


# ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Baa Atoll Conservation Fund

It is my pleasure to present the **Annual Report of the Baa Atoll Conservation Fund (BACF) for 2024**, highlighting the Fund's financial performance, governance, activities and continued contribution towards the conservation and sustainable development of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.

The Baa Atoll Conservation Fund was established on 18 April 2012 under the Public Finance Act (Act No. 3/2006) of the Republic of Maldives. The Fund was established to co-finance activities that contribute to making Baa Atoll a world-class model of atoll ecosystem conservation, in accordance with its designation as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve on 28 June 2011**.**

As the first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the Maldives, Baa Atoll carries an important responsibility to demonstrate how biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihoods, education, research and responsible tourism can be advanced together. BACF plays an important role in supporting this vision by providing a dedicated financial mechanism for conservation and sustainable development activities across the Reserve.

During 2024, BACF continued to support the objectives of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve through responsible financial management, stakeholder engagement, capacity building and support for conservation-related activities. The year also saw continued progress in areas directly connected to the management and sustainable use of the Biosphere Reserve.

The Fund maintained a prudent approach to the management of its financial resources. BACF generated **MVR 4.02 million in income** during 2024, primarily through Hanifaru Access Permits, Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve partnership fees, tour guide examination registration fees, and photography, videography and other permits. Total expenditure during the year amounted to **MVR 1.16 million**, covering essential management and operational costs, transportation, office operations, meetings and workshops, maintenance, procurement and programme activities.

At the end of 2024, BACF recorded a running capital of **MVR 17.21 million**, compared with **MVR 14.35 million at the end of 2023**. This strengthened financial position provides an important foundation for sustaining conservation financing and supporting the priorities of the Biosphere Reserve in the years ahead.

The Mid-Term Review of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve also provided important recommendations for strengthening the governance and institutional framework of the Reserve. In line with the recommendations of the review, BACF Board meetings will be convened regularly from 2025 onwards after undertaking the required changes**.** This will provide a stronger platform for oversight, strategic decision-making, review of financial and programme priorities, and continued alignment of BACF activities with the objectives of the Biosphere Reserve.

Regular Board engagement will strengthen accountability and ensure that the Fund continues to respond effectively to the evolving conservation, community and sustainable development needs of Baa Atoll.

The continued success of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve depends on the commitment and cooperation of many stakeholders. Government institutions, local councils, communities, tourism establishments, dive operators, researchers, conservation organisations, educational institutions and development partners all have an important role to play.

I would like to express my appreciation to the management and staff, the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office, government agencies, local councils, communities, tourism partners, researchers, conservation organisations and all other stakeholders who contributed to the work of the Fund during 2024.

Looking ahead, BACF will continue to strengthen its financial sustainability, governance and accountability while supporting initiatives that advance the conservation, learning and research, livelihoods and sustainable development objectives of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.

I am confident that, through continued cooperation and shared commitment, Baa Atoll can remain a leading example of conservation and sustainable development in the Maldives and within the global UNESCO Biosphere Reserve network.

**Abdulla Shibau**
**Baa Atoll Conservation Fund**

## 2. ABOUT THE BAA ATOLL CONSERVATION FUND

The Baa Atoll Conservation Fund (BACF) is a Trust Fund established **on** 18 April 2012 under **the** Public Finance Act (Act No. 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 founding documents, Terms of Reference, Rules of Procedure and applicable laws and regulations.

The primary purpose of BACF is **to** co-finance activities that contribute to making Baa Atoll a world-class model of atoll ecosystem conservation**,** in accordance with its designation as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

BACF provides an important mechanism through which revenues generated from activities associated with the Biosphere Reserve can contribute towards conservation, management, education, research, community initiatives and sustainable development.

The Fund works in close cooperation with the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve Office, Government agencies, local councils, communities, tourism operators, researchers, educational institutions and other stakeholders.

## 3. BAA ATOLL UNESCO BIOSPHERE RESERVE

The Government of Maldives nominated Baa Atoll for UNESCO Biosphere Reserve status on **28 September 2010**. On **28 June 2011**, Baa Atoll was designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve at the 40th anniversary meeting of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme in Dresden, Germany.

Baa Atoll became the first UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in the Maldives.

The designation recognises the exceptional ecological importance of Baa Atoll while promoting an integrated approach to conservation and sustainable development.

The Biosphere Reserve seeks to balance:

- Conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems;
- Sustainable use of natural resources;
- Scientific research and monitoring;
- Environmental education and awareness;
- Sustainable livelihoods;
- Responsible tourism; and
- Participation of local communities.

