



Cook Islands GEF 7 Project ENUA

4th Quarter Progress Report 2024

Atlas Project ID:	00127363
Project Number/Code:	10780
PIMS #:	6565
Executing Agency:	Cook Islands National Environment Service
Full Project Title:	Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management, to safeguard the cook islands integrated eco-systems and species

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Date: 24 April, 2025

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SECTION 1: SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND HIGHLIGHTS

1.1 Catchment audit assessments - University of Newcastle

From October 22nd to October 30th, a team from the University of Newcastle (UON) conducted a detailed catchment audit across four stream catchments and areas of the lagoon. The team, consisting of two PhD students and two professors, collected water samples from various locations within the catchments to assess key water quality parameters, including nutrient levels. The samples were analyzed to identify other important aspects of the water quality, providing valuable data to inform ongoing environmental management efforts.

Midway through their visit, the UON team held two stakeholder consultations in the villages of Ngatangia and Takuvaine. These meetings served as an opportunity for all participants to learn more about the work the UON team was conducting to support the GEF 7 team. The consultations also provided a platform for community members to voice their thoughts and opinions on the ongoing work, and to highlight problematic areas they have observed. This valuable feedback will help the team prioritize certain areas for future focus. Additionally, the consultations allowed for a deeper understanding of the broader water quality work being undertaken by various ministries, addressing environmental concerns, and ensuring that efforts were not duplicated. Participants also discussed how to align ongoing projects to avoid overlap and make better use of resources.

In addition to their fieldwork, the UON team brought over essential equipment for the GEF 7 team, enabling them to continue conducting water quality catchment audit assessments in the future.





NES
NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT SERVICE
TU'ANGA TAPOROPORO
COOK ISLANDS

PROJECT ENUA
Enhancing Nature's Unique Areas

National Environment Service (NES)'s Project ENUA invites you to join a community meeting to discuss **Catchment Environmental Assessments** across Avana, Turangi, Avatiu & Takuvaine

Avana & Turangi
Tuesday 29th Oct, 5.30pm, Muri Meeting House

Avatiu & Takuvaine
Wednesday 30th Oct, 5.30pm, venue TBC

Light catering will be provided.
For more information contact: nes@cookislands.gov.ck

University of Newcastle Community Consultations Facebook Post Advertisement.

1.2 Muri Environment Care MOU signing

NES and MEC have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to strengthen their collaboration in environmental conservation. This partnership focuses on sharing resources, knowledge, and expertise to address local environmental issues such as conserving waterways and promoting sustainable practices in the Muri area. Key initiatives include training MEC on the Cook Islands Environmental Data Portal for better ecosystem management, raising community awareness through events, and using media to highlight the importance of a healthy environment. This MOU marks a significant step towards creating a sustainable and healthier community.



To learn more about the MOU signing, review the following attached [eDM](#)

1.3 Takitumu Conservation Area Discussions and Planning

The team met with TCA to discuss Project ENUA's support for their activities. The project will assist TCA with conservation efforts, management planning, capacity development, monitoring, and communication. Key priorities for TCA include rat eradication, water catchment testing, education, and using technology for mapping. The budget for these activities over the next four years totals \$109,450, covering costs for rat control, fieldwork, awareness materials, and maintenance. Action items from the meeting include TCA sending a letter outlining support needs, NES updating on the hiring of a Biodiversity Specialist, and potential collaboration with the University of Newcastle for water quality testing. An MOU may also be developed to define areas of support throughout the project.

1.4 Manuae Expedition

In October, a diverse team, including NES GEF7 Project Officer Fred Nicholas, joined the Manuae Enea Conservation Trust (MECT) for a conservation expedition on the remote Manuae Island. The team, which also included experts from the University of Auckland and Plant & Food Research, conducted vital ecological surveys on motus and the surrounding lagoon, focusing on reef health, lagoon conditions, and seabird populations. Despite challenging weather delays, the team successfully reached Manuae after a six-hour boat journey and spent three nights gathering data essential for future conservation strategies. This collaborative effort highlighted the importance of teamwork in advancing long-term environmental goals for the Cook Islands.



To learn more about the Manuae expedition, review the following attached [eDM](#).

1.5 UNCCD COP16

The Cook Islands National Environment Service (NES), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI), and Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) participated in the 16th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP16) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from 2-13 December. The conference, themed “Our Land. Our Future,” emphasized the urgency of addressing global challenges like drought, desertification, and land degradation, which affect billions worldwide. The Cook Islands delegation actively engaged in discussions, advocating for enhanced support for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and highlighting the need for resources and capacity-building to meet reporting obligations. Participation in multilateral environmental agreements like the UNCCD is essential for the Cook Islands, amplifying their voice internationally and ensuring their unique challenges are addressed through collaborative global efforts.



