

Cook Islands GEF 7 Project ENUA

1st Quarter Progress Report 2025

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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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SECTION 1: SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND HIGHLIGHTS

1.1 Catchment Audit Assessments - University of Newcastle

In March 2025, the team from the University of Newcastle returned to conduct a second round of catchment audit assessments across all four catchments: Avatiu, Turangi, Avana, and Takuvaie. As part of their visit, Professor Jodie led an introductory GIS training workshop for NES staff, with additional participation from other stakeholders. The workshop focused on using GIS to understand spatial relationships—specifically, identifying where things are and where activities occur within the catchment areas.



1.2 Biodiversity Technical Specialist

In April 2025, Biodiversity Specialist Cenon Pandolina visited Rarotonga for the first time to support the implementation of Project ENUA. During his visit, he met with the NES and Project ENUA teams, conducted site visits to key project areas, and led internal training on Management Effectiveness Tracking Tools (METTs). The visit also helped advance the development of Terms of Reference for upcoming local consultancies to support project activities.



To review the EDM for the Cenon's visit to Rarotonga click [here](#).

1.3 Development of Terms of Reference for Consultants

Biodiversity Specialist Cenon Pandolina worked alongside the Project ENUA team to develop and refine a series of consultancy positions that will support key components of the project. These roles focus on areas such as protected area management, environmental safeguards, policy and legislative review, remote surveillance, and gender equality mainstreaming, and are scheduled for rollout in the next phase of implementation.

SECTION 2: OUTPUT RESULTS DESCRIPTION & TRACKING

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

Output	Activity
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 safeguards in land use planning development processes.	Development of Terms of Reference for Consultants

Output 1.3: Execution and communication of the catchment audits	Catchment Audit Assessments - University of Newcastle
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).	Catchment Audit Assessments - University of Newcastle
Output 2.2: Intersectoral catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area developed and implemented in partnership with key stakeholders.	Development of Terms of Reference for Consultants.
Output 2.3: Improved gender sensitive natural resource management in priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area achieved through adoption of innovative practices	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
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, and collaborative arrangements with landowners and local communities.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.

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.	• Development of Terms of Reference for Consultants
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.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Component 3: Raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender and monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results.	
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.	
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	• Development of Terms of Reference for Consultants
Output 4.2: Gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings developed and disseminated to stakeholders.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Output 4.3: Participatory monitoring and evaluation, including gender mainstreaming, informs project implementation, decision-making and lessons learned	• Development of Terms of Reference for Consultants

SECTION 3: INDICATOR RESULTS DESCRIPTION & TRACKING

72% (8/11) of project indicators.

Indicator #	Indicator Description	Progress
Indicator 1	Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use. - Cloud Forest - Suvarrow - Takutea - Takitumu Conservation Area	Plans have been made to protect or improve care for these land areas, but they haven't been put into action yet.
Indicator 2	Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use. - Suvarrow - Takutea - Manuae	Plans have been made to protect or improve care for these land areas, but they haven't been put into action yet.
Indicator 3	Area of landscapes under improved practices - Avana - Turangi - Avatiu - Takuvaime	Catchment audit assessments are still happening, and they're helping to improve how these areas are managed.
Indicator 4	Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (hectares; excluding protected areas) - Avana - Turangi - Avatiu	The University of Newcastle's marine team is doing surveys to improve ocean habitats for wildlife. They'll be back soon to continue in areas like Avana, Turangi, Avatiu, and Takuvaime.

	- 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 project directly helps both the community and the country.
Indicator 7	Legislation, policies and safeguard measures adopted and under implementation in - catchment management plans; - PA management plans; and - Island Environment Management Plans (IEMPs, within Island Development Plans [IDPs]).	Consultant positions have been developed and will be advertised to assist with this work.
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.	Our GEF project has released funds to key stakeholders and set up MOUs with organizations supporting conservation.
Indicator 10	Priority actions in the intersectoral catchment management plans reflected in the work programmes/budgets of NES, MOA, ICI, and CIT by the end of the project.	The main actions included in the work plans are between the University of Newcastle and ICI, focusing on GIS mapping and LiDAR data collection.

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.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards 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 draft KAP survey, which was developed by Sascha, a professor from the University of Newcastle who visited Rarotonga last year with some students. The team is now reviewing the document.
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.)	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.

