



Fishermen's Forum 2019

On the occasion of the 39th Fishermen's Day of the Maldives

Report

Prepared by: Hawwa Raufath Nizar & Munshidha Ibrahim

Reviewed by: Aminath Lubna

Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture

Malé, Maldives

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Opening of the forum	1
3.	Highlights of the sessions	2
3.1	Session 1: On the Allocation of Fishing Opportunities for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the Indian Ocean	2
3.2	Session 2: Changes in the global market and trade flow of sea cucumbers	6
3.3	Session 3: Fisheries Insurance Schemes	8
3.4	Session 4: Statistics in Maldivian Fisheries	8
3.5	Session 5: The involvement of foreign labourers in the fisheries sector	10
3.6	Session 6: Status of sharks and changes in its population	13
3.7	Session 7: The Fisheries Act of Maldives and regulation made pursuant to it	17
3.8	Session 8: Masveriya Card	22
3.9	Session 9: Reducing the Production of Plastic Waste in the Fisheries Sector	22
3.10	Session 10: Open discussion session	23
	Appendix I: List of Participants.....	25

1. Introduction

This forum was convened to mark the occasion of the 39th Fishermen's Day of Maldives.

The objectives of the forum were:

- To share information on the fisheries sector with stakeholders;
- To inform the stakeholders about the changes in the fisheries law;
- To discuss the challenges present within the sector and their potential solutions;
and
- To discuss avenues for the development of the fisheries sector in the Maldives.

The forum was attended by a total of 50 participants; including 35 fishers and vessel owners and 15 representatives of the industry. A detailed list of the participants is included in Appendix I. The meeting was held from 8th – 10th December at Brightway International School, Hulhumalé, Maldives.

2. Opening of the forum

The participants were welcomed by the Director of Fisheries Compliance, MOFMRA, Mr. Adam Ziyad. In his remarks, Ziyad noted the successful outcomes of the previous forums and their important role in policy formulation. Following the welcoming remarks, the Minister of Fisheries Marine Resources and Agriculture, Ms. Zaha Waheed addressed the participants. In her keynote speech, she highlighted the important discussions ahead, noting in particular the importance of stakeholder contributions in these sessions.

3. Highlights of the sessions

3.1 **Session 1: On the Allocation of Fishing Opportunities for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the Indian Ocean**

By: Dr Mohamed Shiham Adam, Director General of Fisheries Department, Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources & Agriculture

3.1.1 **Summary of Presentation:**

- While 80% of the yellowfin tuna catch in the Indian Ocean was attributed to Maldives in the 1960s and early 1970s, with the introduction of Distant Water Fishing Nation (DWFN) fleets into the Indian Ocean, we now account for 20% of the catch. Alongside this observed trend of increased removal, fish catch in the Indian Ocean rose up until 2006 and then declined substantially in the ensuing years.
- Consequently, Resolution 10/01, 'For the conservation and management of tropical tunas stocks in the IOTC area of competence' was passed in the IOTC in 2010 and included provisions for the formation of a technical committee to discuss on allocation criteria for the management of the tuna resources of the Indian Ocean.
- The main goal of this management initiative is to maintain fisheries activities at both sustainable and profitable levels; to maintain fish catch perpetually at Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).
- The fish stocks, as per their current status reports, are in immediate need of strong management measures. Yellowfin tuna has been categorised as 'red' (overfished and subjected to overfishing) on the Kobe plot. While measures were taken on paper to combat this, including the decision in 2016 to reduce the catch based on gear of fleets to a proportion of the catch from 2014, they have not been very successful and catch has seen increase in recent years.
- Being the country with the 2nd highest catch of yellowfin tuna in the Indian Ocean, 3rd highest in skipjack tuna and 10th in bigeye, from the total 33 cooperating and

contracting parties in IOTC, Maldives has a responsibility towards the management of the stocks.

- In this regard, Maldives has spearheaded, with the support of the G16 group formed in 2011, a proposal on allocation of fishing opportunities for tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean, which is being sponsored by South Africa, Australia, Comoros, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Pakistan, Seychelles, Somalia and Tanzania. The proposal approaches the allocation process from a variety of angles and pays particular attention to the rights of the coastal states. Whereas, a proposal developed by the EU on the same subject matter is less detailed and heavily oriented towards catch history and is more advantageous to the large-scale industrial fleets of the DWFNs.
- Work done by Maldives in this regard is especially important to ensure the maintenance of the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification for our skipjack tuna catch. Furthermore, research data acquired through tagging and other means indicate that the tuna stocks are straddling and highly migratory, and therefore their management requires shared action at a regional level. It is also directly linked to the political soft power Maldives yields in fisheries matters in the region.
- The way forward must be through spreading awareness on the issue at both national and regional level, in particular, bringing the matter to the attention of law and policy makers, as well as through improved regional cooperation. We must improve upon our current research on the subject and increase our participation in the IOTC.
- Following the presentation, a discussion session with technical experts and the attendees of the forum were carried out. The panelists for this session were Director General of the Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture, Dr. Mohamed Shiham Adam, Minister of Environment, Dr. Hussain Rasheed Hassan and Advisor, Horizon Fisheries Pvt. Ltd., Adnan Ali.

