Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species

Part I: Project Information

GEF ID
10780

Project Type
FSP

Type of Trust Fund
GET

CBIT/NGI
CBIT **No**
NGI **No**

Project Title
Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species

Countries
Cook Islands

Agency(ies)
UNDP

Other Executing Partner(s)
National Environment Service

Executing Partner Type
Government

GEF Focal Area
Biodiversity

Taxonomy
Influencing models, Stakeholders, Capacity, Knowledge and Research, Biodiversity, Focal Areas, Protected Areas and Landscapes, Productive Landscapes, Coastal and Marine Protected Areas, Community Based Natural Resource Mngt, Terrestrial Protected Areas, Biomes, Lakes, Tropical Rain Forests, Rivers, Coral Reefs, Wetlands, Mainstreaming, Tourism, Agriculture and agrobiodiversity, Infrastructure, Sustainable Development Goals, Convene multi-stakeholder alliances, Transform policy and regulatory environments, Strengthen institutional capacity and decision-making, Type of Engagement, Information Dissemination, Participation, Partnership, Consultation, Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities, Beneficiaries, Civil Society, Non-Governmental Organization, Academia, Community Based Organization, Communications, Behavior change, Awareness Raising, Private Sector, Individuals/Entrepreneurs, SMEs, Gender Equality, Gender results areas, Capacity Development, Access and control over natural resources, Participation and leadership, Gender Mainstreaming, Women groups, Sex-disaggregated indicators, Innovation, Learning, Indicators to measure change, Theory of change, Adaptive management, Knowledge Generation, Knowledge Exchange

Rio Markers
Climate Change Mitigation
Climate Change Mitigation 1

Climate Change Adaptation
Climate Change Adaptation 1

Duration
72 In Months

Agency Fee($)
332,782.00

Submission Date
3/24/2021

A. Indicative Focal/Non-Focal Area Elements

Programming Directions	Trust Fund	GEF Amount($)	Co-Fin Amount($)
BD-1-1	GET	1,202,968.00	15,690,600.00
BD-2-7	GET	2,300,000.00	11,096,812.00
	Total Project Cost ($)	**3,502,968.00**	**26,787,412.00**

B. Indicative Project description summary

Project Objective

To mainstream biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services safeguards across Cook Islands key sectors, in partnership with traditional leaders and communities, to deliver sustainably managed protected areas and catchments.

Project Component	Financing Type	Project Outcomes	Project Outputs	Trust Fund	GEF Amount($)	Co-Fin Amount($)
1. Mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across key develop-ment sectors	Technical Assistance	1. Biodiversity and ecosystem services safeguards embedded in national and island governance frameworks, policies and institutional capacities across key development sectors (i.e. agriculture, infrastructure, tourism). *Indicators:* *(i) Proposed legislation and policies submitted to legislature and safeguards incorporated into NEIS by project mid-term; adopted and under implementation in catchment and PA management plans by end of project.* *(ii) 15% increase from baseline in UNDP Capacity Scorecard ratings by end of project for systemic, institutional and individual capacities to adopt and*	1.1. National legislation, policies, strategies and plans amended or created to safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services from unsustainable land use activities of key development sectors. 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 and development processes. Regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services elaborated in Island Environmental Management Plans and applied to relevant catchment audits, PA management plans and EIAs.	GET	1,000,000.00	7,000,000.00

enforce SLM practices across key development sectors:

(a) National Environment Service (25% of employees)

(b) Infrastructure Cook Islands (15% of employees)

(c) Cook Islands Tourism Corporation) 15% of employees)

(d) Ministry of Agriculture (15% of employees)

(iii)All new EIAs in priority catchments compliant with new safeguards and protocols for:

a) wetlands;

b) riparian forest/vegetation; and

c) coastal ecosystems.

Indicators, baselines and targets to be confirmed during PPG.

1. Mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across key development sectors	Technical Assistance	2. Ecosystem services restored, maintained and enhanced; and globally significant biodiversity safeguarded in priority catchments. *Indicators:* *(i) Effective catchment management through SLM and R2R approaches covering at least 1,794 ha, of which 1,114 ha are terrestrial KBAs and 670 ha are marine KBAs abutting the target catchments.* *(ii) At least 25% of households in priority catchments engaged in SLM practices and riparian ecosystem restoration efforts.* ***Indicators, baselines and targets to be confirmed during PPG***	2.1 Audits completed for priority catchments, with key pollutant sources (including nutrients) and responsible parties identified and interventions prescribed. 2.2 Intersectoral catchment management plans developed and implemented, in partnership with key stakeholders. Improved SLM by households in priority catchments achieved through adoption of innovative agricultural practices, as a result of targeted awareness campaigns and training.	GET	1,000,000.00	8,000,000.00

2. Improving the management framework to effectively conserve a national protected areas system representative of Cook Islands biodiversity	Technical Assistance	3. Globally significant biodiversity protected across Cook Islands through effective selection, design, management, monitoring and enforcement of its PAs system. *Indicators:* *(i) 2,800 ha of PAs/MPAs under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (400 ha are terrestrial, 2,400 ha are marine), indicated by at least 15% increase from baseline in METT scores for target sites by end of project.* *(ii) Establishment of 118 ha of new terrestrial PA.* ***Indicators, baselines and targets to be confirmed during PPG.***	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) and co-management options with communities. 3.2 Management capacities in target PAs strengthened through application of PACS, PAMP and tools (e.g. NEIS), and training in biodiversity conservation and monitoring. Effective co-management demonstrated in Rarotonga Cloud Forest PA, newly established with partnership agreement involving government, traditional leaders and communities.	GET	1,000,000.00	7,000,000.00

3. Raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender and monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results	Technical Assistance	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. *Indicators:* (i) At least 20% increase from baseline in Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey scores by end of project. (ii) Number of lessons learned and best practices applied to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services disseminated via NEIS and other knowledge platforms. (iii) Gender fully mainstreamed in project interventions, as indicated by gender-based indicators. ***Indicators, baselines and targets to be confirmed during PPG.***	4.1 National Communication Strategy developed, including annual Action Plan with targeted public awareness programmes to promote the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services. 4.2 Knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned and project findings developed and disseminated to stakeholders. Participatory monitoring and evaluation, including gender mainstreaming, informs project implementation, decision-making and lessons learnt.	GET	336,160.00	3,448,041.00
				Sub Total ($)	**3,336,160.00**	**25,448,041.00**
Project Management Cost (PMC)						
				GET	166,808.00	1,339,371.00

	Sub Total($)	166,808.00	1,339,371.00
	Total Project Cost($)	3,502,968.00	26,787,412.00

C. Indicative sources of Co-financing for the Project by name and by type

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount($)
Recipient Country Government	National Environment Service (NES)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	2,512,500.00
Recipient Country Government	National Environment Service (NES)	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	2,512,500.00
Recipient Country Government	Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	2,512,500.00
Recipient Country Government	Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	5,025,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	804,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	723,600.00
Recipient Country Government	Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	2,010,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT)	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	6,030,000.00
Recipient Country Government	House of Ariki (HOA)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	100,500.00
Recipient Country Government	House of Ariki (HOA)	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	120,600.00
Recipient Country Government	Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	53,600.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Cultural Development (MOCD)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	250,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	33,500.00
Recipient Country Government	Crown Law Office (CLO)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	67,000.00
Private Sector	University of Newcastle, Australia (UON)	Guarantee	Investment mobilized	250,000.00

Donor Agency	New Zealand High Commission	Grant	Investment mobilized	107,200.00
Donor Agency	Seacology	Grant	Investment mobilized	107,200.00
Donor Agency	Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Grant	Investment mobilized	3,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Cook Islands Government	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	400,000.00
GEF Agency	United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	167,712.00
			Total Project Cost($)	**26,787,412.00**

Describe how any "Investment Mobilized" was identified

Government Total co-financing for this project is $26,787,412 (US$18,276,100 of mobilized investments and US$8,511,312 in recurrent expenditure), demonstrates Cook Islands' strong commitment to the project's objective. Opportunities to mobilize further investments will be explored during the PPG, including with Conservation International and Nia Tero in support of inshore marine conservation and planning work with HoA. Investment mobilized from the recipient national government of the Cook Islands has been identified from a range of sources across the relevant agencies, as listed above. These co-financiers include NES, as the GEF OFP and Executing Agency, which has committed to directly enhance investments in biodiversity conservation, focusing on: more effective environmental governance and management through increased monitoring and enforcement in the Compliance Division; training and equipment for rangers in 'protected' and other 'managed' areas ; strengthening information management; raising awareness through improved education and knowledge management; and investing more in project management. The four primary partner agencies operating in the key sectors, Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI), Cook Islands Tourism (CIT), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and House of Ariki (HoA), have committed to co-finance project activities that relate directly to their mandates and planned outputs, while also enhancing national ownership and participation in the project as summarized below. • ICI: Stage 1 of stormwater infrastructure project in Rarotonga to provide nature-based engineering solutions to riparian areas in high impact zones, as well as other riparian enhancements to mitigate development impacts around Rarotonga. • CIT: Enhanced marketing of Cook Islands as an eco-destination promoting environmental best practices and standards in order to mainstream biodiversity safeguards throughout the entire tourism supply chain and experience; and creation of new systems to further the Mana Tiaki Eco-certification Scheme with biodiversity and ecosystem considerations. • MoA: Enhanced training and support to local farmers in organic and sustainable agricultural practices and resources, as well as enhanced data collection and management systems to monitor the results of these interventions. • HoA: Enhanced dialogue and consultation with traditional leaders and communities, especially those in Outer Islands, to strengthen natural resource management that traditionally addresses sustainability and biodiversity conservation. Private Sector / Academia The University of Newcastle in Australia will collaborate with project stakeholders to deliver applied research and technical support focused on specific project activities. This partnership will provide the following long-term benefits: • A foundation for increasing knowledge and technical exchanges whereby Cook Islanders can increase their technical field capacity while gaining higher-level qualifications for impacts beyond the project lifetime. • Opportunities to develop regional and international collaboration between government and industry focused on building Cook Islands national technical capacities in project deliveries during and beyond the life of the GEF-7 project. Donor Agencies New Zealand High Commission will continue its support for NES to review the Environment Act 2003, providing a strong legislative baseline for

planned GEF-7 activities. A grant has been secured from Seacology to enable Cook Islands Government support media and awareness relating to Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park), which accounts for the nation's entire MPAs system. Cook Islands Government is accessing the Green Climate Fund (GCF) for its public sector to apply ecosystem-based interventions to address climate considerations. Activities will be designed to complement GEF-7 interventions, such as foreshore naturalization/stabilization, riparian planting of stream banks, natural sediment trapping and control systems around agricultural plots and drains, and organic agricultural techniques.

D. Indicative Trust Fund Resources Requested by Agency(ies), Country(ies), Focal Area and the Programming of Funds

Agency	Trust Fund	Country	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Amount($)	Fee($)	Total($)
UNDP	GET	Cook Islands	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	3,502,968	332,782	3,835,750.00
				Total GEF Resources($)	**3,502,968.00**	**332,782.00**	**3,835,750.00**

E. Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

PPG Required **true**

PPG Amount ($)	PPG Agency Fee ($)
150,000	14,250

Agency	Trust Fund	Country	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Amount($)	Fee($)	Total($)
UNDP	GET	Cook Islands	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	150,000	14,250	**164,250.00**
				Total Project Costs($)	**150,000.00**	**14,250.00**	**164,250.00**

Core Indicators

Indicator 1 Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
400.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Indicator 1.1 Terrestrial Protected Areas Newly created

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
118.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
Rarotonga Cloud Forest			118.00			

Indicator 1.2 Terrestrial Protected Areas Under improved Management effectiveness

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
282.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
Suwarrow National Park	4256	National Park	162.00						
Takutea Nature Reserve	17822	Habitat/Species Management Area	120.00						

Indicator 2 Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

2,400.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Indicator 2.1 Marine Protected Areas Newly created

Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)

Indicator 2.2 Marine Protected Areas Under improved management effectiveness

Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
2,400.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
Manuae MPA	71023	Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources	400.00						
Suwarrow National Park	4256	National Park	1,240.00						
Takutea Nature Reserve		Habitat/Species Management Area	760.00						

Indicator 4 Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares; excluding protected areas)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
2411.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Indicator 4.1 Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity (hectares, qualitative assessment, non-certified)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
2,411.00			

Indicator 4.2 Area of landscapes that meets national or international third party certification that incorporates biodiversity considerations (hectares)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

Type/Name of Third Party Certification

Indicator 4.3 Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

Indicator 4.4 Area of High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF) loss avoided

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

Documents (Please upload document(s) that justifies the HCVF)

Title	Submitted

Indicator 6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (direct)	788236	0	0	0
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (indirect)	0	0	0	0

Indicator 6.1 Carbon Sequestered or Emissions Avoided in the AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)

Expected metric tons of CO_2e (direct)	788,236
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (indirect)	
Anticipated start year of accounting	2022
Duration of accounting	

Indicator 6.2 Emissions Avoided Outside AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) Sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (direct)				
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (indirect)				
Anticipated start year of accounting				
Duration of accounting				

Indicator 6.3 Energy Saved (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Total Target Benefit	Energy (MJ) (At PIF)	Energy (MJ) (At CEO Endorsement)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at MTR)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at TE)

Target Energy Saved (MJ)

Indicator 6.4 Increase in Installed Renewable Energy Capacity per Technology (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Technology	Capacity (MW) (Expected at PIF)	Capacity (MW) (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at MTR)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at TE)

Indicator 11 Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Female	5,801			
Male	5,627			
Total	11428	0	0	0

Part II. Project Justification

1a. Project Description

1.a.1 The global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed (systems description)

Cook Islands is a Polynesian island nation[1] within the South Pacific Ocean located between 9^{o} and 23^{o} S latitude and 156^{o} and 167^{o} W longitude. It comprises 15 islands and atolls that amount to a land mass of 240 km² scattered across 1.9 million km² of ocean, which constitutes its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). There is a Northern Group and a more populous Southern Group of six[2] and nine[3] islands, respectively. Northern islands are low coral-reef islands and mainly atolls. Southern islands comprise one young volcanic island (Rarotonga), one almost-atoll (Aitutaki) and four uplifted limestone-volcanic islands (Mangaia, Ātiu, Ma'uke and Miti'āro). The entire EEZ was designated Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park) in 2017.

Despite its relatively small terrestrial area, Cook Islands hosts unique geological, ecosystem and species diversity, with many key types of habitats that provide refuge to various threatened, endemic and migratory species. Terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems include cloud forests, remnants of coastal forest, Makatea forest, Strand vegetation, freshwater lakes and tidal salt marsh (Ngatangiia).

Cook Islands form part of the Polynesia-Micronesia Biodiversity Hotspot[4], where extraordinarily high levels of biodiversity and endemism are coupled with severe threats and the highest rate of species extinction on Earth[5]: just 21% of the region's original vegetation remains in pristine condition[6]. The Southern Cook Islands biomes were recognized as one of the Global 200 priority ecoregions for global conservation with its own designated Cook Islands Moist Tropical Forest Ecoregion[7]. On Rarotonga, the largest and highest of the islands, most lowland forests have been converted through human use but the moderately intact forests on the upper slopes are considered representative of the original montane and cloud forests of the Cook Islands. These remain the best examples of primary montane rain and cloud forest in Eastern Polynesia[8] but their status is considered to be critical/endangered.

The southern islands of Miti'aro, Atiu, Ma'uke, and Mangaia are the remains of ancient volcanoes uplifted some 100m above sea level. They have central volcanic hills surrounded by makatea (raised coral limestone). Palmerston and Manuae are atolls, Takutea is a small table reef and Aitutaki is almost an atoll, a central volcanic island surrounded by a barrier reef[9]. Eight species of range-restricted birds occur in the Southern Cook Islands, six of which are strictly endemic and either Endangered or Vulnerable.

Over 4,000 species have been identified in the Cook Islands and these are recorded in the Cook Islands Biodiversity Database[10]. Native and endemic species account for 62% and 2%, respectively, and 4% are threatened or endangered with extinction[11]. Endemic species include 6 land birds, of which four are in the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species, 20 flowering plants, 4 ferns and 26 land snails, of which 14 have become extinct in the last 140 years. The richest terrestrial flora and fauna is found on the largest island of Rarotonga, followed by Mangaia, Ātiu, Ma'uke and Miti'āro.

Cook Islands lies along the West Pacific Flyway of migratory birds, many species of which are listed in the appendices of the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS), to which the Cook Islands has been a party since 2006. Listed species are found on several of the islands, notably Suwarrow and Takutea that have been identified as Important Bird Areas (IBAs), and are designated as protected areas for this reason. Birdlife International has listed at least 11 endemic birds

within the Cook Islands and recognizes 2 endemic bird areas (EBAs). The uninhabited island of Takutea is home to the most significant number of seabirds within the Cook Islands. One seabird species in the Cook Islands is threatened with extinction.

Wetlands are limited but key freshwater habitats in the Cook Islands. The four main types are: freshwater marshes and swamps on Rarotonga, Mangaia, Atiu, Miti'aro, Ma'uke; permanent freshwater lakes on Mangaia, Atiu and Miti'aro; a tidal salt marsh on Rarotonga that is the only remaining habitat on the island to one native crab species; and mountain streams on Rarotonga. Being the largest (6,739 ha) and only mountainous island (650 m) in the country, Rarotonga has 114.4 ha of wetlands and 190.9 ha of swamps.

The diversity of marine ecosystems in the Cook Islands ranges between the high islands in the south, with shallow lagoons and fringing reefs, and atolls in the northern group characterized by large, deep lagoons encircled by coral reef. Other notable marine ecosystems include seamounts, seabeds and the open ocean water columns. Sixty-one marine species present are globally threatened with extinction, including a significant number of endemic species that are locally threatened.

Protecting areas for biodiversity are traditionally an integral part of Cook Islands life and culture. Various forms of Locally Managed Areas (LMA), including Community Conservation Areas and Ra'ui sites, exist without formal protected areas status. A successful example is Takitumu Conservation Area, established by private landowners in 1987 and the primary remaining habitat for the endemic Rarotonga Flycatcher, Rarotonga Starling and Cook Islands Fruit-Dove, all Vulnerable species (IUCN Red List), as well as other native fauna and flora. Takitumu is managed by the landowners with technical and financial support from NES, local NGOs and agencies such as New Zealand Department of Conservation.

Another example is the uninhabited Manuae atoll, managed by private landowners and supported by government agencies. The island is incorrectly considered to be a wildlife sanctuary but more recently included as a 'protected area' in Schedule 3 of the draft Environment (Aitutaki and Manuae) Regulations 2020 that still await approval[12]. A recent coral survey found that the reef outside the lagoon is in very good condition and the lagoon has an abundance of giant clams though these face high local poaching pressure.

The 2021 review of Cook Islands' conservation areas, summarised in Footnote 1, concludes that only two terrestrial sites areas currently meet the internationally accepted IUCN definition of a protected area. Takutea, a sandy cay of prime uninhabited habitat, was a sanctuary under individual ownership from 1903 until 1950, when it was vested by court order in a board of trustees that included most of the Aronga Mana of Atiu. It has since been declared a "community conserved area under the management and control of the Trustees of Takutea" under Section 4 of the *Environment (Atiu and Takutea) Regulations 2008*, which specify that "Takutea" means the island of Takutea and its waters within 12 nautical miles.

Takutea is globally recognised as an IBA with respect to its significant resident colonies of seabirds, including Red-footed Booby, Masked Booby, Red-tailed Tropicbird and Frigatebirds; and the Bristle-thighed Curlew, listed as a key migratory species under the Convention on Migratory Species. Coconut crabs are relatively abundant on the island and it is an important turtle nesting site. The GEF-5 Ridge-to-Reef project recorded an, as yet, unidentified endemic plant during 2019 terrestrial assessment of Takutea.

Also uninhabited and an IBA, the Northern Group atoll of Suwarrow was declared a National Park in 1978 due to its abundant marine and bird wildlife it supports. It provides key habitat and breeding grounds for many bird species, including Red-tailed Tropicbirds (3% of the global population) and Lesser frigatebirds (9% of the global population) that breed on Suwarrow and the migratory Bristle-thighed Curlew[13]. Suwarrow is also home to megafaunal marine species such as green turtle, humphead wrasse, giant manta ray and whaleshark, all of which are endangered species (EN), and sperm whale (VU).

In 2012, two key events propelled biodiversity conservation to the forefront of the Cook Islands development strategy: (i) declaration of the Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP), an area of 1.1 million km^2 (61% of the EEZ), later expanded to the whole EEZ and named Marae Moana; and (ii) an assessment of Cook Islands' Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs)–[14], as part of the Polynesia Micronesia Hotspot initiative[15] to provide a blueprint of priority sites to target conservation efforts within the CIMP that was later extended to the entire EEZ.

Nine terrestrial and four marine KBAs are recognized within the Cook Islands, with a further three candidate KBA sites. These are distributed across 13 Cook Islands (exceptions being Nassau and Manuae), with three located on Rarotonga. Due to the small size of the islands (100 ha to 5,200 ha) and widespread distribution of some species on each island, this has resulted in entire islands being considered a KBA, with the exception of Rarotonga. A national classification system has recently been developed for protected areas, as elaborated in Footnote 1, and a next step is to assess the extent to which KBAs are protected.

Threats: With its limited land area and increasing urbanization, much of which can probably be attributed to tourism[16], intense competing pressures on land resources for housing, agriculture, tourism, water and other needs are increasingly exposing Cook Islands ecosystems to anthropogenic impacts that threaten endemic terrestrial, coastal and marine biodiversity. Additionally, most of the Cook Islands are small, low-lying and isolated, making them particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as cyclones, droughts and sea-level rise. Specific threats to biodiversity are detailed below.

