

Baa Atoll
a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve ?

Consultation document for high level stakeholders
An opportunity to share your views



www.biodiversity.mv/aec

Baa Atoll
a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve ?

Consultation document for high level stakeholders
An opportunity to share your views

April 2009

Atoll Ecosystem Conservation Project (AEC project)

Book Layout & Design by: Hassan Eeman

Photography by: Aqua Dreams Imaging

© Copyright: AEC Project, Ministry of Housing Transport and Environment

Baa Atoll - a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve ?

Consultation document for high level stakeholders

An opportunity to share your views

Contents

I.	Purpose	2
II.	Introduction	3
III.	What are UNESCO Biosphere Reserves?	4
IV.	How are Biosphere Reserves selected and delimited?	5
V.	What could be the implications of Biosphere Reserve designation?	8
VI.	How are Biosphere Reserves governed?	11
VII.	Funding	13
VIII.	Next steps	14
IX.	Conclusions	15
	Questionnaire for high level stakeholders	16

I. Purpose

This document seeks your views on the proposal to nominate Baa Atoll for designation as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. It describes the origins of this proposal, the implications and possible benefits of designation, and the process that would be required.

Biosphere status is entirely voluntary, and application will only be made to UNESCO with government endorsement and local community support. Following this initial high level stakeholder consultation, a process will be established to seek the views of every island community and resort.

At the end of the document is a short questionnaire to gather your views. You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire and return it to the AEC project.



II. Introduction

The Government of Maldives established the Atoll Ecosystem Conservation Project (with support of UNDP and the Global Environment Facility) with the purpose of designing and demonstrating an effective management system for atoll ecosystem conservation and sustainable development on Baa Atoll, which could then be replicated throughout the Maldives.

Baa Atoll was selected as the demonstration atoll for this project on account of its globally significant biodiversity, the commitment and capacity of local communities, the potential to address threats to biodiversity and demonstrate sustainable use. The AEC Project's Vision for Baa Atoll is:

Vision

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

In recognition of the outstanding natural values of this atoll, and the commitments being made by local communities and resorts, the AEC project proposes international designation of Baa Atoll as a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. If successful, this would be the first UNESCO designation for the Maldives (Biosphere Reserve or World Heritage Site).

