

GEF 8 NATIONAL DIALOGUE REPORT

Edgewater, Rarotonga, Cook Islands

19th – 20th April 2023



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Photo by Elizabeth Munro, NES

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Acronyms

BD	Biodiversity focal area
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CC	Climate change focal area
CCCI	Climate Change Cook Islands
CIT	Cook Islands Tourism
COS	Chief of Staff
CICSO	the Cook Islands Civil Society Organisations Inc.
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEF-8	eighth replenishment of the GEF funding cycle
HOM	Head of ministry
INC	Intergovernmental negotiating committee
IP	Integrated Programme
IPLCs	Indigenous peoples and local communities
IW	International Waters focal area
KO	Korero o te Orau
LD	Land degradation focal area
MC	Master of ceremonies
MFAI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration
MMR	Ministry of Marine Resources
MOCD	Ministry of Cultural Development
MOT	Ministry of Transport
NEP	National Environment Policy 2022-2032
NES	Cook Islands National Environment Service
NSDA	National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+
NSDP	National Sustainable Development Plan 2016 – 2020
OFFP	Operational Focal Point
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PFP	Political Focal Point

PPG	Preparatory phase grant
RESPONSE	Reducing Single-use Plastics on Small-Island Economies
STAR	System for Transparent Allocation of Resources
TIS	Te Ipukarea Society
TVOM	Te Vai Ora Maori
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
USD	United States Dollars

Summary

On Wednesday 19th and Thursday 20th April 2023, the National Environment Service (NES), in partnership with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), held the Cook Islands GEF-8 National Dialogue at the Edgewater Resort in Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

The dialogue was intended for key stakeholders including national government, conservation practitioners, policymakers, private sector, civil society and non-government organisations.

The purpose was to increase stakeholder understanding of the GEF; its governance, functions and focal areas, outline the programming resources of the GEF's eighth replenishment (GEF 8), including the \$8,000,000 USD STAR allocation for the Cook Islands in GEF-8, and identify some potential priority areas to allocate these resources.

This was the first national dialogue to discuss the GEF 8 programming in the Cook Islands.

Participants included representatives from GEF Secretariat, the National Environment Service (GEF Operational Focal Point in the Cook Islands), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (GEF Political Focal Point in the Cook Islands), representatives of relevant government ministries, the private sector and non-government organizations, United Nations Environment Programme and University of Newcastle.

The workshop was presented in dual-delivery mode to accommodate international participants and virtual presenters through Zoom.

The workshop received a lower turnout than expected on both days, however many organisation representatives in attendance were of senior position, i.e. Head of Ministry/agency, so the discussions were weighty. Some key stakeholders did not attend the dialogue e.g. Infrastructure Cook Islands on day 1, limiting the discussions to the expertise/mandates/focal areas of those present.

The dialogue facilitated discussions to identify national priorities for GEF resourcing and possible ideas to develop as national projects. These ideas, as presented by the participants, are available in Appendix 9, and have been summarized in the Outcomes section of this report. Water security, waste management and biodiversity were common threads of discussion maintained throughout the entire dialogue. More discussions will be needed to explore these ideas further and clearly define how GEF resourcing can be utilized.

For more information, please email siana.whatarau@cookislands.gov.ck

Participants

Day 1

In-person

	Name	Organization	Email	Gender
1	Andrew Hume	GEF	ahume@theGEF.org	M
2	Halatoa Fua (Director)	NES	halatoa.fua@cookislands.gov.nz	M
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14	Ben Ponia (COS)	OPM	ben.ponia@cookislands.gov.ck	M
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18	Anthony Turua (HOM)	MOCD	anthony.turua@cookislands.gov.ck	M
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4	Asha Bobb-Semple	GEF		
5	Patricia Marcos Huidobro	GEF		
6	Quynh Phan	GEF		
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13	Charlene Hoff	OPM	
14	Sascha Fuller	UON	
15	Isabelle Vanderbeck	UNEP	Isabelle.vanderbeck@un.org

Apologies

	Name	Organization	Email	Gender
1	Liana Scott	CIT	Liana@muribeachclubhotel.com	F
2	Teina Rongo (Chairperson)	KO	eturere@yahoo.com	M
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4	Andy Kirkwood	TVOM	andy@islandbooth.com	M

Day 2

In-person

	Name	Organization	Email	Gender
1	Andrew Hume	GEF	ahume@GEF.org	M
2	Halatoa Fua	NES	halatoa.fua@cookislands.gov.nz	M
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Day 1

Session 1: Welcome and Introduction

The GEF 8 National Dialogue was opened by Mr. Halatoa Fua, Director of the National Environment Service, at 8:45am. Fua introduced the dialogue as a first step for the Cook Islands to develop a national project under the GEF-8 programming and an opportunity to discuss key learnings from past projects, how we can find gaps in our environment management protection and conservation, and where we need to provide support. Opening remarks were followed by an agenda overview by the MC, Mr. Muraai Herman from the NES.

Session 2: Introduction to the GEF

At 8:51am, Mr. Andrew Hume, from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Secretariat started this session with a brief quiz to engage participants and gauge their prior knowledge of the GEF. From this brief engagement, less than half of attendees indicated having some knowledge of the GEF.

This session continued to provide an overview of the GEF. The GEF is a financial mechanism made up of a family of trust funds, e.g. the GEF trust fund, special climate change fund, adaptation fund etc., to support 5 conventions, namely (1) the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), (2) the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and (3) the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, collectively known as the Rio Conventions, as well as (4) the Minamata Convention on Mercury and (5) the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants.

In line with these conventions, the GEF have 5 focal areas: (1) Biodiversity, (2) Land Degradation, (3) Climate Change, (4) Chemicals and Waste, and (5) International Waters. The first 3 of which are collectively known as the STAR focal areas. STAR, which stands for system of transparent allocation of resources, are a specified amount of funds allocated to every GEF country at the beginning of each GEF cycle for activities that address biodiversity, land degradation or climate change. Country STAR is calculated with an algorithm known as the global biodiversity index. In GEF-8, there was a minimum amount that all countries were allowed to receive = \$8,000,000 USD. The Cook Islands STAR allocation is \$8,000,000 USD in GEF-8.

