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United Nations Development Programme

Project Document

Project title: Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species		
Country(ies): Cook Islands	**Implementing Partner (GEF Executing Entity):** National Environment Service	**Execution Modality:** Assisted National Implementation Modality
Contributing Outcome: **United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022,** Outcome 1: Climate change, disaster resilience, and environmental protection; Output 1.5: Number of PICTs coverage of terrestrial and marine areas that are protected. Aligned with **UNDP Strategic Plan (2022-2025)** Output Signature Solution #4 (Environment); contributing to UNDP SP Result 4.1: Natural resources protected and managed to enhance sustainable productivity and livelihoods; and Result 4.2: Public and private investment mechanisms mobilized for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions.		
UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Category: Moderate	**UNDP Gender Marker:** GEN2	
Atlas Award ID: 00136472	**Atlas Project/Output ID:** 00127363	
UNDP-GEF PIMS ID number: 6565	**GEF Project ID number:** 10780	
LPAC meeting date: 9 December 2022		
Latest possible date to submit to GEF: 11 October 2022		
Latest possible CEO endorsement date: 21 November 2022		
Project duration in months: 72		
Planned start date: April 2023	**Planned end date:** April 2029	
Expected date of Mid-Term Review: April 2026	**Expected date Terminal evaluation:** September 2028	
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). Building upon the achievements of the GEF-5 ridge-to-reef project, the GEF-7 project strategy also includes improving management effectiveness of target protected areas, as well as expansion of the protected area system through establishment of a 118-ha community conserved area safeguarding globally significant biodiversity within the cloud forests of Rarotonga. Project results are expected to generate multiple environmental benefits, including 3,130 ha of priority catchments under improved management, and improved management of 1,260 ha of terrestrial protected areas and 14,453 ha of marine protected areas. An estimated 9,588 people (75% of the resident population of the		

country), of whom 51% are women, are expected to directly benefit as a co-benefit of the GEF investment, including local communities living within and benefiting from the ecosystem services provided by the priority catchments, people benefitting from the biodiversity resources and ecosystem services of the target protected areas, and management and staff members of NES, MoA, CIT, and ICI, as well as other stakeholders benefitting from strengthened capacities. Through improved management in the agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU) sector, 288,638 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent of greenhouse gas emissions mitigated are estimated to be achieved through increased carbon sequestration and reduced emissions.	
FINANCING PLAN	
GEF Trust Fund grant	USD 3,502,968
(1) Total Budget administered by UNDP	**USD 3,502,968**
(2) Total confirmed co-financing to this project not administered by UNDP	**USD 27,644,640**
(3) Grand-Total Project Financing (1)+(2)	**USD 31,147,608**

SIGNATURES

Signature: Mr. Mani Mate Director Development Coordination Division Ministry of Finance and Economic Management Government of the Cook Islands	**Agreed by Government Development Coordination Authority**	**Date/Month/Year:** 15 March 2023
Signature: Mr. Holatoa Fua Director National Environment Service Government of the Cook Islands	**Agreed by Implementing Partner**	**Date/Month/Year:** 15th March 2023
Signature: DocuSigned by: Violet Baffour E402CBF0CB48426... Violet Baffour COSQA Coordinator, BRH Regional Bureau for Asia Pacific	**Agreed by UNDP**	**Date/Month/Year:** 05-Mar-2023

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Abbreviations and Acronyms:

ACT	Aitutaki Conservation Trust
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AWP	Annual work plan
BAU	Business as usual
BD	Biodiversity
BPPS-NCE-VF	Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, Nature, Climate and Energy, Vertical Fund team
CC	Climate change
CCCI	Climate Change Cook Islands
CEPF	Critical Ecosystems Partnership Fund
CIMP	Cook Islands Marine Park
CIT	Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CITTI	Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute
CKI	Cook Islands
CLO	Crown Law Office
CMS	Convention on Migratory Species
CR	Critically Endangered (IUCN red list category)
CSO	Civil society organization
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DCD	Development Coordination Division (of the MFEM)
EBA	Endemic Bird Area
EBSA	Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area
E&CC	Environment and Climate Change
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Environmental impact assessment
EN	Endangered (IUCN red list category)
EX ACT	Ex-Ante Carbon Balance Tool
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FSP	Full Sized Project
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GHG	Greenhouse gas
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEFSEC	Global Environment Facility Secretariat
GIS	Geographical Information System
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
ha	Hectare
HACT	Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers
HOA	House of Ariki
IAS	Invasive Alien Species
IBA	Important Bird Area
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDP	Island Development Plan
IEA	Island Environmental Authority
IEMP	Island Environmental Management Pan
ICI	Infrastructure Cook Islands
IP	Implementing Partner
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IRRF	Integrated results and resources framework (UNDP Strategic plan 2022-2025)
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature

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KAP	Knowledge, attitudes and practices
KBA	Key biodiversity area
KM	Knowledge management
KOTO	Kōrero o te 'Ōrau (local NGO)
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MFAI	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
MFEM	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
MMR	Ministry of Marine Resources
MOA	Ministry of Agriculture
MOCD	Ministry of Cultural Development
MTR	Mid-term review
NBSAP	National biodiversity strategy and action plan
NBSC	National Biodiversity Steering Committee
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NES	National Environment Service
NEIS	National Environment Information System
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NKA	Natura Kuki Airini
NPD	National Project Director
NSDA	National Sustainable Development Agenda (Cook Islands)
NTFPs	Non-timber forest products
NZD	New Zealand dollar
OFP	Operational Focal Point
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PA	Protected area
PACS	Protected Area Classification System
PAMP	Protected Areas Management Policy
PCAT	Partner Capacity Assessment Tool
PICTs	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PIMS	Project information management system
PIR	Project Implementation Report (GEF)
PIU	Project implementation unit
PM	Project Manager
PMU	Project management unit
POPP	Programme and operations policies and procedures
PPG	Project preparation grant
R2R	Ridge to reef
RTA	Regional Technical Advisor
SDG	Sustainable development goal
SGP	Small Grants Programme (GEF)
SECU	Social and Environmental Compliance Unit (UNDP)
SES	Social and environmental standards (UNDP)
SESA	Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment
SESP	Social and environmental screening procedure (UNDP)
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SLM	Sustainable land management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
STAP	Scientific Technical Advisory Panel (GEF)
TBD	To be determined

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TCA	Takitumu Conservation Area
tCO2e	Tons of carbon dioxide equivalent
TE	Terminal evaluation
TEV	Total economic valuation
TGA	Takitumu Growers Association
TIS	Te Ipukarea Society (local NGO)
TOR	Terms of reference
TTV	Tō Tātou Vai (drinking water public service provider)
UNCBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDP CPD	UNDP Country Programme Document
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UON	University of Newcastle (Australia)
USD	United States dollar
USP	University of South Pacific
VU	Vulnerable (IUCN red list category)
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Cook Islands Māori language terms:

Aronga mana	Traditional leaders
Mata'iapo	Hereditary chiefly title
Pa Enua	Outer islands
Ra'ui	Traditional conservation approach
Rangatira	Hereditary Māori leader
Turanga Memeitaki	Wellbeing

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II. DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

1. Cook Islands is a Polynesian island nation[1] within the South Pacific Ocean located between 8° and 23° S latitude and 156° and 167° 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 (see country map below in **Figure 1**). 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) and three low coral-reef islands and atolls (Palmerston, Manuae and Takutea). The entire EEZ was designated Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park) in 2017.

