

2025 ANNUAL REVIEW

PEOPLE AND OCEAN THRIVING TOGETHER



MALDIVES
**Resilient
Reefs**





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OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

As we celebrate the fifth anniversary of MRR, I am reminded of where we began and how far we have come together. Before MRR was registered as an NGO in 2020, we operated as a project of Blue Marine Foundation from 2016. Those early years were crucial in helping us understand the complex marine conservation landscape of the Maldives. MRR was born from the lessons we learned working alongside fishers, island communities, fellow NGOs, the private sector, and local and national governments. Through this experience, it became clear that lasting change requires long-term investment in strong local organisations. Building a new NGO is never easy. It demands commitment, resilience, and sustained funding. We remain deeply grateful to Blue Marine Foundation for trusting us, supporting our journey, and helping to establish MRR. Their support shows how international organisations can leave a meaningful and lasting legacy in the countries where they work.

Over the last five years, our organisation has grown from just one-person into a dedicated team of eight full-time staff, the majority of whom are Maldivian. Each year, our governance and operations have become stronger and more robust. We have piloted innovative solutions to tackle some of the biggest threats to our ocean and are now working to scale these efforts across the country. Our capacity for advocacy and campaigning continues to grow. While many of our campaigns have achieved their goals, others have reminded us that some challenges require longer-term, more strategic approaches if we are to address the growing pressures on our marine ecosystems and species.

The next five years will be defining for the future of our ocean. They will require focus, collaboration, and a clear strategy to ensure that our seas remain healthy and resilient to human impacts. The window to achieve the global 30x30 protection target is closing rapidly. We are therefore encouraged to be working closely with the Government of Maldives to develop a pathway to meet these goals and to support the designation of new Protected and Conserved Areas. We are also grateful to



Photo by Andy Ball

the resorts that have stepped forward to improve reef fisheries and conserve seagrass meadows, helping to lead the change needed across the tourism industry. Yet, beyond meeting global and national targets, there is still much to do: safeguarding the habitats that sustain life, improving fisheries management, especially for coral reef resources, to maintain ecosystem balance, and reducing pollution that flows from land to sea.

None of this would be possible without the support of our partners, donors, collaborators, and the communities who place their trust in us. I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has stood with MRR and believed in our mission. As we look to the future, we are committed to deepening our networks and partnerships so that, together, we can protect the Maldivian ocean for current and future generations.

Aminath Shaha Hashim
Executive Director

OUR PURPOSE AND STRATEGY

The future of our planet is inseparable from the future of our oceans. In the Maldives, life above and below the surface is deeply interconnected. Our coral reefs form the seventh-largest reef system in the world, are home to more than a quarter of the world's known hard coral species and nearly a fifth of all coral reef fish. These reefs support an extraordinary diversity of marine life, from sharks and rays to sea turtles. But for Maldivians, they are far more than vibrant underwater ecosystems. They are the very foundation of our islands, and act as natural barriers that protect our communities from the power of the ocean, while also sustaining livelihoods and cultural continuity for Maldivians. Healthy reefs and balanced fish populations are therefore essential to the well-being of both people and nature in the Maldives.

Maldives Resilient Reefs (MRR) is a Maldivian NGO working to ensure that Maldivians can continue to benefit from a healthy and well-managed ocean. We collaborate with island communities, fishers, other NGOs, and the private sector to inspire collective action for the Maldives marine environment. At the same time, we engage with local and national government institutions to strengthen policies and practices that prioritise the protection of the country's marine ecosystems.

OUR STRATEGIC FOCUS (2026–2030)



Vision: People and ocean thriving together.



Mission: Nurturing a future where Maldivians benefit from effectively protecting and managing the ocean.

Objective 1

Protection of biodiversity hotspots



Safeguard the Maldives' most important and vulnerable marine habitats through stronger policies, targeted protection measures, and science-led management.

Objective 2

Sustainable marine resource use



Support responsible fishing, tourism and coastal development practices that sustain livelihoods while protecting marine ecosystems.

OUR IMPACT TO DATE

**6**

newly identified/ proposed potential PCAs.

**6**

PCAs designated with MRR's support, amounting to **2,677.35 hectares**

**5**

PCA management plans developed/ strengthened with MRR's support.

**USD 206,000++**

generated for the local economy.

**Over 20,000 USD**

generated to the local communities through PCAs with MRR's support.

**150 fishers**

engaged in promoting sustainable tourism practices and PCAs.

**33**

scientific evidence (reports, papers, handbooks) generated to support PCA designation and improve marine resource management.

**12****high-level advocacy engagements**

supporting PCAs and sustainable fisheries.

**14****national policies**

influenced by MRR.

**450****community members****338****tourism workers**

upskilled (training support, citizen scientists).

**20****tourism establishments**

adhering to MRR's responsible tourism standards

**Over 83 hectares**

of seagrass conserved through MRR supported initiatives.

**100****fishers**

supported through improved livelihoods via the Fish For Tomorrow programme.

**7****organisations**

using MRR's ocean literacy tools.

**360,000 people**

reached within the Maldives through marine conservation messaging.