3.1.2 Concerns and Discussions

- To start the discussion rolling, the moderator requested that the panellists briefly discuss on the rights of the coastal states and those of DWFNs within the UNCLOS and other international legal instruments.
- The panellists noted that while UNCLOS pays particular attention to the rights of the coastal states, shared stocks cannot be managed without the cooperation of DWFNs. In particular, the EU, to whom we export a large amount of our catch. The MSC, which has shifted in purpose to be almost equivalent to a license to export fish to the EU, also includes harvest control within its 8 conditions for certification. The shift of DWFN fleets from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean is due to the collapse of the Atlantic stocks. While they would have the capacity to once again focus their efforts elsewhere, should the Indian Ocean stocks decline greatly, the coastal states would have no such means. This is why we need to be involved in the allocation process, to ensure that the rights of the coastal states are given preference. Furthermore, even amongst the coastal states within this region, Maldives has a higher stake, with a large percentage of the labour force employed within the sector and fish being vital for our food security.
- Concerns were raised by participants about the purse seine fisheries being MSC certified. Questions were raised about the need to continue fishing using pole and line, if the method used is irrelevant to the certification and its retention. It was discussed that while purse seining employs a very small number of people, the Maldivian fisheries present job opportunities for hundreds of people, in the harvesting sector alone. Furthermore, while our premium has decreased since the initial certification, it is still higher than that received by several MSC certified fleets, in particular the purse seine fleets. Much work is being done to spread awareness amongst consumers on the difference between pole and line caught and purse seine caught tuna.
- A major concern raised by fishers was the lack of dissemination of information in this regard with fishers previously. They further expressed concern over the lack of accessibility to papers and research for fishermen, noting the importance of establishing mechanisms in this regard. Possible solutions discussed included

information sharing through the island councils, and dissemination of information through the new VMS systems which are being piloted, as well as the FIS application *Keyolhu*.

- Fishers raised the issue of the government not focusing on their greatest concerns and not involving stakeholders in decision making. It was noted in response that a lot of developmental activities in this sector such as the establishment of ice plants, as well as the move towards Refrigerated Sea Water (RSW) systems and the development of offloading ports and the work towards the obtainment and retention of the MSC certificate is work done by the government in direct relation to feedback received from stakeholders from meetings and forums such as this.
- Stakeholders noted the possibility of considering the catch allocation and declining stocks a matter of national security, given the importance of the fish to our food security.
- The importance of a pole and line marketing strategy was highlighted, noting the extensive funding MMPRC receives to promote Maldives as a tourist destination. It was also noted that this would be important for ensuring that Maldives receives its due share in allocation. While there is no marketing strategy developed at present, it was noted that the negotiations which will take place at IOTC will be crucial in this regard. Attendees were encouraged to carry the discussion forward and share the information, including with their elected officials, such as parliamentarians. To which, some fishers objected, insisting that the passing on of information should be the responsibility of the government.
- Participants questioned as to whether catch allocation would work in support of retaining the MSC certificate. It was discussed that the retention is dependent on the status of the entire stock, and therefore, it is also dependent on the catch amounts from other states.
- Industry participants noted that MSPEA was working actively to establish a separate golden standard, a single logo under which all Maldivian pole and line catch can be exported. This is because fishing is extremely important to Maldives as an economic activity and it is very important to change public perception

towards the sector through raising awareness, inclusion of the subject matter in our curricula and other means.

3.2 Session 2: Changes in the global market and trade flow of sea cucumbers

By: Shafiya Naeem, Aquatic Pathologist, Maldives Marine Research Institute

3.2.1 Summary of presentation:

- Sea cucumber fishery in the Maldives began in the 1980s.
- Over the past 10 years, the main markets for the Maldives have been Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Singapore. More recently, Hong Kong has been our main export market.
- Data on sea cucumbers is extremely limited. We do not have any information by types or species of sea cucumbers. All we have is the total quantity that has been exported each year.
- According to customs records, dried sea cucumbers cost USD 3 per kilogram. This seems to be inaccurate. Underestimations as such may affect management decisions on the fishery and may lead policy makers to consider this fishery as an insignificant contribution to our economy.
- In August 2019, at COP 18, three types of sea cucumbers have been included in the Appendix II of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) list. The two species that are relevant to Maldives are White teatfish and Black teatfish.
- The inclusion does not prohibit the trade of these species. However, countries that have ratified to this convention have to indicate that the species are exported in a way that does not negatively affect its populations. Currently, this information is not available.
- Companies would require a permit to export the two species of sea cucumbers that are now listed in the CITES. This permit will be granted by the CITES management authority, Ministry of Environment. Before the permits are granted, a

non-detrimental finding report needs to be prepared by the Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI). For this, a lot of preparation is required before August 2020.

