

COOK ISLANDS
NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN
PALMERSTON ISLAND NBSAP REPORT

PALMERSTON ISLAND WORKSHOP

8th October 2024 – via online ‘Teams’ meeting



Photos by Memory Moetaua

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Summary

The Palmerston Island workshop, held on **8 October 2024**, brought together the island community in a collaborative effort to discuss biodiversity conservation and sustainability. Conducted via an online Teams meeting, the event showcased the community's active engagement and enthusiasm, as participants shared insights and knowledge to address Palmerston's unique environmental challenges. Discussions were structured around the five NBSAP Guiding Strategic Goals, focusing on aligning local efforts with national biodiversity objectives. The Palmerston Island community living in Rarotonga were also invited to attend the workshop.

The smooth running and success of the workshop were largely due to the outstanding efforts of Memory Moetaua, whose organizational skills ensured everything was well planned and executed. From hiring the school hall to facilitating group activities, keeping discussions on schedule, and managing presentations, Memory played an instrumental role in coordinating the event. Her follow-up actions, including providing workshop photos, drop sheets, and arranging invoices, further underscored her dedication and efficiency.

Through this workshop, the community identified practical actions to address biodiversity and sustainability concerns, complemented by discussions on local challenges and opportunities. The event not only highlighted Palmerston's commitment to environmental stewardship but also underscored the importance of continued collaboration and engagement to achieve a sustainable future for the island.

Below is a summary of the key points raised under each strategic goal.

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 during the workshop, demonstrating the progress and achievements in biodiversity conservation. Among these, Palmerston Island's very own rat eradication program stood out as a significant accomplishment. The program's success has been so impactful that it is now used as a model example in all NBSAP workshops conducted across the Cook Islands. This initiative highlights Palmerston's proactive approach to addressing biodiversity threats and serves as an inspiration for other islands aiming to protect and restore their ecosystems.

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

1. Area Management and Restoration

- **Clam Preservation:** A clam survey area will help to monitor the effects of climate change and human activities. Measures should include banning clam shell harvesting and implementing sustainable management practices to prevent further depletion. The community, including schools, should actively participate in these efforts.
- **North Islet Conservation:** Designating the North Islet for the protection of parrotfish and coconut crabs was proposed as a way to safeguard critical habitats.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Emphasis was placed on maintaining sustainable practices through regular inspections, recording data on present species, and implementing ecosystem restoration strategies.
- **Ecosystem Restoration:** The community prioritized restoring ecosystems and protecting endangered species by promoting sustainable marine species management.



Photos by Memory Moetaua

- **Coastal Erosion Projects:** To address coastal erosion, the community proposed planting **toa trees** (ironwood) in vulnerable areas and replanting native species to enhance natural barriers.
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2. Species Management

- **Key Species:** Participants identified critical species, including parrotfish, unga (coconut crab), turtles, birds, tamanu trees, corals, whales, sharks, and shellfish. A notable decline in these species, attributed to climate change and overharvesting, was discussed.
 - **Conservation Strategies:** The community proposed limiting the harvesting of fish, coconut crabs, Tavake birds and other species to prevent ecosystem imbalance. A broader focus on replanting seeds and conserving species for future generations was emphasized. Suggestions included community-driven monitoring, limits on harvesting, and expanding the **Rau** system to protect biodiversity.
 - **Public Awareness:** Informing the public about data collection efforts and the pros and cons of harvesting key species was identified as crucial to gaining community support for conservation initiatives.
 - **Biodiversity Revival:** Positive changes have been noted since the rat eradication program, including the resurgence of mahogany plants, chickens, sugar cane, and nu mangaro.
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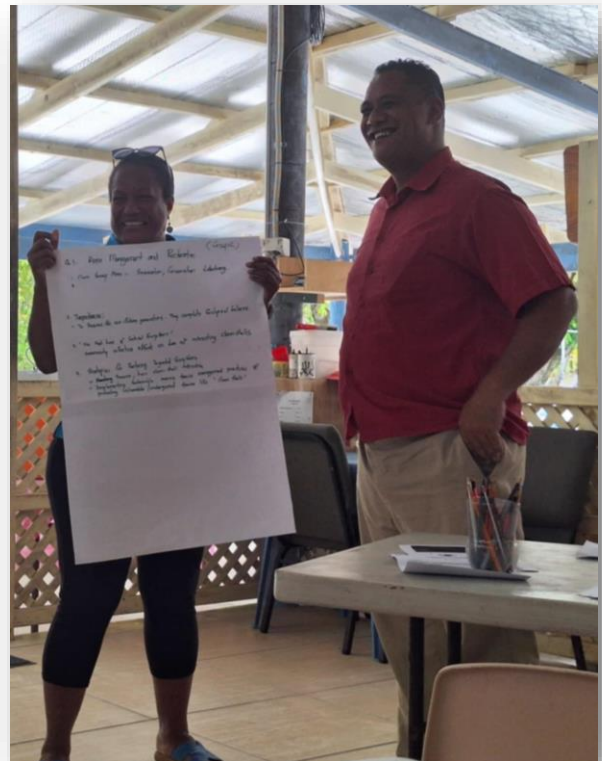
3. Threats Management

