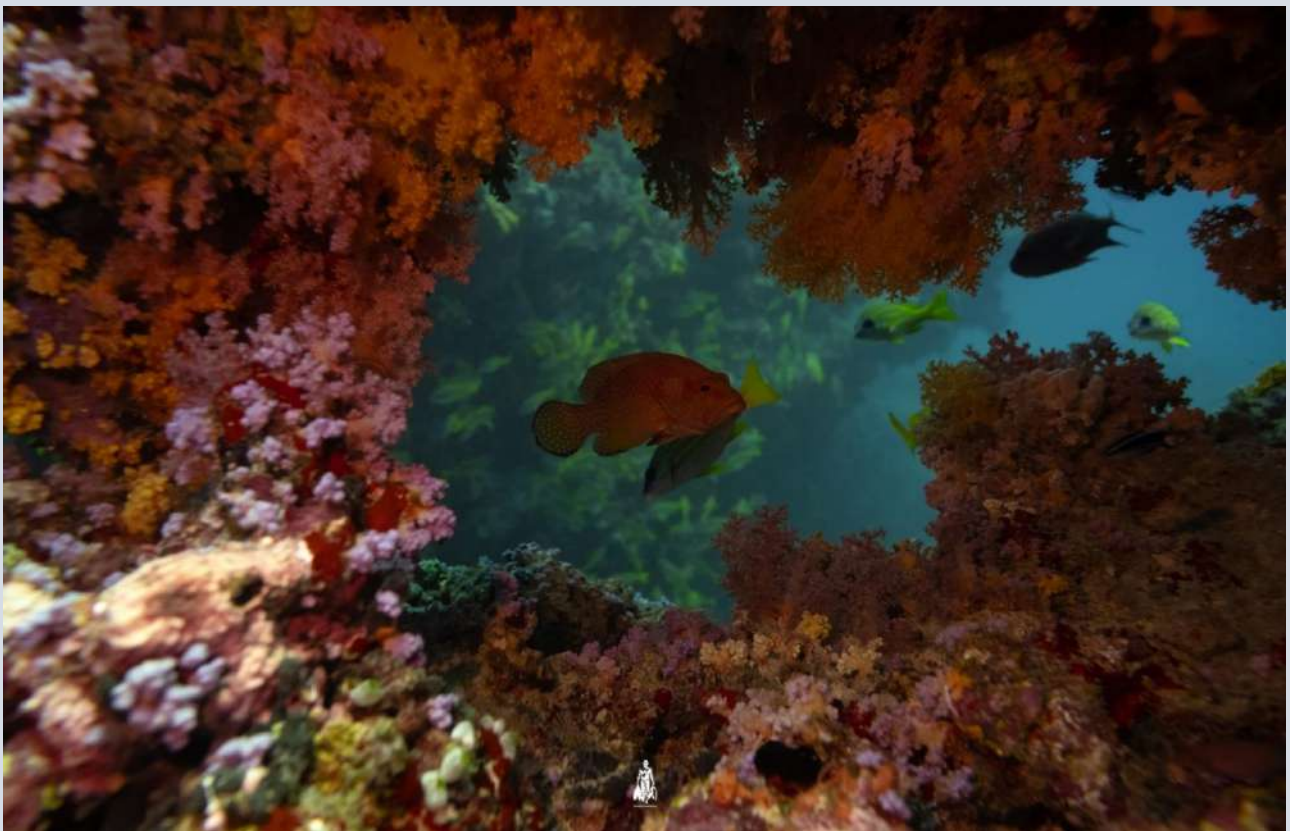


Ocean Country Partnership Programme

Finey Thila

Marine Protected Area

Conservation Plan 2025-2035



Submitted by Island Wetlands



**Ministry of Tourism
and Environment**

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Ocean Country Partnership Programme:

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a bilateral technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy and management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood.

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Executive Summary:

Finney Thila was designated as a Protected Area under the Environment Protection and Preservation Act (4/93) on 17th June 2019 under Category 7 (Area with Sustainable Use). Covering approximately 97.50 hectares, it is located within the jurisdiction of Haa Dhaalu Atoll Finney Island, featuring two distinct *thilas* (bottom reefs) forming a raised reef system. The larger *thila* begins at 12 meters' depth, and the smaller one starts at 18 meters, both covered in soft corals in pastel shades of pink, purple, and yellow. Finney Thila is home to diverse marine life, including vibrant fish species such as clownfish, butterflyfish, parrotfish, and angelfish, making it a popular site for diving and conservation activities.

This conservation plan is developed in accordance with Maldives Management Plan Guidance for Protected and Conserved Areas (August 2024), to ensure the sustainable use and management of the protected area (PA) for the ten-year period 2025-2035. Formulated through extensive stakeholder consultations with local councils, tourism operators, dive centers, and environmental authorities, the plan integrates traditional knowledge and scientific understanding of the area.

The vision for Finney Thila is: *"To preserve and showcase Finney Thila as a thriving underwater wonderland of vibrant coral ecosystems and rich biodiversity, fostering stewardship of marine conservation through community-driven management, responsible ecotourism, and sustainable use within the Haa Dhaalu Atoll."*

To realize this vision, this conservation plan outlines a comprehensive framework with conservation as the primary objective, supported by six strategic management objectives:

Primary Conservation Objective: To conserve and sustainably manage Finney Thila as a thriving marine protected area, protecting its coral ecosystems and biodiversity through community-driven governance, responsible ecotourism, and adaptive management, ensuring long-term ecological health and resilience.

Supporting Management Objectives:

Objective 1: By December 2028, establish a co-managed governance lead by the Finney Island Council, with essential infrastructure and protocols for protected area management, with an adaptive management approach incorporating voluntary codes of conduct and baseline data collection during the three-year grace period.

Objective 2: By December 2029, implement a formalized integrated management framework that transitions from voluntary codes of conduct to enforceable regulations while ensuring local governance and sustainable resource use.

Objective 3: By December 2028, enhance the health of Finney Thila's marine ecosystems through habitat protection measures, voluntary compliance strategies, and structured monitoring during the grace period.

Objective 4: By December 2030, develop and implement a sustainable tourism management system that aligns with conservation objectives while supporting local economic benefits.

Objective 5: By December 2030, establish a stakeholder engagement system that promotes knowledge-sharing, compliance with conservation measures, and active participation in MPA governance.

Objective 6: By December 2034, establish a comprehensive research and monitoring program that integrates community participation and provides data for adaptive management.

The management structure employs a two-tiered system with clear responsibilities:

- **National Level:** Policy direction and oversight by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) and technical guidance and enforcement by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
- **Implementation Level:** Daily operations and enforcement by Finey Council through the MPA Management Unit.

Strategic Areas and Key Management Measures

The plan focuses on seven strategic areas, each with specific management protocols. Key measures include implementing zoning schemes with clear activity protocols, introducing time limits of 2 hours per boat per dive, and allowing a maximum of six vessels within the protected area at any time. These measures aim to ensure sustainable use while minimizing environmental impacts and user conflicts.

Infrastructure priorities include installing six mooring buoys to prevent anchor damage and implementing a 5-knot speed restriction within the core zone. Visitor management will include a flexible fee structure, offering either an annual contribution for dive operators or a per-visitor entrance fee. Protocols will be established for local dive operators, resort dive operators, and safari boats to ensure compliance and equitable contributions to conservation efforts.

Monitoring and Enforcement

Monitoring efforts will focus on tracking reef health and assessing populations of vibrant fish species and other key indicators of ecological health. These efforts will be supported by local dive operators and environmental agencies. Enforcement mechanisms will include regular patrols and community-based monitoring, particularly during the peak dive season (October–February).

Financing and Stakeholder Engagement

Financing mechanisms will rely on visitor fees, contributions from resorts and dive operators, and potential Green Fund allocations. Stakeholder engagement will be facilitated through an Advisory Committee, ensuring regular input from key stakeholders, including local councils, resorts, and dive centers.

Adaptive Management

Adaptive management procedures will allow adjustments to be made based on monitoring results and stakeholder feedback. The strategies outlined aim to address potential challenges such as

increased visitation, resource use conflicts, and environmental degradation while fostering sustainable tourism development and local economic benefits for Finey Island.

With its potential as a premier tourism and recreational dive spot, Finey Thila's conservation plan ensures a balance between conservation and sustainable tourism development, paving the way for responsible use and long-term ecological health.

1. Introduction

Finney Thila, designated as a Protected Area on 17th June 2019 under the Environment Protection and Preservation Act (4/93), is a unique marine ecosystem located within the jurisdiction of Haa Dhaalu Atoll Finney Island. Spanning approximately 97.50 hectares, this protected area falls under Category 7 (Area with Sustainable Use), reflecting its potential for both conservation and sustainable tourism development. The site is characterized by two distinct thilas (bottom reefs) forming a raised reef system. The larger thila begins at a depth of 12 meters, while the smaller one starts at 18 meters, both adorned with soft corals in pastel shades of pink, purple, and yellow. These habitats support a diverse array of marine life, including vibrant fish species such as clownfish, butterflyfish, parrotfish, and angelfish, making Finney Thila a hidden gem for diving and marine conservation activities.

Unlike heavily frequented sites in the Maldives, Finney Thila remains underutilized, primarily visited by a few dive centers, resorts in the region, and safari boats. However, with recent plots leased for local tourism development on Finney Island, the area holds significant potential to emerge as a premier tourism and recreational dive destination in Haa Dhaalu Atoll. This provides a critical opportunity to establish robust management systems that protect the ecological integrity of Finney Thila while supporting its sustainable use for tourism and local economic development.

The conservation plan for Finney Thila focuses on addressing potential challenges before they arise, learning from pressures observed at more popular dive sites. The plan aims to safeguard critical marine habitats, such as the coral-covered thilas and fish nurseries, while fostering sustainable tourism practices. Measures include zoning protocols, speed restrictions, and infrastructure development, such as the installation of mooring buoys to prevent anchor damage. Research and monitoring programs, with an emphasis on coral health and marine life assessments, will guide adaptive management strategies to maintain the site's ecological balance.

Stakeholder consultations conducted in October 2024 have informed the development of this plan. Local dive operators emphasized Finney Thila's potential as a premium dive site and highlighted the need for early intervention to prevent overuse. Safari boat operators noted the importance of clear activity protocols to minimize conflicts and ensure equitable site access. The Finney Island Council stressed the alignment of conservation efforts with local tourism development to maximize benefits for the community. These insights have been crucial in shaping a plan that is both locally relevant and ecologically sound.

The governance structure for Finney Thila will operate as a co-management system with a lead role by the Finney Island Council, supported by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment., to ensure effective local management in alignment with national conservation policies. This locally driven approach ensures that management measures are tailored to the specific needs of Finney Thila while maintaining national conservation standards. With its unique coral formations, thriving marine life, and growing potential as a tourism hub, the plan represents a critical step toward positioning Finney Thila as a sustainably managed marine protected area, balancing ecological preservation with community-centered economic opportunities.

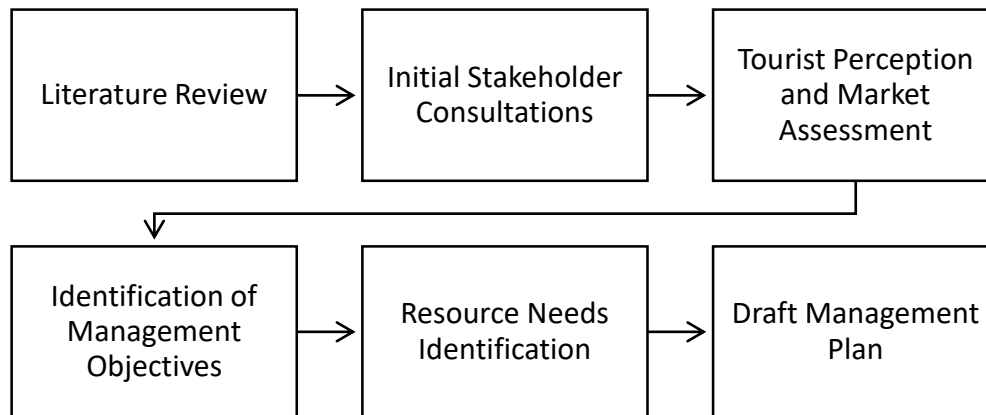


Figure 1 Process of development of Conservation Plan

Stakeholder Consultation:

A comprehensive stakeholder engagement process for the Finey Thila Marine Protected Area (MPA) was conducted in October 2024 to March 2025. This process involved consultations with key stakeholders, including:

- Finey Island Council representatives
- Local dive centers (from Hanimaadhoo and Vashafaru)
- Barefoot Resort representatives
- Maldives Boating Association
- Local fishing community

These consultations highlighted Finey Thila's ecological and socioeconomic significance. The site is a critical habitat featuring two raised reef systems covered in vibrant soft corals and serves as a nursery ground for commercially important fish species. Stakeholders emphasized Finey Thila's ecological significance while raising concerns about the threats posed by coral bleaching due to climate change, unsustainable fishing practices such as night-time bait fishing harvesting with artificial light, and the need for proper awareness and baseline research to guide the management of the MPA. They highlighted that timely implementation of these measures is crucial to support the sustainable growth of the local tourism industry while preserving the area's ecological integrity.

Key insights from the consultation included:

- **Ecological Significance:** Finey Thila supports diverse marine species, including endangered Napoleon Wrasse and sea turtles, while providing essential fish nursery habitats.
- **Management Priorities:** Stakeholders highlighted the need to install mooring buoys to prevent anchor damage, enforce a 5-knot speed limit to protect marine life, and establish no-take zones in critical habitats.

- **Sustainable Fisheries Management:** Stakeholders recommended regulating bait fishing and sea cucumber harvesting inside the species management zone to protect marine biodiversity while supporting local livelihoods.
- **Tourism Management:** Dive operators supported the implementation of visitor guidelines and pre-dive briefings to reduce coral damage. While tourism pressure is currently low, there is concern about potential overcrowding and anchor damage as visitation increases.
- **Governance and Compliance:** The Finey Island Council strongly advocated for local governance of the MPA, including the establishment of a Protected Area Management Unit. An MPA Advisory Committee will be formed with representatives from dive centers, the fishing community, and the resort sector to guide management and mediate conflicts.