3.2.2 Concerns and Discussions:

- According to fishers, sea cucumbers that could be harvested from the lagoon or shallow waters in the past now require greater effort and can only be obtained from deeper areas. This is an indication that the stocks of these species are declining.
- MMRI noted that there is a discrepancy in the prices of sea cucumbers provided by fishers or exporters to MMRI and the export records maintained by the Customs. The drawback of this is that the true market value of sea cucumbers is not represented when calculating the fishery's contribution towards the GDP.
- Fishers raised their concerns about bait fishery being negatively affected in areas near the lagoon where sea cucumbers are gutted and cleaned.
- Not gaining export access to China was raised as a huge concern of fish exporters. In response to this concern, it was clarified by the Ministry that the custom requirements by China is different from other countries and that they require other documents in addition to the catch certificate. Fulfilling these additional requirements has been a challenge due to language barriers and translation issues.
- Industry representatives raised their concern about Chinese businesses having commenced sea cucumber trade in the Maldives with a small commission payable to a Maldivian.
- Participants requested that the teatfish export quota to be determined proportionally based on the export quota of other countries / competitors.

3.2.3 Additional information and notes:

- On average, a Tigerfish is sold at the rate of MVR 90 or MVR 100. However, the prices of different species vary significantly and can range from MVR 2 to MVR 650. Drying levels of sea cucumbers also varies from one species to another. Some are dried 20-fold of its bodyweight, and some to just 5-fold.
- According to information received by MMRI, there are 1300 fishers involved in the sea cucumber fishery.

3.3 Session 3: Fisheries Insurance Schemes

By: Maldives Fishermen's Association

As per the request of Maldives Fishermen' Association (MFA), a session was held on the various insurance schemes and legal aid available for fishers and vessel owners. Facilitated by MFA, representatives from CTL Strategies LLP, Ayady Takaful and the Maldives Islamic Bank presented on their services and how they may be used in a fisheries context. Fishers raised concerns about the difficulty in claiming insurance after accidents and requested that MOFMRA intervene in such cases to ensure that the due amounts are received. It was noted that terms and conditions of the insurance plan must be reviewed thoroughly to ensure that vessels and vessels owners are able to claim insurance in case of an accident.

3.4 Session 4: Statistics in Maldivian Fisheries

By: Mohamed Ahusan, Senior Research Officer, Maldives Marine Research Institute

3.4.1 Summary of presentation:

- Maldives has a long history of fishery. Fishing has been a source of income and livelihood sustenance for Maldivians for centuries.

- However, historical fishery data indicating the extent to which Maldivians were dependent on this industry is extremely limited. The only information available are through travel diaries or other qualitative sources.
- The Maldives fishery data collection began in 1959 and has significantly improved over the years.
- The data collected through the fishery logbook program are used to make decisions on sustainably managing the fisheries and are not disclosed to other parties except for fisheries management purposes. The data are never shared with commercial entities that could use it for commercial purposes.
- Tuna catch and effort data are also used for the assessment of Indian ocean tuna stocks and are important regionally.
- The rest of the presentation described each section of the tuna log sheet with examples of how the data from the section could be used.

3.4.2 Concerns and Discussions:

- Fishers need to be aware on the importance of reporting accurate information and the use of the logbooks. The line of communication through which this information is shared needs to be efficient and sustainable.
- A fisher noted that they have been complaining about the decline in bait fishery over the past few years and enquired if any studies have been done on it. In response, MMRI clarified that a statistical analysis of this has not been done yet as there are concerns around the accuracy of reported numbers. Variations in reported numbers by different fishers are significantly high. Regardless, utilising information received through logbooks and doing an analysis on bait fishery was strongly recommended by a participant.
- Reporting via hard copies of logbooks is a challenge for fishers. A mobile application through which fishers could report their catch will be launched soon. Data received via this will be directly synced with the ministry's database.
- A fisher raised his concern about a lot of data being collected, analysed and reported yet the information never reaching the common fisher. He highlighted the

need of these reports being more accessible to fishers. Knowledge gained by the ministry staff through various trainings and conferences also need to be shared with the fishers.

- Concerns were raised about data being shared with international bodies like the European Union. It was clarified that certain information is shared with organizations as a requirement under ratified conventions. These are organizations that have certain security and privacy standards. The information is shared to comply with such requirements and are shared in aggregated levels where possible.

3.4.3 Additional information and notes:

- The logbook is designed in a way that requires limited effort by the fishermen and includes minimal information that is needed to understand the catch rates.