GEF governance has 3 arms: (1) guidance arm via the GEF assembly, (2) operations arm via the GEF Secretariat and (3) action arm via the GEF implementing agencies, executing agencies and countries. Countries have a GEF political focal point and an operational focal point; in the Cook Islands, these are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI) and the National Environment Service (NES), respectively. The GEF country focal points are the primary mechanism for country ownership in GEF partnership. The organisation and coordination of the country focal points is determined by the country.

There are currently 18 GEF agencies (Table 1), which act as the operational arm of the GEF. All agencies provide the same services but some have different mandates, e.g. some are nationally focused, some are regional and others have a global scope. Any of these agencies can support countries to develop GEF projects. It is important to distinguish the roles of GEF agencies when working with them; countries have ownership of their national projects and agencies provide support to the countries. There is a separation between project implementation, which is done by the GEF agencies, and project execution, which is by the country. A line has been drawn to prevent conflict of interest and to enable country ownership and capacity building in countries for project development and execution.

Table 1: 18 GEF Agencies and their scope

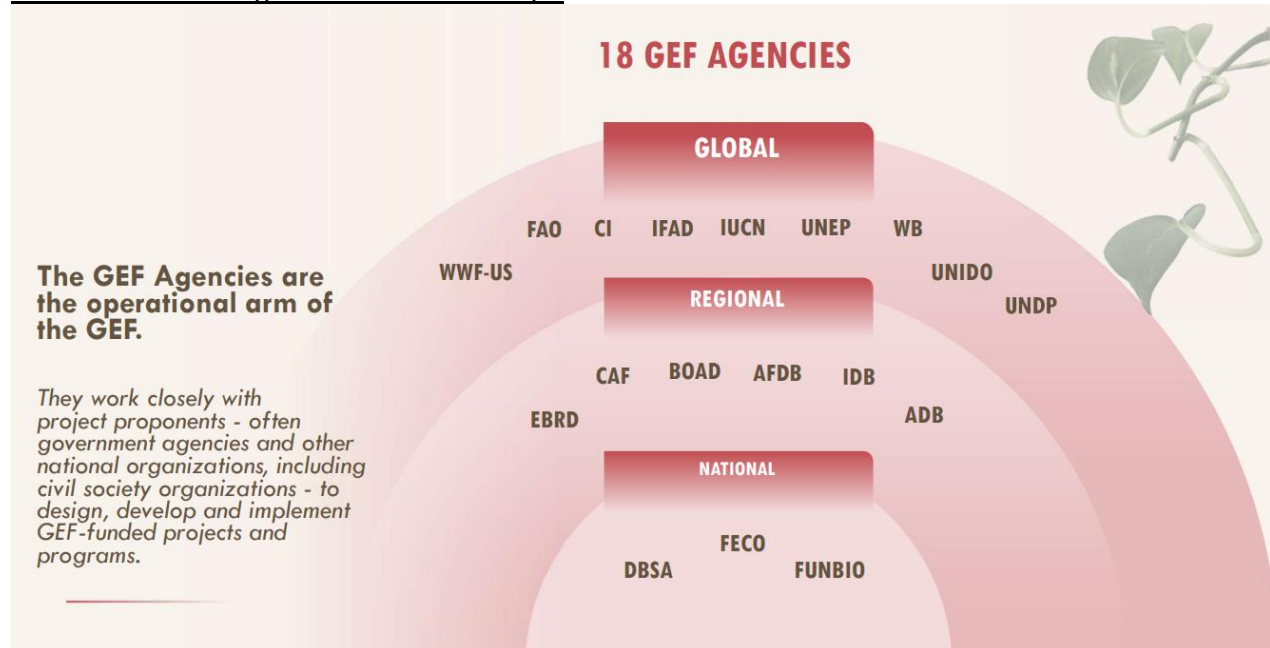


Figure 1: Andrew Hume's Presentation: <https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/resource/andrew-hume-gef-sec-presentation-slides-national-dialogue>

The GEF-8 replenishment and GEF assembly

\$5.33 billion USD has been pledged by 39 donor nations for the eighth replenishment of the GEF, which lasts from 2022-2026. In August of 2023 there will be a GEF assembly in Vancouver, Canada, for GEF countries, agencies and bodies to meet, update the GEF instrument, discuss the governance of the GEF and celebrate the pledging. It will be the only assembly before the GEF-9 replenishment. The Cook Islands delegation to attend this year's GEF assembly is still to be confirmed.

GEF projects: Design, Modality and Cycle

GEF projects are designed with incremental cost reasoning to build on existing action. GEF projects are not for new projects or for supplementing existing needs. The baseline of a GEF project is the core existing work that is addressing a problem and the GEF increment will help move that baseline to cause transformational change and global environmental benefits. How the transformational change is reflected in a GEF proposal is very important. The value of the ongoing work and efforts already in country is known as co-financing.

Project modality includes programmes and child projects. For example, the regional Ridge to Reef programme during GEF-5 had national child projects, including the Cook Islands Ridge to Reef.

The GEF project cycle is summarized in the steps below:

