

SOUTH ARI MARINE PROTECTED AREA: GUIDE EXAMINATION STUDY MATERIAL

Version 3

This version is an updated version of “South Ari Marine Protected Area: Guide Examination Study Material V2”.

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Section 1: Introduction to the document

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

1. The decree of Protection of South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)- (IUL)438-ENV/438/2025/16)
2. The SAMPA Management Plan developed under the Protected Area Regulation (2018/R-78) WDPA-ID-55556579/2025/V1
3. First Amendment to the SAMPA Management Plan - WDPA-ID-55556579/2025/V2
4. Second Amendment to the SAMPA Management Plan - WDPA-ID-55556579/2025/V3
5. Whale Shark Interaction Guidelines under the Protected Species Regulation (2021/R-25), amendment 7 (2024/R-96).

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

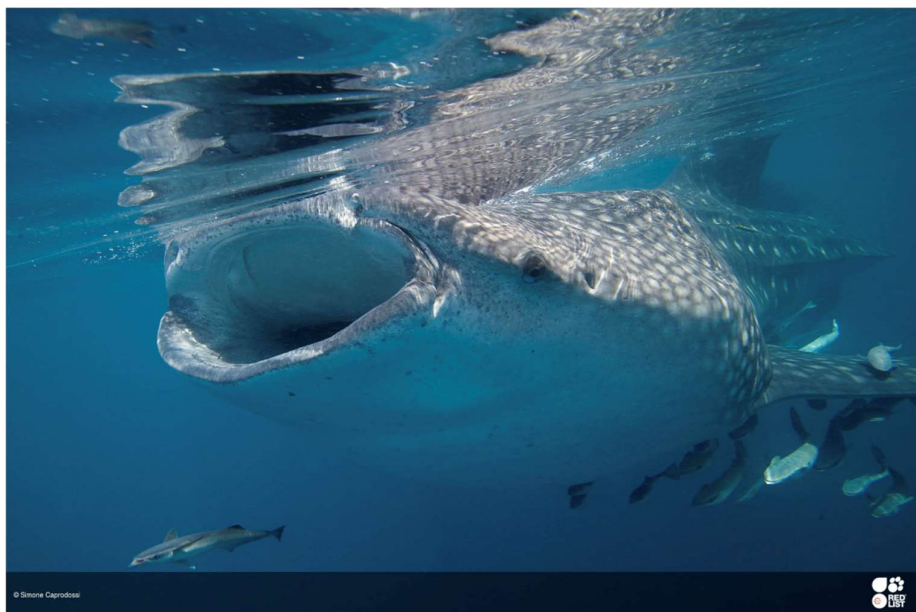
This is a document prepared to help SAMPA Guides prepare for the licensing exam of the Environmental Regulatory Authority, as per the SAMPA management plan.

Section 2: The Gentle Giants of SAMPA

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

- Common Name: Whale Shark
- Scientific Name : *Rhincodon typus*
- Dhivehi Name: ފެހު ރިހި / Fehu Rihi

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



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

- Common Name: Reef Manta Ray
- Scientific Name : *Mobula Alfredi*
- Dhivehi Name: ެރުމަދު/ *En Madi*

According to the IUCN Redlist Global Assessment, manta rays are classified as 'vulnerable' and the population shows a declining population trend.



Section 3: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Decree of protection