2025 PROGRESS

**OBJECTIVE 1****Protection of biodiversity hotspots****SUPPORTING THE MALDIVES' 30X30 ROADMAP**

The Maldives, as a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), is committed to contributing to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). A key component of this framework is Target 3, which calls for the effective conservation and management of at least 30% of the land and sea by 2030 (30x30), through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of Protected Areas (PAs) and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). To date, the Maldives has designated 93 Protected Areas covering approximately 640.95 km². While these designations represent important progress, they currently account for only 0.07% of the country's marine waters, highlighting the need for expanded conservation efforts to meet the 30x30 target.

With funding from the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People through its Rapid Deployment Mechanism, MRR is implementing the project "Building on Biodiversity Conservation and Knowledge Sharing" to accelerate the Maldives' progress toward the 30x30 target. As part of this work, we are supporting the development of the Maldives

30x30 Roadmap, a comprehensive guideline for advancing progress toward Target 3. The roadmap is being developed by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) with technical assistance from the UK's Ocean Country Partnership Programme, MRR and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The roadmap reviews the Maldives' current progress, identifies key evidence and knowledge gaps, and provides recommendations to guide future conservation action. It also serves as a supporting document to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2025–2035.

Photo by Ministry of Tourism and Environment

STRENGTHENING OCEAN GOVERNANCE IN LAAMU ATOLL**Supporting laamu atoll biosphere reserve nomination process**

Laamu Atoll, located in the South-Central Province of the Maldives, consists of 75 islands, of which 11 are inhabited. Also known as Hadhdhunmathi, the atoll is recognised as one of the country's most ecologically diverse regions. It supports a wide range of marine ecosystems, including coral reefs, seagrass meadows, and mangroves, which together sustain rich biodiversity. Reflecting its ecological significance, six areas of the atoll were designated as Protected Areas in 2021. MRR played a key role in providing scientific evidence and garnering community support and buy-in for these areas.

In line with the Government's manifesto commitment to expand the national biosphere reserve network and to contribute to national and international environmental commitments, MoTE is pursuing the designation of Laamu Atoll as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB). If successful, Laamu Atoll would become the fourth biosphere reserve in the Maldives.

To support this process, MoTE engaged the University of New South Wales to develop the full biosphere reserve nomination dossier. In 2025, MRR supported the community consultation process by conducting island-level workshops across all 11

inhabited islands, engaging 268 community members. MRR also contributed to the development of a socio-economic evidence report based on a survey of more than 300 households across the atoll. To carry out these surveys, 33 enumerators from nine islands were recruited and trained to capture household and stakeholder perspectives on ocean dependency and the proposed biosphere reserve designation.

To further support the nomination process, MRR launched the Laamu Biodiversity Challenge on the iNaturalist platform from 1 November to 31 December 2025. The campaign encouraged communities across the atoll to document local biodiversity and contribute observations that could support the biosphere reserve nomination. During the challenge, 17 observers uploaded 292 biodiversity observations. Prior to the challenge, the platform contained 1,743 observations documenting 832 species. By 1 January 2026, this had increased to 2,044 observations documenting 935 species.



Developing pilot social accounts in laamu atoll

In parallel, MRR collaborated with the University of New South Wales to implement the Laamu Atoll Pilot Social Accounts project, which builds on the environmental-economic accounting framework developed under MoTE's Enhancing National Development through Environmentally Resilient Islands (ENDhERI) project by integrating social dimensions into Ocean Accounts. The Social Accounts study consulted 47 participants through targeted focus groups with women, youth and fishers. Ten key informant interviews were also conducted with decision-makers at the local governance level, the education and health sectors across Gan and Hithadhoo. Consultations revealed that ocean-dependent communities such as Gan and Hithadhoo possess deep and nuanced knowledge of how marine ecosystems shape livelihoods, well-being, cultural identity, and social cohesion. However, many of these dimensions remain insufficiently reflected in existing data systems and decision-making frameworks. The report is currently under review and will be validated through a stakeholder workshop planned in 2026.



Supporting the establishment of community conserved areas (CCA) within the Maldives

MRR and Blue Marine, with funding from the UNDP GEF Small Grants Programme, have been working closely with the Laamu Hithadhoo Council to establish a Community Conserved Area (CCA) within the council's jurisdictional boundary. This CCA, referred to as "L. Hithadhoo Baaneykolhu CCA" supports healthy coral reefs and seagrass habitats and is home to a rich biodiversity of marine life, including megafauna, fish, and endangered species, as well as being a critical multi-species grouper spawning aggregation site. The goals of the CCA are to protect its biodiversity and ecosystems, promote the sustainable use of natural resources and foster a better understanding of the Maldives' marine environment through education and outreach. The Hithadhoo Kandu Kolhu area will be a No-take zone, completely removing fishing pressure and enabling fish stocks to replenish. The increase in fish numbers will also be aided by the use of sustainable fishing methods for the rest of the CCA.

In 2023, we drafted a comprehensive CCA Management Plan and regulatory framework with extensive stakeholder engagement. This process included initial scoping interviews

with 130 community members and four stakeholder meetings involving the Hithadhoo community, local fishers, tourism operators, and representatives from research organisations. The draft regulations were submitted to the Local Government Authority (LGA) in September 2023, but publication in the Government Gazette is still pending. Amendments have since been made based on feedback from the LGA, MoTE and the Attorney General's Office. In 2025, MRR worked with MoTE to revise the framework into a CCA Guideline, accompanied by a supporting council resolution that outlines prohibited activities and applicable fees. The proposed approach has been agreed with the Hithadhoo Council and the ministry and has been submitted to the LGA for reconsideration.

