



Annual Report 2025
Baa Atoll Conservation Fund



Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Baa Atoll Conservation Fund (BACF) Annual Report 2025, highlighting the Fund's key activities, achievements, partnerships, and financial performance during the year.

In 2025, BACF continued to support the conservation and sustainable management of Baa Atoll through conservation initiatives, research, education, capacity building, partnerships, and community engagement.

In close collaboration with the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office and other stakeholders, we remained committed to strengthening the protection and management of the atoll's protected areas, with particular emphasis on the globally significant Hanifaru Marine Protected Area.

Looking ahead, BACF will place greater prominence on technology-based monitoring, scientific research, environmental education, and stronger community and school engagement. Through initiatives such as the BR Schools Programme and BACF Grants Programme, we aim to encourage young people to become active contributors to conservation and sustainable development.

We will also continue strengthening partnerships with government agencies, researchers, NGOs, tourism partners, communities, and other stakeholders.

By combining scientific knowledge, local experience, technology, and community participation, we can further strengthen the long-term conservation of Baa Atoll.

I sincerely thank all our partners, stakeholders, communities, schools, researchers, and supporters for their continued commitment and contribution to our work. Together, we can safeguard the unique natural heritage of Baa Atoll for present and future generations.

Baa Atoll Conservation Fund



The Baa Atoll Conservation Fund (BACF) is a trust fund established under the Public Finance Act 3/2006 of the Republic of Maldives.

The Fund is governed by a Board of Directors and managed by the Fund Manager/Managing Director in accordance with its Rules of Procedure and other applicable laws and regulations.

The primary purpose of the Fund is to co-finance activities that support Baa Atoll's development as a world-class model for atoll ecosystem conservation, in line with its designation as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The key objectives of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve are to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, biodiversity, and cultural heritage of Baa Atoll.
- Promote opportunities for local communities and visitors to understand, appreciate, and enjoy the unique qualities of Baa Atoll.
- Support the sustainable development of Baa Atoll, including sustainable fishing and tourism, while promoting the economic and social well-being of the people who live and work in the atoll.

Vision

Baa Atoll: A world-class model of atoll ecosystem conservation, where sustainable use supports a prosperous economy and a good quality of life for all, forever – providing a model for replication across the Maldives.

Mission

Working with public, private, and non-profit partners to protect, preserve, and sustainably manage the natural resources of Baa Atoll for future generations through education, awareness, research, and knowledge sharing.



BACF Board Meeting

The BACF Board meeting was held online on 3 September 2025 and was attended by 11 participants representing eight stakeholder organizations.

The meeting was chaired by the Director General of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office , Mr. Ibrahim Naeem.

The following Agenda items were discussed:

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks
2. Presentation of Income and Expenditure Report
3. Presentation of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Workplan 2025 and Budget
4. Discussion on the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve fee structure
5. Other Matters

Decisions and Actions

The following decisions were approved by the BACF Board at the meeting held on 3 September 2025:

1. The next Board meeting will be held in October 2025.
2. The minutes of the Board meeting, together with the supporting documents, to be circulated to Board members for review and approval. If no comments are received, the minutes will be considered final.
3. Partnership fees for dive schools and safari vessels and guest houses will be put on
4. BACF to develop and circulate a proposal on the new Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve fee structure to all members for comments.

BACF Financials Income and Expenditure 2025



The Baa Atoll Conservation Fund recorded a total income of MVR 4,337,793.00 during 2025. This income was generated primarily through access permits, partnership fees, tour guide examination registration fees, and photography and videography permits.

The Fund's total expenditure for the year amounted to MVR 715,393.80, resulting in an income surplus of MVR 3,622,399.20.

The BACF's running capital increased from MVR 17,206,244.12 at the end of 2024 to MVR 20,828,643.32 at the end of 2025.