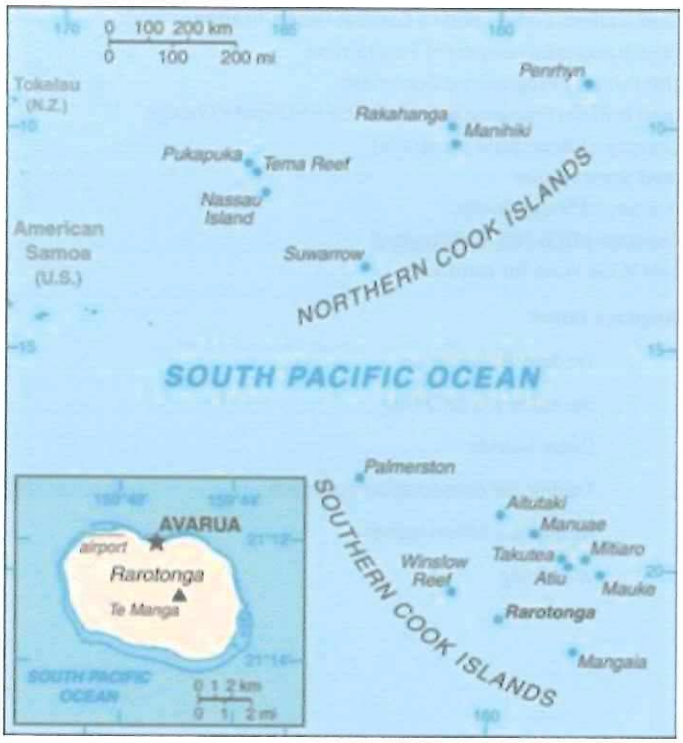


Figure 1: Country map[4]

2. Despite its relatively small terrestrial area, the 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, montane forests, remnants of coastal forest, makatea forest, strand vegetation, freshwater lakes and streams, dry and freshwater caves, lagoons, and tidal salt marshes.

3. Cook Islands form part of the Polynesia-Micronesia Biodiversity Hotspot[5], where extraordinarily high levels of biodiversity and endemism are coupled with severe threats and the highest rate of species extinction on Earth[6]: just 21% of the region's original vegetation remains in pristine condition[7]. The Southern Cook Islands

[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, Atiu, Takutea, Ma'uke, Miti'āro, Mangaia and Palmerston.

[4] Source: https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/cook-islands/map

[5] 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.

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

[7] Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, 2007, *Ecosystem Profile: Polynesia-Micronesia Biodiversity Hotspot*, Conservation International –

biomes were recognized as one of the Global 200 priority ecoregions for global conservation with its own designated Cook Islands Moist Tropical Forest Ecoregion[8]. 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[9] but their status is considered critical/endangered.

4. The southern islands of Miti'aro, Atiu, Ma'uke, and Mangaia are the remains of ancient volcanoes uplifted some 20-60 m 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, where the northern part is a volcanic island surrounded by a barrier reef[10].

5. Over 4,000 species have been identified in the Cook Islands and these are recorded in the Cook Islands Biodiversity Database[11]. Native and endemic species account for 62% and 2%, respectively, and 4% are threatened or endangered with extinction[12]. 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.

6. The 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 atolls and coral reef islands, notably uninhabited Suwarrow, Manuae and Takutea. Where quality survey data is present (i.e., Suwarrow and Takutea) these islands have been identified as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and are designated as protected areas for this reason. Birdlife International recognizes 2 endemic bird areas (EBAs). The uninhabited island of Takutea is home to the most significant number of seabirds within the Cook Islands. Many seabird species that feed or migrate through Cook Islands waters are globally threatened with extinction.

7. 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.

8. 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 two isolated reefs (Flying Venus and Tema), seamounts, seabeds and the open ocean water columns. Sixty-one marine species present in Cook Islands waters are globally threatened with extinction, including a significant number of endemic species that are locally threatened.

9. From the 2021 review of Cook Islands' conservation areas[13], only two terrestrial areas currently meet the internationally accepted IUCN definition of a protected area. The IUCN defines a protected area as "a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values". These islands/atolls are Suwarrow and Takutea.

Melanesia Centre for Biodiversity Conservation, Apia, Samoa.

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

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

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

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

[12] State of Environment Report, 2018

[13] Twyford, K. 2021. Protected Areas Classification System (PACS) Policy Paper, GEF 5 report to the NES.

10. Suwarrow, an uninhabited coral atoll in the Northern Group, was declared a National Park in 1978 due to the abundant marine, turtle and seabird wildlife it supports. As a KBA and IBA, Suwarrow 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[14]. Suwarrow is also home to megafaunal marine species such as green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*; IUCN Red List Endangered: EN), humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*; IUCN Red List: EN), giant manta ray (*Mobula birostris*; IUCN Red List: EN) and whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*; IUCN Red List: EN; Green Status: Largely Depleted LD), and sperm whale (IUCN Red List: VU).

11. Takutea is a sandy cay of prime uninhabited habitat. It 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 the Bristle-thighed Curlew (IUCN Red List NT), listed as a key migratory species under the Convention on Migratory Species, as well as the Red-footed Booby (*Sula sula*; IUCN Red List: Least Concern LC), Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*; IUCN Red List: LC), Red-tailed Tropicbird (*Phaethon rubricauda*; IUCN Red List: LC) and Frigatebirds. Coconut crabs (*Birgus latro*; IUCN Red List: VU) 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.

12. 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 Monarch (*Pomarea dimidiate*; IUCN Red List: Vulnerable VU), Rarotonga Starling (*Aplonis cinerascens;* IUCN Red List: VU) and Cook Islands Fruit-dove (*Ptilinopus rarotongensis*; IUCN Red List: Near threated NT), 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.

13. Another example is the uninhabited Manuae atoll, managed by a court appointed committee of the private landowners. As communicated during the PPG phase, the landowners are currently setting up a conservation trust for the sustainable conservation management of this site. The status as a "protected area" (wildlife sanctuary) has been unclear, but the establishment of a conservation trust by the landowners would be consistent with the definition of a protected area in Schedule 3 of the draft Environment (Aitutaki and Manuae) Regulations 2020[15]. A recent marine survey[16] found that both the lagoon and outer reef are in very good condition, and there is an abundance of giant clams, though these face high poaching pressure.

14. 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)[17], as part of the Polynesia Micronesia Hotspot Initiative[18] to provide a blueprint of priority sites to target conservation efforts within the CIMP that was later extended to the entire EEZ.

15. 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 due to lack of survey data), 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

[14] Evans, J. 2012. Priority sites for conservation in the Cook Islands: Key Biodiversity Areas and Important Bird Areas. Te Ipukarea Society.

[15] Twyford, K. 2021. Protected Areas Classification System (PACS) Policy Paper, GEF 5 report to the NES.

[16] Morejohn, K. Ainley, L. Kora, J. 2019. Aitutaki and Manuae nearshore assessment. Ministry of Marine Resources.

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

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

a KBA, with the exception of Rarotonga. A national classification system has been drafted for protected areas and a next step is to assess the extent to which KBAs are protected.

More information is described in the *Baseline report on the target catchments, managed areas and protected areas* in **Annex 13** to the Project Document.

Global environmental problems, threats and root causes:

16. With its limited land area and increasing urbanization, much of which can be attributed to tourism[19], 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.

17. As illustrated in the generalized problem tree illustrated in **Figure 2**, the main threats and root causes contributing to the environmental problems that will be addressed by the project are described below:

18. **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[19]; and the construction of private dwellings over previous decades[20]. Such development, also reflected in an increasingly urban population[21], 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.

19. **Pollution** is considered one of the most important threats 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.,

[19] 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)

[20] Cook Islands Population Census Report 2016

[21] 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).

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 phosphates and nitrates, 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.