- **Unplanned/unsustainable land development:** The quality and conditions of the country's inland waters and wetlands is poor status and deteriorating with low data confidence (Cook Islands State of the Environment, 2018). There is strong pressure from landowners to in-fill wetlands for residential and commercial development, altering natural water flow and drainage, further contributing to flood events. In Rarotonga, decreasing land availability generates concerns of development progressing towards the mid-slope and upland ecosystems. This demands more stringent land use planning policies and associated monitoring and enforcement of development, especially to preserve catchments where settlements are encroaching riparian areas, and the remaining unique upland and cloud forest ecosystems that are identified as a KBA for their endemic species. The more accessible coastal areas, particularly in Rarotonga and Aitutaki, have experienced a significant reduction in their lowland forests, salt marshes and other types of wetlands, which remain under threat (especially on Rarotonga) from multiple sources, including agriculture, infrastructural development (including tourism) and settlement. This has been driven largely by an escalating tourism industry pre-COVID-19, documented above[18]; and increased private dwellings over previous decades[17]. Such development, also reflected in an increasingly urban population[18], is contributing to removal and fragmentation of sensitive habitats, as well as other consequential impacts such as increasing water discharge, runoff and nutrient inputs into inland waterways and marine ecosystems. In the immediate foreshore area, construction for tourism and other development reduces available habitat for native species, including nesting sites of sea turtles and birds, and increases erosion damage to properties and beaches. Resorts, hotels and smaller accommodations have been constructed and are continuing to be constructed in the coastal fringes of Rarotonga and Aitutaki. Construction of facilities along coastlines, including sea walls and jetties, can dramatically affect the movements of ocean currents, leading to large increases in sediment, as well as erosion, with associated negative impacts on the local marine ecosystem.
- **Pollution** is considered to be the single most important threat to Cook Islands' biodiversity, as reflected in the degradation of aquatic and lagoon environments from land-based sedimentation, nutrient overload and eutrophication, and pollution in the form of agricultural chemicals (pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers), other chemicals (e.g. detergents), sewage and other wastes. Land clearance and excavation on steep slopes and other poorly designed/executed or inappropriate infrastructural development activities contribute significantly to increased freshwater runoff into lagoons, which can change the delicate ecological balance in these ecosystems. Although use of agricultural chemicals declined with the end of large-scale commercial agricultural production (e.g. pineapple and citrus plantations) in the 1980s, and continues to decline in the Outer Islands due to population loss, the use of fertilizer continues to produce nutrient loading, and use of harmful chemicals (e.g. Paraquat) continues to poison aquatic and marine species. Excess sedimentation and inputs in lagoons are most severe around stream mouths and can be critical during the rainy summer season. This is evident from

seasonal algae blooms in Rarotonga and Aitutaki lagoons and other areas, exacerbated by increased temperatures, and confirmed by climate and water quality analyses, the latter demonstrating the presence of nutrients such as phosphate and nitrogen, as well as ammonia from human and organic waste products and fertilizers. These land-based pollutants have significant ecological impacts across land and seascape biodiversity, such as freshwater ecology, lagoon nurseries, associated fish and invertebrate abundance, coral health and also human health (e.g. ciguatera toxins from reef fish). Pollution reduces marine productivity and resilience, particularly in the face of climate change. It has considerable socio-economic costs to the Cook Islands economy, which is highly reliant on tourism and the strong dependence of local communities on these ecosystems for subsistence fishing, livelihoods and wellbeing.

· **Climate Change Impacts:** The South Pacific is highly vulnerable to general climatic factors such as El Niño and La Niña cycles and climate variability. Worsening extreme climatic events in recent years has reinforced the need for a targeted approach to water, land, forest and coastal management. Available scenario modelling indicates that greenhouse gas emissions will raise temperatures by at least 1.5^{o}C, which have significant impacts on Cook Islands biodiversity, including coral reefs and other ecosystems. Higher seawater temperatures are likely to increase coral bleaching, while more extreme and frequent storm events will lead to storm surges, inundation and flooding. Such events pose threats to Cook Islands' freshwater bodies, which in turn impacts on public water supplies, particularly if the issue is exacerbated by saltwater intrusion associated with sea level rise and over-pumping. Changes in rainfall patterns and amounts will impact ecosystems such as cloud forests, while changes in sea temperatures and currents will likely shift the distribution patterns and movements of marine species. Climate change and disaster risks also threaten livelihoods, whether based on agriculture, fisheries, forestry, tourism or trade, and in some cases local populations living on atolls may be required to relocate due to anticipated sea-level rise. Food security is also likely to become a challenge over the coming decades.

The above considerations indicate that many of the most significant drivers of habitat degradation and biodiversity decline in the Cook Islands in the immediate term result from or are exacerbated by anthropogenic land-based impacts. Consequently, activities proposed for this project are focused on addressing land development across the infrastructural, tourism and agricultural sectors, which are recognized as posing the highest risk to biodiversity[19] and the wider environment in the Cook Islands, including downstream impacts on the marine environment.

In 2017, a total economic valuation (TEV) of the Cook Islands' natural capital and ecosystem services amounted to NZ$ 2.375 billion, 80% ($1.9 billion) of which was attributed to direct use values such as tourism, fisheries and agriculture; 16% ($377 million) to indirect use values such as catchment protection, landscape and regulating services; and 4% ($96 million) to non-use values of biodiversity and landscape[20]. This highlights the vital ecological, socio-cultural and economical importance of conserving the country's diversity of species and ecosystems. Furthermore, healthy and stronger ecosystems will enhance the Cook Islands' natural abilities to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts. Thus, it is critical that such threats are reduced by direct, focused efforts.

Barrier 1: Limited capacity, practical frameworks and tools to manage development in Key Biodiversity Areas and integrate biodiversity considerations across key development sectors.

Development and resource use activities in areas adjacent to or upstream from KBAs, catchments and other critical ecosystems pose a considerable on-going threat to biodiversity and ecosystem functioning in many parts of the Cook Islands, particularly given that enforcement of environmental laws and regulations related to land use and resource management is weak and many national policies, legislation, strategies, and regulatory frameworks are outdated and lack cohesion. Furthermore, efforts to implement integrated, landscape level approaches to environmental conservation and sustainable resource management have met with barriers, including a history of fragmented, single sector development efforts that have not adopted integrated spatial management techniques. Knowledge, experience and capacity are limited in linking sustainable land management (SLM) in catchments with the livelihood needs of downstream coastal residents and ecosystems (through Integrated Catchment/Coastal Management); and, despite the reliance of the economy on natural resources, there is no clear strategy, tools or process to mainstream the benefits of a nature-based economy and protect biodiversity and land/seascapes on which it depends across sectors. There is insufficient political and public awareness of the role of ecosystem services and biological diversity in economic development, public

health and environmental protection; practitioners often overlook the root causes of ecosystem services degradation at the landscape level and fail to adopt an integrated approach to addressing it; and at community level there is an absence of widespread examples on how land use practices can be rendered more sustainable. A key challenge is poor access to information on the status of biodiversity and ecosystem functions, which constrains both national level planning and the design and execution of appropriate management interventions for individual catchments. Planning and sustainable land management are hindered further by complex tenure and traditional customary rights to land, which must also take into account the 'public interest', including the planning and protection of water resources such as water catchments and groundwater lenses. Similarly, existing management structures and capacities in the Cook Islands to manage the growth and practices of the tourism, agriculture and infrastructure and settlement sectors do not meet current needs and standards.

For example, tourism is one of the country's main economic sectors, contributing over 60% of the nation's GDP (pre-COVID). It is an extremely important and evolving contributor to the national economy but the balance between tourism development and environmental sensitivity is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. While some tourism operators have taken a lead in making their operations more sustainable, the present national system for accrediting tourism businesses has very few environmental criteria. Also, CIT lacks legislation to better manage and enforce sustainable tourism practices and requirements.

Agriculture, though small in its contribution to GDP (3%), remains an important sector in terms of food production, food security, employment and livelihoods, especially on the more remote outer islands[21]. About 24.4% of all Cook Islands households manage land for agriculture purposes[22]. Of those employed in the sector, only 29% are under 40; a more mature demographic engaged in agriculture generally maintains past practices of fertilizer and pesticide use that are now recognized to be detrimental to environmental health. Changes in attitudes and habitual activities, as well as introducing innovation and alternative practices and solutions, particularly at small scale household level, requires enhanced efforts in awareness raising, education and support to guide and foster more sustainable behaviour, attitudes and practices. Strengthening of legislation to restrict the importation and distribution of synthetic agricultural products, as well as enhanced monitoring and enforcement capacity are needed.

With private dwellings increasing in recent decades alongside the booming tourism industry, a significant portion of the population is employed in construction or development-related work; and public infrastructure continues to be developed in line with national development goals and agendas. It remains a challenging balance of off-setting development goals with environmental management and conservation concerns, particularly in cases of emergency that need to be prioritized. Stronger procedures and consideration of impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems needs to be built into cross-agency (NES & ICI) planning and approval processes, such as EIAs, as well as raising awareness of best practices and promoting guidelines within the industry. Regulations and penalties can be greatly improved, with more resources focused on monitoring and enforcement to ensure a higher environmental standard is applied across the sector. Institutional capacities require considerable strengthening to overcome these challenges.

These shortcomings and needs collectively demonstrate that strengthened capacity, practical frameworks and management tools are essential to better apply biodiversity considerations across key development sectors (i.e. tourism, agriculture and infrastructure).

Barrier 2: Ineffective management of protected and 'managed' areas due to lack of a legal framework and integrated management plans clearly focused on conservation activities necessary to protect key species and habitats.

Efforts to manage biodiversity in the Cook Islands to date are generally limited, fragmented and sporadic. At present, there is no legal framework specifically designed to underpin the PAs system and its integrated management and monitoring. Legal provisions for the designation, declaration and management of protected areas have yet to be clearly articulated and there are gaps, areas of overlap, and redundant and conflicting provisions in the various laws under which PAs are managed. Furthermore, most of the existing legislation used to address PA-related issues is out of date and/or not supported by specific, detailed regulations or accompanying policy guidance. A related barrier is the absence of a national Protected Areas System that is under the legal mandate

of a single authority. Under current arrangements, responsibilities are allocated to a number of government agencies and other stakeholders, without any binding provisions for system-wide planning, coordination and information sharing. Existing management structures within government do not have sufficient capacity to effectively design, implement and, where necessary, enforce management prescriptions.

Related to this barrier and existing PAs legislation is the absence of provisions regarding ownership and management by communities, private landowners or traditional leaders. For example, there is no legal standing or regulatory authority for Community Conservation Areas and Ra'ui sites that are declared by traditional leaders or Island Councils and managed by local communities, usually by verbal agreements. Moreover, from a national and global perspective, Endemic or Important Bird Areas, Key Biodiversity Areas and Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSAs) identified in the country under various initiatives have yet to be assigned to an appropriate management category and officially or legally protected. Rarotonga's montane forests, for example, with their globally significant diversity of species and ecosystems and their critical role in securing the island's water supply, have yet to be legally protected. This lack of cohesive, integrated legislation relating to protected areas identification, establishment, monitoring, management and enforcement is compounded by limited experience and capacity to engage stakeholders, especially non-governmental and community-based organisations, in planning a national PAs system and a more general lack of coordinated public involvement in natural resources conservation and management. Such compromises to the effective management of its PAs must be addressed in order to avert further increasing impacts on ecosystems services, on which livelihoods, public health and the nation's economy are largely dependent.

Significant progress has been made very recently under the GEF-5 R2R project to address issues relating to understanding the history of Cook Islands' 100 or so protected and other 'managed' areas, their current legal status and developing a criteria-based PAs classification system that is aligned to internationally accepted standards (refer to Footnote 1). Hence, this GEF-7 project is very timely with respect to building on this momentum and, once approved, applying PACS Policy (refer to Component 1).

Barrier 3: Weak public and institutional awareness and understanding of the threats posed by development on biodiversity and their appropriate prevention, control and mitigation.

Whilst awareness of environmental issues becomes more apparent with increased flooding events, algal blooms, crown of thorns outbreaks and other negative impacts arising as a direct result of the threats identified above, a comprehensive understanding of the drivers of these events and their cumulative impacts is lacking. Furthermore, even with such knowledge, there remains a void in practical support and training opportunities for communities to become more directly involved in biodiversity and ecosystem conservation activities and support more sustainable approaches. At an institutional level, capacity to develop sufficient prevention, management and enforcement measures is very limited.

These barriers to achieving global environmental objectives and standards reflect the continuing challenges faced by Pacific Island Countries (PICs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). These include limitations in environmental governance, high staff turnover, weak information systems, national budgetary constraints, inadequate science programmes and limited research capabilities. They are further exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has further reduced national GDP, government budgets and eco-tourism revenue that had previously been established as a sustainable financing mechanism. These barriers will be addressed through:

i) mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services conservation across infrastructure, tourism and agriculture sectors;

ii) Improving the management framework to effectively conserve a national system of protected areas representative of Cook Islands biodiversity; and

iii) raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender, and monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results.

1.a.2 The baseline scenario and any associated baseline projects

Much about the baseline scenario has been described and exemplified in the previous section. In summary, the current scenario is that species and their ecosystems are under significant risk, resulting in declining conservation status of species, reduced habitat quality and increasing ecosystem degradation.

The present economic 'pause' due to the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled a re-evaluation of national priorities and how best to move forward appropriately following this global event. It has highlighted the priority need to put environment at the centre of all other activities. This is reflected in Government's introduction of a 'Green Economy Incentive', which offers accelerated tax depreciation until the end of 2021 to encourage investment in environmentally sustainable initiatives and assets[23]. This provides the national context to the baseline scenario under which this project will be implemented.

Key government policies or plans, in place or proposed, that will support the integrated approach proposed by this project include the following:

· The Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) identifies key environmental targets within the following national goals, to which all government agency plans and activities are aligned as part of their contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2016-2020 NSDP goals and indicators are currently being reassessed for the next phase of national development strategies. Whilst indicators may vary, the goals largely remain the same, which means continuing efforts primarily towards NSDP goals 3 ('Promote sustainable practices'), 10 ('Increase sustainable agriculture'), 11 ('Promote sustainable land use, management of terrestrial ecosystems, and protect biodiversity') and 12 ('Sustainable management of oceans, lagoons and marine resources') through this GEF-7 project's contributions to national targets that feed into the global targets. The NSDP creates the overall national strategic framework for the Cook Islands while the National Strategic Framework for the Environment specifically focuses on biodiversity conservation as a thematic area.

· Under the umbrella of the NSDP are key national policy instruments that provide the framework for protecting, conserving and sustainably managing the Cook Island's biodiversity and other natural resources. These include: Marae Moana Policy (2016-2020)[24]; Offshore Fisheries Policy 2013; Draft Policy for Coastal Fisheries Resources 2016; National Cultural Policy 2017-30; Cook Islands National Agriculture Policy 2017-21; Cook Islands National Plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catch of Seabirds (NPOA-Seabirds); Cook Islands Ministry of Marine Resources Action Plan for Sea Turtle Mitigation 2008; Seabed Minerals Policy 2014; Cook Islands Aquaculture Development Plan 2012-2016; Cook Islands National Maritime Transport Policy 2014; Climate and Disaster Compatible Development Policy 2013-2016; Cook Islands National Integrated Water Resource Management Policy; Draft Cook Islands Trade Policy Statement; Draft Tourism Master Plan Update Cook Islands Tourism: 2005-2015; Draft Ministry of Marine Resources Policy Paper for the Cook Islands Whale Sanctuary Bill; Draft Rarotonga Environment Council Policy on the Foreshore 2002; Draft Rarotonga Environment Council Policy on Sloping Lands 2002; Draft Rarotonga Environment Policy on Wetlands 2002.

· In addition to the above, specific legislation is in place to regulate the use of natural resources. The Environment Act 2003 is the primary overarching legislation concerned with the protection, conservation and management of biodiversity, habitats and ecosystems across both land and sea. It establishes the National Environment Service (NES) as the agency to carry out and regulate these activities. It also provides emphasis and further management measures on key vulnerable areas such as wetlands, foreshore and sloping lands. However, the Act does not automatically apply to every island within the Cook Islands, as it is subject to local island councils adopting the Act. Five islands are currently covered by the Environment Act: Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke and Mitiaro; and separate Island Environment Authorities have been established on Mangaia, Pukapuka, Nassau and Rakahanga. A National Environment Policy, supported by the GEF-5 Ridge to Reef Project and New Zealand High Commission, is currently under public consultation. This will inform the revision of the 2003 Environment Act.

· A Ministry of Agriculture Bill 2017 is under development to provide for the functions and powers of the Ministry of Agriculture under modern and reformed arrangements. Under provisions of the Pesticides Act 1987, which controls the importation and use of agricultural chemicals in the Cook Islands, the Pesticides Board was re-established recently to strengthen the application and enforcement of this Act.

· The Islands Government Act (2012-2013) has increased the authority of Island Councils in the outer islands to manage their own affairs, including conservation and resource use decisions and policies. Island Governments have to promote sustainable and environmentally friendly management of their natural resources. Bylaws, consistent with the Environment Act 2003, can be made with regard to promoting the importance of conserving and sustaining the environment of the island.

· The Marae Moana Act (2017) establishes 'Marae Moana' (Cook Islands Marine Park) within the EEZ of the Cook Islands and provides for its integrated management, with the purpose of protecting and conserving the ecological, biodiversity, and heritage values of the Cook Islands marine environment.

· The following legislation is also relevant to this project: Traditional Knowledge Act 2013; House of Ariki Act 1966; Natural Heritage Trust Act 1999; Prevention of Marine Pollution Act 1998; Marine Resources Act 2005; and Marine Resources (Shark Conservation) Regulations 2012.

· Although written in 2018, the Cook Islands State of Environment Report (SOE) has only recently been endorsed and formally launched in 2020. It highlights many of the drivers and issues to be addressed by this GEF-7 project, reflecting its timeliness of this proposal to pilot scalable solutions that can be replicated throughout the country.

· The Ministry of Infrastructure (ICI) plans to manage stormwater in key areas, including some sites targeted by this project. This provides further opportunity to apply natural green solutions in tandem with engineering solutions and further mainstream the ecosystem service benefits of catchment areas.

Past and Ongoing GEF and Other Donor/NGO financed projects

Former and ongoing GEF and other donor/NGO-financed biodiversity and PA projects have provided a strong foundation of knowledge, experience and lessons on which the current project can build. Some of the significant achievements are summarized below. These initiatives will be examined in more detail during the PPG phase to ensure that project activities build substantively on past achievements and lessons. This will include the GEF-7 Inclusive Conservation Initiative from which the House of Ariki has recently secured funds for knowledge and awareness of traditional governance and stewardship, improved management of natural and cultural resources, and organisational and financial management capacity. The management of natural resources component is focused on spatial planning on 'managed areas' and MPAs established under Marae Moana Act. Potential synergies will be explored during the PPG.

Programme/Project	Content	Building blocks
GEF-7 Sixth National Report to the CBD (Pacific - UNEP) (2020)	Progress made towards national targets such as wetlands, biodiversity and water quality, contributions to Aichi targets, and effectiveness of implementation measures.	Identification of priority areas where enhanced efforts needed towards national and global goals. Project design has been aligned with this report, such as conserving BD, improving PAs management and catchments, supporting traditional knowledge and customs, and addressing impacts of deteriorating water quality and associated reef degradation from land-based sources (e.g. agricultural products).
Adaptation Fund - Pa Enua Action for Resilient Livelihoods (PEARL) (2018 – 2021)	Build and implement an integrated approach to increase adaptive capacity of remote island communities and ecosystems to disaster risk and climate change impacts. Focus on water security management and revitalizing agricultural production systems in the outer islands.	Good practices and lessons learned, particularly strong community involvement and interventions. Built capacity of outer island agricultural sector and their ability to export to Rarotonga to enhance livelihoods. Also identified areas for diversified project activities for enhanced complementarity.
GCF Enhancing Climate Information and Knowledge Services for resilienc	Pacific islands require reliable, timely, actionable information and early warning on local weather, climate and oc	Will increase capacities and local knowledge and resources available for more effective responses to climate impacts. T

and Knowledge Services for resilience in 5 island countries of the Pacific (regional) (Approved 2020)	ation and early warning on local weather, climate and ocean systems. Aims to increase generation and use of climate information in decision making, strengthen adaptive capacity and reduce exposure to climate risks, and strengthen awareness of climate threats and risk-reduction processes.	available for more effective responses to climate impacts. This will mitigate climate threats and vulnerabilities of the project supporting successful implementation.
Tonkin and Taylor 2020 report on Cook Islands Permitting Process and SPREP 2018 review of Cook Islands natural resource and environment related legislation	These reports highlighted areas within the development process that require continued strengthening, capacity and support. These especially relate to the EIA process in terms of oversight, management, monitoring and compliance of the development sector.	Specific recommendations on governance frameworks for development, in addition to capacity building needs in these areas as well as education and awareness campaigns to raise understanding within the private and public sectors of the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
Mei Te Vai Ki Te Vai (MTVKTV) (2017-2020)	Identification of sources of erosion, sedimentation, and land-based pollutants as primary impacts on marine ecosystems within the Muri area of Rarotonga.	Recommendations from this research focus on addressing the land-based impacts and drivers, primarily relating to strengthening of riparian areas, erosion & sedimentation control measures and increased conservation efforts around water catchments including wetlands, with associated frameworks, education and monitoring of such activities, in order to decrease inputs and consequently relieve pressures on the marine habitats to increase ecological quality.
GEF-5 Ridge-to-Reef project (2015-2021)	R2R project sought to enhance Cook Islands capacities to effectively manage its PA estate and sustainably manage its productive landscapes at local scales, including operationalization of the CIMP, and the establishment and strengthening of various forms of protected and locally managed areas within the CIMP, including Protected Natural Areas, Community Conservation Areas and Ra'ui Sites.	Lessons learned from R2R project have informed this PIF proposal so that successes can be replicated and applied to this GEF-7 project, whilst challenges addressed can provide momentum forGEF-7 project to forge ahead. Also, baseline information and data collected during GEF-5 project helped identify where key issues are and which sites require additional support from GEF-7 project to better protect valuable habitats and species. Re: policy, GEF-7 project will build on and support application of PAs Classification System and development of a consolidated Protected Areas policy.
GEF-5 Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities – Integrated Water, Land, Forest and Coastal Management to preserve BD, ESS, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods (2014-2020)	The regional R2R project activities in the Cook Islands were focused in the Muri area of Rarotonga and assessed impacts on lagoon health and biodiversity through a rapid coastal assessment (RapCA). It identified and confirmed some of the main input issues such as storm water inputs, nutrient loading from erosion and sediment, piggeries and agricultural waste, etc.	Identified and confirmed biodiversity and ecosystem threats in a specific pilot site area, developed Erosion and Sediment Control Guidelines and Piggeries policy to mitigate impacts on freshwater and lagoon health. Muri lagoon continues to experience these issues, with enhanced enforcement needed in this area, hence it has been included in the proposed project sites for Rarotonga so the outcomes of this project can be continued and implemented further.

