

**COOK ISLANDS**  
**NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN**  
**KOUTU NUI CONSULTATION REPORT**

**Koutu Nui Consultation Report**  
**14th October 2024**



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## Summary

The National Environment Service (NES) was invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Koutu Nui held at the Red Cross Centre, Tupapa, Rarotonga on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2024. The AGM gathered 23 members of the kavana, mataiapo and rangatira of the Cook Islands, some of whom were captured in the above image.

The workshop highlighted the importance of enhancing traditional conservation practices, particularly Raui, a customary system enforced by Aronga Mana (local leadership) to protect natural resources. Discussions centered on reinforcing the Raui system by empowering traditional leaders to impose it more effectively, expanding its boundaries, and addressing the ongoing lack of respect for these practices. Additionally, there was a strong emphasis on integrating traditional knowledge with modern conservation approaches to manage threats like invasive species, control pollution, and preserve sensitive ecosystems.

Participants called for mainstreaming policies that support sustainable practices and aligning them with available funding, while also addressing emerging issues such as invasive species

management and clarifying land ownership for sustainable land use. Overall, the workshop aimed to strengthen cultural practices, manage environmental threats, and promote sustainable biodiversity management through a blend of traditional and scientific approaches.

## Participants

A register of attendees is attached as Annex A. This is the Koutu Nui register and not specific to the NBSAP.

## NBSAP 2002 Presentation

### NBSAP Background

An overview of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) was presented by (name), outlining its history and development since 2002. The presentation detailed how the NBSAP fits within national, regional, and international biodiversity frameworks and emphasized its role in advancing the goals of biodiversity conservation.

### Importance of Biodiversity

The presentation highlighted the crucial role biodiversity plays in ecosystem health, human well-being, and climate regulation. It emphasized the need for a comprehensive biodiversity strategy to protect critical resources such as food, water, medicine, and environmental resilience.

### Rapid Review of the 2002 NBSAP

A rapid review of the 2002 NBSAP, led by Rima, examined the strategy's successes and areas for improvement. Strengths included broad community engagement and the strategy's comprehensive approach to addressing biodiversity issues. However, the review also noted a lack of updates over the past 22 years, particularly in the areas of financial mechanisms and implementation strategies.

### Success Stories

Several success stories were shared, including:

- The formulation of the National Biodiversity and Ethnobiology Database.
- The development of the National Invasive Species Strategy.
- Rat eradication initiatives on selected islands.
- Coordination efforts with various stakeholders to address biodiversity challenges.

## National Biodiversity Targets

New guiding national biodiversity targets were introduced, focusing on the following five strategic goals:

1. Area management and restoration.
2. Species management.
3. Threats management, including climate change impacts and pollution.
4. Integrating knowledge and learning for sustainability.
5. Mainstreaming policies, funding and legislation.

## Open Discussion

The open discussion session followed the NBSAP presentation where a wide range of subjects was expressed, highlighting both the diversity of challenges and the shared commitment to biodiversity conservation across all islands. Each representative contributed valuable local perspectives, offering practical solutions tailored to their unique environmental conditions.

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### Strategic Goal 1: Area Management

The discussions highlighted the importance of enhancing traditional conservation practices, particularly Raui, which is enforced by Aronga Mana (local leadership) to protect natural resources. The following points were discussed:

- **Strengthening Raui:** There is a need to reinforce the traditional conservation practice of Raui across the community. Emphasis was placed on empowering the Matai'apo (traditional leaders) to impose Raui within their respective Matakeinanga (communities).
- **Expanding Raui Boundaries:** Consideration was given to establishing extended Raui zones, potentially 100 meters or more, in key areas to provide broader protection.
- **Respect for Raui:** A major concern was the ongoing lack of respect for traditional practices. Strategies to encourage compliance and recognition of Raui were discussed.
- **Role of Families:** It was recommended that families actively implementing Raui should receive more support and recognition.
- **Strengthening Traditional Systems:** There was a call to uphold and respect Akonoanga Maori (Maori culture) and Peu Maori (cultural practices) through stronger traditional systems.

### Strategic Goal 2: Species Management

The discussion covered the management of species, both invasive and native, with particular attention to biosecurity and natural pest control:

- **Invasive Species:** Participants expressed concerns about the threat posed by invasive species like Mile-a-Minute and Ro Kerekere, which disrupt local ecosystems.
- **Atiu's Red Tulip Issue:** The group acknowledged the need to assist the Atiu community in controlling the spread of invasive red tulips, as previously promised.
- **Natural Pest Control:** There were suggestions to continue initiatives, such as the Ministry of Agriculture's (MOA) natural control measures against pests like Rango One on Atiu.
- **Fire Ants in Mauke:** The spread of fire ants, primarily through the movement of wood and furniture, was discussed. There is a need to implement measures to prevent further infestations.
- **Food Security:** Strengthening biosecurity measures to safeguard local food systems was deemed crucial. Special attention was given to imported crops like potatoes, ensuring compliance with food safety standards.

### Strategic Goal 3: Threats Management

Participants discussed various threats impacting the environment, with a focus on pollution control and preservation of sensitive ecosystems:

- **Pollution Control:** Developing strategies to reduce pollution, particularly in coastal and marine environments, was emphasized.
- **Stream Clean-Up:** Community-driven efforts to clean streams and remove household rubbish were encouraged as a means to improve water quality.
- **Protection of Sensitive Areas:** It was recognized that areas such as wetlands play a vital role in filtering and cleaning contaminants, and efforts should be made to preserve these environments.

