

# HISTORICAL MILESTONE FOR CONSERVATION IN THE COOK ISLANDS: TAKITUMU CONSERVATION AREA RECOGNISED AS AN OECM



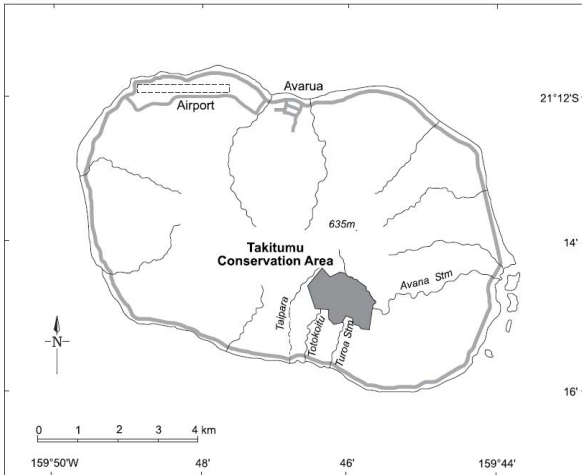
The Cook Islands has embarked on a historical journey to give the Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) international recognition as an Other Effective area-based Conservation Measure (OECM). This is the first OECM site for the Cook Islands, and for the Pacific islands region.

## What is an OECM?

An OECM is a site that achieves effective long-term in-situ conservation of biodiversity. It is different than an internationally recognised protected area as it is not legally protected, and may be set aside for purposes other than conservation e.g. water security (water catchments). However, they still achieve conservation of biodiversity in its natural environment.

## Cook Islands OECM process for the TCA

In January 2023, the National Environment Service (NES) hosted a national workshop, with the support of United Nations Environment Programme – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) and Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), to introduce OECMs and their criteria to government and community representatives, and identify potential OECM sites within the Cook Islands. At this workshop, there was consensus from all participants that the Takitumu Conservation Area was the best potential OECM site for the Cook Islands.



TCA highlighted on the map of Rarotonga, obtained from the TCA Management Plan.

NES began populating the OECM assessment screening tool and full assessment to ensure that the TCA met all of the criteria to be classified as an OECM. The NES then hosted a 2-day community workshop from 1st – 2nd November 2023 to introduce the OECM concept to the three Ngāti whose land the TCA is located on - Ngāti Kainuku, Ngāti Karika and Ngāti Manavaoroa. The community advised the NES on key information missing from the OECM assessment, which was then used to amend the assessment tool.

The NES formed a TCA OECM Working Group, consisting of landowners from each Ngāti and NES, to further refine the information in the assessment tool, which was largely derived from the TCA Management Plan 2020-2030. The TCA Working Group met 3 times between January – February 2024 to do so, before taking the assessment back to the wider Ngāti on 12 March 2024 for confirmation of the information and finally, obtaining consent to submit the application. Consent was formally obtained from Kainuku Kapiriterangi Ariki – Kapiriterangi Tere’s Power of Attorney (POA) her daughter Kapiri Tiaiti, Makea Karika George Ariki – George Taripo and Manavaoroa Mataiapo – Phillip Nicholas, on behalf of the three Ngāti.

OECMs have not yet been established in the Pacific. Mr. Tuaiwi Edward Karika, with the support of NES Biodiversity Coordinator Jessie Nicholson, presented on the Cook Islands OECM process of recognition for the TCA, to a workshop on Protected and Conserved Areas in Sydney from 1-4 May 2024. This was an opportune time for delegates from across the Pacific to learn from the Cook Islands OECM experience.

“Rather than leave land to my kids, I need to leave good kids to this land, that way when I am not here, that land will still be protected”.

- Mr. Tuaiwi Edward Karika  
TCA Landowner

Tuaiwi was able to share his role in the OECM assessment process and the vision he has for his family, “Rather than leave land to my kids, I need to leave good kids to this land, that way when I am not here, that land will still be protected”. He stated, “I want Uncle Ian’s example of getting up there on the land, rain or shine, money or no money, and preserving those birds to be something that we do, part of us, that we will get up and do it whether we have money or not, whether we’re tired or not, because that’s who we are, because it’s our identity.”

## NES submitted the OECM application to SPREP and UNEP-WCMC in April 2024.

Establishing areas as OECMs is one way that the Cook Islands can help to achieve the global target in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to achieve 30% protection of terrestrial and inland water areas, and 30% of marine and coastal areas important for biodiversity, by 2030. NES would like to give its sincere appreciation to the TCA Working Group and landowners, SPREP, UNEP-WCMC, International Union for Conservation of Nature Oceania Regional Office (IUCN ORO) and Infrastructure Cook Islands Planning & Projects Unit for their support in achieving this incredible milestone.

As the first OECM for the Cook Islands, NES will launch the TCA as an OECM on International Biodiversity Day on Wednesday 22nd May, where the theme is to “Be Part of the Plan” to reverse biodiversity loss and put nature on a path to recovery.

Ngāti Kainuku, Ngāti Karika and Ngāti Manavaoroa are welcome to attend and celebrate this historical event. Transport to the Takitumu Conservation Area to unveil and bless new storyboards at the entrance and Avana water intake will depart the Avana Sunday School hall on 22nd May at 9am.

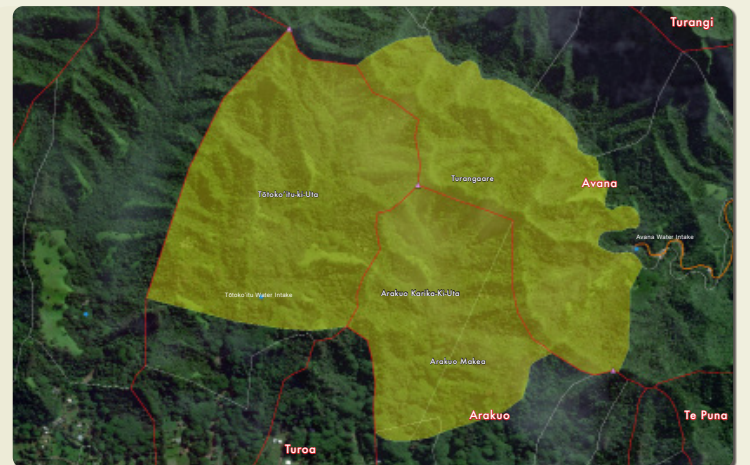
The kakerōri is an endemic bird. In 1989, only 29 kakerōri remained in the world. Through rat control efforts, the kakerōri population has increased to at least 618 birds as of 2023.



## What does being an OECM mean for the TCA?

Being an OECM opens up more opportunities for potential funding to assist with managing the TCA. It reaffirms the landowners decision from 1996 when the TCA was established, to keep 155ha of land set aside for conservation of the kakerōri.

As the first OECM for the Pacific, awareness on the TCA has been raised at regional forums, highlighting the incredible conservation efforts by landowners & volunteers to save the kakerōri from extinction.



TCA highlighted on Tōtoko'itu-ki-Uta, Arakuo, Turangaore



For more information, please see NES website [www.environment.gov.ck](http://www.environment.gov.ck)