Ten- year Conservation Action Plan (2025-2035)

This ten-year Conservation Action Plan (2025-2035) divides the The Finey Thila Marine Protected Area (MPA) into two zones to balance conservation and sustainable use. The Species Management Zone (20% of the MPA) strictly protects the core reef area, allowing a maximum of six vessels, enforcing a 5-knot speed limit, prohibiting fishing, and requiring the use of mooring buoys. The General Use Zone permits sustainable fishing for local residents with valid permits, permitted diving and snorkelling, and vessel transit at speeds up to 15 knots. Enforcement measures include routine patrols, a ranger hotline, and a penalty framework for violations. Biannual biodiversity surveys and citizen science programs will monitor habitat health and guide adaptive management. A stakeholder advisory committee and public consultations will ensure community involvement. Visitor fees, including an annual contribution model for dive operators, will support conservation financing. The MPA will transition from voluntary guidelines to a formal regulatory framework by 2029, ensuring long-term protection while allowing responsible tourism.

2. Description of the Site

2.1 Location and Boundaries

Finney Thila Marine Protected Area (MPA) is located southeast of Finney Island in Haa Dhaalu Atoll, Maldives. The inner boundary of the MPA begins outside the house reef, ensuring that shallow lagoon and reef flat areas are excluded. The offshore boundary extends to a depth contour of 30 meters, covering the deeper reef ecosystem and submerged thilas. The site is accessible via specific GPS coordinates, with an entry point at N 06° 44.211' E 073° 03.494' and an exit at N 06° 44.199' E 073° 03.359'.

The designated MPA is enclosed within the following GPS coordinates presented in Table 1, which define its boundaries:

Table 1: GPS Coordinates of Finney Thila

Point	Latitude (N)	Longitude (E)
1	6.744660852°	73.0593431°
2	6.744599591°	73.06485827°
3	6.734496018°	73.06098232°
4	6.732837799°	73.05214722°
5	6.738893371°	73.05246317°
6	6.73862827°	73.05562662°
7	6.738984237°	73.05644457°
8	6.739517874°	73.05716015°
9	6.739987962°	73.0577607°
10	6.740559522°	73.05820779°
11	6.741308824°	73.05866755°
12	6.742197596°	73.05882043°
13	6.743060867°	73.05878156°
14	6.743670262°	73.05879398°
15	6.744673636°	73.05872397°
16	6.744660852°	73.0593431°

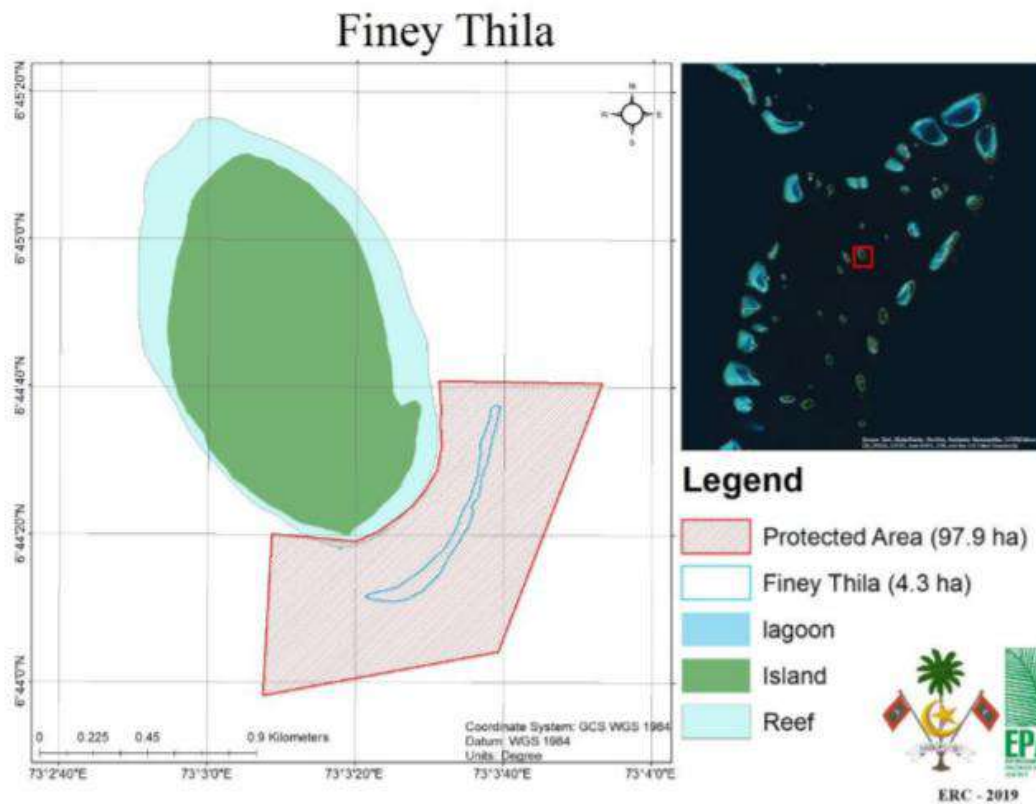


Figure 2: Finey Thila MPA Boundary Map

The MPA is strategically situated south of Finey Island (Figures 2), making it accessible to local dive operators, tourism establishments, and traditional fishermen.

2.2 Physical Features

Finey Thila is a submerged reef formation located 250 meters southeast of Finey Island in Haa Dhaalu Atoll. It features steep slopes, overhangs, and a narrow canyon, allowing water flow between reef sections. The thila's summit begins at 15 meters and descends to 30 meters, with a substrate composed of hard corals, soft corals, and rocky outcrops. Influenced by the semi-diurnal tidal cycle, the site experiences strong ocean currents, particularly during southwest (Hulhangu) monsoon. Due to its depth and structural complexity, Finey Thila is best suited for experienced divers equipped with proper gear, including a torchlight for illuminating the reef's hidden crevices.

2.3 Biological Features:

Biologically, Finey Thila is one of the most colorful and diverse reefs in the area, boasting a rich variety of marine species and coral formations. The reef wall is completely covered in a stunning array of soft corals, with vibrant hues of yellow, blue, purple, and orange. These corals provide

shelter and nourishment for an abundance of reef life and larger marine species. The overhangs and crevices of the reef create microhabitats that support a diverse benthic community, further enhancing the ecological value of the site.

Coral Communities

Finey Thila hosts a diverse range of coral species, with reef walls covered in soft corals (*Alcyonacea*) in shades of yellow, blue, purple, and orange. These corals provide shelter and feeding grounds for various marine organisms including shrimps, lobsters, and nudibranchs, enhancing the reef's ecological productivity. The presence of hard corals, such as *Acropora* and *Porites* species, contributes to reef resilience and habitat complexity.

Fish Populations

Finey Thila supports large schools of reef-associated fish, including species such as Rainbow Runners (*Elagatis bipinnulata*), Red Snappers (*Lutjanus bohar*), and Green Jobfish (*Aprion virescens*). It is also a key aggregation site for bait fish, attracting pelagic predators like tunas (*Thunnus* spp.) and sharks (*Carcharhinus* spp.). The Napoleon Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*), a globally threatened species, is frequently sighted in the area.

Marine Megafauna

The reef serves as a feeding and resting area for large marine species, including Eagle Rays (*Aetobatus narinari*), reef sharks (*Carcharhinidae*), and barracudas (*Sphyraena* spp.). The presence of these top predators indicates the ecological significance of Finey Thila as a key biodiversity hotspot.

Invertebrate Life

Finey Thila supports a wide range of invertebrate species, including shrimp (*Stenopodidae*), lobsters (*Panulirus* spp.), and nudibranchs (*Nudibranchia*), commonly found within reef overhangs and crevices. These species play a crucial role in nutrient cycling and serve as an essential food source for higher trophic levels.

Ecological Interactions

The reef demonstrates complex ecological interactions, serving as both a feeding and aggregation site for fish, megafauna, and invertebrates. The diversity of habitats, including coral gardens, sandy plateaus, and rocky outcrops, supports various trophic relationships and symbiotic associations within the ecosystem.

2.4 Current Resource Use

The current use of Finey Thila Protected Area reflects its value as a natural resource supporting activities such as tourism, fishing, and vessel traffic, contributing to both local livelihoods and

economic development. With proper management, Finey Thila can serve as a model for sustainable marine resource use in the Maldives.

Tourism Activities

Finney Thila is an emerging dive site in Haa Dhaalu Atoll, attracting both local and international divers due to its pristine marine ecosystem and vibrant underwater landscapes. Currently, four dive centers operate in the area, including Barefoot Dive Centre at Barefoot Resort in Hanimaadhoo, two dive centers from Vashafaru, and Hanimaadhoo Dive & Watersports. The site offers diverse diving opportunities, from shallow coral gardens to deeper reef systems at 12 and 18 meters, covered in pastel-colored soft corals. The presence of species such as clownfish (*Amphiprion* spp.), butterflyfish (*Chaetodontidae*), parrotfish (*Scaridae*), and angelfish (*Pomacanthidae*) makes it especially popular among underwater photographers.

Currently, Finey Thila receives approximately one dive visit per month, totaling around 12 visits per year. This translates to an estimated 50–100 divers annually, a significantly lower number compared to high-traffic dive sites in central atolls. The low visitation rate has helped maintain the reef in a relatively undisturbed state, with minimal human impact from recreational diving and fishing.

Haa Dhaalu Atoll dive sites, including Finey Thila, remain less crowded and less impacted compared to popular diving areas in the Maldives, such as Ari Atoll and Male Atoll. Their current condition is often likened to Male Atoll dive sites in the 1990s, before the pressures of reclamation, overcrowding, and climate change became prominent. This low-impact tourism model, if combined with effective management, positions Finey Thila as a site with immense potential for sustainable tourism, offering a model for balancing marine conservation with responsible dive tourism.

Fishing Activities

Fishing continues to be a vital activity at Finey Thila, supporting local livelihoods and food security. Fishing activities at Finey Thila are considered highly productive, with fishermen attributing this to the area's rich bottom reef ecosystem. Species such as Rainbow Runners, Red Snappers, and Green Jobfish are commonly caught with single fishing line with baited hooks. Additionally, sea cucumber harvesting occurs in the area, with divers collecting high-value species such as Sandfish (*Holothuria scabra*) from sandy and rubble substrates. Fishermen from neighboring islands frequently visit Finey Thila to benefit from its productive waters. The reef also supports bait fishing, particularly targeting Blue Sprat (*Spratelloides robustus*), despite occasional challenges posed by strong currents.

Vessel Traffic

Finney Thila experiences moderate vessel activity, reflecting its use as a multi-purpose marine resource. The site is occasionally used by dive boats from four main dive centers: Barefoot Dive Centre in Hanimaadhoo, two dive centers in Vashafaru, and Hanimaadhoo Dive & Watersports. These boats conduct once a month diving excursions, typically catering to small groups of divers.

In addition to dive boats, fishing vessels regularly navigate the waters around Finey Thila. These include both local boats from Finey Island and neighboring islands, as well as occasional liveaboard vessels, particularly during fishing and diving seasons. Speedboats transporting visitors or supplies to nearby islands also occasionally pass through the area.



Figure 3: Resource Use zones

2.5 Seasonal Patterns

The environmental conditions and resource use at Finey Thila exhibit notable seasonal variations that impact both marine life behavior and human activities within the protected area. The best diving conditions are observed during the northeast monsoon season, which spans from December to April, characterized by warm and dry weather. During this period, the visibility is at its peak, and calmer seas create ideal conditions for divers to explore the vibrant coral formations and diverse marine life that Finey Thila has to offer. The northeast monsoon season also coincides with the peak tourist season in the Maldives, typically running from November to January, leading to increased diving activities as resorts and safari boats operate at full capacity.

Tourism activities at Finey Thila experience fluctuations throughout the year, influenced by both seasonal weather patterns and broader tourism trends in the Maldives. The site sees a significant influx of divers during the northeast monsoon, as it offers optimal conditions for underwater exploration, attracting both local and international visitors.

Conversely, during the southwest monsoon season from May to November, rougher sea conditions and reduced visibility may lead to a decline in diving activities, with operators focusing on alternative dive sites better suited for the prevailing conditions. These seasonal trends create an opportunity for tourism management to distribute visitor pressure more evenly throughout the year while ensuring the long-term sustainability of Finey Thila's marine ecosystem.

User Statistics

Based on stakeholder data, the current (year 2024) usage patterns are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: User statistics

Usage Category	Recorded Statistics	Source
Regular Dive Operations		
Daily Dive Boats	No daily visits at present (unless there is an extended dive to multiple sites)	Dive Centre Consultation
Resort Visit Frequency	1 visit per week during peak season (year-round)	Barefoot Dive Centre
Marine Life Sightings		
Turtle Occurrence	1-2 individuals during favorable conditions	Barefoot Dive Centre Consultations
Tourism Operators		
Active Dive Centers	3 centers (1 from Hanimaadhoo and 2 from Vashafaru)	Finey Council
Registered Guesthouses	8 plots leased for guesthouse development	Finey Council
Regular Resort Users	1 resort (Barefoot Resort)	Resort Consultation
Liveaboard Vessels	Only 2-3 boats visit Finey Thila quarterly, primarily during extreme north tours or when liveaboard vessels make occasional stops.	Maldives Boating Association Consultation
Vessel Traffic		
Types of Vessels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diving boats - Fishing vessels - Speedboats - Resort vessels - Liveaboards 	Combined Stakeholder Input

Note: The statistics presented are based on stakeholder consultations and may not represent comprehensive usage data. A systematic monitoring program would be needed to collect more detailed user statistics.

3. Key Values

3.1 Ecological Values

Locally Significant Coral Reef Ecosystem

Finey Thila is an ecologically significant coral reef ecosystem at the atoll and national level, contributing to marine biodiversity conservation and ecosystem stability. The site is known for its pristine coral formations, high fish biomass, and structurally complex reef habitats, which support a wide range of marine species. The soft coral gardens covering its reef walls provide habitat and feeding grounds for various reef fish, invertebrates, and pelagic species. The site plays a vital role in preserving biodiversity, serving as a habitat for rare, endangered species, including important nursery grounds for juvenile fish. The Napoleon Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*) and sea turtles (*Cheloniidae* spp.) found at Finey Thila are globally endangered according to the IUCN Red List.