3.5 Session 5: The involvement of foreign labourers in the fisheries sector

By: Ahmed Shifaz, Assistant Director, Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources & Agriculture

3.5.1 Summary of presentation:

- The issue of foreign labourers is not only singular to the fisheries sector; today it is considered a matter of national concern. This issue has the potential to adversely impact the fisheries sector, as it is important to maintain the essence and origin of Maldivian fisheries
- The issue needs a quick, effective and permanent solution
- As per the previous law, foreign fishers were not permitted to fish within the inner 75 miles of the EEZ. While foreign flagged vessels were licensed to fish in Maldivian EEZ until 2009, the permission is no longer issued, by law.
- If the Ministry is to conclude, with the feedback from stakeholders, that foreign labour is needed in vessels, numbers and conditions must be established,

including what sort of duties they can be permitted to carry out. Would it be restricted to cleaning, cooking and guarding, or would it also include active involvement in the fishing activities.

- If they are to work in directly harvesting fish, as Maldivian fishers do, then there must not be a discrepancy in pay, as two people who are doing the same work cannot be differentially treated in this manner. This especially important for the retention of the fair-trade certification
- The numbers may also depend on the type and size of the vessels and the type of fishery, amongst other factors.

3.5.2 Concerns and Discussions:

- Industry participants noted that foreign labourers are needed presently because there are not enough Maldivians who have an interest in the sector.
- Participants also noted that MOFMRA is obliged as per the recently ratified Fisheries Act of Maldives, to maintain a registry of fishers from across the country. Concerns were raised about how foreign labour would factor into this, noting that MOFMRA is not aware of the extent of the problem.
- Furthermore, it was noted that while paying foreign labourers the same wage as Maldivian fishers, other costs must also be borne for them, including deposit and visa fees. It was also noted with great concern, that this was one of the main avenues for cash flowing out of the country and how policy planning to revert this through education, training and plans on women and youth inclusivity must be expedited. It was noted that the fisheries sector is a high wage job, in the context of the country and more awareness should be created in this regard.
- Fishers highlighted the importance of developing a pay framework to clearly indicate how pay should be structured in the fish harvesting sector. It was also noted that if foreign labourers are employed on a contract basis, the issue of the wage gap becomes irrelevant.
- Concerns were also raised about how the lack of youth in the fisheries sector also links into the persisting substance abuse epidemic. Some also noted that youth

were less active and inclined towards heavy labour, while foreign labourers were more efficient. It was also highlighted that foreign labourers were also resent in very senior positions on vessels, sometimes directly next to the skipper, on the hierarchy.

- With regards to human rights of the labourers, it was also noted that in the case of some vessels, all fishers are equally distributed their shares, however, the vessel owner takes half of the earnings of foreign labourers for his own. In this regard, human trafficking is also a very important issue, and can greatly impact the reputation and legitimacy of the fisheries. It was agreed that regulations were necessary in this regard.
- One fisher noted that due to the low MCS capacity of MOFMRA and the government, if permission is given to allow foreign labour, the reality of the situation would go unchecked, insisting that the fishing community would be destroying itself. However, most fishers and vessels owners noted the inevitability of foreign labour, as the situation currently stands, especially given that most Maldivians are not interested in carrying out the roles foreign labourers currently do, including cooking and cleaning. However, it was also noted that while 3-4 foreign labourers on a vessel are needed to do these chores, when vessels start to have upwards of 8 foreign labourers, this is indicative of a bigger problem. It was asked whether there simply were not enough fishers left to cater to the growing industry.
- It was noted that we cannot immediately ban foreign labour within the sector, given the scale of their involvement, however, in the short term, we can look towards limiting labour and developing the fishers required to take their place. This can also be done by giving internships to students, as is done in the tourism sector. Completely phasing out foreign labour should be a long term plan.
- Participants from the industry noted that there are several issues with introducing youth into the harvesting sector, noting that they have already developed a Level 4 Certificate course for fisheries but have not received the support needed in integrating it into the current curriculum.

3.5.3 Additional information and notes:

- It was noted that the current system enforces the submission of a crew list when fishing licenses are issued and renewed. Furthermore, it was also noted that Skippers are required to sign a vow, with each license application. It was suggested that both these measures should be considered with minor amendments, as a way to monitor foreign labour within the sector.

3.6 Session 6: Status of sharks and changes in its population

By: Sarah Hashim, Research Officer, Maldives Marine Research Institute

3.6.1 Summary of presentation:

- Shark fishing began in the Maldives in the 1970s. Shark species that were fished include Gulper Shark (*kashi miyaru*), reef sharks (*faru miyaru*), and oceanic sharks (*kan'du miyaru*).
- During the early 2000s, shark fishery in the Maldives declined and fishing for Gulper Sharks completely halted. The status of shark fishing activity during this time is summarised below:

	2003	2007
Number of atolls involved in shark fishery	12	8
Number of vessels involved in shark fishery	132	46
Number of fishers involved in shark fishery	528	184

- Following this, great declines were observed in shark exports. The total quantity of sharks that was exported in 2007 was 233 metric tonnes compared to the 400 metric tonnes that was exported in 2003. As a result, the revenue gained from shark trade declined by 77.7% over the four-year period. The most income was generated via the export of shark fins (*uraha*).
- Oceanic shark fisheries became a source of conflict with pole and line tuna industry. Silky sharks were known as an aid in aggregating bait schools, and the

decline in silky sharks were correlated to challenges in collecting bait, by tuna fishermen. They believed that the harvesting of silky sharks and other sharks associated with tuna schools was having a large negative impact on tuna availability.

