

Best Practice Guidance for Stakeholder Engagement for Maldives' Marine Protected Areas

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The preparation of the Best Practice Guidance for Stakeholder Engagement for Maldives' Marine Protected Areas involved contributions from many individuals and organisations.

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Executive Summary

The Maldives' commitment to marine conservation is reflected in its adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ratification of international agreements such as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement (BBNJ) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The associated Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) sets a target to protect 30% of the planet's land and oceans by 2030 (30by30¹).

As an active member of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (HAC for N&P), Maldives is working collaboratively to achieve this 30by30 target and reverse biodiversity loss through inclusive and evidence-based conservation efforts.

Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for the successful identification, designation, and management of Protected Areas (PAs). It ensures fairness, transparency in decision-making, and increases the sustainability and success of conservation initiatives. Integrating

Gender Equality Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) approaches into stakeholder engagement creates a more inclusive process, ensuring that all groups are represented, and their needs are met.

This document provides best practice guidance for PA managers and consultancies contributing to PA designation and management across Maldives. It is recommended that it be used for all projects related to PAs and that it should be followed as far as is practicable, taking the local context into account.

The guidance is based on global standards and best practice from around the world.

¹ Target 3 of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

It highlights some key ethical principles for stakeholder engagement including respect, fairness, and transparency, ensuring free, prior and informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and involving a diverse range of stakeholders particularly marginalised groups that often face reduced engagement opportunities.

It identifies several barriers to effective stakeholder engagement, including language, gender, economic status and cultural complexities and provides solutions for overcoming these barriers.

These include providing translation services, offering financial support, ensuring gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate methods, and building trust through consistent communication.

The guidance assists PA practitioners to navigate the stakeholder engagement process by developing a stakeholder engagement plan.

Developing these plans involves defining the purpose of engagement, identifying stakeholders, mapping their needs, choosing appropriate engagement methods and creating a structured communication schedule.

Effective stakeholder engagement must be inclusive and consider the diverse needs and preferences of different stakeholders.

The guidance also gives PA practitioners insight into various engagement methods such as public meetings, targeted stakeholder meetings, surveys, online engagement, focus groups and workshops.

It also details monitoring and evaluation techniques which are essential in ensuring effectiveness and inclusivity, recommending specific indicators to measure progress and impact and continuously improve engagement strategies based on the feedback received.

The Annexes detail practical tools for PA managers, including templates for a stakeholder questionnaire and stakeholder engagement plan, an engagement checklist, advice on timeframes and budgets for stakeholder engagement and guidance on participatory workshop techniques.

Context

The Maldives is a global advocate for marine conservation², reflected in its adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ratification of international agreements such as the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

The associated Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) sets a target to protect 30% of the planet's land and oceans by 2030 (30by30).

As an active member of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People (HAC for N&P), Maldives is working collaboratively to achieve this 30by30 target and reverse biodiversity loss through inclusive and evidence-based conservation efforts.

For the Maldives, this includes the establishment of new Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs) and the expansion and improved management of existing ones. Stakeholder engagement is crucial in the process of identifying, designating and effectively managing PCAs. Stakeholders have a wealth of

experience concerning the ecological, socio-economic, and cultural significance of areas under consideration.

Utilising local knowledge ensures accurate and comprehensive assessments, fosters social and cultural acceptance, and reduces opposition and conflict. Engagement also empowers local resource users, leading to improved support and acceptance, which may result in higher levels of compliance.

In Maldives, the requirement to consult stakeholders is set out in existing national legislation specifically Clause 11 of The Protected Areas Regulation (R-78/2018):

² Statement by Mr. Adam Hamid, Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Maldives to the United Nations at the Plenary on Agenda item 73: Oceans and Law of the Sea and Sustainable fisheries. Available: Permanent Mission of the Republic of Maldives to the United Nations - Oceans and Law of the Sea

- All relevant persons who may be affected through designation of the protected area shall be identified and consulted.
- Community participation as a process of consultation.

The Maldives National Framework for Management of Protected and Conserved Areas provides the strategic direction for the effective management of the national network of PCAs³.

One of the key principles guiding the management of all PCAs in the network is stakeholder and collaborative engagement. This recognises that there is no single engagement methodology that suits all stakeholders and processes, but that all stakeholders should be empowered to participate in PCA planning, management and decision-making processes.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) is an approach that ensures all individuals, regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other factors, have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from development initiatives.

GEDSI sensitive stakeholder engagement removes barriers to inclusion, addresses power imbalances, and promotes equitable access to resources and decision-making processes. Integrating GEDSI approaches into stakeholder engagement can significantly enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of PCAs.

These approaches focus on creating a more inclusive process, ensuring that all groups are represented, and their needs are met. These inclusion practices must however be completed with a robust understanding of cultural norms and local practices.

In this regard, each site would need a tailored stakeholder analysis and engagement plan to ensure effective engagement. Although effective stakeholder engagement is essential for all PCAs, this document specifically focuses on Protected Areas (PAs) and does not include Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs)⁴. It provides best practice guidance for PA managers and consultancies contributing to PA designation and management, across Maldives.

It is **recommended** that it be used for all projects related to PAs; this may include for example, the designation of new PAs, the development of new management measures (legislation, policy, management strategies) or the revision of management measures for human activities within existing PAs, the development of conservation action plans and the evaluation of protected area management effectiveness.

PA managers should aim to follow this guidance as far as is practicable taking their local context into account. Practical tools for PA managers to use are provided in the Annexes.

³ [Maldives National Framework for Management of Protected and Conserved Areas](#)

⁴ It is recognised that OECMs may need tailored stakeholder engagement that will be included in separate OECM guidelines developed by the Maldives Ministry of Tourism and Environment, but some of the principles in this document could be transferrable.

01 – Introduction to Stakeholder Engagement

A stakeholder is anyone who has an interest in, or who is affected by a plan, project or decision. This includes direct resource users such as fishers as well as those who have an interest in or depend on the area indirectly.

This may also include politicians, government departments, local councils, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), universities, local community organisations, business / industry representatives (e.g. accommodation providers, food services, tourism businesses) as well as the general public.

Stakeholder engagement is the process of involving these stakeholders in the decision-making process. Good stakeholder engagement develops an understanding of

the needs and expectations of different stakeholders; it improves transparency in decision-making, fosters communication which can reduce conflict amongst different stakeholder groups and creates strong relationships.

This helps to build trust in the PA management authority and creates a sense of ownership, ensuring successful outcomes.

1.1 Engagement Principles

When engaging stakeholders, adherence to ethical principles is crucial. By tailoring communication and engagement strategies, we can ensure more inclusive and equitable stakeholder participation.

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:

Free Prior and Informed Consent:

Ensure stakeholders understand the purpose, methods, risks, and benefits of engagement. Consent should be documented verbally or in writing.

Confidentiality: Ensure personal data is protected in the standards followed by the Maldives National Bureau of Statistics and where applicable to follow relevant donor requirements and standards.

Representation and Diversity:

Involve a broad and diverse range of stakeholders, respecting all views equally.

Acknowledgment and Compensation:

Recognise contributions and offer appropriate compensation or incentives where applicable.

1.2 Barriers to Engagement

Before starting any stakeholder engagement activity, it is important to determine whether there are any existing inequalities in the local stakeholder group. Consideration should be given to gender, level of education, cultural background, language barriers, any disabilities or hidden

disabilities, as well as caring responsibilities, work patterns and ability to travel (See Annex 1 for stakeholder questionnaire).

Special attention must be given to disadvantaged or vulnerable stakeholders. These marginalised groups often face reduced opportunities for engagement, which can result in their voices being excluded.

However, these marginalised groups are often the ones who are more likely to be adversely affected by PA designation / management as they are often people who are most reliant on marine resources for their livelihoods.

Focusing on marginalised groups and increasing their participation improves the likelihood of long-term success for PA projects. It is therefore imperative that we understand the barriers to stakeholder engagement and how we might address them to ensure participation is as comprehensive as possible.

GEDSI and SEAH Handbooks have been developed for Maldives. These provide a practical framework and tools for integrating GEDSI into environmental work and a practical framework for preventing and responding to SEAH in environmental work.

<https://www.cefas.co.uk/ocpp/ocpp-maldives/>

LANGUAGE BARRIERS:

Barrier: Stakeholders may not speak the primary language used in the event, making it difficult to understand discussions or materials.

Solution: Provide translation services, offer documents in local languages, and use local facilitators or ensure that interpreters are available during meetings. In some cases, visual aids or simplified language can help enhance understanding.

