

COOK ISLANDS
NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN
RAKAHANGA NBSAP REPORT

RAKAHANGA COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

29th October 2024



Report by Karen Silk, NES
November 2024

Facilitator: Halatoa Fua, Rima Moeka'a, Kura Moeka'a, Sandee Cook and Kas Silk
Participants: Island Council, and Community members

Summary

On the 29th of October 2024, the Island community of Rakahanga welcomed us with heartfelt hospitality, singing, and a beautiful meal. With 28 attendees, the workshop followed an Island Council meeting and saw strong community engagement, especially during group activities. Our team from the National Environment Service (NES) arrived by barge from Manihiki and stayed overnight to facilitate in-depth discussions on the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), the new Environment Bill, and Project ISLANDS. Site visits were conducted the following day prior to our return trip to Manihiki, focusing on local conservation and waste management efforts. This report captures key points from the council meeting and workshop.

Participants

Signed registers attached as Annex A

Workshop Agenda

Attached as Annex B

NBSAP 2002 Presentation

NBSAP Background

Rima Moeka'a provided an overview of the NBSAP's history and development, emphasizing the 2002 NBSAP's alignment with national, regional, and international frameworks. She highlighted its relevance to the broader goals of biodiversity conservation and protection.



Importance of Biodiversity

The presentation underscored biodiversity's vital role in ecosystem stability, human well-being, and climate regulation, stressing the need for a robust biodiversity plan to ensure food security, clean water, medicinal resources, and environmental resilience.

Rapid Review of the 2002 NBSAP

Consultant Rima Moeka'a presented a rapid review of the 2002 NBSAP, evaluating its effectiveness and identifying gaps, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. While strengths included broad community involvement and comprehensive coverage of biodiversity issues, the review also highlighted the need for updates after 22 years and the establishment of financial mechanisms for implementation.

Success Stories

Several success stories were shared, such as the development of the National Invasive Species Strategy, rat eradication efforts on selected islands, and the coordination with various stakeholders on biodiversity issues.

National Targets

The new guiding national biodiversity targets were introduced, 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

Rakahanga Community Environment Workshop

Points of discussion

Strategic Goal 1: Area Management

- **Rauai System:** Strengthening the Rauai system was a priority, including limiting activities like pig hunting in designated zones. Participants emphasized clear signage, community awareness, and seasonal protection of resources such as reefs (for koura crayfish) and coconut crabs, particularly during cyclone seasons or major events.
- **Fish Pond Conservation:** Milkfish ponds, a critical resource under the Rauai system, were highlighted for their ecological importance. Concerns over lagoon encroachment were raised, with suggestions for protective barriers and sustainable management practices.
- **Coastal Erosion:** King tides and sand mining were identified as significant causes of coastal erosion. The community proposed planting tamanu trees and native vegetation to stabilize shorelines.
- **Invasive Plants and Habitat Restoration:** Restoration efforts included reintroducing bamboo for fishing, planting fruit trees (e.g., lemon and lychee), and expanding tamanu tree planting to prevent soil erosion and enhance biodiversity.
- **Waste Disposal:** Designated waste disposal areas were recommended to address pollution and water quality issues caused by current practices.



Sand Mining: Concerns about sand mining accelerating erosion led to calls for stricter regulations to protect vulnerable areas.

Strategic Goal 2: Species Management

- **Decline in Key Species:** Climate-related pressures and human activities have led to declines in species such as paua, ariri (milkfish), kuku (mussels), octopus, and turtles, along with food plants like chilli peppers and figs.
- **Rat Eradication:** Rats were identified as a major threat to motu biodiversity. Effective eradication programs are needed to protect species and ecosystems.
- **Invasive Pests:** Red ants, white flies, and uncontrolled cat populations pose significant threats to vegetation and biodiversity. Biosecurity measures and biocontrol strategies were recommended to address these issues.
- **Traditional Knowledge:** Preserving traditional fishing methods while adapting to modern practices was emphasized to ensure sustainable species management.
- **Legislation Support:** The Environment Act was discussed as a framework to strengthen protections for native species and improve control measures for invasive threats.

Strategic Goal 3: Threats Management

- **Climate Change Impacts:** Rising temperatures, coral bleaching, and droughts were recognized as critical challenges affecting ecosystems and fishing practices. Replanting and monitoring efforts were proposed to mitigate these impacts.
- **Plastic Pollution:** Plastic waste from ships and neighboring islands was noted as a persistent issue. Strategies included waste management improvements, designated storage areas, and data collection through Project ISLANDS to guide adaptive solutions.
- **Waste and Health Risks:** Burning plastics and burying e-waste create environmental and health risks. The community called for improved waste systems and identification of safe disposal hotspots.

Strategic Goal 4: Integrating Knowledge and Learning for Sustainability

- **Community Education:** Schools were identified as key to fostering environmental stewardship among youth, encouraging them to act as guardians of the land.
- **Quarterly Tutaka (Cleanups):** Community-wide cleanup drives were highlighted as effective in maintaining environmental hygiene and promoting shared responsibility.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Emphasis was placed on preserving traditional knowledge, such as the Raui system, weaving, and fishing, to sustain cultural practices and connect the community to their environment.
- **Youth Engagement:** Community workshops focused on educating youth about sustainability, ensuring that environmental practices are passed on to future generations.