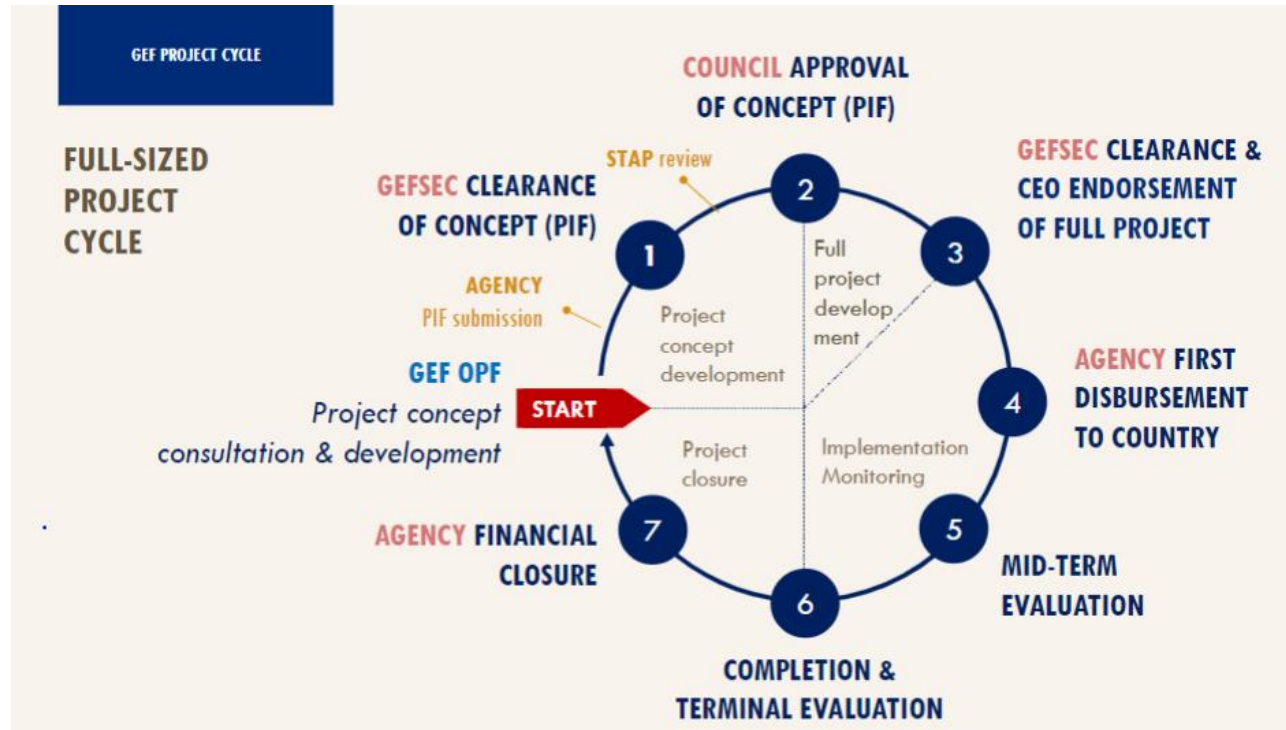


Figure 2 Andrew Hume's presentation: <https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/resource/andrew-hume-gef-sec-presentation-slides-national-dialogue>

Project preparation grant

A project preparation grant (PPG) can be anywhere between \$50,000 USD for medium-sized projects and \$300,000 USD for projects over \$10,000,000 USD. The PPG is for facilitating stakeholder consultations and to develop a full project document. Executing agencies are identified thereafter and then the project document is submitted to GEF CEO for endorsement. There is 18 months between step 2 and step 3 of the project cycle before a risk of project cancellation.

During the Q&A session, Mr. Wayne King, Director of Climate Change Cook Islands, asked why some pacific regional agencies are not accredited by the GEF, such as SPREP or SPC. Response was agencies become GEF accredited by invitation and since most of the project work happens at the GEF executing agency, if SPREP/SPC became implementing agencies they would be prevented from project execution. If there is sufficient interest from countries/regions for an agency to become GEF accredited, GEF assembly would be an appropriate venue to raise this. Additionally, the Pacific representative may raise this at the GEF council meeting. GEF is open to consider this if there is interest.

Ms. Jess Cramp, founder of Sharks Pacific, asked how many small, medium and large projects can occur in a country at one time. Response was there is no quota on the number of country

projects, however, there are funding limitations with STAR and there may be capacity issues if conducting too many projects. Resourcing is more of an issue than project quota. To aid this, the small grants programme (SGP) may be a better modality to fund smaller sized projects.

Ms. Elizabeth Munro from NES asked if the ratio of co-financing expectations (1:5) is the same for small island developing states (SIDS). Response was at the highest level of GEFs portfolio 1:5 co-financing is desirable. However, there is some flexibility with SIDS, as long as partners can demonstrate commitment to action.

GEF-8 strategy and programming directions

The longer-term vision for the GEF is *to halt nature loss and ensure that the world is nature-positive by 2030 and carbon neutral and pollution-free by 2050*. GEF-8 is embracing a post-COVID-19 framework; healthy people means a healthy planet and vice versa. This means protecting nature and restoring health of the environment that can and needs to underpin the health and well-being of human societies. The GEF-8 framework calls for unified action towards the 2030 goals and commitments.

The GEF-8 integrated programmes package aims to address 11 of the world's biggest environment issues. And so, there are 11 global integrated programmes (IP) under GEF-8 that range across the 5 GEF focal areas and have cross cutting elements of circular economy, nature-based solutions, gender responsiveness, resilience and private sector engagement. Integrated programmes draw from the country STAR allocation. In GEF-8, GEF will provide a 3:1 incentive for countries to join a global IP; for every \$3 USD from country STAR allocated to an IP, GEF will contribute \$1 USD.

In the Q&A session, Ms. Noeline Browne from the Koutu Nui asked if there is a mechanism for punishment if a country contradicts previous pledges. Response was the GEF is not a mechanism for punishment as the GEF is not political and as such, it takes zero stance on these matters. Failure to meet commitments are matters for the conventions to address. However, the GEF can provide venue, rationale and opportunity for people to meet and discuss these kind of issues without being too political.

Small grants programme (SGP)

At 10:09am, Mr. Hume gave a brief overview of the Small Grants Programme (SGP). The SGP is a more accessible and much quicker mechanism to access GEF financing. The SGP is a flagship corporate programme of the GEF that provides demand-driven grants to local communities and direct financing and capacity development to civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs). It aims to facilitate local conservation, development and livelihood results and contribute to global environment benefits. Grants are available up to \$50,000 USD, with an average grant size of \$25,000 USD. SGP does not require co-finance but it does have to be submitted by the implementing agency and GEF hopes for global co-financing.

There are some new features of the SGP in GEF-8: (1) Opening up SGP implementing roles of SGP Core, (2) eliminating the SGP upgrading country policy, (3) recalibrating cost efficiency measures and reporting, (4) launching novel two new CSO Initiatives, focused on youth, women and indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs).