20. **Invasive species** (such as rats and invasive plant species) constitute one of the most serious but under-acknowledged threats to sustainable development in small island developing states. Among the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs), invasive species are indicated as the largest threat to globally significant biodiversity.[22] The impacts of invasive species are enormous, insidious, and difficult to reverse, especially given the particularly high vulnerability of small island developing states arising from their small size, geographic isolation, and ecological fragility.[23] On most small, inhabited islands, the land and freshwater systems have been subjected to significant introductions of alien species that have replaced indigenous flora and fauna, resulting in major biodiversity loss, often drastically changing whole ecosystems. Management action against invasive species should aim to prevent new species introductions and eradicate or control established populations. Given that the problem of invasive species control and eradication is still not well understood, research should be encouraged. This approach will help ensure that strategies and policies on invasive species are based on the latest scientific knowledge. A lot is changing in our understanding of the wide-ranging conservation and biodiversity benefits attributed to rat eradications on tropical islands, for example Graham et al (2018)[24] in a letter to scientific journal *Nature* note that: "Rat eradication on oceanic islands should be a high conservation priority, as it is likely to benefit [both] terrestrial ecosystems and enhance coral reef productivity and functioning by restoring seabird-derived nutrient subsidies from large areas of ocean ... total biomass of the reef-fish community was 48% greater adjacent to rat-free islands. ... In a time of unprecedented threats to coral reefs from climate change, enhancing productivity and key ecosystem functions will give reefs the best possible chance to resist and recover from future disturbances."

21. **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°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

[22] Source: https://www.keybiodiversityareas.org

[23] UNEP 2014. Emerging issues for Small Island Developing States. Results of the UNEP Foresight Process. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Nairobi, Kenya

[24] Graham, N.A.J., et al. 2018. Seabirds enhance coral reef productivity and functioning in the absence of invasive rats. Nature 559, 250-253. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-018-0202-3

biodiversity[25] and the wider environment in the Cook Islands, including downstream impacts on the marine environment.

22. In 2017, a total economic valuation (TEV) of the Cook Islands' natural capital and ecosystem services amounted to NZD 2.375 billion, 80% (USD1.9 billion) of which was attributed to direct use values such as tourism, fisheries and agriculture; 16% (USD377 million) to indirect use values such as catchment protection, landscape and regulating services; and 4% (US $96 million) to non-use values of biodiversity and landscape[26]. 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.

23. **Unsustainable harvesting (poaching) of food resources from protected areas and community conservation areas:** There are very few court-enforced "legal" restrictions governing the harvesting of food species from community conservation areas, *Ra'ui* and protected areas in the Cook Islands. Generally, the traditional landowners and/or government agencies have made it known to the community that the poaching of giant clams, coconut crabs, bats, seabirds, pigeons etc., is illegal in these conservation areas. But the consequences of breaching these (legal) regulations are rarely (if ever) enforced. In the case of the Takitumu Conservation Area controls on harvesting seem to be effective in discouraging poaching. But in the case of Takutea and Manuae, the poaching of giant clams and coconut crabs is a serious, growing and immediate problem.[27] These two islands are visited regularly by small boats from Atiu and Aitutaki. These visits have increased markedly in recent years due to the availability of cost-effective locally manufactured aluminium boats coupled with the availability of reliable and affordable outboard motors. Suwarrow is occasionally visited by commercial fishing boats and inter-island cargo ships. Based on testimonial evidence, e.g., photos and comments on social media, these island visits are primarily to harvest giant clams (pa'ua) and coconut crabs, many of these are harvested for sale to restaurants in Aitutaki and Rarotonga. They can also be found (as a luxury food item) at many family gatherings in the Cook Islanders and overseas. The species most impacted historically were turtles (and their eggs), plus seabirds (and their eggs); this harvesting is now much reduced due to changing diets and conservation awareness. There are currently limited options for enforcing owner-mandated conservation measures on Takutea and Manuae due to a lack of resident rangers/wardens on these two islands.

[25] State of Environment Report 2018

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

[27] Confirmed in the baseline METT assessments and stakeholder consultations conducting during PPG phase.

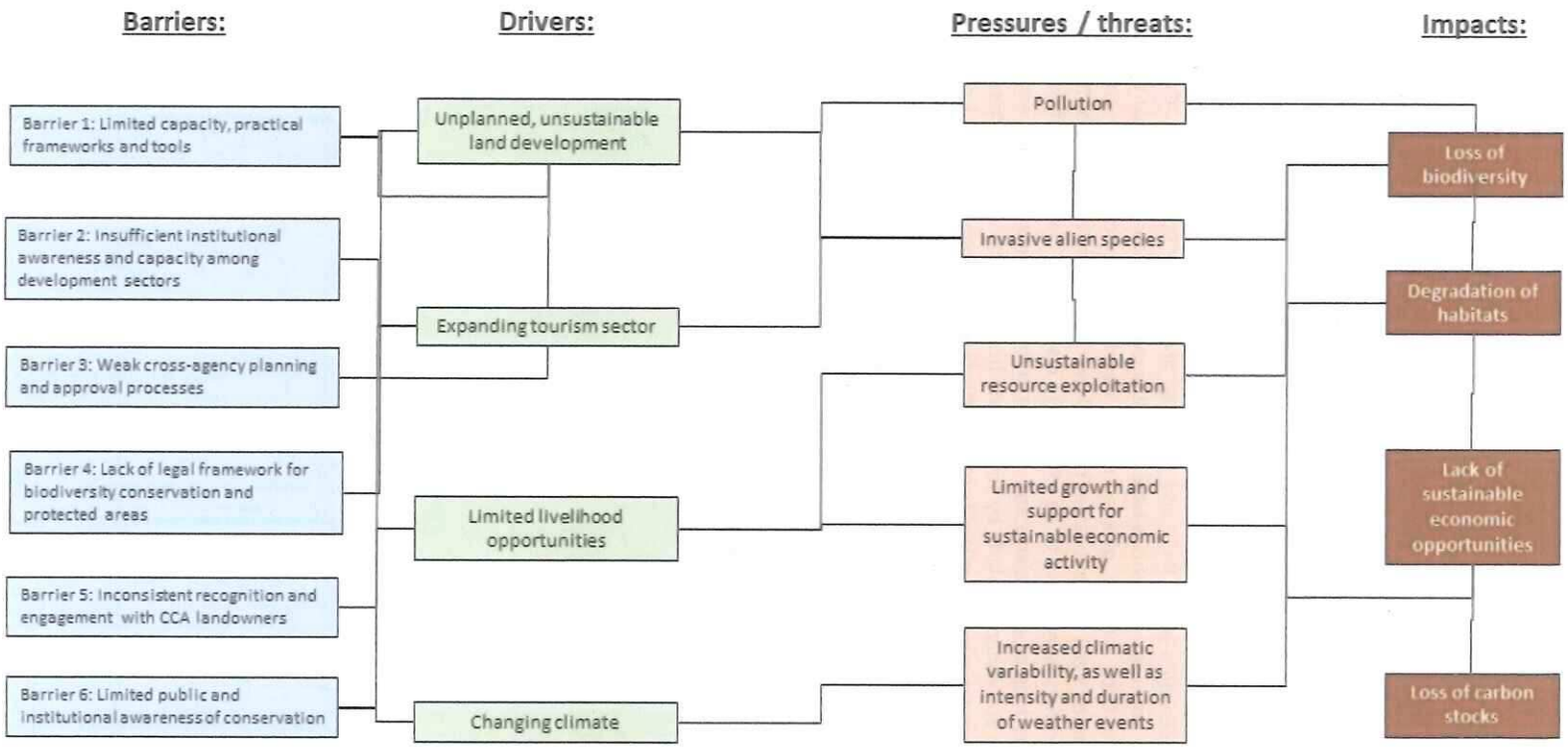


Figure 2: Problem tree analysis

Baseline Scenario:

24. Under the baseline scenario, species and their ecosystems are under significant risk, resulting in declining conservation status of species, reduced habitat quality and increasing ecosystem degradation.