Grouper spawning aggregation research

As part of MRR's scientific monitoring process, in 2025, MRR and Blue Marine continued to monitor the Hithadhoo Corner, a site scientifically verified as a grouper spawning aggregation area in 2018. MRR conducted Underwater Visual Census (UVC) surveys during the months of October-December over eight days surrounding the new moon. Data collected includes the number, the presence of pregnant females and behaviour of four species of grouper. These surveys will further contribute to the long-term data set that will aid in assessing the change of population from baseline numbers and behaviours of groupers at this site over time. The data from the monitoring efforts over the previous years will be collated into a consolidated report, which we hope will inform the effectiveness of the CCA once it is enforced.



Photo by Jemma Paradise



Shark population research

Approximately 40 species of sharks inhabit the waters of the Maldives, but the introduction of longline fishing in the 1960s led to unsustainable levels of shark harvesting. This caused a dramatic decline in shark populations and the collapse of traditional shark fisheries. In response, the Maldives protected whale sharks in 1995 and implemented a complete ban on shark fishing and trade within the Maldives Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in 2010 and 2011. These efforts have allowed the development of shark-based ecotourism as an important socio-economic alternative. However, increasing anthropogenic pressures such as climate change, habitat destruction, and overfishing pose new threats. Additionally, pressure to lift the shark fishing ban in the Maldives has increased, leading to the re-opening of the Gulper Shark Fishery in December 2025 and increases in other illegal shark fishing activities and the trade of shark fins. Given the increasing pressures and uncertain political climate, urgent habitat protection for sharks in the Maldives is essential.

This project aims to provide baseline data about shark populations for the Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs) in Laamu Atoll. This information will also be useful for identifying potential Important Shark and Ray Areas (ISRAs) and shark nursery and aggregation hotspots in the atoll.

Under research permits from the Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources (MFoR) and the Environment Regulatory Authority (ERA), MRR is deploying Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVs) to collect data on shark populations in the Hithadhoo–Gaadhoo Kandu area. In 2025, a combination of benthic and pelagic BRUVs was deployed across 13 survey sites, and footage has recorded of tiger sharks, hammerhead sharks, grey reef sharks and silvertip sharks. In 2026, we will continue collecting additional data to enable statistical analysis, with the aim of publishing a scientific paper on shark populations in the Gaadhoo–Hithadhoo Kandu area.

UNDERSTANDING THE DEEP-WATER HABITATS OF THE MALDIVES

The Indian Ocean is the least-studied and least-protected ocean, yet it is warming rapidly and facing rising threats from pollution, coastal development, and overfishing. In 2022, Shaha Hashim from MRR joined Nekton's First Descent expedition in the Maldives. This was the first comprehensive survey of the country's deep waters down to 1,000 m. In 2025, MRR co-authored two papers resulting from the expedition.

The first paper looked at fish that live on or near the seabed from shallow to deep waters (2 - 500 m). We found that fish communities change with depth: there are fewer types of fish, and fewer different roles they play as you go deeper. Deeper habitats have less "backup" among species, so they are more vulnerable to disturbance. Many deep-water species, including sharks and rays, are threatened.

The second paper assessed how being far from human habitation affects seabed communities from 0 to 500 m. Shallow reefs (0–30 m) on remote atolls had more life, more species, and a more balanced mix of species. This pattern did not hold for deeper reefs (30–150 m). There, depth and seafloor shape mattered more than how remote a site was.

Overall, the Maldives have distinct communities at different depths, including unique and vulnerable marine life below scuba range. We recommend that conservation and marine spatial planning explicitly include mesophotic and deep-sea habitats and incorporate depth and topography alongside human pressure data.



EMPOWERING MALDIVIANS IN MARINE CONSERVATION

Recognising that conservation efforts are most effective when rooted in local knowledge and community ownership, MRR continued to expand its internship and citizen science opportunities. In 2025, MRR provided a three-month internship to Mohamed Sharoo, a Maldivian from L. Gan. Sharoo is also trained as one of MRR's coral reef citizen scientists and has since continued his career in marine conservation, now working as an Assistant Sea Turtle Ranger with the Olive Ridley Project.

Throughout the year, MRR also offered a range of citizen science and experiential learning opportunities designed to build awareness and practical skills among community members. With the support from MoTE's ENDHERI Small Grants Programme, MRR implemented the Community-Based Monitoring of Coral Reefs and Their Associated Fish Assemblages project in 2025. As part of the initiative, 20 participants from L. Maamendhoo, Hithadhoo, Fonadhoo, and Gan completed their Discover Scuba Dive (DSD), with 12 participants going on to obtain their Open Water Diver certification. Ten participants also successfully completed the Reef Check EcoDiver course. Three trained citizen scientists later joined two MRR-led coral reef monitoring dives, applying their newly acquired skills to real-world reef monitoring activities in recognition of World Oceans Day. These initiatives continue to strengthen local stewardship while contributing to ongoing environmental monitoring and resilience building in Laamu Atoll, and we hope to further engage our trained citizen scientists in future research expeditions and monitoring programmes. In addition, throughout 2025, we expanded our seagrass citizen scientist network by providing seagrass monitoring training to 45 individuals.

Furthermore, MRR continued its community capacity-building efforts in collaboration with Maldives National University (MNU) by hosting a training session as part of the Basic Ranger Training Course. The session focused on practical techniques for seagrass and coral reef monitoring, equipping participants with skills to support local conservation efforts.