Finey Thila also plays a critical role in inter atoll connectivity, acting as a nursery and aggregation site for fish species essential to local fisheries and marine food webs. Additionally, the site contributes to ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, nutrient cycling, and shoreline protection, making it an important asset for climate resilience and sustainable resource use.

3.2 Economic Value

Tourism

Finey Thila has the potential to be a key tourism resource, attracting divers, snorkelers, and marine ecotourists due to its thriving coral reef ecosystem and diverse marine life. Despite its potential, tourism in Haa Dhaalu Atoll remains relatively low compared to other regions, which presents both a challenge and an opportunity for sustainable development. Enhancing tourism infrastructure and marketing the site as a premier dive destination could help attract more visitors while ensuring environmental sustainability. The site at present supports few dive centers, resorts, and safari boats, providing economic benefits to the local community. Its underwater caves, soft corals, and unique reef structures make it a high-value dive destination, particularly for night diving and underwater photography. With the leasing of plots on Finey Island for local tourism, the site has the potential to become a premier recreational and dive destination in Haa Dhaalu Atoll, further strengthening regional tourism income.

Fisheries

Finey Thila is also a productive fishing ground, contributing significantly to local fisheries. Fishermen commonly catch species such as Rainbow Runners, Red Snappers, and Green Jobfish using sustainable fishing practices such as baited line and hook. The site serves as a key aggregation area for bait fish, essential for both local and regional fisheries.

In addition to finfish, sea cucumber harvesting is an economically important activity at Finey Thila. Species such as Sandfish (*Holothuria scabra*) are collected for export to international markets.

While these activities provide sustainable livelihoods for local communities, careful management is necessary to prevent overexploitation and ensure long-term economic benefits.

By balancing conservation efforts with sustainable resource use, Finey Thila can continue to support marine biodiversity, local livelihoods, and economic growth, while serving as a model for sustainable marine resource management in the Maldives.

3.3 Social Values

Finney Thila holds significant social value for both the local community of Finey Island and the broader Haa Dhaalu Atoll. Beyond its ecological and economic importance, the site plays a vital role in cultural traditions, food security, and local heritage, reinforcing the community's deep connection to the marine environment.

Cultural, Traditional, and Recreational Importance

Fishing at Finey Thila is deeply rooted in local culture, with generations of fishermen relying on the area for traditional practices such as handline reef fishing, bait fishing, and sea cucumber harvesting. These methods have been passed down over time, preserving traditional knowledge and skills unique to the region. The way of life in Finey Island is intrinsically linked to the sea, making Finey Thila an essential part of local identity and heritage. In addition to its role in fisheries, the site is also valued for recreational fishing opportunities, particularly for local residents who engage in non-commercial fishing activities. The pristine marine environment fosters a sense of pride among residents, strengthening their cultural and emotional ties to the ocean.

Food Security and Livelihoods

Fishing at Finey Thila contributes to local food security, providing a reliable source of fresh seafood for Finey Island and neighboring communities. The fish caught here directly supports many households, ensuring access to nutrient-rich, locally sourced food. While precise data on household dependence is unavailable, local fishermen emphasize that the reef remains a critical fishing ground for daily sustenance. Additionally, fishermen from neighboring islands frequently visit Finey Thila, recognizing it as an important fishing ground within the region.

However, despite Finey Thila's social importance, residents of Finey Island itself rely on multiple fishing grounds and are not solely dependent on this area. As a result, the community is willing to abstain from fishing within Finey Thila to support its designation as a Marine Protected Area (MPA), highlighting their commitment to sustainable resource management and conservation efforts.

By recognizing and integrating these social values into management efforts, Finey Thila can continue to serve as a culturally significant and community-supported marine site, ensuring its preservation for future generations.

4. Identification of Constraints, Opportunities, and Threats

4.1 Constraints

Managing Finey Thila involves addressing several constraints that hinder the full realization of its ecological and economic potential. At present, the MPA lacks formal management, with no enforcement personnel, infrastructure, or funding in place to ensure effective protection. Additionally, there are significant knowledge gaps, particularly in baseline data on the area's ecological dynamics, such as species diversity and habitat use, which limits informed decision-making and adaptive management.

During consultation, resort stakeholders have expressed skepticism about the feasibility of implementing an annual fee structure, instead preferring a one-time entry fee system. Stakeholders have also noted that the presence of alternative dive sites, such as Theefaridhoo Thila, which offer greater biodiversity, may divert interest away from Finey Thila.

Another limitation is that Finey Thila is only suitable for advanced-level divers due to the depth of the bottom reef and strong currents at times, making it inaccessible for beginner divers. This restricts the number of potential visitors and reduces the site's appeal to general tourism markets. Furthermore, the Finey Council has limited experience in managing protected areas and conservation initiatives, posing a challenge for the effective governance of the MPA. To address this, targeted awareness sessions should be conducted for the council, school, and community groups to build capacity and foster local engagement in conservation efforts. Additionally, local dive centers were unaware that Finey Thila is a protected site, highlighting the need for improved outreach and communication to ensure compliance with conservation regulations.

Addressing these constraints will require a coordinated approach, integrating stakeholder collaboration, increased funding, enhanced awareness initiatives, and improved data collection to support evidence-based decision-making.

4.2 Threats

The threats to Finey Thila can be divided into natural and anthropogenic sources. Each presents distinct challenges requiring targeted mitigation efforts.

Natural Threats:

Coral Bleaching: Climate change represents the most significant natural threat. Rising sea temperatures increase the frequency of coral bleaching events, weakening the structural integrity of the reefs that provide essential habitats for marine species. Ocean acidification further exacerbates coral vulnerability, especially impacting species like *Acropora* spp., which dominate the upper reef zones. These stressors do not act in isolation—when combined with other pressures such as pollution, overfishing, and habitat degradation, the cumulative impacts can significantly reduce reef resilience, slowing recovery and altering ecosystem dynamics.

Seasonal Weather Patterns: Weather variability, particularly during the southwest monsoon, introduces additional challenges. Strong monsoonal storms and wave action can lead to coral breakage, sediment displacement, and structural degradation of the reef.

Anthropogenic Threats:

Vessel Traffic Impacts: Although vessel traffic impacts are currently limited, future increases in activity from dive operators, safari boats, and fishing vessels could pose significant risks to marine habitats if not effectively managed. As Finey Thila develops into a more prominent tourism destination, the potential for noise pollution, propeller damage, and accidental collisions with marine species will increase, creating additional pressures on the ecosystem. Proactive measures to manage vessel traffic will be essential to mitigate these potential threats.

Tourism Pressure: Although tourism pressure is currently low, Finey Thila's potential as a premier dive destination may lead to increased visitation, resulting in overcrowding, vessel pollution, and coral damage. A major concern is physical harm to reefs from divers with poor buoyancy control, as accidental contact with fins or equipment can break corals, while touching or standing on reefs weakens them. To mitigate these risks, mandatory pre-dive briefings should be enforced, alongside improved mooring infrastructure to minimize anchor damage and promote sustainable tourism.

Impacts from Anchoring: Anchoring by fishing vessels has already been observed at Finey Thila, causing direct physical damage to coral reefs. While tourist vessel anchoring is currently limited, it remains a potential future threat as visitation increases. Without mooring infrastructure in place, the risk of anchor damage is expected to escalate. Implementing designated mooring buoys and anchoring restrictions will be essential to prevent further damage and ensure the long-term health of the reef.

Fishing-Related Impacts: While the use of destructive fishing gear, such as nets and traps, has not been reported within Finey Thila, unsustainable practices, such as overfishing, bait fishing, and unregulated sea cucumber harvesting, can deplete marine resources and degrade critical habitats if not properly managed. Stakeholders have suggested implementing fishing restrictions or bans in key areas to protect juvenile fish, prevent further habitat degradation, and support species recovery. Strengthening monitoring and enforcement will be essential to ensuring sustainable fisheries management within and around the MPA.

Sedimentation from coastal development: Sedimentation from dredging and reclamation near the MPA threatens marine ecosystems by smothering coral reefs, reducing light penetration, and disrupting habitats.

4.3 Opportunities

Despite these challenges, Finey Thila presents significant opportunities for sustainable development and ecological preservation:

Tourism Development: Finey Thila's unique underwater features, including its vibrant soft coral gardens and underwater caves, position it as a premier dive destination in Haa Dhaalu Atoll.

Unlike more crowded regions in the Maldives, dive sites in Haa Dhaalu Atoll, including Finey Thila, remain relatively undisturbed, with conditions often likened to the pristine state of Male Atoll dive sites in the 1990s. This relatively untouched state offers immense potential to showcase sustainable tourism practices while protecting Finey Thila's unique ecosystem. Promoting activities such as night diving and responsible snorkeling can further enhance its appeal while maintaining ecological integrity.

Future Guest House and Tourism Development: Eight plots have been leased for guesthouse development on Finey Island, although currently, only one guesthouse is operational. This creates an opportunity to develop tourism infrastructure aligned with sustainable practices, allowing Finey Thila to benefit from eco-tourism while maintaining its ecological integrity.

Fisheries Management: Implementing sustainable fishing practices, including regulated bait fishing and sea cucumber harvesting, can support local livelihoods while preserving marine resources for future generations. These measures ensure the continued productivity of the area without compromising its ecological balance.

Conservation of Ecosystems: The preservation and restoration of habitats can enhance the ecological value of Finey Thila. Efforts to rehabilitate coral reefs through coral gardening and utilizing nearby mangroves as nurseries can provide long-term ecological and economic benefits. These efforts would strengthen the resilience of the marine environment to both natural and human-induced pressures.

Community Engagement: Increasing local awareness and participation in conservation initiatives can foster stewardship among stakeholders. Capacity-building programs and community-led monitoring can enhance protection efforts while ensuring that conservation and livelihoods remain interconnected.

Research and Monitoring: Finey Thila provides an opportunity for research on marine ecosystems, particularly focusing on coral resilience to climate change and ecosystem health. Establishing long-term ecological monitoring programs will support adaptive management, improve decision-making, and strengthen conservation outcomes.

MPA Boundary Extension: The Finey Island Council has expressed interest in extending the MPA boundary to include nearby mangrove and wetland areas, already designated as protected zones under the island's Land Use Plan. This extension would further enhance the ecological scope of the MPA and contribute to the protection of critical habitats essential for biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Local Support: The strong support from the Finey Island Council offers a solid foundation for implementing effective local management of the MPA. However, since the Council has no prior experience in managing protected areas, targeted long-term training programs, such as scholarships for bachelor's degrees in environmental conservation or marine sciences, would be valuable in building the capacity of future MPA managers and staff.

5. Governance

5.1 Management structure

The Marine Protected Area will be managed under a co-management regime with clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

National Level Management

The Marine Protected Area (MPA) for Finey Thila will be managed through a co-management regime, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities outlined in Appendix B.

At the national level, the management structure will involve two key institutions: the Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as represented in Figure 4. The MoTE will serve as the primary policy-making body, responsible for developing strategies, providing oversight, and ensuring alignment with national environmental and development goals. It will also manage sustainable financing mechanisms for the MPA, including government funding and external support, while coordinating with national stakeholders to achieve the MPA's objectives.

The EPA will function as the regulatory authority, providing technical guidance on conservation practices, monitoring protocols, and environmental management standards. It will ensure that management measures comply with national regulations and international best practices. Additionally, the EPA will support enforcement by collaborating with local management units to implement compliance mechanisms, address environmental violations, and apply penalties when necessary.

This dual authority structure will provide policy direction and regulatory oversight, ensuring effective national-level support for Finey Thila's management. It will also facilitate collaboration with local management units, addressing challenges such as policy development, enforcement, and operational implementation, as identified during stakeholder consultations.

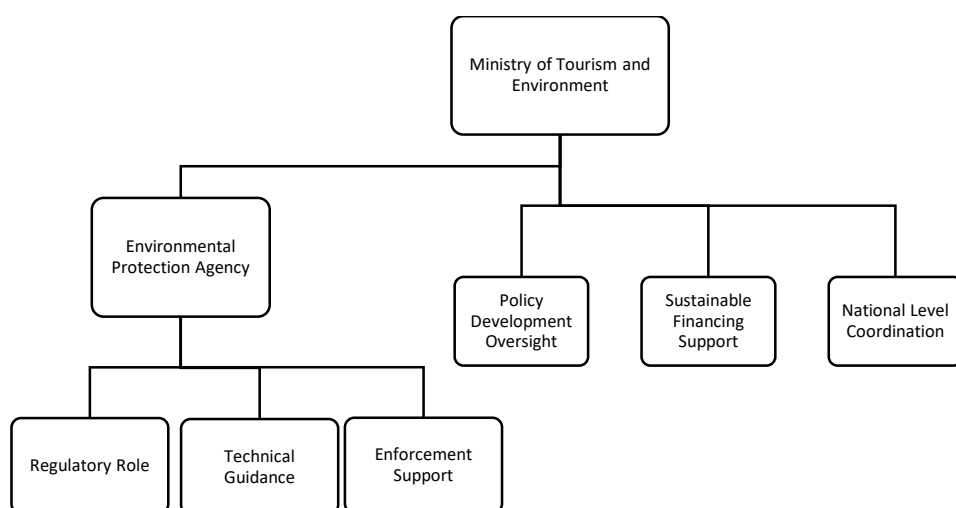


Figure 4: National Level Functions

Local Level Management

The implementation structure for the Finey Thila MPA will follow a hierarchical system, with the Finey Island Council serving as the primary implementing authority, a role they strongly supported during stakeholder consultations. Within the council, a dedicated MPA Management Unit will be established as the central operational body responsible for daily management activities. This unit will oversee four key operational functions: managing vessel traffic and visitor activities, monitoring and conserving resources, enforcing regulations, and handling revenue management. These functions will ensure comprehensive oversight of all MPA activities, maintain monitoring systems, and coordinate with stakeholders to address key concerns such as anchoring and fishing impacts.

An MPA Advisory Committee will form the second pillar of the implementation structure, bringing together representatives from local tourism operators, future guesthouse owners, and the fishing community. This committee will provide operational guidance, facilitate conflict resolution among user groups, and offer recommendations for adaptive management. Members will include representatives from resorts, potential dive centers, and the local fishing community, ensuring that management decisions reflect diverse perspectives while focusing on conservation objectives.