25. The Government of the Cook Islands has recently issued the **National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA)**, broken down into three forward-looking documents:

- **1. Te Ara Akapapa'anga Iti 2021 – 2026**, The five-year scorecard provides metrics to measure our progress towards attaining our midterm outcomes and ultimately our vision of Turanga Memeitaki.
    - **Protect Areas Indicator 11.2 Percentage of protected areas.** This indicator will look at protected areas on land and the ocean. The Cook Islands have made an international commitment to conserve and sustainably manage areas of the Cook Islands Ocean under the Marae Moana Act 2017. This will be monitored for any changes under this indicator. The target is to increase land protected areas by 25% by 2031.
    - **Protecting our Biodiversity Indicator 11.6 Biodiversity Index.** This index tries to understand and track Biodiversity in the Cook Islands. Though not exhaustive it captures a snapshot of this important sector. Biodiversity refers to the variety of life at all its levels.
- **2. Te Ara Akapapa'anga Uki 2021 – 2046.** Our Generational Plan which outlines our targets and midterm outcomes with specific projects over the next 25 years. Our ocean and environment will be protected to the highest level and sustainably integrated into the economy.
- **3. Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui 2021 – 2121.** Our 100-year vision towards Turanga Memeitaki- Wellbeing. It also includes our shared understandings and our 15-star pledge (areas of importance) over the 100-year period or four generations.
    - **To Tatou Ao Ora Natura – Our ocean and environment.** Our Environment and Natural Heritage will be protected to the highest level and sustainably integrated into the economy.

26. Under the umbrella of the NSDA 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 the Marae Moana Policy (2016-2020)[28]; 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 Miti'aro; 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

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

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.

27. The socioeconomic disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled a re-evaluation of national priorities and how best to move forward appropriately. The Government of the Cook Islands 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 offered accelerated tax depreciation until the end of 2021 to encourage investment in environmentally sustainable initiatives and assets. With the pandemic prolonging into 2022, the timing of the GEF-7 project is opportune, in complementing the green recovery initiatives.

Past and ongoing GEF and other donor/NGO financed projects:

28. 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 in **Table 1**. 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.

Table 1: Baseline programmes / projects

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.

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Programme/Project	Content	Building blocks
GCF Enhancing Climate Information and Knowledge Services for resilience in 5 island countries of the Pacific (regional) (Approved 2020)	Pacific islands require reliable, timely, actionable information 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.	Will increase capacities and local knowledge and resources available for more effective responses to climate impacts. This will enable communities to adopt new climate-resilient livelihood practices by using improved climate information and risk knowledge transforming to increased resilience and enhanced livelihoods.
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 project design so that successes can be replicated and applied to this GEF-7 project, whilst challenges addressed can provide momentum for the GEF-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.

Programme/Project	Content	Building blocks
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.
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.

Lessons learned from the GEF-5 Ridge to Reef (R2R) project:

29. Several of the lessons documented in the terminal evaluation (TE)[29] of the GEF-5 R2R project were considered in the formulation of the GEF-7 project strategy. Firstly, the scope of the GEF-7 project was developed to be implementable within the time and budget parameters set forth. The implementation timeframe was designed to be six years, to allow sufficient time for the inception phase, further socialising the project, allocating time for capacities to be built up, and enabling enough time for execution of activities in the field.

30. The partner agencies were closely involved throughout the PPG phase. And the intersectoral catchment management processes are designed to actively engage NES, MOA, ICI and CIT, with priority actions integrated into their agency work programmes and budget frameworks. The stakeholder engagement plan provides practical direction on ensure genuine involvement of governmental and non-government stakeholders. Involvement of landowners, local NGOs and private sector enterprises is an important part of the project strategy.

31. Substantial resources have been allocated for an international Chief Technical Advisor, to be involved from project inception, providing overall technical and strategic guidance.

[29] Final TE report, July 6, 2021. UNDP-GEF "Conserving biodiversity and enhancing ecosystem function through a ridge to reef" approach in Cook Islands", GEF ID 5348, UNDP IMS 5168.

32. The Resident Representative of the UNDP Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Samoa will be a member of the Project Board, and the UNDP MCO and the Asia-Pacific regional hub in Bangkok will provide project assurance services.

33. An attempt has been made to look at the issue of conservation and environment from the bottom up - rather than from the top down - hence, the main biodiversity and protected areas priorities that arose from the extensive community consultations have been integrated into the project strategy at all levels.

34. Language that threatens community and landowner's rights and misrepresented past achievements has been avoided where possible. This project needs to be seen as an opportunity, not a threat to the local communities' control of their land and resources.

Considerations and lessons regarding engagement of landowners:

35. Almost all land in the Cook Islands is considered under customary or native ownership. This usually means that this type of native freehold title is recognised as belonging to families or groups of families, although some islands in the *Pa Enua* have different tenure arrangements, they all uphold their land rights vigorously. Leasehold arrangements are very common, where land is leased by non-owners for an extended period (often 60 years). Apart from the island of Suwarrow, there is very little Crown-owned land.

36. This has important governance implications for decision-making relating to SLM and protected areas. It is common in the Pacific, and elsewhere around the world, for external funders and entities to promote 'co-management' of terrestrial or marine protected areas between indigenous communities and the state. This co-management is often presented as a pragmatic compromise whereby the state cedes exclusive decision-making power, and the community agrees to (perhaps temporarily) put aside some aspects of its historical grievance, in order to achieve environmental management goals. Such co-management arrangements are only an option in the marine/lagoon areas of the Cook Islands - as all (dry) land is under private (customary and often collective) ownership, hence, there is no incentive for landowners to share management with the state; nor can a co-management regime be established without extinguishing some elements of landowner authority. A far more appropriate role for government agencies is to encourage and support landowners to manage their land in ways that yield environmental benefits: this may be through strengthening SLM practices, helping the landowners establish their own protected areas, or other measures.

37. This has important implications when considering the establishment of small-scale protected areas (such as the caves and lakes of Atiu) or the conservation management of whole islands (Manuae and Takutea). Of particular relevance to this GEF-7 project is the proposed Rarotonga Cloud Forest protected area. This area covers the montane centre of the island, including the ridgelines that represent the convergence of many of the ancient tribal boundaries of Rarotonga. There are different measures of the extent of the Cloud Forest itself, but even the smallest of these encompass many different parcels of land and many thousands of landowners; if the whole rainforest area is considered, the landowners are said (anecdotally) to represent almost every family on Rarotonga, including their absentee descendants.

38. Any collective decisions about the management or legally scheduled protection of the Cloud Forest are therefore extremely complicated in some ways - but simplified in others, especially by the power of the courts to set up elected committees to represent the landowners, as in the example of the newly elected Manuae landowners committee. One important lesson that can be drawn from other indigenous peoples' negotiation with governments about land management is the need for collective agreement about: (a) whether negotiations should take place at all; (b) the objectives of these negotiations from the point of view of the community; and (c) who is endorsed to negotiate with government agencies on behalf of the landowning community or communities. Furthermore, the most enduring collective agreements are very often those that are instigated by traditional leaders or elders, rather than by representatives of the government or external bodies.

Long-term Vision:

39. The long-term 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.

Barriers towards Achieving the Long-term Vision:

40. **Barrier 1: Limited capacity, practical frameworks and tools.** The Cook Islands have limited capacity, frameworks and tools to manage biodiversity conservation; protected areas development; and integrate biodiversity considerations across key development sectors. The 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. 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 across sectors.

41. **Barrier 2: Insufficient institutional awareness and capacity among development sectors.** There is insufficient institutional capacity and 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. A key challenge is poor access to information biodiversity and ecosystem functions. Planning and sustainable land management need co-ordination with the traditional customary rights to land and 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, infrastructure and private dwellings do not meet current needs and standards.