- **Biosecurity and Pests:** Quick responses to the introduction of new pests were highlighted as essential. Participants recommended improving biosecurity measures and collaborating with relevant organizations through the Island Administration.
- **Overfishing and Overharvesting:** Setting limits for daily fish and crab consumption, alongside raising awareness about sustainable practices, were seen as critical strategies to mitigate overharvesting and resource depletion.
- **Climate Change and Natural Disasters:** The impacts of climate change, including king tides and cyclones, were acknowledged as significant threats to biodiversity. Community-led strategies to minimize resource harvesting and balance food chains were discussed.
- **Community Rules:** Participants suggested bringing the Island Council into discussions to establish rules and address resource management issues collaboratively.

- **Pest and Climate Change Mitigation:** Discussions covered the introduction of pests like wasps and climate change impacts. Rapid biosecurity responses and community awareness programs were highlighted as essential strategies.
- **Pollution and Human Activities:** Participants called for minimizing human impact through balanced resource use, sustainable harvesting, and conservation-focused initiatives.

4. Integrating Knowledge and Learning for Sustainability

- **Workshops and Education:** Translating workshops into Cook Islands Maori and reinforcing knowledge from elders were proposed to ensure inclusivity and preserve traditional practices.
- **Data Sharing and Research:** Consistent and continuous data collection is essential for informed decision-making and tracking environmental changes over time. Participants emphasized the importance of sharing research and information through multiple channels, including newsletters, social media, websites, and sister islands, to foster sustainability and encourage knowledge exchange. These efforts not only promote environmental awareness but also engage the broader community in conservation initiatives.
- **School Initiatives:** Teaching conservation practices in schools, including participation in rat eradication programs and sharing data, was emphasized as a way to engage younger generations.
- **Raui System:** Expanding the Raui (no-take zones) system to protect both natural and marine resources was a key recommendation.



Photos by Memory Moetaua

5. Mainstreaming Policies and Financial Mechanisms

- **Harvesting Practices:** Seasonal harvesting and conservation areas for species like paua and Tavake (Boson) birds were proposed to minimize overconsumption and maintain ecosystem balance.
- **Economic and Environmental Balance:** Participants emphasized the need to balance tamanu tree harvesting for income with conservation to protect against coastal erosion and cyclones.
- **Community Engagement:** The Island Council and administration were identified as key collaborators in implementing conservation policies and managing resources sustainably.
- **Traditional Methods:** A process plan for the Boson (Tavake) bird, based on traditional practices and specific harvest months, was proposed to conserve marine life and bird populations.
- **Rat Eradication Success:** The program's positive impact on biodiversity highlights the importance of securing funding and maintaining similar initiatives.
- **Monitoring and Survey Plans:** Participants recommended implementing structured monitoring and surveys to ensure data transparency and guide policy decisions.

Conclusion

The Palmerston Island workshop successfully aligned community conservation efforts with the five guiding NBSAP goals. The discussions emphasized the importance of protecting biodiversity through sustainable practices, engaging the community in education and data sharing, and integrating traditional knowledge with modern conservation strategies. The workshop also highlighted the high level of community participation and collaboration, showcasing the collective commitment and shared responsibility of the Palmerston Island residents toward achieving these goals. Continued collaboration between local stakeholders and external organizations will be essential to implement these strategies and ensure a sustainable future for Palmerston Island.

Acknowledgment:

We sincerely thank Memory Moetaua for her excellent coordination of the NBSAP workshop, held via Teams. She ensured the smooth running of the event by hiring the school hall, facilitating group activities, keeping to the schedule, and managing presentations. Her follow-up, including sharing workshop photos, drop sheets, and arranging invoices, was greatly appreciated.