The Cook Islands are allocated \$937,500 USD from GEF-8 SGP core resources. SGP resources are summarized in the figure below:

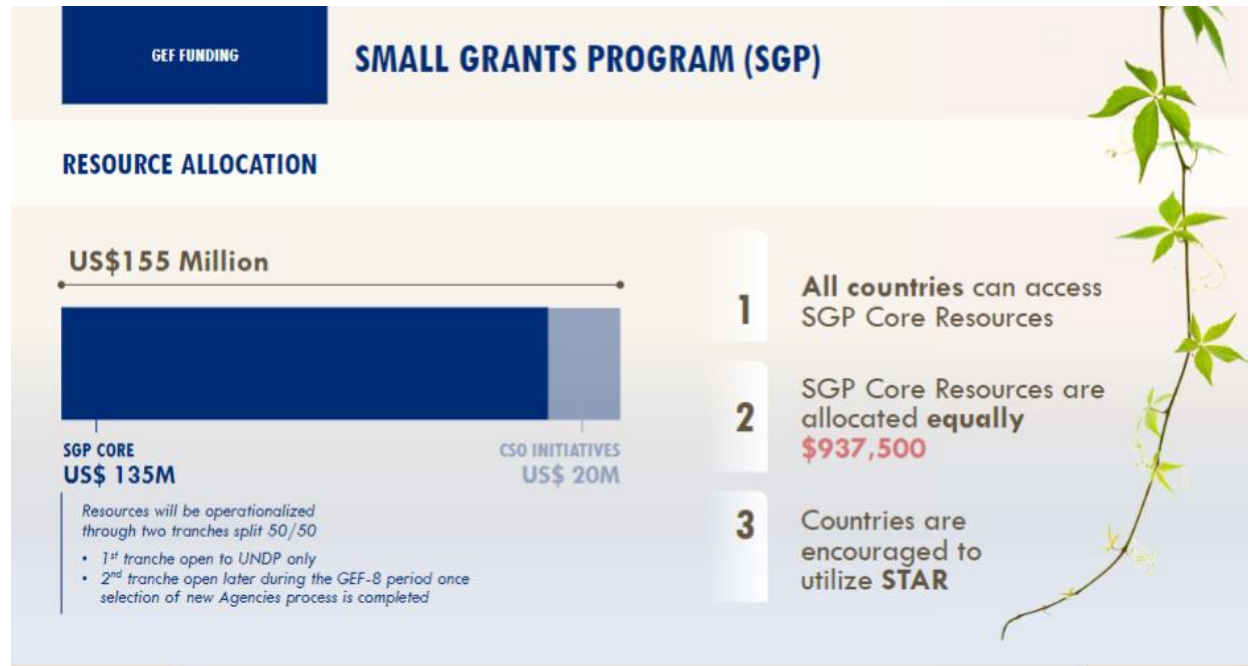


Figure 3 Andrew Hume's Presentation: <https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/resource/andrew-hume-gef-sec-presentation-slides-national-dialogue>. Cook Islands not a part of 1st tranche and a call for second tranche will go out next year 2024.

Session 3: Programming GEF-8 resources

At 10:22am, Ms. Hayley Weeks of the NES presented an overview of the GEF-8 resources available to the Cook Islands and the resources that have been pre-committed by the Cook Islands OFP so far. The Cook Islands has a STAR allocation of \$8,000,000 USD and, of that allocation, \$300,000 USD has been pre-committed to the Pacific Environment Data Programme (PEDP) and \$3,000,000 USD has been pre-committed to the Cook Islands child project under the GEF-8 integrated programme (IP), *Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution*. This left \$4,700,000 USD to be allocated and this dialogue was the first of many meetings to discuss resource allocation.

Mr. Ben Ponia, Chief of Staff (COS) from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), stated the expectation coming to this dialogue was to discuss an \$8,000,000 USD STAR allocation and that OPM were unaware of the plastic IP and the PEDP. Mr. Ponia urged NES, as the GEF operational focal point (OFP), to engage with wider government before committing GEF resources, pointing out how limited resources for development were. Regarding the Pacific Environment Data Programme, Mr. Ponia informed that the OPM are moving away from housing national data on regional data bases. Ms. Weeks responded that the OFP were constrained for time as the expression of interest for the integrated programmes were due 3 weeks after learning about them at the Asia-Pacific GEF workshop in January 2023. The decision to go ahead was based on consultation with a focused stakeholder group, held on 1st

February with NES, CCCI, MFEM, and MFAI. Mr. Hume from GEF Secretariat affirmed GEFs recognition of the small window for consultation, noting it was unfortunate, and highlighted there was a minimum level of STAR contribution to the IP to be able to bring in more money to the Cook Islands. By committing USD\$3 million of STAR to the plastics IP, an additional USD\$4 million is being contributed from the GEF (USD\$3 million from IW + USD\$1 million incentive). Mr Hume also noted many countries were impacted by the short timeframe.

Small Grants Programme (SGP)

At 10:35am, Patience Vainerere-Maoate, the Cook Islands SGP coordinator at Red Cross, provided an overview of the SGP process. Non-government organisations (NGOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) are eligible for the SGP. They must be registered with Cook Islands Civil Society Organisation (CICSO) or Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and must be able to manage the money and submit progress reports. The small grants program is not intended for individuals, businesses or government but partnerships are encouraged. Some of the eligible activities under the SGP are listed below (Figure 5).