This structure will promote collaborative and effective management of Finey Thila, supporting sustainable resource use, tourism, and conservation goals.

Advisory Committee Core Members:

- 1 representative from local dive centers (one from each registered center)
- 1 representative from resort dive operations
- 1 representative from local fishing community
- 1 representative from local guesthouse association
- 1 representative from MPA Management Unit
- 1 representative from Finey Council
- 1 representative from Ministry of Tourism and Environment

Selection Criteria:

1. Must be actively operating in the protected area
2. Minimum 2 years of experience in respective sector
3. Commitment to attend bi-annual meetings

Term Length:

1. 2-year terms with possibility of renewal
2. Staggered appointments to ensure continuity

Meeting Requirements:

1. Quarterly regular meetings
2. Emergency meetings as needed
3. Minimum 75% attendance required to maintain membership

This two-tiered implementation structure (Figure 5) provides an effective framework for managing Finey Thila MPA through clear lines of authority, collaborative monitoring mechanisms, and inclusive decision-making processes. Emphasizing local governance, the Finey Island Council will lead the MPA's management while engaging key stakeholders such as tourism operators and the fishing community. This structure ensures operational efficiency and strong community involvement by addressing key concerns raised during stakeholder consultations, including local control, revenue management, and balancing diverse user interests. The Council's oversight of revenue collection and allocation, combined with its role in coordinating monitoring and enforcement, establishes a solid foundation for sustainable and effective management of the MPA.

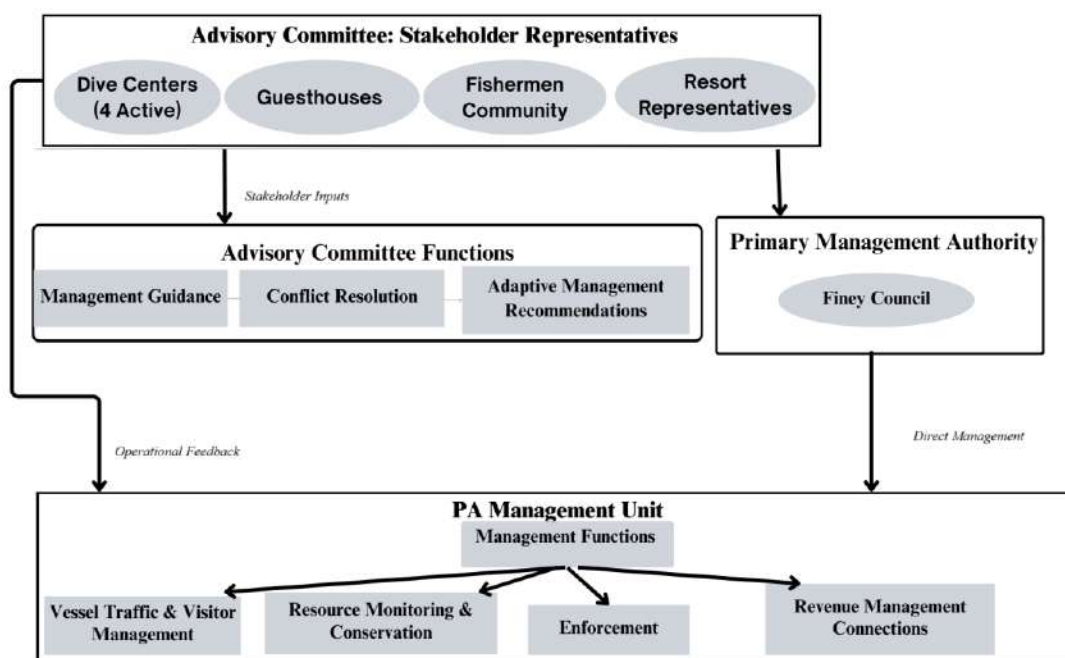


Figure 5: Governance Structure and Functions at local level

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The effective management of Finey Thila MPA will require clear delineation of roles and responsibilities across governance levels, from national authorities to local implementing bodies. The management structure prioritizes local governance, as highlighted during stakeholder consultations, while ensuring oversight and technical support from national entities. This framework is designed to address key challenges such as fishery management, sustainable tourism operations, baseline monitoring and the protection of marine habitats, including soft coral gardens. Each management entity will have defined roles that work in coordination, creating a cohesive system to achieve conservation objectives while supporting sustainable use. The following matrix in Figure 7 outlines the primary roles and responsibilities of each entity, ensuring accountability and effective management of all aspects of the MPA.

Authority/Entity	Primary Role	Key Responsibilities
Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE)	National Policy Authority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and oversee implementation of national policies related to MPA. 2. Secure and manage sustainable financing mechanisms. 3. Coordinate with other national agencies and international partners. 4. Review and approve annual work plans and budgets. 5. Monitor overall management effectiveness.

		Provide capacity building and training support
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	Regulatory Authority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enforce environmental regulations and protected area rules. 2. Provide technical guidance on conservation practices 3. Review and approve research permits 4. Investigate environmental violations 5. Monitor environmental parameters 6. Issue penalties for non-compliance 7. Develop monitoring protocols and standards. 8. Provide enforcement training and capacity building 9. Handle major violations requiring national-level intervention 10. Issue penalties for serious infractions 11. Conduct periodic enforcement audits
Finey Council	Lead Implementation Authority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Host and support the MPA Management Unit 2. Oversee daily operations and management 3. Chair the Advisory Committee 4. Manage local staffing and resources 5. Maintain infrastructure and facilities 6. Handle revenue collection and financial management 7. Report to national authorities 8. Coordinate emergency response
MPA Management Unit	Operational Authority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement day-to-day enforcement activities 2. Monitor compliance with regulations 3. Issue initial warnings for minor violations 4. Document and report infractions to EPA 5. Maintain enforcement records 6. Conduct regular patrols
Advisory Committee	Advisory Authority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide management recommendations 2. Review management effectiveness 3. Mediate stakeholder conflicts. 4. Advise on adaptive management strategies 5. Review annual work plans and budgets 6. Provide technical input on management issues 7. Represent stakeholder interests

		8. Support community outreach efforts
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Figure 6: Authority roles and responsibility

5.3 Key Regulations and Policies

The management of Finney Thila will be governed by the Environment Protection and Preservation Act (4/93) and the Protected Areas Regulation (2018/R-78), providing the legal framework for protected area management in the Maldives. Finney Thila is being established as a demonstration site where management measures, codes of conduct, visitor guidelines, and research protocols can be developed and tested before being formalized into regulations.

A three-year grace period will be implemented, during which codes of conduct for fishers, tourist operators, visitors, and researchers will be voluntarily adopted. This period will allow for the refinement of best practices and the collection of baseline ecological data to inform long-term management. After this three-year phase, the codes of conduct will be converted into a formal management regulation under the Environment Protection and Preservation Act or formal management guideline under the Protected Areas Regulation (2018/R-78), ensuring enforceable guidelines for sustainable use and conservation.

Codes of Conduct

During the grace period, strict but voluntary codes of conduct will be introduced for all user groups, including fishers, tourism operators, and researchers, to promote responsible activities while protecting the marine ecosystem. These guidelines will be developed through stakeholder consultations and refined based on monitoring data and feedback.

- **Visitor Guidelines:**
 - Maintain appropriate distances from marine life to prevent disturbances.
 - Strictly prohibit touching, chasing, or feeding marine species.
 - Regulate the use of artificial lighting to minimize disruption to natural behaviors.
 - Require thorough pre-dive briefings from dive operators to ensure adherence to regulations.
 - Suspend all diving and snorkeling activities during poor weather or low visibility for safety and ecosystem protection.
- **Diver and Dive Operator Responsibilities:**
 - Display proper dive flags when visitors are in the water to reduce boat traffic risks.

- Adhere to a maximum daily carrying capacity of six boats within the MPA, with each vessel limited to a two-hour stay.
- Inform the Management Unit hotline before accessing the MPA.
- Ensure responsible waste management and prohibit any disposal of materials into the ocean.
- **Boating and Anchoring Regulations:**
 - Enforce a speed restriction of 5 knots in designated zones to protect marine life.
 - Prohibit anchoring on reefs; vessels must utilize designated mooring buoys, once established, to prevent damage to corals.
- **Fishing and Resource Use:**
 - Establish sustainable fishing zones while strictly prohibiting destructive practices.
 - Implement no-take zones to protect critical habitats in species management zone.
 - Develop responsible harvesting guidelines for bait fishing in general use zone.
- **Monitoring and Research Activities:**
 - Introduce voluntary citizen science initiatives with trained dive guides to monitor the area and educate visitors.
 - Encourage research and monitoring activities aligned with conservation goals.
 - Set guidelines for underwater photography, commercial filming, and drone use to minimize disruptions.

Management Guidelines

The MPA conservation plan will focus on establishing effective conservation protocols, sustainable resource use, and structured visitor management. Stakeholder collaboration, including the Finey Island Council, local fishermen, and dive operators, will be central to shaping the regulatory framework.

During the grace period, a ranger or MPA hotline number will be established to facilitate reporting and compliance monitoring. Additionally, daily and monthly visitor and resource use data including vessel numbers will be collected and maintained by the Protected Area Management Unit established within the Finey Island Council. The three-year grace period will allow for data collection and stakeholder engagement before transitioning into a regulated framework with visitor fees dedicated to conservation efforts.

During this phase, mooring buoys will be installed to prevent anchor damage, and sustainable fishing practices will be encouraged through zoning guidelines. Group size limits, speed restrictions, and research monitoring will also be tested and refined.

At the end of the three-year period, the voluntary codes of conduct will be transitioned into a mandatory regulatory framework or management guidelines as annexure to protected area regulation, ensuring long-term compliance with best practices for conservation, tourism, and fisheries management. The Finey Thila MPA will serve as a model site, demonstrating how adaptive management and community engagement can support marine conservation in the Maldives.

6. Boundary and Zonation

The zoning plan for Finey Thila Marine Protected Area establishes distinct management zones to balance conservation priorities with sustainable tourism and fishery activities. The zoning scheme in figure 8 incorporates critical habitat protection while allowing for regulated tourism and recreational uses.

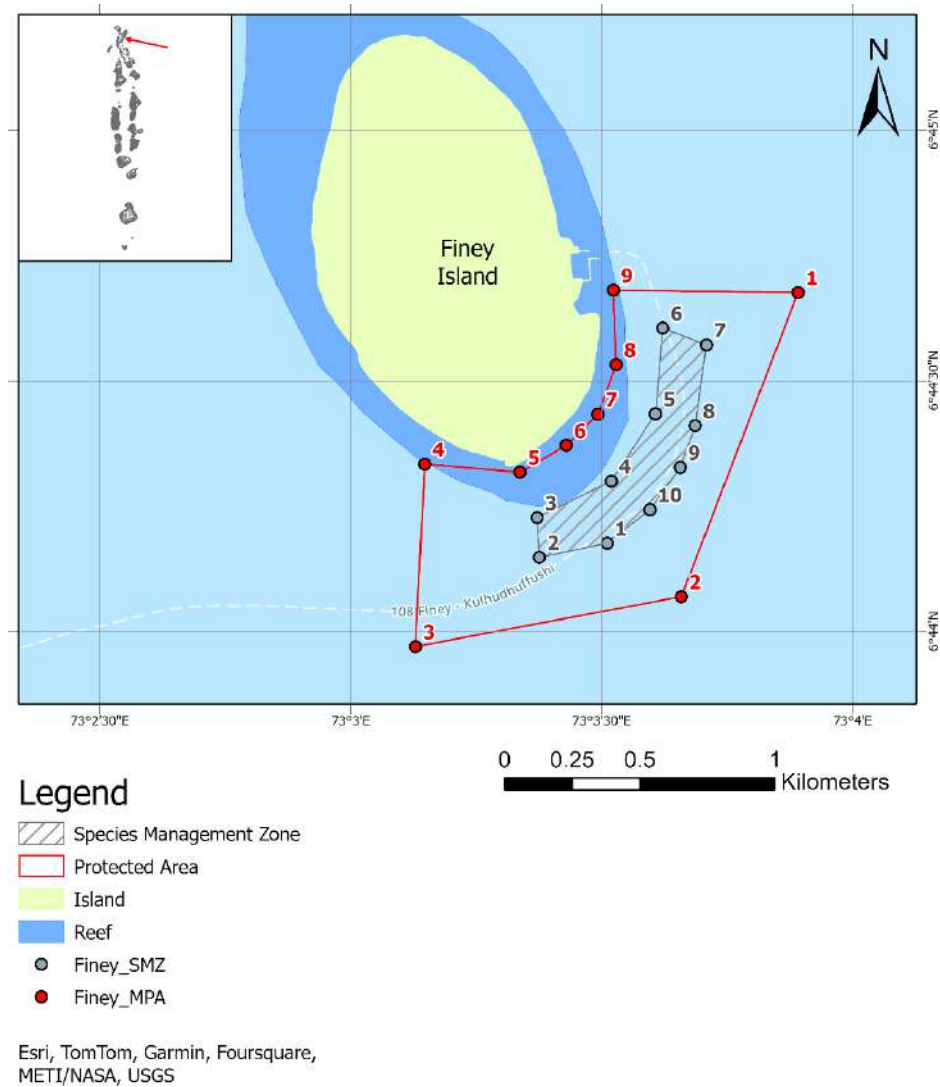


Figure 7: Management Zonation

6.1 Zone Descriptions and Coordinates

Habitat/Species Management Zone (20% of the MPA)

The Habitat/Species Management Zone is clearly demarcated by the striped region which has been identified as the core area of the MPA in Figure 8. This zone includes the actual Thila area (where the two bottom reef are), where protection measures are required.

The main thila reef system forms the centerpiece of the protected area, featuring extensive coral reef ecosystems that support diverse marine life. The zone encompasses several marine biodiversity hotspots that are crucial for the area's ecological balance and marine species survival.

