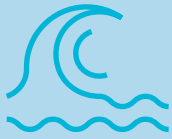




Ocean Country
Partnership
Programme (OCPP)
Interim Evaluation
Maldives
Case Study - summary

Department for Food,
Environment, and Rural Affairs
June 2024

About the OCPP



The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. Funding is provided through the overarching Blue Planet Fund (BPF) by the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

NIRAS is the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) supplier contracted by Defra. Their work under the banner of OCPP-MEL covers a broad range of activities including process and impact evaluations, MEL system strengthening, support for communications, learning and monitoring throughout the lifetime of the programme, as well as conduct of ad hoc evaluation assignments at the request of Defra.

This document is one of five result summaries based on country case studies conducted as part of the interim evaluation. The others include Belize, Ghana, Mozambique and Sri Lanka.

OCPP Delivery Partners in the Maldives

OCPP has been engaged in Maldives since FY 2021/22. The programme's bilateral partnerships are delivered by three British government Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs):

Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
 Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
 Marine Management Organisation (MMO)

The Global Ocean Accounting Partnership (GOAP) is delivering technical assistance to the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy (MoCCEE) through a service provision agreement with GOAP's host the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

Together, these partners work closely with the Government of the Maldives to support the effective management of their marine environment and are focused on providing demand-led technical assistance on marine biodiversity and marine pollution.

Acknowledgements

This case study was prepared by Johan van Duijn and Charlie Dryden. They would like to acknowledge and thank the OCPP Country Coordinator who actively supported the case study, despite its late adoption and tight deadline.



Marine
Management
Organisation

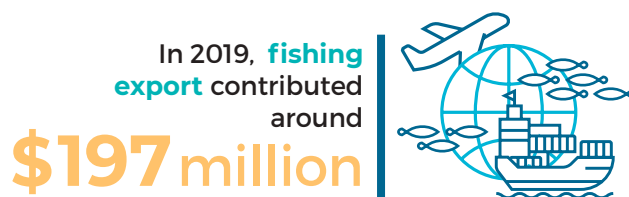
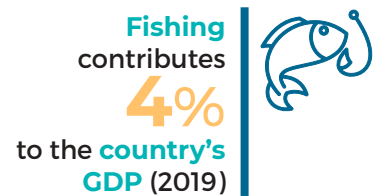
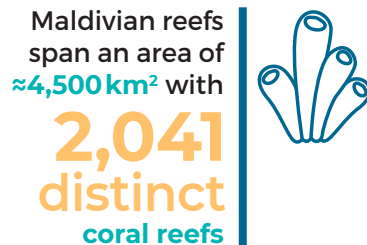
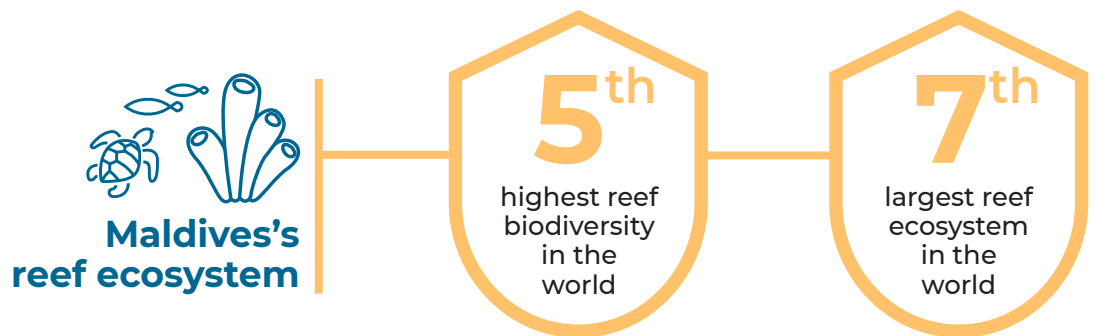


Findings at a glance



- OCPP's work on marine biodiversity has become central to the Maldivian government's protected and conservation area (PCA) management efforts and international conservation commitments.
- The programme is strategically combining capacity building and technical assistance to advance policy and regulatory development.
- The programme is well-suited to the Maldives and has a high chance of leaving a lasting legacy for biodiversity management in the country.
- OCPP maximises efficiency by working closely with the Ministry of Climate Change, Environment and Energy (MoCCEE), producing guidance and providing resources that support long-term sustainability.
- Limitations include unclear plans to address poverty and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), with assumptions rather than concrete outcomes.
- The short workplan cycle limits deeper engagement with stakeholders and focuses on 'low-hanging fruit' rather than projects that require higher levels of investment.
- Concerns exist about the sustainability of the marine protected areas (MPA) website which needs resources and expertise that are currently not available within the MoCCEE.