As part of World Environment Day activities, MRR also collaborated with MoTE to organise the #UjaalaLaamu snorkelling event.

More than 30 students from ten schools across Laamu Atoll travelled to Gan to experience its vibrant house reef. Together with partners including the Maldives Coast Guard, Laamu Gan Regional Hospital, Maldives Police Service, and NGOs from the MUI team, the students were

taught how to snorkel safely and the importance of coral reef ecosystems. For many participants, it was their first time snorkelling. As they explored the reef and observed fish and other marine life, they began to appreciate the delicate balance that sustains reef ecosystems. Their excitement and curiosity served as a powerful reminder that community engagement and environmental education are essential foundations for building resilient reefs.

As part of the Social Accounts focus group discussions, MRR also incorporated a practical skills-building component for local fishers. With the support of the Maldives Red Crescent, MRR delivered Emergency Basic Life Support (EBLS) training to four fishers in Laamu Atoll. The training aimed to equip fishers with essential life-saving skills through tailored first-aid instruction, including CPR, wound care, and emergency response techniques relevant to their work at sea.



STRENGTHENING OCEAN LITERACY IN THE MALDIVES

Developing the maldives' blue ocean learning toolkit (BOLT)



Ocean literacy is key to ensuring stakeholders understand the fundamental concepts about the functioning of the ocean, can communicate about the ocean in a meaningful way, and are able to make informed and responsible decisions regarding the ocean and its resources. Unfortunately, though the Maldives has 99% literacy rate, ocean literacy among the local community is weak. Marine science is not integrated into the national school curriculum, so there are very few Maldivian nationals who receive higher education training in marine science.

To address these gaps and support the national curriculum, MRR and Blue Marine are developing the Blue Ocean Learning Toolkit (BOLT), based on UNESCO's Seven Ocean Literacy Principles and is designed as a practical teaching resource for Maldivian educators. In June 2025, MRR and Blue Marine, supported by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the National Institute for Education (NIE), hosted a co-development workshop with 25 participants. The group included 19 marine science teachers from schools across the northern, central, and southern atolls, conservation NGOs, and an organisation advocating for the inclusion and protection of persons with disabilities. Participants worked together to identify contemporary Maldivian marine case studies that could be incorporated into the Cambridge International Marine Science iGCSE syllabus and the broader school curriculum. The workshop was also supported by the Principal Examiner for Marine Science iGCSE at Cambridge International.

In 2026, MRR will finalise and launch the BOLT resource during a second workshop and begin rolling it out to schools across the Maldives. MRR is grateful for the endorsement and continued support from the MoE and NIE for the BOLT development.



Masmahaaveshi E-learning Portal

In 2023, MRR and Blue Marine launched the online education platform Masmahaaveshi, which means “fish, marine life, and their habitats” in Dhivehi. With the platform, we hope to raise awareness among fishers and the public about Maldivian marine habitats and fishing practices.

This year, MRR launched the 9th and 10th modules on the platform titled “Seagrass Superheroes” and “Together with Sharks”, with an eleventh module on mangroves currently in development, for release in 2026. We also engaged 110 participants across several learning modules. This included 50 school students in Lhaviyani Atoll who completed the Together with Sharks module and 60 students in Malé who participated in the Our Precious Reefs module. The Our Precious Reefs module was also completed by 33 preschool teachers, helping to extend reef awareness into early childhood education. In addition, eight new fishers participating in the Fish for Tomorrow (FFT) programme completed the Laamaseelu Masveriyaa specialist module as part of their enrolment process.



CAMPAIGNING AND ADVOCACY TO SAFEGUARD THE OCEAN

#SaveTheSanctuary

Prior to the Maldivian Government's decision to reopen the gulper shark fishery on 31 October 2025, the Maldives was one of only 17 shark sanctuaries worldwide and the only shark sanctuary in the Indian Ocean. Gulper sharks are among the slowest reproducing shark species, taking more than two decades to reach maturity and producing only one or two pups every few years. The species was previously banned from fishing in 2010 following collapsing stocks and declining populations, and there remains no scientific evidence to indicate that their populations have recovered. Re-opening the gulper shark fishery, therefore presents significant ecological risks. Not only does it threaten further population collapse, but it also risks disrupting marine ecosystems that depend on sharks as apex predators. Given the species' extremely slow reproductive rate and low productivity, the fishery is also unlikely to be economically viable in the long term. The potential ecological consequences of population decline could be severe, affecting marine biodiversity, fishers who invest in the fishery and the tourism industry that benefits from healthy shark populations.

In response, MRR, in collaboration with Blue Marine and Miyaru, launched an online petition titled #SaveTheSanctuary: Keep Gulper Shark Fisheries Closed, gathering 28,788 signatures and attracting both national and international attention. The signatures were formally shared with the Maldivian government. A nationwide campaign #SaveTheSanctuary (#HimaayathunNafaa in Dhivehi, meaning benefit from protection) was also initiated to raise awareness and urge the government to reverse the decision. This campaign produced awareness materials in English and Dhivehi, which were widely disseminated across social media platforms. Additionally, an open letter was addressed to the President of the Maldives, the Minister of Fisheries and Ocean Resources, and the Minister of Tourism and Environment, signed and endorsed by 60 local and international organisations and 50 scientists, respectfully calling for the immediate suspension of any plans to reopen gulper shark fishing. The letter urged the government to ensure full transparency, thorough documentation, and inclusive stakeholder consultations and to reaffirm the Maldives' commitment to maintaining its Shark Sanctuary status. Despite the collective efforts of civil society, scientists and conservation organisations, the fishery has since reopened under a management plan, ending the Maldives' status as a shark sanctuary.

