





Ocean Country Partnership Programme

Maldives

Achievement Report

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Programme:

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) is a 5 year (2021-2026) 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, management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCPP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. OCPP was delivered by three British Government Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs): the Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). Other components of OCPP were delivered by the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) and the Friends of Ocean Action (FOA) and those elements are not covered in this report. More information on OCPP can be found at: DevTracker Programme GB-GOV-7-BPFOCPP Documents

Document Purpose:

This Achievement Report presents a summary of the activities undertaken and the achievements obtained as a result of cooperation between countries for this partnership. This document does not cover the multilateral components of the programme and this report only covers achievements by the end of the programme. A range of further achievements are expected as recommendations from the OCPP are adopted by partner countries in the preceding period post-programme closure.

All OCPP Achievement Reports have been authored by the ALBs and therefore key achievements and impacts of collaboration reflects individuals own perspectives. Independent evaluation by the OCPP MEL provider verifies outputs and outcomes against the programme logframe, the findings of which can be viewed in the programme's annual reviews and closure report on Dev Tracker.

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Contents

Executive Summary 4

Acronyms 5

Context 7

Marine & Environmental Pressures 8

- Climate Change 8
- Gender Equality 9
- OCPP Timeline & Approach 10
- Stakeholders 11
- Strengthening Protected and Conserved Areas 13

Impact 13

- Enhancing Sustainable Tourism Practises 14
- Strengthening National Capacity to Address Marine Pollution 14
- Emergency Response 15
- Embedding GEDSI across the Environmental Sector 15
- Building Institutional & Human Capacity 16

Case Study 17

- Marine Protected Areas 17
- Gender, Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) 18

Case Study 18

Workstreams 19

- Biodiversity – Protected Area Management 20
- Biodiversity – Species Management 23
- Biodiversity – Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) 23
- Marine Pollution - Abandoned, Lost & Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) 24
- Marine Pollution - Macro Litter 24
- Marine Pollution - Microplastics 25
- Marine Pollution - Water Quality 26
- Marine Pollution - Emergency Response 27
- Gender, Equality & Social Inclusion (GEDSI) 28
- Education, Research Empowerment & Institutional Partnerships 29

Conclusion 30

Case Study 32

Annex 1 - Full Stakeholder List 33

Executive Summary

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCPP) has delivered lasting, nationally owned improvements to marine environmental governance in the Maldives by embedding policy, capability, and inclusive practice within national institutions. Working in close partnership with government, local councils, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), academia, and regional bodies, OCPP adopted a demand led approach aligned with Maldivian priorities.

OCPP has fundamentally strengthened the governance and management of Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs). It supported Maldives Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) assessments and developed nationally endorsed PCA management frameworks, monitoring systems, and stakeholder engagement standards. These tools are now embedded in government policy, widely used beyond the programme, and underpin improved planning, monitoring, and measurable gains in management effectiveness at priority sites. OCPP also supported the development of the Maldives Roadmap to 30x30, providing a practical, capacity focused pathway toward global ocean protection targets.

The programme significantly enhanced national capability to address marine pollution by establishing the country's first microplastics laboratory, generating baseline evidence on microplastics, marine litter, and abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear (ALDFG), and strengthening water quality and oceanographic monitoring. OCPP also improved marine pollution emergency preparedness through targeted training, equipment provision, and planning, linking the Maldives into a stronger regional response framework through the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP).

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) were mainstreamed through nationally endorsed guidance. Investments in education, training, digital platforms, and research partnerships—particularly with Maldives National University—have strengthened long term national capacity.

Collectively, OCPP has delivered sustainable, system level change, leaving the Maldives better equipped to protect its marine environment, sustain ocean dependent livelihoods, and respond to future environmental risks beyond the life of the programme.



Acronyms

ACU	Association of Commonwealth Universities
AIS	Automatic Identification System
ALDFG	Abandoned, Lost and otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear
ATR FTIR	Attenuated Total Reflectance Fourier Transform Infrared (Spectrometer)
BRUVS	Baited Remote Underwater Video System
CLiP	Commonwealth Litter Programme
COP	Conference of the Parties
CTD	Conductivity, Temperature and Depth (instrument)
EDMS	Environmental Data Management System
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ERA	Environmental Regulatory Authority
FY21/22	Financial Year 2021/2022
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICS	Incident Command System
IMO	International Maritime Organization
LMMA	Locally Managed Marine Area
METT 4	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (Version 4)
MMRI	Maldives Marine Research Institute
MNU	Maldives National University
MoTE	Ministry of Tourism and Environment
MPA	Marine Protected Area(s)
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation(s)
OCPP	Ocean Country Partnership Programme
ORP	Olive Ridley Project
OSPAR	Oslo–Paris Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic
PAHs	Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons
PAME	Protected Area Management Effectiveness
PCA	Protected and Conserved Area(s)
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RV	Research Vessel
SACEP	South Asia Co operative Environment Programme
SCAT	Shoreline Clean up Assessment Technique
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SIGS	Small Island Geographic Society
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
URA	Utility Regulatory Authority
USP	University of the South Pacific
WDPAME	World Database on Protected Area Management Effectiveness







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Context

The Maldives is an archipelagic state of 1,200 low-lying islands in the Indian Ocean with a large marine area of 920,739 km^2. While the nation has achieved significant economic progress, particularly through tourism, it faces a complex interplay of ocean-dependent livelihoods development and climate change challenges and remains vulnerable to environmental threats.

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The Maldives has a population of around 515,000, comprising of 383,000 Maldivians and 132,000 non-nationals (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, Population Census 2022 Report). Women make up 48% of the population and Malé, the capital city, houses 41% of the population within just 5.8 square kilometres, reflecting high urban density. In contrast, over 75% of inhabited islands remain rural, facing challenges such as limited access to essential services, disaster preparedness, and economic opportunities.