- Another conflict of interest was between reef shark fishermen and the tourism industry as reef shark watching by divers is one of the main attractions for tourist divers visiting the Maldives.
- It was estimated in 1992 that divers spent around US\$2.3 million to watch the sharks in the Maldives; in contrast the export of all shark products earned around US \$0.5 million in the same year. In 2016, US\$14.4 million was generated from shark watching alone.
- Since the early '80s, numerous management measures had been taken on shark fisheries. The first measure came in 1981, where shark fishing during day time was prohibited in tuna fishing areas. This was superseded in 1992 by the decision to prohibit shark fishing with bait in the vicinity of tuna schools in the presence of tuna fishing vessel. In 1996, taking sharks or operating any type of fishing that might be detrimental to pole and line tuna fishing was banned within 3 miles radius of any FAD. In addition, in 1996 and 1997, longlining for sharks was banned also around important seamounts for tuna fisheries. In 1998, in hopes of replenishing the declining reef shark stocks, a ten-year moratorium on shark fishing was declared within 12 nautical miles of seven atolls. Despite the many management measures imposed, decline in shark fisheries continued, prompting new management actions. In 2010, a ban on shark fishing within the entire territorial waters was declared. This was an important measure taken to reduce negative impacts on the most significant two contributors to our economy (tourism and tuna fishery). Maldives is the second nation in the world to become a sanctuary for sharks. The advantage of having these management measures is the high market value of the fish exported from the Maldives.

- The sharks that have been listed in the Appendix II of CITES, which is an international agreement between governments that regulates trade, are:
 - Scalloped hammerhead (2014)
 - Silky shark (2016)
 - Thresher sharks (2016)
 - Shortfin mako (2019)
- According to the ongoing video surveys, compared to other countries such as Seychelles and Australia that have regulated and manage the shark fishery, the abundance of sharks in the Maldives is low. However, compared to the other countries in this region, the abundance of sharks is high, although not significantly.
- Results of a diver survey conducted between 2009 and 2014, shark sightings in majority of the sites were very low. The highest number of sightings were observed in areas that have been protected over long periods of time and the least number of sightings were in atolls where reef fishery used to be practiced.
- Shark depredation issues have been the most pressing complaints from fishers in recent times. Complaints have been raised by reef fishers, grouper fishers as well as yellow-fin tuna fishers. In order to understand the impacts of sharks on tuna fisheries, an observers' survey was conducted. A total of 102 trips were made in this survey and shark depredation level was measured at 10% (1-2 catch per trip).
- Shark depredation issue may be indirectly linked to the expansion of reef fishery, which may have led to declines in naturally occurring sources of food for the sharks.
- Behavioural changes are noticed in sharks due to easy access to food sources through regular shark feeding practices at resorts as well as discards of fish waste from fish processing plants. When the sharks feel the vibration of a vessel, they are attracted towards the vessel, potentially because they recognise the vibration as an indication of food availability.
- In going forward, there are plans to:
 - Continue the work done to understand the changes in shark populations;
 - Incorporate a research component on shark depredation into field surveys;

- Determine the source of shark depredation issues (whether it is the increased abundance or changes in their behaviour);
- Identify the types/species of sharks that usually cause depredation; and
- Understand the correlation between shark depredation and operation of reef fishery.

3.6.2 Concerns and Discussions:

- Complaints were raised about sharks being a nuisance to fishers. According to fishers, sharks are more abundant than fish in the sea. A participant suggested lifting the ban on shark fishery out in the ocean while retaining the ban on reef shark fishery as tourists are interested in snorkelling around the reefs. The other option suggested by a participant was lifting the ban on shark fishery for a certain period of time, given that the premium value of Maldives exports remains unaffected by the decision. Doing a more recent biological survey to determine current shark population was also strongly suggested.
- Inconsistency in complaints received from fishers and numbers recorded by field observers is a concern of the ministry.
- Grouper fishermen claimed that they are affected the most by sharks. Grouper fishery is an inshore fishery, and they usually dive to target the fish. The high numbers of sharks have meant that the practice of grouper catch has become extremely dangerous for fishers.
- A participant raised his concern about sharks being exported unofficially / illegally even at this time.

