

### Noo Raajje scientist joins National Geographic Pristine Seas scientific expedition of the Maldives

**February 26, 2023, MALÉ:** Noo Raajje scientist Maeesha Mohamed joins National Geographic Pristine Seas scientific expedition which embarks today to gather scientific information that will fill current data gaps in ongoing efforts to develop Maldives' Marine Spatial Plan.

The expedition will travel to Huvadhoo Atoll, Fuvahmulah and Addu during the upcoming month aboard *Blue Force Three* and conduct a variety of scientific surveys that will build upon information gathered during previous Noo Raajje expeditions. The data and research from this expedition will help inform a long-term plan to protect marine life and support sustainable development in the Maldives.

Maeesha will be joining a star line-up of local and international scientists and ocean experts such as expedition leader Dr. Keiron Fraser of the University of Plymouth, expedition chief scientist Dr. Alan Friedlander and local marine biologist Aya Naseem. Together, they will use sampling methods such as Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVs), deep drop-camera surveys, and micro-paleo and microplastics sampling to determine the health of south Maldives ocean ecosystems.

Following the expedition, the team will produce a scientific report and a short video detailing their findings. This information will complement data already collected by Noo Raajje from previous expeditions, its Ocean Use Survey and numerous public and stakeholder consultations towards drafting the country's Marine Spatial Plan.

Additionally, the expedition team will conduct a live online educational talk and Q&A session aboard the expedition vessel for Maldivian students and youth.

"This expedition will help us expand our knowledge about the marine ecosystems of the Maldives, which will be crucial for the continuation of our efforts to manage marine resources. This is also an opportunity for Maldivians to learn more about our environment and elevate our appreciation and love for the ocean," said Minister of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture Dr Hussain Rasheed Hassan.

"I am thrilled to join this expedition that will not only help us gather valuable data about the marine health of the southern Atolls, but also help better identify areas that need to be protected. Expeditions like this reinforce the scientific basis for protecting marine areas and help the government design science-backed policy," said Noo Raajje Science & Communications Liaison Maeesha Mohamed.

Dr. Alan Friedlander, National Geographic Pristine Seas Chief Scientist, said "The National Geographic Pristine Seas team has worked all over the world to protect some of the most vital places in the ocean. This is our first expedition to the Maldives and an amazing opportunity to learn more about the unique ecosystems in the southern atolls. Our team is excited to support the goals of the Noo Raajje partnership to protect and value the ocean and its resources to build a bright future for communities, the economy, and the environment of the Maldives."

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#### **About Noo Raajje**

Noo Raajje is a program led by the Government of the Maldives, including the <u>President's Office</u> and the <u>Ministry of Fisheries</u>, <u>Marine Resources and Agriculture</u>, and in partnership with government agencies including the <u>Ministry of Environment</u>, Climate Change and Technology, the <u>Ministry of National Planning</u>, <u>Housing and Infrastructure</u>, the <u>Ministry of Economic</u> <u>Development</u>, the <u>Ministry of Tourism</u>, the <u>Environmental Protection Agency</u>, and the <u>Maldives Marine Research Institute</u>, and others.

International support comes from the <u>Blue Prosperity Coalition</u>, including the <u>Waitt Institute</u>, <u>National Geographic Pristine Seas</u>, <u>Scripps Institution of Oceanography</u>, <u>SeaSketch</u>, <u>Environmental Markets Solutions Lab at UC Santa Barbara</u>, <u>UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability</u>, and others.

Learn more at <a href="www.nooraajje.org">www.nooraajje.org</a> and follow along on the program's <a href="Facebook">Facebook</a>, <a href="Instagram">Instagram</a>, and <a href="Twitter">Twitter</a>.

#### **About National Geographic Pristine Seas**

National Geographic Pristine Seas is an exploration, research and media project founded and led by National Geographic Explorer in Residence Enric Sala. The Pristine Seas team is comprised of determined scientists, policy experts and filmmakers who work to inspire the creation of protected areas where marine life can thrive—while ensuring effective management for years to come. Pristine Seas has helped to inspire the creation of 26 marine reserves, an area totalling over 6.5M square kilometers. Learn more at <a href="mailto:nationalgeographic.org/pristineseas">nationalgeographic.org/pristineseas</a>.



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