Marine & Environmental Pressures

The Maldives has an abundance of highly sensitive marine habitats including mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs, which are integral to the Maldives' two major industries of fisheries and tourism. The Maldives' marine environment supports food security, employment, income, and recreation, and these marine habitats are also vital in protecting islands from coastal erosion and storm protection. However, they face threats from climate change, destruction/modification, over-extraction of corals and sand, pollution, and unsustainable coastal development.

The Maldives has a long-established Marine Protected Area (MPA) network consisting of 93 MPAs and three UNESCO biosphere reserves. However, the ability to monitor the marine environment to look for long-term trends or environmental responses to policy or regulatory change is challenged by constraints of geography and budget.

The Maldives has no history of heavy industry or the resulting legacy contamination that is problematic in many countries. The Maldives also has no rivers or estuaries, which historically have tended to be where human populations have expanded and inevitably created concentrations of associated problem contaminants. The key pollution challenges faced by the Maldives are managing contamination sources (litter, organic food-related waste and sewage), fishing related litter and shipping related pollution.

Due to the physical nature of the Maldives archipelago, boats are the primary means of people transport for shipping goods, tourism, fishing, and for provision of fuel to run the nation's industry. The location of the Maldives with respect to international sea lanes, and its geography and numerous sensitive habitats means that the country is at risk from marine pollution incidents such as spills from tankers and container carriers as well as the risk of transboundary ALDFG (abandoned, lost and otherwise discarded fishing gear) from adjacent countries and the international fishing industry.

Climate Change

The Maldives is exceptionally susceptible to climate change risks. It is one of the world's lowest lying nations, with most islands rising less than one meter above sea meaning even small increases in sea-level pose risks, including chronic flooding, accelerated coastal erosion, and the gradual submersion of land. The physical makeup of the islands, built from coral derived sediments, offers little natural resilience. At the same time, the coral reefs that normally protect the islands from wave energy are

deteriorating due to rising sea temperatures and widespread bleaching, leaving islands even more exposed to the ocean. These geological and ecological vulnerabilities are compounded by severe impacts already unfolding across the archipelago. Increased storm intensity, unpredictable rainfall, and higher temperatures are escalating damage to infrastructure and disrupting day to day life for residents.

Adding to the challenge is the nation's limited land area, its 360-degree exposure to the ocean, and restricted technical and financial resources. The government already spends a significant portion of its national budget on adaptation, yet long term solutions remain difficult due to the geographic constraints of small island atolls. Projections suggest that if global warming continues at current rates, large parts of the Maldives may be uninhabitable by 2050, underscoring the urgent need for local adaptation.

Climate change also threatens the Maldives' two main economic pillars: tourism and fisheries. Degradation of coral reefs diminishes the natural beauty that attracts tourists, while changes in fish populations impact food security and livelihoods. Furthermore, the intrusion of saltwater into freshwater sources and soil erosion compromise agriculture and impacts human health.

Gender Equality

The Maldivian Constitution of 2008 guarantees equal rights and freedoms to both women and men, removing previous constitutional barriers for women's participation in various sectors.

Despite this legal framework, disparities persist across multiple domains:

- **Political Representation**: As of February 2024, women held only 5% of parliamentary seats, indicating significant underrepresentation in decision-making processes
- **Economic Participation**: In 2019, labour force participation was 45.6% for women compared to 77.1% for men. Additionally, women are more likely to engage in informal employment, with 44% of women and 36% of men working in such conditions
- **Education**: While gender parity has been achieved in many educational outcomes, women have fewer economic opportunities than men, suggesting that educational attainment does not directly translate into economic empowerment
- **Gender Inequality Index (GII)**: In 2021, the Maldives scored 0.348 on the GII, reflecting disparities in reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity

A full review of the GEDSI context in the Maldives has been undertaken by OCPP and is available at: https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/983c9af2-4ecb-457c-8c72-04f0093a2338/ocpp-maldives-1-gesi-seah-status-review.pdf

OCPP Timeline & Approach

OCPP's intended impact in the Maldives was to support better sustainable management of the marine environment and biodiversity and enhance marine dependent livelihoods and the well-being of those that depend on them sustainably, equitably and inclusively.

Despite post-Covid challenges, OCPP was able to leverage relationships and build upon work delivered through the Commonwealth Litter Programme (CLiP) in the Maldives, initiating delivery in the first year of the programme (Financial Year 2021/22). Early delivery under OCPP included microplastics work with the Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI), pilot Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) assessments and provision of BRUVS (Baited Remote Underwater Video System) rigs, all of which provided an excellent platform for relationship building wider programme development across themes of pollution and biodiversity.



Figure 1: Timeline of OCPP's work in The Maldives

In 2022, a comprehensive scoping exercise was undertaken alongside stakeholder mapping, enabling OCPP to develop strategic work packages that aligned with the Maldives' long-term ambitions and goals. A number of specific challenges were identified by Government, NGO and community stakeholders;

Challenge 1: There was no baseline data available for benchmarking problems and assessing change over time, which creates challenges for development planners and policymakers.

Challenge 2: The Government of the Maldives Ministries have limited capacity, and sometimes capability, to detect, manage, monitor and regulate human activities and impacts across both the marine and coastal environment

Challenge 3: The extent, condition and full value of marine ecosystems and the services they provide are not always fully realised or considered in national and local decision-making processes.

Challenge 4: The geographically dispersed nature of the Maldives, and the limited capacity within the Maldives Government means that collaboration between existing initiatives (e.g. NGO-led projects and funds), and engagement among stakeholders is incredibly challenging. As a result, connections across sectors are fragmented and engagement of stakeholders may not take place at the scale or frequency required.

Challenge 5: Decentralisation of decision making from the national level to Atoll Councils risks loss of knowledge and harmonisation for marine protection governance initiatives, although could also provide opportunities for more local input to decision making.

Challenge 6: Communication and sharing of information are lacking amongst stakeholders, resulting in duplication of activities and missed opportunities for synergies between programmes.