2025 PROGRESS



OBJECTIVE 2

Sustainable marine resource use

IMPROVE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF MALDIVIAN FISHERIES

Fish For Tomorrow “Laamaseelu Masveriyaa” resort reef fishery programme

The rapid development of tourism in the Maldives over the past 50 years has increased demand for coral reef fish. Despite this growing demand, limited data exist on the impacts of tourism-related seafood consumption on reef ecosystems. This highlights the need for improved management to ensure that fisheries remain sustainable and resilient. In response, MRR and Blue Marine launched the “Laamaseelu Masveriyaa” sustainable reef fishery programme in 2020 at Six Senses Laamu. The programme operates under a code of conduct that requires participating fishers to report their catch, use sustainable fishing gear and target only resilient species of mature size while avoiding protected and ecologically sensitive areas. In return, resorts provide fishers with a stable market for sustainably caught seafood and offer competitive prices for their catch. The programme aims to support both marine conservation and local livelihoods by improving fisheries sustainability while strengthening connections between local fishers and the tourism sector. Since its launch at Six Senses Laamu in 2020,



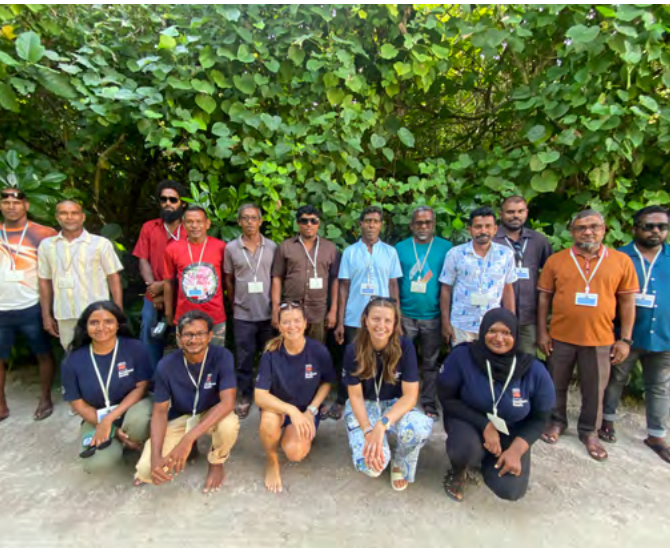
the programme has been expanded to Amilla Maldives in Baa Atoll.

At Six Senses Laamu and Amilla Maldives, the programme continued to operate successfully throughout 2025. During the year, more than 13,000 kg of local seafood were landed at Six Senses Laamu through the programme, contributing USD 33,440 to the local economy. A total of 21 local fishers supplied seafood to the resort, with six new fishers joining the programme in 2025, bringing the total number of participating fishers at Six Senses Laamu to 49. In Baa Atoll, the number of fishers registered in the programme has also grown to 51. There, 12 fishers landed 20,992 kg of local seafood through the programme in 2025, contributing USD 20,992 to the local economy. Throughout the year, MRR held three quarterly meetings at Six Senses Laamu and two meetings with participating fishers and resort representatives at Amilla Maldives. These meetings also included training sessions on

fish measurement techniques and the Masmahaaveshi Secret Life of Reef Fish module, delivered to nine fishers from Baa Atoll and eight from Laamu Atoll.

In addition, data were collected from 156 recreational fishing trips conducted at Six Senses Laamu, providing valuable information to help inform the management of recreational fishing within the Maldives’ tourism sector.

To enhance real-time landing monitoring and improve supply chain traceability, a new project to pilot Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS), funded by The Ocean Foundation, which is supported by the U.S. Department of State and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, in partnership with The Local2030 Islands Network, was initiated in 2025. The implementation of VMS technology was achieved over three work phases: 1) consultation: two consultation meetings were held with fishers to identify their main concerns regarding the



FFT programme to inform the selection of the most appropriate VMS Device; 2) implementation: device installation commenced in June 2025. Over four months period VMS devices were installed on five FFT programme vessels from two islands in Laamu atoll. The project was initially due to be piloted for three months, and; 3) evaluation: adverse weather and engine troubles for several fishers restricted how often fishers were able to test their VMS devices during the initial pilot period. As a result, the trial period has been extended until May 2026 to give fishers ample time to test and use their devices. Further use of the devices over the next eight months will enable fishers more time to understand the devices and enable the project team to make informed decisions around next steps for integrating technology into the FFT programme.



FFT Programme Roll-out

Following the successful implementation of the Laamaseelu Masveriyaa programme at Six Senses Laamu and Amilla Maldives, MRR and Blue Marine have recognised the long-term commitment required to replicate the model in other resorts across the Maldives. To accelerate the programme's expansion and address nationwide reef fishery declines, MRR and Blue Marine have introduced a tiered system for the programme, and the programme has been rebranded as Fish for Tomorrow (FFT) to support its future expansion across the Maldives. The new name was chosen to make the programme more accessible and easier for resorts nationwide to adopt.

