one hundred and sixty-four) feet boundary surrounding megafauna such as whale sharks, vessels must maintain a speed limit of below 2 (two) knots, or 3.7 (three point seven) kilometres per hour.
			4. Vessels operating within the contact zone must maintain a distance of 15 (fifteen) metres / 49.2 (forty-nine point two) feet from the nearest megafauna, such as whale sharks. If a megafauna, such as a whale shark, approaches a vessel within the contact zone while the vessel is maintaining the 15 (fifteen) metre / 49.2 (forty-nine point two) feet distance, the vessel must be switched to neutral. The vessel may engage the engine once the 15 (fifteen) metre / 49.2 (forty-nine point two) feet distance between the vessel and the megafauna is re-established.
		h)	While vessels are operating in the contact zone, they should approach to unload passengers for snorkelling with whale sharks, in a manner that does not interfere with the whale shark’s direction of travel. Vessels approaching whale sharks from the reef-ward side and unloading passengers from the reef-ward side is prohibited.
		i)	Within the surrounding contact zone of 250 (two hundred and fifty) metres / 820.2 (eight hundred and twenty point



			two) feet, only six (6) vessels, including the ranger vessel, may operate for the purpose of snorkeling with whale sharks. The guidelines for queueing the five (5) vessels, excluding the ranger vessel, are as follows.		
		1.	If a vessel in the contact zone encounters a megafauna, such as a whale shark, it must notify the rangers via the ranger hotline.		
		2.	For queueing purposes, priority shall be given to the first vessel that notifies the rangers, followed by the nearest vessels based on live location tracking.		
		3.	Within this area, vessels operating in the contact zone for the purpose of snorkelling with whale sharks may unload a maximum of 60 (sixty) passengers. Each passenger is allowed a maximum of 15 (fifteen) minutes in the water.		
		4.	If other vessels are queueing outside the contact zone for snorkelling with whale sharks, once the 15 (fifteen) minutes per passenger has elapsed or if the whale shark has moved away, the next vessels in the queue must be given the opportunity.		
		j)	Vessels operating within the area must maintain a minimum distance of 25 (twenty-five) metres / 82 (eighty-two) feet from one another.		
		k)	Within the 250 (two hundred and fifty) metre / 820.2 (eight hundred and twenty point two) contact zone surrounding megafauna, such as whale sharks, vessels under 10 feet in length with engines are not permitted to operate.		
		l)	The Authority reserves the right to suspend or revoke the permits of vessels that violate the guidelines outlined in this plan for a period of not less than one (1) year.		
		m)	Motorized vehicles used for water sports are prohibited within the SAMPA zone. Water sports are defined as activities involving the use of vehicles such as jet skis and jet cars.		
		Captain and vessel crew operating within the Protected Area	13.	a)	Captains and crew of vessels operating within the area for snorkelling and diving purposes must register with the Authority as “SAMPA Crew”.
b)	The following requirements must be met to register with the Authority as “SAMPA Crew”.				
	1.			Must be familiar with the management of SAMPA. It is the responsibility of the individual registering as a SAMPA crew member to familiarize themselves with SAMPA rules before completing the registration.	
	2.			All persons operating as “SAMPA Crew” must comply with the Maldives Maritime Navigation Act (Act No.	



Guides operating within the Protected Area	14.		69/78) and all regulations made under this Act, and must, in particular, hold a “Captain and Crew License” in accordance with Section 24 of the Local Vessel Survey and Certification Regulation (2015/R-229).
		c)	The Authority reserves the right to suspend or revoke the registration of “SAMPA Crew” members who violate the guidelines outlined in this plan for a period of not less than one (1) year.
		a)	Individuals operating as guides within the area, who take passengers for snorkelling and diving, must register with the Authority to operate as a “SAMPA Guide”.
		b)	To register as a “SAMPA Guide”, a certificate issued by the Authority must be obtained. The following requirements must be met to obtain the certificate
		1.	Must be familiar with this management plan and must pass the exam conducted by the Authority.
		2.	Must be Emergency First Response certified
		3.	Must have a rescue dive level certification. If a minimum rescue dive level certificate is not held, the individual must be certified as a snorkelling guide by PADI, SSI, or an equivalent organization AND must hold a Life Guard Certification by SSI or an equivalent organization.
		c)	The 'SAMPA Guide' certificate is valid for three (3) years. Three (3) months before the expiry of this period, the exam referred to in clause (1) of this section must be completed again, and copies of the certificate referred to in clauses (2) and (3) must be submitted to the Authority to renew the “SAMPA Guide” certificate.
		d)	There must be at least one (1) SAMPA Guide for every six (6) passengers in groups visiting the area for snorkelling with whale sharks.
		e)	In the event of bad weather, rangers operating within the area reserve the right to adjust the number of passengers and SAMPA Guides specified in clause (d) of this section.
		f)	SAMPA Guides visiting the area with passengers are responsible for providing information on the species found in the area and for communicating the guidelines for operating within the area to its users.
		g)	It is the responsibility of the “SAMPA Guide” to ensure the safety and security of visitors to the area and to ensure their compliance with this management plan. Visitors under the supervision of the Guide must be provided with information on safety, security, and the guidelines established for the management of this area prior to entering the area.