GEF-5 National Biodiversity Planning to Support Implementation of CBD 2011-2020 Strategic Plan in Cook Islands (2014)	Draft National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2021	Alignment of this project with 2 of the 5 Themes of the NBSAP, namely: Theme 2 conservation of ecosystems and Theme 5 Management of knowledge, science and technology related to biodiversity.
GEF-5 Strengthening the Resilience of our Islands and our Communities to Climate Change (SRIC - CC)	Project improved livelihoods of Cook Islands communities through food security, water harvesting, capacity building, and policy support for CCA and DRM, tourism, coastal management, health and communications. Under SRIC-CC Program, Climate Change Adaptation and disaster risk management mainstreamed in development plans of key sectors in each island.	Good practices and lessons learned from community level interventions, and sectoral CCM/CCA mainstreaming efforts.
National water quality testing conducted collaboratively between Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) and National Environment Service (NES)	Identification of key stream outlets in Rarotonga that are particularly prone to land-based pollutants.	This information has been used to identify key sites that should be targeted within this project and will be confirmed at PPG.
Adaptation Fund – Strengthening the Resilience of our Islands and our Communities to Climate Change (2011-2018)	Enhancing knowledge and understanding of climate change and options for adaptation and mitigation. Strengthening the ability of the Cook Islands, particularly outer islands, to effectively and strategically plan and respond to climate change pressures thus reducing vulnerability to disaster risk impacts.	Good practices and lessons learned, strengthened coordination between agencies, mitigating vulnerabilities of climate impacts on future project activities.
GEF3 LDC/SIDS Capacity Building for Sustainable Land Management in Cook Islands (2007-2013)	The SLM project has succeeded in raising awareness, building capacity and improving the baseline understanding of SLM at the individual, institutional and systemic levels; the project assisted with the understanding across community and government of the benefits of a land use planning system to assist with SLM mainstreaming and implementation.	Best practices and lessons learned from the operation of the Soil School and pragmatic trials in sustainable farming practices at the demonstration sites in Rarotonga and Mauke. Also, from community awareness and communications efforts and the participatory development of models for land use planning analysis.

1.a.3 Proposed alternative scenario and brief description of expected project outcomes and components

Based on the above context and global significance of Cook Islands biodiversity, the detrimental impacts of land-based development that threaten its biodiversity and drive environmental degradation, the identified barriers where future efforts must focus and the foundations in place and on which to build and strengthen the protection and conservation of such vital ecosystems and biodiversity: this project aims to bring about a paradigm shift towards delivering effective and scalable solutions at key target sites through enhanced ridge-to-reef, land/seascape and catchment scale approaches that bring together relevant sectors and other interested parties in an integrated, coordinated manner that will foster the necessary enabling conditions for achieving long-term environmental sustainability across entire islands, lagoons and coastal waters. Thus, the GEF alternative scenario builds on lessons learned from previous GEF and other experiences with respect to demonstrating integrated ridge-to-reef and land/seascape approaches. It will be further enhanced, where appropriate, by adopting a catchment-scale framework to secure the integrity of ecosystems and sustain their functioning within a given area defined by natural topographic boundaries. The GEF alternative is based on the following theory of change in line with STAP guidance[25].

· The overall vision is that Cook Islands biodiversity and ecosystems are resilient, safeguarded and at reduced risk from key threats posed by unsustainable resource use driven by key development sectors.

· Achieving this vision will result in: healthy populations of indigenous species conserved and improved quality of their habitats; better managed land/seascapes for biodiversity at catchment scales, where applicable; better managed production areas; reduced forest encroachment; maintenance and enhancement of ecosystem services across land/seascapes; and sequestration of carbon and avoidance of its loss.

· The potential intervention pathways and assumed links to achieve the desired state include:

o If government policy, coordination and regulations are improved, then government investments in conserving biodiversity and combatting land degradation will be more effective and mainstreaming across other sectors facilitated.

o If capacity of government officials is enhanced this will lead to improved delivery of mandates and greater implementation and enforcement of legislation.

o If capacity of communities in SLM and biodiversity conservation techniques and approaches is enhanced, then this will solicit their greater engagement and participation.

o If awareness is raised of the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services, this will lead to behavioural shifts and increase support for biodiversity conservation and SLM across communities, government ministries and key development sectors.

o If tangible economic incentives and resilient, sustainable livelihoods are identified and developed for local communities, this will further enhance desirable behaviour shifts and uptake in SLM and biodiversity conservation practices.

o If opportunities are made to engage with SLM impacting sectors (i.e. infrastructure, agriculture and tourism), raised awareness and understanding about the values of biodiversity will result in more biodiversity- and land-friendly attitudes and practices.

· These potential pathways have been used to inform the project's components and integrated approach, which is based on the premise that biodiversity and ecosystems degradation are fundamentally inter-connected and can be successfully resolved by addressing them simultaneously in ways that deliver benefits to local communities. Hence, the project strategy proposes that:

o To remove the barriers to addressing threats, best practices in biodiversity conservation and SLM need to be mainstreamed across key sectors (notably agriculture, infrastructure and tourism) and communities to raise awareness of sustainable development pathways and promote them. Effort is required to improve inter-sectoral and vertical coordination, regulations, government capacity and the availability of up-to-date information and tools to support decision-making.

o Demonstrations are required at catchment scale to show how the development and implementation of integrated management plans involving government, communities and the private sector can effectively conserve indigenous species and habitats and deliver sustainable land management, while simultaneously supporting nature-based livelihoods. Based on the Cook Islands context, an integrated Ridge to Reef approach deployed at catchment scales across landscapes and seascapes needs to be promoted and strengthened.

o Empowering the community within these land/seascapes to adopt and promote sustainable livelihood options that are environmentally friendly and support the perpetuation of ecosystem services will provide the foundation for sustainable, diversified livelihood opportunities resilient to environmental, including economic, shocks.

o A concerted effort in awareness raising and knowledge sharing is necessary to generate a sound understanding and appreciation of the values of biodiversity and the importance of addressing threats to PAs and ecosystem services through integrated approaches involving relevant stakeholders.

The theory of change has led to the formulation of four project Outcomes that will work in synergy to achieve:

1. Biodiversity and ecosystem services safeguards embedded in national and island governance frameworks, policies and institutional capacities across key development sectors (agriculture, infrastructure, tourism).
2. Ecosystem services restored, maintained and enhanced; and globally significant biodiversity safeguarded in priority catchments.
3. Globally significant biodiversity protected across Cook Islands through effective selection, design, management, monitoring and enforcement of its PAs system.
4. Greater understanding of values of conserving Cook Islands biodiversity in PAs and sustainably managing catchments to provide ecosystem services; adaptive management informed by M&E results; and dissemination of knowledge gained and lessons learned.

An outline of the Theory of Change is shown below; and this will be elaborated during the PPG in consultation with stakeholders (note that not all connections and pathways are shown for simplicity). There are explicit assumptions that must be met in order to achieve the intended results, notably:

a) Government maintains its political, institutional and co-financing support for the project;
b) Customary land tenure does not jeopardise implementation of ridge-to-reef approaches, which are a precondition for delivering Outcome 2;
c) Improved nature-based livelihoods can potentially increase community participation in biodiversity conservation and SLM;
d) Improved knowledge management, supported by adaptive management, M&E and gender mainstreaming will increase capacity and resilience, leading to enhanced sustainability and up-scaling of project outcomes;

The project is able to be managed efficiently, effectively and adaptively, not jeopardised by COVID-19.

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[1] The total resident population of the Cook Islands is about 14,800 (Cook Islands Census Report, 2016).

[2] Suwarrow, Penryhn (Tongareva), Manihiki, Rakahanga, Pukapuka and Nassau.

[3] Rarotonga, Aitutaki & Manuae, Ātiu & Takutea, Ma'uke, Miti'āro, Mangaia and Palmerston.

[4] Allison A., Eldredge, L.G. 2004. Polynesia-Micronesia – 197-203. *In* Mittermeier, R.A et al, 2004, *Hotspots Revisited* – Earth's Biologically Richest and Most Endangered Terrestrial Ecoregions, Mexico City, Mexico: CEMEX.

[5] Steadman, D.W. 1995. Prehistoric Extinctions of Pacific Islands Birds: Biodiversity meets Zooarcheology. Science 267: 1123-1131.

[6] Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, 2007, *Ecosystem Profile – Polynesia-Micronesia Biodiversity Hotspot*, Conservation International – Melanesia Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, Apia, Samoa.

[7] Olson, D. M., Dinerstein, E. 2002. *The Global 200: Priority ecoregions for global conservation*. Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden 89(2):199-224.

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[9] http://worldwildlife.org/ecoregions/oc0103

[10] Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust: http://cookislands.bishopmuseum.org/search.asp

[11] State of Environment Report, 2018

[12] Cook Islands Protected Areas Classification System, Policy Paper, 2021

[13] Jones, 2001

[14] Evans, 2012. *Priority Sites for Conservation in the Cook Islands: Key Biodiversity Areas & Important Bird Areas*. Te Ipukarea Society, Rarotonga, Cook Islands. 39p.

[15] Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, 2007, Ecosystem Profile – Polynesia-Micronesia Biodiversity Hotspot, Conservation International – Melanesia Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, Apia, Samoa.

[16] Numbers of visitors increased from 49,000 in 1998 to 71,000 in 2002, by when tourism had become the dominant economic sector (Mellor, C.S. 2003. Pacific Economic Bulletin 18 (1). Numbers continue to rise, from125,130 in 2015 to 171,550 in 2019. (http://www.mfem.gov.ck/images/documents/Statistics_Docs/4.Tourism/2020/10October/Mig_Statistics_Report_202010.pdf)

[17] The number of private dwellings has steadily increased over the last six decades, from about 100 in 1950-1959 to 984 in 2000-2010; and 620 between 2010 and 2016. (Source: Cook Islands Population Census Report 2016)

[18] Cook Islands urban population increased from under 7,000 in 1955 to 9,500-12,000 during the period 1970-2000, since when numbers have fluctuated between 13,000 and 14,000. (Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision. (Medium-fertility variant).

[19] State of Environment Report 2018

[20] Connor & Madden, 2017: Valuing Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital for the Cook Islands.

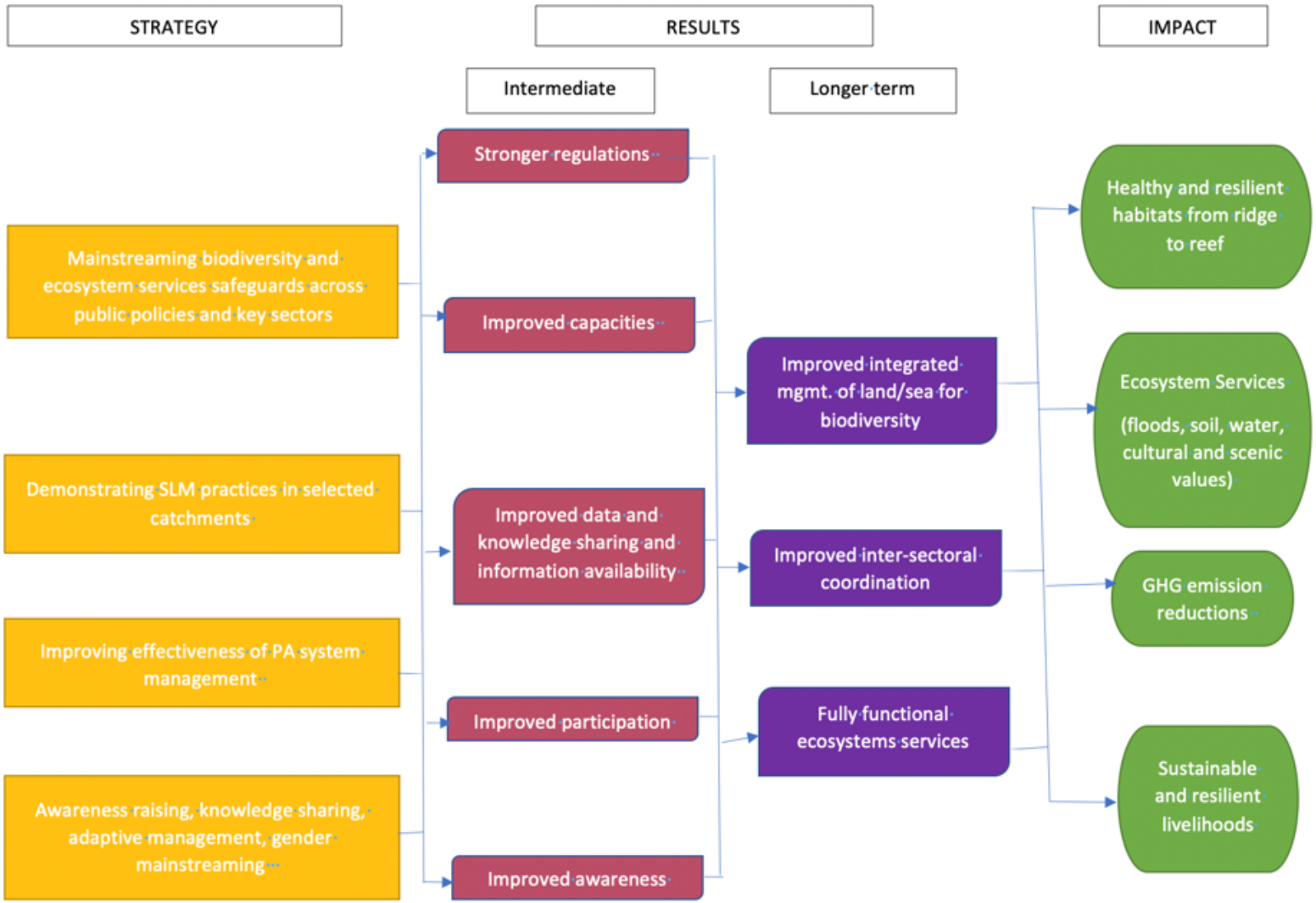
[21] Cook Islands Agriculture Census, 2011

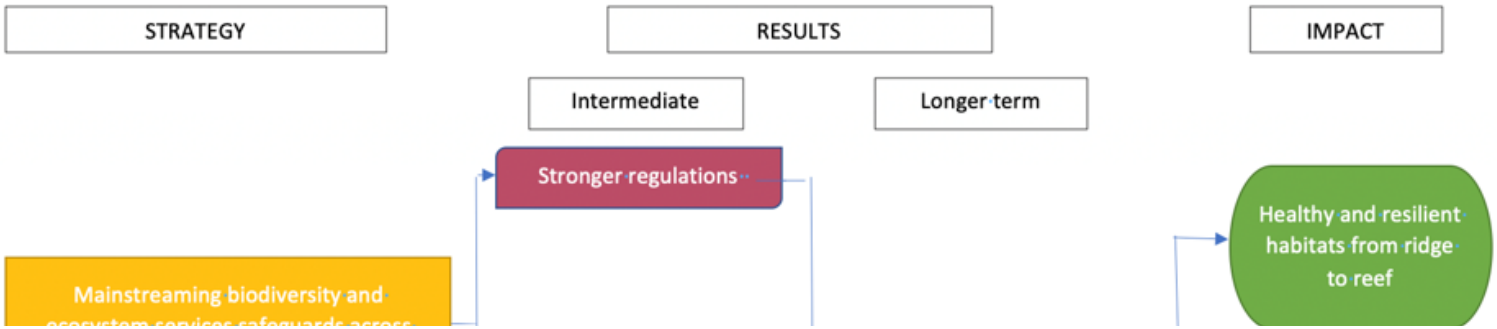
[22] Cook Islands Census report, 2016

[23] http://www.mfem.gov.ck/economic-planning/erp-phase-ii

[24] This Policy continues to apply and is not currently scheduled to be revised.

[25] Stafford Smith, M. 2020. *Theory of Change Primer, A STAP Advisory Document*. Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel to the Global Environment Facility. Washington, D.C.


STRATEGY
RESULTS
IMPACT
Intermediate
Longer term
Stronger regulations
Improved capacities
Improved data and knowledge sharing and information availability
Improved participation
Improved awareness
Improved integrated mgmt. of land/sea for biodiversity
Improved inter-sectoral coordination
Fully functional ecosystems services
Mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services safeguards across public policies and key sectors
Demonstrating SLM practices in selected catchments
Improving effectiveness of PA system management
Awareness raising, knowledge sharing, adaptive management, gender mainstreaming
Healthy and resilient habitats from ridge to reef
Ecosystem Services (floods, soil, water, cultural and scenic values)
GHG emission reductions
Sustainable and resilient livelihoods


STRATEGY
RESULTS
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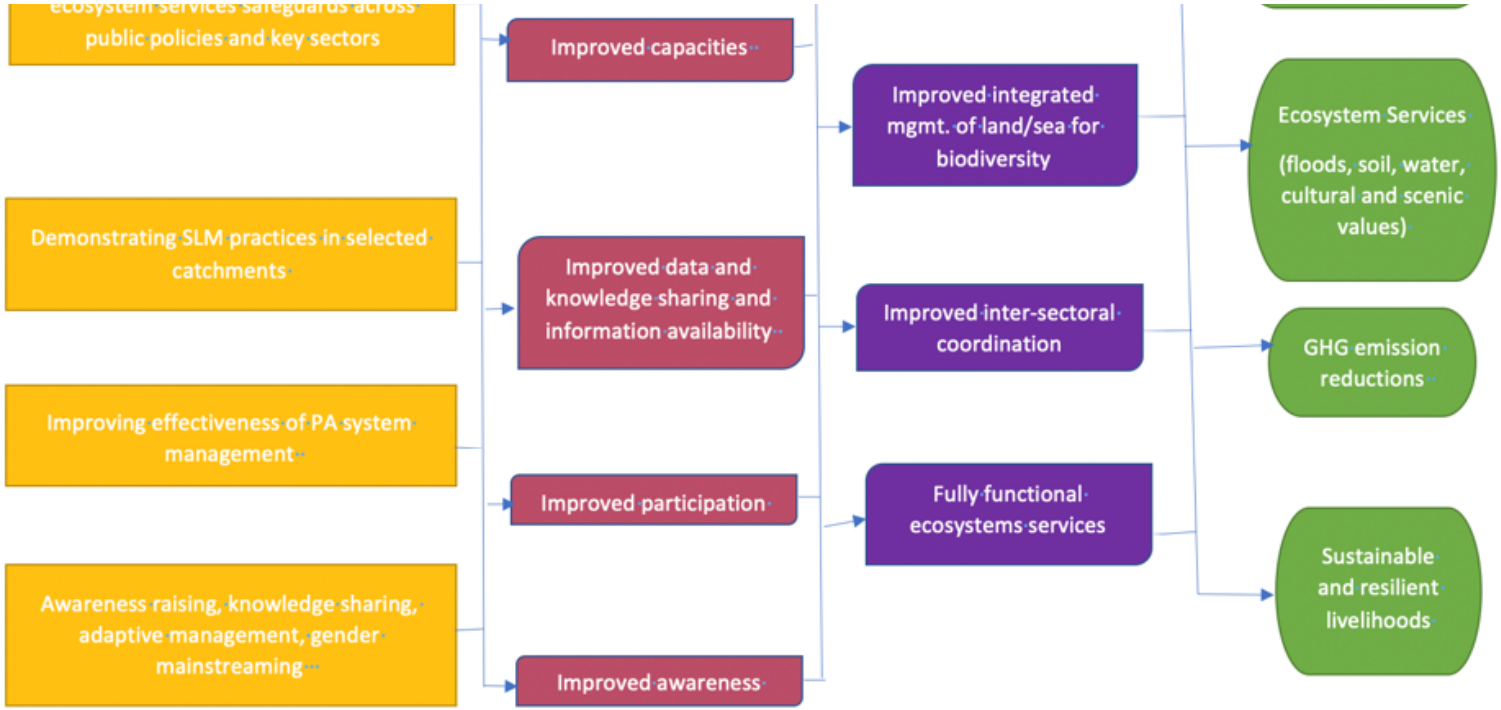
Mainstreaming biodiversity and
Healthy and resilient habitats from ridge to reef



Significant efforts have been made in the design of this PIF to integrate green recovery and resilience principles that can also deliver global environmental benefits. These include green and climate-smart agriculture and other livelihood initiatives based on sustainable use of natural resources.

The project objective is: *To mainstream biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services safeguards across Cook Islands key sectors, in partnership with traditional leaders and communities, to deliver sustainably managed protected areas and catchments*.

The project aims to reduce and mitigate negative environmental impacts of the key development sectors (agriculture, infrastructure, tourism), which are the main national drivers of biodiversity and habitat degradation, through mainstreaming integrated, sustainable management of land and coastal waters across the National Environment Service (NES), Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI), Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT), and the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). This will be achieved by: enhancing policy and institutional frameworks that are in place to regulate and monitor activities relating to these industries; improving

knowledge-sharing platforms within and between agencies; increasing awareness and understanding of biodiversity; strengthening capacity and better equipping these public sectors to apply and enforce such frameworks and supporting safeguard measures. Transformed understanding, improved policies and enhanced capacities into action will be demonstrated in selected key catchments to improve the quality of terrestrial, freshwater and marine habitats by addressing the sources and contributory factors of land-based pollution to land/seascapes.

In addition to the above integrated approach to public sector development, the project will apply the PACS Policy, once approved, to the PAs system and follow up on the ground by: strengthening conservation management effectiveness in two key PAs, as well as a newly designated PA (Rarotonga Cloud Forest); and demonstrating a co-management approach with traditional leaders, represented by the House of Ariki, as well as communities and landowners. Best practices and lessons learned from these efforts will be replicated across the PAs system and other 'managed areas' following in the wake of this project.

Significant attention and support will be given to the private sector such as development contractors, tourism providers and small-scale farmers, as well as the wider community, not only to mainstream biodiversity safeguards but also to foster innovative and original solutions and stimulate private sector involvement and investment in conservation efforts. Additionally, awareness and education campaigns will be paramount to bring about a paradigm shift in the way the Cook Islands considers and prioritizes its biodiversity in development activities at all levels, whilst also ensuring that gender equality and social inclusion are mainstreamed across all activities and opportunities. Civil society organisations will play a key role in developing and delivering these activities.