Participating resorts can choose to join the FFT programme at three different levels, depending on their sustainability goals and operational needs. The first tier focuses on increasing traceability of local seafood purchases; the second demonstrates resorts' commitment to responsible sourcing by actively improving practices and sharing knowledge with guests; and the third represents full programme integration through collaboration with local fishers and fair pricing. An FFT programme handbook has been developed, using Six Senses Laamu and Amilla Maldives as case studies. The handbook details the programme's principles and guidelines and provides detailed justifications for the programme's management measures, empowering staff to effectively implement the programme at their resorts and to effectively communicate the programme's benefits to guests. The manual will be shared with all interested parties and is publicly available on MRR's website.

Maldives Tourism Industry Fish and Seafood Sourcing Survey

In 2023, MRR and Blue Marine, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) and the Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources (MFOR), concluded a fish and seafood sourcing survey across the tourism industry in the Maldives. The survey aimed to better understand how, from where, and what types of seafood are sourced by tourism operators. The findings were used to develop recommendations to help ensure that seafood sourcing practices are sustainable and equitable for both marine ecosystems and local communities. The final report was completed in 2025 and has been published on MRR's website.



Understanding the impact of climate change on fisheries

As climate change is expected to intensify in the coming decades, improving understanding of its impacts on Maldivian fisheries and the communities that depend on them is increasingly important. Strengthening this knowledge base is essential for developing effective management responses that can safeguard both marine ecosystems and the livelihoods of fisherfolk. In 2024, with the funding from the Commonwealth Foundation, MRR launched a project to examine and document the impacts of climate change on Maldivian fisheries and fishing communities, while also developing policy recommendations to help protect fisher livelihoods from these emerging risks.

During 2025, the project completed a literature review examining climate change impacts on fisheries in the Maldivian context. The review found that rising sea surface temperatures, ocean acidification, and deoxygenation are contributing to coral bleaching, reef degradation, and shifts in the distribution of marine species. These changes threaten the health of coral reef ecosystems, which provide critical habitat and nursery areas for marine life and also act as natural coastal buffers.

The project also completed a legal and policy review assessing how climate change is addressed within the Maldives' fisheries

governance framework. This analysis examined the Climate Emergency Act alongside 40 fisheries-related legal and policy instruments, including primary legislation, national strategies, fishery management plans and regulations, and monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) frameworks. The review identified several strengths within the existing governance framework. These include an explicit climate mandate within the Fisheries Act, science-based planning in key fisheries, and established monitoring and compliance systems. However, the analysis also found that climate considerations are not yet consistently integrated into regulations and management plans. In particular, climate risk assessments, climate projections, and indicators that could trigger adaptive management responses are not widely embedded within fisheries policies. The review further highlighted limitations in the use of spatial management tools, which remain static and do not yet incorporate dynamic environmental data. Similarly, existing fisheries data systems do not consistently integrate environmental and climate information alongside catch and compliance data. Fisheries-specific climate adaptation measures and safety nets for fisherfolk also remain limited. While ambitions for a low-carbon transition within the sector are emerging, these have not yet been fully incorporated into fisheries' governance. The findings and recommendations from the report were shared with the MoFOR, MoTE and the Climate Change Envoy's Office at the President's Office.





PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Seagrass Industry Leaders:

Seagrass is vital for the Maldives supporting fisheries, protecting coastlines and contributing to tourism. The ecosystem services provided by seagrass meadows globally are the ecosystem services provided by seagrass meadows are valued between USD 19,000-43,000 per hectare per year globally. However, this important ecosystem is undervalued and threatened in the Maldives by its active removal for developmental activities such as tourism and land reclamation. This has caused localised retreats in seagrass extent in many areas. Many resorts in the Maldives actively remove the seagrass around their islands because of the desire to achieve the stereotypical white sandy beaches that the Maldives tourism industry has become associated with - an image that was coined in the 1970s when tourism first began. Removal of seagrass can have several adverse effects, such as loss of sediment and destabilisation of the seabed. These can lead to a reduction of resilience across the entire ecosystem, causing fisheries to decline and making coastlines more vulnerable to erosion.



Building on the #ProtectMaldivesSeagrass campaign of 2019 which garnered the support of over a quarter of all Maldivian resorts committed to protecting more than 830,000m² of seagrass, the #SeagrassIndustryLeaders (SIL) Circle, led by MRR and Blue Marine Foundation, aims to transform these commitments into tangible conservation actions, allowing resorts to emerge as Seagrass Industry Leaders. MRR and Blue Marine officially launched the SIL Circle in July 2025, as part of the mission to champion seagrass conservation and change its narrative. Recognising the importance of seagrass for people, nature, and the Maldives' tourism industry, we ask that resorts pledge to protect a minimum of 80% of their baseline seagrass area. Seventeen resorts attended a three-day workshop in Dhiffushi, Kaafu atoll and signed the pledge as 'Early Adopters', positioning themselves at the forefront of sustainable tourism. In signing the pledge, 11 resorts with seagrass committed to protect a minimum of 80% of their seagrass meadows and six resorts that do not have seagrass pledged to raise awareness about the significance of seagrass for the Maldives' tourism and the broader ecosystem. The formation of the circle was a huge milestone for seagrass conservation in the Maldives and a positive step towards integrating seagrass conservation into national policies. By the end of 2025, 20 resorts have joined the SIL circle. All resorts in the circle are provided with a plethora of educational and branding assets, including images, videos, guest presentations, and seagrass identification guides.