Additionally, common themes emerging from early engagement included:

- A strong appetite for clearer coordination across existing marine initiatives.
- Interest from multiple partners in contributing data and knowledge to OCPP activities.
- Recognition of the importance of community level and inclusive engagement through councils and locally active organisations.
- A shared commitment to supporting sustainable management of the Maldives' marine environment.
- An understanding that governance needs to work for all islands, not just the main economic ones, but there are no obvious exemplars for how to deal with all the geographical and economical barriers to such outcomes

OCPP has been demand-led throughout, and these challenges identified at the beginning of the programme formed the basis of the workstream identification and prioritisation in the Maldives. By listening to our partners, OCPP developed a programme of work in collaboration with the Maldives from the outset that has been designed to yield impact and facilitate change in line with the Maldives' ocean ambitions.

Stakeholders

OCPP developed a strong network of partners in the Maldives, forming a critical foundation for programme delivery across governance, science, and implementation. At the national level, OCPP worked closely with multiple government ministries and agencies, particularly those responsible for environmental regulation, marine management, and emergency response such as Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE), Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA), Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources and Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI). These relationships ensured alignment with national priorities and statutory processes, while the British High Commission in Malé played an important facilitation role in supporting coordination and communication between UK and Maldivian partners.

OCPP also engaged Atoll and Island Councils during delivery of specific activities, particularly those related to MPA management effectiveness. This local-level engagement helped to incorporate community perspectives, local marine-use knowledge, and cultural values into technical work, strengthening local relevance and ownership.

In addition, the programme established productive relationships with a range of NGOs, research organisations, and academic institutions that contributed scientific expertise, data, and field-based insights across several thematic areas. Engagement with industry and sector-based organisations was explored through stakeholder mapping, though



"… OCPP has not been a project that simply delivered outputs, but it has been a partnership that genuinely strengthened our team, our systems and the way we work on a day-to-day basis." – Hassan Mohamed, Chief Executive of ERA

and







Impact

Strengthening Protected and Conserved Areas

OCPP has made substantial contributions to the national policy landscape for Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs) in the Maldives. The **PCA Management Framework and associated Guidance document** developed under OCPP has been endorsed by the Minister of Environment and has been fully integrated into government policy to establish a standardised national approach to MPA governance.

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Building on this policy foundation, the **PCA Management Plan Guidance** has been widely utilised. Notably, stakeholders not affiliated with the programme have independently developed **management plans for 10 MPAs** using this template. OCPP has further developed a **Maldives PCA Website**, which is now the Ministry of Environment's official digital platform. The long-term ambition is for the website to become the platform to purchase visitor permits for PCAs.

At a site level, OCPP conducted PAME Assessments for six MPAs, four of which have been uploaded to the World Database on PAME (WDPAME). Following these evaluations, OCPP has delivered critical tools and frameworks that underpin improved conservation outcomes across multiple MPAs. For example, two cornerstone documents were produced, a Conservation Action Plan 2025 to 2030 (Management Plan) and the Research and Monitoring Plan (2025–2030) both produced for the Hanifaru MPA and both have been formally adopted. Similar progress has been achieved in Farikede and Huraa MPAs, where OCPP led the development of the Conservation Action Plans following extensive stakeholder consultations. Both plans have been adopted by national ministries and local councils, positioning these sites for long-term, adaptive management.

At South Ari MPA, OCPP strengthened operational management by providing **drones, cameras, and binoculars** to support monitoring. These tools are now used in routine patrols. Likewise, **a pilot camera** installed within the Baa Atoll Biosphere Reserve has enabled managers to reduce illegal landings by around 90%, significantly decreasing disturbance to sensitive wildlife, including nesting turtles. Collectively, these tools have transformed PCA governance, contributing to a measurable rise in management effectiveness, primarily driven by strengthened planning and monitoring systems.

Enhancing Sustainable Tourism Practises

OCPP played a central role in improving sustainable tourism practices, particularly in high use marine environments, such as the development of the **Fuvahmulah Shark Diving Codes of Conduct**. The Ministry of Environment has endorsed the guidelines, while the Fuvahmulah Council is incorporating them into a new local Diving Regulation.

Strengthening National Capacity to Address Marine Pollution

OCPP installed the country's first **microplastics laboratory at Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI)**, supplying advanced analytical equipment, and embedding harmonised laboratory protocols. This investment enabled Maldivian scientists to begin generating their own

microplastics baseline data and participate in international laboratory networks, laying the foundations for long term, nationally led pollution science. Alongside technical capability, OCPP delivered important advances in regulatory development, data quality, and evidence-based **public health protection**. Scientific review strengthened the forthcoming Potable Water Quality Guidelines, while toxicity assessments at popular swim sites triggered the formation of a new team within Water & Sanitation Directorate and scoping of practical tool to reduce health risks and protect livelihoods.

OCPP also advanced national understanding and management of **marine litter and ALDFG** by producing the Maldives' first nationwide ALDFG baseline dataset. Additional training on **OSPAR beach litter monitoring** equipped civil society with long-term monitoring tools.

Emergency Response

Through South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), OCPP has had a direct impact on the Maldives' approach to dealing with **marine pollution emergencies**. SACEP is a regional programme working across South Asia (including the Maldives) to address increasing risks from shipping related pollution incidents by building shared capacity, strengthening governance, and improving cross border communication. Through SACEP, OCPP has enabled the Maldives to identify capability gaps, strengthen cross border cooperation, and influence the direction of South Asia's pollution response framework embedding the Maldives in a stronger, more coordinated regional governance structure.

Embedding GEDSI across the Environmental Sector

OCPP has been instrumental in mainstreaming **Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)** and **Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (SEAH)** within environmental and development organisations across the Maldives. The programme facilitated the development of the **GEDSI Handbook** and **SEAH Handbook**, both of which include a foreword from the Minister of Tourism and Environment and are endorsed by the Minister of Tourism and Environment. Through targeted workshops and advisory support, OCPP has encouraged **11 organisations** to document new or strengthened internal actions, processes, and policies related to GEDSI and SEAH.