The Habitat/Species Management Zone is enclosed within the following GPS coordinates, which define its boundaries:

Point	Longitude (E)	Latitude (N)
1	73.058514	6.736273
2	73.056267	6.735799
3	73.056191	6.737123
4	73.058653	6.738334
5	73.060127	6.740571
6	73.060364	6.743414
7	73.061812	6.742861
8	73.061443	6.740176
9	73.060951	6.738796
10	73.059943	6.737386

Permitted Activities

The Habitat/Species Management Zone, represented by the striped region, is subject to stricter management measures to protect sensitive habitats such as coral reefs and marine species. Within this zone, only regulated activities are permitted, including:

- **Snorkeling and Diving:** These activities are allowed but must adhere to strict guidelines to prevent damage to the coral reef and marine life. Divers and snorkelers will be properly briefed by dive guides.
- **Photography and Videography:** Visitors and researchers are allowed to capture images and videos for educational, scientific, and promotional purposes, provided they follow responsible practices that do not disturb the ecosystem. The responsible photography and videography practices include ensuring minimal disruption to the ecosystem, such as avoiding wildlife disturbance, respecting protected area, and refraining from using equipment that may harm the environment. All activities should align with ethical practices.
- **Permitted Research:** Scientific research activities focusing on marine biodiversity, ecosystem health, and conservation efforts are permitted with prior authorization, ensuring minimal disturbance to the habitat.

Vessels may use the six designated mooring points (Mooring 1-6) when established, to prevent anchor damage to the reef system.

Prohibited Activities

To ensure the preservation of the marine ecosystem, the following activities are strictly prohibited within the Management Zone:

- **Fishing:** All types of fishing activities are banned to safeguard marine biodiversity and maintain ecological balance.
- **Anchoring:** Anchoring is not allowed, except at designated mooring points, to prevent damage to the coral reef and seafloor habitat.
- **Unguided Activities:** Independent or unguided exploration within the core area is prohibited to ensure compliance with conservation guidelines and minimize human impact.
- **Speed Restrictions:** Vessels must operate at speeds below 5 knots to reduce disturbances to marine life and ensure the safety of divers and snorkelers.
- **Unregulated Tourism:** Any unauthorized tourism-related activities are not permitted to prevent environmental degradation and overcrowding.
- **Resource Extraction:** Activities such as coral harvesting, sand mining, and any form of resource extraction are strictly forbidden to preserve the area's natural integrity.

Maximum speed:

- 5 knots at all times
- No exceptions except for emergency response

Access Restrictions

Access to the zone is limited to authorized vessels that have obtained special permits. The maximum capacity is six (6) vessels at any given time at the mooring points. Each dive session is limited to 2 hours to manage impact on the marine environment. Operators must book in advance to ensure organized access and compliance with capacity limits. The daily vessel limit is strictly aligned with the mooring capacity to prevent overuse.

Protected Area with Sustainable Use Zone

The area within the red boundary, excluding the striped habitat/species management zone, is designated as the Sustainable Use Zone of the Finey Thila Marine Protected Area (MPA). This zone is managed with special conservation efforts to protect marine life and habitats while allowing sustainable use. It serves as a buffer around the core protection zone, offering controlled access to marine attractions while minimizing environmental impact on sensitive areas.

The Sustainable Use Zone supports traditional and recreational activities that align with conservation goals, ensuring a balance between ecosystem preservation and community needs. Strategically positioned transit corridors facilitate organized vessel movement, and supporting marine habitats complement the core protected area's ecological integrity.

Permitted Activities:

- **Sustainable Fishing:** Fishing is permitted exclusively for local residents holding valid permits, supporting traditional livelihoods while maintaining sustainable resource management. Only hand line fishing and bait fishing will be allowed, with restrictions on the use of nets and traps to prevent habitat degradation.
- **Guided Diving and Snorkeling:** These activities are allowed under professional supervision to ensure safety and environmental protection.
- **Vessel Transit:** Safe passage through this zone is permitted, ensuring minimal disruption to marine life.
- **Scientific Research:** Research activities are allowed with the necessary permits to support conservation efforts and sustainable use practices.
- **Mooring Access:** Vessels can access mooring points to reduce environmental impact.

Prohibited Activities:

- **Unauthorized Fishing:** Fishing without a valid permit is strictly prohibited to prevent overexploitation of marine resources.
- **Destructive Fishing Methods:** Practices that harm marine habitats, are strictly forbidden, even for permit holders. Destructive fishing methods, as per the General Fisheries Regulation are strictly prohibited. Any practices causing significant bycatch, habitat destruction, or physical damage to coral reefs and seagrass beds are not permitted.
- **Anchoring in Sensitive Areas:** Anchoring is not allowed outside designated mooring points to protect coral reefs and seabed ecosystems.
- **Speed Limits:** Vessels must not exceed 10 knots within the zone, and speeds must be reduced to 5 knots when:
 - Within 100 meters of dive boats.
 - During divers active in the two zones.
- **Vessel navigation:** Vessel transit is allowed. Vessel transit is permitted within sustainable use zone area, with a maximum speed of 15 knots to minimize environmental impact.
- **Marine Pollution:** Any activity that contributes to pollution, such as waste discharge, is strictly prohibited.
- **Unregulated Tourism:** Unauthorized tourism activities are not permitted to ensure environmental sustainability and avoid overcrowding.

Summary of Permitted Activities by Zone

Activity	Habitat Management Zone	General Use Zone
Diving	Guided only (with permit)	Regulated
Snorkeling	Guided only (with permit)	Regulated
Fishing	Prohibited	Sustainable (with permit)
Anchoring	Prohibited	In designated areas
Research	Allowed (with permit)	Allowed (with permit)
Photo/Videography	Allowed	Allowed
Navigation	Allowed in emergencies	Allowed

7. Vision

7.1 Long-term Vision

The vision for Finey Thila is "to preserve and showcase Finey Thila as a thriving underwater wonderland of vibrant coral ecosystems and rich biodiversity, fostering stewardship of marine conservation through community-driven management, responsible ecotourism, and sustainable use within the Haa Dhaalu Atoll."

7.2 Guiding Principles

The conservation plan for Finey Thila focuses on addressing potential challenges before they arise, learning from pressures observed at more popular dive sites. The plan aims to safeguard critical marine habitats, such as the coral-covered thilas and fish nurseries, while fostering sustainable tourism practices.

The management of Finey Thila Marine Protected Area is built on the following guiding principles:

Precautionary Principle: Management decisions prioritize conservation in cases where potential threats to marine ecosystems are identified, even if scientific understanding is incomplete. This approach ensures that sensitive ecosystems, including coral reefs and species-specific habitats, are protected proactively to prevent irreversible damage.

Ecosystem-Based Management: Decisions are made with a holistic view of marine ecosystems, accounting for interactions between species, habitats, and human activities. For example, protecting coral reefs is integral to sustaining fish populations, as the reefs provide essential habitat for cleaner fish and other marine organisms critical to the ecosystem.

Adaptive Management: Management approaches are flexible and responsive, evolving based on monitoring data, scientific advancements, and stakeholder input. Regular evaluations ensure that conservation strategies remain effective and can adapt to emerging challenges, such as climate change impacts and changing patterns of marine resource use.

Community-Centered Conservation: The success of Finey Thila's conservation efforts depends on meaningful engagement with local communities and stakeholders, ensuring that management decisions balance ecological protection with sustainable resource use while promoting equity, so that vulnerable or low-income groups are not disproportionately impacted and the benefits of conservation, including eco-tourism opportunities, are fairly distributed across the community.

Climate Change Awareness: Recognizing climate change as a significant and overarching threat, management strategies align with the National PCA Management Framework to ensure resilience in marine ecosystems. Conservation actions prioritize mitigating climate-related stressors such as coral bleaching, and sea-level rise.

7.3 Conservation Targets

The protected area focuses on specific conservation targets that represent its core ecological values and management priorities:

Soft Coral Communities and Fish Nursery Function maintained: Finey Thila's vibrant soft coral communities—featuring yellow, orange, red, and blue varieties—are a primary conservation target, providing essential habitats for juvenile fish and bait fish aggregations. These corals play a crucial role in supporting the life cycle of commercially and ecologically important species, contributing to the overall health of the reef ecosystem. Conservation efforts will focus on maintaining the condition of these habitats by preventing damage from anchoring and other human activities while ensuring their resilience to environmental changes.

Reef Ecosystem Health maintained: The health and resilience of Finey Thila's coral reef ecosystem are vital. This includes protecting reef structures that support species such as wrasses, moray eels, eagle rays, and reef-associated fish. Emphasis will be placed on maintaining coral cover, preventing destructive practices such as dredging and reclamation, and ensuring the survival of reef-building coral species.

Protected Species Populations maintained: Finey Thila serves as a critical habitat for a variety of marine protected species, including nurse sharks, white-tip and black-tip reef sharks, moray eels, wrasses, napoleon wrasse, and eagle rays. Conservation efforts will focus on preserving their habitats, such as feeding areas, resting zones, and movement corridors. Guidelines will minimize disturbances from human activities like diving, snorkeling, and vessel navigation.

Habitat Quality Maintained: Maintaining excellent water quality and ensuring habitat connectivity are critical for sustaining marine biodiversity at Finey Thila. Conservation measures will address threats such as sedimentation and pollution while protecting currents and pathways essential for species movement between habitats.

Ecosystem Significance and Opportunities: Finey Thila's ecosystem is rich in ecological value and offers opportunities for sustainable ecotourism. The underwater caves, soft coral gardens, and diverse species attract divers and researchers. Conservation measures will ensure these attractions are protected, promoting long-term sustainability and awareness through education and responsible tourism practices.

8. Management Objectives

The management objectives for Finey Thila MPA have been developed through stakeholder consultation and an analysis of current challenges. Each objective includes specific timelines, measurable indicators, and clearly defined outcomes to ensure effective implementation and evaluation. The MPA will operate under the Environment Protection and Preservation Act (4/93) and the Protected Areas Regulation (2018/R-78), with a three-year grace period to refine best practices before transitioning into formal regulatory enforcement.

8.1 Governance Objectives

Objective 1: By December 2028, establish a co-managed governance lead by the Finey Island Council, with essential infrastructure and protocols for protected area management, with an adaptive management approach incorporating voluntary codes of conduct and baseline data collection during the three-year grace period.

Timeline: Short-term (By December 2028)

Measures:

- Formation of a Protected Area Management Unit within Finey Island Council
- Development and voluntary adoption of codes of conduct for different user groups (fishers, tourism operators, visitors, and researchers)
- Installation of mooring buoys
- Establishment of a ranger/MPA hotline and compliance monitoring protocols
- Establishment of a monitoring and reporting system for visitor and resource use data
- Capacity-building programs for MPA management staff and stakeholders

Indicators:

- At least 80% of user groups voluntarily adopting the code of conduct by the end of the grace period
- At least 70% reduction in reported violations of voluntary guidelines by the end of the grace period
- At least two annual stakeholder meetings held for governance review

Expected Outcomes:

A locally led governance structure that ensures adaptive management, stakeholder participation, and the transition from voluntary guidelines to enforceable regulations by the end of the grace period.

Objective 2: By December 2029, implement a formalized integrated management framework that transitions from voluntary codes of conduct to enforceable regulations while ensuring local governance and sustainable resource use.

Timeline: Short Term (By December 2029).

Measures:

- Development of formalized regulations or management guidelines under the Environment Protection and Preservation Act or Protected Areas Regulation (2018/R-78)
- Establishment of a sustainable financing mechanism (e.g., visitor fees) to support conservation efforts
- Regular stakeholder coordination meetings and integration of local and atoll authorities in decision-making

Indicators:

- Full transition from voluntary guidelines to enforceable regulations by 2029
- At least 50% of operational costs covered through sustainable financing mechanisms
- At least 90% of reported compliance cases resolved through local governance structures

Expected Outcomes:

A fully operational governance system with clear regulatory measures and financing mechanisms that ensure long-term conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

8.2 Ecological Objectives

Objective 3: By December 2028, enhance the health of Finey Thila's marine ecosystems through habitat protection measures, voluntary compliance strategies, and structured monitoring during the grace period.

Timeline: Short Term (By December 2028)

Measures:

- Conduct baseline habitat assessments and biannual ecological monitoring
- Establishment of no-take zones and sustainable fishing zones
- Reduction in observed anthropogenic impacts on coral reefs and soft coral gardens
- Implementation of visitor guidelines to minimize disturbances
- Introduction of citizen science initiatives for ecosystem monitoring

Indicators:

- At least 20% reduction in coral damage from anthropogenic impacts by 2028
- At least 50% of tour operators actively participating in voluntary monitoring programs
- No-take zones showing measurable increases in fish biomass and coral cover by the end of the grace period

Expected Outcomes:

Improved ecosystem health through data-driven conservation efforts, leading to formalized habitat protection and species management strategies by the end of the grace period.

8.3 Socio-Economic Objectives

Objective 4: By December 2030, develop and implement a sustainable tourism management system that aligns with conservation objectives while supporting local economic benefits.

Timeline: Medium Term (By December 2030)

Measures:

- Establishment of designated snorkeling, diving, and vessel anchoring zones
- Development of visitor guidelines promoting responsible behavior
- Implementation of a locally managed fee system for conservation funding
- Training programs for local tour guides and dive operators
- Enforcement of boat speed limits (5 knots in designated areas)

Indicators:

- At least 80% of visitors and operators complying with responsible tourism guidelines
- At least 70% of visitor fees reinvested into conservation and community initiatives
- At least 60% of trained local guides actively involved in tourism activities

Expected Outcomes:

A responsible tourism framework that enhances visitor experience while minimizing ecological impacts, transitioning from voluntary adherence to regulatory enforcement.

Objective 5: By December 2030, establish a stakeholder engagement system that promotes knowledge-sharing, compliance with conservation measures, and active participation in MPA governance.

Timeline: Medium Term (By December 2030)

Measures:

- Formation of a stakeholder advisory committee
- Development and execution of two annual capacity-building programs for local fishers, tour operators, and conservation groups
- Regular public consultation meetings for feedback and policy refinement
- Monitoring and evaluation of training impact on community involvement

Indicators:

- At least 70% of stakeholders participating in advisory committee meetings annually
- At least 60% of trained stakeholders demonstrating improved compliance with conservation measures
- Increased stakeholder-led initiatives supporting conservation efforts

Expected Outcomes:

A community-driven MPA with strong stakeholder participation, fostering a sense of ownership and compliance with conservation regulations.