- **Offer Materials in Dhivehi:**

Use local facilitators where possible and translate reports, agendas, and key documents into Dhivehi for participants to promote accessibility.

- **Provide Translation Services:**

Ensure interpreters are available for both spoken and sign language translations during meetings, workshops, and discussions as needed.

- **Use Visual Aids and Simplified Language:**

Graphs, diagrams, infographics, and plain language summaries help communicate key messages effectively, ensuring all stakeholders can engage, regardless of literacy levels. Large-print documents and audio translation can enable stakeholders with visual impairments to engage.

LOGISTICAL CONSTRAINTS:

Barrier: Physical distance, lack of transportation, or timing of events may prevent groups from attending.

Solution: Undertaking a stakeholder analysis will highlight the bespoke requirements for each of the groups and will allow staff to organise events in **accessible locations** close to these communities, **offer transportation** or host virtual options. **Flexible timing** (evenings or weekends) can help participation.

ECONOMIC BARRIERS

Barrier: Participants may lack the financial resources to attend or may be unable to take time away from work or daily responsibilities.

Solution: Where feasible, offer **financial support** such as travel re-imbursements, meals, or compensation for lost wages. Offering childcare services during the event can also help those with family obligations.

CULTURAL BARRIERS

Barrier: Cultural or societal norms may discourage certain groups from speaking out or attending public events.

Solution: Ensure gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate engagement methods. Consider holding **separate meetings** for certain groups or individuals to ensure participation.

Consider the adoption of **gender-sensitive facilitation** which provides a safe, equitable, and empowering environment where women can actively contribute and be heard. These facilitated spaces help balance perspectives and encourages wider participation.

Facilitators should ideally be women or be trained in unconscious bias awareness and inclusive communication to ensure discussions

remain equitable. Involve trusted community leaders to encourage participation. Where possible, offer options for **formal and informal settings** to provide feedback.

LIMITED TRUST

Barrier: Some groups of stakeholders may distrust authorities or feel that their voices will not be heard, leading to reluctance to participate.

Solution: Where possible, build trust through **long-term engagement** and **consistent communication**. Where possible, involve community leaders or trusted intermediaries who have been identified in advance and who can advocate for these groups.

Clearly demonstrate how their input will be used in decision-making processes. Communicate follow up reports and send progress and / or updates to ensure consistent communication.

LIMITED AWARENESS

Barrier: Some groups or individuals may lack awareness of the issues being discussed or feel that the topics are too complex.

Solution: Offer **capacity-building opportunities** such as pre-event workshops or educational materials that explain key issues in simple terms. Provide ongoing support to ensure they understand how decisions will impact them.

Additionally, assess participants' awareness and understanding of key concepts before the session and allocate time to **address any gaps** before starting consultations and feedback discussions.

In addition to awareness-raising, introduce provisions for **skill-building and leadership** training for marginalised groups. This ensures they are not only informed but also equipped with the skills and confidence to take on leadership roles in the future.

EXCLUSION

Barrier: Dominant groups may overshadow marginalised voices, or there may be formal exclusion from decision-making spaces.

Solution: Create bespoke facilitation practices, such as **smaller focus groups**, where marginalised voices can be heard more effectively. Techniques can be adopted including voting stickers or ranking preferred options; also, anonymous feedback mechanisms such as surveys or suggestion boxes.

CASE STUDY: Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) – Gender and Inclusion in Fisheries Management

The Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) has developed a regional strategy to integrate Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) into fisheries management and marine conservation. This initiative ensures that women and Indigenous groups actively participate in stakeholder consultations, governance, and decision-making processes.

The CTI approach includes capacity-building programs for women fisherfolk and community leaders, providing leadership training and technical skills to support their participation in marine resource management.

To strengthen SEAH prevention, the initiative has developed community-based complaint mechanisms, ensuring that harassment and abuse cases can be reported safely. Additionally, legal aid and survivor support services are available for SEAH victims in fisheries governance.

By disaggregating stakeholder engagement data by gender, age, and community status, the CTI monitors progress in GESI integration, ensuring that marginalised voices are actively heard in marine conservation planning.

This case illustrates how regional marine initiatives can institutionalize SEAH prevention and inclusive governance in conservation efforts.

Reference: CTI Gender and Social Inclusion Exchange

DISABILITY BARRIERS:

Barrier: Physical disabilities, health conditions or limited mobility may prevent individuals from attending stakeholder meetings.

Solution: Ensure venues are accessible (e.g., ramps, handrails and wheelchair access) to prioritise in-person participation.

Where this is not possible, provide helpers or assistive devices, consider hybrid or fully online participation; in this case, individuals identified as important community leaders should also be included.

LACK OF REPRESENTATION :

Barrier: Marginalised groups may not have representation or advocates who can speak on their behalf in stakeholder events.

Solution: Encourage marginalised groups to form alliances or networks to represent their interests. Provide training for community members to serve as effective advocates or representatives in stakeholder discussions.

1.3 Safeguarding and Reporting Mechanisms

Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) refers to a range of harmful behaviours that involve the misuse of power or trust for sexual purposes. SEAH informed stakeholder engagement sets out robust expectations which prevent, address, and respond to this type of transgression. All interactions in the

Maldives are governed by the Prevention of Sexual Abuse and Harassment Act (Law No. 16/2014) which aims to prevent and address sexual abuse and harassment⁵.

Integrating SEAH-informed practices early in stakeholder engagement is key to creating a safe, inclusive, and ethical environment. It builds trust, ensures accountability, and protects vulnerable groups. Integrating SEAH codes of conduct, zero tolerance statements and professional codes of conduct in the meeting sets clear expectations on what is acceptable behaviour and signposts to reporting systems if there is an issue.

All practitioners and stakeholders are encouraged to uphold SEAH safeguarding measures. The Gender Equality, Social Inclusion (GESI) & Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH) Safeguards Assessment and Recommendations for OCPP Projects in Maldives⁶ will provide practical guidance on preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment across projects and partnerships.

In the meantime, more support and information on SEAH can be found on the Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (CAPSEAH) website⁷, including practical tools details on reporting mechanisms.

CASE STUDY: São Tomé and Príncipe's Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Development

São Tomé and Príncipe developed a Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network using a comprehensive stakeholder analysis to ensure inclusive participation in marine conservation planning.

Recognizing the marginalization of certain groups, such as women and spearfishers, the project conducted separate consultations to ensure their concerns and priorities were addressed. Women representatives were explicitly invited to participate in stakeholder consultations, ensuring their voices were heard in decision-making processes.

To prevent Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (SEAH), the initiative established safe engagement spaces by organizing separate consultations for marginalized groups, creating a safe environment where participants could express concerns without fear of discrimination or harassment.

The outcome of this approach was enhanced inclusivity, ensuring broader community involvement in marine spatial planning and the conservation process. This case demonstrates the importance of proactively including marginalized groups in stakeholder engagement, fostering equity and participation in marine conservation.

Reference: Establishing a Marine Protected Area Network Using a Marine Spatial Planning Approach

⁵ **Sexual Abuse:** This term encompasses any unsolicited sexual act. It includes actions where consent is not given or cannot be given. **Sexual Harassment:** Defined as unwelcome sexual advances. Such behaviour is considered harassment when it creates an intimidating, environment for the victim.

⁶ [Gender Equality, Social Inclusion \(GESI\) & Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment \(SEAH\) Safeguards Assessment and Recommendations for OCPP Projects in Maldives](#)

⁷ [Home | CAPSEAH](#)

02 – Planning Stakeholder Engagement

A stakeholder engagement plan is a structured way to ensure key stakeholders, either groups or individuals, work together through facilitation and communication.

A stakeholder engagement plan can help to create structure in which to develop, communicate and inform stakeholders throughout the planning, delivery, and monitoring of the project.

Developing a stakeholder engagement plan helps to target engagement activities more effectively and ensures that engagement methods are tailored to the local context, achieving the desired outcomes. It is especially important for projects that affect individuals, families,

communities or sectors like tourism, fisheries or conservation. Stakeholder engagement plans are necessary to ensure that plans and projects are sustainable, inclusive, and aligned with local needs while meeting environmental, social, and regulatory standards.

Developing a stakeholder engagement plan follows a series of steps, which are defined below. A template for a stakeholder engagement plan is included in Annex 2, and a checklist is included in Annex 3.

2.1 Step 1: Define the purpose of your engagement

The first step in developing a stakeholder engagement plan involves consideration of several critical components that lay the foundation for effective interaction and collaboration with stakeholders (Table 1). This will help to determine who you engage with and the methods you use.