Additionally, OCPP produced **best practice stakeholder engagement guidance**, ensuring that inclusive and equitable engagement principles are embedded into MPA designation and management processes. This guidance has been formally adopted and uploaded to the PCA website, supporting consistent application across all future PCA activities.

"This was not just about supplying equipment, but also ensuring it is used, maintained and stored effectively. The focus on sustainability within this program is what ensures the benefits continue to last after the program ends as well." – Hassan Mohamed, Chief Executive of ERA

"Beyond national capacity, OCPP has also strengthened regional connections through SACEP and OCPP initiatives. Maldivian responders are now better linked to expertise across South Asia. Nine Maldivian participants attending expert training in the UK is not just a number, it represents knowledge exchange, professional network building and confidence that our participants are also at an international standardized level."

Building Institutional & Human Capacity

OCPP collaborated with **Maldives National University (MNU)** to develop a series of **career case studies** that promote environmental science pathways. OCPP has supported five students from the Maldives in Masters-level courses in environmental topics. OCPP's investment in human capacity is further illustrated by the trajectory of an **ACU supported Masters student**, who has secured employment within the Ministry of Tourism and Environment's Protected Sites Team.

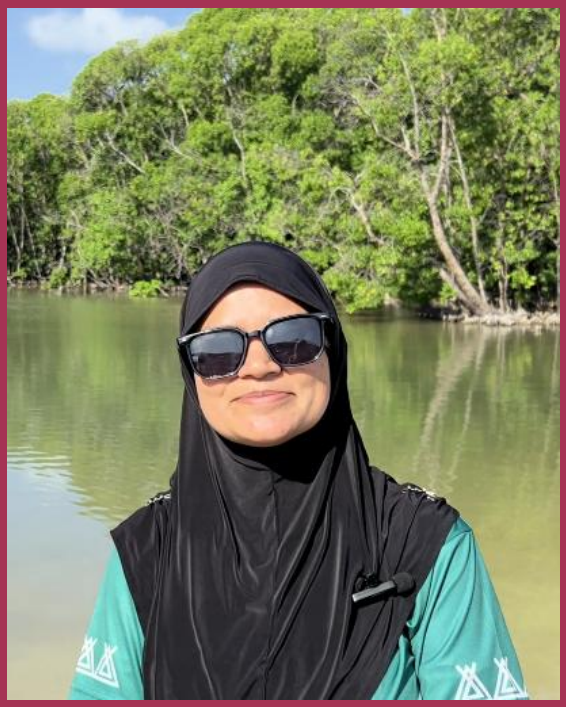


Case Study

Marine Protected Areas

Building effective management of PCAs

A key focus of the Maldives partnership has been strengthening the management effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs), beginning with the country's first-ever Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME) evaluations, which established a national baseline and identified priority actions. These recommendations informed the subsequent development of the Maldives National PCA Management Framework and the National Guidance for PCA Management Plans, both of which were formally adopted by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and now provide a standardised, nationally endorsed approach for producing coherent PCA management plans.





These tools have since been used by OCPP, government partners, and other stakeholders to develop multiple management plans in a consistent, replicable way, helping transition from ad hoc planning to a more strategic, system-wide approach. Building on this progress, OCPP recently supported the creation of the Maldives Roadmap to 30x30, outlining the country's pathway to achieving the global target of protecting 30% of its ocean by 2030, with a strong focus on management effectiveness, institutional strengthening, and long-term sustainability beyond the programme's lifespan.



Figure 11: The second Gender, Equality, Disability & Social Inclusion (GEDSI) workshop held in October 2025

Case Study

Gender, Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)



To support the work delivered on GEDSI in Maldives under OCPP, two workshops were held in 2025. The workshops brought together ~50 stakeholders from across the environment and development sector, to provide training on GEDSI and Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harm (SEAH). The training gave an opportunity for attendees to share their experiences and progress within their respective organisations as a result of their consideration of GEDSI and SEAH in a safe and supportive manner. As a result of these workshops, a GEDSI network has been established in Maldives, providing the opportunity for sustained peer to peer learning and knowledge exchange after the OCPP programme end.



"The training and the handbook from GEDSI training have helped me think more systematically about GEDSI in our projects. Instead of creating inclusion as something general, the tools have helped us break it down into practical steps like how to assess risk, how to design inclusive consultations, and how to think about safe reporting mechanisms. They make it easier to translate commitments into real changes in how we plan and implement work."

– Aminath Zoona, Salted Ventures Swimmers





Workstreams

The following section provides a more detailed breakdown of the key outputs and areas of delivery across all OCPP workstreams in the Maldives, all of which underpin the programme's impact described in the previous section. Figure 2 provides an overview of the scope and breadth of OCPP's work delivered in the Maldives.

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The following section provides a more detailed breakdown of the key outputs and areas of delivery across all OCPP workstreams in the Maldives, all of which underpin the programme's impact described in the previous section. Figure 2 provides an overview of the scope and breadth of OCPP's work delivered in the Maldives.