Income (MVR)	
Sale of Access Permits	3,592,953.00
BR Partnership Fees	615,600.00
Tour Guide Exam Registration Fees	103,370.00
Photography and Videography Permit and other permits	25,870.00
Total Income	4,337,793.00

Expenditure	
BACF Management Costs	
Salary and Allowances	450,385.00
Total	450,385.00
Transport	
Internal /Sea	79,800.00
Internal /Air	6,735.00
Overseas	9,252.00
Total	95,787.00
Office Management Costs	
Services for Office Operation	580.00
Fuel	105,845.82
Miscellaneous Expenses	8,269.00
Total	114,694.82
Maintenance	
BR Vessel Repair and Maintenance	20,000.00
Total	20,000.00
Procurement of Goods	
Other Equipment	34,526.98
Total	34,526.98
Total Expenditure	715,393.80



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Partnerships

The Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Promotion and Management with Four Seasons Resort was renewed in 2025 and renewal of other existing and potential partnership arrangements with dive schools, liveaboards and guest houses were placed on hold following the BACF Board's decision to review the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve partnership fee structure.

The temporary suspension of new partnerships allowed the review process to be undertaken and provided an opportunity to assess the existing partnership framework and develop a more appropriate and sustainable structure for future engagement with tourism operators and other stakeholders.

Contributing Partners



Brand Partners





Reserach

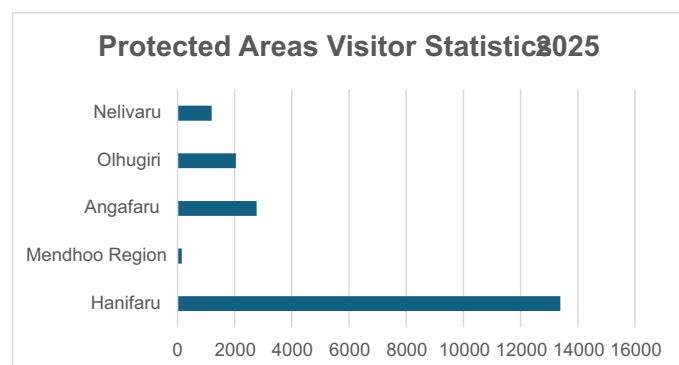
In 2025, a total of six (6) research permits were issued by the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office to support research and environmental survey activities within the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve, with particular focus on Hanifaru Marine Protected Area and its marine ecosystems.

These permits enabled research organisations and independent researchers to conduct approved scientific activities while ensuring that all research was carried out in accordance with the management and conservation requirements of the protected areas. The resulting research and survey findings contribute valuable scientific information to support evidence-based conservation, monitoring, and future management decisions.

The issuance of research permits also strengthened collaboration between the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office and the research community, supporting continued efforts to better understand and protect the Reserve's marine biodiversity and ecosystems.

Building on the progress made in 2025, through the continued facilitation of research permits and collaboration with researchers, the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office aims to strengthen scientific knowledge, conservation planning, and effective protected-area management, while encouraging greater collaboration among researchers, communities, and other stakeholders in safeguarding Baa Atoll's natural heritage.

Protected Area Visitor Statistics





Highlights of Conservation Programme

Remote Monitoring and Surveillance System Established in Mendhoo

One of the most notable achievements of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office in 2025 was the establishment of a remote surveillance and monitoring camera system on Mendhoo Island, a protected area within Baa Atoll.

The initiative marked an important milestone in protected-area management in the Maldives, introducing a remote monitoring approach to strengthen surveillance and improve the efficiency of conservation efforts. The system enables the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office to monitor activities and conditions at Mendhoo remotely, reducing the need for continuous physical presence on the island.

The technology has strengthened the Office's ability to identify unauthorised access and activities that may contravene protected-area regulations, while also supporting faster responses to potential management and conservation concerns. The system therefore provides an important additional tool for rangers and management teams in safeguarding Mendhoo and its surrounding environment.

Following the installation of the system, Operations Training for the Mendhoo Surveillance System was conducted in Eydhafushi from 2 to 6 February 2025. The training was led by experts from Sirius Insight, UK, and was attended by participants from the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office, Ministry of Environment, and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The successful introduction of the Mendhoo surveillance system demonstrates the potential of technology and innovation to strengthen protected-area management in the Maldives. It also provides a foundation for exploring similar remote monitoring solutions in other protected areas, supporting more effective, responsive, and sustainable conservation management across the Baa



Highlights of Conservation Programme

Baa Atoll BR Rangers attend Training in Laamu Atoll

The Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office was represented by three of its Rangers at the inaugural Environmental Rangers Training Programme conducted by the Maldives National University (MNU). Their participation reflects the Office's continued commitment to strengthening the professional capacity of its field team and enhancing the effectiveness of protected-area management in Baa Atoll.