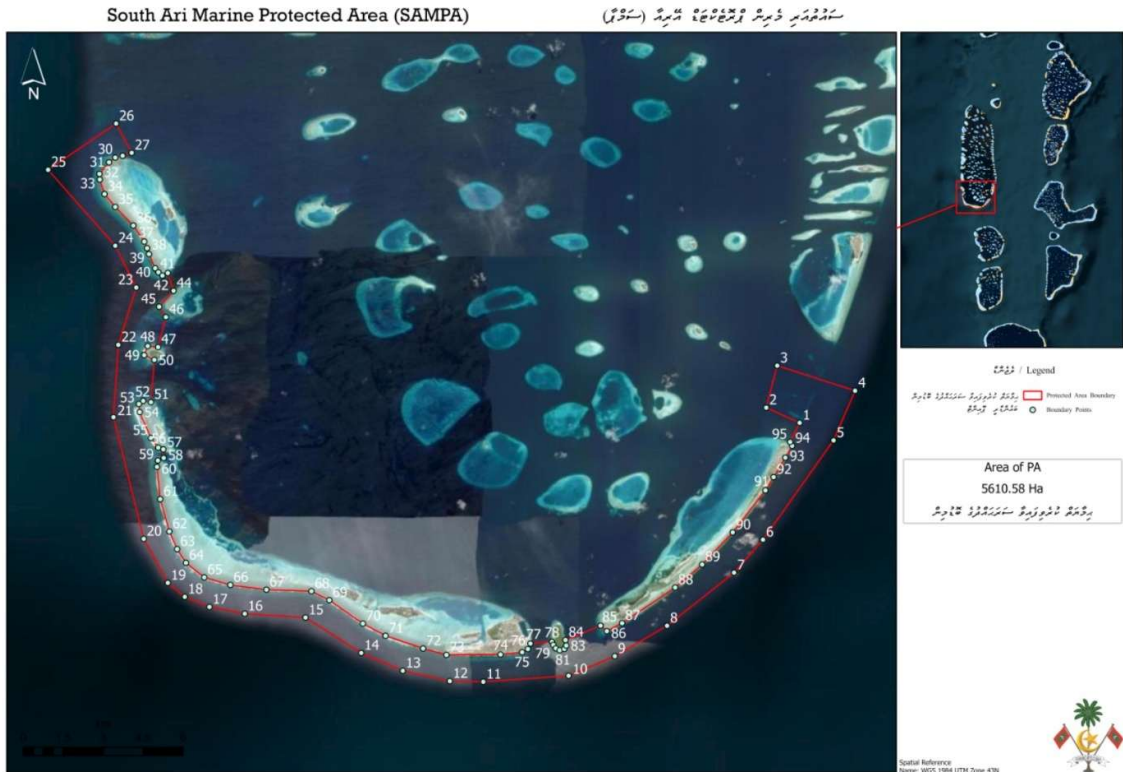
When was SAMPA declared as a protected area?

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

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

What is the boundary of SAMPA?

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



What is the Category of Protection of SAMPA

There are 7 Categories of Protection under the Protected Area Regulation (2018/R-78) of the Maldives.

- Category 1: Internationally recognized areas
- Category 2: Strict Nature Reserve
- Category 3: Wilderness Areas
- Category 4: National Parks
- Category 5: Natural Monument
- Category 6: Habitat/Species Management area
- Category 7: Protected Area with Sustainable Use

SAMPA is protected under **Category 7: Protected Area with Sustainable Use**.

Why was SAMPA declared a Protected Area?

SAMPA is the largest protected area in the Maldives (5610.58 hectares) representing one of the world's most significant sites for whale sharks. Whale sharks in SAMPA are present all-year round, and to date, more than 726 individual whale sharks have been sighted within the Marine Protected Area (MPA), with many returning frequently to the area leading to more than 8000 encounters, (Big Fish Network,2024). This makes it probable that this area has the highest re-sighting rate of individual whale sharks in the world. Most sightings in the areas are (72.5%) male sex bias.

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

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

What activities are prohibited in the area?

The following activities are prohibited in the SAMPA area

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

Section 4: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan General information

What is the purpose of the management plan?

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

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

What is the governance and enforcement mechanism for SAMPA?

The SAMPA management plan will be co-managed by the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy and the Environmental Regulatory Authority together with SAMPA Guardians.