8.4 Research and Monitoring Objective

Objective 6: By December 2034, establish a comprehensive research and monitoring program that integrates community participation and provides data for adaptive management.

Timeline: Long Term (By December 2034)

Measures:

- Development of a standardized research framework
- Biannual biodiversity surveys and habitat assessments
- Annual reporting of ecological and visitor impact data
- Collaboration with dive centers (citizen science), academic institutions, and research organizations
- Integration of monitoring data into decision-making processes

Indicators:

- At least two peer-reviewed studies published using Finey Thila data by 2034
- At least 80% of key ecological indicators (e.g., coral cover, fish biomass) monitored consistently over five years
- Increased local participation in citizen science programs

Expected Outcomes:

A data-driven management system that informs policy decisions, ensures ecosystem resilience, and transitions from voluntary monitoring to a structured research framework supporting long-term conservation.

9. Management Strategies and Action Plans

Finney Thila Marine Protected Area's (MPA) management strategies and action plans establish an integrated framework for implementing six core management objectives over the period 2025-2035. The strategic framework prioritizes the establishment of essential governance structures by December 2028, followed by the transition to formalized regulatory enforcement (2029), marine habitat conservation (2028), sustainable tourism development (2030), stakeholder engagement (2030), and comprehensive research programs (2034). Each strategy incorporates specific technical parameters, quantifiable success indicators, and defined implementation protocols designed to achieve measurable outcomes.

The implementation framework begins with critical governance and infrastructure development. This includes the establishment of a Protected Area Management Unit within Finney Island Council, the installation of mooring buoys and navigation markers, and the development of a monitoring and reporting system for visitor and resource use data. The governance strategy focuses on transitioning from voluntary compliance to enforceable regulations, supported by an adaptive management approach that integrates stakeholder feedback and scientific monitoring. Success will be measured through indicators such as the formation of governance structures, adoption of codes of conduct, and implementation of compliance monitoring protocols.

The ecological conservation strategy prioritizes habitat protection through baseline habitat assessments, biannual ecological monitoring, and the establishment of no-take and sustainable fishing zones. The implementation plan includes citizen science initiatives, visitor guidelines, and structured monitoring to track reductions in anthropogenic impacts. Success indicators will include measurable improvements in coral reef health, reductions in disturbances to marine life, and adherence to conservation guidelines by tourism operators and fishers.

Sustainable tourism development will be addressed through the designation of snorkeling, diving, and vessel anchoring zones, alongside the implementation of responsible visitor guidelines and locally managed conservation fee systems. Capacity-building programs will train local tour guides and dive operators, while enforcement of vessel speed limits will minimize marine disturbances. Performance indicators will measure compliance with tourism guidelines, visitor satisfaction metrics, and financial contributions to conservation efforts.

Stakeholder engagement is a core element of the conservation plan, ensuring active community participation in decision-making processes. A stakeholder advisory committee will be formed, and capacity-building programs will be conducted twice annually to educate fishers, tourism operators, and conservation groups on best practices. Public consultation meetings will be held regularly to refine policies based on community feedback, with success indicators focusing on stakeholder participation rates and compliance with conservation measures.

A comprehensive research and monitoring program will be developed by 2034 to support adaptive management and policy decision-making. This program will integrate biannual biodiversity surveys, annual ecological and visitor impact assessments, and collaboration with research institutions and dive centers through citizen science initiatives. Monitoring data will be systematically incorporated into decision-making processes to refine conservation strategies and

ensure ecosystem resilience. Performance indicators will include the establishment of standardized research protocols, improvements in habitat quality metrics, and increased scientific contributions to marine conservation policies.

The Ministry of Tourism and Environment will lead the implementation across all objectives in partnership with the MPA Management Unit, Finney Island Council, local fishing cooperatives, resort dive operators, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI), and other stakeholders. This collaboration will ensure coordinated management of the protected area, balancing conservation efforts with sustainable resource use and local economic benefits.

1.1. Action Plan

Objective	Key actions	Timeline																																Success Indicators	Responsible party											
		2025			2026				2027				2028				2029				2030				2031				2032				2033				2034				2035					
		Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1			Q2	Q3	Q4								
Objective 1: By December 2028, establish a locally managed governance system under Finey Island Council leadership.	Formation of a Protected Area Management Unit within Finey Island Council																																								Official establishment of the unit, documented operational guidelines and assigned staff roles	MoTE (Lead), Finey Council (Partner), MPA Management Unit (Partner)				
	Development and voluntary adoption of codes of conduct for different user groups (fishers, tourism operators, visitors, and researchers)																																								High compliance rate (>80%) among target groups, awareness programs conducted, and feedback from stakeholders indicating understanding and adherence					
	Installation of mooring buoys																																								Buoys and markers installed at identified locations, reduction in anchoring-related reef damage					
	Establishment of a ranger/MPA hotline and compliance monitoring protocols																																								Hotline operational with a response log, enforcement reports indicating increased compliance and reduced violations					
	Establishment of a monitoring and reporting system for visitor and resource use data																																										Regular reports published on visitor trends and resource use, improved enforcement strategies			

	Establishment of no-take zones and sustainable fishing zones																																	No-take zones demarcated and enforced, fish biomass and biodiversity indicators showing positive trends	MMRI (Partner)
	Reduction in observed anthropogenic impacts on coral reefs and soft coral gardens																																Decrease in coral damage incidents, improved reef health indicators (coral cover, fish abundance)		
	Implementation of visitor guidelines to minimize disturbances																																High compliance among visitors, reduction in reef disturbance incidents		
	Introduction of citizen science initiatives for ecosystem monitoring																																Participation rates in citizen science programs, increased local engagement in reef monitoring		
Objective 4: By December 2030, develop and implement a sustainable tourism management system.	Establishment of designated snorkeling, diving, and vessel anchoring zones																																Zones clearly marked and adhered to, reduced anchoring in sensitive areas	MoTE (Lead), MPA Management Unit (Partner), Advisory Committee (Partner), Finey Council (Partner)	
	Development of visitor guidelines promoting responsible behavior																															Guidelines published and distributed, increased awareness and compliance from tourists			
	Implementation of a locally managed fee system for conservation funding																															Fee system operational, revenue reports showing financial sustainability			

10. Compliance and Enforcement

Effective management of the Finey Thila Marine Protected Area (MPA) requires a robust compliance and enforcement framework that ensures adherence to regulations while fostering collaboration with local stakeholders. This framework establishes specific rules, enforcement mechanisms, penalties for violations, and monitoring protocols aimed at protecting the ecological integrity of Finey Thila while promoting sustainable use by local communities and businesses.

Although Finey Thila is not heavily used by visitors, the conservation plan for Finey Thila focuses on addressing potential challenges before they arise, learning from pressures observed at more popular dive sites. The plan aims to safeguard critical marine habitats, such as the coral-covered thilas and fish nurseries, while fostering sustainable tourism practices. Through proactive management strategies, the plan seeks to balance conservation priorities with future tourism development, ensuring the long-term resilience of the ecosystem.

10.1 Rules and Regulations

Finney Thila MPA operates under the Environment Protection and Preservation Act (4/93) and the Protected Areas Regulation (2018/R-78) as a demonstration site for developing and testing management measures, codes of conduct, visitor guidelines, and research protocols. A three-year grace period allows voluntary adoption of codes of conduct for fishers, tourist operators, visitors, and researchers, refining best practices and collecting ecological data before formalizing regulations.

Key Regulations:

- **Vessel Operations:** Vessels must register with the MPA Management Unit and obtain permits. A 5-knot speed limit applies within designated zones to protect marine life. To prevent overcrowding and reduce environmental impact over time, a maximum of six vessels is allowed within the protected area at any given time. Mooring buoys and designated anchoring zones must be used to prevent coral damage.
- **Tourism Activities:** Tour operators must implement sustainable tourism practices, employ certified guides, and follow strict guidelines for diving and snorkeling to minimize ecological impact. Pre-activity briefings are required, and visitor compliance is monitored.
- **Fisheries Resource Use:** Fishing within the MPA will be regulated to balance traditional fishing practices with conservation goals. Sustainable fishing zones will be established, with restrictions on gear types and catch limits to protect critical habitats and fish populations. No-take zones will be designated to safeguard breeding and nursery areas, ensuring long-term fish stock viability. Fishers will be engaged through capacity-building programs and alternative livelihood initiatives to promote sustainable resource use.
- **Adaptive Management:** Compliance measures remain flexible and proportional to actual site usage, ensuring long-term ecological integrity while supporting responsible tourism and stakeholder participation.

At the end of the grace period, codes of conduct will be transitioned into formal regulations or guidelines under the Environment Protection and Preservation Act or the Protected Areas Regulation to ensure enforceable conservation measures.

10.2 Enforcement Mechanisms

The enforcement of Finey Thila's regulations follows a multi-tiered approach that integrates self-monitoring, community involvement, and regulatory oversight to ensure compliance while fostering positive relationships with stakeholders. Given the site's relatively low activity levels, enforcement strategies are designed to maintain vigilance without imposing undue restrictions. Key enforcement measures include an Intelligence-Led, Risk-Based Enforcement approach which will be implemented to ensure the efficient and effective allocation of enforcement resources. This strategy emphasizes proactive monitoring, education, and targeted enforcement actions based on identified risks. Key enforcement tools include education and outreach initiatives, such as stakeholder engagement, community workshops, and visitor briefings, to promote voluntary compliance. For first-time or minor infractions, verbal and written warnings will be issued to encourage adherence to regulations. In cases of repeated or severe violations, proportionate and consistent fines and penalties will be applied to deter non-compliance while maintaining fairness. This balanced enforcement system prioritizes education and compliance over punitive measures, while still allowing for necessary regulatory interventions when required.

Routine patrols by rangers are conducted to verify compliance and provide immediate responses to violations, supplemented by surprise inspections during peak periods to deter potential infractions. Community-based monitoring further enhances enforcement efforts by encouraging local stakeholders, such as fishermen and tourism operators, to report violations through an established hotline. Additionally, community awareness programs are conducted to strengthen compliance through voluntary participation and foster a sense of shared responsibility for the protection of Finey Thila's marine resources.

10.3 Penalty Framework

Violations of protected area regulations incur penalties according to a graduated system that reflects the severity and frequency of infractions. First-time minor violations typically result in written warnings and mandatory additional training. Repeated or serious violations may lead to monetary fines, suspension of access privileges, or revocation of operating permits.

The penalty framework establishes clear consequences for specific violations:

- Speed limit violations: Fines ranging from MVR 2,500 to MVR 10,000
- Unauthorized anchoring: Fines of MVR 10,000 plus compensation for any damage
- Exceeding capacity limits: MVR 5,000 per excess vessel
- Operating without proper permits: MVR 15,000 and immediate cessation of activities
- Wildlife harassment: Fines from MVR 10,000 to MVR 50,000 based on severity

10.4 Monitoring Protocols

Systematic monitoring ensures consistent enforcement and provides data for evaluating management effectiveness. The monitoring system includes several key components:

Daily monitoring activities focus on vessel compliance, visitor numbers, and adherence to operational guidelines. This includes regular checks of mooring buoy usage, vessel speeds, and activity patterns at key sites. Technology-based monitoring through the digital management system provides continuous data on vessel movements and site usage.

Monthly assessments evaluate patterns of compliance, identify recurring issues, and assess the effectiveness of enforcement measures. These assessments inform adaptive management responses and help identify needs for additional enforcement resources or modified regulations.

Annual reviews analyze enforcement data to identify trends, assess the effectiveness of current measures, and recommend adjustments to the enforcement framework. These reviews incorporate stakeholder feedback and consider both compliance levels and the impact of enforcement measures on protected area users.

11. Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation framework for Finey Thila Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Figures 11 ensures the systematic assessment of ecological health, tourism activities, and management effectiveness. Although Finey Thila is not heavily used by visitors, the monitoring plan is designed to address potential challenges before they arise, learning from pressures observed at more frequented sites. The plan is designed to be adaptive and evidence-based, ensuring that Finey Thila continues to meet its conservation objectives while also supporting sustainable tourism and local community involvement, as outlined in the 5-year action plan.

11.1 Ecological Monitoring

The ecological monitoring program for Finey Thila is designed to track the health of key marine habitats, with an emphasis on coral communities, fish nurseries and reef habitat in line with the Ten-Year Action Plan. The program is structured around the following key actions:

- **Baseline Habitat Assessments:** The MPA Management Unit, in collaboration with resort dive schools, EPA, MMRI, and MoTE, will complete baseline habitat assessments in 2028. These assessments will measure coral cover, fish populations, and the presence of endangered species, establishing critical reference points for future monitoring.
- **Regular Habitat Monitoring:** Annual surveys, focusing on coral health, fish abundance, and water quality, will be conducted by the MPA Management Unit, MoTE, and EPA. These surveys will inform the ongoing management of the MPA and help evaluate the effectiveness of conservation actions.
- **Visitor Guidelines and Impact Mitigation:** The MPA Management Unit will develop and enforce visitor guidelines by 2028 to minimize human impact on sensitive habitats, including coral reefs.
- **No-Take Zones and Protection Areas:** As per the action plan's objectives, habitat management zones will be established by 2028, at the end of the grace period, based on the scientific data from the baseline assessments and ongoing monitoring.

11.2 Tourism Impact Monitoring

The tourism monitoring program for Finey Thila will track operational compliance and the effects of tourism on the marine environment, aligning with the integrated management framework outlined in Objective 2 and 3 of the Ten-Year Action Plan. Key actions include:

- **Tourism Monitoring System:** In 2028, the MPA Management Unit will establish a structured tourism monitoring framework to track visitor numbers, vessel activity, and interaction patterns. Monitoring will be integrated into the overall ecological and socio-economic assessments, ensuring adherence to carrying capacity limits.
- **Stakeholder Coordination:** Quarterly coordination meetings will be held with tourism operators and other stakeholders to address potential conflicts between different user groups, such as diving, fishing, and tourism activities.
- **Training for Guides:** In 2029, the MPA Management Unit will implement training programs for local guides, focusing on sustainable tourism practices and marine conservation principles. Certification programs will be introduced to ensure adherence to environmental guidelines.