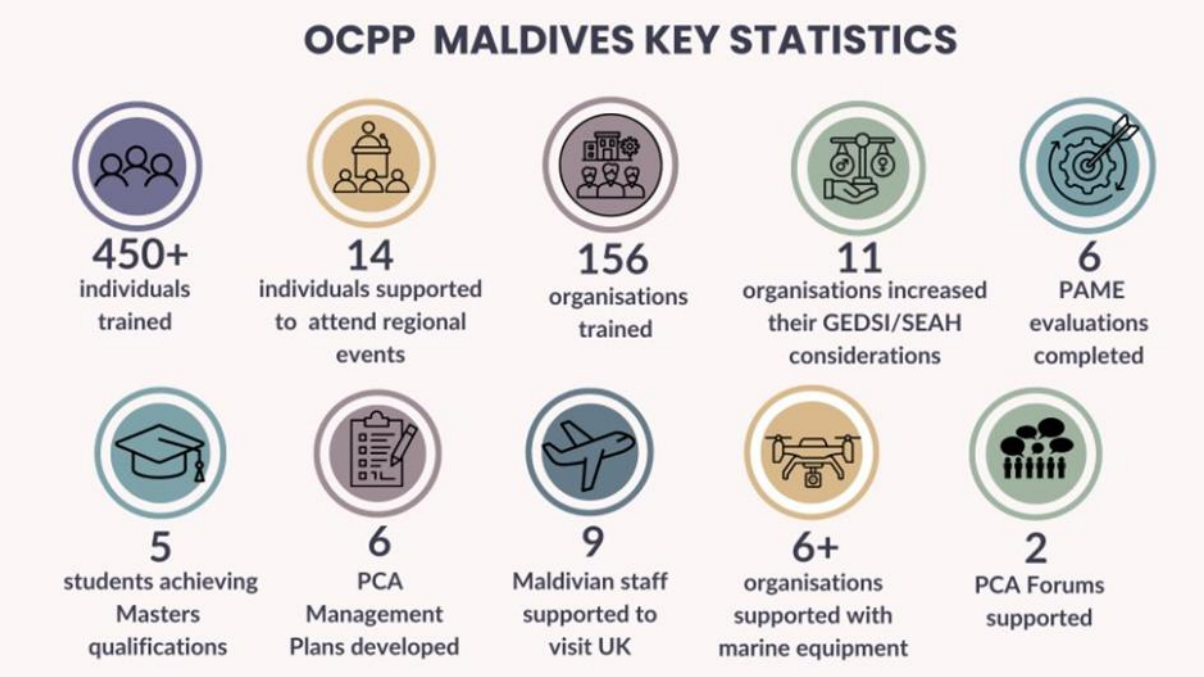


Figure 2 Infographic summarising extent of OCPP's delivery in Maldives

Biodiversity – Protected Area Management

OCPP's support to biodiversity conservation in the Maldives has focused on strengthening the effectiveness, governance and long-term sustainability of Protected and Conserved Areas (PCAs), while embedding national capability to plan, manage and monitor these sites in line with international best practice. Delivery has combined **system-wide capacity building and coordination** with site-level interventions, ensuring lessons learned translate into policy and system-wide improvement.

A core strand of work has been **Protected Area Management Effectiveness (PAME)**, and OCPP supported the Maldives' first-ever PAME Evaluations. Early in the programme, OCPP supported the use of the **Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT-4)** across three sites, alongside outreach materials and stakeholder surveys. These evaluations provided the Maldives with its first consistent, structured understanding of strengths, gaps and priorities across the MPA network. Importantly, this evidence directly informed subsequent management planning and capacity-building work, rather than remaining a standalone assessment exercise. The PAME assessments were uploaded to the World Database of Protected Areas Management Effectiveness Assessments (WDPAME).

Building on this evidence base, OCPP partners worked closely with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment to develop a **national PCA Management Framework and accompanying PCA Management Plan Guidance**. These documents provide practical, step-by-step guidance on how to design, implement and review PCA management plans. These tools have since been used by OCPP, government partners, and other stakeholders to develop multiple management plans in a consistent, replicable way, helping transition from ad hoc planning to a more strategic, system-wide approach.

Complementing management planning, OCPP has strengthened monitoring and evaluation systems of PCAs. A national **MPA Monitoring Framework** has been completed, providing a consistent approach to ecological and management monitoring across sites. OCPP has also developed **best practice guidance for stakeholder engagement for MPAs**, which will ensure fairness, inclusivity and transparency in decision-making throughout the identification, designation and management of MPAs across the Maldives. Formal adoption of these documents by the Ministry as policy represents a significant legacy, ensuring approaches are now embedded within national systems and will continue to shape future protected area designations and management beyond the life of the programme.

OCPP has also significantly strengthened **monitoring, surveillance and enforcement** across PCAs in the Maldives by supporting national systems, local capacity, and the use of innovative technologies. OCPP piloted **new technologies** to enhance compliance, including a fixed surveillance camera system (camera, radar and AIS receiver) on Mendhoo Island in Baa Atoll that has proven successful in supporting enforcement efforts. Alongside this, the programme advanced initiatives to professionalise and equip PCA rangers, such as creating a Roadmap to standardise the ranger profession, facilitating participation in national and regional training events, and delivering a ranger training exchange with the Seychelles.

Building on this progress, national-level ambition has been further supported the creation of the **Maldives Roadmap to 30x30**, outlining the country's pathway to achieving the global target of protecting 30% of its ocean by 2030. It aligns protected area expansion with national priorities and institutional capacity, with a strong focus on management effectiveness, institutional strengthening, and long-term sustainability. This work has been closely coordinated with wider stakeholder engagement and is designed to support a smooth transition beyond OCPP funding.

At the site level, Hanifaru MPA has been a flagship for applied delivery. Following completion of the PAME evaluation, OCPP used the outputs to work collaboratively with local stakeholders to develop the **Hanifaru MPA Conservation Action Plan** (management plan), now published on the national protected areas website, followed by targeted assistance to support implementation. OCPP has supported the development of the **Hanifaru MPA Research and Monitoring Plan**, which provides the framework for assessing whether the site's Conservation Action Plan is achieving its desired outcomes, enabling the ERA and Biosphere Reserve team to track condition, pressures and management effectiveness over time.

Together the Conservation Action Plan and MPA Research and monitoring plans provide a robust framework for adaptive management of the site beyond the life of the programme. In addition, technical advice was provided on establishing a multi-agency Research and Monitoring Working Group to formalise data sharing, coordination and evidence-based decision-making among government agencies, researchers and site managers. The decision to prioritise governance and coordination over awareness materials reflects adaptive delivery, responding to partner feedback that effective management structures were the most immediate need. A light-touch / informal PAME evaluation highlighted that the management effectiveness score for Hanifaru MPA has increased from 55% in 2021/22 to 69% in 2025 as a result of OCPP's contribution.