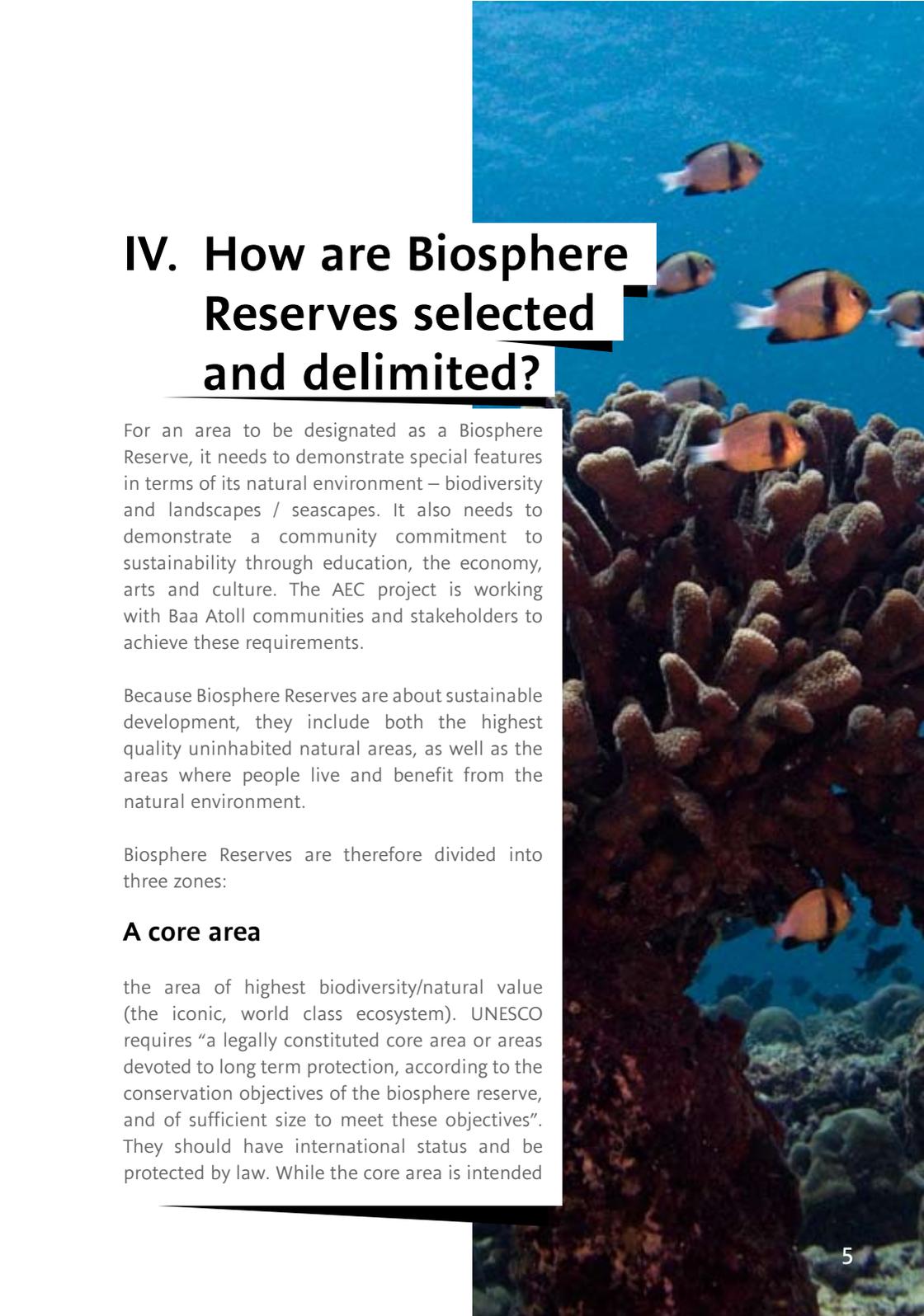


III. What are UNESCO Biosphere Reserves?

UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) coordinates a world network of over 500 Biosphere Reserves in 105 countries. These are sites recognized under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme, which innovate and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development. They include such famous sites as Ayer's Rock in Australia, the Pantanal wetlands of Brazil, the Niagara escarpment, the Sundarbans of India, and the Amboseli National Park of Kenya.

Biosphere Reserves have three key functions: conservation, learning and research, and sustainable development. They are vehicles for knowledge-sharing, research and monitoring, education and training, and participatory decision-making. Biosphere Reserves are under national sovereign jurisdiction, yet share their experience and ideas regionally and internationally within the world network of Biosphere Reserves.

Biosphere Reserves are "living laboratories" for testing and demonstrating sustainable development. They are therefore about the future, and how local people can conserve the things they value – local knowledge, culture and the environment – whilst ensuring sustainable development. In other words, the designation is about encouraging and facilitating people to work together, to live in and manage the whole area for a sustainable future.

An underwater photograph showing a vibrant coral reef. In the foreground, there is a large, dark brown, branching coral structure. Several orange and white striped clownfish are swimming around the coral. The background is a clear blue ocean with more coral and fish visible in the distance.

IV. How are Biosphere Reserves selected and delimited?

For an area to be designated as a Biosphere Reserve, it needs to demonstrate special features in terms of its natural environment – biodiversity and landscapes / seascapes. It also needs to demonstrate a community commitment to sustainability through education, the economy, arts and culture. The AEC project is working with Baa Atoll communities and stakeholders to achieve these requirements.

Because Biosphere Reserves are about sustainable development, they include both the highest quality uninhabited natural areas, as well as the areas where people live and benefit from the natural environment.

Biosphere Reserves are therefore divided into three zones:

A core area

the area of highest biodiversity/natural value (the iconic, world class ecosystem). UNESCO requires “a legally constituted core area or areas devoted to long term protection, according to the conservation objectives of the biosphere reserve, and of sufficient size to meet these objectives”. They should have international status and be protected by law. While the core area is intended



to be strictly protected, “certain activities and uses may be occurring or allowed, consistent with the conservation objectives of the core area”.

For Baa, this is likely to be a set of key reefs which represent the most bio-diverse areas of the atoll, which will be established as marine protected areas.