42. 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[30]. About 24.4% of all Cook Islands households manage land for agriculture purposes[31]. 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 land management practices and solutions, both at the small-scale household and commercial levels, 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, the promotion and upscaling of alternative land management practices to reduce the need for agrichemicals, increased availability of organic inputs, as well as enhanced monitoring and enforcement capacity are needed.

43. 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 and 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.

44. Baseline institutional capacity assessments were made during the project preparation phase, utilising the UNDP-GEF capacity development scorecard methodology, adapted for the Cook Islands GEF-7 project by the PPG team. The scorecards focus on the role of each institution in Sustainable Land Management (SLM), which for the purpose of the capacity assessment is defined as *"practices that integrate the management of land, water and other natural resources to ensure conservation of biodiversity, durable ecosystem services, and*

[30] Cook Islands Agriculture Census, 2011

[31] Cook Islands Census report, 2016

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sustainable livelihoods". The agencies were assessed across 15 key capacity indicators, grouped within five thematic 'Capacity Result' strategic areas, with the baseline results presented below in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Baseline institutional capacity assessment results

Institution	CR1	CR2	CR3	CR4	CR5
	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
National Environment Service (NES)	44%	33%	33%	33%	33%
Cook Islands Tourism (CIT)	67%	60%	22%	50%	50%
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	56%	27%	44%	0	17%
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	33%	40%	56%	33%	33%
Capacity result (CR) definitions: **CR1**: Capacities for Engagement; **CR2**: Capacities to Generate, Access and Use Information and Knowledge; **CR3**: Capacities for Strategy, Policy and Legislation Development; **CR4**: Capacities for Management and Implementation; **CR5**: Capacities to Monitor and Evaluate.					

45. 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). More information on baseline institutional capacity is provided in **Annex 19***: Capacity baseline and needs assessment*.

46. **Barrier 3: Weak cross-agency planning and approval processes**. Stronger cross-agency planning and approval processes, such as EIAs, as well as raising awareness of best practices and promoting guidelines within the industry are essential. 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.

47. **Barrier 4: Lack of legal framework for biodiversity conservation and protected areas.** There is a need for the more effective management of conservation areas, this is hampered by the lack of a legal framework and plans clearly focused on conservation activities necessary to protect key species and habitats. Efforts to manage biodiversity in the Cook Islands to date have been generally limited, fragmented and sporadic. At present, there is no legal framework specifically designed to underpin the protected areas system and its 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 protected areas are managed. Furthermore, most of the existing legislation used to address protected area-related issues is out of date and/or not supported by specific, detailed regulations or accompanying policy guidance.

48. **Barrier 5: Inconsistent recognition and engagement with community conservation area landowners.** The existing environmental legislation lacks provisions regarding ownership and management by communities, private landowners or traditional leaders. For example, there is no legal standing or recognition for Community Conservation Areas and *Ra'ui* sites that are declared by landowners, traditional leaders or Island Councils. This lack of legislation is compounded by limited experience and capacity to engage stakeholders, especially non-governmental and community-based organisations and a more general lack of coordinated public involvement in natural resources conservation and management. Such an oversight in the effective management of Cook Islands protected areas must be addressed in order to minimise impacts on biodiversity, on livelihoods, public health and on the nation's economy. Progress has been made 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 protected areas classification system that is aligned to internationally accepted standards. Hence, this GEF-7 project is very timely with respect to building on this momentum. Early steps include developing (mutually agreed) protocols, with the aim of creating/strengthening

biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods in community conservation areas, which may include setting up collaborative partnerships between the government agencies, the stakeholders, and the landowners.

49. Baseline management effectiveness assessments were made during the project preparation phase of the target protected and managed areas using the GEF-7 biodiversity tracking tool; the Suwarrow National Park, and the indigenously owned islands and forested areas in the southern Cook Islands, namely Manuae, Takutea, Takitumu. As recorded in the baseline METT assessments, Takitumu and Suwarrow are well managed for conservation, with resident rangers/staff for most of the year. Suwarrow is well supported by the Cook Islands government, and Takitumu by the local landowners and community. The training and equipment supplied to the rangers could/should be greatly enhanced, and this is under consideration by the National Environment Service. Manuae urgently needs a detailed resource inventory/biodiversity survey - as none exists. This type of wide-ranging survey (of natural resources, such as fresh water, vegetation and other biodiversity) is essential before the planning process can proceed. Both Manuae and Takutea need management and operational plans, and regular reviews and monitoring of these plans is essential and will increase their effectiveness in the long term. More information on management effectiveness is provided in **Annex 14***: METT baseline assessments;* and **Annex 15**: *Report on assessment of management planning status of target and planned protected areas*.

50. **Barrier 6: Limited public and institutional awareness of conservation**. 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, an understanding of the drivers of these events and their 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. These barriers to achieving global environmental objectives include limitations in environmental governance, high staff turnover, weak information systems, national budgetary constraints, inadequate science programmes and limited research capabilities.

51. One of the methods used during the PPG phase to obtain stakeholder feedback and information on the baseline scenario was the design and delivery of a rapid knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey, administered through an online survey over the Google Forms platform. A total of 59 people were invited to participate in the rapid KAP survey, and 24 respondents completed the online questionnaire over the period of February-March 2022. Participants were selected from those who had been part of the PPG community consultations, and from those who had attended the PPG workshop. 29.2% of the respondents indicated that they strongly agree that "conservation areas/ra'ui have improved the status of ecological system in the Cook Islands", and 16.7% disagreed with this statement. More information on the findings of the rapid KAP survey is provided in **Annex 17**: *Report on rapid knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey*.

52. These barriers to achieving global environmental objectives and standards reflect the continuing challenges faced by Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) 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.

iii) Recognising and supporting landowners in the development of their community conservation areas.

iv) Raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender, and monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results.

National Policy Alignment:

53. **National Biodiversity Strategy and 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.

54. **Convention on Biological Diversity – 6th National Report.** The 6th National Report submitted for 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%[32].

55. **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.

56. **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.

57. **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.

58. **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.

59. **'Te Mana Māori' 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

[32] 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 fulfil its current CBD targets that will consolidate the foundations for a more effective future PAs system.

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.

Relevance to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework:

60. The project is relevant to a number of SDGs, most notably SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), as outlined below in **Table 3.**

Table 3: Project contributions towards Sustainable Development Goals

SDG	Project Contribution:
	9,588 estimated direct beneficiaries, participating and benefitting from interventions on increased productivity from sustainable natural resource management practices, access to low-value grant assistance, access to capacity building on sustainable agricultural practices, best practices in ecotourism, and alternative livelihoods (aligned with SDG 1.1). The intersectoral catchment management plans will promote gender-sensitive development strategies, and facilitation of biodiversity-friendly livelihood ventures will contribute towards investments in poverty alleviation (aligned with SDG 1.b).
	51% of the envisaged direct beneficiaries are estimated to be women (4,892 individuals). Women empowerment is expected to be strengthened through increased participation in governance structures, livelihood ventures, as well as increased leadership through active participation of women's groups (aligned with SDG 5.a).
	The project's Knowledge Management and Communications Plan will be developed on the basis of the results of the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey conducted during the PPG phase and updated at project inception. Knowledge management and environmental education activities will focus on ensuring stakeholders have increased access to information and knowledge related to role of biodiversity in the sustainable development in the Cook Islands (aligned with SDG 12.8).
	The project will help facilitate strengthened resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in the target catchments and outer islands (aligned with SDG 13.1). Climate change considerations will be incorporated into the intersectoral catchment management plans and the Island Environmental Management Plans (aligned with SDG 13.2). Landowners and local communities will have increased awareness of climate change through learning-by-doing capacity building delivered through partnerships with expert organizations and interactions with enabling stakeholders (aligned with SDG 13.3).
	The project aims to improve marine protected area management effectiveness of marine and coastal ecosystems (aligned with SDG 14.2), promote best practices to reduce pollution of and damage to environmentally sensitive marine areas (aligned with SDG 14.1), and contribute towards the objective of conserving coastal and marine areas (aligned with SDG 14.5).
	The project aims to ensure conservation and sustainable use of environmentally sensitive terrestrial areas (aligned with SDG 15.1); facilitate sustainable management of terrestrial ecosystems through intersectoral catchment management (aligned with SDG 15.2); improve terrestrial protected area management effectiveness (aligned with SDG 15.5); mainstream biodiversity conservation into key production sectors (aligned with SDG 15.9); help facilitate increased and diversified conservation financing in the target catchments and protected areas (aligned with SDG 15.a); mobilize co-financing to support the conservation and sustainable use interventions (aligned with SDG 15.b).
	Enhancing South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on collaborative initiatives with new or existing scientific partners to advance knowledge on biodiversity conservation in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (aligned with SDG 17.6); and encouraging public-private-community partnerships in protected area management (aligned with SDG 17.17).