SECTION 4: FINANCIAL SUMMARY AND PROGRESS

At the end of Q4 we had an in-country expenditure of NZ\$101,146.19. This was expended out of NES funds due to delayed receipt of project budget in-country, and reimbursed by the project upon receiving funds from UNDP on 1st April 2025. A breakdown of expenditure across quarters, components and budget lines is provided below:

Budget line	Amount (USD)	Amount (NZD)	% of total expenditure
Audio visual & print production costs	1902.37	\$ 3,100.87	3%
Trainings & Workshops	215.5	\$ 351.27	>1%
Travel	373.01	\$ 608.00	>1%
Comms & Audio-Visual Equipment	259.93	\$ 423.73	>1%
Contractual services - companies	38,348.59	\$ 62,508.20	62%
Contractual Services – Implementing Partner	20,953.45	\$ 34,154.12	34%
Total	62,052.88	\$ 101,146.19	100%

In addition to this, the project team made simultaneous Q1 and Q2 2025 advance requests to ensure activities could progress efficiently, and to streamline processes & mitigate delays in receiving funds in-country for implementation. These funds were received on 21st March 2025, totalling NZ\$992,063.92. A breakdown of these is provided below:

Total Q1 & Q2 2025 budget received by components

Components	Q1 USD	Q2 USD	Q1 + Q2 USD totals
Component 1:	226,348.85	153,448.56	379,797.41
Component 2	44,065.08	137,698.56	181,763.64
Component 3	25,301.08	17,193.56	42,494.64
Monitoring & Evaluation (Output 4)	7,976.20	9,498.56	17,474.76
PMU	17,147.25	5,156.25	22,303.50
Total USD	US\$320,838.46	US\$323,000.49	US\$643,838.95
Converted NZD	NZ\$494,365.29	NZ\$497,698.63	NZ\$992,063.92 received

The project again faced significant budget utilization challenges in Q1, as funds were not received until 21 March 2025, delaying implementation of Q1 activities against the AWP. Despite this, the project continued as much as possible and expended a total of NZD\$21,939.41 in Q1. A summary of this Q1 expenditure across components and budget lines is provided below:

Narration	NZ\$ Amount	% budget
Q1&Q2 Advance received	992,063.92	100%
Q1 Liquidation	21,939.41	2%
Balance remaining	970,124.51	98%

Component	Expenditure (NZ\$)	%
Comp 1	3762.76	17%
Comp 2	3762.76	17%

Comp 3	3762.75	17%
M&E	3762.75	17%
PMU	6888.41	31%
Total	21,939.41	100%

Budget line	Expenditure (NZ\$)	%
Contractual Services - company	\$ 0.00	
Contractual Services - implementing partner	\$ 21,939.41	100%
Supplies	\$ 0.00	
Trainings & workshops	\$ 0.00	
Travel	\$ 0.00	
Total	\$ 21,939.41	100%

The Project ENUA team will continue to make concerted efforts to fully utilize Q1 funds as soon as possible in line with the approved work plan and proceed with Q2 expenditure, and will endeavour to close the expenditure progress gap throughout the remainder of the year.

SECTION 5: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & GENDER

In quarter 1 2025, the NES team held several meetings focused on environmental projects, with a strong emphasis on including everyone, regardless of gender. They worked on the Environment Bill, updated the NBSAP, and finalized targets and actions. There were also workshops and a field visit for the NATCAP project, along with planning for the UNDP audit and discussions with the Cenon Consultant. The team participated in audits, reviewed the NBSAP, and introduced new staff members. They also carried out catchment audits in Takuvaine and Avana, held QGIS training, and worked on the Rarotonga Southern Passage Management Plan. Additionally, the team collaborated with Cook Islands Tourism on the Destination Stewardship Pillar, ensuring that both men and women were involved in all these activities.

SECTION 7: LESSONS LEARNED, GOOD PRACTICES & SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

In Quarter 1, while there weren't many project activities directly executed, the team focused heavily on preparing for a busy Quarter 2. During this time, we learned how to better coordinate future visits from teams supporting project activities, which will help ensure smoother collaboration moving forward. Communication with key stakeholders has been consistent, and we plan to keep this open dialogue throughout the next phases. The team also worked on strengthening internal relationships, improving how we tackle challenges together, and deepening our understanding of the project and its goals. While we didn't do much fieldwork in this quarter, we gained valuable insights from the University of Newcastle about our catchment areas and kept in mind the community's concerns about environmental issues.