Seagrass drone mapping

Between 29 June and 1 July 2025, a hands-on workshop equipped participants with skills in safe drone operation, flight planning, ground control, ground truthing, and high-resolution map generation using tools such as DroneDeploy. The workshop also initiated the collaborative development of a national drone mapping protocol, with participants from government agencies, NGOs, the tourism sector, and academic institutions, including Southern Cross University, MRR, MoTE, Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA), Maldives Marine Research Institute, and Water Solutions. The drone-based seagrass monitoring protocol has been developed to standardise and enhance seagrass mapping across the Maldives, ensuring that drone operations are safe, accurate, and compliant with legal and insurance requirements. Imagery is currently being collected in L. Hithadhoo to monitor changes over time within the CCA. Additional drone surveys will be conducted at resorts in the Seagrass Industry Leader Circle to develop baseline maps and track changes over time.



Guest education and awareness at Six Senses Laamu

The opening of the SHELL (Sea Hub of Environmental Learning in Laamu) at Six Senses Laamu in March 2023 provided new opportunities for MRR and Blue Marine to engage in educational activities with guests and hosts. In 2025, the team engaged a total of 817 guests (including those at SHELL), 56 hosts, and more than 60 community members through various activities. Additionally, 1,995 guests participated in the guest fisheries observers programme on 156 recreational fishing trips.

At Six Senses Laamu, Guest Experience Makers (GEMs) are at the forefront of making every trip special. As the guest’s direct contact, they also play a crucial role in communicating the resort’s conservation message. Despite the important role that seagrass plays, both for humans and nature, it is often perceived in a negative light and thought of as a nuisance in the tourism industry. Since 2019, MRR, Blue Marine and Six Senses Laamu have committed to protecting this bountiful ecosystem both physically and through raising awareness of its importance and beauty through guest education. To aid this mission, this year we completed educational seagrass sessions with the GEMs team. Sessions were split in two: 1) theory, with GEMs educated on the vital roles of seagrass ecosystems and how to communicate this message to guests and; 2) practical, with GEMs invited to participate in a seagrass snorkel to increase their understanding and passion for the ecosystem.

Laamu tourism coalition

In 2025, MRR developed a set of proposed sustainable tourism standards for marine conservation. Our team met with tourism operators in Laamu Atoll to collaborate on best practice examples and get a joint agreement on the standards that will be adopted by all. MRR delivered the Responsible Tourism Masmahaaveshi module to a total of 29 staff from five tourism establishments across the atoll to increase awareness of the importance of responsible tourism. With strengthened communication, expanded language accessibility, and continued focus on committed operators, 2026 presents strong opportunities for advancing responsible tourism across the atoll.





UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF NITROGEN POLLUTION TO IMPROVE MANAGEMENT

Seagrass loss is often driven by nutrient pollution, but in very nutrient-poor waters, a small increase in nutrients can actually promote seagrass growth. In the Maldives, seagrass areas have expanded over the last 20 years, possibly because more nutrients are leaking from island activities.

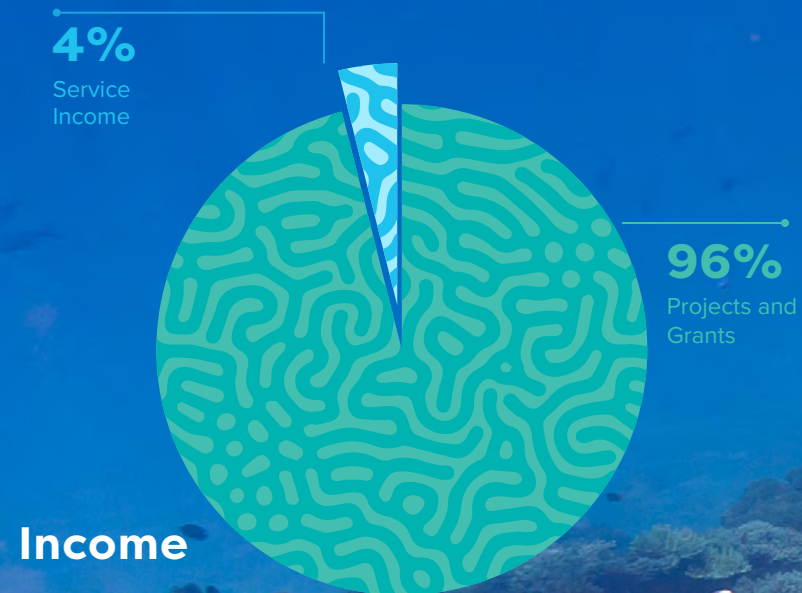
Working with the University of Edinburgh under the South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH) project, we published a study in 2025 testing how the seagrass *Thalassia hemprichii* responds to added inorganic fertiliser. Fertiliser was applied in two ways: mixed into the water above the plants (water-column) or released into the sediment around the roots (pore-water), and at two different nutrient levels.

We found that both ways of adding nutrients increased leaf growth and new leaf production. However, growth increase was stronger when nutrients came through the water column. Chemical tracing showed the fertiliser was taken into both leaves and roots, but the signal was clearer when nutrients were added below ground.

This means that seagrasses quickly respond to added nutrients, and the route nutrients take (water vs. sediment) affects that response. To protect seagrass and nearby coral reefs, it is important to map nutrient sources and control island-based leaks (such as sewage and fertiliser run-off).