61. The project will also contribute to achievement of the targets outlined in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework [33], which was under development at the time of developing the Project Document. The project is aligned with the following draft 2030 Action Targets of the zero draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework:

[33] CBD, 17 August 2020. Update of the Zero Draft of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD/POST2020/PREP/2/1. The term "post-2020 global biodiversity framework" is used as a placeholder pending decision on the final name at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

- **Target 2.** By 2030, protect and conserve through well connected and effective system of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures at least 30 per cent of the planet with the focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity.
- **Target 7.** By 2030, increase contributions to climate change mitigation adaption and disaster risk reduction from nature-based solutions and ecosystems-based approaches, ensuring resilience and minimizing any negative impacts on biodiversity.
- **Target 9.** By 2030, support the productivity, sustainability and resilience of biodiversity in agricultural and other managed ecosystems through conservation and sustainable use of such ecosystems, reducing productivity gaps by at least [50%].
- **Target 13.** By 2030, integrate biodiversity values into policies, regulations, planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts at all levels, ensuring that biodiversity values are mainstreamed across all sectors and integrated into assessments of environmental impacts.
- **Target 19.** By 2030, ensure that quality information, including traditional knowledge, is available to decision makers and public for the effective management of biodiversity through promoting awareness, education and research.
- **Target 20.** By 2030, ensure equitable participation in decision-making related to biodiversity and ensure rights over relevant resources of indigenous peoples and local communities, women and girls as well as youth, in accordance with national circumstances.

Relevance to United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022 and UNDP Strategy Plan 2022-2025:

62. The project is aligned to the **United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022**, specifically Outcome 1: "Climate change, disaster resilience, and environmental protection"; Output 1.5: "Number of PICTs coverage of terrestrial and marine areas that are protected." The GEF-7 project aims to facilitate improved management effectiveness of four protected and managed areas and establishment of a new, community conserved area in the cloud forest in Rarotonga.

63. The expected project results will also contribute towards achievement of the **UNDP Strategic Plan (2022-2025),** namely Output Signature Solution #4 (Environment); contributing to UNDP SP Result 4.1: "Natural resources protected and managed to enhance sustainable productivity and livelihoods"; and Result 4.2: "Public and private investment mechanisms mobilized for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions". Under the Integrated results and resources framework (IRRF) of the UNDP Strategic Plan, the project will contribute towards Indicator IRRF 4.1.1 ("Number of people directly benefitting from initiatives to protect nature and promote sustainable use of resources"), and Indicator 4.2.1 ("Number of people directly benefitting from mechanisms for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions funded by public and/or private sector resources"): 9,588 estimated direct beneficiaries, of whom 4,892 are women; and Indicator IRRF 4.1.2: 15,831 ha of "area of terrestrial *(1,378 ha)* and marine protected areas *(14,453 ha)* created or under improved management practices", and 3,130 ha of "areas of landscapes under improved practices, excluding protected areas".

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III. STRATEGY

GEF Alternative

64. 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.

65. 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.

66. 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 support for effective conservation management and conservation action.

67. Where appropriate, the government and conservation community need to collaborate with the landowners in developing conservation projects on their own land. This new approach to conservation development in the Cook Islands will demonstrate how supporting the landowners opens up many opportunities for small, medium, and large-scale conservation gains in the Cook Islands. Equally important and productive is supporting the House of Ariki, Aronga Mana, and local communities, plus the local and international NGOs towards urgently needed conservation gains. By supporting the conservation aspirations of the landowners and the local community, funding agencies show respect for the local (indigenous) culture and the legally binding land laws of the Cook Islands. Best practices and lessons learned from these efforts will be replicated across the 'protected areas' system and other 'managed areas' following in the wake of this project.

68. 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 and sustainable management 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.

Theory of Change

69. The GEF alternative scenario is based on the project theory of change depicted in **Figure 3** and explained below. The theory of change for the project is broken down into the following three causal pathways: (1)

strengthening the enabling environment, (2) improving management practices and effectiveness, and (3) facilitating adaptive management. The project results are expected to be sustained after GEF funding ceases, leading the following long-term outcomes:

- Strengthened enabling environment facilitates biodiversity mainstreaming.
- Biodiversity and ecosystem services protected through updated adoption of SLM practices.
- Durable achievement of conservation objectives through improved management of protected areas.
- Stable populations of globally threatened species through improved management.
- Enhanced well-being and resilience of local communities, inclusive of women and other marginalized groups, through participatory approaches.
- Adaptive management facilitated through effective knowledge sharing and durable collaboration with enabling partners.

70. 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.

71. 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.

72. The assumed links across the causal pathways to achieve the desired longer-term outcomes include:

- 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.
- If capacity of government officials is enhanced this will lead to improved delivery of mandates and greater implementation and enforcement of legislation.
- If capacity of communities in SLM and biodiversity conservation techniques and approaches is enhanced, then this will solicit their greater engagement and participation.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

73. 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:

- 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.
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.

74. 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.

The theory of change is predicated on a number of explicit assumptions, notably:

a) Government maintains its political, institutional and co-financing support for the project.

b) Landowners continue to accept a role for government in the conservation of their land.

c) A significant portion of the funding is available for on-the-ground actions and operations focused on biodiversity conservation and protected areas enhancement.

d) Improved nature-based livelihoods increase community participation in biodiversity conservation and SLM.

e) Improved knowledge management, supported by adaptive management, M&E and gender mainstreaming increase capacity and resilience, leading to enhanced sustainability and up-scaling of project outcomes.

f) The project is managed efficiently, effectively and adaptively, not jeopardized by COVID-19.