Table 1. Components to consider when defining the purpose of your engagement

1	Identify the area and level of designation	Define the geographic scope	Clearly define the geographical scope of the project. For example, the ecosystem type and whether it is a local, regional, or national area.
		Define the focus of the project	For example, whether it is focussed on a specific marine resource, area, or target stakeholder group.
2	Determine why the activity is needed	Rationale for engagement	Clearly articulate the reasons and objectives for engaging stakeholders. This could include gaining input on management plans, fostering community support, addressing conflicts, or ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements.
		Alignment with goals	Ensure that the engagement activity aligns with broader conservation goals, organisational objectives, or governmental mandates.
3	Define outcomes & objectives	Desired outcomes	Specify the outcomes you hope to achieve through stakeholder engagement. This could range from improved understanding of stakeholder perspectives to consensus on management actions
		Define objectives	Define the objectives that will guide your engagement efforts. Ideally, these should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.).
4	Scope and context of engagement	Scope	Determine the scope of the engagement, including the timeframe, resources available, and the extent of stakeholder involvement. Consider whether the engagement will be ongoing, periodic, or project specific.
		Context	Understand the broader social, economic, political, and environmental context within which the engagement will take place. Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Who uses the resource/area of focus and how they use the space (e.g. commercial, recreational, industrial, research).</i> - <i>What relevant governance structures need to be included at a community, local, regional and national level.</i>
5	Issues and topics for engagement	Identify key issues	Determine the specific issues or topics that stakeholders will be engaged on. Focus on issues that are relevant, impactful and align with the goals of the engagement.
		Feasibility	Assess what can realistically be achieved within the available time frame and resources. Prioritise issues that are actionable and where stakeholder input can lead to meaningful outcomes.

2.2 Step 1: Identify your stakeholders

The next step is the identification of your stakeholders; this requires a strategic and systematic approach to ensure that engagement is both inclusive and equitable. Identifying your stakeholders from the outset will allow for the continued consideration of engagement preferences including timings of meetings and information accessibility.

Different groups may have different preferences for communication and participation. For example, research has found that women tend to receive information verbally through the radio⁸ or community groups⁹, while men may prefer to attend formal meetings.

Younger generations are often more inclined to use social media. Understanding these differences is key to ensuring all individuals and groups receive the flow of information, that communication is consistent and that no group is inadvertently empowered over another through the communication methods chosen.

Stakeholder engagement is inherently an iterative process, evolving as a project develops and as new insights, challenges, and opportunities emerge. The number and type of stakeholders involved can, and will, vary depending on the specific site, its context, and the nature of what is being proposed (i.e. a new proposed PA or a change of management to an existing one).

There is no right number of who and how many to engage — if the engagement steps set out below are applied appropriately, the process

can remain adaptive and responsive to changing circumstances.

Defining a fixed number of stakeholders at the outset can undermine the flexibility needed for meaningful and inclusive engagement. Ultimately, stakeholder involvement should be determined on a case-by-case basis, to ensure that all the perspectives included are relevant, constructive, and representative.

With this in mind, all potential stakeholders should be listed, including individuals, groups, and organisations who use and depend on the PA, whose activities affect it and/or who have a direct or indirect interest in it.

It is important to include a wide range of stakeholders who represent different views and perspectives. To ensure inclusivity, it is crucial to also identify historically underrepresented groups early in the process through targeted outreach strategies.

This includes groups such as women in non-traditional marine roles, persons with disabilities, and migrant fisher communities, who may otherwise be overlooked in conventional stakeholder engagement processes.

Consider:

- What organisations exist that represent resource/area users; for example, fishing (commercial and recreational) organisations, snorkelling, diving, associations, stakeholder partnerships / alliances, tourist boards.
- Who has expertise (skills, knowledge) that could be helpful; for example, local knowledge,

⁸ Addressing gender inequalities and strengthening women's agency to create more climate-resilient and sustainable food systems – ScienceDirect

⁹ Gender and Digital Access Gaps and Barriers in Asia: But What About After Access?

practice based, academic, authors of research papers and experts in the area.

- Whether there are any marginalised groups who historically do not engage in PA projects and may be harder to reach by traditional engagement methods

Stakeholders can be identified through several methods as described below.

BRAINSTORMING EXERCISE:

- Best undertaken as a team effort and preferably with people who understand the project's aims and remit. This could be achieved as part of a workshop with the project team.
- Make use of data, information and knowledge held within the Ministries or Atoll or Island Councils and existing relationships with stakeholders.
- Speak to contacts who have existing relationships with stakeholders e.g., colleagues, government agency contacts, island councils, but also trusted contacts who are part of existing stakeholder partnerships.

When contacting colleagues and wider contacts, make sure that your team clearly articulates the nature and scope of the project.

This allows them to better assist your team but also ensures that they can clearly feed this back to stakeholders when communicating with them.

Be aware of any sensitivities around what can and cannot be discussed about the project at

the time but aim to be honest and as transparent as possible.

ONLINE SEARCH:

- Look at relevant online forums, social media groups, and online maps that can help to identify businesses, activities and associated industries, organisations, authorities, groups, and partnerships relevant to the project.
- Note that not all stakeholders have an internet presence, so this must not be used as a stand-alone activity, or the project may hold a biased picture of relevant stakeholders.

REVIEW, EVALUATE AND ITERATE:

- Stakeholder identification should be an iterative process and updated at regular points as the project progresses, and more information becomes available.
- Be mindful of gaps in representation and look to fill these gaps. Talk to identified stakeholders to ask them if there is anyone else to whom they think the team should talk. You can ask people for specific types of stakeholders e.g. *'can you recommend any young fishers / women we should speak to?'*
- Seek assistance and input from island councils to identify additional stakeholders
- Allow time in the schedule to ensure that any new or emerging stakeholders are provided with sufficient information and support to enable them to fully engage in the process.

REPRESENTATIVES AND PROPORTION OF REPRESENTATIVES:

When identifying stakeholders, it is useful to consider whether there are individuals or small groups who can represent different sectors.

This has a number of benefits:

- It allows decision-makers to engage with a manageable number of individuals or groups rather than attempting to involve all stakeholders individually.
- Stakeholder representatives help to share the diverse perspectives of stakeholders, ensuring that decision-making is inclusive and considers the needs of different stakeholders.
- Representatives have in-depth knowledge of their respective stakeholder groups and the issues they face. Their insights and expertise contribute to more informed and well-rounded decision-making, incorporating on-the-ground realities and local context.
- Working with representatives streamlines communication, as they can disseminate information and gather feedback from their respective stakeholder groups.

This enables two-way communication and ensures stakeholders are well-informed and engaged.

- Stakeholder representatives play a critical role in engaging their respective stakeholder groups. Their involvement creates a sense

of ownership and accountability among stakeholders, increasing their commitment to the project outcomes.

- By involving stakeholders through their representatives, **conflicts and resistance can be minimised**. Addressing concerns early and incorporating stakeholder input reduces the likelihood of opposition and increases the likelihood of support for the project outcomes.
- Stakeholder representatives can serve as a **link between decision-makers and stakeholders over the long term**.

Their continued involvement promotes consistency in decision-making and ensures that stakeholder engagement remains an ongoing process.

It is important to check who representatives claim to represent and whether these people also feel the same. This could be done through speaking to stakeholders directly to ensure their views are being adequately represented.

Suggested proportions for each sector are set out in Table 2 below.

Additional considerations when looking at proportionality are to consider GEDSI principles where possible and introduce minimum representation targets to ensure that women, fisher groups, and marginalised communities have a voice in stakeholder processes.

For example, it is recommended that one-third of advisory or decision-making panels are women and representatives of marginalised communities.

Table 2. Recommended proportions of different sectors.

Sector	Proportion	Role
Government and Regulatory Bodies	10-20%	Ensure compliance with regulations, provide necessary approvals, and offer policy guidance.
Community and Public	20-30%	Represent local interests, provide feedback on community impact, and support public engagement efforts.
Industry and Business	20-30%	Offer insights on market trends, contribute to economic impact assessments, and support project implementation.
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and advocacy groups	10-20%	Advocate for environmental and social considerations, provide expertise on specific issues, and help ensure sustainable practices.
Academia and Research Institutions	10-15%	Provide scientific and technical expertise, support data collection and analysis, and contribute to evidence-based decision-making
Internal stakeholders (e.g. project team, employees)	10-20%	Ensure project alignment with organisational goals, facilitate internal communication, and support project execution.