In this co-management, the responsibilities of Ministry are:

1. Managing the area and determining the policies for the management of the protected area
2. Establishment, repair and maintenance of the facilities required to manage the protected area.
3. Recruiting and training the human resource needed to manage the area including rangers

4. Monitoring, surveillance, and patrolling the SAMPA region.
5. Chair the Advisory Committee and perform the responsibilities of the Secretariat of the South Ari Marine Protected Area Advisory Committee.
6. Screening the SAMPA Guardians and providing the necessary training to these individuals.
7. Compiling, publishing and keeping an up-to-date registry of SAMPA Guardians.
8. Providing all necessary training and capacity building for “SAMPA Guides” and “SAMPA Crew” involved in vessel operations such as captains and crew members
9. Developing, managing, and maintaining a portal or website for issuing access permits and other authorizations under the management plan.
10. Establishing and maintaining a hotline for users of this area to contact.
11. Awareness and outreach regarding the protected area
12. Assessing management plan effectiveness of the protected areas at least once every 5 years
13. Revising the management plan based on management effectiveness

In this co-management the responsibilities of ERA are:

1. Ensure that the objectives of the management plan are achieved in accordance with the objectives of protecting this area. Also, ensure that there is an appropriate mechanism in place for managing the protected area, and evaluate whether the protected area is being managed adequately.
2. Investigating and taking action against any person who violates the rules and management plans in the protected area.
3. Registration of vessels engaged in snorkelling and diving activities in this area, and issue flags for use by these parties when operating in this area. Also, compile and publish a registry of registered vessels.
4. Register, compile, and publicize a directory of captains and crew members (SAMPA Crew) operating vessels engaged in snorkelling and diving activities in the area
5. Facilitating necessary examinations required for the guides operating in the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) and issuing certificates for the guides. Additionally, compile and publicize a list of certified guides.
6. Issuing permits for research in the area
7. Issue permits related to restoration and rehabilitation activities conducted in this area.
8. Issue permits for photography and videography in this area

In this co-management the responsibilities of SAMPA guardians are:

1. Support rangers on the field and in the absence of rangers to patrol the area
2. Advise users within this area to comply with the management plan in the absence of on-site ranger
3. Report any violation of the Management Plan and Regulation No. R-78/2018 (Protected Areas Regulation) to the Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA)
4. Notify the agency regarding any changes or activity that alters the natural environment of the Marine Protected Area (MPA), including any unintentional detrimental impacts to the MPA must be reported to the Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA)

Who is a SAMPA Guardian?

SAMPA Guardians are resource users of SAMPA that are registered as SAMPA Guides at ERA. Only those who achieve a minimum score percentage of 90% in the SAMPA Guide Examination can become

a Guardian. SAMPA Guardians must be a Maldivian and must be a frequent user within the area that is familiar with the management plan. They are volunteers helping rangers on site and are responsible for reminding users regarding the code of conduct in the absence of rangers. Guardians are also expected to report non-compliance to ERA. Guardians will be trained by the Ministry and ERA regarding their responsibilities and will be screened by the Ministry.

What is the role of the Advisory Committee of SAMPA?

The roles of the SAMPA Advisory Committee are:

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

The composition of the advisory committee are:

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

What is the role of rangers in SAMPA management?

Rangers will be patrolling the site, advising on compliance and reporting to ERA regarding non-compliance for the enforcement of the rules, regulations and Management Plan of SAMPA.

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

Section 5: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Vessels

What vessels should be registered?

The first phase of the management plan will regulate the vessels used for snorkelling and diving only. Therefore, all vessels using the SAMPA for snorkelling and diving should register at ERA before 31st July 2025.

The link for vessel registration is given below:

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

The registered vessels will receive a flag set from ERA to identify and organise themselves in the contact zone. The flag set consists of one flag to be used when diving and another flag for snorkelling. Flags will be distributed as follows:

- 1 (one) flag set per resort or the dive centre of the resort
- 1 (one flag) set per safari

Do all vessels need propeller guard?

Yes, Propeller guards is mandatory for ALL vessels operating within SAMPA for snorkelling and diving.