This objective will be realized through three component strategies and four outcomes as described below.

Component 1: Mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across key development sectors.

This component will ensure that biodiversity safeguards are institutionalized within governance frameworks to provide long-term sustainable solutions to national development by integrating them across key sectors within national processes. Thus, the project's legacy will be safeguarded beyond its life, fostering national ownership and sectoral responsibilities to address the key drivers of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation.

Within this component, Outcome 1 directly seeks to strengthen the development and implementation of national and island-level governance frameworks for the conservation of globally and nationally important biodiversity, and the maintenance of ecosystem services at catchment scales. This will be measured by the number of policies, regulations, plans or frameworks produced or modified to mainstream biodiversity safeguards across the agricultural, institutional and tourism development sectors, as well as increases in Capacity Scorecard ratings at institutional and individual levels. Outcome 1 will include the following initiatives:

· The 2021 Protected Areas Classification System (PACS)[1] and draft Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP), key outputs of GEF-5 R2R project, are due to be incorporated in the revised Environment Act to strengthen the foundations, management and accountability of the PAs system. Their progress through the legislature will be assessed during the PPG in order to fine tune outputs under this Outcome.

· Island level regulations will be updated or created for those islands subject to the revised Environment Act. This may include new functions to identify and legislate PAs and protected species, as well as more stringent EIA processes and safeguards against destructive development activities. This will provide the legislative framework at local island level to protect, manage and sustain their unique ecosystems and species in line with the national Environment Act, with emphasis on island-specific considerations with respect to native, threatened, endemic or migratory species, as well as PAs. Better monitoring and enforcement of environmental safeguards across the Cook Islands is also planned,

· Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs)will be piloted, applying regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem services in an integrated and holistic manner that is based on a whole-island approach, in consultation with island communities, traditional leaders, island governments and other stakeholders. Such strategies will benefit from the wealth of traditional, local and ecological knowledge and experience specific to

each island, as well as commitment and support arising from the inclusive consensus-building stakeholder engagement process. It may be helpful, as appropriate given that all land is traditionally owned, to apply policies and safeguards spatially, using a GIS application to the extent possible, to inform management planning at catchment and PA scales, environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and for other purposes. Inclusion of such maps within IEMPs would help stakeholders visualise the safeguards in place and to be enforced island wide. IEMPs might be accompanied by guidelines for the private sector, communities or general public in relation to key areas of vulnerability (e.g. Erosion and Sedimentation Control Guidelines, Riparian Planting Guidelines, Foreshore Planting Guidelines). Options will be considered during the PPG.

· A National Environmental Information System (NEIS) will be developed for purposes of managing and sharing data and information on environment, including biodiversity and ecosystems; monitoring, for example, the effectiveness of managing the PAs system (using the METT) and the status/condition of its biodiversity (using indicators that can double up for purposes of reporting to national and/or global goals); processing (and monitoring) permits; and providing links to other portals hosting data and/or information on Cook Islands biodiversity and other natural resources, for example the database of Cook Islands plant and animal species managed by the National Heritage Trust[12] and government's geoportal managed by Infrastructure Cook Islands that will provide ministries with access to spatial planning data. The geoportal potentially provides opportunities for NES to develop its own mapping applications for such purposes as PA, catchment and Island Environment management plans. NEIS will also provide a valuable and readily accessible repository for its technical reports, research studies, publications, guidelines, policies, strategies and training materials. The potential for partnering with the UN Biodiversity lab for improving geospatial data management and analysis capabilities will be assessed during PPG.

Linked to these innovative activities to increase the institutional capacities of agencies, such as NES, CIT and ICI, who are primarily involved in the consideration of biodiversity within the development sector, a capacity needs assessment will be undertaken during the PPG with respect to technical capacities in fostering science-based analyses of potential impacts on biodiversity to inform decision making and enforcement activities, as well as to improve natural capital intersectoral governance mechanisms.

Outcome 2 is focused on demonstrating how safeguards can be applied to a selection of priority catchments to conserve biodiversity and sustain ecosystems services through avoidance and reversal of degrading land use practices. Targets will be based on the number of hectares in which ridge to reef approaches are applied to improve management practices in these catchments, the hectarage of PAs within such catchments that benefit directly from such activities, and the number of households engaged in sustainable land management (SLM) and riparian ecosystem restoration activities within the selected catchments.

A total of six catchments have been prioritised in Rarotonga and Aitutaki to address deteriorating terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystem quality issues resulting from increased land-based human pressures. These catchments embrace terrestrial KBAs, or parts of them, and abut marine KBAs that are de facto MPAs under the Marae Moana Act (Annex A). It is proposed to apply full catchment audits, supported by the University of Newcastle, Australia (UON) as part of national capacity building efforts, to identify key nutrient sources impacting these catchments. This will be complemented by household surveys to assess current practices that may be contributing to catchment degradation. It will also provide a baseline for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of targeted communications, citizen science and training.

Equipped with both environmental data from catchment audits and social behaviour data from household surveys, it will be possible to apply more science-based decision-making with specific safeguards and solutions across an array of management options (capacity building, education and awareness, monitoring, policies, regulations, etc.). This will enable the greatest threats to habitat health and ecosystem functioning to be directly addressed through such measures as: erosion and sediment control, strengthening riverbanks, monitoring and enforcement against commercial and agricultural waste to reduce inputs to waterways.

Intersectoral catchment management plans, aligned with their respective IEMPs if applicable, will be developed in close consultation with their respective community and other local stakeholders, focusing particularly on KBAs or parts of them that are not designated PAs. Capacities of households in SLM will be improved through increased awareness and training in innovative agricultural practices, including soil and water conservation, agricultural runoff control, mixed cropping, terracing, organic waste management (green waste and livestock manure), organic fertilizer use etc.. Interventions will target riparian ecosystems to enhance the natural capabilities of these ecosystems to retain, reduce and filter water flows, thereby improving freshwater and marine habitats downstream. Replanting with native plants in riparian areas that benefit other native species and habitats and sustain ecosystem functions and services will be promoted. Improvements in water quality will be monitored to track cumulative improvements in habitat health, aquatic organisms and other ecosystem services, including resilience to climate change.

Component 2: Improving the management framework to effectively conserve a national protected areas system representative of Cook Islands biodiversity

This component is focused on strengthening the integrity of the PAs system and the effectiveness with which individual PAs are managed. The former includes applying the Protected Areas Classification System (PACS) and the Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP), once legislated, across the PAs system; and developing more diversified financing mechanisms to conserve biodiversity and sustain the PAs system. The latter will be demonstrated in a selection of key PAs through highly participatory partnerships involving private landowners, traditional leaders, Island Councils and local communities, as appropriate, supported by government agencies and NGOs. A new PA will also be created.

Outcome 3 is focused on strengthening the integrity and effectiveness of the national system of PAs with respect to their selection, design, management and monitoring to address the key threats to Cook Islands national and globally important biodiversity. Targets include baseline METT scores increasing by 15% and the total protected area estate under improved conservation management.

Additionally, it is planned to increase the PAs system by 150 ha with the creation of Rarotonga Cloud Forest as a new PA on account of its unique cloud forest and endemic species, and water catchment functions. Due to the strong land tenure system of the Cook Islands, the establishment of the Cloud Forest PA will be collaboratively led by NES alongside the Koutu Nui and traditional leaders of the respective villages, who have already expressed a strong desire to protect this area site. Co-management arrangements and formal agreements will be developed to secure the long-term involvement of local communities, landowners and government in best co-management practices.

The PAs selected for improved management effectiveness are Suwarrow National Park, Takutea Nature Reserve and the new Cloud Forest, totalling 400 ha in terrestrial area and, with the inclusion of Manuae, 2,400 ha in MPAs. Takitumu Conservation Area in Rarotonga is also included in the selection, albeit currently classified as a ‘managed area’. Further details with maps are provided in Annex A.

Management plans will be updated or formulated for each site in alignment with the PACS and PAMP, complete with action plans that clearly identify necessary interventions to efficiently improve and strengthen management effectiveness. For many sites this will include invasive species management of the ship rat (*Rattus rattus*) that threatens key bird species present. Implementation of these plans will contribute significantly to global environment benefits by ensuring key habitats for vulnerable native, endemic and migratory species are protected and, in some sites, will also enhance ecosystem services. Such management and accompanying action plans should be signed off by all implementing partners, with responsible parties and budgets identified for specific actions. More specific measures include the following:

· Takitumu: A management plan was created under the GEF-5 R2R project in its final year (2020), therefore activities will focus on implementing this plan, having updated its budget and revised the allocation of responsibilities among partners as necessary.

· Takutea: A terrestrial assessment conducted under GEF-5 will be replicated to identify any changes over time. These will be built into the management planning and monitoring process developed under GEF-7.

· **Manuae**: A draft management plan was prepared in 2005 but never implemented. Through a strong participatory approach with the Landowners Association, the project will help to: secure legal designation of Manuae under the new PACS/PAMP policies developed under GEF-5; update and implement the management plan and related resource use regulations; and provide ongoing training and support to rangers to enhance surveillance and monitoring. Education and awareness programs will also be carried out in Aitutaki to support conservation efforts in nearby Manuae.

· **Suwarrow**: Terrestrial and marine assessments are required, as well as restoration strategies to target removal of invasive species and increase native vegetation that supports important bird nesting. Management planning and regulations need to be updated; and the potential opportunities, in conjunction with other areas of globally unique biodiversity, for nominating the national park under UNESCO's Man and Biosphere Programme or World Heritage Convention.

· **Baseline METT score**s for Manuae, Takutea and Takitumu will be confirmed at PPG stage, by when the GEF-5 project will have been terminally evaluated and new management effectiveness targets can be agreed for GEF-7. Suwarrow will require a baseline METT score.

· **Management plans** will prioritise biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services, alongside climate change, gender and traditional management systems considerations. Full consideration given to the new Environment Act and updated PA policy frameworks, as well as any other applicable legislation. Specific species restoration plans for key threatened species will be incorporated into respective management plans.

· **Management tools** will be updated or developed to improve management effectiveness, including the feasibility of using innovative technologies for remote monitoring and surveillance of these geographically dispersed PAs to reduce management costs and provide sustainability and legacy beyond the project. Associated capacity development will be identified to support PA managers, rangers and communities to better apply the management plans, safeguards and monitoring frameworks made available to them.

Importantly, a diverse portfolio of sustainable financing mechanisms at system and individual PA levels will be reviewed at the outset of the project to inform a strategy that will be applied while piloting the above management plans.

Recommendations in the 2021 review of Cook Islands PAs system and its 'managed areas' estate[1] will be followed up, including incorporation of these data into NEIS (Outcome 1) and development of a spatial layer defining every 'protected' and 'managed' area. A priority will be to ensure that such spatial information is incorporated within the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) and Word Database on Other Effective Conservation Measures (WD-OECM) [1], thereby enhancing cooperation in PA monitoring and surveillance in line with regional and international goals and other initiatives.

Component 3: Raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender, and monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results

This component is concerned with: raising awareness and understanding about the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the vital importance of intersectoral approaches to sustainable management at large catchment scales; generating and sharing data and knowledge; and applying a monitoring and evaluation system to ensure effective project implementation, including management of safeguards, gender mainstreaming, and establishment of long-term partnerships between government, landowners, traditional leaders and communities to help ensure that stakeholder engagement is sustained beyond the life of the project. Knowledge management will include development of best practices, exchanges between project sites (Cook Islands) and with other countries in the Pacific.

Outcome 4 will be underpinned by a Communication Strategy that aligns project interventions with the respective target stakeholders, ensuring that: stakeholders are supported with relevant data, information and guidance; and project outputs, findings and lessons are disseminated appropriately (e.g., via EXPOSURE, PANORAMA, Google Story Maps, etc.). Intersectoral collaboration and gender mainstreaming will be key elements of the Strategy, which should be drafted within six months of project onset and accompanied by an Action Plan that is reviewed/updated annually.

Importantly, formulation of the Strategy will be informed by a Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey of a representative sample of the project's stakeholders undertaken at project inception. KAP surveys will be repeated at mid-term and end of project, enabling the effectiveness of project's interventions to be tracked with respect to awareness raising and understanding among stakeholders. The key stakeholders will be clearly identified, defined and quantified at project inception to ensure reliable baseline scores are established, against which future progress can be tracked towards the target. KAP scores will be disaggregated by gender.

Existing data, reports and related information on Cook Islands biodiversity, along with new data, guidelines, training modules, reports and other findings generated by the project, will be consolidated and held on a centralized platform in NEIS (Output 1.2)[2] to support science-based decision making. Species-related data will continue to strengthen existing platforms, such as the Cook Islands Biodiversity Database[12] to which NEIS can be linked subject to trilateral agreements.

Technical capacity development and training among key partners and NES will enhance and sustain knowledge management. Training the trainers in water quality testing, terrestrial surveys, reporting and publication will be available through the UON partnership. The project will fully align with, and benefit from, UNDP's SIDS offer[3]. Tertiary education courses and other levels of studies will be made available to further build national capacities. By project end, it is expected that local land owners, communities and other key decision-making stakeholders within the target sites will be better equipped, more knowledgeable and adequately skilled to identify and monitor detrimental impacts on biodiversity, ecosystem services, food production systems and water security caused by unsustainable land use practices and introduce/enforce appropriate safeguard measures within an integrated holistic context.

1.a.4 Alignment with GEF focal area and/or Impact Program strategies

The project's multi-sectoral, integrated landscape approach to safeguard biodiversity from unsustainable land use practices, notably caused by agriculture, infrastructure and tourism development sectors, and to enhance the effectiveness of protected areas aligns well with the goals of the GEF-7 Biodiversity Focal Area strategy: *to maintain globally significant biodiversity in landscapes and seascapes*; particularly its Objectives 1 and 2. More specifically, the project will contribute to two programmes within the Biodiversity focal area as summarized below.

BD-1-1	*Mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes through biodiversity mainstreaming in priority sectors* The project will provide an opportunity to mainstream biodiversity considerations into governance fr ameworks across multiple development sectors. Additionally, it will demonstrate how catchments c an be sustainably managed in a holistic and integrated manner across a range of stakeholders (i.e. i nfrastructure, agriculture, tourism, private enterprises and communities), while focusing specifically on reducing the terrestrial pollutant inputs to freshwater and marine ecosystems in order to safegu ard their natural functioning and associated biodiversity, as well as to enhance the quality of downs tream KBAs and PAs established under Marae Moana and traditional systems of raui.
BD-2-7	*Address direct drivers to protect habitats and species and improve financial sustainability, effective management, and ecosystem coverage of the global protected area estate* The effective management of PAs (2,800 ha) and 'managed areas' (2,572 ha) will be improved at six key sites across the Cook Islands in order to strengthen protection measures for KBAs with their thr eatened, endemic and migratory species. Increased capacity development will help ensure that effe ctive protection of these sites will continue beyond the life of the project. This includes the propose d establishment of Rarotonga Cloud Forest, adding 118 ha to the PAs system. Diversified sustainab le financing mechanisms will be sought to provide long-term support to biodiversity and PAs conser vation.

1.a.5 incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEFTF, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing

Cook Islands Government is specifically interested in support from GEF-7 to implement national plans, described in the baseline section above, to address identified drivers impacting habitats and species. This will provide a timely investment to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards across the environment, particularly with respect to the agriculture, infrastructure and tourism development sectors, to sustain the functioning of ecosystems and restore their ecological integrity and ridge-to-reef connectivity.

The GEF investment will maximize this opportunity by supporting an integrated and holistic sustainable development approach at catchment and entire island scales that will mainstream SLM and biodiversity safeguards. It will also remove systemic and institutional barriers to mainstreaming biodiversity in key development sectors and strengthen biodiversity management at the national and local levels through community-based natural resource management, whereby sustainable land use practices under traditional governance systems will also sustain livelihoods. The support of biodiversity considerations into key sectors (i.e. infrastructure, agriculture, tourism and traditional leaders) will promote the involvement of these stakeholders in efforts to improve the management effectiveness of PAs, thus assist in preventing species extinctions, conserve globally significant biodiversity, and protect and improve ecosystem services in the Cook Islands: thereby strengthening the local and national economies, and generating global environmental benefits. Demonstration sites, habitats and ecosystems have been identified in a holistic manner, incorporated into the Core Indicators for this project and will be confirmed during the PPG.

Without the GEF investment, it is likely that actions against the pressures and drivers identified will be fragmented and largely diluted due to the known barriers, insufficient resources and capacity, and other competing national priorities. This scenario is exacerbated in wake of Covid-19: with many of the alternative sustainable financing mechanisms previously received from sustainable tourism halted, much of the remaining environmental conservation relies

on government budgets that have also been reduced due to economic pressures. Furthermore, capacity development and strengthening of governance frameworks is likely to be significantly slower without the relevant technical support in place to assist in this process, with such delays contributing to ongoing environmental degradation at its current rates. Due to the connectivity of landscapes, particularly in PICs and SIDS, any dilution of action against key pressures of habitat degradation will continue to have consequential impacts on community livelihoods, wellbeing and health. The barriers and insufficient capacity for integrating biodiversity and ecosystem concerns into management actions across terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems means that a business-as-usual scenario will result in continuing weakness in coordination and integration of biodiversity concerns across the various sectors and in stakeholders that manage or influence these critical ecosystems. Opportunities for synergies will also be constrained by the absence of coordinating mechanisms. As a result, development risks to key ecosystem services, such as biodiversity conservation, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and catchment services, will continue to be widespread in areas ranging from sloping lands and agricultural landscapes to riparian zones, wetlands and coastal landscapes and out to coral reefs and other inshore marine habitats, with significant impacts including biodiversity loss, sedimentation, pollution and nutrient overloads flowing from terrestrial to coastal to marine ecosystems. Finally, public awareness of the benefits provided by biodiversity and functioning ecosystems will continue to be low and hence participation in biodiversity conservation will continue to be limited; and incentives for communities to manage their natural resources wisely will continue to be inadequate.

1.a.6 Global environmental benefits (GEFTF) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF)

The project will contribute to safeguarding globally significant biodiversity and its ecosystem goods and services, including the security of food production systems. There are huge environmental, social and economic values to be gained nationally and globally in piloting an integrated catchment management approach because once mainstreamed it could transform sustainable management from a few catchments to entire islands and their coastal waters, enhancing conservation of native biodiversity and production systems from ridge to reef. Social benefits are inherent in the integrated approach, with multiple sectors and communities working together towards a common vision; and sustainable economic benefits are underpinned by sustaining ecosystem goods and services. Additionally, the improved management and effectiveness of the national PAs system, complemented by its surrounding buffer of sustainably managed catchments, will more effectively protect globally threatened and endemic biodiversity.

The target catchment sites, comprising approximately 1,794ha (about 7.5% of Cook Islands' total land area), will benefit from holistic, integrated sustainable management from ridge to reef that is characteristic of a catchment approach to safeguard the integrity and functioning of ecosystems and production systems. If successful, it should be sufficient incentive to mainstream such an approach across 100% of catchments. Additional global benefits resulting from the project include:

- 400 ha of terrestrial and 2,400 ha of marine protected areas will be under improved management for conservation and sustainable use.
- 118 ha of new protected area established, conserving key ecosystems that contain threatened endemic species and valuable fresh water sources. It features among the best remaining examples of primary montane rain and (Metrosideros) cloud forest in Eastern Polynesia, as cited in WWF's *The Global 200*[4].
- 2,411 ha of landscape will be under improved practices (excluding protected areas)
- 788,236 tCO2eq emission avoided during a 20-year period.
- The investment will directly benefit an estimated 11,426 community members (5,627 female and 5,801 male) representing about 75% of the Cook Islands resident population.
- US$ 26.5 million of co-financing leveraged and invested in this integrated catchment approach to safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystem services; and effectively managing protected areas.

· Improved management (i.e. community-based co-management) of selected priority catchments, as well as specific priority protected areas that are habitat to key threatened and endemic species.

· Raised awareness and understanding of biodiversity considerations and mainstreaming safeguards across key development sectors (tourism, agriculture and infrastructure), as well as increased technical capacity within relevant government sectors and communities to apply sustainable control measures.

1.a.7 Innovation, sustainability and potential for scaling up

Innovation is particularly pertinent in conserving biodiversity in PICs and SIDS due to the wide spectrum of scales over which interventions are required (i.e. small islands distributed across oceans of sea) and the limited resources available within small island state economies. The latter require smarter, intelligent solutions to maximize potential benefits and ensure sustainability and legacy post-project. For example:

· Applying integrated land/seascape approaches designed at scales large enough to address ecological integrity needs and to engage all interest groups in generating consensus through realizing a common vision. around that aim to tackle a multitude of factors for maximum benefit and efficiency of resources.

· Piloting such approaches at catchment scales from ridge-to-reef is a further innovative enhancement, as is the application of the emerging new National Environment Policy to entire islands under the proposed Island Environment Management Plans.

· Building on Cook Islands government commitments and investments in innovative technology, increasing access to ICT and its engagement with communities and the private sector are reflected in this project:
o establishment of a National Environment Information System to assist with integration between sectors through increased access and sharing of data, information and knowledge;

o enhanced use of mapping and spatial data to better inform decision making processes (e.g. EIAs, UN biodiversity Lab):

o online knowledge platforms to support flexible and accessible learning opportunities for different sectors (public, private and civil [e.g. EXPOSURE, PANORAMA, Google Story Maps, etc.]);

o use of applications (apps) for innovative citizen science programs and engage communities, private sector and volunteers in much needed environmental, biodiversity and socioeconomic data gathering and reporting;

o remote monitoring/surveillance of geographically isolated PAs too difficult/costly to visit regularly.

· Building on, and benefiting from, UNDP's SIDS offer, in particular the blue Economy and digital transformation pillars.

· Small low value grants to incentivize communities, local NGOs/CSOs and academia to develop creative solutions to known environmental pressures within the project's scope (key development sectors).

· Partnership with University of Newcastle to ensure project activities are informed by the latest science and technological innovation in biodiversity conservation and management, and enhancing national capacities to implement them.

