

## **BAA ATOLL CONSERVATION FUND BOARD MEETING**

Meeting No: 01

Date: 28 January 2019

Time: 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Venue: Ministry of Environment and Energy

### **Minutes of the Meeting**

The Board meeting of the Baa Atoll was attended by 8 participants from 7 stakeholder organisations (Annex 1).

The meeting was chaired by the Director General of Environmental Protection Agency, Mr. Ibrahim Naeem.

In his opening remarks he welcomed all members who attended the meeting and briefed the participants on the agenda (Annex 2) scheduled for the meeting.

He also highlighted on the main agenda items for discussion for the day.

### **Agenda, Item 2**

#### **Presentation of BR Office Workplan and Budget 2019**

The BR Office/BACF Workplan and budget for 2019 (Annex 3) was presented by Shaafi Ali (Outreach Officer) of Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office.

In his presentation he first underlined on the achievements of BR Office Workplan 2018 and stated that almost 85% of the work was completed in 2018.

#### **With regards to BR Office/BACF Workplan the following were discussed:**

##### **LGA**

- The need for all Councils in Baa Atoll to be aware of the Workplan of the Office, work undertaken and the need to improve communication.

##### **BACF**

- Highlighted that working together only we can solve the issues that are existing.
- In terms of partners dive schools have increased although not resorts.
- Guest House tourism in on the rise in the atoll.

#### **With regards to Hanifaru Management Plan the following were discussed:**

- The plan was developed in 2012 when there were only 6 resorts/6 dives schools operating in the atoll.
- Presently there are 16 resorts/dives schools operating in Baa Atoll resorts only.
- More than 26 registered guest houses and 5 dive schools on local islands.
- Since the usage of Hanifaru has increased there are challenges in managing the area.

**To come up with a solution for congestion and smooth management it was informed that the following was undertaken in 2018 :**

- A waiting area with 3 more mooring buoys were installed inside the lagoon with guidance from EPA catering up to 3 vessels bringing the total vessels in the PA to 8 compared to 5 reducing the issues of congestion.
- As was the case in previous years monthly stakeholder meetings were held during the manta season.
- Regular communication was undertaken with resorts, dives schools and guest houses.

### **Item 3, OTHER MATTERS**

#### **1. Official Partners of Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve**

- The number of contributing resort partners is presently 1 although there are 8 dives school partners operating in the atoll.
- Resorts guests are mostly managed either by the Dive School or the Water Sports Centre.
- The dive schools being partners of BR get the discounted face value from Hanifaru Access Permits
- Since guests can visit Hanifaru through Dive School or Water Sports Centres resorts do not see the need to become partners of the Biosphere Reserve.
- The fee charged by some dive schools/Water Sports Centres from guests is quite high for Hanifaru snorkelling trips and the partnership fee the dive schools pay is almost returned with 3 to 4 trips.

#### **Resort Participant**

- Only one contributing resort partner is not acceptable when there are 16 resorts.
- If the resorts are not partners of Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve, the possibility of exploring dive schools not gaining partnership, hence they are not eligible for discounted rates.
- Recommend to increase the face value of Hanifaru Access Permits.

#### **Atoll Council**

- Supports the idea of increasing the face value of the tokens if the resorts are unwilling to become partners.
- Communities has sacrificed a lot since the declaration of Baa Atoll as a Biosphere Reserve but it is the only the tourism industry which is benefiting most as the BR tag is widely used.

#### **LGA**

- Not happy with the level of contributions received.
- Need to improve the numbers in terms of resort partners.

#### **BACF**

- Need to look at all existing Dive School partner contracts before deciding on this.

## **EPA/LGA/BR OFFICE/BACF/LAM/RESORT/ATOLL COUNCIL**

- Supports the idea of increasing the face value of the tokens if the resorts are unwilling to become partners

### **2. Qualification Certified Tour Guides at Hanifaru MPA**

- The present Hanifaru Management Plan (2012) states that in order to become a tour guide one of the main prerequisite is to have the qualification of a Dive Master.
- The main reason why this prerequisite was put in place was issues raised in relation to the the safety and the security of clients in the water when the initial plan was discussed.
- The management plan was developed back in 2012 and no guest houses were in operation back then.
- Since guest houses tourism have started in the atoll, requests have been coming in to lower the prerequisite of Dive Master to that of a Rescue Diver as it not affordable for the guest houses to employ a full time Dive Master.

#### **Resort Participant**

- Resorts can sponsor dive training of Hanifaru Tour Guides from the guest houses.

#### **Atoll Council:**

- The prerequisite should be brought down to that of a rescue diver.
- There should be more engagement with the Guest Houses.

#### **LAM:**

- LAM to look into the possibilities of dive training for guest houses and write back to BR.

### **3. BACF GRANTS**

- 7 grants from BACF were issued in 2015, 5 have completed, 1 counting its final 3 months and 1 has failed.
- Presently funds are generated to BACF mainly through the sale of Hanifaru Access Permits, Tour Guide certification fees, Videography and photography permits and partnership fees from resorts and liveboards.

#### **Four Seasons**

- Grants from BACF to be issued in 2019 as it has been a while since the last cycle.
- The communities should be excited to be living in a Biosphere Reserve, but they are not.