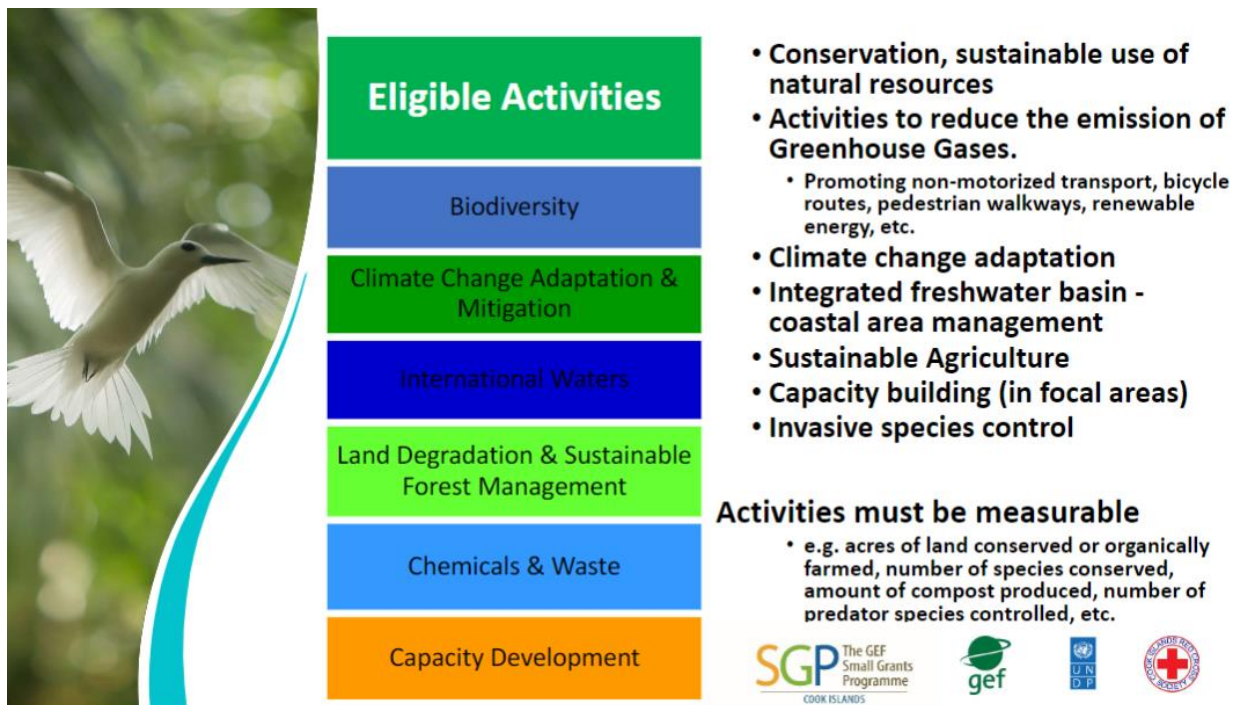


Figure 5: Patience Vainerere-Maoate presentation: <https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/resource/appendix-2-nes-presentation-slides-day-1-19th-april-2023>

Session 4: Plastics Integrated Programme

At 11:20am, Ms. Isabelle Vanderbeck from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provided an overview of the GEF-8 integrated programme; *Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution*, otherwise referred to as the Plastic IP throughout this report.

The goal of the Plastic IP is to catalyze circular economy approaches to reduce plastic production, consumption and disposal with a focus on single-use plastics (SUP) in the food and beverage sector. The programme aims to demonstrate and scale upstream and midstream solutions to plastic pollution, including: eliminating single-use plastic products/packaging and reducing use of crude oil as the primary feedstock; enabling circular design of materials, products and business models; ensuring circulation of materials and products in practice through reuse and refill systems (Figure 6). Private sector play a key role in this programme. Pilot testing circular solutions to reduce plastic packaging; catalyzing system change among businesses; supporting circular government policies and participating in an incubator programme are some examples of private sector involvement.

Not included in programme scope are recycling and waste management, clean ups, research for academic publication, material development (e.g. biodegradable/alternative materials) and general awareness campaigns (communications and campaigns should support project components) etc.

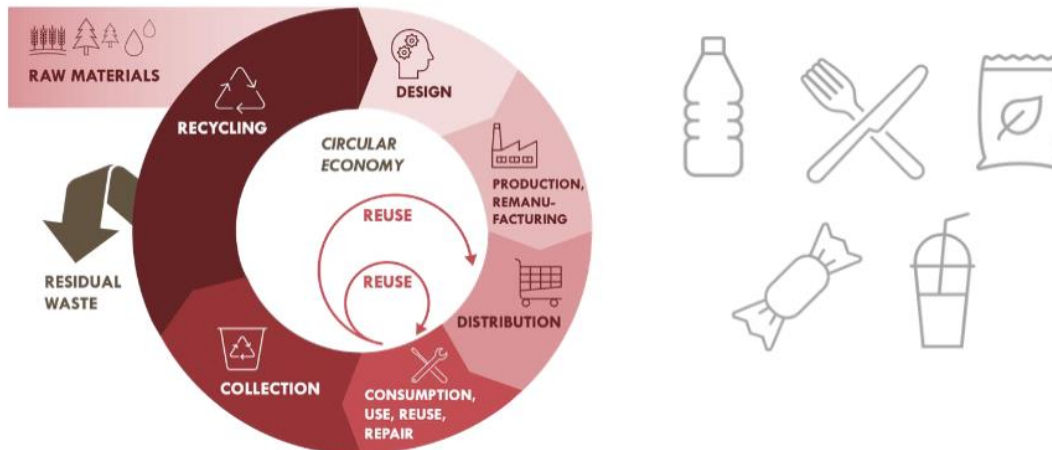


Figure 6: Isabelle Vanderbeck's presentation: <https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/resource/plastics-integrated-programme-presented-unep-19th-april-2023>

For the Plastics IP, 15 countries have been recommended for GEF council review and approval. The Cook Islands is (a) 1 of 2 small island developing states and (b) the only Pacific country in this IP. Isabelle applauded the Cook Islands concept note submitted for this Plastic IP, stating it had some of the best feedback of all the country concepts put forth.

The Cook Islands Project Concept

The NES Partnerships department developed the concept note for the Cook Islands child project under the Plastics IP with support from the UNEP team, who is the selected implementing agency. At the time of this workshop, UNEP had submitted this concept note to the GEF council for their approval at the next meeting in June 2023. The final concept note is available for view on the [Cook Islands Environment Data Portal](#).

The child project is titled “**Reducing Single-use Plastics on Small Island Economies**” or **RESPONSE**. The objective is to reduce the amount of plastics entering the Cook Islands via the

food and beverage sector and to support enabling environments for reuse options and other circular solutions, with the intention of reducing the burden on the Cook Islands waste management system, as well as reducing pollution and harmful impacts of plastic.