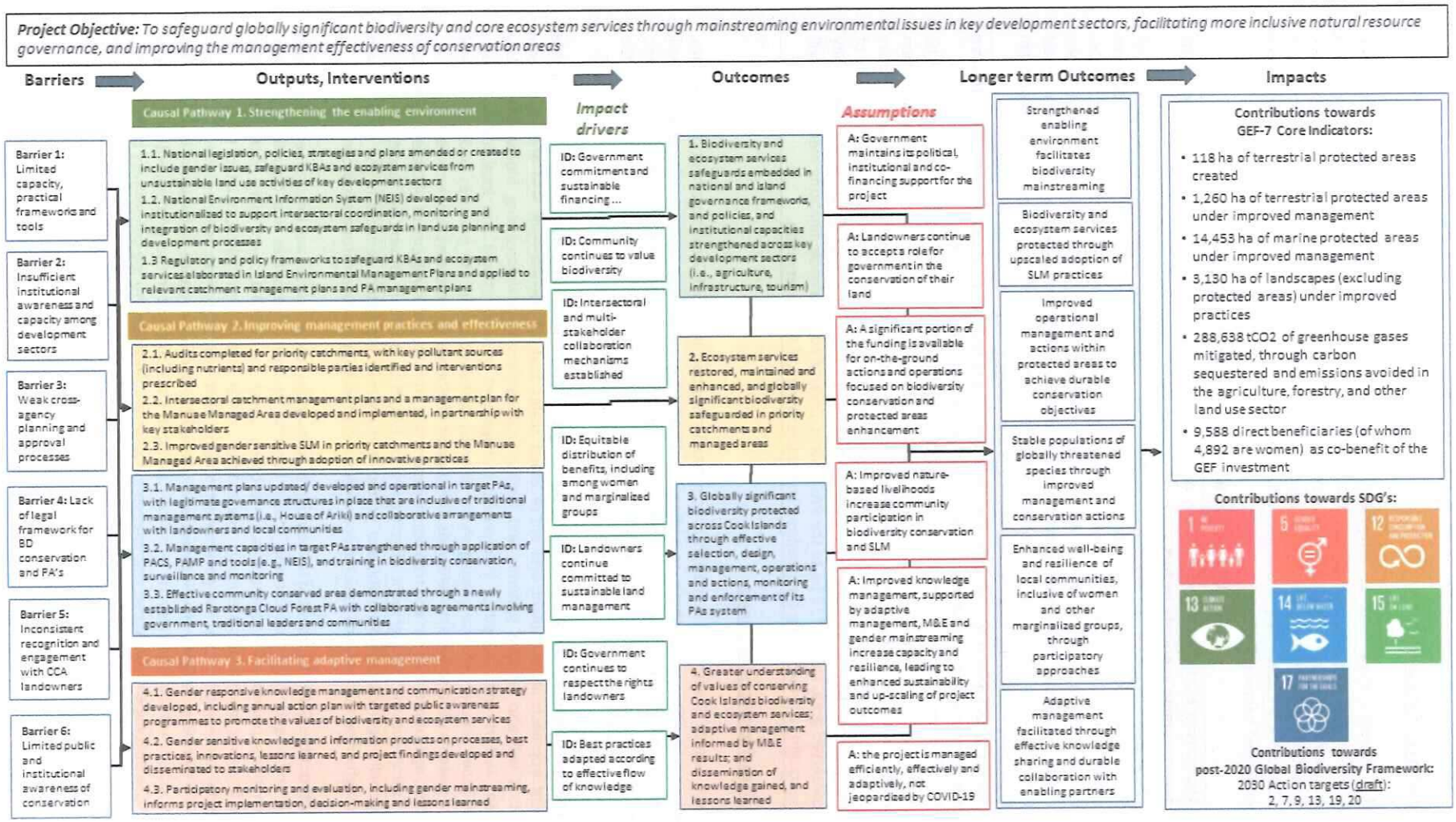


Figure 3: Project theory of change

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Alignment with GEF focal area

75. 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 in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Alignment with GEF focal area strategy

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 frameworks across multiple development sectors. Additionally, it will demonstrate how catchments can be sustainably managed in a holistic and integrated manner across a range of stakeholders (i.e., infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, private enterprises and communities), while focusing specifically on reducing the terrestrial pollutant inputs to freshwater and marine ecosystems in order to safeguard their natural functioning and associated biodiversity, as well as to enhance the quality of downstream KBAs and PAs established under Marae Moana and traditional systems of Ra'ui.
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 (1,260 ha of terrestrial and 14,453 ha of marine ecosystems) will be improved at four key protected areas across the Cook Islands in order to strengthen protection measures for KBAs with their threatened, endemic and migratory species. Increased capacity development will help ensure that effective protection of these sites will continue beyond the life of the project. This includes the proposed establishment of the Rarotonga Cloud Forest community conserved area, adding 118 ha to the PAs system. Diversified sustainable financing mechanisms will be sought to provide long-term support to biodiversity and PAs conservation.

Incremental/additional cost reasoning

76. 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.

77. **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.

78. **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

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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.

Global environmental benefits

79. 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.

80. The target catchments, comprising approximately 1,784 ha (about 26% of the land area of Rarotonga), 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:

- 1,260 ha of terrestrial and 14,453 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*[34].
- 3,130 ha of landscape will be under improved practices (excluding protected areas).
- 288,638 tCO2eq emission avoided during a 20-year period.
- The investment will directly benefit an estimated 9,588 people, of whom 4,892 are women (based on 75% of resident population of Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Atiu).
- USD 27.64 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.

Socioeconomic Benefits:

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

81. The project will generate a range of socio-economic benefits as it invests in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and ecosystem safeguards across key development sectors in partnership with landowners, traditional leaders and local communities, and further improve management of the protected area system and priority catchments.

82. **Increased inclusion of landowners and local communities in biodiversity conservation and sustainable natural resource management**. Landowners and local communities will be proactively engaged in the governance and management of protected and managed areas and priority catchments, protecting and respecting traditional practices and knowledge. Engagement of Cook Island Māori communities will be ensured through obtaining free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

83. **Gender mainstreaming and increased inclusion of youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups**. The project will facilitate advances in gender equality and women's empowerment, through inclusion in decision-making processes on natural resource management, delivery of capacity building on improving financial management skills, and disseminating information on available financing options for local community organizations, helping to enhance small-scale entrepreneurship, with a particular emphasis on engaging women-led community-based organizations and local enterprises. Project activities will emphasise priority inclusion of women, youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

84. **Strengthening wellbeing and income-generating measures**. Livelihood benefits will be generated for local households through increased soil productivity, soil and water conservation, access to low-value grant assistance for interventions on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, and through access to capacity building on sustainable agricultural practices, best practices in ecotourism, biodiversity conservation, and alternative livelihoods.

85. **Strengthened resilience (adaptation benefits)**. Protection of scarce freshwater resources in Rarotonga is one of the main priorities with respect to climate change adaptation in the Cook Islands. The target catchments in the project cover a cumulative area of 2,513 ha, representing more than 35% of the total terrestrial area of the island. The catchment audits and management plans under Outputs 2.1 and 2.2 will provide scale-able frameworks for the other catchments in the country. Implementation of sustainable land management practices and reduction in the use of agrochemicals will generate substantive adaptation benefits. Moreover, improved and intersectoral management of priority catchments will contribute to the low carbon development priorities of the country, safeguarding important ecosystem services, increasing awareness, and increasing resilience and coping capacities of local communities.

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IV. RESULTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Expected Results:

86. The **objective of the project** is to safeguard globally significant biodiversity and core ecosystem services through mainstreaming environmental issues in key development sectors, facilitating more inclusive natural resource governance, and improving the management effectiveness of conservation areas.

87. 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
Total Cost: USD 16,596,460; GEF project grant requested: USD 1,866,460; Co-financing: USD 14,730,000

88. The focus of component is strengthening the enabling environment, ensuing that biodiversity safeguards are institutionalized within legal and 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.

Outcome 1: Biodiversity and ecosystem services safeguards embedded in national and island governance frameworks, and policies, and institutional capacities strengthened across key development sectors (i.e., agriculture, infrastructure, tourism)

89. 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. Outcome 1 will include the following initiatives:

- The **2021 Protected Areas Classification System** (PACS) 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. The project will also provide legal assistance in the drafting of **EIA permitting and consent regulations** and **agricultural regulations under the Pesticides Act 1987**.
- **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.
- **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 Natural Heritage Trust[11] 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.
- **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, landowners, traditional

leaders, island governments and other stakeholders. The IEMPs will be based on the requirements of UNDP SES 1, ensuring compliance with the necessary stipulations and principles of the SES and most notably those relating to Biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of living natural resources. 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).

90. Linked to these innovative activities to increase the institutional capacities of NES, MOA, CIT and ICI, who are primarily involved in the consideration of biodiversity within the development sector.

