

**COOK ISLANDS
NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN
ARE ARIKI CONSULTATION REPORT**

**House of Ariki Consultation Report
8th October 2024**



Report written by Karen Silk, NES
October 2024

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Summary

On October 8th, 2024, the National Environment Service (NES) was invited to participate in the 53rd Annual General Meeting of Te Kura Nui A Te Are Ariki (House of Ariki), held at Nebo Hall in Nikao, Rarotonga. The meeting brought together 30 participants, including Ariki and traditional leaders from various islands, such as Aitutaki, Mauke, Atiu, Pukapuka, Mangaia, Mitiaro, and the Rarotonga Vakas, including Puiakura and Te-au-o-Tonga.

The presentation aimed to engage traditional leaders in discussions on biodiversity conservation, gather insights into the unique environmental challenges facing their islands and communities, and collaboratively identify sustainable solutions. This effort aligns with NES's strategy to integrate island-specific priorities within the framework of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

Participants

A signed register of attendees is attached as Annex A.

Opening Remarks

The session commenced with Elizabeth Munro expressing gratitude to the Ariki for the opportunity to present the National Biodiversity and Action Plan. She acknowledged the Ariki's longstanding support for conservation efforts and highlighted the Ariki's vital role in guiding sustainable practices and preserving the Cook Islands' biodiversity for future generations. She concluded by expressing anticipation for the valuable perspectives and discussions the Ariki would bring to the table regarding environmental issues.

NBSAP 2002 Presentation

NBSAP Background

An overview of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) was presented by Elizabeth Munro, 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 Consultant Rima Moeka'a 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 and legislation.



Open Discussion

The open discussion session allowed each island's representatives to share their views and concerns on these strategic goals. A wide range of opinions was expressed, highlighting both the diversity of challenges and the shared commitment to biodiversity conservation across all islands. Representative contributed valuable local perspectives, offering practical solutions tailored to their unique environmental conditions.

Strategic Goal 1: Area Management

- **Mauke:**
Ra'ui (traditional conservation areas) enforcement is critical, as invasive species like rats and ants threaten local biodiversity. A follow-up program for planting 200 coconut trees is also needed to ensure long-term conservation success.
- **Mangaia:**
Poaching in ra'ui areas remains an issue. There is a need for community education to raise awareness about the benefits of ra'ui and for better monitoring and regulation of these conservation areas.
- **Aitutaki:**
Aitutaki has a unique approach to ra'ui management, collaborating with agencies like the Marine Resources department. Tourists are permitted to 'catch and release' kiokio (fish) in ra'ui areas under specific conditions, with funds raised supporting community initiatives such

as the work of the Vainetini (women's groups). There is also an ongoing plan to limit the number of tourists visiting the island to reduce environmental pressures.

- **Rarotonga (Puaikura):**
Development on mountains and wetlands is impacting biodiversity. There is a need to halt further development in these areas to preserve their ecological integrity.

Strategic Goal 2: Species Management

- **Mauke:**
Efforts are underway to preserve native species such as tamanu and tou. However, invasive species like sand wasps and rats are posing significant threats to these conservation efforts.
- **Mangaia:**
Invasive plants like mimosa pudica (pikika'a) and animals like pigs are causing damage to both natural ecosystems and agricultural areas. Local councils (Puna) are attempting to control these invasive species by fencing off planting areas, but they require additional support.
- **Atiu:**
Although mynah birds have been successfully eradicated, their absence has led to unintended consequences, such as damage to coconut trees, highlighting the need for a balanced approach to species management.
- **Rarotonga (Puaikura):**
The prevalence of rats and ants across multiple islands is a concern. A coordinated, island-wide approach is needed to address these invasive species.

Strategic Goal 3: Threats Management

- **Aitutaki:**
Coastal erosion is a pressing issue that threatens the island's shores. The community is developing strategies to manage this environmental threat and plans to limit the number of visitors to minimize human impact.
- **Mangaia:**
Invasive species not only pose ecological risks but also threaten local agriculture. The community is struggling to control these species, which are damaging both natural and cultivated areas.
- **Rarotonga (Puaikura):**
Waste management is a significant challenge. Each village is tasked with identifying suitable waste disposal sites, but a more coordinated and comprehensive approach is necessary to prevent further environmental damage.

Strategic Goal 4: Integrating Knowledge and Learning for Sustainability

- **Mitiaro:**
Efforts are being made to align Mitiaro's local environmental plans with national and international frameworks, ensuring long-term sustainability. Conservation of native plants like tamanu and tou is also seen as vital for preserving biodiversity.
- **Mangaia:**
Community education on the benefits of ra'ui is essential for fostering long-term sustainability. Educating people about the advantages of ra'ui increases the likelihood of compliance and respect for these traditional practices.
- **Traditional Knowledge:**
Across all islands, there is strong support for integrating traditional knowledge into modern environmental governance. Practices like ra'ui are recognized as essential for conserving biodiversity while maintaining cultural values.

