



Protecting Marine Ecosystems in MFF Countries Using the Green Fins Approach

Coral reefs are home to 25% of all marine life, and are source of food security, income, medicine, coastal barriers to storms and a whole host of other benefits to more than 275 million people worldwide. Yet, one quarter of global reefs are damaged beyond repair due to destructive fishing practices and overfishing, pollution, sedimentation, and climate change, as well as irresponsible tourism.

Protecting Marine Ecosystems in MFF Countries Using the Green Fins Approach

is a new project that aims to effect change among the diving industry and local communities in the Maldives and Viet Nam through the implementation of the Green Fins approach, an innovative conservation initiative for implementing environmentally friendly guidelines and a robust management and assessment system. To date, the Green Fins approach has been successfully adopted by the diving industry in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, and has proven as an effective tool to share important environmental information for marine ecosystem protection and coral reef monitoring.

Project objectives:

Objective 1 - Environmentally responsible diving tourism based on Green Fins approach is introduced to representative dive operators in the Maldives and Viet Nam

Objective 2 - Green Fins approach is integrated into the national dive tourism approaches and regulations in the Maldives and Viet Nam.

The project is expected to lead to the following results:

- Enhanced understanding of the diving industry impacts and current relevant environmental policies in the two project countries
- Functional National Teams established and trained on the Green Fins approach in the Maldives and Viet Nam
- Specific activities implemented in Viet Nam and the Maldives aimed at the protection and wise management of coral reefs through the promotion of the Green Fins approach with relevant partners and stakeholders.
- Outlined method for integrating Green Fins approach into environmental laws and regulations governing tourism industries and natural resource management.



The project is implemented by the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** in collaboration with key **National Partners**:

- The Environment Protection Agency under the Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Maldives
- The Institute of Oceanography under the Viet Nam Academy of Science and Technology, Viet Nam

Project budget: USD 200,000

Duration: January 2013-December 2014

Maldives also known as the Maldives Islands, is an island nation in the Indian Ocean consisting of a double chain of twenty-six atolls. The Maldives atolls encompass a territory spread over 90,000 square kilometers, making one of the world's most geographically dispersed country. It is also the smallest Asian country in both population (328,536 inhabitants in 2012) and land area (only 192 of its 1,192 islands are populated). The best known ecosystem are the colorful coral reefs, home to 1100+ species of fish, 5 species of sea turtles, 21 species of whales and dolphins and 187 species of corals. In addition to honeymoon tourism, the primary activity of the Maldives is scuba diving, either daily trips organized through the resorts dive centers or liveaboards. The 31 protected areas in Maldives include 31 dive sites, which are administered by the Ministry of Environment and Energy, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Maldives. However, Maldives coral reefs are highly threatened, due to over-fishing, sedimentation, pollution and other environmental factors. For example, in 1998, a single El Niño phenomenon event caused coral bleaching, killing 2/3 of the nation's coral reefs. The Green Fins project will focus on the Male Atoll, which boasts some of the top diving destinations in the country, promoting ecosystem protection and environmental friendly practices among divers and the diving industry.

Viet Nam, with its 400 hard coral species, despite not such as famous diving destination, it has witnessed significant growth in the past couple of years. Recreational tourism diving has been developed in MPAs and national parks, including certain hotspots of Nha Trang Bay MPA, Cham Island MPAs, Phu Quoc MPA, Con Dao National Park, and Nui Chua National Park. Nha Trang Bay MPA is the most developed diving hotspot in Viet Nam, with more than ten registered tourism diving enterprises. Diving activities include SCUBA diving (fun diving and trial diving), snorkeling and glass-bottom boat (auto-boats) trips. But the diving industry may be posing significant threats to local marine ecosystems due irresponsible garbage management, damage to corals through direct diver contact and weak management of the diving sector. Though there are some provisions related to control diving activities within MPAs, there are gaps that needed to be filled. The diving service operators have expressed their wish to have more effective management practices to make their business more sustainable. Green Fins is a comprehensive programme that encourages dive centres and snorkel operators to work together to reduce their environmental impacts on coral reefs, through the adoption of the Green Fins Code of Conduct, as a way to reduce diving's environmental impacts on coral reefs in Viet Nam.

The project is one of the **Regional Initiatives funded by the Mangroves for the Future (MFF)**. In addition to promoting responsible diving, these initiatives are aiming to consolidate and share existing knowledge and best practice in coastal resource management, and conduct research on emerging issues, such as: mangrove conservation; coastal erosion; community resilience; and governance in small island communities.