Strategic Goal 5: Mainstreaming and Integrating National, Regional, and International Policies/Legislation

- **Island By-Laws:** Reviewing and updating Rakahanga's environmental by-laws to address challenges like sand mining and waste management was strongly recommended.
- **Dedicated Environmental Officers:** The community emphasized the need for an NES officer and a biocontrol officer on the island for consistent support.
- **Waste Management:** Developing recycling systems, setting up a waste storage facility, and reusing bulky waste materials were proposed.
- **Funding Support:** Securing funding for conservation programs, such as rat eradication, coastal restoration, and waste management, was seen as crucial.
- **Legislative Updates:** Discussions on the new Environment Bill focused on enhancing waste management and environmental protections through collaboration between NES, local councils, and government bodies.

Conclusion

The Rakahanga workshop emphasized the community's strong commitment to biodiversity conservation, sustainability, and resilience against climate-related challenges. By fostering discussions among the Island



Council and community members, the workshop aimed to identify key biodiversity issues that will inform the development of their future Island Plan. These insights will also shape the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and guide updates to the Environment Bill, ensuring alignment with local priorities and cultural values. Site visits and feedback gathered during the workshop will support the creation of strategies for conservation, waste management, and climate resilience, addressing the unique environmental and cultural needs of Rakahanga Island. Continued collaboration, funding, and stakeholder support will be essential as the island embarks on planning and implementing these initiatives.

Acknowledgement

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Rakahanga Island Council for their exceptional preparation, warm welcome and thoughtful planning during our visit. Your efforts in organizing site visits and ensuring smooth coordination were invaluable to the success of our engagement on the island.

Attachments:

- **Annex A:** Participants Attendance Sheets
- **Annex B:** Workshop Agenda



Rubbish Pit



Milkfish pond

Annex A. Participants Attendance Sheets

Rakahanga Island Council
29 Oct 2024
10:30pm - 4pm

THE BIODIVERSITY PLAN
For Life on Earth

Cook Islands National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) Workshop

Attendance Sheet

Name	Gender	Contact details: Phone or Email *optional	Signature
TOKA MAKIRA	G.R		<i>Makes</i>
HAGAI NOA TEANINI	MARINE		<i>Hearnik</i>
Tuatangi Aratangi			<i>Tuatangi</i>
TOKAMOKOHA . TUPOA	ADMIN		<i>Kupou</i>
APOLO PIHO	M	MOF 55015	<i>APHO</i>
TAUNGA TEMU HAGAI	M	MOB: 89-097	<i>Tau</i>
PETER ARATANGI	M	MOB: 52998	<i>Peter</i>

Rakahanga Community
Workshop
29 Oct 2024
4:30pm

THE BIODIVERSITY PLAN
For Life on Earth

Cook Islands National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) Workshop

Attendance Sheet

#	Name	Gender	Contact details: Phone or Email *optional	Signature
1	TOKAMOKOHA. TUPOA	M	44003	<i>Tupou</i>
2	TAUNGA TEMU HAGAI	M	MOB: 89-097	<i>Tau</i>
3	PETER ARATANGI	M	MOB: 52998	<i>Peter</i>
4	SULINA YAVALA	F	74526	<i>Sulina</i>
5	MACCIE TARIPO	F	77921	<i>Maccie</i>
6	WISSEN TARIPO	M	75640	<i>Wissem</i>
7	Onete Papahu	F	99427	<i>Onete</i>
8	Laurel Harper Manu	F	89427	<i>Laurel</i>
9	Ngaturanga	M		
10	Kupes Takai Manu	M		<i>Kupes</i>
11	Rui Teana	M		<i>Rui</i>
12	ANA PIHO	F		
13	TENIKO Tunulolo	M	71151	<i>Teniko</i>

	Name	Gender	Contact details: Phone or Email *optional	Signature
14	Toke Makiza	M		<i>Toke Makiza</i>
15	HAGAI NOA TEANINI TEANINI	M	87741 50955	<i>Hagai</i>
16	Benji Tarau	M	50723	<i>Benji</i>
17	Tuatangi Aratangi	M	89640	<i>Tuatangi</i>
18	Ngairi Tetevano	F	1111	<i>Tetevano</i>
19	Rev. TAVIRE POKIPAKI	M	79144	<i>Pokipaki</i>
20	MAMA DROMETA TUATAI POKIPAKI	F	56916	<i>Pokipaki</i>
21	ANAU TUNULOLO	F	52005	<i>Anau</i>
22	Emily Taripo	F		<i>Emily</i>
23	Mahiriki. Pih	F	87226	<i>Miho</i>
24	ALAN NIPU	M	50816	<i>Alan</i>
25	Jupuna HAGA	M	50955	<i>Jupuna</i>
26	Munoka Takai	F	89493	<i>Takai</i>
27	Janel Aporo	f		<i>Janel</i>
28	FRANCES. TEMU. HAGAI	F.	50955	<i>Hagai</i>

Annex B. Workshop Agenda

DATE	TIME	ORGANIZATION/GROUP/DEPARTMENT	ACTIVITY	VENUE
Tue 29 th Oct	9:30 am	Arrive Manihiki		
	1 pm	Arrive Rakahanga by boat		
	3 pm	Island Council Meeting	NBSAP Intro	Council chambers
	4:30 pm	Welcoming Presentation with the Community Discussions on the NBSAP Rapid Review on NBSAP 2002 Group work	NBSAP Presentation	Community Hall
Wed 30 th Oct	8 am	Site visits	Assessment	Waste sites, Milkfish ponds
	9 am	Depart Rakahanga		