Strategic Goal 5: Mainstreaming and Integrating Policies

- **Mitiaro:**
The island's environmental by-law is not being fully recognized, which is affecting the implementation of local governance measures.
- **Rarotonga (Te-au-o-tonga):**
There is a need for legislation to empower Aronga Mana (traditional leaders) to enforce conservation regulations in ra'ui areas. Currently, these leaders lack the authority to penalize offenders, which undermines their ability to protect these areas effectively.
- **Aitutaki:**
Aitutaki prefers a locally managed approach to ra'ui enforcement and does not support the creation of formal rules. They have a system where various agencies collaborate to monitor and manage ra'ui.

Resolutions by the House of Ariki

Development of Rules for Ra'ui:

- **Mangaia:** Will take the resolution back to the island for further discussion.
- **Rarotonga (Te-au-o-tonga):** Supports developing rules to assist with penalizing ra'ui violators.
- **Rarotonga (Puaikura):** Believes that the decision to enforce rules should be left to individual areas or islands.
- **Aitutaki:** Does not agree with developing formal rules for ra'ui management.
- **Mauke:** Already has rules and regulations in place for its island.


- **Overall Resolution:** It was agreed that each Ariki should decide whether to implement rules, with further discussions planned for the next meeting.
- **Traditional Knowledge:**
All islands unanimously support the protection and integration of traditional knowledge into governance for managing biodiversity.
- **Funding Support for the House of Ariki:**
There is unanimous agreement on the need to secure funding to assist the Are Ariki in managing the environment of the Cook Islands.
- **Invasive Species Control:**
The House of Ariki will request support from government agencies to help each island with their invasive species eradication and control efforts.

Conclusion

The consultation between the National Environment Service (NES) and the Are Ariki provided a vital platform for traditional leaders to voice their environmental concerns and shape the future of biodiversity conservation across the Cook Islands. The alignment of island-specific priorities with the Global Biodiversity Framework is a key step in ensuring that both modern and traditional knowledge systems are utilized to protect and sustain the unique biodiversity of the islands. By fostering collaboration, respecting traditional practices, and addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change, invasive species, and pollution, the Cook Islands can move towards a more sustainable and resilient future for its people and ecosystems.



Annex A. Participants Attendance Sheet




Registration Form

Name of Activity: **THE 2ND UNAKA INCORP SOCIETY GENERAL ASSEMBLY/LEADERSHIP**
Location: **NEBO HALL, NIKAO, AVARUA, RAROTONGA, COO**
Date: **MONDAY 7TH - 8TH OCTOBER**

No	Name	Island/Community	Position + protocol	Gender
1	IAVANA HENRY	PUKAPUKA	A' NIFE	F
2	Vai PERO	NIKAO	TAVIUKU ORAMETUA, NIKAO CHAILESS	M
3	NAOROA TEINA	RARO	ANAGATIRA	M
4	Mary Taripo Karika	Raro	Wife of Karika Arko	F
5	Melita Taroa	Mauke	wife of Taroa Ariki	F
6	Jepara Jan	Mitika	Tou Ariki Vaine.	
7	Renall Vogel	Raro	Kauono o Tupe Ariki Rangitira	M
8	Illegie Samuela	Mauke	Taruera Ariki Vaine	MS
9	Averau Rino Maao	Aitutaki	Pukotoko D Tamaroa Ariki	M
10	Tupua S. S. S.	Office	Gen. Sec.	M

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No	Name	Island/Community	Position + protocol	Gender
1	Manarangi Titai Ariki	Aitutaki	Ariki	female
2	Tinomanre Ariki	RARO	Ariki	
3	TARARO ARIKI	MAUKE	ARIKI	
4	VAELUARANGI ARIKI	AITUTAKI	ARIKI	MALE
5	Tou Ariki	A.O.A.	ARIKI	✓
6	BARUN ARIKI	AITU	ARIKI	MALE
7	George Kaska	Raro	Ariki	male
8	PEPEU ARIKI	PUKAPUKA	ARIKI	MALE

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Date: **MONDAY 7TH - 8TH OCTOBER**

No	Name	Island/Community	Position + protocol	Gender
1	Pa Tapparu Ariki	RARO	ARIKI	F
2	Numangatini Ariki	Mangaha	ARIKI	M
3	Samata Ariki	ARUTAKI	ARIKI	M
4	RONGOMATANE ARIKI	ATIU	ARIKI	M
5	Tupene Ngamary	ATIU	NGAMARY ARIKI	F
6	ANTHONY J. TEAVARIKI	MAUKE	ARIKI	M
7	Samuela ARIKI	MAUKE	ARIKI	M
8	PAULIF VAKATINI	RARO	ARIKI	M
9	TEREVA TIATAPA ARIKI	NUKUNOA	ARIKI	M
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Date: **MONDAY 7TH - 8TH OCTOBER**

No	Name	Island/Community	Position + protocol	Gender
1	TAAPUNI NIHAM	ATIU	TINOKURA MATIAPO TUTARA	M
2	ISAHUI TACU	MAUKE	VAA ARAARA	M
3	TUTAI TEREAPII	MANGAIA	NUMANGATINI VAIKE	F
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