1.6 NES and Environmental Partnerships Strategy Day

The NES office held a successful strategy day in November at Nautilus, bringing together all four divisions—compliance, policy and planning, stewardship, and partnerships to discuss work plans and strengthen cross-team collaboration. This was followed by the NES partnerships division strategy day at the Edgewater Resort, where the team focused on bonding, sharing updates on ongoing projects, and prioritizing goals for the year ahead. Both events fostered a stronger sense of teamwork, improved communication, and set the stage for a more organized and efficient approach moving forward.



1.7 Project Steering Committee Meeting (21.11.24)

The project steering committee meeting for the GEF 7 Project focused on reviewing the progress of activities, addressing action items from the previous meeting, and discussing the quarter 1 information papers. The financial report was also reviewed to ensure the project is staying within budget. Additionally, the meeting provided an opportunity for open discussion, allowing committee members and the UNDP team to raise questions, share thoughts, and provide feedback on various aspects of the project. The endorsed meeting minutes of the project steering committee are attached as an annex to this progress report.

SECTION 2: OUTPUT RESULTS DESCRIPTION & TRACKING

This quarter's activities contributed towards the following project components, outcomes and outputs:

<i>Output</i>	<i>Activity</i>
Component 1: Mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across key development sectors.	
Outcome 1: Biodiversity and ecosystems services safeguards embedded in national and island governance frameworks, and policies, and institutional capacities strengthen across key development sectors (i.e., agriculture, infrastructure, tourism)	
Output 1.1: National Legislation, policies, strategies and plans amended or created to include gender issues and safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services from unsustainable land use activities of key development sectors.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Output 1.2: National Environment Information System (NEIS) developed and institutionalized to support intersectoral coordination, monitoring and integration of biodiversity and ecosystem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muri Environment Care Group MOU Signing • UNCCD COP16 • National Environment Service Strategy Day and NES Partnerships Division Strategy Day • Project Steering Committee Meeting

safeguards in land use planning development processes.	
Output 1.3: Execution and communication of the catchment audits	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Outcome 2: Ecosystems services restored, maintained and enhanced, and globally significant biodiversity safeguarded in priority catchments and managed areas	
Output 2.1: Audits completed for priority catchments, with key pollutant sources (including nutrients) and responsible parties identified and interventions prescribed (linked to output 1.1).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catchment Audit Assessments - University of Newcastle • UNCCD COP16
Output 2.2: Intersectoral catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area developed and implemented in partnership with key stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuae Expedition • Catchment Audit Assessments - University of Newcastle • Project Steering Committee Meeting
Output 2.3: Improved gender sensitive natural resource management in priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area achieved through adoption of innovative practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catchment Audit Assessments - University of Newcastle • Muri Environment Care Group MOU Signing
Component 2: Improving the management framework to effectively conserve a national protected areas system representative of Cook Islands biodiversity.	
Outcome 3: Globally significant biodiversity protected across Cook Islands through effective selection, design, management, monitoring and enforcement of its PAs systems	
Output 3.1: Management plans updated / developed and operational in target PAs, with legitimate governance structures in place that are inclusive of traditional management systems (i.e. House of Ariki), gender mainstreaming objectives,	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.

<p>and collaborative arrangements with landowners and local communities.</p>	
<p>Output 3.2: Management capacities in target Pas strengthened through application of PAC, PAMP, and tools (e.g., NEIS), and training and systems on biodiversity conservation, surveillance and monitoring.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Environment Service Strategy Day and NES Partnerships Division Strategy Day
<p>Output 3.3: Effective community conserved area demonstrated through a newly established Rarotonga Cloud Forest PA with collaborative agreements involving government, traditional leaders and communities.</p>	<p>No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.</p>
<p>Component 3: Raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender and monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results.</p>	
<p>Outcome 4: Greater understanding of values of conserving Cook Islands biodiversity and ecosystem services; adaptive management informed by M&E results; and dissemination of knowledge gained, and lessons learned.</p>	
<p>Output 4.1: Gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy developed and implemented, including annual action plans with targeted public awareness programmes to promote the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muri Environment Care Group MOU Signing • UNCCD COP16 • National Environment Service Strategy Day and NES Partnerships Division Strategy Day
<p>Output 4.2: Gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings developed and disseminated to stakeholders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuae Expedition • Muri Environment Care Group MOU Signing • UNCCD COP 16 • Project Steering Committee Meeting
<p>Output 4.3: Participatory monitoring and evaluation, including gender mainstreaming, informs project implementation, decision-making and lessons learned</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuae Expedition • National Environment Service Strategy Day and NES Partnerships Division Strategy Day • Project Steering Committee Meeting

SECTION 3: INDICATOR RESULTS DESCRIPTION & TRACKING

60% (9/15) of project indicators.