The estimated project cost is approximately \$6,200,000 USD and the project will be implemented across 5 years. NES and Infrastructure Cook Islands were identified as the executing agencies for this project.

Project Components and Framework

Outcome 1: The first outcome is to strengthen upstream policies to limit plastic pollution and US\$800,000 USD has been allocated to this component.

Output 1.1: The first output under this outcome will be to conduct a gap analysis of existing SUP related policies and legislation to strengthen reduce and reuse considerations. Examples may include reviewing the Solid Waste Management Policy (2016-2026), the Single-use Plastic Ban Policy (2019), the National Solid Waste Management Strategy (2013), Solid & Hazard Waste Bill (draft), the Prohibition of Plastic Shopping Bags regulations (2012) and the Environment Act (2003). Review the innovative financing mechanism (the Advanced Recovery and Disposal Fee policy and Fund), to address any gaps in our national sustainable financing model to sufficiently include reduce and reuse elements of the waste hierarchy and its application to plastics.

Output 1.2: To develop a national strategic action plan (SAP) on plastics that is fully inclusive, participatory and gender-sensitive.

Output 1.3: To develop or update legislation in response to the gap analysis and the SAP of the previous outputs.

Outcome 2: Large scale regional producers are to be identified to replace harmful F&B packaging commonly imported into the country. \$800,000 USD has been allocated to this.

Output 2.1: Analysis of the current import product categories in the F&B sector, and identify key categories of products and sub-sectors for intervention. For example, big producers like coca cola, watties etc.

Output 2.2: Bringing policies to support the alternatives and replacement of problematic plastics product in the F&B sector.

Output 2.3: Supporting the pilot and roll out of alternative products in key businesses and venues (e.g. supermarkets, tourism sites, restaurants and schools).

Outcome 3: The private sector, NGOs and communities will be engaged and supported to pilot and scale up innovative solutions to plastic pollution. This is where the bulk of the budget has been allocated, just over \$2,000,000 USD.

Output 3.1 will provide technical and low-value grant assistance for implementing innovative practices and solutions aligned to the SAP (Output 1.2), including existing NGO initiatives.

Output 3.2: At least 10 pilot projects with local businesses, retailers and producers will be identified and implemented or scaled up. Examples of local private sectors that could

be involved include supermarkets, retailers, farmers, growers, hydroponics, bakers etc. The pilot projects have not been allocated prior to implementation and we are still in very early design phase of the project.

Output 3.3: At least 10 pilot projects will be identified and implemented or scaled up in the tourism industry, this can include accommodations, restaurants, and operators. The pilot projects have not been allocated prior to implementation and we are still in very early design phase of the project.

Output 3.4: Multi-stakeholders platforms, dialogues and trade events are facilitated for peer to peer and business to business exchange and support.

Outcome 4: National data on single-use plastics will be enhanced to inform and improve decision making, \$1,000,000 USD has been allocated to this component.

Output 4.1: National inventory on plastics for the F&B industry undertaken

Output 4.2: Capacity building initiatives conducted, including support for tertiary education in plastics science-policy programmes

Output 4.3: Regional & South-South knowledge exchange activities and events with Pacific Island Countries and other SIDS

Outcome 5: Best practices, innovative solutions and lessons learned are documented and exchanged through knowledge management and knowledge transfer. \$850,000 USD has been allocated to this component.

Output 5.1: Gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy developed and implemented

Output 5.2: Gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings developed and disseminated to stakeholders

Output 5.3: Gender-responsive Knowledge, Aptitudes & Practices (KAP) surveys throughout the project demonstrate quantifiable changes in public understanding & consumer behavior

Output 5.4: Participatory monitoring and evaluation, including gender mainstreaming, informs project implementation, decision-making and lessons learned.

And there is the monitoring and evaluation component, which has been allocated USD\$300,000 to ensure effective on-going monitoring and evaluation of the project throughout its life.

Discussion session

In the discussion session, Mr. Ponia noted the IP is focused on plastics and was concerned the Cook Islands are being pushed into a corner to meet the priorities and timelines of the GEF. Mr. Ponia urged the room to drill down to small projects that can hit the ground running. Mr. Halatua Fua responded that while the IP helps to fill a gap in plastic consumption, there are programmes working on other areas of waste e.g. legacy waste. The NES is working on reviewing the waste management facility with ICI, who were invited to this dialogue but not present (until day 2).

Ms. Jess Cramp, founder of Sharks Pacific, asked what backstops will be put in place to ensure the money is managed and used effectively and noted the concept note has no component addressing drivers of consumer behavior nor a plan to use such data to encourage behavior change. There is a lack of social science in the outset of this project to ensure this is an appropriate project. Ms. Hayley Weeks responded day 2 of the dialogue will discuss previous issues in past GEF projects. The implementing agency (IA) has been changed, so we expect improved IA support. NES have a MOU with Newcastle to support with technical advice. Ms. Sascha Fuller from University of Newcastle added in response that the project is focused on mid and upstream interventions. If the Cook Islands are going to prevent plastic pollution, the gap analysis in output 1.2 will be key. Mr. Andrew Hume added we have just started the beginning of this programme and project. These questions are being asked at the appropriate time given where we are in the project cycle. There is plenty of room to modify the outputs. There is a lot of room to update this to reflect the needs of the country, however the GEF do not like to see major changes from initial concept.

Closing

Day 1 closed at 1:11pm.

Morning tea was held at 10:45am to 11:00am, lunch was right after the workshop and both were catered by the venue.

Day 2

Session 1: Welcome and Introduction

Day 2 started at 8:50am with a brief recap of day 1 discussions and an overview of day 2's agenda. Day 2 would delve deeper into lessons learnt from previous GEF projects and focus on prioritizing GEF resources. Mr. Andrew Hume gave a recap of day 1's GEF presentation for new attendees and invited participants to engage for bilateral discussions, as he would be on island for the week.