A buffer zone

an area which supports the core area, where local people can derive direct benefits from the ecosystem (such as through fishing and tourism). UNESCO requires “a buffer zone or zones clearly identified and surrounding or contiguous to the core area or areas, where only activities compatible with the conservation objectives can take place...”. Buffer zones may support a variety of uses which promote the multiple functions of a Biosphere Reserve while helping to ensure the protection and natural evolution of the core area(s).

For Baa, the buffer area is likely to include the remaining reefs and lagoon areas of the atoll, the uninhabited islands and perhaps the environmental protection zone around each inhabited island.

A transition area

where sustainable resource management practices are promoted and developed. The UNESCO Seville Strategy gave increased emphasis to the transition area since this is the area where the key issues on environment and development of a given region are to be addressed. It has been referred to as the co-operation zone.

In most continental Biosphere Reserves this might be the river basin or catchment area upstream or

downstream of a site. However, for atolls such as Baa it might be the inhabited islands, themselves, as well as the offshore marine areas (? out to territorial limits)

The delimitation of these three zones will require strong community engagement, which will begin once a decision has been taken to proceed with the nomination.





V. What could be the implications of Biosphere Reserve designation?

Achieving this designation would provide a unique opportunity to bring people and organisations together to work towards a common goal. It's about identifying and being proud of what local people really value about the area; its environment and landscape, its fisheries, its tourism and business, its heritage and culture - and deciding how to look after them in a changing world.

Living in a world Biosphere Reserve raises two questions:

What could a Biosphere Reserve do for us?

Experience from existing Biosphere Reserves show that this designation can bring diverse benefits to an area:

- A sense of pride for local communities (social and cultural development)
- Improving the area as a great place to bring up children and creating more opportunities for them to stay there
- A more self-reliant local economy; less dependent on fossil fuel, with growth driven

by local knowledge and resources

- A more sustainable area; with residents and visitors choosing locally-produced goods more often and reducing their impact on the world
- A differentiator – this will be the only Biosphere Reserve in the Maldives
- An opportunity for marketing and product accreditation using the UNESCO brand for products (“Biosphere approved fishery, handicrafts, resorts.....”)
- A focus for innovation (and national / international funding)
- An opportunity to learn from, and share experiences with, other Biosphere Reserves (perhaps enhanced through twinning arrangements)

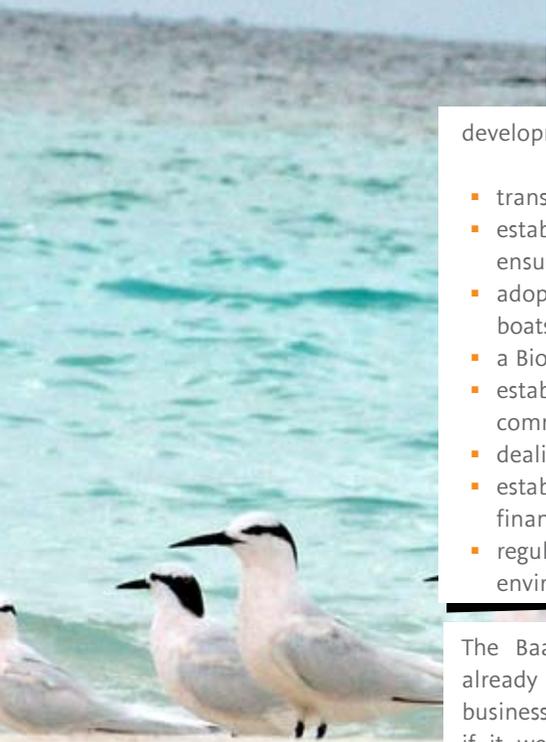
The extent to which a Biosphere Reserve achieves these benefits will depend on the community - on innovation, on entrepreneurship and on bold leadership. It is not the Biosphere status that is important, but the related activities and projects that take place. Anybody can propose or help design these.

It is important to understand that successful designation would not give the area a dedicated fund of additional money. However, it is likely to increase the chance of success of relevant funding applications made by local groups and businesses who work with the necessary organisational structures.

What could we do for our Biosphere Reserve?