11.3 Management Effectiveness Evaluation

To assess the effectiveness of MPA management, an evaluation will be conducted every five years using the Protected Area Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT). The assessment will incorporate both quantitative data and qualitative feedback from stakeholders, including local councils, tour operators, and community members. Key performance indicators include:

- **Infrastructure Maintenance and Functionality:** Monitoring the effectiveness of infrastructure, such as mooring systems and the watch station.
- **Revenue Generation and Financial Sustainability:** Evaluation of the locally-managed fee system and the creation of a sustainable financing mechanism, including eco-tourism revenue.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction:** Regular consultations with stakeholders to assess satisfaction levels and the effectiveness of the advisory committee.
- **Conservation Targets:** Progress toward achieving habitat protection and biodiversity conservation goals.

11.4 Reporting Requirements

The reporting framework for Finey Thila will ensure that monitoring results are communicated to relevant authorities and stakeholders in a timely and transparent manner, in line with the Ten-Year Action Plan. Reports will be prepared as follows:

- **Monthly Reports:**
 - Visitor statistics and compliance with carrying capacity
 - Infrastructure maintenance status (once infrastructure is established)
 - Incident reports and enforcement actions
 - ecological observations
- **Quarterly Reports:**
 - Tourism impact assessments
 - Stakeholder engagement activities
 - Financial performance and budget tracking
- **Annual Reports:**
 - Comprehensive ecological assessments
 - Progress on conservation and management goals
 - Stakeholder satisfaction analysis
 - Adaptation recommendations based on monitoring outcomes
- **Every 5 Years:**
 - Management effectiveness evaluation

Reports will be submitted to the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) according to established deadlines. Key findings will also be shared with stakeholders through meetings and digital platforms.

Monitoring Component	Parameters	Indicators	Frequency	Methods	Responsible Parties	Reporting Requirements	Timeline
Ecological Monitoring	Coral Reef Health	Live coral cover percentage, Coral disease prevalence, Reef fish abundance	Annual	Line intercept transects, Photo quadrats, Fish census, Health surveys	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Monitoring team, Research partners	Annual health reports, Annual reef assessment	Start 2028
	Fishery No-Take Zones	Compliance with no-take regulations, Fish populations in no-take areas	Bi-annually	Fishing activity monitoring, Catch data, Visual surveys	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Fisheries Officer	Bi-annual reports on no-take zone compliance	Start 2028
Tourism Impact Monitoring	Visitor Management	Daily vessel numbers, Compliance with carrying capacity, Activity patterns	Daily	Site inspections, Activity logs	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Rangers, Partners: Tour Operators	Daily operation logs, Monthly compliance reports	Start 2025
	Visitor Experience	Visitor satisfaction ratings, Complaint incidents, Service quality	Annually	Visitor surveys, Feedback forms, Online reviews	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Partners: Tour Operators	Annually satisfaction reports, Annual tourism assessment	Start 2027
Management Effectiveness	Operational Performance	Infrastructure condition, Staff performance, Protocol compliance, Revenue generation, Enforcement effectiveness	Monthly	Performance reviews, Compliance checks, Financial audits, METT assessments (every 5 years)	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Community liaison, Partners	Monthly performance reports, Five-year effectiveness evaluation	Start 2029

Conservation Outcomes	Ecosystem Health	Threat reduction, Target achievement, Ecosystem improvements, Management adaptations	Annually	Impact assessments, Target reviews, Outcome evaluation	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Environmental Officer, Research partners	Annual conservation report, Management recommendations	Start 2029
	Stakeholder Engagement	Meeting attendance, Program participation, Community feedback, Local benefits	Bi-annually	Meeting records, Engagement surveys, Partnership reviews	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Local councils	Bi-annual engagement reports	Start 2028
Research & Monitoring	Biodiversity & Ecosystem Monitoring	Species diversity, Population health, Coral cover, Fish abundance	Annually	Surveys, Fish census, Habitat mapping	Lead: MPA Management Unit, Research partners	Bi-annual biodiversity assessments	Start 2031

Figure 9 Monitoring Plan

12. Appendices

12.1 Appendix A: MPA Management Unit Functions

1. Administration and Oversight Functions

- The PA Management Unit oversees comprehensive daily operations and management of the protected area, implementing standardized procedures for all administrative activities.
- The unit handles all financial management aspects including budget planning, revenue collection, expense tracking, and financial reporting to relevant authorities.
- Staff supervision responsibilities include scheduling, performance monitoring, training coordination, and maintaining proper staffing levels for all operational needs.
- Infrastructure and equipment maintenance involves regular inspections, coordinating repairs, maintaining inventory, and ensuring all facilities remain operational.
- The unit manages all permit and license systems, maintaining detailed documentation and ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements.

2. Monitoring and Enforcement Functions

- Implementation of vessel monitoring systems to track and manage vessel movements within the protected area.
- Coordination of regular patrol schedules covering all zones of the protected area, with specific focus on habitat/species management zone.
- Enforcement of speed restrictions, carrying capacity limits, and other regulations through monitoring systems.
- Collection and analysis of compliance data to inform enforcement strategies and identify areas requiring additional management attention.
- Maintenance and operation of all MPA management equipment.

3. Tourism Management Functions

- Management of visitor access ranger/MPA hotline and coordination with tour operators to ensure compliance with carrying capacity limits.
- Operation of the mooring buoy reservation system, including maintenance scheduling and usage monitoring.
- Implementation of fee collection systems and management of revenue from tourism activities within the protected area.
- Coordination of guide certification programs and oversight of tourism activity standards within the protected area.
- Development and implementation of visitor satisfaction monitoring programs to maintain service quality standards.

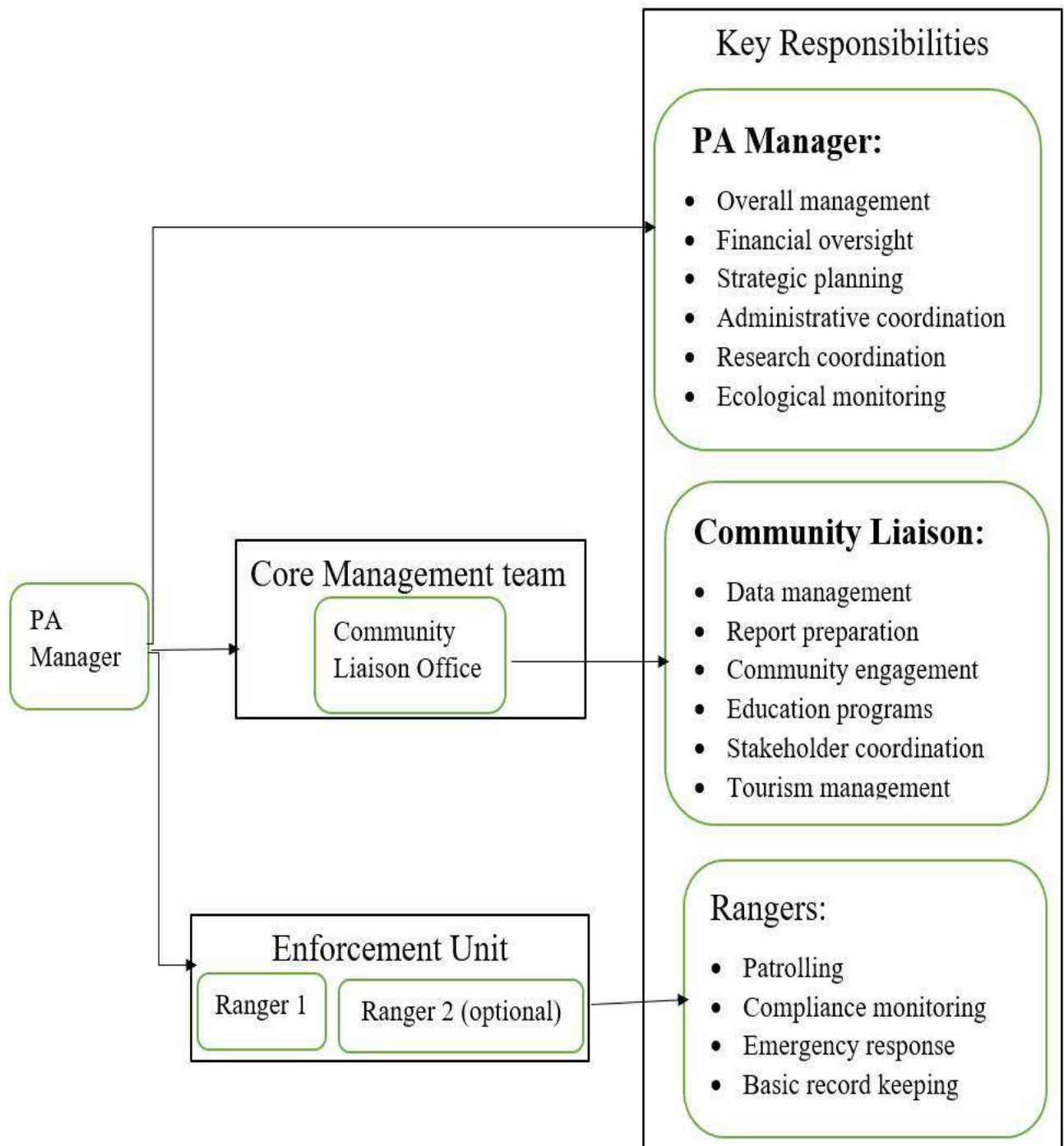
4. Research and Conservation Functions

- Implementation of standardized ecological monitoring protocols focusing on key species and habitat health indicators.
- Collection and management of scientific data regarding coral reef health, and water quality parameters.
- Coordination with research partners and management of research permit systems to facilitate scientific studies.
- Maintenance of comprehensive scientific databases and preparation of regular monitoring reports.
- Development and implementation of habitat restoration and species conservation programs based on monitoring results.

5. Community Engagement Functions

- Coordination of stakeholder consultation processes and implementation of regular community feedback mechanisms.
- Development and delivery of environmental education programs for local schools and community groups.
- Implementation of capacity building programs focusing on marine tourism operations and conservation monitoring.
- Support for local business development initiatives related to sustainable tourism operations.
- Management of traditional use activities and implementation of conflict resolution procedures when needed.

PA Management unit



12.2 Appendix B: Training Requirements

The training requirements for Finey Marine Protected Area's management unit establish a comprehensive framework to ensure effective protected area management through systematic capacity building and skill development. This framework addresses the specific needs of each position while maintaining standardized baseline requirements across all staff members. The training program integrates theoretical knowledge with practical applications, focusing on both technical competencies and soft skills required for effective protected area management.

The training framework is designed to be adaptive and responsive to emerging management needs while maintaining consistent core competencies. Each position within the management unit requires specific technical skills and certifications, complemented by regular refresher courses and updates to ensure currency of knowledge and capabilities. The program emphasizes hands-on learning experiences, incorporating both formal training sessions and practical field applications.

Required Certifications:

- First Aid and CPR for all staff
- Vessel operation license for rangers
- Dive certification for Rangers
- Guide certification for Community Liaison Officer

Training Partners:

- Maldives Marine Research Institute
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Environment Management and Tourism Training Institutes (MNU)
- Emergency Response Organizations (Red Crescent, MNDF)
- Local dive schools.

Position	Core Training Requirements	Specialized Training	Refresher Requirements
Protected Area Manager	<p>Protected area management fundamentals</p> <p>Ecological monitoring methods</p> <p>Data collection and analysis</p> <p>Scientific report writing</p> <p>GIS and mapping</p>	<p>Manta ray monitoring protocols</p> <p>Coral reef assessment techniques</p> <p>Water quality monitoring</p> <p>Research methodology</p> <p>Database management</p>	<p>Annual refresher on:</p> <p>Monitoring protocols</p> <p>Data analysis methods</p> <p>Latest conservation techniques</p>
Community Liaison Officer	<p>Stakeholder engagement methods</p> <p>Communication techniques</p> <p>Education program development</p> <p>Project management</p> <p>Tourism management</p>	<p>Guide training certification</p> <p>Community development</p> <p>Conflict resolution</p> <p>Environmental education</p> <p>Tourism product development</p>	<p>Biannual refresher on:</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement</p> <p>Communication skills</p> <p>Tourism management</p>
Rangers	<p>Basic marine biology</p> <p>Law enforcement procedures</p> <p>First aid and emergency response</p> <p>Navigation skills</p>	<p>Vessel operation</p> <p>Patrol techniques</p> <p>Incident reporting</p>	<p>Quarterly refresher on:</p> <p>Emergency procedures</p> <p>First aid</p> <p>Law enforcement</p>

	Radio communication Use and maintenance of surveillance equipment (e.g., drones)	Safety and rescue operations	Safety protocols
All Staff	Protected area regulations Basic computer skills Health and safety Standard operating procedures Emergency protocols	Team building Basic equipment maintenance Digital reporting systems Environmental awareness	Annual refresher on: PA regulations Emergency procedures

12.3 Appendix C: Reporting Templates

Monitoring Report Template:

1. General Information

Date: [Month/Year]

Report Prepared By: [Name/Position]

Location: Finey Thila Marine Protected Area

2. Visitor Statistics Table

Visitor Category	Daily Count	Weekly Total	Monthly Total	Notes
International Tourists				
Domestic Visitors				
Research Groups				
Educational Groups				
Total Visitors				

3. Activity Monitoring Table

Activity Type	Number of Operations	Number of Participants	Revenue Generated	Incidents
Diving				
Snorkeling				
Fishing				
Research Activities				
Photography				

4. Ecological Monitoring Table

Parameter	Location	Observation	Status	Action Required
Coral Health				
Protected Species				
Environmental Threats				

5. Infrastructure Status Table

Infrastructure Type	Condition Rating	Maintenance Required	Action Taken	Next Inspection Due
Mooring Buoys				
Monitoring Equipment				
Visitor Facilities				
Safety Equipment				

6. Incident Report Table

Date	Time	Location	Incident Type	Description	Action Taken	Follow-up Required

7. Research Activity Table

Research Project	Principal Investigator	Start Date	End Date	Progress Status	Key Findings	Challenges

Condition Rating Key:

- Excellent (5): Fully functional, no issues
- Good (4): Minor wear, fully operational
- Fair (3): Showing wear, needs attention
- Poor (2): Significant issues, needs immediate attention
- Critical (1): Non-functional, requires replacement

12.4 Appendix D: Non-compliance Monitoring Guidelines

The following provides guidelines for PA management unit to attend to any incidences of non-compliances or violations of the PA rules.