Figure 3: Protected & Conserved Area (PCA) Forum 1 held in 2024, including representation from Government, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and local stakeholders



Figure 4: One of the stakeholder engagement workshops held during the development of the Farikede Protected & Conserved Area (PCA) management plan

Communications and engagement activities have reinforced technical delivery. MPA communications materials have been developed, and the Maldives PCA website was developed, providing a hub of information regarding PCAs in the Maldives, as well as a permit portal to support sustainable financing. Two PCA Forums have been planned and delivered, bringing together over 100 staff working on PCAs from across the Maldives to share knowledge, synergies and build capacity. A short course on PCAs was held in collaboration with the Maldives National University and the Ministry of Environment, helping to build a shared understanding of protected area objectives across government, practitioners and emerging professionals. This course is being used by MNU to feed into a future longer course on PCAs. International and regional engagement, including symposia and learning exchanges, has further positioned the Maldives as an active participant in global conservation dialogue.

Collectively, OCPP's support has strengthened the Ministry's capacity to monitor, manage, and protect PCAs—bolstering long-term conservation outcomes.



Figure 5: Training being delivered on the use of the surveillance camera system trialled at Mendhoo Island, Baa Atoll

Biodiversity – Species Management

The biodiversity theme has also delivered a suite of work relating to **species management**, including work to support sustainable shark diving in Fuvahmulah. After a review of the existing context, a shark diving code of conduct was developed and rolled out across the island, providing guidance around diving with specific shark species such as tiger sharks, thresher sharks, and other species. The guidance has been adopted by the Council and is being considered as they develop their Dive Regulation for the industry.

Furthermore, the first review of birds across the Maldives was completed with ERA, using citizen science and existing scientific knowledge to build understanding about key species found across the country.

Biodiversity – Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA)

OCPP has provided assistance in strengthening the **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)** process in the Maldives using lessons learned and best practice guidance from the UK process. An EIA workshop was facilitated by OCPP and held in Malé in January 2024. This workshop brought together colleagues from the ERA and EIA consultants from the Maldives and facilitated discussions around the Maldives EIA process. Following this workshop, OCPP provided advice on licence conditions and the EIA process and feedback from ERA was that advice was useful and was being taken forward and put into practice in-country. OCPP also facilitated a project to scope the user needs for an environmental data management system (EDMS). The resulting report from this project outlined recommendations for ERA to take this work forward and build the EDMS which the ERA identified as being a high priority for them. Taken together, the biodiversity portfolio has moved the Maldives from fragmented site-by-site management towards a coherent national approach to protected and conserved areas, underpinned by policy-adopted guidance, trained institutions, operational

monitoring frameworks and collaborative governance structures. The remaining programme period will be critical for consolidating these systems, finalising site-level plans, and ensuring national institutions are fully equipped to maintain and adapt protected area management in the long term.

Marine Pollution - Abandoned, Lost & Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG)

Marine pollution work has centred on building an evidence base and national capability to address plastics, fishing gear loss and water quality pressures. Following a national scoping study on **ALDFG** (early 2024), a national ALDFG baseline assessment was completed in 2025 through fisher surveys, spatial analysis and a material flow assessment focussing on the life cycle and value chain of fishing gear in the Maldives. The results were fed back to the fishing industry via outreach to agree practical recommendations to address the issue and the results of the fisher survey were ground-truthed with ALDFG data provided by the Olive Ridley Project (ORP). Findings guided an extensive outreach programme with regional fisher workshops and a national policy level workshop, raising awareness of ALDFG, validating survey data, and identifying opportunities for improved gear management and plastic pollution reduction.



Figure 6: Abandoned, Lost, & Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) workshop with Government and fishing industry representation

Marine Pollution - Macro Litter

The Maldives eXXpedition-led SHiFT programme trained a cohort of local volunteers to be litter champions for their immediate communities, developing their ideas and capabilities into plans. This part of the OCPP programme also delivered a technical circularity assessment, investigating how plastics arrive, are distributed, purchased and disposed of in Malé. This work was supported by Maldives National University (MNU) and local NGO's and has provided a deeper understanding of how plastics move through Maldivian society, generating data and insights to support policy improvements, infrastructure development and circular economy approaches. OCPP convened over 70 stakeholders and produced a published report that is now informing national discussions on waste

management and material flows. Engagement has strengthened partnerships between government, NGOs and academia, and the data was presented at the National Marine Science Symposium.

Staff of Small Island Geographic Society (SIGS) were trained in the OSPAR methodology of beach monitoring including how to profile a beach, collect litter larger than 5cm, categorise litter, weigh in the field and correct disposal. The training provided will enable SIGS to conduct beach monitoring beyond the life of the programme with the potential for baseline data collection for litter on beaches and periodic monitoring to show trends over time with the potential to track the effectiveness of any interventions.



Figure 7: Beach litter monitoring; *Left*: Litter collection, *Right*: Litter classification.

Marine Pollution - Microplastics

Microplastics work has delivered a lasting institutional legacy through the establishment of a dedicated microplastics laboratory at the Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI), supported by hands-on training for MMRI and Maldives National University (MNU) staff. OCPP supplied key analytical equipment, including an Attenuated Total Reflectance Fourier Transform Infrared (ATR-FTIR) spectrometer, and delivered theoretical and practical training to MMRI and MNU staff.

The facility now contributes to national baseline data on microplastics and is embedded in the OCPP International Laboratory Network to ensure global knowledge exchange, best practices sharing, troubleshooting as well as funding identification to reach financial sustainability and has already contributed to peer-reviewed science. The online platform is also being used to retain training materials from field sampling, including GIS training to laboratory processes.



Figure 8: Microplastics laboratory established at the Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI)

Baseline beach sand microplastics data have been generated for multiple years, providing the Maldives with its first consistent evidence on spatial and temporal trends. Complementary water quality activities have included a pollution proof-of-concept study and the development of a forward work plan for data collection, equipment provision and staff training, laying foundations for more systematic national monitoring.