3.7 Session 7: The Fisheries Act of Maldives and regulation made pursuant to it

By: Adam Ziyad, Director, Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources & Agriculture

3.7.1 Summary of presentation:

- The new Fisheries Bill 14/2019 was passed by the Parliament on 5th September 2019, and was ratified by the President on 16th September 2019. It is comprised of 12 chapters and 80 clauses.
- The previous Fisheries Act was passed on 24th August 1987. The main objective of this law was to determine boundaries where foreign vessels can carry out fishing activities in the maritime zones of the Maldives.
- The main challenge in regulating the fisheries sector under this Act was that it was very broad and referred to all the various sections of the fisheries sector collectively. Managing the different sections and types of fisheries under this law was therefore difficult.
- In addition, the law did not specify offences related to the fisheries sector and only stated the penalties associated with the operation of foreign fishing vessels within the Maldives, some of which were outdated and conflicted with international conventions that Maldives has ratified to. A revised and modernised law, therefore, was essential to improve the management of fisheries and marine resources of the Maldives.
- In 2017, the new Act was submitted to the Attorney general's office as a Framework Act to govern and manage all the fisheries sectors of Maldives.
- The new law was formulated after discussions with multiple stakeholders, including fishers, representatives from the fisheries sector, relevant government agencies as well as various civil societies.
- The purpose of this framework law is to provide a governance framework for the protection and management of the fisheries resources of the Maldives. It provides general obligations and principles for the sustainable use and management of fisheries resources within the maritime zones of the Maldives and mandates the

Ministry to formulate and enact further regulations pursuant to it. It specifies the responsibilities of implementation and enforcement agencies, their authoritative powers, offences and respective penalties.

- If within the maritime zones of the Maldives, the Act applies to Maldives and foreign fishing vessels entering the maritime zones of the Maldives and to Maldivians and foreign nationals in, or associated with, such vessels. The Act also applies to fishing and related activities carried out in such vessels and any other matters falling within the scope of the Act. If outside the maritime zones of the Maldives, it applies to Maldives fishing vessels and all Maldivians and foreign nationals on these vessels.
- The law requires the Ministry to dedicate one day of the year to celebrate Fishermen's Day, establish a fisheries institute or college to promote and expand the fisheries industry and establish a mechanism to provide modern fisheries education and training, formulate an action plan to protect seabird nesting islands, sandbanks and such other areas, and prepare and keep under review fishery management plans for the planning and management of each type of commercial fisheries.
- The Act prohibits the following types of fishing; Purse seine fishing; Gillnet fishing; Trawl net fishing; Fishing using a net with the exception of bait fishing and fishing for personal consumption; and Fishing using an explosive, poison or such other chemical.
- According to the law, foreign vessels are prohibited from engaging in any type of fishing in the maritime zones of the Maldives. The implementation agency has the right to penalise foreign vessels that contravene the Act and the fines can be up to 20 times the amount imposed on local vessels. In this regard, the Ministry has the discretion to impose a fine of MVR 400,000.00 against a foreign vessel fishing without a license or in contravention of licensing conditions and the authority to impose a fine of MVR 200,000.00 against any person that carries out the types of fishing prohibited under the law. The Ministry needs to enact a regulation that clearly outlines these penalties.

- The Ministry is required to formulate regulations on the establishment and operation of offshore platforms and neighbourhood fish factories.
- Although the bill does not clearly specify the policies of the government or indicate the four resolutions that were submitted to the parliament. it paves the way to implement and enforce these resolutions and activities relevant to the government's policies.
- Since it is a governance framework law, the following aspects are not a part of this bill:
 - Providence of welfare benefits to fishermen. However, it ensures the protection of the rights of fishers and everyone involved in the sector when enacting, implementing and enforcing fisheries related regulations. A separate Act is needed to provide social welfare benefits such as a pension scheme to fishers.
 - Ensuring fair prices for fish and fish products.
- The bill grants the relevant authorities the power to enact regulations in order to implement and enforce the policies of the government. Some of the policies can be achieved without enacting separate regulations. For example, addressing the issues related to ice plants. Others may require specific regulations, for example, establishing offshore platforms.
- Prosecuting offenders within this sector is difficult due to challenges in obtaining sufficient and reliable evidence. The bill grants authority to access the premises of fish processing plants without a court order, allowing security forces such as the police to take actions against parties involved in illegal fisheries related activities.

3.7.2 Concerns and Discussions:

- Several fishers present noted that there were many challenges within the fisheries sector due to the conflicts of interest between the sector and the tourism sector, noting that the extensive tourist resort boundaries, information regarding which is unavailable in the public domain, greatly restrict fishers' rights and access to

resources. Fishers highlighted that given that the country is 98% water, and the fisheries sector is crucial to ensuring food security and livelihoods, the way other sectors are always being prioritized over the fisheries sector is highly detrimental.