- The need for more resorts to become partners as this will allow more communities to be aided.
- Come up with tangible outputs and end products through grants awarded.
- Concerned regarding the opportunity for the resorts to take advantage of the existing partnership arrangements through dives schools.
- Grants could be awarded each year if more resorts are partners.
- Need more funding for community programmes

#### **ATOLL COUNCIL**

- The scale of grants issued previously is a bit low.
- When allocating grants for 2019 come up with projects which will benefit the whole atoll.
- Thinking along the lines of a ferry system or associated facilities for all islands.
- More resorts partnership means more opportunity for more grants and this would foster the community spirit and cohesion.
- Should explore of finding means for the resorts to become partners whereby increasing the ownership of the Biosphere Reserve together with the local communities.

Agreement amongst all attendees that grants should be awarded to the communities in 2019 and Baa Atoll Council to be the main grantee for this cycle..

#### **4. Baa Atoll UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Periodic Review**

- Baa Atoll was declared a UNESCO BR in 2011.
- Baa Atoll BR is up for its periodic review by UNESCO in 2021(10 year cycle).
- This review will decide whether Baa Atoll will maintain its status as a BR.

The periodic review is an important event in the life of a biosphere reserve. It enables a review, every ten years, of the functioning, zoning, scale of the biosphere reserve as well as the involvement of the populations living in the site.

The Statutory Framework for the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) makes provision under Article 9 that **“the status of each biosphere reserve should be subject to a periodic review every ten years, based on a report prepared by the concerned authority, on the basis of the criteria of Article 4, and forwarded to the secretariat by the State concerned. The report will be considered by the Advisory Committee for Biosphere Reserves for recommendation to International Co-ordinating Council.”**

The periodic review represents an opportunity to carry out a qualitative survey of the actions implemented, their results. It's a time to take stock of progress made by the biosphere reserve, especially as concerns the updating of knowledge, skills and expertise in resource and ecosystem management. It also provides an opportunity to discuss the updating of the zonation system and assess its relevance, question the objectives and means of management policies and examine the issues and problems tied to implementation. It is also a time to discuss weak points. Its objective is to improve the quality of the biosphere reserves and their functioning as sites for testing and demonstrating approaches to sustainable development.

To date, more than 370 periodic reviews were received by the Secretariat and examined by the MAB International Coordinating Committee.

Biosphere Reserves which are not able to meet the criteria of Article 4 have been withdrawn by the countries from the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR).

As of June 2017, **38 sites have been withdrawn.**

#### **BR OFFICE**

- Work is presently underway working with UNESCO to undertake the periodic review process of Baa Atoll BR and the Ministry of Environment is leading the exercise together with BR Office.
- The need to come up with a positive review with participation from all sectors is required especially the management of the resorts which is lacking right now.
- A major factor which the REVIEW will look into will be the "man" human element of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Reserve programme. What has the declaration of Baa Atoll as a BR improved for the communities of Baa.
- We should be ready to answer this facts and figures.

The members inquired about the periodic review process and information was provided with regards to it.

**The following was approved by the BACF Board in its meeting held on 28 January 2019 :**

- a. MVR 3,000,000.00 (Three Million Maldivian Rufiya) to be awarded as grants from BACF for cycle 2019.
- b. The next cycle of grants from BACF to be officially announced in April 2019.
- c. Write to Baa Atoll Council for follow up action of BACF Grants 2019.
- d. Priority to be given to Baa Atoll Council as the Grant recipient for 2019 and the Atoll Council to come up with tangible outputs for all islands after communicating with all Island Councils.
- e. No concerns were raised regarding the Workplan of BR Office 2019 and BR OFFICE/BACF budget.
- f. Write to all Guest Houses regarding the opportunity of dive training to their staff with assistance from the resorts.
- g. Write to LAM in relation to the dive training opportunities which can be provided.
- h. Write to all resorts stating that they should become partners of the BR, if not the Dive Schools will no longer be able to get discount on the face value of Hanifaru Access Permits and permits will be sold at face value only.
- i. Inform all stakeholders on Baa Atoll BR periodic review and to seek support from all involved in maintaining the BR status for Baa Atoll.

The Board meeting of the Baa Atoll Conservation Fund Board came to a close at 2.55 pm.

Annex 1

**Participant's List**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Organization</b>
1.	Ibrahim Naeem	Director General (Chair)	Environment Protection Agency
2.	Armando Kraenzen	General Manager	Four Seasons Maldives
3.	Abdulla Rasheed	Assistant Director	Local Government Authority
4.	Ahmed Afrah	Treasurer	Liveaboard Association of Maldives
5.	Abdulla Shibau	Managing Director	Baa Atoll Conservation Fund
6.	Shaafee Ali	Outreach Officer	BR Office
<b>OTHER PARTICIPANTS</b>			
1.	Muhusina A. Rahman	Assistant Director	Ministry of Environment and Energy

Annex 2

**Agenda**

1. Welcome Remarks by Chairman
2. Approval and Discussion of BR OFFICE/BACF Budget 2019
3. Update of BR Office Workplan 2018
4. Other Issues

**Annex 3**

Workplan and BR Office/BACF Budget