BACF contributes to these objectives by providing financial support and institutional mechanisms for activities that strengthen the long-term sustainability of the Reserve.

## 4. GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

BACF is governed through a Board of Directors and managed by the Fund Manager/Managing Director.

The governance framework is intended to ensure that the Fund's resources are managed transparently, responsibly and in accordance with applicable legislation and the objectives of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.

The Mid-Term Review of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve identified opportunities for strengthening governance and institutional coordination. One of the key steps arising from the review is the regular convening of BACF Board meetings.

Accordingly, from 2025 onwards, BACF Board meetings will be convened regularly, strengthening strategic oversight, accountability and decision-making concerning the Fund's finances, programmes and priorities.

This strengthened governance arrangement will also help ensure closer alignment between BACF investments and the management priorities of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.

## 5. BACF ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024

During 2024, BACF continued to support the operational and conservation objectives of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.

The Fund's activities and revenue mechanisms are closely connected with the sustainable management of the Reserve and include:

- Management of Hanifaru Access Permits;
- Biosphere Reserve partnership arrangements;
- Tour guide examination and certification;
- Management of research permits;
- Management of photography and videography permits;
- Support for conservation-related programmes;
- Community-related activities;
- Maintenance and operational support; and
- Procurement of essential equipment and services.

These activities contribute to the wider objective of ensuring that tourism, research and other uses of the Biosphere Reserve are managed in a manner consistent with conservation objectives.

## 6. TOUR GUIDE CERTIFICATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

An important aspect of this work was strengthening the capacity of tourism and conservation stakeholders. During 2024, 135 tour guide examinations were conducted**,** contributing to the development of knowledgeable and responsible guides who play an important role in communicating the values and conservation requirements of the Biosphere Reserve to visitors. By the end of the year, 111 tour guides had been certified**.**

Tour guides are among the most important points of contact between visitors and the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve. Well-trained and certified guides help visitors understand the ecological importance of Baa Atoll, particularly its marine ecosystems and protected areas, while promoting responsible visitor behaviour.

The examination and certification system contributes to strengthening professional standards and ensuring that guides operating within the Biosphere Reserve have the necessary knowledge to provide responsible interpretation and guidance to visitors.

The continued development of the guide certification system is therefore an important part of sustainable tourism management in Baa Atoll.

## 7. RESEARCH, PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY PERMITS

Baa Atoll is an important location for marine research and scientific observation because of its diverse coral reef ecosystems, manta ray aggregation sites, whale shark habitats, seagrass ecosystems and other areas of ecological significance.

Research activities within the Biosphere Reserve are managed through an appropriate permitting process to ensure that research is undertaken responsibly and does not adversely affect protected ecosystems or species.

The management of research and other permitted activities within the Biosphere Reserve also remained an important responsibility. During 2024, 10 research permits were issued**,** supporting scientific activities and research relevant to the Reserve. In addition, 10 photography and videography permits were issued, enabling permitted professional activities while ensuring that such activities were undertaken in accordance with applicable conservation requirements and management measures.

The permitting system allows relevant activities to take place while maintaining appropriate oversight and ensuring that conservation requirements are respected.

Professional photography and videography can also contribute to public awareness of the natural values of Baa Atoll. At the same time, such activities need to be managed carefully to minimise disturbance to marine life and sensitive habitats.

## 8. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

### 8.1 Opening Capital

BACF commenced 2024 with a running capital balance of **MVR 14,347,731.07**

### 8.2 Income

BACF generated total income of **MVR 4,021,048.00**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Running Capital BACF end 2023** | 14,347,731.07 |
| **Income** | |
| **Sale of Hanifaru Access Permits** | |
| Male' and Eydhafushi | 3,467,628.00 |
| **BR Partnership Fees** | |
| Resorts, Dive Schools, Liveaboards | 262,140.00 |
| **Tour Guide Exam Registration Fees** | |
| Male and Eydhafushi | 45,100.00 |
| **Photography and Videography Permit and other permits** | 246,180.00 |
| **Total Income** | **4,021,048.00** |

The largest source of income was the sale of **Hanifaru Access Permits**, demonstrating the importance of sustainable visitor management and associated conservation financing within the Biosphere Reserve.