		h)	The Authority reserves the right to suspend or revoke the certificate of any SAMPA Guide who violates the guidelines set out in this management plan for a period of not less than one (1) year.
Guidelines for visiting and operating within the Protected Area	15.	a)	All persons operating in this area must comply in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Protected Species Regulation (Regulation No. 2021/R-25).
		b)	Permit must be obtained prior to visiting this area for snorkelling and diving purposes. This permit may be obtained through the hotline or the access permit booking system.
		c)	Visitors using the area for snorkelling and/or freediving must adhere to the following guidelines.
		1.	This area may be used by snorkelers and freedivers from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.
		2.	If others are queuing to use the area, each person in the water is allowed a maximum of 15 (fifteen) minutes for snorkelling and freediving.
		3.	Within the 250 (two hundred and fifty) metre / 820.2 (eight hundred and twenty point two) feet contact zone surrounding megafauna, such as whale sharks, a maximum of 60 (sixty) persons can be allowed at one time.
		4.	Visitors must not go beyond the head of the whale shark to look at the whale shark.
		5.	While in the water, a distance of 3 (three) metres must be maintained from the body of the whale shark, and a distance of 4 (four) metres must be maintained from its tail.
		d)	Visitors using the area for scuba diving must adhere to the following guidelines.
		1.	The diving zone and planned diving time must be shared with rangers when obtaining the permit referred to in sub-section (b) of this section.
		2.	For the safety and security of divers, it must be ensured that the diving zone is located away from areas where vessels are normally active for snorkeling purposes.
		3.	Scuba diving is prohibited within zones where vessels are already operating for whale shark snorkeling, or while vessels are operating within the 250 (two hundred and fifty) metre / 820.2 (eight hundred and twenty point two) feet contact zone surrounding megafauna such as whale shark.
		4.	If a megafauna, such as a whale shark, is observed while diving, it shall be considered an “opportunistic



			sighting”. In such cases, it is prohibited to chase, touch, or obstruct the movement of the megafauna, such as whale shark.
		5.	If a whale shark is observed while diving, the time and location of the observation must be reported via the rangers hotline.
		6.	While scuba diving at night, it is prohibited to use a flashlight in a manner that may attract whale sharks. If a whale shark surfaces while a light is in use, the light must be turned off.
Conducting Research within the Protected Area	16.	a)	Research in this area shall be conducted with a written permit issued by the Authority.
		b)	No research conducted in this area shall be used for commercial profit.
		c)	The authorized person is not exempt from compliance with any of the laws and regulations of Maldives.
		d)	This permit may only be used for research within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA). The researcher must obtain a separate permit in accordance with section 18 of this plan for photography and videography purposes.
		e)	After conducting research within the area, the findings must be submitted to the Authority within one (1) month. Researchers who fail to submit these findings will be issued any subsequent permits only after submitting the results of the research conducted under the Authority-issued permit.
		f)	Researchers granted permits for this area must keep their permits visible at all times.
		g)	Only individuals whose names are listed on the written permits issued by the Authority may participate in research activities conducted in this area.
		h)	If the purpose of the research in this area is violated, the issued research permit will be revoked.
Conducting Restoration or Rehabilitation within the Protected Area	17.	a)	Restoration or rehabilitation activities in this area must be carried out with a permit issued by the Authority.
		b)	Persons granted restoration or rehabilitation permits for this area must keep their permits visible at all times
		c)	It is prohibited to carry out any restoration or rehabilitation activities that may harm or negatively alter the natural environment of this area.
Conducting Photography and Videography	18.	a)	A maximum of five (5) drones may operate within the contact zone at any one time. Drones operated by the Authority or by Rangers on behalf of the Ministry for the purpose of managing the area are exempt from this number limit.