Indicator #	Indicator Description	Progress
Indicator 1	<p>Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cloud Forest - Suvarrow - Takutea - Takitumu Conservation Area 	<p>No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.</p>
Indicator 2	<p>Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suvarrow - Takutea - Manuae 	<p>In October 2024, Fred Nicholas joined a team to survey Manuae Island's reef, lagoon, and seabirds, gathering data for future conservation efforts.</p>
Indicator 3	<p>Area of landscapes under improved practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avana - Turangi - Avatiu - Takuvaine 	<p>From October 22-30, a University of Newcastle team audited water quality in four catchments and the lagoon, held community consultations, and provided equipment for future assessments.</p>
Indicator 4	<p>Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (hectares; excluding protected areas)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avana - Turangi - Avatiu 	<p>No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.</p>

	- Takuvaine	
Indicator 5	Greenhouse emissions mitigated.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Indicator 6	Number of direct project beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as a co-benefit of GEF investment	The team has held consultations and developed meeting tracking sheets, which includes a column to record participants' gender. This helps us break down the number of direct beneficiaries by gender.
Indicator 7	Legislation, policies and safeguard measures adopted and under implementation in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - catchment management plans; - PA management plans; and - Island Environment Management Plans (IEMPs, within Island Development Plans [IDPs]). 	A Technical Advisor and local NGO consultant team to develop a management Plan for the Southern Passages of Rarotonga (within Rarortonga's Marae Moana marine protected area) to improve biodiversity and ecosystem conservation of the area.
Indicator 8	Regulations developed or updated to reflect strengthened biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Indicator 9	Improved capacities of key development sectors, as measured by improvements in capacity development scorecard assessments of (a) NES, (b) CIT, (c) MOA, (D) ICI.	Efforts are ongoing to assess and improve the capacities of these key sectors (NES, CIT, MOA, and ICI).
Indicator 10	Priority actions in the intersectoral catchment management plans reflected in the work programmes/budgets of	As of December 2024, efforts are ongoing to integrate the priority actions from the intersectoral catchment management plans into the work programmes and budgets of the NES, MOA, ICI, and CIT. Initial discussions

	NES, MOA, ICI, and CIT by the end of the project.	and planning have begun, and progress is being tracked to ensure alignment by the end of the project.
Indicator 11	Increased adoption of sustainable natural resource management, as measured by (a) number of innovative practices piloted in the priority catchments; (b) reduction in the use of glyphosate, paraquat, and imidacloprid, and (c) number of tourism operators certified under the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification Scheme.	CIT are currently redesigning their Cook Islands Quality Assurance and Mana Tiaki Eco-accreditation scheme, which may require amendments to be made to part c) of this indicator.
Indicator 12	Improved science-based protected area management, as measured by information on biodiversity resource inventories and vegetative area/cover systematically compiled.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Indicator 13	Biodiversity threats reduced, as measured by the number of sites reporting absence of invasive rats after eradication interventions.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Indicator 14	Level of agreement to the following statement: Conservation areas/Ra'ui have improved the status of ecological systems in the Cook Islands.	The University of Newcastle KAP survey team will soon share their final report with the Project ENUA team. This information will help us identify the areas that require the most attention and improvement.
Indicator 15	Increase in flow of knowledge and information on best practices, as measured by (a) the cumulative number of visits to the NES website and social media platforms, and (b) the number of knowledge products generated and disseminated (case studies, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc.)	As of now, this indicator is a work in progress. The team is collaborating with key project stakeholders to develop factsheets and other knowledge products to share best practices.