Vessels operating for the purpose of snorkelling and diving must install propeller guards by 30th June 2026. After this date only vessels with jet engines or propeller guards may operate within the area for snorkelling or diving purposes.

What is the speed limit for vessels operating in SAMPA?

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

Distance / Area		Maximum Speed	
Meters (m)	Feet (ft)	Nautical mile (knots) per hour (knots/hr)	Kilometer per hour (km/hr)
Within the SAMPA boundary	Within the SAMPA boundary	10	18.5
Within a contact zone 250 m around megafauna	Within a contact zone: 820.2 ft around megafauna	5	9.3
Within 50m of a megafauna	Within 164 ft of a megafauna	2	2
Megafauna closer than 15m	Megafauna closer than 49.2ft	Gear neutral	Gear neutral

What is a contact zone?

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

How many vessels are allowed in SAMPA within a contact zone?

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

How will 5 vessels in the contact zone be monitored or organized?

- Step 1: The FIRST vessel that observes the whale shark or other megafauna should inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300. For queuing purposes, priority shall be given to the FIRST vessel that notifies the rangers, followed by the nearest vessels based on live location tracking.
- Step 2: The FIRST vessel that observes the whale shark or other megafauna should indicate their sighting by displaying the flag issued by ERA
- Step 3: The 4 vessels closest to the FIRST vessel can inform rangers and display their flags.

The rangers on site will observe the queue of vessels through Telegram Live location shared by the vessels.

- Step 4: The number of persons entering the water from a vessel with the contact zone is limited to a maximum of 60 persons in total.
- Step 5: The people in water must not exceed a duration of 15 minutes for snorkelling and freediving, if there are other vessels queuing to view the megafauna.

What is the permit procedure for visiting SAMPA?

- Step 1: Users holding a permit to enter the area must inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300 or protected area website page linked below:
<https://protectedareas.environment.gov.mv/en/protected-areas/south-ari-marine-park-sampa>
Bookings should be done for snorkelling and diving in the area
- Step 2: Share live location with the ranger hotline using Telegram while travelling in SAMPA boundary

What is the code of conduct for operating a vessel in SAMPA?

A vessel operating in the SAMPA should follow the following code of conduct:

- Vessel should not go above a whale shark under any circumstance
- When a vessel encounters a whale shark, the vessel should not block the direction of travel of the whale shark. And the vessel should change the direction of travel to give way to the whale shark
- As whale sharks are sensitive to light, it is prohibited to use any lights within areas where whale sharks are commonly sighted, unless for safety purposes. Apart from lights needed for safety, the use of lighting devices within these areas is prohibited between 6pm and 6am.
- Light pooling to attract whale sharks is prohibited.
- Vessels in the contact zone must maintain a distance of at least 15 metres from the nearest whale shark. Should a whale shark swim towards a vessel to within 15 metres, all engines

should be in neutral or switched off until the whale shark has moved more than 15 metres away from the vessel.

- Vessels should maintain 25 meters between other vessels.
- Vessels less than 10 feet in size should not operate in a contact zone.
- In the contact zone, vessels should 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.

Section 6: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Captain and Crew

What is the requirement that should be fulfilled by captains and crews operating a vessel in SAMPA for snorkeling and diving?

The captains and crew operating a vessel in SAMPA for snorkelling and diving are called “SAMPA Crew” in the management plan. Captains and crew of vessels operating within SAMPA for snorkelling and diving purposes should fulfil the following requirements and register at ERA s before 31st July 2025:

1. Must be familiar with the management of SAMPA. It is the responsibility of those 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. 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).

Is there an exam for captains and crews?

No. Participation in an awareness session/familiarizing themselves with the SAMPA management plan and other related materials is sufficient for SAMPA crew registration.

Section 7: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Guides

What is the requirement that should be fulfilled by SAMPA Guides?