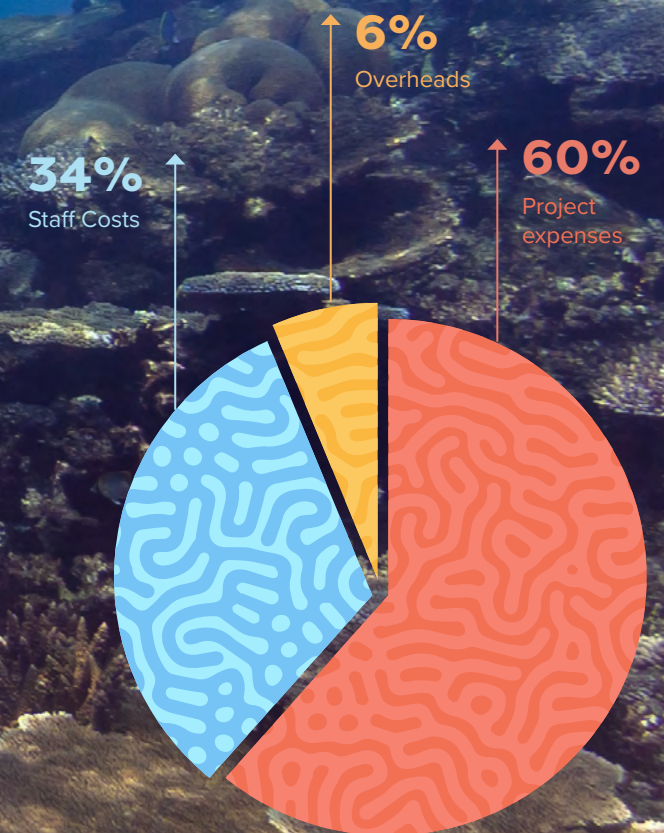
FUNDING AND FINANCE



2025 was a positive year for MRR, with total income increasing by 40% to MVR 4.60 million, compared with MVR 3.29 million in 2024. This growth was driven primarily by an increase in projects and grants income, which amounted to MVR 4.41 million and represented 96% of total income for the year. Service income contributed 4%, while donations and other income remained minimal at less than 1%. The income profile for the year reflects MRR's continued strategic focus on securing longer-term programme funding through project partnerships and grants.

Expenditure

Total expenditure for the year ended 31 December 2025 was MVR 4.03 million, compared with MVR 2.97 million in 2024. The largest share of expenditure (60%) related to direct project expenses, amounting to MVR 2.41 million. Staff costs accounted for 34% of total expenditure at MVR 1.37 million, while overheads remained relatively low at 6% (MVR 0.24 million). This expenditure pattern demonstrates MRR's commitment to directing the majority of its resources towards programme delivery and conservation outcomes.



“SHUKURIYAA”

The success of our work depends on the generosity, expertise, and collaboration of many partners and supporters. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to advancing our mission.

We are especially grateful to Blue Marine Foundation for its crucial role in establishing MRR and for continued project and core funding. We value the guidance and technical expertise provided by Blue Marine's teams in Blue Education, Blue Media, Blue Science and Blue Climate.

Our work this year was made possible by generous support from the High Ambition for Nature and People, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment – ENDhERI Project, Six Senses Laamu, the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, the Commonwealth Foundation, The Ocean Foundation, and the University of New South Wales.

We thank our long-term partner, MUI by Six Senses Laamu, for enabling innovative conservation pilots and stronger marine protection in Laamu Atoll, and the Amilla Maldives for its continued commitment to the Fish for Tomorrow programme.

We appreciate the Seagrass Industry Leaders for their dedication to protecting this critical

ecosystem: Anantara Dhigu Maldives Resort, Anantara Veli Maldives, Angsana Velavaru, Banyan Tree Vabbinfaru, Coco Bodu Hithi, Coco Palm Dhuni Kolhu, Dhawa Ihuru, Gili Lankanfushi Maldives, Kurumba Maldives, LUX* South Ari Atoll, Naladhu Private Island Maldives, Niyama Private Islands Maldives, Six Senses Kanuhura, Six Senses Laamu, Siyam World Maldives, Taj Coral Reef Resort & Spa, Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Amilla Maldives, Huvafenfushi Maldives and Fihalhohi Maldives.

Thank you to Cambridge International for supporting the Blue Ocean Learning Toolkit for the Maldives, and to the schools that generously contributed time and participation: Ha. Atoll Education Centre, Madrasathul Ifthithaah, Sharafuddin School, Iskandharu School, Jamaluddin School, Thaajuddeen school, Imaduddin School, Aminiya School, Majeediyya School, Dharumavantha School, Hiriya School, Ghaazee School, Rehendhi School, Huravee School, S'alaah'udhdheen School, Muhyiddin School, Hithadhoo School and Jalaaludin school.

We also thank our local NGO partners for their collaboration and advocacy, and our national partners: Ministry of Tourism and Environment, National Institute of Education (Ministry of Education), Maldives National University, and the atoll and island councils of Laamu Atoll, for their continued partnership and support.

Photo by Hassan Hameez

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Hussain Shareef (Consultant - enumerators coordination for the Laamu Biosphere Reserve project)





**“We are dedicated to nurturing a future where
Maldivians benefit from effectively protecting
and managing the ocean”**

[illegible]

MALDIVES
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Reefs**

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