Marine Pollution - Water Quality

The OCPP pollution team provided an informal audit of the Utility Regulatory Authority laboratory, which is responsible for the national requirements for industrial monitoring and carries out a wide range of analytical chemistry and microbiology for the benefit of the Maldives. The audit provided external perspective and experience in high quality analytical science in a report giving practical, actionable recommendations.

Similarly, significant support was provided to the ERA to enhance oceanographic water quality monitoring. This included procurement and training for a high specification Conductivity, Temperature and Depth (CTD) instrument, delivery of a Blue Boat u4nmanned surface vessel, BRUVS for ecological monitoring, and guidance for safe and effective use of newly commissioned research vessels. Joint surveys delivered baseline oceanographic, microbiological and pollution datasets while improving national proficiency in sampling, data interpretation and equipment operation. OCPP established links between ERA Maldives and labs in Sri Lanka to provide regional depth of analytical capability for marine samples.



Figure 9: OCPP supported Utility Regulatory Authority (URA) as they look to grow their commitment to providing microbiology services to all of the Maldives

Cross-agency fieldwork supported ERA and the Directorate of Water and Sanitation to build evidence around effluent impacts, water quality and potential public health risks. OCPP developed a low-cost current indicator buoy system design—ready for future deployment—to improve real-time public health advisories around outfalls.

OCPP also collaborated closely with URA, supporting the development of national drinking water guidelines, providing an informal laboratory audit, and offering ongoing expert technical advice on expanding microbiological testing capacity nationwide.

Marine Pollution - Emergency Response

Marine pollution emergency response capacity has been significantly strengthened through an integrated programme of training, planning and equipment provision.



Figure 10: Marine pollution emergency response tabletop exercise

Spill incidents, particularly oil and chemical spills from shipping or offshore activities, pose serious risks to the Maldives' fragile marine environment, as they can damage coral reefs and seagrass beds that are essential for fisheries, coastal protection, and the country's tourism-driven economy. As communities on low-lying islands rely heavily on clean seas for food and income, contamination of lagoons and beaches can threaten public health and livelihoods, meaning even relatively small spills can have long-lasting and widespread impacts.

To address this, the Maldives, supported by OCPP, has made substantial progress in **strengthening its capacity** to protect the marine environment and respond effectively to marine pollution risks through a structured timeline of activities and collaboration with national, regional, and international partners. Capacity-building began in February 2024 with a Marine Pollution Emergency Response Workshop and Vessel Traffic Analysis focused on emergency preparedness and risk analysis.

In May 2024, a **GIS and Remote Sensing Workshop** was held to improve spatial analysis and monitoring. Infrastructure and safety enhancements followed in August 2024 with the provision of response and monitoring equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE), and vessel safety assurance for the RV Muraka and RV Thimaaveshi.

By October 2024, responders received safety and **emergency response training**, gaining proficiency in personal survival techniques, fire prevention and fighting, elementary first aid, and the use of survival craft and rescue boats. A key milestone in regional engagement was the SACEP Symposium on Marine Pollution Preparedness and Response in November 2024, which brought together regional policymakers and response agencies to share best practices and reignite regional cross--border collaboration under the existing SACEP framework.

From January to March 2025, efforts focused on capacity building and knowledge transfer, including an expert SACEP-UK technical visit, training in International Maritime Organization (IMO) Levels 1, 2 & 3, Incident Command System (ICS) 200/300, aerial surveillance, and Shoreline Clean-up Assessment Techniques (SCAT). During this period, an environmental modelling workshop on fate and transport was delivered in February 2025, followed by the delivery of a Tactical Response Plan for the Central Atoll and a reviewed Dispersants Policy response document in March 2025. In October 2025, the regional contingency response plan which the Maldives is a signatory to under SACEP, was agreed by the 5 South Asia Seas countries and is on track to be adopted at the next Conference of the Parties (COP). In November 2025, the program delivered scientific analysis and research training focused on analysing metals and Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs) in sediments. The relationships built with ERA and Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF), two of the main responders in case of events, and the gaps identified through OCPP, have already been leveraged to support further work on national preparedness through other programmes.

Together, these coordinated engagements and targeted workshops have built strong professional networks, reinforced marine monitoring and response capabilities, and laid the foundation for a more resilient collective approach to the long-term protection of the Maldives' marine ecosystems at both a national and regional level.

Gender, Equality & Social Inclusion (GEDSI)

The Maldives OCPP partnership has placed strong emphasis on GEDSI, beginning with a comprehensive GEDSI context review conducted in collaboration with Maldives-based experts. This was followed by in-country OCPP case studies that generated practical recommendations to

strengthen inclusive practice across the programme. These recommendations have since been implemented by the OCPP team, including designing activities to be more accessible and inclusive, and supporting wider institutional uptake of GEDSI principles by delivering two multistakeholder workshops reaching 50 participants and establishing a national GEDSI network.

OCPP has also developed a **Maldives GEDSI Handbook** and **a Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harm Handbook** to provide practical guidance for government, NGOs and community partners. As a result of this sustained support, 11 organisations have reported taking concrete steps to improve their GEDSI and SEAH policies and practices, helping ensure that inclusive approaches are embedded across the sector and continue to influence decision making long after the programme concludes.

Education, Research Empowerment & Institutional Partnerships

OCPP delivered a highly subscribed scientific writing course for 30 Maldivian scientists from multiple government agencies, directly supporting the publication of local research and strengthening long term national scientific capacity.

OCPP has provided significant capacity building support to Maldives National University (MNU) across both biodiversity and marine pollution workstreams. This included mapping environmental career pathways and producing eight case studies of MNU alumni now working in the Maldives' environmental sector, designed to showcase potential career routes and encourage greater enrolment in environmental courses.

OCPP also supported five Maldivian students to complete Master's degrees in environmental subjects. OCPP has five Maldivian scholars studying at the University of the South Pacific (USP) through the ACU Programme. The South Pacific was chosen as a suitable location for the Maldives' scholars as at the time the scholarship offer was being investigated there was not an appropriate host in the Maldives, whilst Fiji offered the opportunity to study somewhere with similar small island developing state challenges. The scholars were able to undertake their research within the Maldives but had supervision from USP and studied with MSc Environment Science or MSc Biology, with research titles aligned to OCPP themes.