A total of 17 participants successfully completed the training programme, which was developed through a partnership between the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and MNU. The programme was designed to equip environmental rangers with the technical, practical, and legal knowledge required to effectively support the management and protection of protected areas across the Maldives.

The participation of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Rangers is an important achievement for the Office, as the knowledge and skills gained through the programme will directly contribute to ongoing monitoring, conservation, enforcement, and community engagement efforts within the Biosphere Reserve.



Highlights of Conservation Programme

Capacity Building Workshop on IUCN Green List Standards

The National Capacity Building Workshop on the IUCN Green List Standard for Protected and Conserved Areas Management in the Maldives was held from 27 to 29 October 2025 in Eydhafushi, Baa Atoll. The three-day workshop brought together representatives from several protected areas across the country, including Hanifaru Marine Protected Area, Addu Nature Park, Fuvahmulah Nature Park, South Ari Marine Protected Area, Laamu Atoll Protected Area, and Shaviyani Atoll Farukolhu Protected Area, together with representatives from the Ministry of Tourism and Environment.

The workshop provided an important opportunity to strengthen the capacity of protected-area managers through knowledge sharing, self-assessment, and planning based on the IUCN Green List Standard. The Standard provides a globally recognised framework for assessing the effectiveness of protected and conserved areas, with a focus on good governance, sound design and planning, effective management, and positive conservation outcomes.

For Hanifaru Marine Protected Area, the workshop was particularly significant. As one of the most internationally recognised marine protected areas in the Maldives and a key site within the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve, Hanifaru provides a strong opportunity to demonstrate effective protected-area management against internationally recognised standards.

The knowledge and tools gained through the workshop will support the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office in assessing current management practices at Hanifaru, identifying gaps, strengthening monitoring and governance systems, and improving management effectiveness. These steps are important in progressing Hanifaru towards meeting the requirements for IUCN Green List recognition.

Achieving IUCN Green List status for Hanifaru would provide international recognition of the effectiveness of its management and conservation efforts, while further strengthening its position as a model for sustainable marine conservation in the Maldives and internationally.



Highlights of Conservation Programme

Hanifaru Management Action Plan 2025–2030

The Hanifaru Marine Protected Area Conservation Action Plan 2025–2030 was officially launched in Eydhafushi, Baa Atoll, on 12 February 2025, with support from the Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPD).

The Action Plan serves as an important strategic framework for the long-term conservation and effective management of Hanifaru Marine Protected Area (MPA). It provides a clear direction for strengthening protection, monitoring, research, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable use of the area, while responding to the ecological and management challenges faced by Hanifaru.

As one of the Maldives' most significant marine protected areas and a globally recognised aggregation site for manta rays and whale sharks, effective and coordinated management of Hanifaru is essential to safeguard its exceptional biodiversity and ecological value.

The Action Plan also provides a practical basis for guiding the work of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office, rangers, government agencies, researchers, tourism operators, local communities, and other stakeholders towards shared conservation objectives.

The 2025–2030 Action Plan therefore represents an important milestone in strengthening the management of Hanifaru MPA and ensuring that its unique marine ecosystem, including its internationally renowned manta ray and whale shark populations, is protected and sustained for future generations.



Highlights of Awareness, Education and Outreach Programme

Information Session for MNU Students

An information session was conducted for degree-level students of the Maldives National University (MNU). The session was attended by five university students, along with members of the faculty.

The session focused primarily on the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve, providing participants with information on the importance of the Biosphere Reserve and its significant environmental and ecological values. Information was also shared on the objectives and measures established to protect and conserve the area's natural resources.

In addition, the session highlighted the important role of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office in promoting the sustainable development of Baa Atoll, including its work in conservation, environmental management, awareness, and stakeholder engagement.

The session provided an opportunity for students to gain a better understanding of the Biosphere Reserve and the importance of balancing environmental conservation with sustainable development, while encouraging greater awareness and interest among young people in the conservation of Baa Atoll's natural heritage.



Highlights of Awareness, Education and Outreach Programme

Baa Atoll Marine Biology Internship Programme 2025

The second phase of the Baa Atoll Marine Biology Internship Programme 2025 was successfully conducted over five days, with the participation of 18 students from schools across Baa Atoll.