These proportions can be adjusted based on the specific needs and context of the project. It is important to ensure a balanced representation to capture diverse perspectives and achieve comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

There are some important considerations when choosing representatives as described in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Important considerations when choosing representatives

What can representatives expect?	What can be expected from representatives?
Terms of Reference (ToR) and/or a Code of Conduct which sets out behavioural expectations from members of any regular meetings or groups. It is important that these are co-developed and co-signed to create a sense of ownership.	Representatives need to adhere to a co-agreed code of conduct and ToR.
Clear simple language and consider choosing language with stakeholders to ensure messages and decisions are understood; this can be developed alongside a Code of Conduct/ToR. Respect is the cornerstone of effective stakeholder engagement, enabling teams to establish trust, listen and understand, resolve conflicts, be culturally sensitive, uphold ethical standards and empower stakeholders.	Representatives need to be prepared to represent the views of others and feedback outcomes to the communities they represent.
Adopt transparent ways of working, this could take the form of 'you said, we did' sections in meetings or email, publishing meeting minutes, actions or comments from in-person quayside engagement. Be clear about where stakeholders can find relevant information	
The timelines, processes and time expectations of the project should be explained to representatives as early as possible to ensure they understand their level of input and level of support.	The interests represented at any meeting or event should be declared from the start to all attendees.
To become effective, some representatives may need extra support if they lack key resources and/or skills. These barriers may be things that as a project team you can work around, or they may require the project team to invest time in supporting individuals.	They need to be prepared to raise and openly discuss capacity needs.

2.3 Step 3: Mapping your stakeholders and identifying needs

Stakeholder mapping helps to determine the most appropriate level of engagement for each group, recognising that it is neither always possible nor necessary to engage every stakeholder equally.

A common method of stakeholder mapping involves classifying stakeholders by their interest and influence in the specific project. Engagement may range from simply informing or consulting stakeholders to actively involving or collaborating with them, depending on the

situation. The mapping process can be seen in Figure 1 below. In this model, one method of engaging stakeholders is not considered to be better than another; each has value and is suitable for different purposes.

Using this approach allows you to better tailor levels of stakeholder engagement to different groups. Whichever level of engagement is used it is important that stakeholders understand their role and the extent of their influence in the decision-making processes; this should be communicated as early in the process as possible.

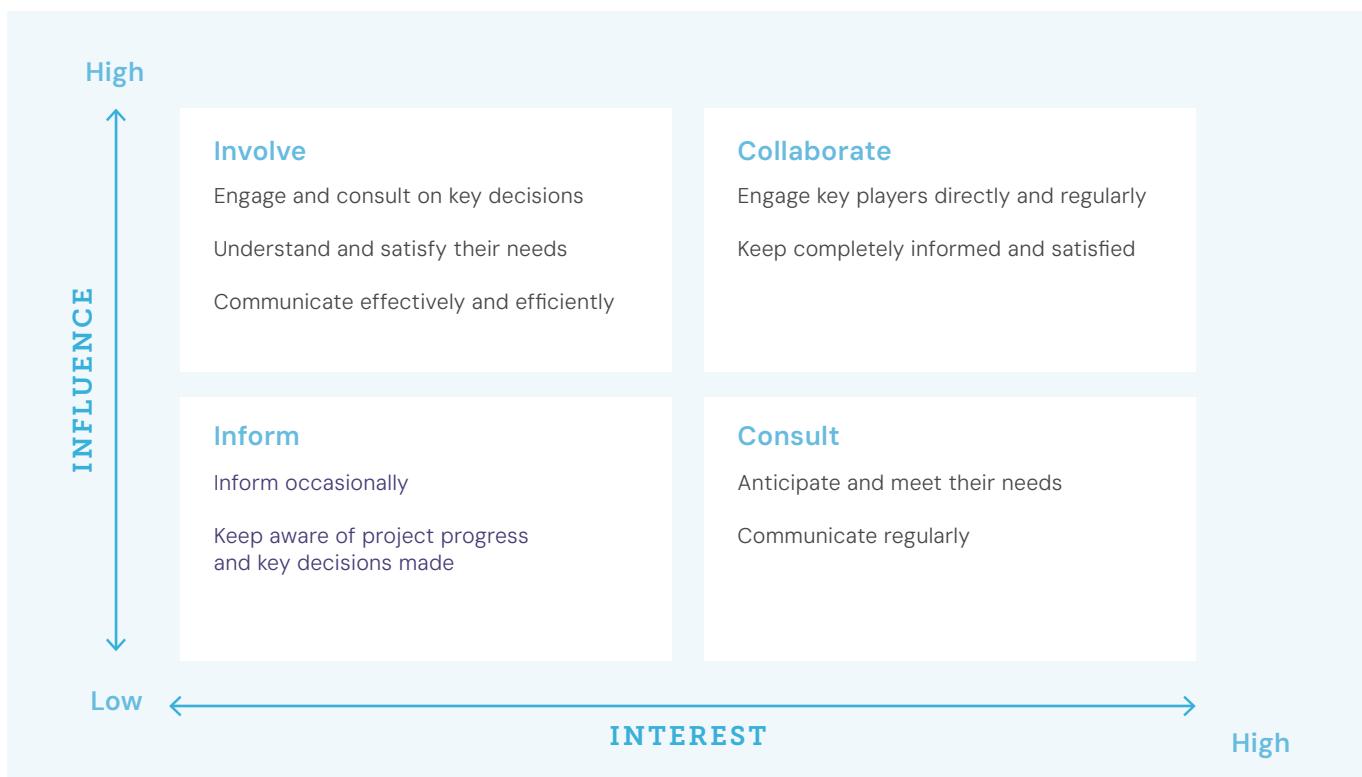


Figure 1. Stakeholder mapping exercise (adapted from MPA Fisheries Management Toolkit (2020))¹⁰

¹⁰ MPA Fisheries Management Toolkit (2020) : <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/mpa-fisheries-management-toolkit/>

Mapping stakeholders based on their influence and interest helps to determine which individuals or organisations are the most important to engage with.

This is important for:

- **Resource Allocation:** helps allocate resources (time, budget) more efficiently.
- **Risk Management:** helps in identifying potential risks and challenges associated with specific groups. Concerns and interests of key stakeholders can be proactively addressed mitigating risks before they become major problems.
- **Communication Strategy:** Facilitates the adaptation of communication approaches to suit diverse stakeholder groups.

Enhances cultural and linguistic inclusivity by ensuring translation services and provision of accessible materials, such as large-print documents and audio translations.

It is recommended best practice that any identified marginalised groups have direct channels of communication to decision-making bodies and that there

is a participatory feedback mechanism to ensure their concerns are considered in the decision-making process.

- **Decision-Making:** not all stakeholders carry the same weight. By prioritising stakeholders, decision-makers can consider the perspectives and preferences of those who are most critical to the success of the project.
- **Building Relationships:** allows for a more focused approach to relationship-building.
- By understanding the needs and expectations of key stakeholders, you can develop stronger, more collaborative relationships, fostering support and buy-in for the project.

Once stakeholders have been mapped, the specific needs of each group need to be

determined considering the different factors detailed in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Identification of stakeholder needs

1	Consider demographic, cultural, and social factors	Demographic factors	Age, gender, education level, and socio-economic status can influence stakeholder views and behaviours. Tailor your engagement strategies to accommodate these differences.
		Cultural factors	Be mindful of cultural norms, values, and traditions that may affect stakeholder participation. Ensure respect and sensitivity in all engagement activities.
		Social factors	Consider social dynamics, such as community leadership structures and historical contexts that may impact stakeholder engagement.
2	Understand stakeholder needs and expectations	Surveys	Distribute questionnaires to gather quantitative data on stakeholder views, needs, and expectations.
		Interviews	Conduct one-on-one or small group interviews to collect in-depth qualitative information.
		Focus groups	Organise focus group discussions to understand diverse perspectives and foster dialogue among different stakeholder groups.

This process is essential for understanding how different stakeholders prefer to receive information and engage, whether through meetings, emails, social media, community gatherings, or digital platforms. It is important

to consider GEDSI principles including factors like accessibility, familiarity with technology, and cultural norms when selecting engagement methods, ensuring that the most appropriate approach is used for each group (Figure 2).