The research areas supported by the scholars in Maldives were;

1. *Spatial distribution and Abundance of Mangrove vegetation and crabs in a Mangrove forest in Huraa, Maldives*
2. *The Germination and Growth Rate of Four Mangrove Species in the Maldives at different Salinity Levels.*
3. *Integrated monitoring as a tool to enhance the effectiveness of Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) in Ovalau Island, Fiji*
4. *Spatial distribution and annual density variation within a multi-species grouper spawning ground in Laamu Atoll, Maldives.*
5. *Evaluating microplastic in tuna and some reef fish from the greater Male' area, Maldives*







In summary, OCPP's work in the Maldives has delivered lasting, system level impact by strengthening national policy frameworks, building local capacity, and embedding practical tools and standards directly into government and community practice. Across multiple MPAs, OCPP-supported guidance, management plans, and codes of conduct have been formally adopted, actively applied, and in many cases expanded independently by national ministries and local authorities, demonstrating true ownership and sustainability. Training and equipment provision has allowed both Government and Non-Government Organisations to collect baseline pollution data enabling the independent design and implementation of monitoring programmes to follow trends and track the effectiveness of interventions, providing legacy beyond the end of OCPP. Investments in monitoring equipment, education materials, and digital platforms have further empowered institutions to manage protected areas more effectively, communicate more widely,

and inspire the next generation of conservation professionals. Collectively, these achievements show that OCPP has not only met its objectives but has helped establish a stronger, more resilient foundation for environmental governance throughout the Maldives.



"Let me also take this opportunity [PCA Forum 2] to thank our partners, OCPP, for the support they have provided in this work, particularly the valuable contribution from UK government through the Blue Planet Fund."

Minister Thoriq Ibrahim speech at Protected & Conserved Area (PCA) Forum 2026





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Case Study

Protected and Conserved Area (PCA) Forums



In 2024, at the request of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, OCPP led the planning and delivery of the first Maldives Protected and Conserved Area (PCA) Forum, bringing together stakeholders from across the country to build capacity, share knowledge, and identify areas for collaboration in PCA management. The success of this inaugural event prompted the Ministry to convene a second PCA Forum in February 2026. This time, OCPP adopted a more supportive role as the Ministry took the lead in planning and delivery, with additional partners engaged to strengthen relationships and ensure long term sustainability beyond the lifetime of OCPP. The second Forum also provided a strategic platform to validate the Roadmap to 30x30, a key document developed with OCPP support that outlines the Maldives' future ambitions for expanding and effectively managing its network of PCA's.



"The relationships built, the skills strengthened, and the systems we have improved will hopefully continue to serve our communities long after this forum and hopefully much into the future." – Hassan Mohamed, Chief Executive of ERA



Annex 1 - Full Stakeholder List

Government Partners in the Maldives

OCPP has worked closely with a wide range of Government partners, particularly:

- **Ministry of Tourism and Environment (MoTE) –** OCPP has notably engaged with the Protected Sites department on MPA governance. Engagement with MoTE throughout the partnership has been extensive.
- **Environmental Regulatory Authority (ERA) –** extensive engagement with the ERA has occurred throughout the partnership, as the statutory regulator involved in environmental management and compliance processes. The ERA have also been a core partner in the programme.
- **Ministry of Fisheries and Ocean Resources** – engagement with MoFOR has focused on the litter (via MMRI) and ALDFG work.
- **Maldives Marine Research Institute (MMRI)** – a technical partner contributing scientific expertise, data, and participation in technical workshops.
- **Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF)** - the Ministry within which the Coastguard is located who OCPP worked closely with on marine pollution emergency response.
- In addition, the **British High Commission in Malé** has played a critical facilitation role, supporting coordination between UK partners and Maldivian authorities and supporting in-country communication.

Local Governance Engagement

OCPP has worked with a number of Atoll and Island Councils as part of delivery of specific activities, specifically in relation to the MPA management effectiveness work delivery. This recognises their central role in representing local communities and providing insight into local marine use, cultural values and community priorities.

Engagement with NGOs & Research Organisations

OCPP has established links with key organisations whose work aligns with our programme:

- **Noo Raajje (Blue Prosperity Coalition/Waitt Institute)** – OCPP engaged with the Noo Raajje project in the early years of the programme, however, the initiative hasn't been active in recent years.
- **Maldives Resilient Reefs –** OCPP has worked with MRR around the development of the Roadmap to 30x30
- **Manta Trust**, **Maldives Whaleshark Research Programme (MWRP)**, **Maldives Coral Institute**, **Olive Ridley Project (ORP)**, **Small Island Geographic Society (SIGS)** and **Small Island Research Group** – OCPP engaged with the Manta Trust and MWRP on management and monitoring activities in Hanifaru MPA. SIGS received training in the OSPAR method of beach litter monitoring and assisted in developing and piloting the ALDFG fisher survey. ORP provided ALDFG data to ground truth the ALDFG fisher survey.
- **IUCN Maldives** – OCPP has worked with IUCN specifically on the PCA work and Roadmap to 30x30.
- **Maldives National University** – engaged as an academic, delivery and training partner with potential to support data provision and research collaboration.

These relationships provide important avenues for shared learning, local expertise and sites specific ecological insights.

Industry & Sectoral Partners

A number of sector-based organisations were identified through stakeholder mapping at the start of the programme. Whilst some communications took place, engagement was very limited

- Maldives Fishermen Association (MFA) Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI)
- Divers Association of Maldives (DAM)
- National Boating Association of Maldives (NBAM)
- Fairmont Maldives Sirru Fen Fushi Sustainability Lab
- Parley Maldives
- Zero Waste Maldives
- White by 8
- Small Island Research Centre
- Land and Marine Environmental Resource Group Pvt Ltd. (LAMER)