SECTION 4: FINANCIAL SUMMARY AND PROGRESS

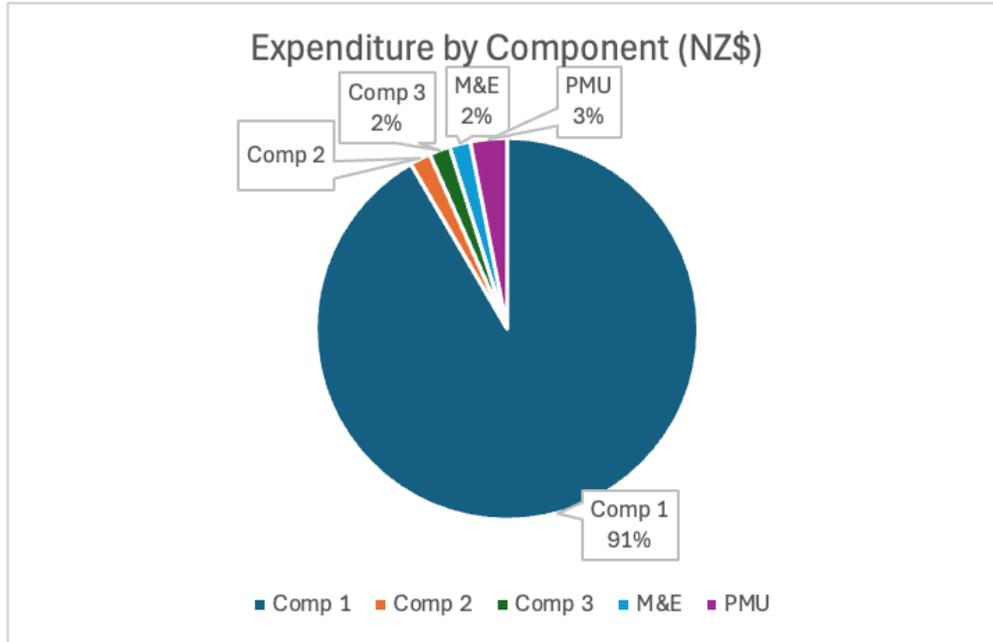
At the start of Q4 we had an in-country balance of NZ\$75,185.50, representing 35% remaining of funds received earlier in the year. These were fully utilised and liquidated within the quarter, with endorsed financial reports submitted to UNDP on 21st November 2024.

A summary of this expenditure across components and budget lines was reported to the Project Steering Committee (PSC) on 21st November 2024 and forms part of the endorsed PSC meeting minutes (refer to Annex 1), with a summary provided below:

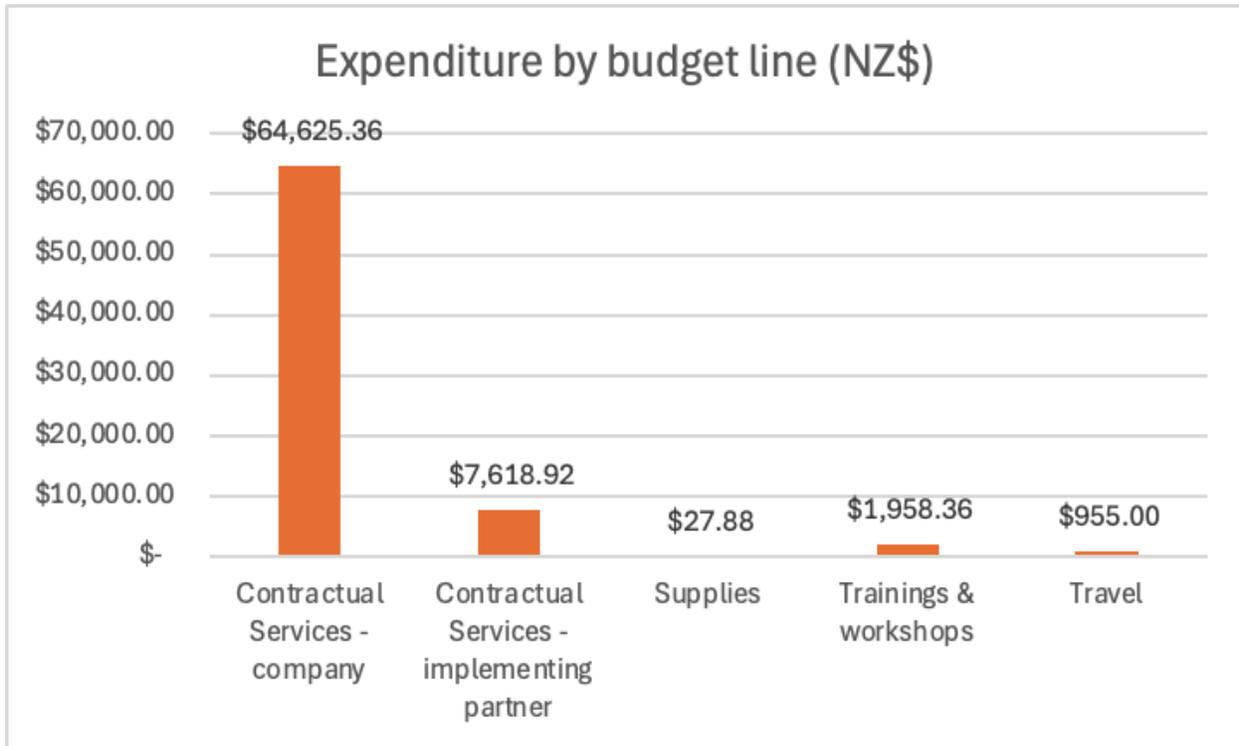
<i>Narration</i>	<i>NZ\$ Amount</i>	<i>% budget</i>
Total amount received	\$ 214,254.63	100%
Q1 liquidation	\$ 42,055.51	20%
Remaining balance	\$ 172,199.12	80%
Q2 expenditure	\$ 45,814.97	21%
Remaining balance	\$ 126,384.15	59%
Q3 expenditure	\$ 51,198.65	24%
Remaining balance	\$ 75,185.50	35%
Q4 expenditure	\$ 75,185.52	35%
Remaining balance	\$ (0.02)	0%