The Maldive's ocean environment



Seeking long term change to the Maldivian marine environment



Coastal tourism and fisheries are two of the main drivers of economic growth in the Maldives, illustrating the country's intrinsic connection and dependence on a healthy marine environment. However, the government has limited financial and human resources and capacity to effectively manage marine biodiversity and address marine pollution. In addition, there is a lack of underpinning policies and management frameworks to guide their activities.¹

OCPP's ambitions lie in addressing these issues by improving policies and regulations before moving towards enhanced collaborative action by stakeholders to manage and protect their marine environments effectively and sustainably. The long term outcome of OCPP in the Maldives is that partners can better address the challenges to their marine environments and biodiversity, enhance marine dependent livelihoods, and the wellbeing of those that depend on them, sustainably, equitably and inclusively.

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) has identified three pathways through which programme can deliver change in the way these issues are addressed in the Maldives through the generation and use of scientific knowledge to better inform policymaking and action.²

- **Capacity building and technical assistance:** Providing expertise towards sustainable marine ecosystem science, management and emergency response and better marine environment monitoring.
- **Governance and regulation:** Supporting the creation of evidence-informed policies, frameworks and plans for sustainable marine ecosystem management (including natural capital accounting and models for inclusive local marine ecosystem governance), governance and budgeting.
- **Science, education and knowledge exchange:** Conducting study pilots and environmental and needs assessments and facilitating cross-sector collaboration to enhance knowledge sharing, learning and innovation and the development of educational resources.



GOAP and the University of New South Wales are working together to help improve government agencies' understanding of natural capital and ecosystem services and how they are utilised by local communities and sea users. In addition to supporting agencies to conduct ocean accounting, GOAP has also supported development of a coral ecosystem account and a seagrass ecosystem access account.

¹ OCPP Maldives Annual Review, October 2022.

² Identified as 'causal pathways' and aligned with OCPP's programme level Theory of Change which was refreshed with support from the NIRAS MEL team in 2023.

Key findings



The interim evaluation of the Maldives involved a deep dive investigation into the design and implementation quality of the programme from its start in 2021 until the end of May 2024. Evaluators focused on the likelihood of the programme achieving its intended outcomes and impact and identify early indications of its contributions.

Meeting the Maldives' needs



Successes and strengths

- OCPP has identified key gaps through Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) assessments and worked with in-country partners to ensure programme activities meet the country's marine needs.
- Effective management of protected and conservation areas (PCAs) support commitments of the Government of the Maldives towards the conservation of marine ecosystems and biodiversity.
- OCPP frameworks are strategic, incorporating capacity building and examples to guide the programme and others taking processes forward.
- Stakeholders perceive OCPP to be distinct from other donor driven development projects due to its demand-led approach.



Areas for improvement

- Despite strong support for expanding the country's PCA network, limited capacity and resources in-country are hindering progress.
- The need for regulations and frameworks has been identified as a priority for the Government of the Maldives and the urgent need for such documents was confirmed by interviewees.



The National Management Plan Guidance for PCAs developed by OCPP was recognised by interviewees as a valuable tool for improving management effectiveness. It has been designed to be accessible to local managers and councils so that they can develop management plans for their own PCAs without relying on the central government. As the government undergoes a process of decentralisation for PCA management, this is a timely and much needed resource.






Coherence with others working in the same space

Successes and strengths

- OCPP is very well aligned with national policies and ongoing work by the government and other agencies.
- The ALBs and GOAP both plan and implement activities with MoCCEE and the Maldives National University (MNU) albeit with different departments and leads.
- OCPP aligns with the World Bank recommended pathways towards a more sustainable and resilient Blue Economy³.
- The ALBs brand their activities as OCPP and are recognised as such by stakeholders.