Session 2: Results and Lessons Learnt from the GEF Portfolio Experiences

At 8:58am, Ms. Hayley Weeks, presented an overview of the Cook Islands GEF portfolio, including historical and current projects, to highlight previous priorities and issues. The intention was to provide an overview of what areas have had efforts and focus, to identify where the gaps are now. A summary of national projects is provided below:

Cook Islands GEF Portfolio – National Projects					
GEF ID	Project Title	Project Type	FocalArea	Agency	Phase Project Status
10780	Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species	FSP	Biodiversity	UNDP	GEF - 7 CEO Endorsement Cleared
10733	First Biennial Transparency and Fourth National Communication Report (BTR1/NC4)	EA	Climate Change	UNDP	GEF - 7 CEO Approved
9067	Renewable Energy Sector Project	FSP	Climate Change	ADB	GEF - 6 Under Implementation
5756	National Biodiversity Planning to Support the Implementation of the CBD 2011-2020 Strategic Plan	EA	Biodiversity	UNDP	GEF - 5 Project Implemented
5348	Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Functions through a "Ridge to Reef" Approach in the Cook Island	FSP	Multi Focal Area	UNDP	GEF - 5 Project Implemented
3508	LDC/SIDS Portfolio Project: Capacity Building for Sustainable Land Management in the Cook Islands	MSP	Land Degradation	UNDP	GEF - 3 Project Implemented
3344	Initial Assistance to enable the Cook Islands to fulfill its obligations under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPS). (NIP for Cook Islands)	EA	POPs	UNDP	GEF - 4 Financially Closed
1971	National Capacity Needs Self-Assessment (NCSA) for Global Environmental Management	EA	Multi Focal Area	UNDP	GEF - 3 Financially Closed
1565	Biodiversity Enabling Activity 'Add-on' Component for Cook Islands	EA	Biodiversity	UNDP	GEF - 3 Council Approved
510	National Biodiversity Strategy, Action Plan and Country Report to the CoP	EA	Biodiversity	UNDP	GEF - 2 Financially Closed

Figure 7: Hayley Weeks presentation: <https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/resource/appendix-3-nes-presentation-slides-day-2-20th-april-2023>

Ms. Weeks noted although land degradation in Figure 8 is minimal, projects with elements of biodiversity and climate change also address elements of land degradation. However, during the Q&A session, Mr. Ponia responded to this; one of the UNFCCC's main focus is to combat drought and there has been confusion about this during previous Cook Island projects. For

example, there was confusion during the GEF5 project; that project was more tourism and land use focused, not land degradation focused because it did not address drought. He stated the Cook Islands are currently not doing enough to address water security and drought. Water issues in the Cook Islands are severe and the pa enua (outer islands) have many examples of drought to reflect this. Mr. Hume added that water security can fall under international waters (IW) focal area so there is potential for an IW funded project, which can be explored further.

Cook Islands GEF STAR allocations (GEF 4 - GEF 7)

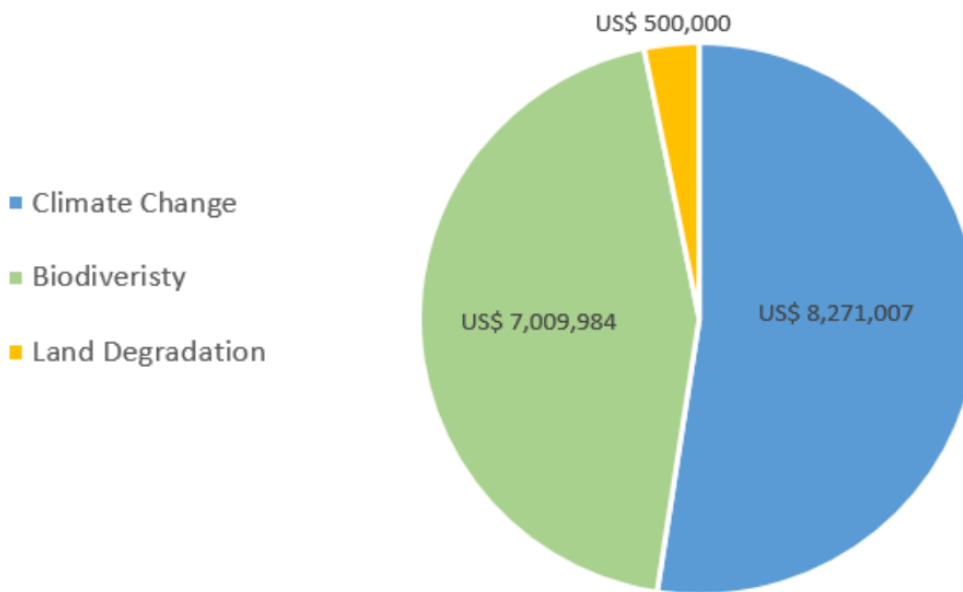


Figure 8 Hayley Weeks presentation: <https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/resource/appendix-3-nes-presentation-slides-day-2-20th-april-2023>

Cook Islands GEF-7 project

Implementation of the Cook Islands GEF-7 project is starting this year, 2023, and will continue for the next 5 years. An overview of the project components was provided (see presentation slides and full project document on Cook Islands Environment Data Portal).

GEF-8

Moving into GEF-8, Ms. Weeks provided an overview of projects in the pipeline for this current GEF cycle:

- Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution integrated programme
- Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency
- Technology Needs Assessment (TNA V)
- CBD 7th National Report
- Global Biodiversity Finance Programme

Of these 5 activities, STAR allocation has only been committed to the *Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution* integrated programme (\$3,000,000 USD), and the rest is funded through other GEF resourcing.

Mr. Wayne King asked how the special climate change fund (SCCF) sits in this framework. Ms. Weeks responded, the GEF is a family of funds, such as the GEF trust fund, the SCCF and the least developed country fund (LDCF). The Cook Islands are not eligible for the LDCF given our development status.

Lessons Learnt

Lessons learnt from historical and current projects have been listed below:

- Avoid over-ambitious goals, focused and simplified projects work best
- Maintain close and ongoing collaboration with key stakeholders
- Ownership and accountability is important
- Early preparation and front loading of projects is recommended
- Mitigating staff turnover and institutionalizing operations, knowledge sharing and creating dynamic teams is recommended
- Understand capacity limitations and plan portfolios accordingly to avoid overburdening

Mr. Hume recommended utilizing GEF resources on lessons learnt. Mr. Kelvin Passfield, former director of Te Ipukarea Society, agreed to prioritise frontloading of projects and all issues will be easier to manage.