The programme was implemented through a collaboration between the Baa Atoll Council and the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office, with the support of Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru. The programme also benefited from the involvement and expertise of Reefscapers and Manta Trust, demonstrating the value of partnerships developed by the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office to support conservation, education, and capacity-building initiatives.

The main objective of the programme was to increase students' awareness and understanding of marine ecosystems, marine species, and conservation efforts. It also aimed to encourage young people to explore marine biology as a potential field of study and career, contributing to the development of future marine professionals within Baa Atoll.

Through partnerships with resorts, conservation organisations, schools, and other stakeholders, the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office continues to create opportunities that connect education, conservation, and sustainable development. These partnerships enable students to gain practical exposure and learn directly from conservation practitioners and marine specialists. The participation of 18 students in the second phase reflects the growing interest in marine science among young people in Baa Atoll. The programme also highlights how effective partnerships can create meaningful opportunities for the next generation while strengthening long-term conservation efforts.



Highlights of Awareness, Education and Outreach Programme

Research on Plankton Aggregation and Manta Rays in Hanifaru Bay

Dr. Phil Hosegood of the University of Plymouth, UK, presented the findings of his research on the natural oceanographic processes and ecological systems associated with plankton aggregation in Hanifaru Bay, highlighting important scientific observations on the physical and ecological processes that influence plankton aggregation in Hanifaru Bay. Previous research involving Dr. Hosegood has demonstrated the relationship between high zooplankton concentrations and manta ray feeding activity in Hanifaru Bay, providing important insights into the environmental conditions that contribute to large manta ray aggregations.

The research is particularly important for Baa Atoll and the management of Hanifaru Bay, as understanding the oceanographic processes that concentrate plankton can help explain why Hanifaru supports one of the world's most significant aggregations of reef manta rays. These scientific findings can contribute to more informed conservation, monitoring, visitor management, and long-term protection of the Hanifaru Marine Protected Area. The significance of the research also extends beyond Baa Atoll. Hanifaru provides an internationally important natural setting for studying the relationship between oceanographic processes, plankton dynamics, and the behaviour of large marine animals. The findings therefore contribute to the broader global understanding of manta ray ecology and the importance of protecting the environmental processes that sustain critical feeding habitats.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to discuss how the research findings could be incorporated into the future management and conservation of Hanifaru Bay and the wider Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve, strengthening the scientific basis for evidence-based conservation and reinforcing the international significance of Hanifaru as a globally important marine ecosystem.



Videography and Photography Permits

In 2025, a total of eight permits were issued for videography and photography activities within the Hanifaru Marine Protected Area, with permits facilitated through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in accordance with the applicable requirements.

These permitted activities provided an opportunity to document and showcase Hanifaru's exceptional marine environment, including its internationally renowned manta ray aggregations, while supporting greater awareness of the importance of protecting this unique ecosystem.

The photographs and videos produced through these activities helped promote Hanifaru Bay as a leading eco-tourism destination and brought greater international attention to its rich marine biodiversity. They also contributed to showcasing Hanifaru as an important part of the UNESCO Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve, highlighting its ecological significance and the need for responsible and sustainable use.

The issuance of permits also provides a mechanism for ensuring that commercial filming and photography activities within the protected area are conducted in accordance with established conservation requirements, helping to balance awareness and promotion with the protection of Hanifaru's sensitive marine environment.



Hanifaru Tour Guides

In accordance with the Baa Atoll Hanifaru Area Protection and Preservation Regulation (Regulation No. 23/2012), all visitors to Hanifaru Bay are required to be accompanied by a certified Hanifaru Tour Guide. This requirement plays an important role in ensuring that tourism activities are conducted responsibly while protecting the sensitive marine ecosystem of the area.

In 2025, a total of 77 applicants who successfully passed the Hanifaru Tour Guide Examination were officially registered as Hanifaru Tour Guides. This represents an important expansion of the pool of qualified guides supporting the management of visitor activities at Hanifaru Bay.

The increased number of certified guides strengthens the capacity to manage tourism activities in accordance with the Regulation and supports the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office's efforts to promote safe, responsible, and sustainable tourism at one of the Maldives' most ecologically significant marine sites.



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