 OCPP is working closely with IUCN to incorporate its work on the Green List. It is also partnering with the Noo Raajje programme⁵, a coalition between the Government of the Maldives and the Blue Prosperity Coalition, to develop a nationwide marine spatial plan (MSP), including protecting 20 per cent of the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Areas for improvement

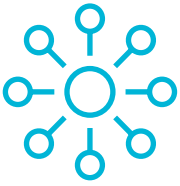
- Some stakeholders believe OCPP would have benefitted from more detailed initial scoping to better understand local policies, context and resource allocation work in the Maldives.
- Identifying stakeholders at the start of the programme was difficult, as was finding the right people within the ministries to work with.⁴



³ World Bank. 2024. "Maldives: Country Environmental Analysis. Towards a More Sustainable and Resilient Blue Economy". Washington DC, The World Bank Group

⁴ OCPP Stocktake May 2023

⁵ <https://www.noorajje.org/>



Use of resources



Successes and strengths

- OCPP implementation is efficient, delivering quality products in a timely manner. Many activities are conducted remotely and shared online and on social media.
- OCPP delivers programme activities in consultation with in-country partners, carefully coordinating field missions to serve multiple purposes and reduce their workload.
- Stakeholders praised OCPP for its coordination on marine biodiversity. They attributed this to responsive, effective communication, especially through preferred informal channels like WhatsApp instead of emails.



Areas for improvement

- OCPP and its partners do not formally engage with communities and community members, but a participatory inclusive approach is used for consultative activities such as planning.
- The approval processing period has been identified as a cause of inefficiency, leading to delays in implementation.
- Engaging communities in a gender equitable and socially inclusive (GESI) responsive way is challenging as it takes time to build trust. A government stakeholder noted that OCPP's annual planning cycles limit its ability to address this. Moreover, inequality has deep cultural roots and change requires long-term commitment led by the government.

OCPP's is working with local service providers to develop resources such as the MPA Handbook and awareness materials on MPAs. The development of course materials for the MPA management online training is a good example of multiple agencies working together, with OCPP leading with contributions from MNU, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the MoCCEE. The delivery of the course is also a joint effort.





Meeting programme objectives



Successes and strengths

- OCPP is producing PCA frameworks that will guide the government and other stakeholders in designing management plans without the need of major additional resources in the future. Key frameworks that are in development and/or nearing finalisation include: **the National Management Plan Guidance for Protected and Conserved Areas and SMART Management plan for Farikede Shark Point MPA and Hanifaru MPA.**
- OCPP was instrumental in developing MoCCEE’s website for protected areas that acts as a document repository as well as learning tool and place to book and pay for permits to visit MPAs and other sites.
- The programme has delivered significant progress– 75 percent of programme activities were delivered in FY 2023/24.
- The commitment and passion of the OCPP team has been praised by in-country stakeholders as a contributing factor towards their strong record of achievement around the biodiversity theme.



Areas for improvement

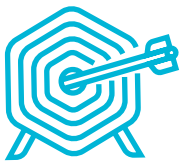
- The hiring of an in-country consultant to work on behalf of OCPP from the start of the programme in the Maldives may have led to better communication with in-country partners and local stakeholders.



Marine biodiversity: potential for change

The OCPP provided advice on Maldives National Framework for Management of Protected and Conserved Areas (2024 – 2029). OCPP led the development of the framework in consultation with key government officials. Before finalization the draft content was presented at the PCA forum to a broader audience of policy makers and protection practitioners from across the Maldives. This work has the potential for replication, as OCPP may opt to share the National Framework with countries in the region for potential adaptation.





Programme impact



Successes and strengths

- Key results achieved so far provide optimism that OCPP is on track to help the Maldives address marine and biodiversity challenges and improve marine-dependent livelihoods and wellbeing.
- In particular, the guidance documents and frameworks developed with the support of OCPP are likely to have a big impact on the management of PCAs, if implemented by tourist resorts or local government.



In collaboration with government stakeholders, the OCPP finalised the National MPA Research and Monitoring Framework. The Environmental Protection Agency has access to guiding principles on incorporating research and monitoring activities into MPA management plans and activities. Parallel to this a research and monitoring strategy is being developed for the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve as a pilot to support the development of the national strategy.



Areas for improvement

- Despite optimism surrounding the PCA frameworks, some stakeholders are sceptical about their effectiveness unless they are institutionalised or fully endorsed by the government.





Delivering lasting benefits



Successes and strengths

- The planning and monitoring frameworks developed by the OCPP are expected to be the legacy of the programme.
- Most OCPP outputs, such as the MPA management planning guide, have been designed to be used by local councils with minimal resources and without the need for a large budget.



The MPA management planning process has already been adopted by a local NGO contracted by the MoCCEE working in six MPAs in the Laamu Atoll.



Areas for improvement

- There are no exit strategies in place for OCPP's work in the Maldives or for individual activities. However, the plan is to hand over final products to the MoCCEE for distribution and promotion.



OCPP led the development of the National Framework for Management of Protected and Conserved Areas (2024 - 2029) in consultation with key government officials. This work has the potential for replication, as OCPP may opt to share the National Framework with countries in the region for potential adaptation.





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