Living in a Biosphere Reserve is about ensuring that the area is in a better condition for your children than it was when you started living in it. This means improving the environmental, social and economic assets of the area – sustainable

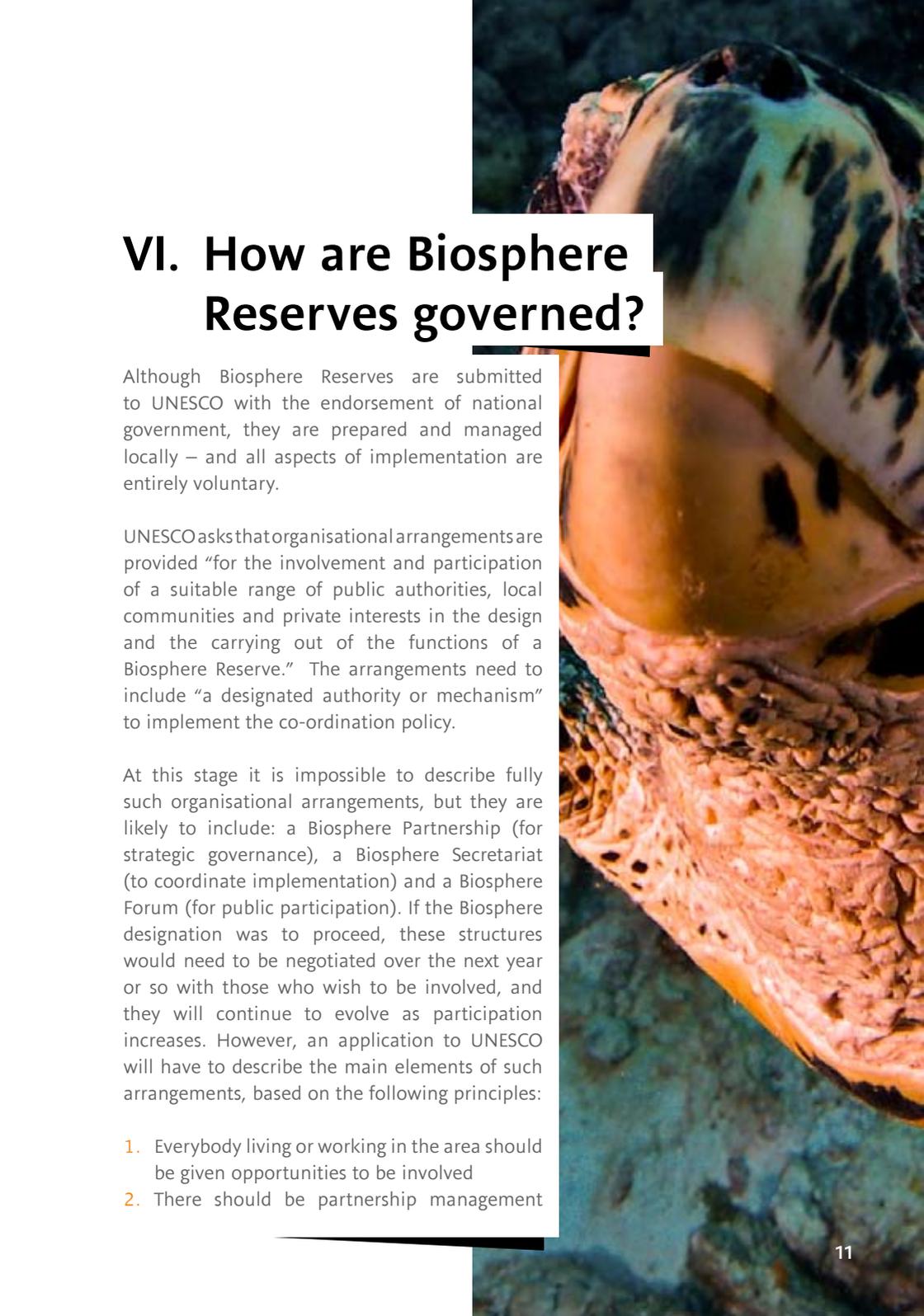




development. Practical examples might include:

- transferring to renewable energy sources
- establishment of an accredited reef fishery to ensure sustainable fishing,
- adoption of codes of practice for diving, safari boats etc..
- a Biosphere cultural festival
- establishing picnic islands for local communities
- dealing with the waste management problem
- establishing a visitor payback scheme to finance environmental conservation
- regular monitoring of the state of the atoll environment

The Baa Atoll Sustainable Development Plan already provides guidance on what individuals, businesses and government can do for Baa Atoll if it were designated as a Biosphere Reserve. Overall, any action which would make Baa Atoll a better and more sustainable place for future generations will be consistent with the aims of the Biosphere Reserve. Once a nomination has been approved, a specific Strategy for the Biosphere Reserve would be prepared with full community participation.