<i>Component</i>	<i>Expenditure (NZ\$)</i>	<i>%</i>
Comp 1	\$ 68,869.42	92%
Comp 2	\$ 1,330.70	2%
Comp 3	\$ 1,330.70	2%
M&E	\$ 1,330.70	2%

PMU	\$ 2,324.00	3%
Total	\$ 75,185.52	100%



Budget line	Expenditure (NZ\$)	%
Contractual Services - company	\$ 64,625.36	86%
Contractual Services - implementing partner	\$ 7,618.92	10%
Supplies	\$ 27.88	0%
Trainings & workshops	\$ 1,958.36	3%
Travel	\$ 955.00	1%
Total	\$ 75,185.52	100%



As can be seen from the information presented above, the majority of this expenditure was on Component 1 and Contractual Services - Company, which consisted of contract stage payments to the University of Newcastle for the delivery of services in the catchment audit assessment activities.

The project team subsequently made an additional advance request for remaining Q4 funds to UNDP, amounting to **\$101,146.19**. Once these are fully expended they will also be reported and liquidated, and the Q1 2025 advance request will also be made to ensure activities can progress efficiently in the new year.

SECTION 5: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & GENDER

Between October and December 2024, several meetings were held to advance various aspects of the Project ENUA and related initiatives. Key discussions included collaboration with NZ Landcare Trust on catchment audits, development of factsheets with Cook Islands Tourism and MOA, and a national consultation on the Food Systems Dialogue. Meetings also focused on marine spatial planning with NZ MFAT, a draft MOU for TCA, and the Southern Rarotonga Passage Management Plan. Additionally, the team worked on reviewing tourism factsheets, refining the project's work plan, and transitioning to 1-week sprints for more efficient task management. Regular updates and coordination with stakeholders ensured progress on various action items.

SECTION 7: LESSONS LEARNED, GOOD PRACTICES & SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

This quarter, the team learned how to better coordinate future visits from teams assisting with project activities, ensuring smoother collaboration and support. Communication with key stakeholders has been consistent, and we plan to maintain this strong communication throughout the project. The team also learned how to overcome challenges together while strengthening relationships and gaining a deeper understanding of each other, the project, and its activities. We had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork, gaining valuable insights from the University of Newcastle on the quality of our catchments, while also listening to the community's concerns about environmental issues, which were important for the team to consider. Additionally, the team successfully signed an MOU with a local NGO, enabling closer collaboration to achieve shared environmental goals. Lastly, we had a great opportunity to learn about the challenges of international negotiations and how the Pacific faces difficulties when working with large developed countries.

APPENDICES

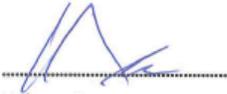
Appendix 1: [Endorsed PSC meeting minutes_21.11.2024](#)

Appendix 2: Signed Muri Environment Care Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

18/10/2024, 08:28 MOU - NES & MEC.docx - Google Docs



SIGNED ON BEHALF OF THE ORGANISATIONS BY:

 Anne Tierney Group Lead Muri Environment Care Date: 18/10/2024	 Halatoa Fua Director National Environment Service Date: 18 th October 2024
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