Sustainability is incorporated into the project design by ensuring that key initiatives are institutionalized before the project ends. Strengthening governance frameworks that enhance biodiversity considerations ensures a legacy of national commitment. Furthermore, through the use of innovative tools and development of capacity during the project, monitoring, management and enforcement of biodiversity conservation can continue post-project. Mainstreaming biodiversity safeguards across the key development sectors of infrastructure, tourism and agriculture, including government, private sector and local

communities, is intended to deliver a paradigm shift in conserving biodiversity and sustaining ecosystem services, based on tangible benefits evident in the demonstration land/seascapes and catchments with respect to improved human health, wellbeing and livelihoods, alongside retention of traditional cultural values.

Potential for up-scaling post-project is high given that there are other key habitats and sites that are not targeted by this project. These comprise catchments and PAs that would benefit from relevant interventions implemented by this project. Furthermore, biodiversity will be mainstreamed across other development sectors following best practices and lessons gained from the experience in strengthening governance and policy frameworks. Additionally, small value grants made available to stakeholders under this project may present further opportunities for continued development through other channels (e.g. GEF-SGP).

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[1] https://www.protectedplanet.net/en

[2] Other platforms for wider dissemination include Exposure and Panorama.

[3] See https://www.sparkblue.org/content/rising-small-island-developing-states

[4] Olson, D. M., Dinnerstein, E. 2002. The Global 200: Priority ecoregions for global conservation. Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden 89(2):199-224.

1b. Project Map and Coordinates

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place.

Maps and information relating to proposed project target sites are provided in **Annex A**. Project interventions are specific to selected islands based on the context of the respective outcomes, as follows:

· Outcome 1 interventions are focused on national governance frameworks and, therefore, applicable at national systemic and legislative levels, demonstrated across any or all of the of sites, as appropriate;

· Outcome 2 interventions are focused on six catchments in the two main islands (**Rarotonga** and **Aitutaki**);

· Outcome 3 is the increased management effectiveness of four key national sites (Takitumu in Rarotonga, entire islands of **Manuae, Suwarrow** and **Takutea**) and creation of a new Cloud Forest PA in **Rarotonga**.

Outcome 4 relates to raising awareness, knowledge management, gender mainstreaming and M&E that will underpin project interventions in all sites.

2. Stakeholders

Select the stakeholders that have participated in consultations during the project identification phase:

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Yes

Civil Society Organizations Yes

Private Sector Entities Yes

If none of the above, please explain why:

In addition, provide indicative information on how stakeholders, including civil society and indigenous peoples, will be engaged in the project preparation, and their respective roles and means of engagement

Key stakeholders were engaged at an early stage in the development of this project via a National Dialogue attended by representatives from UNDP and GEF. Participants included: island council leaders from many of the various islands, representatives of traditional leaders, CSOs (e.g. NGOs and Red Cross), private sector, heads of ministries and directors of government agencies, ensuring a wide range of political support. This proved ideal for consulting on the initial project concept, as well as taking into account other projects past and present, GEF and otherwise, in-country, regional and global, in order to learn lessons.

Numerous follow-up meetings and discussion have since been held with key stakeholders, particularly with the House of Ariki to ensure proposals relating to PAs management are harmonized with the plans, expectations and aspirations of traditional leaders. The key agencies, who will be the main Implementing Partners in this project (ICI, CIT and MOA) have been consulted throughout the formulation of this PIF to ensure a cohesive, shared vision and approach to project planning; and to secure their full support in project execution. Additionally, conversations have been ongoing with the Ministry of Finance & Economic Management (MFEM) Development Coordination Division (DCD) to ensure complementarity between various national projects being planned and avoid duplication of efforts. Key stakeholders, their roles and potential involvement in the project are described below. Other potential stakeholders will be contacted on approval of this project, for example the GEF Small Grants Programme who may be keen to assist in pilot activities for subsequent up-scaling. A stakeholder engagement plan will be developed during the PPG.

Stakeholder	Roles and Responsibilities	Involvement in the Project
GEF	Donor Agency: provides high-level guidance and oversight to ensure funds are being spent appropriately against project design, targets and outcomes to deliver national, regional, global benefits.	§ Funding, high-level oversight, direction, guidance and support
Other multilateral partners and IGOs	The following multilateral agencies have active programmes with government that play a key role in capacity development: Green Climate Fund (GCF); World Bank; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO); International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).	§ Synergies with ongoing projects; potential co-financing
UNDP		

UNDP	GEF Agency for project: coordinates PPG process, ensuring project development process and project document meet GEF and UNDP-GEF requirements; oversees project implementation in accordance with GEF Agency role; overall oversight of project, provides mid-level guidance, regional advice and support; helps to fully apply lessons learned and good practices from other national, regional, and global projects; point of communication between GEF and Cook Islands project team.	§ Guidance, regional advice, support and project oversight § Training and capacity building of PMU staff in GEF processes and procedures § Lessons learnt from other projects and countries on best meeting the Project Document outcomes and targets
National Environment Service (NES)	Executing Agency: mandated to protect, conserve and manage the environment in a sustainable manner (Environment Act 2003). As GEF Operational Focal Point (OFP), NES is responsible for: coordination and implementation of GEF projects in Cook Islands. Lead government agency in project development and endorsement of Project Document. Related responsibilities include: § Project Management Unit (PMU), housed within NES and responsible for reporting to UNDP/GEF. § Financial management oversight and monitoring of the project. § Implementation of MEAs such as CBD, CCD as well as national goals such as NSDP and NBSAP, with which project goals and activities are well aligned. § Management of Suwarrow National Park	§ Primary agency responsible for coordination and management of project, leading activities related to biodiversity conservation and facilitating links with other related initiatives in country. § Responsible for progress reporting, financial budgeting, record keeping, M &E. § Participation in capacity building activities § Key units in NES responsible for conservation include Biodiversity Conservation, Education and Awareness, Environmental Monitoring.
Implementing Partner Agencies:		
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	Largely responsible for controlling erosion and sedimentation from source to sea in Component 1 through technical advice and design. Involved in EIA process regarding environmental standards cited in Building Code (2019) to reduce negative impacts of development. Supports private sector training to increase understanding and awareness of environmental considerations and best p	§ Design of green engineering to safeguard riparian zones, lagoons and PAs from erosion and sedimentation impacts. § Participation in capacity building activities § Participation in development of enhanced industry environmental standards

	and awareness of environmental considerations and best practices.	
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	Largely responsible for implementing activities in Component 1. Promotes sustainable development of crop production and food security. Facilitates role of agriculture in project design and implementation through agri-environment approaches, including reduction of threats caused by land-based sources of pollution, especially from pesticides and fertilizers. Conserves agricultural biodiversity and ensues that land and water resources are sustainably managed in agricultural activities.	§ Participation in capacity building activities § Critical role in Component 1 to ensure that agri-ecosystems around priority areas such as streams, wetlands and PAs are sustainably managed to minimize source-to-sea/ridge-to-reef impacts.
Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT)	Promotes tourism in the country and accredits tourism-related businesses (accommodations, restaurants etc.). Role is to ensure that tourism activities do not degrade KBAs and PAs but that contribute to the nation's biodiversity and economy, with close engagement of private sector. This will be achieved by marketing natural environment and PAs, highlighting importance of biodiversity for tourism; promoting ecotourism; developing Tourism Charter to better regulate the industry and apply environmental standards. CIT will play key role in mainstreaming biodiversity under Component 2. Progress towards Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework and Goals, to which the project is well aligned.	§ Transform key messages on KBAs and PAs to have positive impact on tourist market. § Public awareness of Cook Islands endemics and natural beauty to be raised globally. § Promote support for biodiversity among public sector. § Implement Sustainable Tourism Strategy to ensure minimal disturbance or degradation to Cook Islands PAs and KBAs. § Participation in capacity building activities
House of Ariki (HOA)	Constitutional and statutory agency of Cook Islands that comprises all principal indigenous paramount Ariki (High Chiefs) from the nation's 24 tribes. Given the strong traditional land tenure system, their support for community conservation areas is critical. HOA communicates with traditional leaders and landowners/island Aronga Mana[1], which is essential for creating PA co-management systems under Component 2. Support capacity building of traditional leaders around PAs	§ Facilitate engagement with landowners and Aronga Mana re: PAs governance. § Traditional leaders at each conservation site directly involved in delineation, formulation of rules, delivery of conservation activities. § HOA highly respected and key to awareness raising in their communities and resolving any conflicts via mitigation mechanis

	and BD. Facilitate progress towards Te Mana Maori national plan, to which project is well aligned. Allow for transparency around government and PPP re: PAs establishment, management, enforcement and evaluation.	ms. Crucial to keep them abreast of project's progress.
Other partners:		
University of Newcastle (UON), Australia	Responsible for working alongside partners and deliver research, analysis and capacity building activities. Specifically, UON will: § Independently advise and develop, implement, undertake and interpret a range of activities that relate to Components 1-3. § Build capacity among government agencies and partners re: PAs biodiversity, ecosystem services and knowledge management. § Improve women's participation in natural resource management via Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM).	§ Technically advise partners and help design, develop and implement key project activities. § Engage with local institutions (e.g. USP and CITTI) to explore and support feasibility of national provision of training and skills development in environmental management.
Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)	NHT, established in 1999, provides definitive national expertise on species diversity through its Cook Islands Biodiversity Database[12] and key role in NBSAP development. It will play a technical role advising on project design, development and implementation.	§ Technical capacity to assist the project in biodiversity conservation § Web administration of Cook Is Biodiversity § Participation in capacity building
Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR)	Protection of marine resources, biodiversity and ecosystems under Marine Resources Act 1989. MMR conducts scientific assessments of key marine biodiversity and ecosystems; manages commercial fisheries and aquaculture industry; and provides technical expertise nationally on marine-related biodiversity and ecosystems.	§ *Ad hoc* support, as required, to monitor changes in water quality at selected sites resulting from project interventions. § Technical advice on marine species and ecosystems.
Ministry of Cultural Development (MOCD)	Established in 1989, MOCD is responsible for the protection, preservation and perpetuation of all forms of Cook Islands culture, such as language, arts, crafts, historic sites, traditional knowledge.	§ MOCD supports House of Ariki in project activities, with technical and financial resources, knowledge and liaison with island communities and leaders.
Ministry of Finance	Responsible for economic management of Cook Islands, in	§ Receive and release project funds from U

Ministry of Finance & Economic Management /Development Coordination Division (**MFEM**/DCD)	Responsible for economic management of Cook Islands, including national audits and protocols that ensure transparency in financial management. Their project role is to be the financial intermediary between UNDP and PMU. DCD provides technical support to the project team, including alignment of multiple project objectives with national priorities.	§ Receive and release project funds from UNDP § Annual audits § Oversee national procurement processes § Provide technical support on an ad-hoc basis to PMU as required.
Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)	OPM Central Policy & Planning Division is responsible for development, monitoring and reporting against the National Sustainable Development Plan, to which GEF-7 project is closely aligned. Additionally, the project will be well placed to inform the Research Council, which approves international research permits, about its planned and future research in relation to national interest. OPM's Climate Change Office is engaged in many other national projects related to environment, funded by partners such as ADB, Adaptation Fund and GCF. Close communication with them is key to ensure complementarity between projects and avoid duplication. Overcoming drivers biodiversity degradation in the GEF-7 project will also support responses to climate adaptation and mitigation. Importantly, OPM also houses the Coordination Office (MMCO) of Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park), the country's largest 'park' comprising MPAs and managed areas, a number of which are (partial) target sites in the GEF-7 project.	§ Streamlining project design with other national efforts in alignment with national sustainable development planning § Oversight, tracking and reporting on project implementation § Identifying and facilitating opportunities for co-financing and sharing lessons learned.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAI)	MFAI is the GEF Political Focal Point (PFP), responsible for coordination and approval of GEF projects in the Cook Islands, as well as showcasing Cook Islands' project successes and demonstrating its commitments to environmental conservation and safeguards on national, regional and international platforms.	§ Political oversight of this GEF-7 project
Crown Law Office (CLO)	CLO are responsible for reviewing and providing legal advice on any legislative proposals in the Cook Islands. It will be closely involved in Component 1 to strengthen governance systems through regulations and other legislative instrume	§ Review proposed legislation § Provide legal advice and assistance

	nts.	
NGOs:		
Te Ipukarea Society (TIS)	Environmental NGO with a wide remit, primarily as a government watchdog: advocates reduction of chemical pollutants, waste management and recycling, and conservation of biodiversity. Successful initiatives include: recovery program for the endangered Rarotonga Monarch (*Pomarea dimidiata*); "Save Our Suwarrow" campaign; and key species assessments. Anticipated role in local capacity building, public awareness and certain project activities.	§ Technical advice on biodiversity conservation and reduction of chemical pollutants. § Raising public awareness and building capacity among school and stakeholder platforms around key conservation and sustainable management issues.
Korero O Te 'Orau (KOTO)	Environmental & social NGO focused on improving the well-being of indigenous Cook Islanders and their environment, with focal areas on research, youth involvement, traditional knowledge, education and awareness. Anticipated role in local capacity building, public awareness and implementation of project activities.	§ Technical advice and assessment of key species, marine environment and culture. § Public awareness on key conservation and traditional practices to pass on to Cook Islands youth.
Takitumu Growers Association (TGA)	Promotes organic agriculture among local farmers in Rarotonga. Potential technical agency to support local activities on sustainable agriculture under Component 2.	§ Public awareness and outreach on composting and organic alternatives. § Technical advice on composting and its operationalization on Rarotonga. § Participation in agriculture-related activities
Aitutaki Conservation Trust (ACT)	Environmental NGO based in Aitutaki. Previously involved in project conservation activities and well positioned for further project activities in Aitutaki, including education and awareness.	§ Public awareness, monitoring and participatory research on biodiversity § Activities conducted in Aitutaki.
Other CSO	**Au Vaine**: Introduce best practices to restore riparian zones in Pa Enua (Outer Islands), with inclusion of women (Components 1,3). Other members of civil society to be identified and engaged to maximise contributions, benefits and impacts.	§ Consultations, public awareness, monitoring and participatory research on biodiversity
Communities/ landowners/ general	§ Communities are the primary stakeholders for most aspects of the project and benefit directly from its implementation	§ Ownership of the project by communities in respect of their traditional knowledge

downers/ general public / Koutu Nui	cts of the project, as benefitting directly from its investm ents. § Local communities will be primary agents to manage co mmunity conservation areas and co-manage 'managed a reas'. § Landowners are a vital element of communities targeted by project and require strong engagement, consultation a nd information sharing. This applies especially in Compo nent 2 for Manuae, Takutea, Takitumu and Cloud Forest. § Traditional leaders as well, as formal leaders (parliament arians), will play key roles in the declaration, managemen t and enforcement of local conservation areas of such ar eas.	in respect of their traditional lands, is cru cial as many interventions in the target sit es will be community-based. § Voicing concerns or solutions to the plan ning, implementation and l management of this project § Market driven approaches, with stakehold ers made aware of their vested interests i n conserving the resources that provide t heir income, will ensure voluntary particip ation in the resource planning and manag ing process. § Key beneficiaries to participate in monitor ing, scientific, socio-economic studies, as well as key participants in identification a nd development of project needs. § Key stakeholders to ensure project succe ss by creation of green value chains base d on reality on the ground and communit y/market needs
Private sector	Companies are vital for driving economic development, ther efore need to be on board and supported to be able to do s o sustainably through innovative solutions to existing probl ems. Plan to engage them through small-grant mechanism s to apply sustainable practices in development sectors (inf rastructure, tourism and agriculture), ensuring sustainabilit y, ownership and mainstreaming of activities beyond end of project.	§ Will be key stakeholders in the developme nt and promotion of ecotourism, developme nt of economic activities and finding ways t o enhance the value of natural resources. Wi ll also be key participants in enforcement ef forts of development sectors (infrastructure, tourism and agriculture) and engaged in cap acity building and information sharing activi ties.
National Biodiversi ty Steering Commi ttee	NBSC was established specifically as the Project Steering C ommittee (PSC) for GEF-5 R2R project. It includes heads of ministries, NGOs and traditional leader representatives, me ets quarterly and also provides a platform to discuss other national biodiversity matters, some of which directly relate t o the project. This arrangement will continue with the GEF-7 project: all key stakeholders will be in place once ICI is adde	§ Oversee project implementation and coor dination - supported by its Technical Advi sory Panel. § Approval of annual work plans and quarte rly work programs with associated budge ts

	d.	§ Sound advice from stakeholders on other projects /programs relevant to this GEF-7 project.

[1] **Aronga Mana** are noted in the constitution; they are holders of subordinate titles and responsibilities under the Ariki.

3. Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Briefly include below any gender dimensions relevant to the project, and any plans to address gender in project design (e.g. gender analysis).

Cook Islands is party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, signed in 1980 and ratified in 1985 to affirm its commitment to improve the situation of its women[1]. Later in 2015 Cook Islands committed itself to the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5 to *"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*", in order to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing the world". Such international commitments are nationalised through Cook Islands' National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP), in which Goal 9 is to *"Accelerate gender equality, empower all women and girls, and advance the rights of youth, the elderly and disabled*".

Thus, policies and governance structures to achieve gender equality, promote the role of women in leadership and decision-making, provide equal opportunities for women in employment and include gender in resilience and disaster preparedness are well established. This project, which seeks to align its interventions with priorities at community levels, will work closely with communities in the target catchments and PAs to ensure meaningful participation of women and other marginalized and vulnerable groups, empowering women in the community and promoting gender equality and social inclusion in biodiversity and conservation for sustainable development. By adopting an inclusive community-based approach that is gender equitable and socially inclusive, the project will also be fulfilling human rights goals under UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

A gender and social inclusion analysis will be undertaken as a priority during project preparation to determine the different roles of women, men and youth in biodiversity conservation, sustainable land use, natural resources management and food production. Results of the analysis will inform a more responsive gender mainstreaming action plan and assigning of a UNDP gender marker. A full Gender Strategy and Action Plan will be developed during the PPG and duly implemented.

Gender disaggregated indicators will provide the basis for monitoring and evaluating the project's impact on inclusive participation, promoting gender equity and empowerment of women and youth. Gender disaggregated indicators have been included as part of the Project Results Framework, such as increases against baselines in the UNDP Capacity Scorecard number of individuals in relevant public sector agencies, disaggregated by gender, and will be further identified in the Gender Assessment and Action Plan.

Furthermore, additional data will be collected such as: (i) total number of male and female full-time project staff; (ii) total number of male and female Project Board members, etc. The project design will ensure that financial and human resources are set aside to mainstream gender during project implementation and to monitor the effectiveness of this mainstreaming. Both during design and implementation, the project will ensure equal opportunities for women and men to participate in training, small value grant applications and decision-making. Steps will be taken to ensure that women's needs are addressed in management arrangements set up by the community, including women's active participation in community meetings and platforms involving project activities.

During project implementation, the role of women in decision-making, access to traditional ecological knowledge, SLM and other biodiversity related topics will be carefully documented and analysed for better understanding the dynamics of gender and power in relation to the context of each community. Findings will inform outputs from this project, such as Island Environment Management Plans, education and awareness messaging, and opportunities for capacity development. Through these increased opportunities for knowledge, alternative income and skills, women and other vulnerable groups will be empowered to make significant contributions to community development initiatives, reduce risks identified in the project and to become change agents within their communities.

[1] CEDAW, Initial Reports of State parties, Cook Islands, 2006

Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment? Yes

closing gender gaps in access to and control over natural resources; Yes

improving women's participation and decision-making; and/or Yes

generating socio-economic benefits or services for women. Yes

Will the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators?

Yes

4. Private sector engagement

Will there be private sector engagement in the project?

Yes

Please briefly explain the rationale behind your answer.

Strong engagement with the private sector is a pre-requisite to mainstreaming biodiversity across key development sectors, namely infrastructure, tourism and agriculture, based on the following initiatives.

Capacity building programs will support the private sector in mainstreaming biodiversity safeguards and other considerations across these key development sectors. This will be in tandem with public sector agency capacity development and legislative strengthening, alongside targeted media campaigns to enhance awareness and understanding among the wider public, based on the following harmonized approach:

· Development and infrastructure sector - Train private sector contractors engaged in development and infrastructure to raise awareness and understanding of biodiversity issues, as well as the inter-connectedness of ecosystems in relation to the impacts (positive and negative) of their key services. Additionally, raise public awareness and understanding of changes and updates to regulations and legislative or management frameworks; and dissemination of best practices and guidelines for the industry to adopt or follow. Training will emphasize the need for contractors in the development sector to be more accountable and responsible in complying with standards and EIAs. Regulation of the private sector in this area, such as through licensing, will also be reviewed under Component 1.

· Tourism sector - Train private sector tour operators and suppliers to mainstream biodiversity considerations throughout the sector, in parallel to strengthening CIT and raising awareness among the public. Tour operator training can be delivered as part of the existing Mana Tiaki Eco Certification program developed by Cook Islands GEF-5 project and be made available via an online portal to enhance mainstreaming.

· Agriculture sector – MoA has historically provided quality training and capacity building programs that promote sustainable agricultural practices among small-scale farmers in areas such as organic farming, composting and bee keeping. The project will support MoA in such efforts by ensuring that biodiversity considerations are mainstreamed through these and other capacity building opportunities under demand.

· Once training programs have been developed for these industries, their delivery on-line as a free resource will be explored to overcome potential barriers to their ongoing delivery and sustainability post-project. Such barriers include human resources for teaching, physical venues, logistics and related funding, freedom and flexibility of participants to be able to complete the training remotely in their own time.

Public communications with key messaging related to biodiversity and ecosystem services will be targeted towards the private sector, part of the National Communications Strategy (Output 4.1). The effectiveness of this campaign will be monitored by Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) surveys undertaken at the start, mid-term and end of the project to quantify changes in public and private sector awareness and understanding about of key biodiversity issues over the project's lifetime. This is a tool that can also be adopted by NES for regularly monitoring its engagement with its public and private sectors

5. Risks to Achieving Project Objectives

Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the Project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the Project design (table format acceptable)

Based on lessons learned from previous projects, as well as the current situation nationally, regionally and internationally, the following risks with corresponding mitigation measures have been identified as applicable to this project. Risks, ratings and their mitigation will be reviewed during the PPG.

