



## ***Noo Raajje Begins Ocean Use Survey of Maldivian Waters to Better Understand Ocean Stakeholders' Activities & Priorities***

**December 7, 2021, MALE:** The *Noo Raajje* program begins a 6-month survey today to examine how Maldivian waters are used by fisherfolk, local communities, individuals, the tourism sector, and others. This Ocean Use Survey will aid the Government in understanding important areas of access to stakeholders, habitats that would benefit from specific management and protection, as well as areas of particular ecological, economical, and cultural importance. The goal of the survey is to ensure that the marine spatial plan is developed in partnership with local communities who use the ocean and its resources.

The Ocean Use Survey team aims to collect responses from thousands of people across the country, working with stakeholders of different sectors such as tourism, fishing, recreation, and infrastructure, to document how they use and value ocean space. Individual survey responses will be combined into heatmaps highlighting areas most used and valued for fishing, tourism, recreational use, etc. The maps are created through the 'SeaSketch' tool developed by the McClintock lab at University of California, Santa Barbara, which has been used around the world to record stakeholder and community voices.

The Survey results will be used to develop a detailed Marine Spatial Plan for the Maldives, with the goal of strengthening the government's blue economy initiatives by boosting sustainable fishery practices and tourism activities. Survey results will also help identify potential areas for conservation to reach government target of conserving at least 20% of Maldives EEZ.

Commenting on the Ocean Use Survey, Minister of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan, said:

*"We encourage everyone to participate in this important survey, as this is the first time, we map out our ocean space by area and use. The information gathered through this survey will be critical for the sustainable management and conservation of our marine resources, for generations to come."*

The public is encouraged to get involved and make sure their voices are heard. The survey can be taken online at [nooraajje.org/oceanusesurvey](https://nooraajje.org/oceanusesurvey). *Noo Raajje* will also deploy survey facilitators who will connect in-person with stakeholders on each island. Individual responses will be kept confidential. The resulting heatmaps will be made available to the Government and to the general public, and will inform *Noo Raajje's* ongoing Blue Economy, and Marine Spatial Planning work.

*"When it comes to identifying places to protect, what we look out for are areas that are ecologically significant. This might be, for example, a particularly healthy and resilient coral reef, or an area where fish aggregate in large numbers for spawning, which if*



*protected would provide spill-over benefits to the surrounding areas. However, we also need input from ocean users to see where and how they use the ocean space,” said Noo Raajje Site Manager, Fathimath Nistharan.*

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

International support comes from the [Blue Prosperity Coalition](#), including the [Waitt Institute](#), the [Waitt Foundation](#), [National Geographic Pristine Seas](#), [Scripps Institution of Oceanography](#), [SeaSketch](#), [Environmental Markets Solutions Lab at UC Santa Barbara](#), [UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability](#), and others.

Learn more at [www.nooraajje.org](http://www.nooraajje.org) and follow along on the program's [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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