The guides taking tourist to SAMPA for snorkelling and diving are called “SAMPA Guides” in the management plan. SAMPA Guides should be certified by the ERA and should fulfil the following requirements

- Pass the SAMPA Guide exam provided by the ERA. The dates and location of exam will be announced on social media pages @pcamaldives on Instagram. Requests for guide exam can also be mailed to SAMPa@environment.gov.mv.
- Must be familiar with the SAMPA management plan.
- Must have a valid Emergency First Response Certification.
- Must be certified by PADI, SSI or equivalent organisation as a Rescue Diver.

Is there an exam for SAMPA Guides?

Yes. The Guides must pass the exam to be a certified SAMPA Guide. The exam will have the content in this study material that is a simplified compilation of all formal documents such as the SAMPA management plan, the decree of protection of SAMPA and Whale Shark Interaction Guidelines under the Protected Species Regulation.

Does the SAMPA Guides have to participate in the awareness sessions?

It is not mandatory. However, as awareness sessions and guide exams will be held on the same dates and locations, it will be helpful to SAMPA Guides to prepare for the exams.

What is the expiry date of a SAMPA Guide certificate?

Three (3) years.

Guides must redo the exam after three (3) years and submit valid certifications for EFR and rescue dive after three years.

How many tourists can a SAMPA Guide take for megafauna watching?

The guide to tourist ratio is 1:6

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

What is the responsibility of a SAMPA guide?

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

Section 8: Whale Shark interaction Guidelines

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

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

- a. A person in the sea must always maintain a distance of at least 3 metres from the head or body of the whale shark, when approaching a whale 4 metres from the tail of the whale shark
- b. A person must not touch or ride on, or attempt to touch or ride, a whale shark under any circumstance
- c. Must not deliberately cross in front of the whale shark's direction of travel or impede its movement.
- d. Must not deliberately cross in front of the whale shark's direction of travel or impede its movement.
- e. When approaching a whale shark, a person must approach slowly and from the sides of the whale shark so that the whale shark can see the person approaching. A person must not impede the direction of the whale shark
- f. If a person encounters a whale shark from below, while in the water, a person must maintain a distance of at least 20 meters. It is not allowed to swim closer than this to a whale shark from above. This is to allow the whale shark to swim upwards and to not hinder its thermoregulation process. In this case when a person wants to observe the whale shark, the person must step back and follow the distances described in (a) and from behind the whale shark.

- g. Feeding whale sharks is not allowed. Feeding whale sharks will have negative impacts on its natural filter feeding behaviour.
- h. Since whale sharks are sensitive to light, use of flash photography or other sorts of lights near its head is not allowed. Lights such as this could result in startling behaviour and for whale sharks to disorient and lose its sense of direction
- i. Light pooling is not allowed to attract whale sharks
- j. A person in the sea must not use a motorized or otherwise powered device capable of towing or carrying a person while snorkelling or swimming near whale sharks
- k. All activities should be conducted as quietly as possible in the proximity of a whale shark. Care should be taken to reduce noise levels when entering the water and when engaging in activities in the water. Aggressive flapping motions and loud movements should be avoided.
- l. If entering the water by jumping into the water from a boat, care should be taken to avoid doing so in a way that is noisy.
- m. Using a motorized or otherwise powered swimming or diving aid in a contact zone is prohibited. The use of any device capable of towing or carrying a person, that is towed behind a vessel, in a contact zone.