Gender	Socio-Economic	Disability	Other
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culturally sensitive • Use of female engagement terms • Focus group discussions • Timings of meetings • Care considerations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory planning (alternative engagement options) • Face to face consultations • Timings of meetings • Repeat/recurring engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multifaceted participatory approach • Alternative engagement options • Face to face participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age inclusion and representation of older and younger groups. • Other minority groups • Isolated communities

Figure 2. GEDSI principles involved in stakeholder mapping and communication

2.4 Step 4: Choose your engagement methods

Once you have a clear picture of your stakeholder profile, you can select the most suitable methods to engage them in decision-making. You should aim for a mix of methods that cater to the different learning styles, preferences, and capacities of your stakeholders identified in the previous step. You can also use online, offline, or hybrid platforms to facilitate dialogue and collaboration.

Managing expectations is critical in ensuring successful engagement, and clearly setting out boundaries is important. All engagement methods have strengths and weaknesses, so the important

thing is to choose the right one for the particular purpose and context.

Table 5 suggests some suitable methods for achieving each level of engagement; further details are provided in Annex 4. More than one method may be selected for any given engagement and different methods may be used together.

It is important to ensure that engagement processes are inclusive and safe, incorporating multiple engagement formats including in-person, online, informal consultations, safe consultation venues.

Table 5. Levels of stakeholder engagement and suitable engagement methods

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
<p>Informal discussions and conversations</p> <p>Printed information (e.g. fact sheets, newsletters, bulletins)</p> <p>Websites</p> <p>Press and media</p> <p>Social media</p> <p>Public presentations</p> <p>Community events / open days / exhibitions</p>	<p>Public meetings</p> <p>Workshops</p> <p>Surveys / questionnaires</p> <p>Consultations</p>	<p>Workshops</p> <p>Multi-stakeholder forums</p> <p>Focus groups</p>	<p>Workshops</p> <p>Focus groups</p> <p>Advisory boards</p> <p>Consensus building</p> <p>Task and finish groups</p>

2.5 Step 5: Create your stakeholder engagement plan

Once you have identified your stakeholders, determined the level of engagement and identified appropriate methods, you need to start planning the engagement process, considering the full list of activities you plan to conduct.

As part of your stakeholder engagement plan you should follow the process set out in Table 6 below. This will allow consideration of whether the planned methods are realistic

and appropriate for delivering the desired outcomes, and that the proposed timing will enable stakeholders to engage in proposals at the most appropriate time. Advice on stakeholder engagement timeframes and budgets is provided in Annex 5.

Additionally, in cases where stakeholder engagement is conducted through a consultancy, it is important to ensure the stakeholder engagement plan is designed and agreed in advance by the Ministry using the outlined engagement methods.

Table 6. Planning the engagement process

1	Define Activities	List all engagement activities planned, considering the level of engagement and engagement needed for each stakeholder group.
2	Estimate Costs	<p>Time: Allocate time for planning, execution, and follow-up for each activity.</p> <p>Money: Budget for resources, materials, venue hire, travel expenses, and any compensation for stakeholder participation.</p>
3	Assign Responsibilities	<p>Identify an Engagement Coordinator who has overall responsibility for the engagement process.</p> <p>Identify team members and allocate specific tasks such as communications, logistics, facilitation, and data analysis.</p>
4	Set Realistic Timeframes	<p>Develop a timeline for each engagement activity.</p> <p>Ensure sufficient time for planning, execution, and stakeholder feedback.</p>
5	Monitor and Evaluate	Set evaluation metrics: define how success will be measured, such as levels of participation, quality of feedback, and stakeholder satisfaction.

2.6 Step 6: Implement your stakeholder engagement plan

Once your stakeholder engagement plan is developed, the next critical stage is implementation. If done correctly your plan will provide a clear roadmap for engaging with stakeholders by detailing who should be involved, when, and how.

Suggested steps for implementation are provided in Table 7 below; this will ensure that all necessary parties, particularly marginalised groups, are included in a systematic and strategic manner. Annex 4 details the different types of stakeholder engagement methods.

Consistent and transparent engagement develops trust, allowing stakeholders to feel valued, respected, and confident that their voices are being heard, which leads to stronger relationships and long-term cooperation.

The stakeholder engagement plan establishes a framework for tracking engagement efforts, making it easier to assess whether agreed-upon methods and timelines are being followed, which helps maintain accountability.

The plan also incorporates mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating engagement activities, gathering feedback from stakeholders to assess the effectiveness of the engagement.

Regular evaluation ensures that the engagement remains relevant, adapts to feedback and new challenges, and continues to meet the needs of both the stakeholders and the project.

Following any period of engagement activity, it is recommended to produce an engagement report to communicate with stakeholders. The engagement report is an opportunity to thank stakeholders for their input, share progress and outputs and inform them of the next steps, including the next engagement opportunity.

This feedback following stakeholder engagement is often overlooked and does require some resource to complete.

However, it should be considered an investment in the process and will build trust and better working relationships with stakeholders as the project progresses.

Table 7. Implementation process of stakeholder engagement plan

1	Planning stakeholder engagement events: (ensure inclusivity)	<p>Use the plan to ensure you have included the right stakeholders and to agree on specific techniques to use during the event.</p> <p>Plan for culturally sensitive approaches and accessibility.</p> <p>Use female engagement teams where appropriate and safe to do so, provide language support, schedule convenient meeting times, and offer childcare services if needed.</p> <p>Consider training for stakeholders to ensure they can proactively engage with the process.</p>
2	Planning consultation processes	Ensure comprehensive and inclusive consultations.
3	Establishing ground rules	<p>Set clear expectations for respect, honesty, and confidentiality</p> <p>Foster learning opportunities: create space for stakeholders of different ages to share perspectives and skills.</p>
4	Developing communications materials	Use the plan to guide the creation of announcements on progress, the publication of new reports, or any significant updates
5	Promoting collaboration	Encourage co-creation of solutions that leverage diverse strengths
6	Developing annual work plans:	Develop the plan to help in planning staff time and budgets for the year, ensuring resources are allocated appropriately for engagement activities.

2.7 Step 7: Monitor and evaluate your stakeholder engagement plan

Monitoring and evaluating stakeholder engagement is crucial to ensuring that the process is effective, inclusive, and responsive to stakeholder needs.

The evaluation approach depends on whether the focus is on assessing the effectiveness of

the engagement process itself or the impact of the engagement on project outcomes. The use of specific indicators allows for the measurement and evaluation of progress toward achieving successful stakeholder engagement.

It is recommended that co-ordinators use feedback forms and stakeholder surveys as a key method for monitoring and continually improving engagement processes. These allow stakeholders to provide insights into

their experience with the engagement, help to identify areas for improvement and ensure that the process remains adaptive to their needs. Analysis of the results of these evaluations should be used to revise stakeholder engagement moving forwards, ensuring that it remains fit for purpose, resulting in better project outcomes and more engaged stakeholders.

INDICATORS

To effectively track the progress and outcomes of stakeholder engagement, specific, measurable indicators are essential. These indicators can be divided into quantitative and qualitative measures to provide a comprehensive evaluation of both the process and its impact (see Table 8).

- **Quantitative Indicators:** Number of stakeholders engaged, number of meetings or events held, response rates to surveys. It is recommended that collected data is disaggregated by gender, age, disability and socio-economic background to measure engagement impact.
- **Qualitative Indicators:** Stakeholder satisfaction, perceived inclusivity, quality of feedback, changes in stakeholder attitudes or behaviours; qualitative metrics can also be used to capture the lived experiences of marginalised groups which is important during the process of PA designation or management.

Table 8. Suggested indicators that could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of your stakeholders engagement plan

High-level indicator	Indicator type	Examples of specific indicators	Suggested methods for evaluation
Communication and information dissemination to stakeholders	Process	Number of communications materials produced and shared with stakeholders	Number of communications materials produced and shared with stakeholders
Involvement of communities and stakeholders in management activities	Process	Number of responses received to consultations	Responses to informal / formal consultations noting the number of individuals (disaggregated by gender, age, disability and socio-economic background)
Local understanding of rules and regulations	Outcome	% of respondents who are aware of the PA regulations	Stakeholder questionnaire (households / key informant groups) (disaggregated by gender, age, disability and socio-economic background)
Level of stakeholder participation	Outcome	Number of respondents who are satisfied with the level of engagement	Stakeholder questionnaire Workshop feedback forms (disaggregated by gender, age, disability and socio-economic background)

It may be necessary to collect some baseline data before the engagement begins, to have data to compare against; this is particularly important if you want to understand whether

the engagement has brought about a change in stakeholder understanding or awareness (see Table 9).