within the Protected Area	b)	Photography or videography for commercial purposes in this area must be conducted with a written permit issued by the Authority. When applying for this permit, a copy of drone permit obtained through the Ministry of Defence must be submitted to the Authority.
	c)	Photographs and videos taken for personal use or for the private use of tourists are not covered under clause (b) of this section.
	d)	The general guidelines for conducting photography and videography for any purpose within the area are as follows.
	1.	When conducting photography or videography using unmanned aerial vehicles or drones within this area, drones must be operated at a minimum distance of 30 (thirty) metres above sea level.
	2.	A maximum of one (1) hour may be spent in this area per session for photography or videography using an unmanned aerial vehicle or drone.
	3.	The permit issued for the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) within this area for photography or videography must be kept visible at all times.
	4.	When using unmanned aerial vehicles or drones for photography or videography, the drone must remain within the operator's line of sight at all times.
	5.	Only individuals listed on the permit issued by the Authority may participate in photography or videography within the area.
	e)	If any person or object is damaged while using an unmanned aerial vehicle or drone within the area, the operator of the drone shall bear full responsibility for the damage caused.
	f)	It is prohibited to conduct research or any similar activities within this area using a permit obtained for commercial photography or videography.
Closure of the Protected Area	g)	Drones should be operated in accordance to the guidelines and standards by the Authority, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation.
	h)	Rangers and SAMPA guardians have the authority to take photos and videos for the purpose of managing the area.
	19.	The Ministry and the Authority reserve the right to temporarily restrict public access and operations within the area due to accidents or for research purposes. If the area is closed for such reasons, the closure shall be publicly announced along with the reason, and the specific boundaries of the closure zone shall be clearly defined.



Issuance of fees for accessing the Protected Area	20.	The Ministry reserves the right to impose a fee for visitors using the area. The fee shall be determined in consultation with, and based on the advice of the Advisory Committee of the South Ari Marine Protected Area.	
Violation of the Management Plan	21.	Action shall be taken against individuals who violate this management plan under Law No. 4/93 (Environmental Protection and Preservation Act) and Regulation No. R-78/2018 (Protected Areas Regulation).	
Monitoring and Evaluation of the Protected Area	22.	This management plan shall be reviewed annually at the end of each calendar year, based on the outcomes and activities of the preceding year. The review of the management plan will take into account recommendations proposed by the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) Advisory Board.	
Assessing the Management Plan Effectiveness of the Protected Area	23.	The Ministry shall assess the management effectiveness of the area at least once every 5 years. Global standards must be used to measure and determine the management effectiveness of the of the area. Based on the effectiveness of the management, the governance and the management plan must be reviewed and updated with the advice and consultation of the Advisory Committee.	
Commencement of the Management Plan	24.	a)	This Management Plan shall come into force when it has been published in the government's gazette.
		b)	Clause (b) of section 12, clause (a) of section 13, and clause (a) of section 14 of this management plan shall come into force after 31 July 2025.
Meanings	25.	Unless the use of a phrase in this management plan is to definitely convey any other meaning:	
		a)	“South Ari Marine Protected Area” refers to the boundary of ‘1 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between southwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef ‘illustrated in Annex 1 of this management plan.
		b)	“Ministry” refers to the government ministry formed by the President of Maldives, vested with all the powers of enacting and executing policies relating to the environment.
		c)	“Authority” means the Environmental Regulatory Authority.
		d)	“Rangers” means the staff of the Ministry, trained by the Ministry to manage the South Ari Marine Protected Area.
		e)	“Guardians” means the resource users of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) who are registered with the Ministry and serve as assistants in South Ari Marine Protected Area.



	f)	“SAMPA Guide” means a guide who accompanies guests in the water for snorkelling and diving activities within this area.
	g)	“SAMPA crew” refers to the captain and crew involved in operating vessels within the area for snorkelling and diving purposes.
	h)	“Snorkelling” refers to swimming while keeping one’s face underwater with the assistance of a mask and snorkel.
	i)	“Free diving” refers to diving underwater while holding one’s breath, without the assistance of any equipment for breathing purposes.
	j)	“Scuba diving” refers to diving underwater with the assistance of compressed air tanks for breathing.
	k)	“Contact zone” refers to the boundary of 250 (two fifty) meter / 820.2 (eight hundred and twenty point two) feet surrounding the whale shark.
	l)	“Live location” refers to a mechanism that shares the real-time global positioning system (GPS) location of vessels operating within the area for snorkelling and diving purposes, as determined by the Ministry.
	m)	”Megafauna” refers to whale sharks, manta rays, and other large species of a similar nature.
	n)	“Unmanned Aerial Vehicle’ refers to vehicles, such as drones, that are operated or controlled remotely from a distance or autonomously.
	o)	“Commercial photography and videography” refer to photography or videography conducted for the purpose of selling a product, service, or brand, or for advertising purposes.



Annex 1 – Boundary of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)

