

COOK ISLANDS
NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN
PUKAPUKA NBSAP REPORT

PUKAPUKA COMMUNITY WORKSHOP
Tuesday 22 April and Thursday 24 April 2025



Pukapuka Community Workshop above, held on Tue 22nd Apr and Apii Niuia students, teachers and NGO's below, held on Thu 24th Apr 2025.

Report written by Karen Silk, NES
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PUKAPUKA NBSAP COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS REPORT

Location: Both workshops were held in the CICC Sunday School Hall, Pukapuka

Facilitator: National Environment Service (NES) Elizabeth Munro, Rima Moeka'a, Kas Silk and Moana Tetauru

Participants: Island Council, and Community members

Summary

As part of the 2024–2025 Cook Islands National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) update, two workshops were held in Pukapuka to ensure inclusive community engagement and alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The first workshop, held on Tuesday 22 April, engaged the broader community through five breakout groups, featuring a spirited singing challenge with biodiversity messages woven into songs and storytelling. The second session, on Thursday 24 April, included students and teachers from Apii Niua School and local NGOs. Opening with a student-led song, groups enthusiastically followed with their own presentations highlighting native species, food security, and conservation themes. We are especially grateful to the students and teachers who participated during the school holidays, arriving dressed in uniform and contributing with energy and pride.

The NES team also participated in the ANZAC parade, attended the Pukapuka vs Nassau Volleyball Final, and conducted site assessments of *raui* areas on **Motu Ko and Motu Kotawa**. Throughout the visit, the hospitality of Pukapuka's communities—who took turns preparing our meals, shared cultural music, and honoured us with a special serving of **kaveu** (coconut crab) —was outstanding. These experiences underscore Pukapuka's deep cultural and ecological connection to biodiversity stewardship.

Participants

- Pukapuka Island Council
- Community Members
- Niua School (Years 6–8) students and teachers
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

NBSAP 2002 Presentation

A brief overview of the original 2002 NBSAP was presented to establish context for the 2024–2025 update. Participants learned about progress made, persistent challenges, and the need for updated strategies that reflect current biodiversity threats, knowledge, and international frameworks such as the GBF.



Pukapuka Island Council and NES staff

NBSAP Background

Participants were introduced to the purpose and structure of the revised NBSAP and how each island's consultation would shape the national strategy. The NBSAP aligns with the Global Biodiversity Framework and supports locally-driven implementation that upholds traditional knowledge, promotes sustainable practices, and strengthens environmental governance.



NES Officer Iorama engaging with the students

Importance of Biodiversity

Discussions emphasised biodiversity's role in sustaining life—from food security and traditional medicine to climate resilience and cultural identity. Community members stressed the importance of protecting coastal ecosystems, wetland areas, and forest resources, and recognised key native species that form the basis of their way of life.

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

- Pukapuka maintains an active *raui* system across two motu, managed by village-level committees.
- Annual meetings and vananga facilitate community-wide alignment and rule-setting.
- Wetland and taro planting areas are viewed as essential ecological and food production zones.
- Overcrowding in closed raui zones was identified as a concern requiring improved monitoring.
- Youth participants voiced concerns over the impacts of climate change on marine life and coral reefs.

2. Species Management

- Priority species include

Plant:

Ngangie - *Pemphis acidula*, Pemphis Ngangie Raupunupunu

Purou - *Hibiscus tiliaceus*, Tree Hibiscus 'Au (*Pulou*)

Wetau – *Calophyllum inophyllum*, Tamanu

Niu - *Cocos nucifera*, Coconut Palm *Nū*

Puka - *Pisonia Grandis*, Pisonia - *Pukatea*

Pukama - *Hernandia nymphaeifolia*, Lantern Tree *Puka (Puaama)*

Wawa - *Colocasia esculenta*, Wetland Taro *Taro*

Animal:

Ngongo - *Anous stolidus*, Brown Noddy *Ngōio*

Lupe - *Ducula pacific*, Pacific Pigeon *Rupe*

Tavake – *Phaethon rubricauda*, Red-tailed Tropicbird *Tavake*

Kaveu - *Birgus latro*, Coconut Crab *Kaveu*

Ariki ature - *Selar crumenophthalmus*, Purse-eyed or Bigeye Scad *Ature*

3. Threats Management

- Invasive species such as balloon vine, merremia, and pigs were identified as major threats.
- Waste management remains a challenge, with no formal recycling and widespread rubbish dumping.
- Sewage and water quality concerns stem from the lack of adequate treatment systems.
- Coral is sometimes removed from the lagoon for building purposes, damaging marine habitats.
- Plastic pollution and burning rubbish were cited as pressing issues.
- Climate change was linked to rising water temperatures and disrupted fish populations.

4. Integrating Knowledge and Learning for Sustainability

- Traditional penalties such as *akatamariki* remain a strong cultural enforcement tool.
- Students actively engaged in workshop discussions and delivered presentations.
- Concerns were raised over the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge, with calls for more intergenerational education.

5. Mainstreaming Policies and Financial Mechanisms

- Island by-laws are central to governance and are reviewed through regular community processes.
- Continued local autonomy in rule-making and environmental enforcement was strongly supported.

Recommendations

- Recognise and support Pukapuka's *raui* system as a model for community-based conservation (GBF Target 1).
- Develop tailored waste and invasive species action plans (GBF Targets 7 & 8).
- Strengthen climate resilience through nature-based coastal protection (GBF Target 10).
- Expand youth and intergenerational education programs grounded in traditional knowledge (GBF Target 15).
- Support island-led governance frameworks by integrating *raui* committees into national biodiversity planning (GBF Target 22).

Conclusion

The Pukapuka consultations confirmed the island's deep-rooted commitment to biodiversity protection through traditional governance systems and community action. These insights directly inform the revised NBSAP's goals, indicators, and implementation measures under the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Acknowledgement

Meitaki ma'ata to the people of Pukapuka for your whole-hearted welcome, unwavering hospitality, and enthusiastic involvement throughout the NBSAP workshops. From heartfelt discussions to lively performances, your community spirit and dedication to conservation made this consultation both vibrant and deeply meaningful. Your voices are a powerful reflection of how traditional knowledge and island values continue to guide our national biodiversity journey.



Teachers and NGO's brainstorming ideas

We humbly thank ***Pepeu Henry Makira Ariki, the Island Council, Mayor Levi Walewaoa, and Executive Officer Nomairaro 'Mai' Melota*** for granting us the opportunity to visit the islands of Pukapuka and Nassau and for your exceptional support and organisation throughout our stay. We are also sincerely grateful to ***Mama-Koyi Tiere*** for all her behind-the-scenes work in coordinating logistics and ensuring everything ran smoothly.

We also extend a sincere 'meitaki ma'ata' to our NES officer, 'Captain' Iorama Punga, who played a central role in the success of our visit to Pukapuka. As well as safely navigating the lagoon and guiding us to Motu Ko and Motu Kotawa, Iorama arranged the school workshop and proudly led the Boys' Brigade as flag bearer during the ANZAC parade. His quiet leadership, humility, and pride in his community were evident throughout. We are grateful for his support, remarkable patience and his valuable contribution to his community.



A favourite swimming spot on Motu Kotawa

Entrance to Pukapuka's original wharf





Pukapuka Niua School students, teachers and NGO's in their breakout groups in deep discussion



Apii tamariki boys presenting their findings



NES Raro Staff being fare welled by Mayor Levi Walewaoa, Executive Officer Nomairaro 'Mai' Melota and NES Officer 'Captain' Joe.