Table 9. Data collection and analysis

1	Data collection methods	Surveys and questionnaires	Collect feedback from stakeholders before and after engagement activities.	
		Interviews and focus groups	Gather in-depth insights from key stakeholders.	
		Observations	Record observations during engagement activities to assess participation and interaction.	
		Feedback forms	Provide opportunities for stakeholders to share their thoughts and suggestions.	
2	Data sources	Event attendance records		
		Meeting minutes		
		Communication logs (emails, social media interactions)		
		Feedback and evaluation forms from before and after meetings		
3	Timeline	Establish a schedule for data collection, analysis, and reporting.	Pre-engagement baseline assessment	
			Post-event evaluations	
			Quarterly or biannual reviews	
			Annual summary reports	
4	Collect data	Implement your data collection methods consistently across all engagement activities		
5	Analyse data	Use quantitative methods (statistical analysis) to evaluate numerical data.		
		Use qualitative methods (thematic analysis) to identify patterns and themes.		

Table 9. Data collection and analysis (continued)

6	Compare Against Indicators <i>(Assess the collected data against your predefined indicators to determine if objectives are being met)</i>	Internal reporting	Share findings with your team to inform ongoing and future engagement strategies
		External reporting	Communicate outcomes and progress to stakeholders through newsletters, reports, and meetings.
		Visual aids	Use charts, graphs, and infographics to present data clearly and effectively.
7	Adjust and improve	Identify gaps	Determine areas where engagement did not meet objectives or where stakeholder feedback indicates room for improvement.
		Implement changes	Adjust your engagement strategies and methods based on evaluation findings.
		Continuous improvement	Regularly update and refine your stakeholder engagement plan to reflect lessons learned and evolving stakeholder needs.
8	Feedback	Ensure stakeholders know how their feedback has been used and what changes have been made as a result.	Keep stakeholders informed about ongoing developments and future engagement opportunities.

CASE STUDY: Canada's Integrated Marine Spatial Planning Approach

Canada has adopted an Integrated Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Strategy to institutionalise stakeholder engagement in ocean governance. The approach involves multi-sectoral stakeholder platforms where government agencies, Indigenous groups, fisheries organisations, local businesses, and environmental NGOs collaborate on marine conservation and resource-use policies.

One of the key features of this model is the co-design of marine management policies, where communities are not just consulted but

given active decision-making power. To ensure GESI considerations are mainstreamed, Canada's MSP strategy requires gender-disaggregated data collection, leadership training for underrepresented groups, and inclusive consultation mechanisms that consider barriers such as language, financial constraints, and accessibility.

Additionally, Canada has strict SEAH safeguarding requirements, including mandatory ethics training for marine conservation stakeholders and transparent SEAH response frameworks. This example illustrates how institutionalised stakeholder engagement can enhance equity, accountability, and long-term sustainability in marine conservation.

Reference: Canada's Integrated Marine Spatial Planning Approach

03 – Useful Resources

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04 – Technical Annexes

Annex 1: Stakeholder Questionnaire

Stakeholder Engagement Form

SECTION A:

1: Stakeholder Information:

- Full Name:
- Organisation (if applicable):
- Role/Position:
- Contact Information:
 - Phone:
 - Email:
 - Preferred Method of Contact: Phone Email Other
- Location/Region:
- Primary Language(s) Spoken:
- Do you require communication in Dhivehi or any other language?
 Yes No If yes, please specify:

2: Accessibility and Engagement Preferences

- Preferred Meeting Format:
 In-Person Online Hybrid No Preference
- Do you require any accommodations (e.g., wheelchair access, sign language interpretation)?
 Yes No If yes, please specify:
- Are there specific days/times that work best for you due to work patterns, caring responsibilities, or other commitments?
 Yes No If yes, please specify:
- Do you have any caring responsibilities (e.g., children, elderly relatives)?
 Yes No If yes, please specify:

- What engagement methods would best support your involvement (e.g., workshops, focus groups, one-on-one meetings)?

SECTION A: Additional Comments

- Please provide any additional information or considerations that would help us ensure an inclusive and accessible engagement process:

SECTION B: (OPTIONAL)

1: Demographic Information:

- **Gender:** Male Female Non-Binary Prefer Not to Say Other
- **Age Group:** Under 18 18-30 31-50 51+
- **Level of Education:**
 No Formal Education Primary Secondary Higher Education
- **Cultural Background/Ethnicity:**
- **Do you have any disabilities or hidden disabilities that we should consider?**
 Yes No If yes, please specify:

2: Inclusion and Representation:

- Do you belong to any historically underrepresented or disadvantaged group (e.g., women in non-traditional marine roles, migrant fisher communities, persons with disabilities)?
 Yes No If yes, please specify:
- Do you feel that your community is adequately represented in decision-making processes?
 Yes No
If no, what barriers do you face in participating?
.....

Consent and Agreement

I consent to the collection of my information for the purpose of stakeholder engagement and understand that my responses will be used to improve inclusivity and accessibility in decision-making processes.

Signature: Date:

Annex 2: Stakeholder Engagement Plan Template

PURPOSE

This section should clearly set out the purpose of the stakeholder engagement as defined in Section 2.1 above.

OBJECTIVES

This section should define the specific objectives of the stakeholder engagement. Some examples are included below for reference:

- Create a legitimate and transparent process by engaging stakeholders in decision-making.
- Build awareness of the benefits of the proposal amongst stakeholders and the wider public and encourage a sense of ownership.
- Use the input and local knowledge of stakeholders to gain a better understanding of their perceptions and interests.
- Develop a shared understanding about the challenges and opportunities of the plan, project or decision (proposal).
- Assess the feasibility of the plan, project or decision by engagement of relevant stakeholders.
- Build trust among stakeholders to encourage voluntary compliance with rules and regulations.

HOW THIS PLAN WILL BE USED

This section should explain how the stakeholder engagement plan will be used. Some examples are provided below for reference::

- Develop stakeholder engagement activities to enable effective design, designation and management of plans or projects in the Maldives, by effectively incorporating stakeholders' views.
- Develop stakeholder engagement activities to enable the right stakeholders to be involved at the right time in the process to develop a sense of ownership.

- Develop appropriate communication materials to raise awareness amongst the wider public about the plan or project.
- Ensure that stakeholder engagement activities are inclusive and accessible to all.

WHO TO ENGAGE

This section should list all the stakeholders identified through the processes described in Section 2.2.

It should also include stakeholder mapping as described in Section 2.3 to ensure that the engagement methods used are tailored to suit individual groups and local contexts.

HOW TO ENGAGE

This section should describe the proposed engagement methods for the different levels of engagement.

This should be determined through stakeholder mapping and identification of needs as described in Section 2.3.

The different methods listed in Section 2.4 (and described in more detail in Annex 4) can be used to help identify the most appropriate ones to use for the particular project and local context.

More than one method may be selected for any given engagement and different methods may be used together.

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate

WHEN TO ENGAGE

This section should include an action plan setting out who will be engaged with, how and when. It is recommended that this action plan is reviewed and updated on an annual basis to reflect changing priorities for stakeholder engagement.

The first two rows of the table below have been completed as an example.

Activity	Level of Engagement	Purpose of Engagement	Stakeholder Category(ies)	Engagement Methods	Responsibility	Indicators of Success	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Review and revise PA Conservation Action Plan (CAP)	Inform	To provide people with information to assist their understanding of why the MMP is being revised and how	General public International NGOs	Newspaper article Radio interview Posts on Social Media	PA Management Authority	Number of communications materials produced and shared with stakeholders												
	Collaborate	To bring people together to jointly review and revise the MMP	Fishers Marine tour operators Diver operators	Workshops	PA Management Authority	% of respondents who are satisfied with the revised CAP												

MEASURING SUCCESS

This section should set out how success is suggested that this is done on an annual basis at a minimum. of the stakeholder engagement plan will be assessed and the period for review using the process set out in Section 2.7;

Annex 3: Engagement Checklist

	Activity	Tick once complete
1. Define the purpose of your engagement	Geographic Scope [Define the Area] Rationale for Engagement Desired Outcomes Scope and Context Key Issues	
2. Identify your stakeholders and identify their needs	Identify stakeholders [List Stakeholders] Stakeholder mapping Consider demographic, cultural, and social factors: Understand stakeholder needs and expectations: Consider any barriers to engagement [language, logistical, economic, cultural, awareness, exclusion, disability]	
3. Engagement Methods	Identify different engagement methods to be used	
4. Engagement Plan	Draft the stakeholder engagement plan	
5. Implement Your Stakeholder Engagement Plan	Plan stakeholder engagement events Plan consultation processes Establish ground rules and consider engagement principles (informed consent; confidentiality; representation and diversity; acknowledgement and compensation) Develop Communications Materials Promote Collaboration Develop Annual Work Plans	
6. Monitor and evaluate your stakeholder engagement plan	Determine relevant indicators Determine appropriate data collection methods, sources and timeline Collect data Analyse data Compare against indicators Feedback Revise stakeholder engagement plan as required	

Annex 4: Engagement methods

A4.1 INFORM

The 'Inform' level of stakeholder engagement does not actually provide the opportunity for stakeholder participation at all but instead provides stakeholders with the information they need to understand the decision-making process.

COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS

Materials such as newsletters, newspaper articles, websites or social media can be used to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders.

Any printed materials should be kept short and to the point and avoid technical language. Where possible, they should be printed in Dhivehi and should include contact names and numbers to help encourage further engagement.

However, it is important to note that written materials may not be the preferred method of engagement for some individuals. Additional ways to communicate might be using short films and social media reels.

These can also create an interactive element whereby views and opinions can be shared online, or the short films can be used to make others aware of the project.

COMMUNITY EVENTS, OPEN DAYS AND EXHIBITIONS

Community events provide a fun occasion that will attract people of all ages and backgrounds. These events therefore provide different opportunities to inform and engage a wide range of stakeholders at one time, including people you might normally not engage with; it can also create interest from the local media.

Open days offer opportunities for local stakeholders to see behind the scenes and understand what you do. It provides the opportunity for them to talk to staff, find out information, ask questions and discuss local issues in an informal way; it may also provide an opportunity for them to give feedback on new plans or proposals.

Attendance, however, is very difficult to predict and it may be difficult to determine how representative any feedback received is unless stakeholder information is gathered at the time the feedback is given.

Exhibitions and other display methods can be taken out to where people are, such as schools or shops, rather than having to attract people to them. They can also appeal to groups, such as young people, who may not respond as well to other engagement methods.

The visual aspect of exhibitions means that some ideas can be more easily communicated, and they can be used to gather immediate reactions.

A4.2 CONSULT

The 'Consult' level of stakeholder engagement is the basic minimum opportunity for stakeholder input to a decision. In this case, the PA management authority would ask the public for their opinions and consider the input it receives when it makes the decision.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Public meetings are generally used for information giving but provide an opportunity for questions and further discussion at the end. Public meetings provide a face-to-face approach to awareness raising and consultation.

They can enable you to engage with stakeholders at once and allow a wide range of different viewpoints to be aired.

TARGETED STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

Targeted stakeholder meetings are also generally used for information giving but to a specific group of stakeholders.

These meetings provide an informal, face-to-face opportunity for awareness-raising that enables stakeholders to ask questions and voice their opinions and can be valuable if specific or marginalised groups needs are to be accommodated.

These can be valuable where particular marginalised groups can share their initial views.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Questionnaires are useful tools for gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. They can be given out as paper forms, sent electronically, or shared online. They might also be part of an interactive display. If the people responding to the questionnaire represent the general public, the results can give insight into broader public opinions. It is important that questionnaires are non-technical, ensure concession are made for older or younger readers, a range of literacy levels and are produced in accessible languages.

Another way to approach this, where appropriate, is to use different questionnaires with tailored questions for use with certain groups, or to develop one part of a questionnaire which can be answered by different groups using different pathways within a survey.

Questionnaires can also be anonymous and serve to help in gathering feedback from many people about new ideas or projects. However, because they focus on simple questions and answers, it can be hard to understand the reasons behind people's responses, which can make it harder to fully interpret the results, especially when it is not possible to follow up with the respondent.

One way of partly addressing this is to include open ended questions as well as closed questions which enable respondents to elaborate on their answers. However, not all respondents will choose to elaborate on their answers and even when they do, there is no mechanism for following up with any

further questions where more clarity is needed.

When determining how many stakeholders to engage with using a questionnaire, it is important to consider the purpose of the data collection, and the diversity of views required to gain meaningful insights. Individuals can be selected at random, or questionnaires can be more focussed on specific groups. The number of questionnaires should be sufficient to accurately represent the range of perspectives relevant to the project.

It will depend on whether you want to understand the broad views of the whole community or particular issues within a specific group of stakeholders. A larger sample size will more accurately represent the wider community but can have time and budget implications.

Generally, a minimum ratio of 10% of the community is advised to ensure representativeness of the sample.¹¹ For more focussed questionnaires, smaller sample sizes (e.g. 5 to 30 participants) are more appropriate.

ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

Online engagement tools mean that people can participate in their own time without having to travel to meetings or workshops. As a result, a large number of stakeholders can provide direct input and express their opinion with relative ease and little cost. These tools are particularly useful for engaging with international stakeholders for whom face-to-face engagement methods would be impossible. They also work well for people who feel intimated

by speaking in public. Online engagement methods can include questionnaires, polling or online forums where people can interact, discuss issues and share ideas.

These tools will however exclude people who do not have internet access. They can also require time and effort to respond to comments on forums or analyse information provided through surveys and polls, and simple question and answer responses can make it difficult to understand why people responded the way they did, limiting meaningful interpretation of the data.

FORMAL CONSULTATION

Formal consultation is generally used for gaining stakeholder views on already formulated ideas or proposals and is the method most commonly used by government departments and official bodies. Consultation documents are usually posted on websites or placed in public buildings with a request for comment. It is important to give advanced warning of the consultation and to allow sufficient time for the stakeholders to respond.

This process can provide both quantitative and qualitative data on the level of support for the proposal. The size and detail of many official proposals may, however, dissuade some stakeholders from responding, and the responses may not necessarily come from those stakeholders who will be affected by the proposals.

There are also options available that can be explored to facilitate stakeholder responses, including running a stakeholder "surgery" where

¹¹ Mohanasundaram, S.S.T. and Harsha, P.B.H. (2024). Selecting the Right Sample Size: Methods and Considerations for Social Science Researchers. International Journal of Business and Management Invention, 2319 – 8028

officials can help individuals fill in their online responses; this method ensures inclusivity allowing for individuals without access to information online to submit a response.

A4.3 INVOLVE

The 'Involve' level of stakeholder engagement is more thorough than a consultation. Stakeholders are invited to participate in the process and are provided with multiple, if not ongoing, opportunities for input into the decision-making process. The PA management authority is, however, still the decision-maker and there is no expectation of building consensus or providing stakeholders with any sort of high-level influence over the decision.

FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups provide a useful way of exploring a topic in depth with small groups of people (around six to twelve people). Focus groups can be used to obtain information about people's preferences and values and allow people to build on each other's ideas and can therefore generate a lot of qualitative information in a short period of time.

They can be useful in gaining opinions from people who may not respond to other methods. The design of the focus group meeting should allow participants to speak openly and develop ideas.

Focus groups need to be carefully facilitated to avoid certain people dominating the group. Focus groups work well with individuals who know and work with each other already; they are not an effective means of addressing

conflicting interests. Furthermore, only the views of those present are obtained which may not be representative of wider stakeholders.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops provide a way of exploring a topic with a larger number of stakeholders. They can help the group to understand and explore complex issues and can help to build relationships between diverse groups of stakeholders. An effective workshop requires advanced planning and design, including identification of the desired objectives and outcome of the workshop. It is helpful to provide any workshop materials to participants well in advance.

Workshops that are well facilitated are more effective at achieving their intended outcomes. Facilitators must remain neutral on the workshop topics and should guide the participants to help make sure that the workshop's objectives are met, encourage participation, and where possible foster agreement on key decisions.

The design of the workshop may employ a variety of participative techniques, either to seek views and level of support for existing proposals, or for visioning and generating new ideas. Using a range of different techniques during a workshop is important as different people prefer to participate in different ways: some people prefer more visual approaches; other people will only talk in small groups and others will not talk unless called on.

Individual participants should always be given the opportunity to write down their thoughts on a particular question so that everyone can think at their own pace and is able to share their

opinions without feeling intimidated. Encouraging people to move around the room for different activities and the use of visual aids (for example short videos) and simple props (for example stickers, Post-it notes, cut-out fish) can help people to stay energised and engaged in the process. Some useful participative techniques that can be used during stakeholder workshops are detailed below.

Developing a Vision:

While many stakeholders' interests may at first appear to contradict one another, in reality they often want the same thing in terms of a healthy marine environment and abundant marine resources. It can therefore be helpful to start a workshop by focussing on developing a shared vision for the future. This can help to build trust and a willingness for different stakeholder groups to then work together.