### Strategic Goal 4: Learning for Sustainability

The group emphasized the importance of integrating traditional and modern knowledge for sustainable biodiversity management:

- **Strengthening Traditional Knowledge:** Reinforcing traditional practices surrounding Raui and biodiversity conservation was identified as a key focus area.
- **Biodiversity Awareness:** Participants advocated for increased awareness of biodiversity issues, promoting the integration of traditional and scientific knowledge in conservation efforts.
- **GIS Mapping:** The use of GIS tools was recommended for monitoring and managing key conservation areas effectively.

### Strategic Goal 5: Mainstreaming Policies and Funding

The discussions explored ways to incorporate environmental policies into mainstream practices and align them with available funding:

- **Policy Integration:** There was a consensus on the need to mainstream environmental policies that support sustainable practices and conservation initiatives.
- **Funding Alignment:** Efforts should be made to ensure that policies align with funding opportunities, enabling more effective implementation.

### Other Matters

Additional issues were raised, with recommendations to address newly introduced species and strengthen policies related to Raui:

- **Newly Introduced Species:** Concerns about species like Ro Kerekere were noted, with suggestions for MOA to support management efforts.



- **Strengthening Raui Policies:** Participants proposed enhancing policies related to Raui, including enforcing stricter penalties for non-compliance.
- **Land Ownership and Legislation:** There was a call to clarify land ownership laws, particularly concerning Crown lands, to support sustainable land management practices.

## Recommendations and Next Steps:

- Implement the discussed strategies for reinforcing Raui practices and expanding protected zones.
- Coordinate with MOA and other agencies for invasive species control and biosecurity measures.
- Develop community-led pollution control initiatives and organize stream clean-ups.
- Promote biodiversity awareness and the integration of traditional and scientific conservation methods.
- Align policies with funding opportunities to facilitate the implementation of sustainable practices.

## Conclusion

The Koutu Nui Consultation highlighted the importance of merging traditional conservation practices with modern strategies to achieve sustainable biodiversity management. The discussions underscored the need to strengthen Raui and other customary practices, while also addressing emerging environmental threats such as invasive species and pollution. The integration of traditional knowledge with scientific approaches was identified as a critical pathway for effective conservation efforts.

The workshop outcomes reinforced a shared commitment among participants to enhance local leadership roles in conservation, particularly by empowering traditional leaders to implement and enforce Raui practices more robustly. Additionally, it was evident that aligning policy development with available funding is essential for long-term environmental sustainability.

Moving forward, the National Environment Service (NES) will collaborate with key stakeholders to implement the recommended strategies, ensuring that policies are adaptive and reflective of both traditional and contemporary conservation needs. This approach will help safeguard the Cook Islands' unique biodiversity and cultural heritage for future generations.

## Annex A. Koutu Nui AGM attendance sheet

Note that this is not a NES attendance sheet, rather it is the Koutu Nui's attendance sheet for their AGM meeting.

### 2024 Receipts

Attendance List - Rarotonga Day 1  
2024 AGM KOUTU NUI



CUSTOMARY TITLE	NAME	ADDRESS
1 Tiikura Mataiapo	Mrs Tai Adamson	Puaikura
2 Ngarepa Mataiapo	Mrs Makiroa Tua Nicholas	Te-Au-o-Tonga
3 TeTika komono	Mrs Philomen Williams	Takitumu
4 Tamakeu Mataiapo	Joseph Heather	Takitumu
5 Paroro Mataiapo	Mrs Rongo Preston	Takitumu
6 Utunui vaa Ara'ara (Rongomatane Ariki_	Rangi Tutaka-Tatuava	Atiu
7 Vaikai Mataiapo Tutara	Sonny Daniel	Takitumu
8 Ara Ki te Ra Maraiapo	Retire Puapii	Aitutaki
9 Apii Rangatira (Tamakeu Mataiapo)	Mrs Parau Williams	Takitumu
10 Vakapora Mataiapo	Mii Nicholls	Te-Au-o-Tonga
11 Ngarue Rangatira (Tamakeu Mataiapo)	William Cuthers	Takitumu
12 Tiori Rangatira (Vakatini Ariki)	Nooroa Teina	Te-Au-o-Tonga
13 Koia Rangatira (Tamakeu Mataiapo)	Joseph Manuel	Takitumu
14 Tinokura Mataiapo	Tapuni Williams	Atiu
15 TePa Mataiapo Tutara	Ms Imogen Ingram	Takitumu
16 Ita'ata Rangatira	Ms Noeline Browne	Takitumu
17 Tiotekai Mataiapo Tutara	Glassie Utia	Puaikura
18 Nia Mataiapo	Ms Marjorie Boaza	Takitumu
19 Kamoe Mataiapo	Ian Karika	Te-Au-o-Tonga
20 Kiingati Mataiapo	Teva Simiona	Aitutaki
21 Utariki Mataiapo	Teapai Manuela	Aitutaki
22 Taiakapu Mataiapo	Mrs Puna Moo	Mauke
23 Raitia Mataiapo	Ms Joanne Rongoape Stevens	Mauke