- A vessel owner noted that the restrictions with regards to the resort boundaries were initially developed due to protect tourists' privacy due to an incident in that occurred where a tourist's photo was taken without their consent. However, he noted that it was unfair that the whole community should suffer due to the actions of one fisher. He further noted that some resort boundaries have now extended well beyond the 700 metres originally declared in the regulation, due to the clause which allows further extension under contracts with the Tourism Ministry. He highlighted that this was particularly concerning, given the increase in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and resort islands, year by year.
- On this note, fishers further raised the importance of shallow lagoons and island reefs for the bait fishery, which is an integral part of the tuna fishery, tied to the history and tradition of the craft of fishing in Maldives. They expressed concern about the poor consultation with fishers and MOFMRA, prior to declaring important fishing grounds as conservation areas and tourist resorts, stating that it was unacceptable for historical and crucial bait grounds to be lost simply because the Tourism Ministry did not consider it necessary to engage the other resource users and stakeholders in the decision making process.
- Other fishers present also noted that the Tourism Industry alone cannot be held responsible for the inequitable resource use allocation and access rights, as there is much public drive for the development of tourism facilities, fishers should also make their concerns heard with the island and atoll councils, rather than only discussing these matters once a year at the Fishermen's Day Forum.
- Fishers also noted the use of nets, particularly by recreational fishers, in the lagoons of inhabited islands and raised questions as to how this can be better monitored.
- A fisher noted with concern, the encroachment of foreign fishing vessels, in particular Sri Lankan ones, into Maldivian waters, especially during Iruvai Monsoon. He noted that while 7 foreign vessels have recently been captured for this offence, all were released by the Maldivian Government. Questions were

raised as to how fishers can be better equipped to report and deal with IUU fishing by foreign flagged vessels. A representative from the Ministry responded that a regulation on fining will be put into place under the new Fisheries Act of Maldives, so that fines can be issued immediately, without a long dispute resolution and investigation process involving the police, the Prosecutor General's Office and the courts. Regarding the illegal fishing operations by Sri Lankan vessels, it was assured that MOFMRA will request Sri Lanka to take action against those vessels, and will also share the information with the EU's IUU team which works together with the Ministry.

- Concerns were also raised about the increasingly prevalent use of light in attracting fish, within the grouper fishery and how this can cause significant damage to the ecosystem and fish stocks, especially when grouper aggregation sites are targeted. MOFMRA representatives stated that there are plans to create additional protected areas for groupers, with better monitoring, control and surveillance measures. It was also explained that the Grouper Fishery Management Plan is being reviewed under the World Bank SFRD Project, and such concerns will be considered and duly addressed within this process.
- Questions were asked about what was being done to protect the seabird populations and their nesting sites, noting that in certain areas such as Hithadhoo Raha birds are not present anymore due to erosion and other environmental problems. It was explained from MOFMRA side that seabird protection and management is under the mandate of the Ministry of Environment
- A question was raised about why the fishery management plans were taking so long to formulate, and whether the fishing community will be sufficiently engaged prior to finalising the plans. Concerns were raised that the consultative process was not thorough enough. The Ministry responded that survey forms have been sent to all of the island councils, to identify key stakeholder islands for each fishery, based on fisher and vessel numbers, noting that stakeholder trips at various levels have been conducted in several islands based on this information and that it is an ongoing process.

3.8 Session 8: Masveriya Card

By: Bank of Maldives

This session was presented by Bank of Maldives, where they explained how the card works and discussed the challenges associated with the service.

3.9 Session 9: Reducing the Production of Plastic Waste in the Fisheries Sector

By: Shaahina Ali & Hulwa Khaleel, Parley Maldives

3.9.1 Summary of presentation:

- In June 2019, Parley Maldives commenced a programme to facilitate fishing vessels to easily dispose of their plastic waste.
- Once the vessels dispose the plastic, fishing companies are required to follow a standard procedure to transport the collected jumbo bags to Thilafushi/Male'. Details of this Standard Operating Procedure and a list of the materials provided by Parley to programme participants can be found in the Appendix.
- So far, 105 boats and 5 companies have signed up for the programme and 61 individual boats have logged records. A total of 709.51 kg of plastic waste has been logged from August to November 2019.