1. The Finey Thila Management Unit established within the Finey Council (Management Unit) will be the primary party responsible for attending to reported incidences of non-compliance and violation of PA rules.
2. The Management Unit has the right to attend to such issues and resolve these in a peaceful manner.
3. Reports of the incident shall be received through direct observation by the Management Unit staff or through reports either by phone, letter, email or other means of communication.
4. Management Unit Staff shall attend the site and gather information on the day an incident is reported. Any violations of PA rules should immediately be stopped, or necessary mitigation action should be taken as advised by the EPA.
5. A report of the incident should be sent to the EPA within 5 days of the incident being reported.
6. The EPA will investigate the incident and take necessary action.
7. The Management Unit shall maintain a log of all reported incidences and compile a list of incidences in the monthly PA management report.
8. The EPA shall maintain a register of reported incidences and actions taken.

Incident Classification Matrix

Violation Category	Description	Severity Level	Immediate Required Action
Critical	Coral damage Protected species capture Operating in no-entry zones Wildlife harassment	High	Immediate cessation of activity Documentation Report to EPA immediately.
Major	Speed violations Unauthorized anchoring Exceeding capacity limits Operating without permits	Medium-High	Issue warning Document incident Report to EPA within 24 hours.
Minor	Improper vessel operation Minor rule infractions Documentation issues	Low	Issue warning Record incident Monthly reporting

Response Protocol

Step	Action	Timeline	Responsible Party	Documentation Required
1. Detection	Direct observation Report from stakeholders	Immediate	Rangers	Incident log entry
2. Assessment	Evaluate severity Classify violation Determine response	Within 1 hour	Rangers	Assessment form
3. Response	Issue warning Enforce regulations Contact authorities if needed	Within 2 hours	MPA Management Unit	Action report
4. Documentation	Complete incident report Collect evidence Record witness statements	Within 24 hours	Rangers	Full incident report
5. Follow-up	Monitor compliance Review effectiveness Update procedures if needed	Within 7 days	Management Unit	Follow-up report

Monitoring Equipment Requirements

Equipment Type	Purpose	Maintenance Schedule	Data Storage
Patrol Vessel Equipment	Enforcement operations	Daily checks	Continuous
Documentation Tools	Evidence collection	Per use	Permanent

Reporting Requirements

Report Type	Content	Frequency	Distribution
Incident Reports	Date/time	Per incident	MPA Management unit
	Location		EPA
	Violation type		Council
	Actions taken		
Patrol Reports	Areas covered	Daily	PA Management
	Observations		
	Issues noted		
Compliance Summary	Violation statistics	Monthly	All stakeholders
	Trends		
	Recommendations		
Enforcement Review	Effectiveness analysis	Annual	Advisory Committee
	Resource needs		
	Policy updates		

Evidence Collection Guidelines

Type of Evidence	Collection Method	Storage Requirements	Retention Period
Photo/Video	Digital documentation	Secure server backup	5 years
Written Statements	Standard forms	Physical and digital	5 years
Equipment Records	Maintenance logs	Filing system	3 years

Note: All monitoring activities must comply with legal requirements and protected area regulations. Regular training updates required for monitoring staff.

12. 5 Appendix E: Ecological Monitoring Schedule

Daily Monitoring Parameters

Parameter	Method	Location	Staff Responsible	Data Recording
Weather Conditions	Visual observation	All zones	Rangers	Weather log
Vessel Activity	Visual observation	All zones	Rangers	Vessel log

Annual Monitoring Requirements

Assessment	Timing	Method	Partners	Outputs
Coral Reef Assessment	January	Line Intercept Photo quadrats	Research institutions	Annual reef health report
Fish Surveys	Belt transects Timed swims	EPA Protocols	PA Manager Research partners	Species abundance Size class data
Benthic Cover	Line intercept transects Photo quadrats	EPA Protocols	PA Manager Research partners	Percentage cover data Photo documentation
Ecosystem Health Review	December	Comprehensive survey	External experts	Management effectiveness report

Equipment Maintenance Schedule

Equipment	Maintenance Frequency	Calibration Requirements	Responsible Staff
Survey Equipment	Monthly	Quarterly	Rangers
Cameras	After each use	Annually	Rangers

*Notes:

- All monitoring activities subject to weather conditions
- Data to be entered into central database within 24 hours
- Quality control checks required for all data entry
- Immediate reporting required for any unusual observations*

12. 6 Appendix F: Activities Allowed and Prohibited

Note: All permitted activities must comply with protected area regulations and may be subject to temporary restrictions based on environmental conditions or management requirements.

✗ = Prohibited ✓ = Permitted with standard regulations ✓* = Permitted with special authorization

Activity Category	Habitat/Species Management Zone	Sustainable Use Zone	Permitted With Authorization*
General Activities			
Any activities causing harm to marine ecosystem	✗	✗	
Littering	✗	✗	
Introduction of alien species	✗	✗	
Feeding marine life	✗	✗	
Night lighting to attract marine life	✗	✗	
Resource Extraction			
Mining activities	✗	✗	
Sand mining	✗	✗	
Coral mining	✗	✗	
Dredging	✗	✗	
Development Activities			
Infrastructure development	✗	✗	
Reclamation	✗	✗	
Aquaculture/mariculture	✗	✗	
Installation of mooring buoys	✓	✓	✓*
Maritime Activities			
Anchoring	✗	✗	
Vessel speed above 5 knots	✗	✓	
Tourism Activities			
Recreational diving	✓*	✓	✓*
Snorkeling	✓*	✓	✓*
Wildlife watching	✓*	✓	✓*
Photography/videography	✓*	✓	✓*
Research Activities			
Scientific research	✓*	✓*	✓*
Monitoring activities	✓*	✓*	✓*
Equipment installation	✓*	✓*	✓*

Activities marked with (✓) require special permits and must comply with specific conditions:

12.7 Appendix G: Fee Guidelines

The fee structure for Finey Thila Marine Protected Area operates as a dual system, with separate mechanisms for commercial operators and individual visitors. Both fee systems operate concurrently as follows:

1. Annual Operator Fees (voluntary)
2. Individual Visitor Entry Fees (Applicable to all visitors except those entering with annual permit holders)

All fees are listed in Maldivian Rufiyaa (MVR) with US Dollar (USD) equivalents shown in parentheses for reference. The official MVR amount shall be considered binding.

Annual Operator Fees:

Operator Type	Annual Fee MVR (USD)	Includes
Safari Vessels	MVR 15,000 (\$975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unlimited access within carrying capacity limits - Use of mooring buoys - Marketing through PA platforms
Resort Dive Centers	MVR 25,000 (\$1,625)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unlimited access within carrying capacity limits - Use of mooring buoys - Marketing through PA platforms
Local Tour Operators	MVR 10,000 (\$650)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unlimited access within carrying capacity limits - Use of visitor facilities - Marketing support
Photography/Videography Business	MVR 12,000 (\$780)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commercial photography rights - Marketing through PA platforms

Individual Visitor Entry Fees:

Visitor Category	Fee per Visit MVR (USD)
International Tourists	MVR 150 (\$10)
Maldivian Nationals	MVR 77 (\$5)
Children (under 12)	Free
Research/Educational Groups	50% discount

Activity-Specific Fees:

Activity	Fee MVR (USD)	Duration
Diving	MVR 77 (\$5)	Per dive
Snorkeling	MVR 77 (\$5)	Per session
Photography (Commercial)	MVR 770 (\$50)	Per day
Research Activities	MVR 1,540 (\$100)	Per week
Educational Field Trips	Free	Pre-arranged

Note:

- 1. Commercial operators must pay annual fees regardless of visitor entry fees.*
- 2. Visitors entering with annual permit holders are exempt from individual entry fees.*
- 3. All fees are reviewed annually and may be adjusted based on management requirements.*
- 4. Exchange rates will be updated quarterly based on official MMA rates*
- 5. For multi-day access, weekly passes are available at a 20% discount from daily rate.*

Fee Exemptions

- Government monitoring activities
- Emergency response operations
- Local school educational visits
- Conservation research (with approved permits)
- Traditional non-commercial activities

Payment Terms

Annual Operator Fees:

- Annual operator fees must be paid in advance of the operational year to maintain valid permits for protected area access.
- Operators have the flexibility to pay their annual fees through quarterly installments to manage cash flow more effectively.
- Operators who choose to pay the full annual fee upfront are not required to purchase daily visitor fees, simplifying the payment process.
- A late payment penalty of 5% will be applied to any payments received after the designated due dates to ensure timely compliance with payment schedules.

Visitor Fees:

- All visitor fees must be paid and validated before entering the protected area to ensure proper access control and visitor management.
- The protected area would offer convenient digital payment options through an online portal and mobile payment systems to facilitate easy transactions for visitors.
- Groups consisting of ten or more persons qualify for a 10% discount on the standard entry fees, making the protected area more accessible for organized tours and educational groups.
- Season passes are available offering cost-effective access options for regular users of the protected area, with passes available in various durations to suit different visitation patterns.

Revenue Allocation

Revenue generated from protected area fees will be allocated as follows:

- The largest portion, comprising 40% of total revenue, will be directed towards conservation programs including ecological monitoring, species protection initiatives, and habitat restoration projects.
- Infrastructure maintenance will receive 25% of the revenue, ensuring proper upkeep of mooring buoys, monitoring stations, and other essential facilities within the protected area.
- Community development initiatives will be supported through 20% of the revenue, focusing on capacity building, local business development, and educational programs that benefit surrounding communities.
- The remaining 15% will be utilized for administrative costs, covering operational expenses, staff salaries, and basic management requirements necessary for effective protected area governance.

12.8 Appendix G: Vessel Regulation

Regulation Category	Parameter	Limit/Requirement
Capacity Limits	Total MPA Vessels	Maximum 6 vessels simultaneously
Time Restrictions	Stay Duration	Maximum 2 hours per vessel
	Vessel Interval	Minimum 30 minutes between arrivals/departures
	Operating Hours	6:00 AM to 6:00 PM
Access Priority	Regular Access	First-come, first-served basis
	Commercial Operators	Advance booking required
	Emergency Vessels	Exempt from capacity limits

12.9 Appendix H: Photography/Videography Guidelines

Commercial Photography/Videography Permits

- Commercial photography and videography activities require a specific permit from the MPA Management Unit.
- Permit applications must be submitted at least 14 working days prior to the planned activity.
- Permits are valid for the duration specified in the application, with maximum duration of one month.

- Commercial activities include but are not limited to advertising, film production, professional portfolios, and social media content creation for commercial purposes.

Application Requirements

- Completed permit application form
- Detailed description of planned activities and equipment to be used
- Proposed shooting schedule and locations within the protected area
- Number of crew members involved
- Proof of liability insurance
- Equipment inventory including drone registration if applicable

Fee Structure

Activity Type	Duration	Rate (USD)
Standard Commercial Photography/Videography		
Daily Rate	1 day	50
Weekly Rate	7 days	250
Monthly Rate	30 days	800
Additional Services		
Drone Usage	Per day	100
Underwater Filming	Per day	75
Additional Crew Member (>5 persons)	Per person/day	25
Special Permits		
Night Photography	Per session	150
Special Access Areas	Per day	200
Extended Hours	Per hour	50

Notes: Rates are subject to annual review and may be adjusted based on management requirements.

- All fees must be paid in advance
- Permits are non-transferable
- Cancellation fee of 25% applies if cancelled within 48 hours
- Special permits subject to management approval
- Additional fees may apply for specialized equipment use
- Group discounts available for long-term projects

Operational Guidelines

- Photography/videography activities must not interfere with wildlife behavior or habitat
- Minimum distance of 3 meters must be maintained from coral reefs during underwater photography
- Use of artificial lights limited to hand-held devices only
- No flash photography permitted during manta ray observations
- Drone operations restricted to designated zones and times
- All activities must be conducted during daylight hours (6:00 AM to 6:00 PM)

Prohibited Activities

- Use of tripods or equipment stands on coral reefs.

- Touching or manipulating marine life for photo opportunities.
- Use of baiting or feeding to attract marine life.
- Moving or removing any natural objects for staging.
- Operating drones within 50 meters of manta ray cleaning stations.
- Night photography without special permission.

Special Conditions

- Special permits required for night photography/videography.
- Additional restrictions may apply during peak tourist seasons.
- Weather-dependent activities may be suspended without notice.
- Compliance with general protected area regulations required.

Content Sharing Requirements

- Copies of final content must be shared with MPA Management Unit.
- Credit line "Filmed at Finey Thila Marine Protected Area" required.
- MPA Management Unit reserves right to use content for promotional purposes.
- Acknowledgment of protected area status in commercial uses.

Note: Violation of these guidelines may result in immediate permit revocation and denial of future permits. All fees are non-refundable unless activities are cancelled due to management decisions.

12.10 Appendix I: Research Guidelines

Application Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research proposals must be submitted to the MPA Management Unit at least 30 days prior to intended start date • Applications must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Detailed research methodology ○ Project timeline ○ Equipment list ○ Team composition and qualifications ○ Expected outcomes and deliverables ○ Data management plan • All research activities require final approval from EPA
Research Requirements	<p>Research teams must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit monthly progress reports • Provide final research report • Share raw data with MPA Management Unit • Acknowledge the protected area in publications • Present findings to local stakeholders
Research Priorities	<p>Priority will be given to research focusing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manta ray population dynamics • Coral reef resilience • Climate change impacts • Sustainable tourism practices • Socio-economic impacts • Marine ecosystem connectivity

Operational Guidelines	Researchers must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow all protected area regulations • Use designated mooring buoys • Minimize impact on marine life • Coordinate activities with PA management • Report any incidents or unusual observations • Maintain research logs
Prohibited Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of specimens without specific permits • Destructive sampling methods • Interference with tourism operations • Night operations without special permission • Use of unauthorized equipment • Unauthorized drone usage
Data Sharing Requirements	Submit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw data in specified format • GIS files if applicable • Photo documentation • Research reports • Copies of publications • Monitoring protocols used

Note: All research activities must comply with national research guidelines and protected area regulations. Permits may be revoked for non-compliance with these guidelines.