Mr. Ponia expected more colleagues to speak to the issues experienced during the Cook Islands GEF-5 project. During GEF-5's Ridge to Reef project, Mr. Ponia was Secretary of Marine Resources and had poor experience working with the implementing agency, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). For example, UNDP would not reimburse until every dollar was spent, so core government funds were used to implement project activities instead of ministry activities and priorities. Mr. Ponia pointed out that no one took accountability for the issues in GEF-5 and called for other participants to share their experiences.

Mr. Anthony Turua, Secretary of Cultural Development, wanted accountability and staff turnover to be rigorously addressed in GEF-8, as these were key issues in previous Cook Island GEF projects. Ms. Weeks responded accountability will be addressed at many levels; national and IA levels. Mr. Hume added the issue of accountability and staff turnover are common amongst other countries. Every GEF agency works differently. GEF does not require spending down to the last dollar; this is a requirement for some GEF agencies. It is recommended to ask these kind of questions when exploring your IA so these processes are clear before agency selection. UNDP is just one IA option and countries are invited to broaden their agency options during selection. It is also noted GEF have had a few issues with UNDP and there are procedures in place to address these issues from GEF.

Mr. Wayne King, Director of Climate Change Cook Islands, raised the challenge of working through institutional arrangements. Government signs an agreement to take on GEF projects with conditions; in hindsight we can drill into the conditions to enable us to work effectively. Over time, priorities and circumstances change, especially coming out of COVID, so there needs to be opportunity to introduce some flexibility. Mr. King recommended being more clear about who is going to work with us moving forward and under what conditions, because the same issues

keep reoccurring. Mr. Hume encourages the Cook Islands to skip over the GEF implementing agency entirely and contact GEF directly, when there are issues working with the agencies. GEF have a team dedicated to support these type of issues. Mr. Hume acknowledged adaptive management and flexibility is key and the grant agreement doesn't necessarily allow flexibility.

Session 3: National Priorities and Planning

In this session, Ms. Hayley Weeks provided an overview of the National Sustainable Development Plan 2020+ relating to the GEF focal areas to show how national and GEF targets can align.

The participants were then separated into break out groups by table and discussed key issues and priorities for potential GEF projects. The full results of these discussions, as presented by the participants, are in Annex 9 of this report. A brief summary of common thematic areas has been provided below.

Water security, waste management and biodiversity/ecology projects were common thematic areas throughout stakeholder/participant discussions. Other areas of interest included:

- Participants were interested in cross disciplinary understandings through data collection and research, considering disasters in solutions.
- Recognition of island specific strategy for sources and meteorology, small water cycles. Water-climate engagement/assessment to identify what we have, what would be and what can change.
- Water management
- Land degradation and sanitation
- Cloud forests management
- Investment into public transport e-vehicles
- Improved waste management
- Invasive species work
- Prioritized lagoon health & pollution
- Improved food security
- Renewable energy. Mr. Ponia recommended we have shovel ready projects, such as phase 2 to the Aitutaki upgrade of the renewable energy system, which already has investment of \$2,000,000.
- Biodiversity work, e.g. document biodiversity hotspots like seamounts etc.

Mr. Andrew Hume recommended the Cook Islands to have more discussions to flesh out these ideas and priorities for a Cook Islands GEF project. He affirmed many of the project ideas listed do align with the GEF. He noted the GEF does fund targeted research for decision making and sustainable development, but not for academic publication and advised that GEF funds should ultimately go towards action.

Closing

Day 2 was closed at 12:57pm with a recap by Mr. Muraai Herman and Ms. Hayley Weeks of the NES Partnerships Department.

Morning tea was at 10:40am to 11:20am, lunch was directly after the workshop, catered by the venue.

Workshop Outcomes

- Increased stakeholder understanding of the Global Environment Facility (including the GEF focal areas, project cycle and timelines)
- Provide stakeholders with overview of the GEF-8 resources available to the Cook Islands
- Inform stakeholders of pre-committed resources
- Increase stakeholder understanding of the small grants programme and new features under GEF-8
- Provided overview of the plastics integrated programme, including timelines.
- Provided overview of the Cook Islands child project under the Plastics IP with discussion session to identify additional ideas, risks etc.
- Provided overview of the Cook Islands GEF portfolio and national focal point roles
- Discussed elements for preparing an integrated project with focus on a target geography
- Provided an overview of NSDA 2020+ related to the GEF focal areas (national priorities to GEF key targets)
- Identified key issues/priorities for potential GEF projects
- Identified potential thematic areas and project ideas for GEF resourcing

Next Steps

- The NES to develop report consolidating the discussions of the GEF-8 dialogue and to disseminate to stakeholders and participants
- The NES to consolidate all materials from the GEF-8 National Dialogue and disseminate to all stakeholders and participants
- The NES to develop and disseminate post-dialogue survey to collate feedback from participants of the dialogue
- The NES to await decision from GEF council in June on the concept note for the Plastics IP
- The NES to plan for further discussions to allocate GEF-8 resourcing
- Stakeholders to discuss, agree and confirm allocate GEF-8 resourcing

Annexes

Annexes are accessible via the Cook Islands Environment Data Portal:

<https://cookislands-data.sprep.org/dataset/cook-islands-gef-8-national-dialogue-19th-20th-april-2023>

- Annex 1: National Dialogue Agenda
- Annex 2: NES Presentation Slides Day 1
- Annex 3: NES Presentation Slides Day 2
- Annex 4: Andrew Hume (GEF Sec) Presentation Slides Day 1
- Annex 5: Isabelle Vanderbeck (UNEP) Presentation Slides Day 1
- Annex 6: Participants Sign in sheets – GEF-8 National Dialogue
- Annex 8: Cook Islands RESPONSE Concept Note - Plastics Integrated Programme
- Annex 9: Activity sheets (raw) – GEF-8 National Dialogue