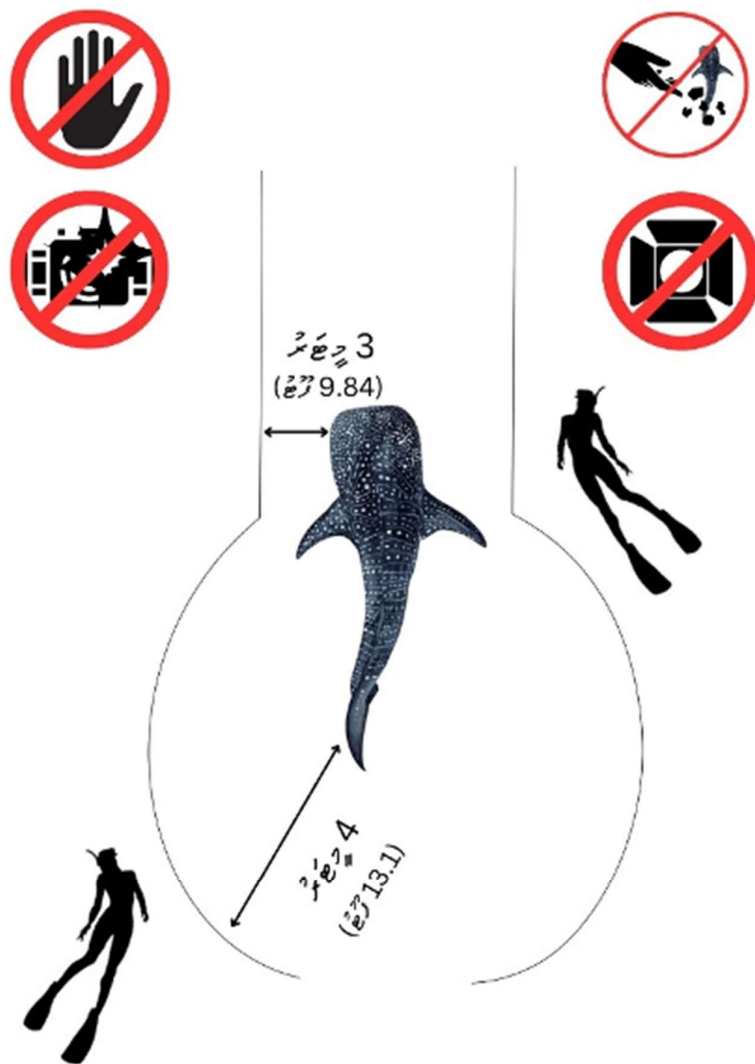


Figure 1: Graphical Summary of Whale Shark Encounter Guideline

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

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

- a. Permission should be obtained before visiting the area for snorkeling and diving.
 - Step 1: Inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300 or protected area website page linked below: <https://protectedareas.environment.gov.mv/en/protected-areas/south-ari-marine-park-sampa>

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

Section 9: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Scuba Diving

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

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

- a. Permission should be obtained before visiting the area scuba diving.
 - Step 1: Inform SAMPA ranger hotline 7448300 or protected area website page linked below:
<https://protectedareas.environment.gov.mv/en/protected-areas/south-ari-marine-park-sampa>

Bookings should be done for diving in the area

- Step 2: Inform in the rangers' the estimated time and planned zones for scuba diving
- Step 3: Share live location with the ranger hotline using Telegram while travelling in SAMPA boundary
- b. For the safety of scuba divers, planned scuba diving zones should not coincide with the general seasonal zones used for snorkeling and free diving activities and zones where vessels are actively engaging in snorkel and free diving should be avoided.
- c. If a megafauna such as whale shark is sighted within the planned scuba dive zone, it shall be considered as an “opportunistic sighting”. Scuba divers shall not chase after the megafauna in such cases and shall maintain the distances identified above for whale shark interactions.
- d. Scuba divers should inform rangers of information regarding megafauna sightings after the dive. This data will be used to ecological monitoring of the site
- e. Night diving activities should not use flash photography or lights with intensity that can attract whale sharks.

Section 10: Guideline for Guidelines for when an injured or sick whale shark is encountered.

- a. If a live whale shark is caught in fishing gear, ropes, mooring lines or ghost nets, report this to the Rangers/ERA immediately and note the location of the incident.
- b. Two people could work together to free any whale shark caught in fishing gear or other such debris or gear using a knife or sharp instrument. Care should be taken to not harm the whale shark while freeing it.

