

COOK ISLANDS NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN NASSAU NBSAP REPORT

NASSAU COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Wednesday 23 April 2025



Nassau Community – united and proud

Report written by Karen Silk, NES
April 2025

NASSAU NBSAP COMMUNITY WORKSHOP REPORT

Location: Nassau Community Hall

Facilitator: National Environment Service (NES)

Elizabeth Munro, Rima Moeka'a, Kas Silk and Moana Tetauru,

Participants: Island Council, and Community members

Summary

The NBSAP consultation in Nassau provided an opportunity for the island community to share their experiences and concerns regarding biodiversity changes over time. The community's generosity, warmth, and commitment to conservation were evident throughout the session. Group presentations ended with a playful singing challenge that brought joy and togetherness to the evening.

Participants

Nassau Community

NBSAP 2002 Presentation

A summary of the original 2002 NBSAP was presented to highlight progress and challenges over the past two decades. This helped contextualize current efforts and community input toward the 2024–2025 update.



Nassau welcoming committee greets us ashore

NBSAP Background

The NBSAP aims to ensure all 12 inhabited islands of the Cook Islands are consulted to create a national plan rooted in community realities. The plan builds on traditional systems and modern conservation science to protect biodiversity for future generations.

Importance of Biodiversity

Residents highlighted the central role of biodiversity in their daily lives, from food and medicine to cultural practices and livelihoods. Changes in the health of coconut trees, bird populations, and taro production were identified as indicators of biodiversity loss.

National Targets

The new guiding national biodiversity targets were discussed, focusing on five key strategic goals:

- Area management and restoration
- Species management
- Threats management (including climate change impacts and pollution)
- Integrating knowledge and learning for sustainability
- Mainstreaming policies and legislation

Community Workshop Discussion

1. Area Management and Restoration

- A **raui** site was established in 2015, though the boundaries have since changed. The community expressed interest in re-establishing a more consistent system.
- Past practices of conservation were stronger; there is an expressed desire to revive these efforts.
- There was also mention of the concerns for potential damage to the environment caused by the metal from stranded ships

2. Species Management

- Species once abundant—including **kaveu** (*Birgus latro* – Coconut crabs), birds, and taro—have declined in population or health, with particular concern noted around the reduced size of **kaveu**.
- Coconut trees are threatened by termite (***Neotermes rainbow***, Coconut Termite) infestation, and medicinal plants are becoming harder to find.

3. Threats Management

- Plastic pollution, particularly from imported goods and discarded household items, was recognised as a growing issue affecting both land and sea ecosystems.
- E-waste and white ware accumulation is increasing due to more consistent power supply, but there is limited capacity for removal or proper disposal.
- Concerns were raised about metal buried along the coastal area, with visible evidence of leakage into the lagoon, potentially causing long-term environmental harm.
- Termite (*Neotermes rainbow*, Coconut Termite) infestation in young coconut trees was reported as a growing problem affecting agricultural productivity and local biodiversity.
- Residents reflected on past agricultural chemical use, which was intended to control pests but has had ongoing ecological impacts.
- Shifts in traditional food sources, including declining bird and coconut crab populations, are being attributed to environmental degradation and changing land use practices.
- Like Pukapuka, Nassau is also affected by sewage-related concerns, where the lack of proper waste treatment has been noted as a pressing issue.

4. Integrating Knowledge and Learning for Sustainability

- Elders shared observations from as far back as 1996 to show the gradual decline of biodiversity.
- There is a strong desire to pass traditional conservation knowledge to younger generations and include it in local planning.

5. Mainstreaming Policies and Financial Mechanisms

- Questions were raised about the role of national environmental funding and how NES can support waste removal and management in partnership with ICI.
- The community supported continued collaboration and tailored assistance.

Recommendations

- Support the re-establishment of consistent raui protections in Nassau based on community-defined rules and monitoring.
- Support treatment and removal of e-waste and address termite infestations affecting key tree species.
- Capture and integrate traditional ecological knowledge into the NBSAP framework.
- Provide ongoing support for island-led conservation initiatives.



One of many generous spreads by the ladies of Nassau.

Conclusion

The Nassau consultation emphasized the island's deep connection to its natural environment and the urgency of addressing emerging threats to biodiversity. Community insights will be integrated into the updated NBSAP to ensure it represents the realities of the Pa Enua.

Acknowledgements

Meitaki ma'ata to the Nassau community for your warm hospitality, generous spirit, and open-hearted participation in our final NBSAP consultation. Your thoughtful reflections, meaningful discussions, and beautiful singing brought the workshop to life—especially the joyful phrase from the imene: “Nassau’s the best.” It truly captured the heart of the evening.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the women of Nassau who chose to remain on the island—foregoing the annual inter-island volleyball match in Pukapuka—to host us and take part in the workshop. Your presence made a lasting impact, and your contributions were essential in capturing a complete picture of Nassau’s environmental priorities and hopes for the future. And also to our wonderful hosts Papa Jack and family.

We also extend a warm ‘meitaki ma’ata’ to our NES officer, ‘Captain’ **Joe Mataio**, whose quiet strength and steady presence were felt throughout our time in Nassau and Pukapuka. Whether assisting with boat travel, helping coordinate logistics, or arranging the memorable tractor ride on Motu Ko with his brother, Joe was consistently observant, helpful, and dependable. His calm presence, steady support, and remarkable patience did not go unnoticed. We are thankful for his contribution to the success of the visit and dedication to his community is deeply valued.



Ladies joyfully singing “*Nassau’s the best!*”



NES Officer ‘captain’ Joe Mataio skippering the ferry

A baby Black Noddy



The beautifully tendered, lush ‘**raui**’ gardens in the centre of Nassau



Nassau atoll