Risk	Rating	Mitigation Measures
Risk 1: Poor collaboration between project partners leads to fragmented approach to protected areas management and biodiversity conservation.	Moderate	Ensure partners are fully engaged from the outset, inputting to the design, planning, management and execution of project activities during both PPG and project inception processes. Given a 12-18 months elapse between PPG and project start-up, it is very important to ensure that the PMU and Chief Technical Adviser are in place by month 2 in order to review the Project Document with partners and develop an Inception Report to share with stakeholders at the Inception Workshop, usually scheduled for month 3. Slow procurement and insufficient time with partners reviewing the Project Document and agreeing necessary amendments during the inception phase is a common short-coming that can result in poor collaboration among partners. Technical support from the GEF Agency is crucially important during this 'formative' stage. It will also be important for each partner to assign a staff member as its Focal Point to ensure effective coordination with the lead partner.
Risk 2: Changes in leadership, ministers, and heads of agencies results in limited appetite for policy changes, updates or reform.	Moderate	Whilst such changes are likely over the course of the project due to high turnovers in personnel common in SIDS, they can be mitigated through strong communication within and between government agencies and relevant stakeholders, so that there is wider support and understanding of the project's goals and outputs across government and other key stakeholders. Institutionalizing protocols, agreements and improvement plans will help to reduce reliance on key individuals, whilst also being more effective, efficient and sustainable – ensuring that delivery of project activities is also timely.
Risk 3: Differing views and priorities of individual island councils	Low	Ensure that participatory engagement processes well designed and executed: tailored to the status and uniqueness of the natural resources of individual islands within national and global environmental and socio-economic context, while also taking into account island culture, traditions, know-how and experience. Clearly communicate the project concept, framework and budget (what it can and cannot support), including partnership /cooperation opportunities, prior to consulting with Island Councils on their priorities for environment and the extent to which these can be accommodated by project. If an impasse is reached, then move on to another Island Council, ideally keeping the door open for as long as practically possible (i.e. without jeopardizing project results).
Risk 4: Deteriorating political, economic and soc	High	Covid-19 has had significant economic and social impact on the Cook Islands as a SIDS count

Risk 4: Deteriorating political, economic and social conditions due to the global pandemic	High	COVID-19 has had significant economic and social impact on the Cook Islands as a SIDS country. To date, Cook Islands Government has shown strong leadership in monitoring and responding the pandemic, with zero cases in the Cook Islands and resilience demonstrated by the Cook Islands people. Pandemic may restrict project activities in some ways due to changes in regular travel, shipping, etc. and these should be considered in the project design and implementation approach. Adaptive management can be applied to continue project activities through innovative solutions. Project will assist Government in supporting economic recovery efforts through private sector engagement in project activities, as well as establishing diversified sustainable financing mechanisms for continued support to BD and PA conservation outside of traditional government budget allocations.
Risk 5: COVID-19 has impeded local livelihoods and raised feasibility questions about some nature-based livelihood options such as ecotourism and risk of over-reliance on these. ***Note:*** *Cook Is remains free of COVID with 0 cases. Borders closed since 20-3-2020, only residents can travel to/from N.Z. if they quarantine. Info here .*	Moderate	During PPG, livelihood assessments will be conducted in consultation with communities taking full account of COVID-19 related impacts and risks. Project will promote diversified livelihoods linked to green-blue economy rather than over-rely on tourism. Project livelihoods approach will seek to align with broader government planning and economic recovery processes. For potential support to build tourism-related livelihoods, project approaches will align with UNWTO guidelines and processes for tourism recovery and resilience. Tourism will be considered as only one part/option of a diversified, resilient portfolio of livelihood options
Risk 6: Elite capture of project benefits; particularly unequal distribution cost and benefits to women, youth and vulnerable	Low	Project will ensure a strong, inclusive approach, transparency and capacity building with a focus on equitable access to more marginalized groups to ensure that there is no elite capture of benefits. Government is also committed to equitable access to project benefits through strong partnerships with other parties and CSOs. A Gender Strategy & Action Plan will be developed during PPG and implemented from project onset.
Risk 7: Limited local expertise to carry out implementation and/or follow up	Moderate	Local and international expertise is envisioned to provide technical competence and skills necessary to build knowledge and capacity, as well as mentor key stakeholders and staff. Gaps in competence will be identified in Outcome 1. UON partnership will also enable gaps to be quickly mitigated in the short term. Fostering learning and sharing experience from relevant projects and other initiatives will also help to building capacity among partners and local experts.
Risk 8: Access and availability of policy/ legal expertise to support Component 1	High	Ongoing support of Crown Law Office and in-house policy teams across various government agencies will be secured. Also, NES plans to secure a legal adviser as part of its institutional development. Other fall-back options are SPREP or SPC legal advisors; or hire local/international consultants to prepare materials for government agencies to process. Hence, some technical legal assistance will be factored into the Component 1 budget. Legal capacity needs to be assessed as above (Risk 7).
Risk 9: Lack of private landowner engagement	High	Strong, transparent participatory processes with communities and private landowners is essential to gain their trust and engage in partnerships. Targeted communications to raise awarenes

		tial to gain their trust and engage in partnerships. Targeted communications to raise awareness and understanding will contribute to such processes.
Risk 10: Limitations to consolidate/share data from various stakeholders	Moderate	OPM is working with GCF and partners to strengthen national use of the INFORM database, related to which and currently underway is the development of a geoportal to centralize spatial planning data across government and be accessible to all ministries. Work on the PA Classification System and policy has been conducted under GEF-5 R2R project[1]. Enhanced PAs monitoring, reporting and management will be enabled via a dedicated website created by this GEF-7 project under Output 1.2 (NEIS). It will be also linked to other national and regional databases as required.
SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS (FROM SESP PRE-SCREENING)		
Risk 1: The project proponent may not effectively engage and ensure participation of all stakeholders, including women, and pacific islanders, during the project design and implementation phases resulting in violation of human rights.	Moderate	Early in Year 1 of project implementation, based on the Environment and Social Management Framework (ESMF) prepared during the PPG phase, targeted engagement process plans will be developed and implemented. These include: · Stakeholder Engagement Plan · Gender Mainstreaming Plan FPIC will be required based on the activities proposed on the PIF; and it will need to be reviewed/revised routinely throughout implementation. If needed, a grievance redress mechanism for the project will be included in the project design, based on the existing government and UNDP mechanisms.
Risk 2: Efforts to halt/minimize land/forest degradation may unintentionally result in restriction to access to natural resources and/or affect the traditional use and livelihoods of local communities.	Moderate	To manage this risk a stakeholder engagement assessment will be conducted, and a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan will be incorporated into the project design, together with a gender mainstreaming action plan. These plans will ensure that Pacific Islanders rights (including, but not limited to self-determination and customary rights, land tenure and traditional use rights) are considered and mainstreamed during PPG and implementation phases.
Risk 3: Poorly designed or executed project activities, could unintentionally damage critical or sensitive habitats and ecosystems, resulting from the implementation of land management mal practices.	Moderate	The project development phase will identify suitable models and techniques for sustainable land management practices that are technically sound. (e.g. resources available on WOCAT, FAO's SFM Toolbox, best practices from other SIDS, UNDP-GEF R2R projects, etc.) Technically qualified SLM specialist will be included in the PPG team to adequately manage the risk.
Risk 4: Prevailing gender biases could unintentionally discriminate against women, limiting or adversely impacting their opportunities to access and/or influence project activities	Moderate	Develop, budget and implement a comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming Plan. Develop gender mainstreaming indicators in the project Results Framework and periodically monitor progress through PIRs, MTR and TE.

Risk 5: Use of pesticides, herbicides or insecticides could potentially pose risks to community health and lack of adequate guidelines on usage and storage of these chemicals could result in generation of hazardous waste through different migration pathways (soil, water, or air).	Low	Every effort will be made to avoid or minimize use of harmful chemicals. In an unavoidable situation, risks related to chemical handling, usage and storage for project activities will be incorporated into the project design and in the chemical management system through project guidelines, trainings, etc. Only pesticides, herbicides and insecticides meeting internationally accepted standards will be used by the project. Their storage and application will be subject to health and safety guidelines.
Risk 6: Climate variability and change will increase frequency and intensity of natural disasters: this can potentially delay or destroy project interventions.	Moderate	An initial basic climate screening has been done for the PIF. During PPG, further analysis will be carried out using the CC risk assessment tool developed by the World Bank to support climate-proofing and building resilience into project outcomes. The selection of species for SLM demonstrations will be of the highest climate resilience and biodiversity gains potential.
Risk 7: PPG team, PMU or UNDP staff/ consultants travelling to Cook Islands and demonstration landscapes could increase risk of COVID-19 spreading if pandemic is prolonged or if a different pandemic emerges during the project's lifetime.	Low	Should there be a relaxation on travel restrictions in the future that might allow international specialists to participate in full implementation of the project or indeed movements of Cook Islanders between islands, internationally recognized biosecurity standards will need to be followed.

Climate risk screening – Cook Islands

The following climate change risk screening has been completed by the Cook Islands Government following advice from GEF Secretariat in the drafting of the Cook Islands GEF-7 PIF. This is to ensure that the project sufficiently considers risks associated with climate change impacts that may affect project planning and implementation. In doing so, it is intended that the fully designed project is better prepared and resilient to potential shocks, thus enabling more effective and impactful contributions towards national and global environmental benefits despite ongoing and inevitable climate change effects.

Key aspects of climate change impact projections for the Cook Islands

Cook Islands as a Small Island Development State (SIDS) and Pacific Island Country (PIC) is particularly vulnerable to the effects and impacts of a changing climate under various climate change scenarios[1]. During this century, the Cook Islands as a SIDS and PIC will face increasing threats to sustainable development from the impacts of climate change. Sectors likely to be most affected include human health, infrastructure, coastal resources, disaster management, freshwater availability, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, marine ecosystems and tourism[34].

SPREP's Pacific Climate Change Portal (2020)[2] notes the following ***current trends*** evidenced from climate science for the Cook Islands:

· **Temperatures have increased** with warming trends evident in annual and half-year maximum and minimum air temperatures.

· **Rainfall varies from year to year** with no clear trends over the Cook Islands since 1899. There has been substantial variation in rainfall from year to year over this period but little change in extreme daily rainfall since the mid-1930s.

· **Tropical cyclones** affect the Cook Islands mainly between November and April. An average of 18 cyclones per decade developed within or crossed the Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) between 1969 and 2010 (74 in total). Tropical cyclones were most frequent in El Niño years (28 cyclones per decade) and least frequent in La Niña years (6 cyclones per decade). Seventeen of the 53 tropical cyclones (32%) between the 1981/82 and 2010/11 seasons became severe events (Category 3 or higher) within the EEZ.

· **Larger storm waves** are seen in the Southern Cook Islands than in the Northern Cook Islands, dominated by trade winds and the South Pacific Convergence Zone (SPCZ).

· **Ocean acidification has been increasing** in Cook Islands waters steadily since the 18th century.

· **Sea level has risen** near the Cook Islands by about 4 mm per year since 1993, slightly larger than the global average of 2.8-3.6 mm per year.

· Global climate model (GCM) projections and climate science findings indicate the following **future projections for the Cook Islands**:

o ***El Niño and La Niña*** events will continue to occur in the future (very high confidence) but there is little consensus on whether these events will change in intensity or frequency.

o ***Annual mean temperatures*** and extremely high daily temperatures will continue to rise (very high confidence).

o Projected changes in the SPCZ are uncertain, so there is only moderate confidence in ***rainfall changes*** for the Cook Islands. Projections indicate that the Northern Group is expected to get drier during the dry season (medium confidence) with more extreme rain events (high confidence); and extreme rainfall days are likely to occur more often and be more intense. However, average annual rainfall is not projected to change significantly over the course of the 21st century.

o ***Drought frequency*** is projected to remain similar to the current climate in Southern Cook Islands but increase slightly in Northern Cook Islands under the high emission scenario (medium confidence).

o ***Ocean acidification*** is expected to continue (very high confidence) and the risk of coral bleaching is expected to increase (very high confidence).

o ***Sea level*** will continue to rise (very high confidence) 7-17cm by 2030, increasing the impact of storm surges and coastal flooding; wave climate is not projected to change significantly (low confidence).

o ***Tropical cyclones*** are projected to be less frequent but more intense, with an increase in average maximum wind speed of cyclones by 2-11% and an increase in rainfall intensity of about 20% within 100 km of the cyclone centre.

Based on the above current and projected climate change effects, the following key impacts are anticipated:

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[1] https://www.pacificclimatechangescience.org/

[2] https://www.pacificclimatechange.net/country/cook-islands#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20most%20recent,for%20the%20period%201934%E2%80%932011

- Both **flooding and drought events** from variable and unpredictable rainfall patterns, impacting ecosystems and habitats from lack of water in droughts as well as inundation of stormwater (quantity, quality and velocity) during flood events. These in turn impact human health, water and crop security and damage infrastructure, as well as surrounding ecosystems and biodiversity.
- **Salt water intrusion** of ground water and freshwater habitats from rising sea levels, reducing available habitat for species and impacting food and fresh water security for communities and the agricultural sector.
- **Habitat destruction** from cyclones, resulting in loss of biodiversity in those areas.
- **Varying diversity of species** due to changing temperatures, seasons and other climatic factors. This may also reduce the range of some species, increasing threats to endangered, endemic and migratory species.
- Problems with **transportation and shipping** of goods due to extreme weather and disaster events.
- **Loss of land** surface area caused by sea level rise due to low elevation of atolls and some islands, reducing available habitat and security for biodiversity and communities alike.

- Further impacts are identified in the Cook Islands Joint National Action Plan (JNAP) II 2016-2020:

Table 4. A summary of climate change vulnerabilities in the Cook Islands

	Temperature Rise	Rainfall Variation	Extreme Weather events	Sea Level Rise
Coastal Zones Infrastructure and Coral Reefs	Coral bleaching	Runoff, sedimentation, salinity	Wave damage, erosion	Erosion, increased storm surge
Marine Resources / Fisheries	Pearl Diseases, food chain, migratory and distribution changes	Habitat, salinity	Damage to coastal infrastructure and vessels, stock loss,	Damage to coastal infrastructure, unsuitable growing conditions
Water Supply and Quality	Quantity, demand, quality, vectors	Shortages, blockages, contamination	Water pollution, infrastructure damage	Increased salinity of freshwater table
Agriculture, Food Security and Diet	Prevalence of invasive species, productivity	Drought, flooding, crop diseases	Damage to infrastructure and crops	Increased salinity of low lying growing areas
Biodiversity (Terrestrial and Marine)	Increased prevalence of invasive species, species distribution or migration	Increased prevalence of invasive species	Casualties, habitat, food loss	Degradation of habitat, breeding sites
Human Health and Wellbeing	Emergence of tropical diseases, heat stress, productivity impacts	Favourable mosquito breeding conditions	Injury during and increased disease risk following, stress and social disruption	Impact on coastal infrastructure, housing etc.
Cross-cutting Socio-Economic considerations	Key economic sector losses increasing poverty. Increasing energy demand (cooling). Particularly of concern for already vulnerable groups the disabled, youth, and women	Reduced tourism attractiveness, and economic losses from productive sectors, food insecurity, natural resources for handicrafts etc, lack of insurance cover	Damages to critical infrastructure, relocation of people, pollution, disruption of education and social services, affecting already vulnerable groups like disabled, youth, and women	Loss of land, traditional livelihood and culture, social and gender implications, investment diverted

The collective effects of the above-mentioned impacts will cause significant challenges for human health and stability in terms of food and water security (availability, quality and affordability), infrastructure, agriculture, fisheries and other livelihoods such as tourism, all of which have socio-economic impacts and reduce the resilience of communities. Throughout the first decade of this century the damage caused by frequent cyclones cost the Cook Islands NZ$ 750,000 per year just on the main island of Rarotonga[1]. They will also impact biodiversity due to effects on habitats, restricted ranges, changes to food webs (loss/introduction of prey/predators) and increase vulnerability to catastrophic events such as invasive species or disease introductions. This will further impact ecosystems and ecosystem services that rely on the interrelated functions of biodiversity and relatively stable climate conditions.

How the climate scenarios are likely to affect the project

At a project level, these scenarios are likely to impacts project activities and implementation, depending on how soon these effects emerge and at what scale. There are clearly multiple risks that need to be anticipated and mitigated, particularly in a SIDS country. Effective planning and readiness to adapt management will result in a more efficient response to mitigate and adapt to climate impacts, thus support the livelihoods, wellbeing, security, and the cultural and natural heritage of the Cook Islands, which inherently includes the biodiversity and ecosystems on which these depend.

The Cook Islands Government, recognising these and other challenges, has committed to proactive mitigation and adaptation responses to address them. These include high level policy and institutional reforms, frameworks and strategies. The 2016-2020 NSDP sets out key national sustainable development goals to create a comprehensive and integrated whole-of-government approach to realise the global SDGs and the sustainable development challenges they aim to address. This places nature and culture at the forefront, and specifically addresses climate action in Goal 13 *Strengthen resilience to combat the impacts of climate change and natural disasters*.

Additionally, Joint National Action Plans (JNAP) have been developed to deliver a sectoral approach to climate change and disaster risk management to enhance resilience in the face of climate change. Cook Islands also ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016 and is currently transitioning all 15 islands to 100% renewable energy in line with its NSDP goals. Furthermore, Cook Islands seek to reduce disaster risk through the implementation of measures that minimise exposure and vulnerability to disaster under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. There are also a plethora of other more specific plans, policies, strategies and legislative frameworks that seek to implement these overarching goals, such as the NBSAP, National Invasive Species Strategic Action Plan, Sustainable Tourism Development Policy framework and goals, Erosion and Sediment Control guidelines, Pesticides Act and a new National Environment Policy and Protected Areas Management Policy currently underway that will feed into a revised National Environment Act.

This demonstrates the Cook Islands Government's strong commitment to mitigate the effects of climate change, providing a resilient political, physical and socio-cultural environment in which project activities can be implemented more efficiently and effectively. The project will strongly support these objectives in line with the national climate agenda by providing integrated landscape and ecosystem-based approaches to enhance the natural ability of the Cook Islands to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Climate Risk Assessment and Mitigation Measures to Protect GEBs

Risk	Rating	Mitigation Measures
Project outcomes are at risk because of climate change.	Moderate	Project activities have been developed in line with national climate plans, frameworks, actions and agendas to ensure they are cogniscent of and resilient against climate threats, thereby supporting Cook Islands efforts in enhancing the abilities to adapt to such risks. Project activities have been designed with a climate lens applied and will be conducted with readiness to adapt management should unforeseen impacts arise that affect project implementation. Project activities will be planned and executed efficiently to ensure that issues are mitigated and experienced options remain for adaptive strategies.
Climate sensitivity has not been adequately addressed.	Low	Climate sensitivity is an inherent part of Cook Islands life and as such is applied to all activities to varying degrees. This PIF has been developed in collaboration and consultation with key stakeholders who hold significant knowledge and experience relating to climate and disaster action and mitigation. Hence, climate sensitivity is believed to have been applied comprehensively. Furthermore, project activities aim to enhance the Cook Islands ability to respond to climate risks and mitigate its vulnerability and sensitivity to climate threats.
Resilience practices and measures do not address projected climate risks and impacts adequately.	Moderate	Strong consultation and collaboration between various stakeholders, including Government agencies, CSOs and the general public will ensure that project activities adequately address national goals and interests, including mitigation against climate risks and impacts. This collaborative and inclusive approach is already underway with inclusion of the Cook Islands Climate Change Office, as well as other key stakeholders contributing to the development of the PIF. This support will continue throughout PPG and project implementation.
There is inadequate technical and institutional capacity and information to address climate change impacts.	Moderate	Capacity building forms a core part of project activities, as detailed in the PIF, and it will include a climate lens throughout to ensure these considerations are sufficiently included. The project's partnership with University of Newcastle, Australia, provides enhanced expertise, knowledge and data to apply to a Cook Islands context as necessary. Strong collaboration with national partners will also ensure the collective intellectual and technical capacities of the Cook Islands are harnessed and maximised in response to climate threats and impacts.

[1] Cook Islands JNAP II 2016-2020

6. Coordination

Outline the institutional structure of the project including monitoring and evaluation coordination at the project level. Describe possible coordination with other relevant GEF-financed projects and other initiatives.

The National Environment Service is the GEF operational focal point for the Cook Islands, as well as the lead agency mandated to *"provide for the protection, conservation and management of the environment in a sustainable manner"* (Environment Act, 2003). Therefore, given the biodiversity focus of this GEF project, NES will be the lead executing agency, working closely with other key partner agencies.

A permanent Project Management Unit (PMU) has been built into the organizational structure of NES, as a result of the Cook Islands GEF-5 project, to overcome delays experienced at the start of new projects, as well as ensuring consistency and continuity from one project to the next. This also enables key personnel, skills, experience and institutional knowledge to be retained and applied to subsequent projects. In the case of GEF-7, specific staff will be assigned to focus on the management of this project for effective implementation, delivery and reporting, including a Project Coordinator.

The PMU division will house the team assigned to this GEF-7 project. This also provides a strong co-financing commitment to project management costs associated with running and managing the project from NES offices. This division reports directly to the NES Director, as recommended in the GEF-5 capacity needs assessment to increase ownership and efficient communication. PMU will also be the key point of contact for project partners (Tourism, Agriculture, Infrastructure), as well as the other key public and private entities, such as NGOs, traditional leaders and communities.

UNDP has been selected as the GEF Implementing Agency, to which the PMU Division within NES will report. UNDP has supported previous GEF projects in the Cook Islands, thus points of contact, systems, templates and procedures are already well known and understood. Cook Islands also benefit from UNDP's wealth of experience and the direct support and oversight from UNDPs Asia-Pacific Regional hub working in close coordination with the Multi-Country Office in Samoa.

The dedicated PMU team for the project will oversee project planning, budgeting, reporting against targets and indicators, as well as procurement of consultants and other technical expertise required. This ensures there is a central management focus for the project and that any deviations from the project plan by other partner agencies are captured early and addressed. PMU reports quarterly to a Project Steering Committee (PSC), proposed to be the National Biodiversity Steering Committee (NBSC), so that there is transparency and independent oversight regarding key project activities. NBSC was originally established to serve as the PSC for the GEF-5 project and this successful arrangement will be continued.

In relation to other GEF-funded projects, partnership with the SGP team in the Cook Islands will be increased, particularly for the potential scalability of small-value grant mechanism to be used in this project.

Relationships with national NGOs, trusts and other ministries, such as Climate Change Cook Islands, will continue to be nourished, ensuring further collaboration and co-financing in shared targets and ambitions. In doing so, full potential across various sectors, projects and activities will be realized in fulfilling national and global commitments to environmental as well as socio-cultural improvements.