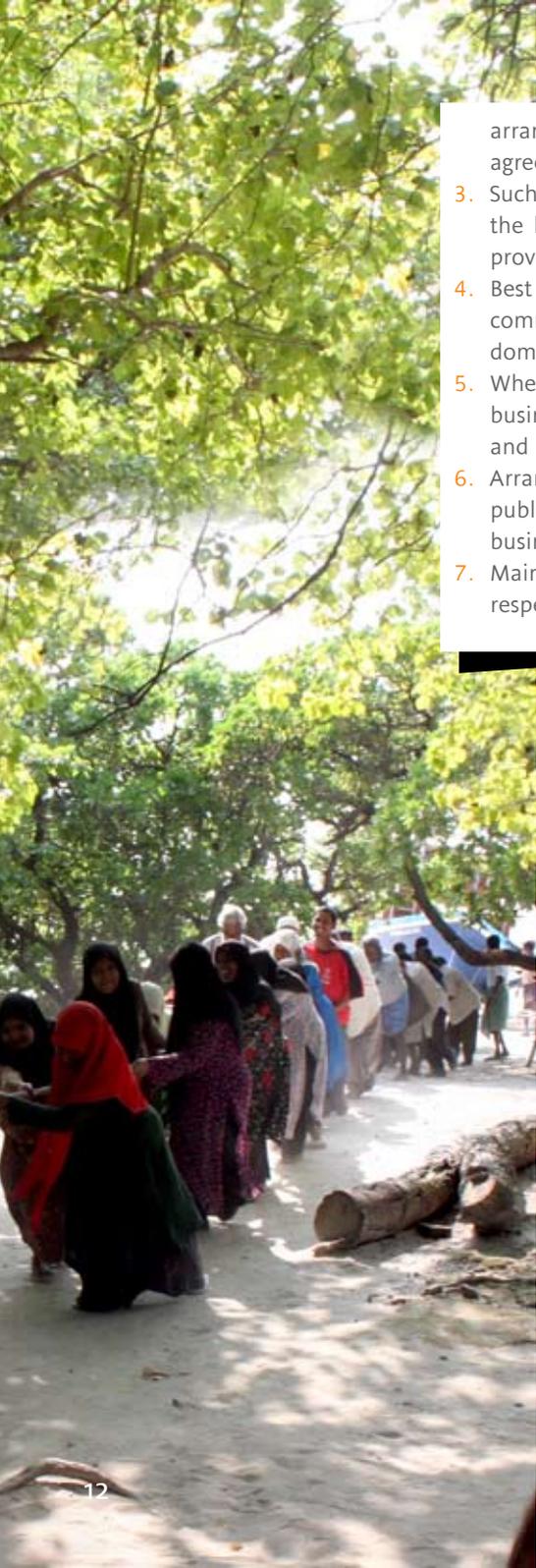
VI. How are Biosphere Reserves governed?

Although Biosphere Reserves are submitted to UNESCO with the endorsement of national government, they are prepared and managed locally – and all aspects of implementation are entirely voluntary.

UNESCO asks that organisational arrangements are provided “for the involvement and participation of a suitable range of public authorities, local communities and private interests in the design and the carrying out of the functions of a Biosphere Reserve.” The arrangements need to include “a designated authority or mechanism” to implement the co-ordination policy.

At this stage it is impossible to describe fully such organisational arrangements, but they are likely to include: a Biosphere Partnership (for strategic governance), a Biosphere Secretariat (to coordinate implementation) and a Biosphere Forum (for public participation). If the Biosphere designation was to proceed, these structures would need to be negotiated over the next year or so with those who wish to be involved, and they will continue to evolve as participation increases. However, an application to UNESCO will have to describe the main elements of such arrangements, based on the following principles:

1. Everybody living or working in the area should be given opportunities to be involved
2. There should be partnership management



arrangements to oversee progress towards agreed objectives

3. Such partnerships should be accountable to the local community as well as to whoever provides money to carry out actions
4. Best practice should apply, e.g. open communication, no one body should dominate, respect for all participants.
5. Where possible, initiatives should be led by businesses or groups in the private, voluntary and community sectors
6. Arrangements need to allow landowners and public bodies to go about their day-to-day business and fulfil their legal responsibilities
7. Main zoning arrangements agreed and respected