### 8.3 Expenditure

Total expenditure during 2024 amounted to **MVR 1,162,534.47**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Expenditure** | |
| **BACF Management Costs** | |
| Salary and Allownaces | 477,021.64 |
| | **477,021.64** |
| **Transport** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Internal /Sea | 300,322.00 |
| Internal /Air | 35,134.00 |
| Overseas | 55,920.00 |
| | **391,376.00** |
| **Office Management Costs** | |
| Office Operation | 22,000.00 |
| Services for Office Operation | 0.00 |
| Office Equipment | 0.00 |
| Fuel | 110,080.00 |
| Miscellneous Expenses | 5,360.00 |
| Printing Costs | 22,555.80 |
| Transportation of goods | 24,931.23 |
| | **184,927.03** |
| **Meetings, Workshops, Seminars** | |
| Meetings, Workshops, Seminars | 13,389.00 |
| | **13,389.00** |
| **Maintenance** | |
| Spare parts | 23,514.00 |
| BR Vessel | 1,635.00 |
| | **25,149.00** |
| **Procurement of Goods** | |
| IT Related Hardware | 19,654.60 |
| Other Equipment | 33,595.00 |
| | **53,249.60** |
| **Programmes** | |
| Celebration of Special Occassions | 6,264.00 |
| Community Programs | 11,158.20 |
| | **17,422.20** |
| | |
| **Total Expenditure** | **1,162,534.47** |

## 9. FINANCIAL POSITION AT THE END OF 2024

The Fund recorded total income of **MVR 4,021,048.00** and total expenditure of **MVR 1,162,534.47** during 2024.

This resulted in a net increase in capital of **MVR 2,858,513.53**

The financial position can be summarised as follows:

| Financial Indicator | Amount (MVR) |
|---|---|
| Running Capital – End of 2023 | 14,347,731.07 |
| Total Income – 2024 | 4,021,048.00 |
| Total Expenditure – 2024 | (1,162,534.47) |
| **Net Increase in Capital** | **2,858,513.53** |
| **Running Capital – End of 2024** | **17,206,244.60** |

The increase in the Fund's capital during 2024 strengthens BACF's capacity to support future conservation and sustainable development initiatives within the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.

## 10. OUTLOOK AND PRIORITIES

The next phase of BACF's development will focus on strengthening the Fund's institutional, financial and programme capacity.

Key priorities include:

**Strengthened Governance**

Regular BACF Board meetings from 2025 onwards, in accordance with the recommendations of the Mid-Term Review of the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve, will provide stronger oversight and strategic direction.

**Sustainable Financing**

BACF will continue to strengthen and diversify sustainable sources of conservation financing while ensuring that revenue-generating activities remain consistent with the conservation objectives of the Biosphere Reserve.

**Capacity Building**

Continued development of certified tour guides and other stakeholders will contribute to improved visitor management and environmental awareness.

**Research and Knowledge**

BACF will continue to support responsible research and knowledge generation that contributes to evidence-based management of the Biosphere Reserve.

**Sustainable Tourism**

The Fund will continue to support mechanisms that promote responsible tourism while ensuring that tourism-related activities contribute to conservation and benefit local communities.

**Community Participation**

Local communities remain central to the long-term success of the Biosphere Reserve. Future initiatives will continue to encourage community participation, awareness and locally relevant conservation and sustainable development activities.

## 11. CONCLUSION

The year 2024 represented another important year in the continued development of the Baa Atoll Conservation Fund and its contribution to the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve.

Through its financial mechanisms, permit systems, tour guide certification, research oversight and programme support, BACF continued to contribute to the responsible management of the natural resources of Baa Atoll.

The Fund's financial position strengthened during the year, with running capital increasing from **MVR 14.35 million at the end of 2023 to MVR 17.21 million at the end of 2024**. **18 Partnership agreements** were signed including 1 resort, 10 dives schools and 4 guest houses. At the same time, the certification of **111 tour guides**, conduct of **135 tour guide examinations**, issuance of **10 research permits** and **10 photography/videography**

**permits** demonstrate the continued role of BACF in supporting capacity building, research and responsible use of the Biosphere Reserve.

The recommendations of the Mid-Term Review provide an important foundation for the next phase of institutional development. The regular convening of BACF Board meetings from 2025 onwards will strengthen governance, accountability and strategic oversight of the Fund.

BACF remains committed to ensuring that financial resources are managed responsibly and directed towards activities that support the long-term conservation and sustainable development of Baa Atoll.

The Fund recognises that the success of the Biosphere Reserve is ultimately a shared responsibility. Continued cooperation among Government institutions, local councils, communities, tourism partners, researchers, conservation organisations and other stakeholders will be essential to maintaining Baa Atoll's position as a leading example of integrated conservation and sustainable development.




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