7. Consistency with National Priorities

Is the Project consistent with the National Strategies and plans or reports and assesments under relevant conventions?

If yes, which ones and how: NAPAs, NAPs, ASGM NAPs, MIAs, NBSAPs, NCs, TNAs, NCSAs, NIPs, PRSPs, NPFE, BURs, INDCs, etc

National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan

Cook Islands NBSAP is due to be updated pending renewal/replacement of the Aichi targets and CBD post-2020 framework. Meanwhile, the GEF-7 project will address a number of the key threats and drivers of biodiversity and ecosystem change and degradation across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine environments described in the 2002 Cook Islands NBSAP. Of the eight thematic goals within the 2002 NBSAP, this project will contribute directly to the following five themes: Theme A, Endangered Species Management; Theme C, Ecosystem Management; Theme E, Management of Knowledge relating to Biodiversity; Theme F, Biodiversity Awareness and Education; and Theme G, Mainstreaming Biodiversity.

Convention on Biological Diversity – 6th National Report

The 6th National Report, recently submitted to the CBD, reports on some of the issues that will be addressed by this project proposal. They relate particularly to the effective management of PAs. Also, the project contributes to CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets 1 (awareness of biodiversity values), 7 (sustainable production, e.g. agriculture), 8 (pollution of ecosystems), 11 (invasive alien species), 12 (extinction of threatened species), 14 (ecosystem services safeguarded), 18 (traditional knowledge and indigenous practices relating to biodiversity) and 19 (improved, shared and applied knowledge) and the post-2020 framework that calls for increasing global protected areas to 30%[1].

Convention on Migratory Species - National Reports

Cook Islands became a party to CMS in 2006, under which it provides migratory habitat along the West Pacific Flyway for 13 species listed in the appendices of the Convention. Such species and their habitats have been included in the criteria for site selection, particularly in the cases of PA sites, and those selected for project interventions will contribute to Cook Islands' commitments reported to this convention.

Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan and UN Sustainable Development Goals

As mentioned in the baseline scenario and elsewhere throughout this document, the project is well aligned with relevant NSDP goals, notably sustainable practices (3), agriculture (10), terrestrial biodiversity (11) and marine diversity (12). Consequently, the project will contribute significantly towards these NSDP goals, which feed directly into the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Thus, the project is also well aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goals 2, 14 and 15, while also contributing to Goal 5 through the mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion across its interventions:

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture;

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development;

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Cook Islands State of Environment Report

The SOE Report launched in 2020 has provided much of the baseline data and information that has informed the development of this project, particularly with respect to identifying the main pressures that are significantly threatening Cook Islands biodiversity and ecosystems. Given that SOE is reported every five years, the next one will bear testimony to the emerging achievements (or otherwise) of the project's interventions and indicate where continued efforts should be placed.

Cook Islands Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework & Goals

The project is inherently designed to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem considerations throughout key development sectors including the tourism industry. As such, it will contribute directly to the 2017 STDPF goals, particularly Goals 1 and 4, which respectively reflect integrated management and governance, and ensuring the protection of the pristine environment through sustainable practices. Progress achieved under this project will be reported and contribute to tracking progress towards such goals.

'Te Mana Maori' Strategic Plan

This national strategy produced by the House of Ariki traditional leaders is concerned with safeguarding Cook Islands culture and ensuring that appropriate interventions are mainstreamed across relevant public sectors. The House of Ariki is a key stakeholder and partner, with whom the project has consulted extensively to ensure that project activities and cultural development priorities are integrated, particularly in relation to PAs management. Project activities will be recorded against contributions to this Strategic Plan to expressly demonstrate the linkages between environmental conservation and culture.

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[1] Note that before increasing its PA estate and confirming any such national commitments, Cook Islands must first enhance its effective management of its existing PAs system, and in doing so better fulfill its current CBD targets that will consolidate the foundations for a more effective future PAs system.

8. Knowledge Management

Outline the knowledge management approach for the Project, including, if any, plans for the Project to learn from other relevant Projects and initiatives, to assess and document in a user-friendly form, and share these experiences and expertise with relevant stakeholders.

Component 3 addresses awareness raising, knowledge management, gender mainstreaming, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), all of which cut across other components and their respective activities, while also being interlinked – arguably with knowledge at the core of the project's National Communication Strategy.

Raising awareness and understanding (i.e. knowledge) about the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services and their relationship to people's livelihoods is fundamental to securing the support of stakeholders to engage with the project, all of which is knowledge based. Levels of awareness and understanding among the different stakeholder groups will be benchmarked at the onset of the project and inform the Communication Strategy on what it should be messaging, to whom and by what means (media). Further Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) surveys will be undertaken mid-term to monitor changes in KAP and fine tune communications; and at end of project to record and analyse achievements to learn lessons.

Knowledge management will be upgraded through the creation of a National Environment Information System, institutionalized within NES and accessible to its stakeholders via the World Wide Web (potentially with different levels of access in the interests of safeguarding certain biodiversity). NEIS will hold data (e.g. details about its PAs and 'managed areas' system), information (e.g. total hectarage of PAs, monitoring results, details of forthcoming events, newsletters) and knowledge (e.g. technical studies and publications, best practice guidelines, training manuals). NEIS will also provide links to other sources of data, information and knowledge, such as the Cook Islands Biodiversity Database managed by the Natural Heritage Trust and hosted by Bishop Museum[12]. A particularly vital link will be government's new geoportal, housed by Infrastructure Cook Islands, that is intended to provide a one-stop-shop for spatial data, enabling bespoke maps to be readily generated.

The project will also provide for the exchange of knowledge and lessons learned by other Pacific Island Nations and SIDS, especially through regional partnerships with neighbouring projects under UNDP (e.g Samoa, Niue) and other regional institutions (e.g. SPREP, SPC, USP and UON). Through such partnerships, the project will not only learn from experiences within the region on PA management and community-based biodiversity conservation, but also share its successes.

Data, information and knowledge, generated by the project will also feedback into national platforms such as Cook Islands Biodiversity Database to further strengthen national knowledge, as well as international platforms such as WDPA[1] and IBAT[2] to raise the profile of Cook Islands biodiversity.

[1] World Database on Protected Areas: https://www.protectedplanet.net/en

[2] International Biodiversity Assessment Tool: https://www.ibat-alliance.org

9. Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Risks

Provide information on the identified environmental and social risks and potential impacts associated with the project/program based on your organization's ESS systems and procedures

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification*

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
Medium/Moderate			

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

Provide preliminary information on the types and levels of risk classifications/ratings of any identified environmental and social risks and potential impacts associated with the project (considering the GEF ESS Minimum Standards) and describe measures to address these risks during the project design.

Project Information	
1. Project Title	Enhancing Biodiversity Considerations and Effective Protected Area Management to Safeguard The Cook Islands Integrated Ecosystems and Species
2. Project Number (i.e. Atlas project ID, PIMS+)	PIMS 6565
3. Location (Global/Region/Country)	The Cook Islands
4. Project stage (Design or Implementation)	Design
5. Date	17 December 2020

Part A. Integrating Programming Principles to Strengthen Social and Environmental Sustainability

QUESTION 1: How Does the Project Integrate the Programming Principles in Order to Strengthen Social and Environmental Sustainability?

Briefly describe in the space below how the project mainstreams the human rights-based approach

The project will support the Government of the Cook Islands to conserve ecosystems and species by mainstreaming biodiversity in the development planning process as well as by improving effectiveness of the protected area management. The project will uphold human rights principles, by ensuring inclusiveness and equitable distribution of the development opportunities and the project benefits. Monitoring and Evaluation will work as a feedback loop mechanism that will continuously measure the success and the impact as well as provide opportunities to revisit the project activities for course correct. During the implementation, the project will ensure that these stakeholders are included in the project monitoring, the trainings, and the various livelihood schemes, when applicable and the achievements will be measured against targets with gender-disaggregated data. The participatory approach considered in the project design, the development and the implementation will empower community resource users as well as the resource managers ensuring the protection of the islands' natural and cultural heritage. The project will support rights to access and use of resources, building on the principles of "sustainable development," which considers the needs of the present and the future generations.

Briefly describe in the space below how the project is likely to improve gender equality and women's empowerment

The Cook Islands is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was signed in 1980 and ratified in 1985. As a party to the Convention, the Cook Islands are committed to improve the gender equality and women's empowerment. Further, the Cook Islands have adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and committed to all goals including SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls. These international commitments are nationalized in the Cook Islands through its National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP), in which Goal 9 is to "Accelerate gender equality, empower all women and girls, and advance the rights of youth, the elderly and disabled".

The project will work closely with communities in the target catchments and protected areas, empowering women in the community and promoting gender equality in accord with the community's norms and traditions. To better inform how gender can be mainstreamed across the full range of project interventions, a gender analysis will be undertaken during project preparation to determine the different roles of women in biodiversity conservation, sustainable land and marine resources use, natural resources management and food production. Results of the analysis will be used to develop gender mainstreaming action plan and assigning of a UNDP Gender Marker. As such, a full Gender Assessment and Action Plan will be developed and implemented to achieve the Gender Marker objective. Gender disaggregated tracking of the beneficiaries will provide the basis for monitoring and evaluation of the project's impact on promoting gender equity and empowerment of women and youth. Gender disaggregated indicators will be included in the Project Results Framework. Furthermore, additional data will be collected such as: (i) total number of male and female full-time project staff; (ii) total number of male and female Project Board members, etc. The project design will ensure that financial and human resources are set aside to mainstream gender during project implementation and to monitor the effectiveness of this mainstreaming. Both during design and implementation, the project will ensure equal opportunities for women and men to participate in training, decision-making, and all activities with potential opportunity to improve gender equality and gender empowerments. Steps will be taken to ensure that women's needs are addressed in management arrangements set up by the community, including women's active participation in community meetings and platforms involving project activities.

Briefly describe in the space below how the project mainstreams sustainability and resilience

The Cook Islands is a signatory of many international conventions including the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The project supports its commitment to the CBD through alignment with the GEF-7 Biodiversity Focal Area. Specifically, it will support in mainstreaming biodiversity across key sectors (i.e. Agriculture, Infrastructure and Tourism) as well as landscapes and seascapes through biodiver

sity mainstreaming in priority sectors and address direct drivers to protect habitats and species and improve financial sustainability, effective manage ment, and ecosystem coverage of the global protected area estate. The project will also support United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022 – multi cou ntry sustainable development framework in the pacific region, strategic areas 1: CC, disaster resilience and environmental protection and 3: sustainable and inclusive economic empowerment. The project aims to enhance institutional and technical capacities of partner agencies and targeted communiti es to enhance biodiversity conservation through biodiversity-friendly development planning, effective protected area management and sustainable land management of in the targeted landscapes and seascapes.
Briefly describe in the space below how the project strengthens accountability to stakeholders
The project will work closely with the islanders, including women groups, representation of all the ethnic groups through the House of Ariki/traditional l eaders and Island Councils, youth, elders, differently abled, and extremely poor in rural areas that depend heavily on the islands' terrestrial and the surro unding areas' marine ecosystems to meet the basic necessities (food, clean drinking water, shelter, and livelihoods) through a participatory approach d uring the project design, development, and implementation phases to provide inputs in the development of the project activities and to ensure positive i mpacts reaches these communities during the implementation phase. Key stakeholders listed above were engaged at an early stage in the development of this project via a National Dialogue, in which island council leaders from various islands, representatives of traditional leaders, various members of CSO's, private sector participants, as well as heads of ministries and dir ectors of government agencies participated, ensuring political support in addition to traditional, private and community engagement. This provided an i deal setting to share ideas, aims and global goals to be achieved through this project, as well as overviews of social and environmental standards, inclu ding UNDP's grievance and redress mechanism. This model was a great asset in early concept discussions for this project that will be replicated during the preparation and implementation phases.

Part B. Identifying and Managing Social and Environmental Risks

QUESTION 2: What are the Potenti al Social and Environmental Risks? *Note: Complete SESP Attachment 1 before responding to Question 2.*	QUESTION 3: What is the level of significance of the potential social and environmental risks? *Note: Respond to Questions 4 and 5below before proce eding to Question 5*			QUESTION 6: Describe the assessment and manageme nt measures for each risk rated Moderate, Substantial o r High
Risk Description *(broken down by event, cause, impac t)*	*Impact a nd Likelih ood (1-5)*	*Significan ce* *(Low, Mod erate Subs tantial, Hig h)*	*Comments (optional)*	*Description of assessment and management measures for risks rated as Moderate, Substantial or High*
Risk 1: The project proponent may no				Assessment:

t effectively engage and ensure partic ipation of all stakeholders, including women, and pacific islanders, during t he project design and the implementa tion phases resulting in violation of h uman rights. (Human Rights: P.4, P.5 & P.6; - Standa rd 6: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 & 6.9)	I = 4 P = 2	Moderate		The proposed project includes stakeholder engagement strategies supporting project interventions, including en gagement with women's group, pacific islander commu nities. Assessment of the potential impacts of the proj ect on rights and interests, lands, territories, resources, and traditional livelihoods is also needed, and it will be determined during the PPG whether Free, Prior and Info rmed Consent (FPIC) is required in accordance with the SES. Consultations with relevant stakeholder groups we re initiated during the National Dialogue and will be cont inued during the PPG phase. Community level consultat ions will be scheduled, carried out and consultant sum maries will be included in the Project Document packag e. <u>Management:</u> During the project development phase the following ma nagement plans will be prepared: · A comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Pl an · A comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming Plan Note: Considering that Cook Islanders people self-identi fy themselves as Pacific Islanders/Indigenous peoples, the project will not develop an indigenous people plan (as it would need to cover most of the population). Inst ead, a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan wit h all elements of an IPP (or IPPF) will be prepared durin g the project design. The procedures for FPIC will be defined (in the Stakehol der Engagement Plan) and the requirements for FPIC wi ll be outlined, based on the final design of project activit ies. Please note that FPIC may need to be secured multi

				ple times during the project timeline. A grievance redres s mechanism for the project will be included in the proje ct design, based on the existing government and UNDP mechanisms.
Risk 2: Efforts to halt/minimize land/f orest degradation may unintentionally result in restriction to access to natur al resources and/or affect the traditio nal use and livelihoods of local comm unities. (Human Rights: P.4, P.6 - Standard 1: 1.2; standard 5: 5.2; standard 6: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.6)	I = 4 P = 2	Moderate		<u>Assessment:</u> While a catchment framework to safeguard indigenous species, natural ecosystems and food production syste ms from unsustainable land uses in Cook islands is imp ortant for the overall national economy, it is especially c ritical for the local farmer who depends on her/his land and produce for the family's livelihood and well-being. A failure for a farmer, regardless of gender, to safeguard the land/forests and mangroves from degradation stan ds the risk of losing part or the entire livelihood with dra stic implications on the family's economy and level of s elf-subsistence, which could result, in practical terms, in an economic displacement. While land and forest/mangrove degradation do not tar get any one in particular, women and children can gener ally be seen as the people being in the frontline experie ncing the negative impacts firsthand. This is mainly bec ause of the generally accepted family/household strate gy, in which the man more often than the women have j obs away from the family home. - <u>Management:</u> To manage this risk a stakeholder assessment will be c onducted, and a comprehensive stakeholder engageme nt plan will be prepared during the project design, toget her with a gender mainstreaming action plan. These pla ns will ensure that Pacific Islanders rights (including, bu t not limited to self-determination and customary rights,

				land tenure and traditional use rights) are considered and mainstreamed during the PPG and implementation phases. The need for a Livelihood Action Plan (LAP) is not anticipated at this stage, due to the nature of the economic displacement risk in the context of this project. However, this will be confirmed during the PPG. As needed, measures will be integrated into the project's activities or the LAP will be planned for implementation.
Risk 3: Poorly designed or executed project activities, could unintentionally damage critical or sensitive habitats and ecosystems, resulting from the implementation of land management malpractices. (Standard 1: 1.1, 1.2 & 1.3)	I = 4 P = 2	Moderate	The project could select a sustainable landscape management model that does not adequately address the issues or could produce counterproductive outcomes.	<u>Assessment:</u> During the project development phase, focus will be placed on fully scoping appropriate sustainable landscape management models and techniques that are to be included in the project activities. <u>Management:</u> The project development phase will identify a suitable models and techniques sustainable land management practices (e.g. resources available on WOCAT, FAO's SFM Toolbox, SLM best practices from other SIDS, UNDP-GEF R2R projects, etc.) that are technically sound. Procedures for screening those techniques will include consultations with national and international experts, local communities, local and national government agencies, national and regional programmes, projects and initiatives and literature review (i.e. scientific papers, project reports, MTR and TE reports, white papers, and other relevant documentation). A technically qualified SLM specialist will be included in the PPG team to adequately manage the risk. If screening cannot be fully concluded during the project development phase, then screening procedures will be included in the ProDoc. At this stage, an ESMF is not considered necessary but that will be revisited as needed during PPG.

Risk 4: Prevailing gender biases could unintentionally discriminate against women, limiting or adversely impacting their possibilities for accessing opportunities and/or influence on project activities. (Gender: P.10 & P.11)	I = 3 P = 2	Moderate	Although there is remarkable progress on gender issues in the policy area in the Cook Islands, gender mainstreaming still needs to be actively promoted to ensure women's empowerment. If not actively pursued, less engagement of women could potentially occur.	<u>Assessment:</u> A comprehensive Gender Analysis (GA) is needed to clarify relevant gender concerns and determine how mainstreaming of women into the project interventions can be ensured. It will focus on providing specific trainings for women, to best facilitate women livelihood activities and ensuring equal pay. During the project development phase specific consultations with the relevant women's groups or their representatives will be undertaken by the project development team. <u>Management:</u> Develop, budget and implement a comprehensive Gender Mainstreaming Plan. Develop gender mainstreaming indicators in the project Results Framework and periodically monitor progress through PIRs, MTR and TE.
Risk 5: Use of pesticides, herbicides or insecticides could potentially pose risk to community health and lack of adequate guidelines on usage and storage of these chemicals could result in generation of hazardous waste through different migration pathways (soil, water, or air). (Standard 3: - 3.4, 3.9; Standard 7: 7.6; Standard 8: 8.1, 8.2, 8.5)	I = 3 P = 1	Low	Pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides potentially could be applied during the project activities. This could potentially result in negative impacts on community's health effects.	<u>Assessment:</u> Potential use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides during the project activities will be assessed by the PPG team, and following the international guidelines for chemical management, handling, and storage to ensure the project design adequately addresses this risk. <u>Management:</u> Every effort will be made to avoid or minimize use of harmful chemicals through the project's design. In a situation when it cannot be avoided, the risks related to chemical handling, usage and storage in the project activities will be integrated into the project design and in the chemical management system through project guidelines, trainings, etc. Only pesticides, herbicides and insecticides meeting internationally accepted standards will be used by the project. Their storage and application will be subject to the health and safety guidelines

Risk 6: Climate variability and change will increase frequency and intensity of natural disasters and this can potentially delay or destroy project interventions. (Standard 2: 2.2)	I = 4 P = 2	**Moderate**	Climate change may negatively influence soil quality & fertility, moisture regime, dry up water sources and cause fragmentation of natural areas and their connectivity in the watersheds. Such climate impacts socio-economic resilience of the communities and survival chances of species including crops. This threat is amplified in SIDS due to their fragile ecosystems. Failure to select species that provide a long-term climate benefits as well as that are native to the project areas could results in potentially having a negative impact from the climate change, thus, posing a climate change adaption risk or malpractice. Climate change impacts could include shifting rainfall and seasonality of rainfall, temperatures, and lead to more extreme weather events including flooding, this climate uncertainties need to be added to sustainable land management models that will be selected for the project.	**Assessment:** The PPG phase will carefully examine the project activities against the climate change projections for the project areas. Based on the examination, the need for further project climate screening will be determined. **Management:** An initial basic climate screening has been done at PIF. During PPG, further analysis will be carried out using the CC risk assessment tool developed by the World Bank to support climate-proofing and building resilience on the project outcomes. During the project design, species for SLM demonstrations will be selected and recommended based on the highest climate resilience and biodiversity gains species potential.
Risk 7: PPG team/project or UNDP staff/consultants travelling to Cook Islands and demonstration landscapes could increase risk of COVID-19 spread if pandemic is prolonged or if a diff	I = 4 P = 1	**Low**	There have been no confirmed cases of COVID 19 in Cook Islands since the WHO declared a pandemic in early 2020. However, such cases may emer	**Assessment:** Detailed assessment of this risk will be undertaken by UNDP early during PPG and full implementation stages of the project.

erent pandemic emerges during the project's lifetime. (Standard 3: 3.9)			ge during the PPG or implementation phase, or a different pandemic may emerge during the project's lifetime.	**Management:** Assuming the pandemic continues at least through the PPG stage, it is likely that PPG activities will have to be undertaken by national consultants, supported remotely by international specialists and external UNDP staff. The potential for inter-island transmission will be reduced by the project including a high degree of devolution of implementation responsibility to local level. Should there be a relaxation on travel restrictions in the future that might allow international specialists to participate in full implementation of the project or indeed movements of Cook Islanders between islands, internationally recognized biosecurity standards will need to be followed.

	QUESTION 4: What is the overall project risk categorization?		
	Low Risk	☐	
	Moderate Risk	X	During this SESP pre-screening, **7** potential risks were identified, **5** of which are rated as moderate and **2** as low. Thus, the overall risk rating for this project is **moderate**. To mitigate the identified potential risks, during the PPG phase a set of targeted plans will be developed, including a comprehensive stakeholder engagement plan and a gender mainstreaming action plan. During PPG an effective grievance mechanism will be put in place to ensure that all potential issues and concerns will be reported, discussed and addressed.
	Substantial Risk	☐	
	High Risk	☐	

QUESTION 5: Based on the identified risks and risk categorization, what requirements of the SES are triggered? (check all that apply)				
Question only required for Moderate, Substantial and High Risk projects				
Is assessment required? (check if "yes")	☐			*Status? (completed, planned)*
if yes, indicate overall type and status		X	Targeted assessment(s) – corresponding with Targeted Management Plans noted below	Planned
		☐	ESIA (Environmental and Social Impact Assessment)	
		☐	SESA (Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment)	
Are management plans required? (check if "yes)	X			
If yes, indicate overall type		X	Targeted management plans (i.e. Gender Action Plan, Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan, LAP [as needed], others)	Planned
		☐	ESMP (Environmental and Social Management Plan which may include range of targeted plans)	
		☐	ESMF (Environmental and Social Management Framework)	
Based on identified risks, which Principles/Project-level Standards triggered?		Comments (not required)		
Overarching Principle: Leave No One Behind				
Human Rights	X	Risks 1 and 2		

	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	X	*Risk 4*
	Accountability	☐	
	1. Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management	X	Risks 2 and 3
	2. Climate Change and Disaster Risks	X	Risk 6
	3. Community Health, Safety and Security	X	Risks 5 and 7
	4. Cultural Heritage	☐	
	5. Displacement and Resettlement	X	Risk 2
	6. Indigenous Peoples	X	Risks 1 and 2
	7. Labour and Working Conditions	X	Risk 5
	8. Pollution Prevention and Resource Efficiency	X	Risk 5

Supporting Documents

Upload available ESS supporting documents.