Visioning can be very useful for PA management planning; it can provide a means to understand what different stakeholders want the PA to actually achieve in the long-term. Stakeholders can be asked to write or draw on sticky notes / pieces of paper what they hope their marine environment will be like in 10 years' time. These ideas can then be used to identify key themes to start developing management aims and objectives.

Mentimeter:

Mentimeter is an online tool used to create interactive presentations, polls, quizzes, and surveys. It provides workshop facilitators an opportunity to engage with their audience in real time by letting them participate through their smartphones or other devices. Through audience participation it provides the presenter

with the audience's responses immediately, allowing for live interaction and feedback.

This makes it easier to gauge the audience's opinions, preferences, or understanding of a topic. While also capturing the thoughts and opinions of individuals that want to engage anonymously.

Carousel:

Participants are assigned to groups (with the same number of groups as there are stations) and given a fixed time to contribute to one station before being rotated to the next. If each group is given its own coloured pen, it is possible for participants to see which ideas were contributed by previous groups. When a group reaches a new station, they are given time to read the ideas of the previous group and can then build on the previous contributions.

As the activity continues, it becomes increasingly difficult for groups to add new points, so the time per station can be decreased. This method gives everyone a good idea of what has been contributed by other participants.

This is a useful technique for producing lists, for example, the different threats affecting the marine environment, or what stakeholders value about the marine environment. It can also be used to investigate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (i.e. a SWOT analysis) of existing PA management.

Ranking:

This can be used to place ideas in rank order. Getting consensus amongst different stakeholders for a particular ranking can be challenging, although this can stimulate

some very useful discussions. In terms of PA management planning, this technique can be useful for identifying the main threats to the PA. The list of threats identified by stakeholders can be ranked, taking into consideration their likelihood and consequence so that discussions around management actions can then be focussed on the most important threats.

Brainstorming:

This can help to quickly identify initial ideas from a group. By getting participants to think rapidly and express their ideas in short phrases, the technique encourages participants to use 'blue sky thinking' and suggest things that might not immediately seem achievable.

Many of the ideas might not be useable, but there may be a number of new and innovative ideas that may not have been thought of that can be further developed later. This technique can be useful in PA management planning to suggest potential management actions to minimise threats to the marine environment and address current management gaps.

Prioritisation:

This allows stakeholders to express the strength of their feeling towards a particular option. In prioritisation exercises, participants are given some form of counter that they can assign to different options (e.g. stickers, coloured sticky notes).

Participants are normally given a fixed number of counters / sticky dots (at minimum this should be the same number as the number of options) but are able to assign as many of their counters as they want to the different options.

This allows the facilitator to identify which ideas are preferred by the participants. In PA management planning, this technique can be useful for determining which of the proposed management actions are likely to be most acceptable to the majority of stakeholders.

Participatory mapping:

This is a useful technique that is widely used around the world. It is an interactive approach that draws on stakeholders' knowledge of their local environment. Small groups of stakeholders are provided with a map of their environment and asked to mark information on the map.

This technique can be used to gather local knowledge about where important habitats and species occur or to identify areas such as potential spawning sites or breeding areas. It can be used to map where different human activities take place within the marine environment; this can be helpful for understanding potential conflicts between different stakeholder groups where a particular area might have value for different groups for different reasons.

This technique can also be very useful when thinking about zoning or introducing spatial closures to understand how these might impact on stakeholders' use of the marine environment and to identify areas that are acceptable to the majority.

Theory of change:

This technique maps the relationship between a long-term goal of a project and the intermediate and early changes that are needed to bring it about. It is useful for developing a common vision and developing a clear map for how the goal will be achieved that is agreed upon by

all stakeholders. It is usually developed using a backwards mapping approach, which starts with identifying the long-term goal of your project i.e. the long-term difference you want to see happen.

Next, work backwards from the goal to think about the different outcomes that are needed to achieve this long-term goal. This might include outputs, which are short-term products or processes occurring during the life of the project.

The steps can be displayed in an outcome framework that shows the relationship between the short, intermediate and long-term outcomes over time (pathway to change).

In PA management planning, it can be useful to identify the different management actions that are needed to achieve your objectives and ultimately your vision.

Cause-effect mapping / root-cause analysis / threat analysis:

This is an approach that helps stakeholders answer the question of why a particular issue occurred in the first place, so that the most effective solutions can be identified. It is a useful technique to use at the start of a project.

For each issue that has been identified by the group, stakeholders are asked to identify the direct or immediate causes of the issue, the underlying causes and then finally the root causes in the form of a problem tree (or spider diagram). The next step in the process is identified by asking the question 'Why?' and repeating this process until eventually the root cause is revealed.

In PA management planning it can be useful for determining appropriate management actions to ensure that they address both the direct and indirect causes of the issue.

A4.4 COLLABORATE

At the 'Collaborate' level of stakeholder engagement, stakeholders are directly engaged in decision-making. Collaborate may include an attempt to find consensus solutions but the PA management authority is still the ultimate decision-maker. It is important that the degree to which consensus will be sought and how much say in the final decision the management authority is willing to give stakeholders is made explicit at the start of the process.

ADVISORY BOARDS / TECHNICAL WORKING GROUPS

An advisory board, technical working group or similar is a formal stakeholder-based group consisting of representatives from different user groups, government agencies, interest groups and local communities.

The role of a formal advisory board is to provide advice to the PA management authority on the operation of the PA and/or on addressing management issues.

Boards generally meet on a regular basis, allowing members to develop a detailed knowledge of the issues and to understand other perspectives to come to a single recommendation. It is important to make sure that the board membership is balanced and represents all relevant stakeholder groups.

Advisory boards must be given a meaningful role in the decision-making process to avoid stakeholders becoming disillusioned. It is, however, important to make the group or board aware that although recommendations can be made, all decisions on management or designation of PAs will be made by the relevant government ministry.

Advisory boards can be very time intensive which may mean that some stakeholders lose interest, so it will be important for members to be aware of the time commitment required. It may be helpful to establish Terms of Reference to set out the aims and purpose of the advisory board or working group, and the roles, responsibilities and requirements placed on members.

CONSENSUS-BUILDING

Consensus-building is a decision-making process which aims to identify mutually beneficial outcomes amongst stakeholders with a wide range of different interests. It should only be used where the outcome of the process will be respected and followed through by the PA management authority.

The approach uses facilitators trained in consensus-building to design and deliver a process to suit the local situation. The process generally involves a sequence of workshops separated by time for information gathering.

Workshop sessions employ a variety of techniques to gain information from participants, explore issues, develop ideas and identify priorities. This technique aims to find win-win outcomes and identify an agreed

way forward. This provides transparency in decision-making, helps build relationships and develops ownership of the outcome amongst stakeholders.

The process can, however, take a long period of time and so stakeholders need to be made aware of the time commitment required.

Annex 5: Advice on stakeholder engagement timeframes and budgets

The duration of a stakeholder engagement plan can vary widely depending on the project's scope, complexity, and specific requirements. Some example timeframes and estimated budgets are set out in Table A5.1 below.

Table A5.1 Example timeframes and budgets for stakeholder engagement activities

Duration	Example	Budget
Short-term Projects	These typically last from a few weeks to a few months. Examples include small-scale campaigns or community events	£5,000 to £20,000
Medium-term Projects	These can span several months to a year. Examples include developing or implementing a new management practice for PAs	£20,000 to £100,000
Long-term Projects	These projects can last several years, such as large infrastructure projects or identification and designation of Biosphere reserves	£100,000 to £500,000+

These estimates can vary based on factors such as the number of stakeholders involved, the methods of engagement used, and the specific goals of the project.

A5.1 STATUTORY CONSULTATION PERIODS

Statutory consultation periods can vary significantly, they can be influenced by the scale or complexity of the project, the number of stakeholders needed to be engaged with the government jurisdictions: The durations can be adjusted based on the urgency, complexity, and potential impact of the proposed changes.

In line with the Environmental Protection and Preservation Act of Maldives (Law No. 4/93) The public has a period of **10 working days** to submit comments on the report.

After the public consultation period and the completion of the review process, the ministry has **28 days** to issue an Environmental Decision Statement. This statement determines whether the project can proceed and under what conditions.

Ocean Country
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Best Practice Guidance for Stakeholder Engagement for Maldives' Marine Protected Areas



Ministry of Tourism and Environment
Republic of Maldives



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