3.10 Session 10: Open discussion session

Panel: Zaha Waheed, Minister of Fisheries, Marine Resources & Agriculture

Hassan Rasheed, State Minister of Fisheries, Marine Resources & Agriculture

Ismail Fauzee, CEO, MIFCO

- It is a concern of fishers that while fishermen have invested in the development of their gear and fleet through their income, the government has not put much effort into developing the infrastructure such as processing plants. The factory in Kooddoo has not changed in 18 years. The Minister of MOFMRA noted that the ministry recognises the current status and challenges and assured that the ministry is formulating plans and policies to overcome these challenges.
- Having to travel long distances to get ice was raised as a great concern by fishers. Some ice plants that have been established haven't started operations in months. In response, the Minister highlighted the lack of companies' presence as a cause for the limited development of the fishery sector in the northern region of Maldives, and ensured that the ministry is working towards addressing these problems based on the availability of financial resources.
- While the Bank of Maldives promises that the *Masveriyaa Card* can be used every day, regardless of the weekends or holidays, the processing companies in Kooddoo claim that the payments cannot be processed on a holiday. MIFCO assured that this issue will be resolved by the end of the year.
- Fishers raised the challenges associated with accessing docking harbours in Male' region due to high traffic, especially in Hulhumale'. According to the fishers, the harbours are filled with supply vessels and these remain docked for days, blocking the way of fishing vessels. MSPEA noted that this problem needs to be addressed through discussions with the Hulhumale' Development Corporation. The Minister added that discussions are ongoing with the Male' City Council to arrange a harbour for fishing vessels to dock in Male'.
- Question was raised about why no compensations are given to vessel owners on loss or damage to vessels caused by a fire similar to how compensations are given to loss or damage to homes caused by a fire incident. The ministry clarified that

insurance schemes are now available for fishers so that they can claim for any such loss and that the ministry is working towards making information on these schemes easily accessible to fishers and vessel owners.

- A fisher requested the exemption of duty on raw materials (fibre) used to build fishing fleet.
- The importance of following safety guidelines and equipment checks in fishing vessels were discussed. This will minimise the risk of decompression incidents that currently occur so frequently.

Appendix I: List of Participants

Fishers and Vessel Owners

No.	Name	Atoll	Island
1.	Ibrahim Reehan	AA	Rasdhoo
2.	Ali Hassan	ADh	Mahibadhoo
3.	Ismail Shimal	Dh.	Kudahuvadhoo
4.	Ibrahim Rasheed	Dh	Meedhoo
5.	Moosa Jameel	Dh	Meedhoo
6.	Ali Rasheed	F	Feeali
7.	Areeh Ismail	F	Bilehdhoo
8.	Fiyaz Hassan	GA	Gemanafushi
9.	Mohamed Didi	GA	Gemanafushi
10.	Ameez Hassan	GA	Villingili
11.	Mohamed Rasheed	GDh.	Faresmaathodaa
12.	Mohamed Hassan	GDh.	Thinadhoo
13.	Abdul Hannan Ahmed Fulhu	HA	Hoarafushi
14.	Abduhlatheef Umar	K	Gaafaru
15.	Abdul Maseeh Abdul Raheem	L	Hithadhoo
16.	Aboobakuru Moosa	L.	Hithadhoo
17.	Mohamed Adam	Lh.	Hinnavaru
18.	Ali Rasheed	R.	Maduvvari
19.	Ali Saeed	S.	Hulhudhoo
20.	Ahmed Rashnaan	Th.	Vandhoo
21.	Ali Shareef	Th.	Hiriladhoo
22.	Ali Waheed	AA	Rasdhoo
23.	Moosa Jamaal	B	Kendhoo
24.	Muhuthaz Muhsin	GA	Maamendhoo
25.	Ahmed Firaq	GA	Kolamaafushi
26.	Ismail Shareef	GA	Kolamaafushi
27.	Mohamed Shafeeg	GDh	Madaveli
28.	Saddam Solaah	GDh	Madaveli

29.	Fazulee Ismail	GDh	Madaveli
30.	Munzir Aboobakuru	HA	Hoarafushi
31.	Mohamed Mausoom	HA	Ihavandhoo
32.	Mohamed Hameed	HDh	Makunudhoo
33.	Adam Naseem	K.	Dhiffushi
34.	Ismail Adam	R.	Maduvvari
35.	Ali Auraf	S.	Maradhoo

Industry Representatives

No.	Name	Designation	Organisation
1.	Hussain Sinan	CEO	Big Fish Maldives Pvt. Ltd
2.	Maizan Ahmed Manik	President	Maldives Fishermen's Association
3.	Abdulla Shakir	Secretary General	Maldives Fishermen's Association
4.	Hussain Shareef	Secretary General	MSPEA
5.	Hussain Saany	HR Manager	Sea Partners Maldives Pvt. Ltd.
6.	Ibrahim Hussain	Operations Manager	Maldives Fishermen's Association
7.	Mohamed Nishah	Business Development Manager	Blue Bridge
8.	Abdul Ghaneer	General Manager	Blue Ventures
9.	Adnan Ali	MD	Horizon Fischeies Pvt. Ltd.
10.	Ahmed Shareef	Chief Sales and Marketing Officer	MIFCO
11.	Ahmed Naadhihu Ameer	Purchasing Officer	Maldives Quality Seafood Pvt. Ltd.
12.	Umar Jamal		Ocean Seafood Pvt. Ltd.
13.	Ibrahim Nadheeh	Observer	
14.	Mohamed Waseem		
15.	Ismail Fauzee	CEO	MIFCO