- c. The drifting object should be brought to land. And where possible should be taken to a waste management center.
- d. A whale shark injured due to a boat strike or due to natural circumstances should be left alone to heal on its own in its natural environment. Injured whale sharks should not be touched or taken to any facilities.
- e. Any incidences should be reported to the Agency as soon as possible. The location of the incident and information about the whale shark should be relayed (along with photos and videos where possible).
- f. If a whale shark is seen trapped on the reef, in the lagoon or near the harbour of an island for more than two (2) hours, this should be reported to the Agency. In such situations, it is not allowed for individuals or groups to go in the water to rescue the whale shark. It is also recommended to limit the movement of vessels in the area and give way for the whale shark to move.

Section 11: Guideline for encountering a dead whale shark or a whale shark that has been killed

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

Section 12: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Fishing

Is fishing allowed in the SAMPA area?

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

- Anchoring in the contact zone is prohibited
- Light pooling is prohibited
- If a whale shark is attracted to a light being used for the purpose of fishing, the light must be turned off, and bait fishing activities should be moved to a different location.

Section 13: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Research

What is the procedure for conducting research in SAMPA?

- Research in the area shall be carried out with the written permit from the Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA).
- No research in this area shall be used for commercial gain.

- The research granted permission to conduct research is not exempt from all laws and regulations of the Maldives.
- This permission can only be used for research in the South Ari Marine Protected Area. The researching party must obtain separate permission to take photographs and videos in this area
- After completing the research in this area, the results of the research shall be submitted to the agency within 1 (one) month. Further permission will be granted to those who do not submit these findings only after submitting the results of the research conducted under the previous permission to the Authority.
- Parties who have been granted permission to conduct research in this area must have permit issued to them visible at all times.
- Only those individuals whose names are written on the permission issued by the ERA can participate in conducting research activities in this area.
- If the purpose of the research in this area is violated, the research permit will be revoked.

Section 14: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Restoration and Rehabilitation

What is the procedure for conducting restoration and rehabilitation activities in SAMPA?

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

Section 15: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Photography and Videography

What is the procedure for undertaking photography and videography in SAMPA?

- A permit from the Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA) is required for commercial use photography or videography within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
- The drone permit from Ministry of Defence shall be submitted while applying for the commercial photography permit from ERA
- Parties who have been granted permission to undertake commercial photography and videography in this area must have permit issued to them visible at all times
- Only individuals that have their names mentioned on the permit issued by the Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA) may engage in photography or videography in this area.
- The party with commercial photography and/or videography permit is not except from obtaining visiting permit and/or research permits
- Rangers and SAMPA Guardians have the authority to take photos and videos for the purpose of managing the area.

What will be considered as commercial photography and videography?

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

What is the maximum number of drones that can be operated in the area?

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 are not included in this limit. [What is the general code of conduct for operating drones in the area?](#)

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

Are selfie sticks allowed in whale shark watching?

Use of selfie sticks or other similar products that could disturb or distress the whale sharks are not allowed near them.

Section 16: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Closure of the area

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

Section 17: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Fees

Are there any fees for accessing SAMPA?

No fees are being charged at the moment.

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

Section 18: South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA): Management Plan – Penalties

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

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SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS

1. When was the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) declared as a Protected Area?
 - a. 5th June 2009
 - b. 5th June 2008
 - c. 5th July 2009
 - d. 5th July 2019

2. Whale shark related tourism activities can be conducted during which time?
 - a. 6 am to 12 pm
 - b. 6 am to 6 pm
 - c. 12 pm to 6 pm
 - d. 8 am to 6 pm

3. What is the contact zone around a whale shark?
 - a. 200m around the whale shark
 - b. 250m around the whale shark
 - c. 150m around the whale shark
 - d. 50m around the whale shark

4. What is the minimum distance that should be kept from the tail of the whale shark?
 - a. 2m
 - b. 3m
 - c. 4m
 - d. 5m

5. What is the minimum distance that should be kept from the body of the whale shark?
 - a. 2m
 - b. 3m
 - c. 4m
 - d. 5m