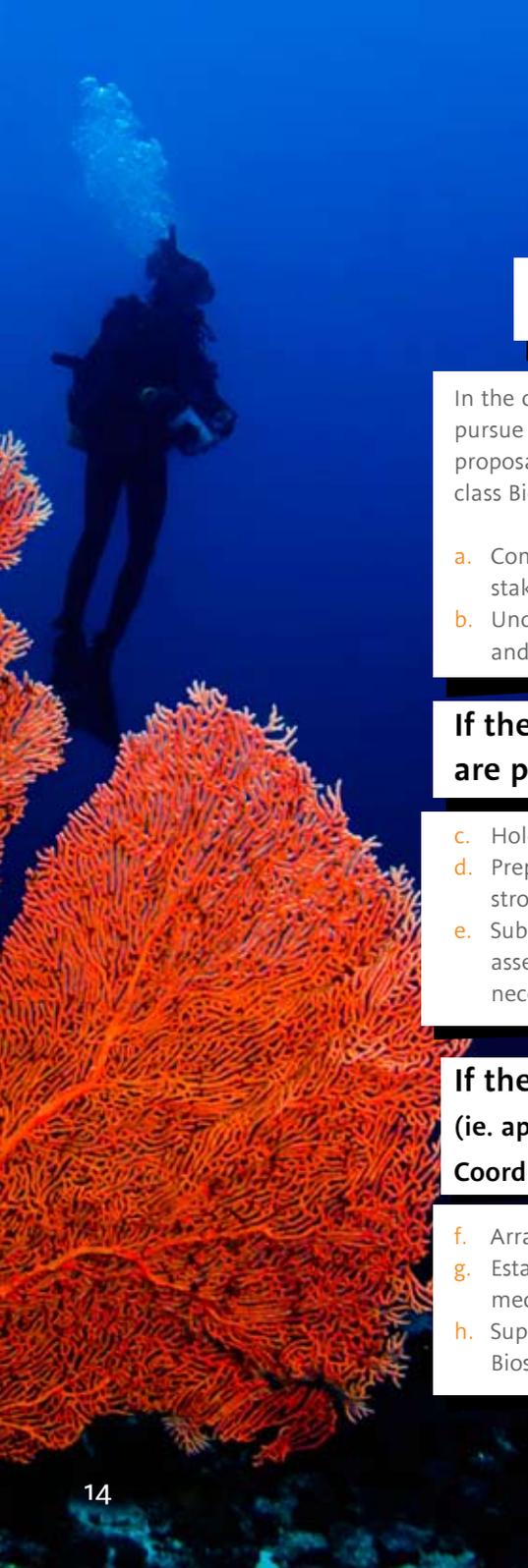
VII. Funding

The existence of the AEC project until 2011 provides a unique opportunity to enable these consultations and the preparation of the nomination documents to UNESCO, as well as initial follow-up to a successful designation. However, long-term funding will be required to cover the core running costs of the Biosphere Secretariat, and particularly for projects to improve the area.

At least the core running costs should be provided through a strong public / private partnership. It is important not to “over-institutionalise” the Biosphere Reserve, but rather to work through existing partnerships so that these costs are kept to modest levels.

There are many options for funding Biosphere projects, including applications to national and international sources, business sponsorship, visitor payback schemes and donations, and volunteering schemes.





VIII. Next steps

In the coming months, the AEC project team will pursue the following strategy to advance this proposal to nominate Baa Atoll as the first world class Biosphere Reserve for the Maldives:

- a. Complete this consultation with high level stakeholders
- b. Undertake a local community information and consultation exercise

If the results of the consultations are positive:

- c. Hold initial discussions with UNESCO
- d. Prepare a draft nomination document with strong community engagement
- e. Submit the nomination document with assent from government, and follow-up as necessary

If the nomination is successful (ie. approval by UNESCO International Coordinating Council):

- f. Arrange a launch event
- g. Establish governance and funding mechanisms
- h. Support initial implementation of the Biosphere Reserve Strategy and Action Plan

IX. Conclusions

While the decision about whether to nominate Baa atoll to UNESCO for designation as a Biosphere Reserve is in the hands of the community and Government of Maldives, the AEC project believes that this is an opportunity not to be missed. It provides an opportunity to explore and demonstrate approaches to sustainable development on a regional scale. It has the potential to foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable.