Title	Submitted
PIMS 6565 pre-SESP_CKI_17DEC2020	

Part III: Approval/Endorsement By GEF Operational Focal Point(S) And GEF Agency(ies)

A. RECORD OF ENDORSEMENT OF GEF OPERATIONAL FOCAL POINT (S) ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT(S): (Please attach the Operational Focal Point endorsement letter with this template).

Name	Position	Ministry	Date
Mr. Nga Puna	Director & GEF Operational Focal Point for the Cook Islands	National Environment Service (NES)	1/13/2021

ANNEX A: Project Map and Geographic Coordinates

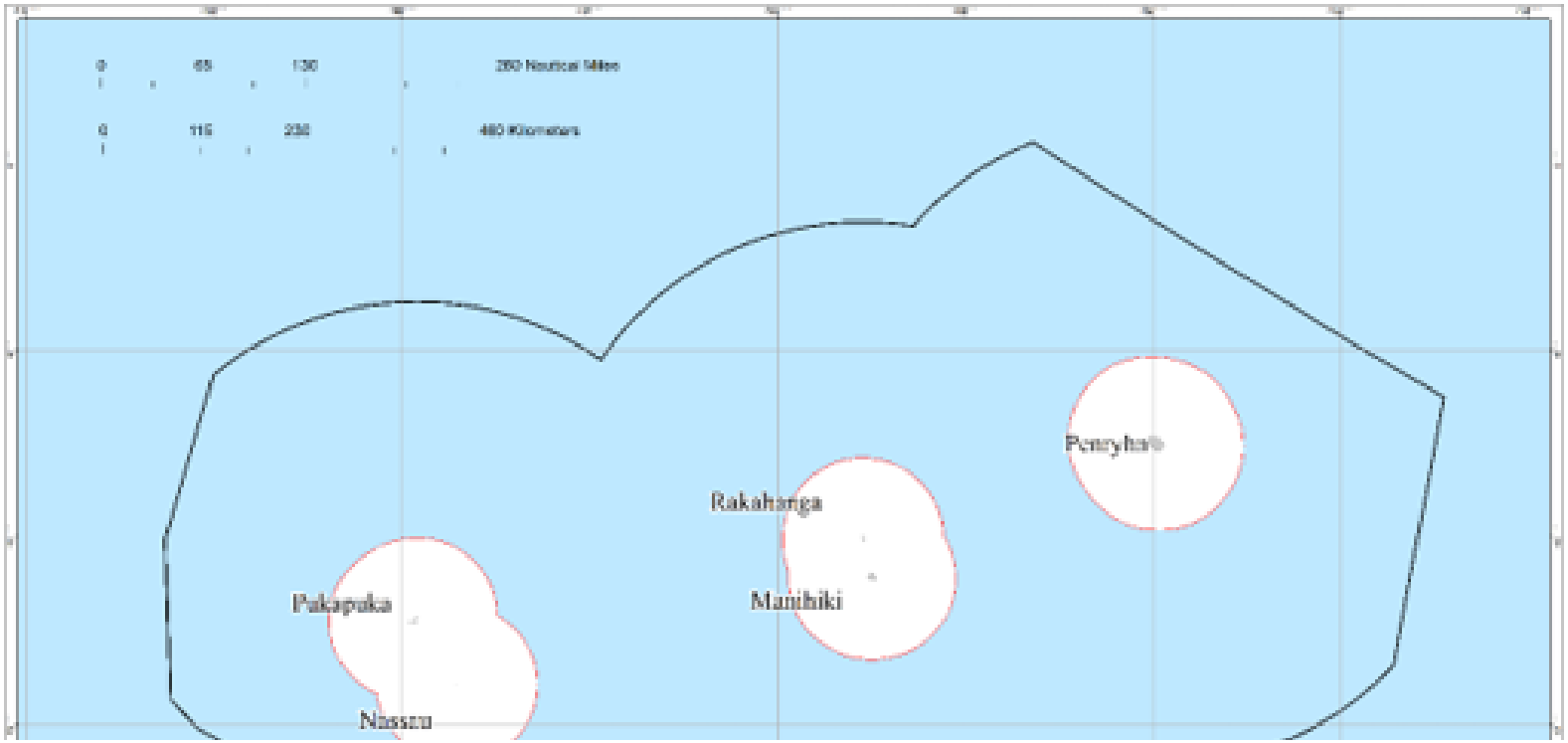
Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project intervention takes place

Figure 1: *Cook Islands Marae Moana Marine Park and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)*

The entire Cook Islands EEZ comprises the Cook Islands Marine Park, also known as Marae Moana Marine Park (1.9 million km²), including all 15 islands of the Northern and Southern groups. Each island is encircled by its respective Marae Moana marine conservation zone (delineated in red on the map) that extends 50 nautical miles from its coastline, within which all commercial fishing and mining are prohibited. These conservation zones, which are designated as Marine Protected Areas under the 2017 Marae Moana Act and in accord with IUCN's MPA definition[1], form eight contiguous MPAs covering 309,136 km^2.

The project will target a third of the Cook Islands: Suwarrow in the Northern Group; Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Takutea and Manuae in the Southern Group; and all islands will benefit from changes in national legislation and policy.

[1] Dudley, N. (ed.) (2008). Guidelines for applying protected area management categories. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. https://portals.iucn.org/library/node/9243



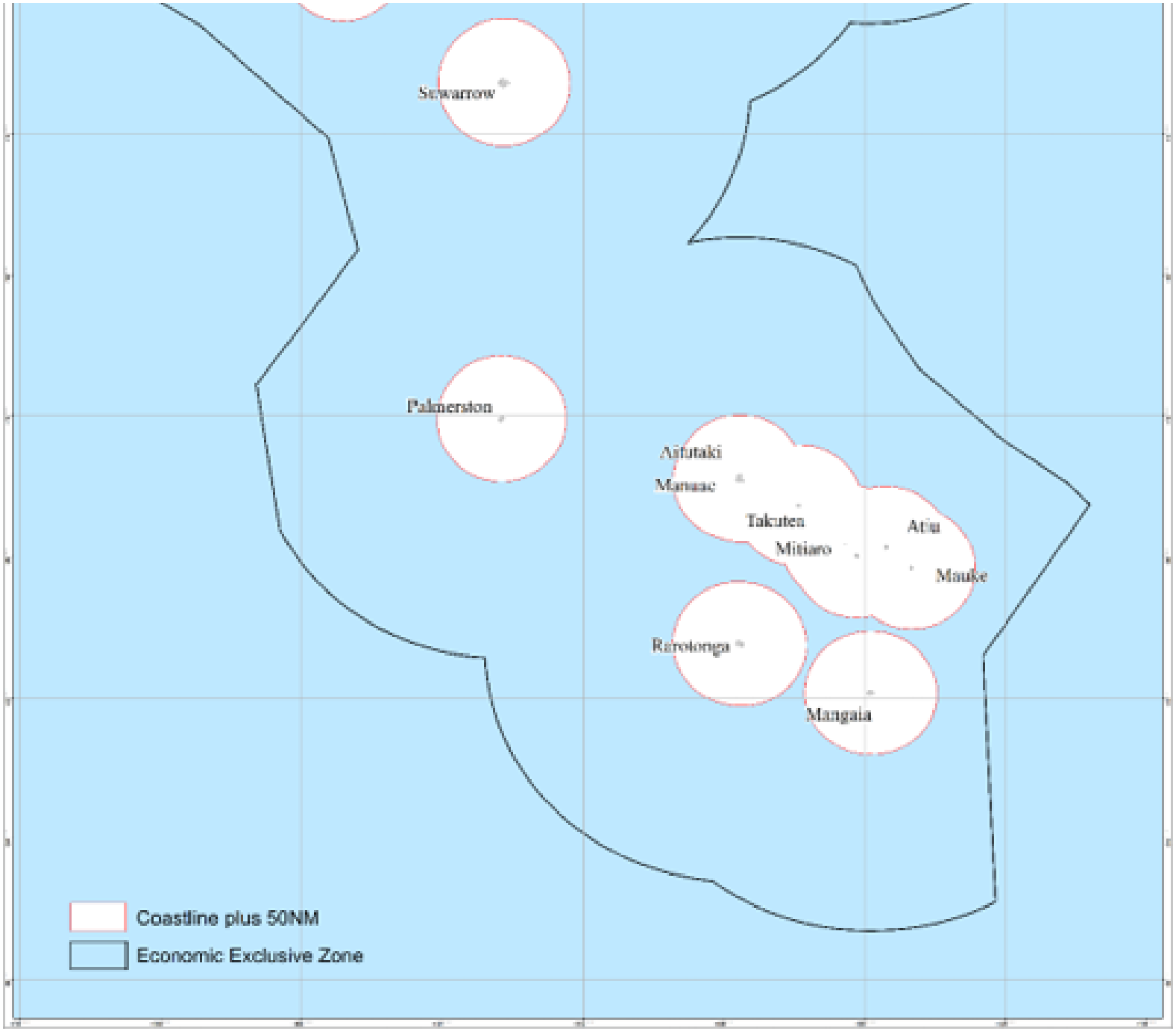
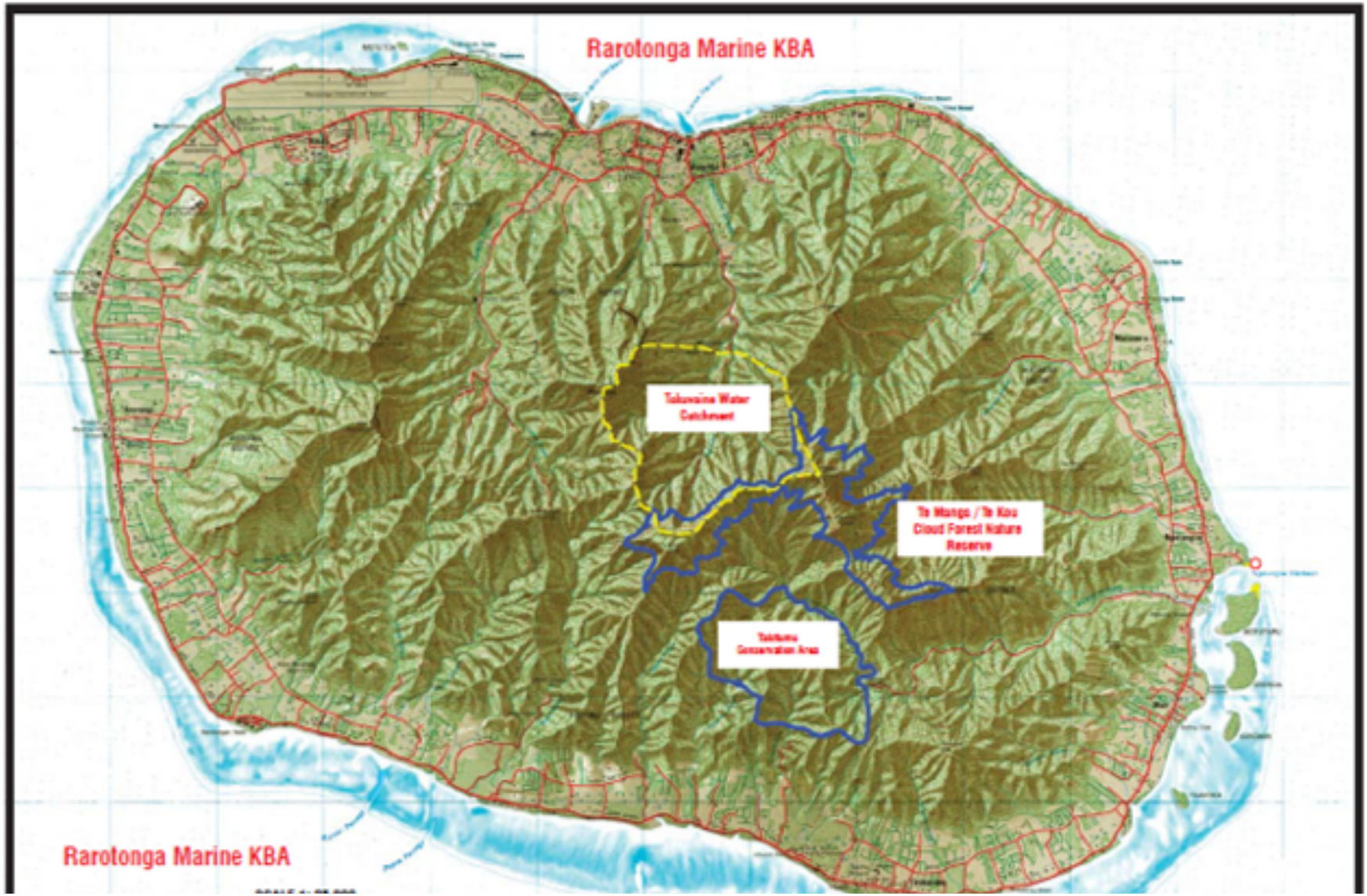

Suwarrow
Palmerston
Aitutaki
Manuae
Takuten
Atiu
Mitiaro
Mauke
Rarotonga
Mangaia
Coastline plus 50NM
Economic Exclusive Zone

Figure 2: *Key Biodiversity Areas of Rarotonga*
Blue lines highlight identified KBAs: Takitumu Conservation Area and Te Manga/Te Kou Cloud Forest; and Rarotonga Marine, which circumvents the island and extends 151m out to sea as part of Marae Moana Marine Park. Takituma will be subject to improved management effectiveness and the Cloud Forest is proposed as a new PA under the project.

Rarotonga KBAs will benefit from the project's strategic selection of three abutting or embracing catchments for mainstreaming sustainable management practices. Reference to Figure 3 enables the strategic juxtaposition of these catchments with KBAs to be appreciated.



Area of Rarotonga's KBAs:

KBA	Designation	Terrestrial	Marine
Rarotonga Marine	Marine Conservation Zone (Marae Moana)	-	1,600 ha
Takitumu	Conservation Area	155 ha	-
Te Manga/Te Kou Cloud Forest	Nature Reserve	118 ha	-
Total		**273 ha**	**1,600 ha**

Source of map and areas of KBAs: Evans, 2012[16]

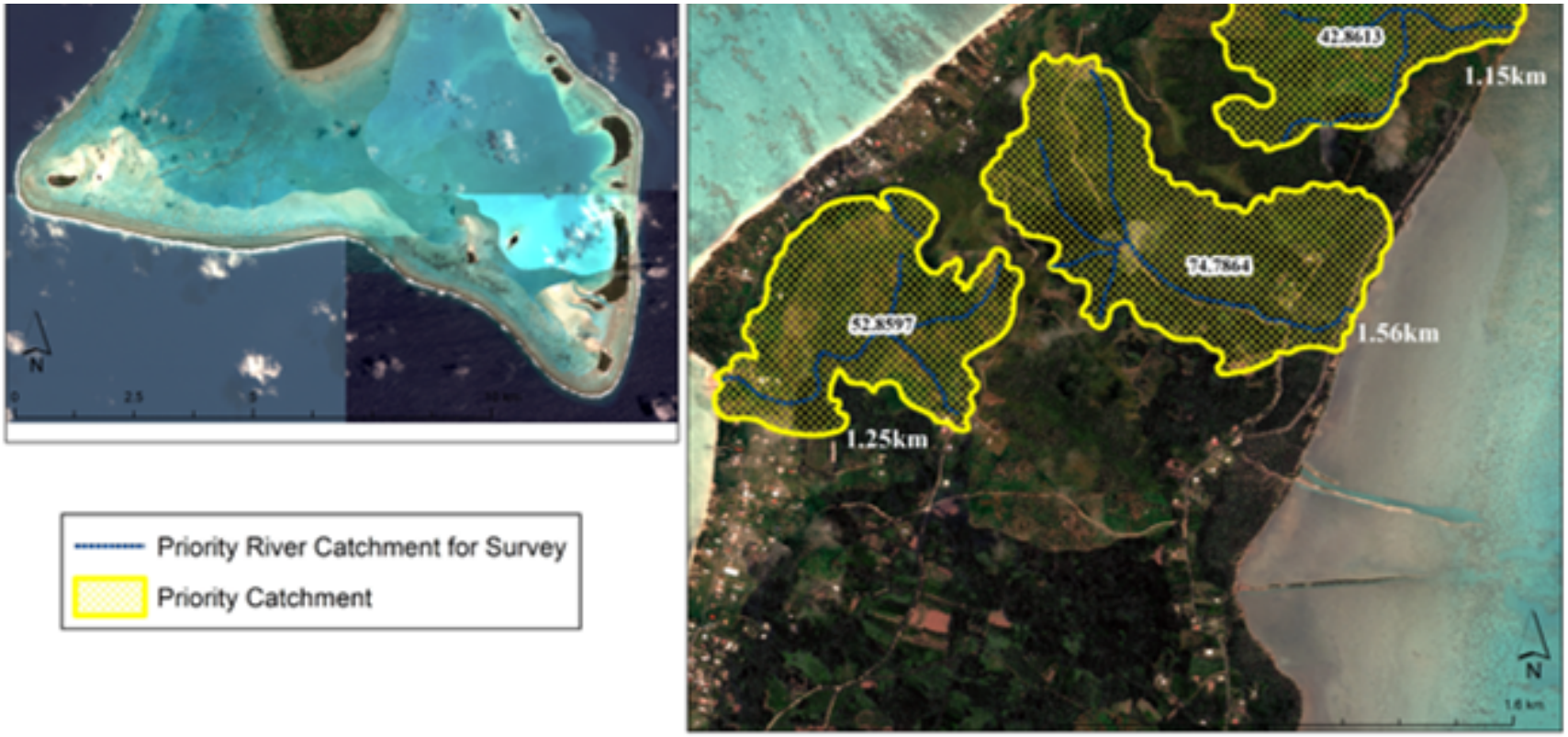
Figure 3: *Rarotonga water catchments*

The project's three focal catchments in Rarotonga proposed under Component 1 for improved sustainable land management in the vicinity of riparian areas are identified by their yellow boundaries: Avatiu (675 ha), Turangi (357 ha) and Avana (591 ha). The thick blue lines demarcate some 25 km of primary streams that will be the focus of riparian activities within a total area of 1,623 ha.

Efforts will target upstream land-based impacts that are degrading the coastal marine waters of Rarotonga Marine KBA (1,600 ha), which is a Marine Protected Area under Section 24, Marae Moana Act 2017.

Interventions in these catchments will also buffer the abutting Takuvaine water catchment area (#15), protected under Environment Act 2003 regulations, and Te Kou Cloud Forest KBA along the ridge of these catchments.

Figure 4: *Aitutaki water catchments*
Three catchments in Aitutaki, totalling 170.5 ha and identified by their yellow boundaries, are proposed under Component 1 for improved sustainable land management, focusing on riparian activities along some 4 km of priority streams (marked in blue). All of Aitutaki (terrestrial and marine) is designated as a KBA; and its marine waters are protected from all commercial fishing and mining under Marae Moana S24.



Aitutaki KBA:

KBA	Terrestrial	Marine
Total	1800ha	4300ha

Marine reserves:

Ootu ra'ui (220ha); Maina ra'ui (128ha); Maine ra'ui (81ha); Motukitiu ra'ui (407ha)

Figure 5: *Manuae*

Manuae's terrestrial areas have not formally been designated any form of protected area (Twyford, 2021[1]), despite commonly being referred to as a reserve[41]. However, in 2020 a new Landowners Committee was formed, similar to that of Takutea, to facilitate more effective decision making to enhance environmental conservation. Thus, it is classified as a 'managed area'. Under the Marae Moana Act 2017, the marine part of Manuae is a designated marine conservation zone from the baseline to 50 NM.

Its terrestrial and lagoon areas, where project interventions will focus on improving management effectiveness under landowner governance in Component 2, are 620 ha and 1,375 ha, respectively[42].

[41] Butler 2017; SPREP 2018; CBD 5th National Report 2017
[42] CBD 5th National Report 2017; Aitutaki and Manuae Nearshore Marine Assessment 2019

Figure 6: *Takutea Nature Reserve*

The entire island of Takutea is a KBA and protected bird area, having originally been designated as a Community Conservation Area under the Environment (Atiu and Takutea) Regulations 2008 and defined as the island and its adjoining waters to 12 NM, within which there should be no-take of any plants or animals. It is also an MPA under the Marae Moana Act, which extends from its coastline to 50 NM (PACS Policy Paper, 2021). Its terrestrial and marine areas are 120 ha and 760 ha, respectively[43], but these need to clarified using GIS during the PPG.

Project interventions in Component 2 will focus on supporting effective management through landowner governance.

Figure 7: *Suwarrow National Park*

Uninhabited Suwarrow is the Cook Islands' only national park; it is also a MPA under Marae Moana. Terrestrial and marine areas are 162 ha and 1,240 ha, respectively (5th National Report to CBD, 2017). Both Suwarrow Atoll National Park and Suwarrow Atoll Marine are IBAs, the latter covering 6,305,875 ha. http://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/31020

Project interventions under Component 2 will focus on supporting improvements in PA management effectiveness through landowner governance.

[43] The terrestrial area of Takutea is cited as 100 ha in Evans (2012) but the PACS Policy Paper (2021) cites 120 ha, which is taken from McCormack (2002). Takutea Wildlife Sanctuary is cited as 127 ha and Takutea Marine as 762 ha in the 5th National Report to CBD (Butler 2017) in a list of Cook Islands IBAs: the relationship of these designations to that of Takutea Community Conservation Area needs clarification.