6. What is the scientific name of the whale shark?
 - a. *Rhincodon typus*
 - b. *Galeocerdo cuvier*
 - c. *Physeter macrocephalus*
 - d. *Alopias vulpinus*

7. Is the whale shark a shark or a whale?
 - a. A whale
 - b. A shark
 - c. Both
 - d. None of the above

8. Vessels operating within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) shall not exceed above:
 - a. 5 knots
 - b. 10 knots

- c. 20 knots
 - d. 30 knots
9. Vessels within contact zone shall not exceed a speed of:
- a. 5 knots
 - b. 10 knots
 - c. 15 knots
 - d. 20 knots
10. Within 50m around a whale shark, vessels shall not exceed a speed of:
- a. 1 knot
 - b. 2 knots
 - c. 5 knots
 - d. 6 knots
11. Tour guides have the authority to touch the whale shark as part of the excursions.
- a. True
 - b. False
12. What is the biggest Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Maldives?
- a. AA. Rasdhoo-Madivaru Area
 - b. South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)
 - c. B. Hanifaru Region
 - d. K. Thanburudhoo Region
13. What is the area of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)?
- a. 40 km²
 - b. 41 km²
 - c. 42 km²
 - d. 50 km²
14. Light pooling to attract marine species such as whale sharks are prohibited within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
- a. True
 - b. False
15. Vessels less than 10ft with engines can operate in the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
- a. True
 - b. False
16. Introduction of non-native species is allowed within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
- a. True
 - b. False
17. What are the four local islands next to the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) Boundary?

- a. Maamigili, Dhihdhoo, Mahibadhoo, Dhigurah
 - b. Fenfushi, Maamigili, Dhangethj, Dhigurah
 - c. Dhihdhoo, Fenfushi, Maamigili, Dhigurah
 - d. Mandhoo, Fenfushi, Dhihdhoo, Dhigurah
18. Underwater flash photography is allowed within the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA).
- a. True
 - b. False
19. Research in the area shall be carried out without the written permit from the Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA)
- a. True
 - b. False
20. How many National Protected Area Categories are there?
- a. 6
 - b. 7
 - c. 8
 - d. 9
21. What is the Protected Area Category of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA)?
- a. Category 1- Internationally recognized areas
 - b. Category 2- Strict Nature Reserve
 - c. Category 6- Habitat/Species Management Area
 - d. Category 7- Protected areas with Sustainable Use
22. What is the correct boundary of the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) from below:
- a. 3 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. 2 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between southwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhigurah Island reef
 - c. 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
 - d. 1 km seaward from the reef crest of all islands between southwest corner of Rangali Island Reef to the northern tip of Dhihdoo Island reef
23. How many protected areas are located in South Ari Atoll?
- a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
24. Currently, how many South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) Rangers are there?
- a. 2
 - b. 3
 - c. 4
 - d. 5

25. What is the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) globally and nationally significant for?
- Year-round whale shark aggregation
 - Year-round manta aggregation
 - Both
 - None of the above
26. Contact vessels must maintain a distance of at least ___ metres from the nearest whale shark.
- 5m
 - 10m
 - 15m
 - 20m
27. Should a whale shark swim towards a vessel, to within 15 metres, all engines should not be in neutral or switched off until the shark has moved more than 15 metres away from the vessel.
- True
 - False
28. Certified guides for the South Ari Marine Protected Area (SAMPA) are responsible for:
- Taking as many visitors as possible in water to swim with the whale shark in any circumstance.
 - Making sure the visitors get to touch the whale shark to provide a good experience for the visitor.
 - Make sure the visitors can get closer than 2m to the whale shark to view the whale shark properly.
 - Informing users of the area regarding the wildlife within the area and the rules for using the area, to give proper briefing regarding the code of conduct and the whale shark conservation guidelines.
29. How many vessels (including the ranger vessel) are allowed within the contact zone at once.
- 6
 - 4
 - 10
 - 8
30. Propeller guards are mandatory for vessels operating within SAMPA for snorkelling and diving purposes.
- True
 - False