Baa Atoll has the potential to serve as a pilot site for promoting the sustainable development of the Maldives, with an international perspective. While the AEC project is already seeking such outcomes, nomination as a Biosphere Reserve would provide formal and international recognition, and a long-term perspective.

Further information

- www.unesco.org/mab

contacts:

Maldives National Commission for UNESCO Chairperson:

Hon. Dr. Musthafa Luthfy

Ministry of Education Ghazee Building

MALE' 20-05

REPUBLIC OF MALDIVES

Tel: (960) 333 3262; (960) 331 1316

Fax: (960) 331 5254

EEmail: natcom@moe.gov.mv

- www.biodiversity.mv/aec



The Baa Atoll Biosphere Consultation

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR HIGH LEVEL STAKEHOLDERS

To proceed with an application to UNESCO, there would need to be declarations of support from the Atoll and Island governing bodies and the Government of Maldives. Opinions will be sought at two levels through separate consultation exercises: (a) high-level stakeholders; (b) local communities on Baa (including resorts). The AEC Project will review the responses to see whether there is a consensus about the way forward

We welcome your views on the Biosphere proposal. Please complete the form below by 30 June 2009 if you want to influence the main decision (whether to proceed to a formal application for UNESCO Biosphere status). If you would like direct discussions with the AEC team before completing the questionnaire, please contact Abdulla Shibau, AEC Project Manager, at the address below.

- Organisation completing the Questionnaire:
.....
- Name of person completing the Questionnaire:
.....
- Phone number:
- Email address:
- Position:
- Date:

Please send your comments to:

Abdulla Shibau (Project Manager)
Atoll Ecosystem Conservation Project (AEC)
Ministry of Housing, Transport and Environment
Tel: 3324861, Fax: 3322286
Web: www.biodiversity.mv/aec, www.environment.gov.mv
Email: abdulla.shibau@environment.gov.mv

QUESTIONS

Q1. Has this consultation document provided you with adequate information at this stage?

Yes / No (*Please circle one response*)

If no, what additional information would you like?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q2. Does your organisation perceive benefits from designating Baa Atoll as a Biosphere Reserve?

None / Few / Some / Many (*Please circle one response*)

Please list the possible benefits for your organisation:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q3. Does your organisation perceive any disadvantages from designating Baa Atoll as a Biosphere Reserve?

None / Few / Some / Many (*Please circle one response*)

Please list the possible disadvantages for your organisation:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q4. Will Biosphere Reserve designation of Baa Atoll bring added value to the work that is already going on for sustainable development in the Maldives?

Yes / Some / No (*Please circle one response*).

Comment:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q5. Should the Biosphere Reserve be concerned with enhancing economic sustainability as well as natural assets?

Yes / No (*Please circle one response*)

Comment (what / how):

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Q6. Should the Biosphere Reserve be concerned with protecting social and

cultural as well as natural assets?

Yes / No (*Please circle one response*)

Comment (what / how):

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q7. Do you think the suggested zoning (section 4) will enable the reserve to demonstrate sustainable development on a regional scale?

Yes / No / Don't know (*Please circle one response*)

Comment (what / how):

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q8. Are there any particular activities or projects that your organisation would like to pursue under the Biosphere Reserve banner?

Please describe:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q9. Do you have any comments about the organisational arrangements described?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q10. Do you have any comments about the financial arrangements described?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Q11. Do you have any comments about the next steps described?

.....

.....

.....

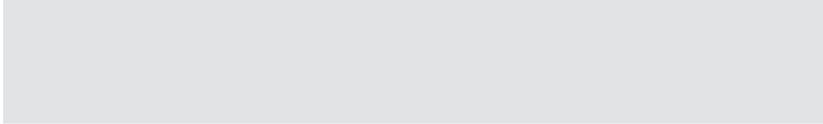
.....

.....

Q12: Key final question - Should the AEC project proceed with developing a nomination to UNESCO, asking for acceptance of Baa Atoll as a modern Biosphere Reserve?

Yes / No / Don't know Please circle one response.

Comments:



.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for responding to this document

Baa Atoll
a UNESCO World
Biosphere Reserve

Consultation document for high level stakeholders
An opportunity to share your views

www.biodiversity.mv/aec