91. Results expected through achievement of Outcome 1 include:

- Formal adoption and initial implementation of four catchment management plans, four PA management plans and four island environmental management plans (within island development plans).
- New regulations formally adopted and under implementation, (a) EIA (permitting and consent) regulations under the new Environment Act; (b) Agrichemical regulations under the Pesticides Act 1987; (c) Protected Area (PA) regulations under the new Environment Act, aligning with the new Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP).
- Improved institutional capacities of NES, CIT, ICI and MOA measured by a project adapted version of the capacity development scorecard.

92. The Outcome 1 results will be achieved through the implementation of the following three outputs.

Output 1.1. National legislation, policies, strategies and plans amended or created to include gender issues and safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services from unsustainable land use activities of key development sectors

93. Under Output 1.1, the project will provide environmental law and policy assistance in updating key legislation and preparing derivative regulations that include gender issues and safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services from unsustainable practices across key development sectors. Based on consultations during the PPG phase, the regulations include the EIA permitting and consent regulations, agricultural regulations under the Pesticides Act 1987, and the protected area regulations under the new Environmental Act and aligning with the new PAMP, which will also be developed based on the existing discussion paper. Project resources are also allocated for facilitating consultations and finalising the PACS.

94. A scoped Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) will be conducted by the international and local consultants providing environmental law and policy assistance under this Output, to assess the potential environmental and social impacts associated with the upstream activities supported by the project, namely the development of derivative regulations (Activity 1.1.1), the finalisation of the Protected Areas Management Policy (Activiti 1.1.2) and the integration of regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguards KBAs and ecosystem services into catchment management plans under Output 2.2 and PA management plans under Output 3.1 (Activity 1.3.3).

95. Delivering capacity building and awareness-raising on the developed and strengthened legislation, policies, regulations and strategies is an important dimension of this output. A set of online courses (e-courses) will be developed and delivered to governmental stakeholders, NGOs, private sector, and the general public. The project will also deliver a series of gender mainstreaming training sessions, through seminars, webinars, or similar modalities. The training sessions and e-courses will also be available to *Pa Enua* communities.

96. To ensure intersectoral coherence the project will develop and implement protocols to ensure coordination between the GEF-7 institutional partners in policy development and implementation.

97. Indicative activities under Output 1.1 include:

1.1.1. Utilising SESA approaches, provide environmental law and policy assistance in updating legislation and preparing draft derivative regulations, expected to include the EIA permitting and consent regulations, agricultural regulations under the Pesticides Act 1987, and the protected area regulations under the new Environmental Act and aligning with the new PAMP.
1.1.2. Utilising SESA approaches, develop the Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP) based on the existing discussion paper.
1.1.3. Facilitate consultations (in line with UNDP SES 6 requirements on FPIC) and finalise the Protected Area Classification System (PACS).
1.1.4. Deliver capacity building and awareness-raising on legislation, policies, regulations and strategies to government stakeholders, NGOs, private sector, general public, through development of online courses (e-courses) available for both public sector officials, practitioners, NGOs, and other stakeholders.
1.1.5. Deliver a series of gender mainstreaming training sessions, through seminar, webinar, or similar modalities, including to *Pa Enua* communities.
1.1.6. Deliver training on EIA best practices for addressing and formulating mitigation measures for wetland, riparian, and coastal ecosystems.
1.1.7. Develop and implement protocols to ensure coordination between the GEF-7 institutional partners in policy development and implementation.

Output 1.2. National Environment Information System (NEIS) developed and institutionalized to support intersectoral coordination, monitoring and integration of biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards in land use planning and development processes

98. This output includes development and operationalization of the national environmental information system (NEIS), an important platform that has long been needed for enabling science-based management decisions and improving information-sharing across governmental and non-governmental sectors. The first step will be a gender-sensitive feasibility assessment for the NEIS, looking at best practices and recommending a system that is fit-for-purpose and cost-effective and that allows flexible development, as new information and technology continue to emerge. The feasibility assessment will also prioritise collaboration and coordination with other information systems, including the biodiversity database managed by the Natural Heritage Trust. Based on the findings of the feasibility assessment, project resources are allocated for development of the NEIS, formulation of a roadmap for continuous improvement of the system, delivery of training on the applications of the system. Technical investment assistance for operationalization of the NEIS includes subscription charges for the platform, e.g., ArcGIS or similar, tablet computers for the NES compliance team, and drones for aerial surveys of protected areas, catchments and other ecosystems. Professional time is also required for populating the system with available information from different sectors and for translating documentation and disseminating the NEIS across the stakeholder community.

99. The design of the NEIS will include linking to available regional and international platforms, for example the UN Biodiversity Lab[35], a free, open-source environment providing access to over 400 global datasets on nature, climate change, and sustainable development. A priority is enabling policy makers to use spatial data for conservation and socioeconomic development.

100. Indicative activities under Output 1.2 include:

1.2.1. Carry out a gender-sensitive feasibility assessment for the national environment information system (NEIS).

[35] UN Biodiversity Lab – Providing decision makers with the best available spatial data to put nature at the center of sustainable development.

1.2.2. Provide technical assistance for development of the inclusive NEIS; formulation of a sustainability roadmap for continuous improvement of the system, and delivery of training on the use of the system; interpretation of data, and management decisions.
1.2.3. Provide technical investment assistance for operationalization of the NEIS, including subscription charges for the NEIS platform (e.g., ArcGIS); tablet computers for the compliance team and drones for aerial surveys; and professional time for populating the system, including translation of specific information.

Output 1.3. Regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services elaborated in Island Environmental Management Plans and applied to relevant catchment management plans and PA management plans

101. Under Output 1.3, regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services will be elaborated in gender-responsive Islands Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs) that will be developed and integrated into Island Development Plans (IDPs) for Atiu and three other outer islands (Pa Enua). The selection of the three *Pa Enua* apart from Atiu will be made during project implementation, based on the level of interest, commitment from enabling local stakeholders and other criteria. The GEF resources will catalyse a replicable process that can be upscaled to other *Pa Enua*.

102. The project will also support integration of the regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguards KBAs and ecosystem services into catchment management plans under Output 2.2 and PA management plans under Output 3.1.

103. Indicative activities under Output 1.3 include:

1.3.1. Develop and integrate gender-responsive Island Environmental Management Plans (integrating UNDP SES requirements[36] where necessary) into Island Development Plans (Atiu and 3 other outer islands – *Pa Enua*).
1.3.2. Facilitate *Pa Enua* consultations (following UNDP SES 6 requirements on FPIC), socializing the IEMPs among local stakeholders.
1.3.3. Utilising SESA approaches, support integration of regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguards KBAs and ecosystem services into catchment management plans under Output 2.2 and PA management plans under Output 3.1.

Outcome 2: Ecosystem services restored, maintained and enhanced, and globally significant biodiversity safeguarded in priority catchments and managed areas

104. **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. A total of four catchments have been prioritised in Rarotonga 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 (see **Annex 13**: *Baseline report on the target catchments, managed areas, and protected areas*). It is proposed to conduct full catchment audits, led 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 the agricultural census carried out by Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to assess current practices that may be contributing to catchment degradation, including changes in the types and quantities of agrochemicals used.

105. Equipped with both environmental data from catchment audits and data from the MOA agricultural census, 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 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.

[36] Most notably UNDP SES 1

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106. Intersectoral catchment management plans 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 and commercial growers in applying innovative natural resource management practices 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.

107. Outcome 2 also includes facilitating sustainable natural resource management practices in the Manuae Managed Area. A resource inventory will support the development of a management plan for Manuae, and implementation of specific management measures will be initiated, e.g., eradication of invasive rats.

108. Results expected through achievement of Outcome 2 include:

- Priority actions in the intersectoral catchment management plans adopted in the work programmes / budgets of NES, MOA, ICI and CIT and under initial implementation.
- Increased adoption of sustainable natural resource management, as measured by (a) 20 low-value grants implemented, piloting innovative practices in the priority catchments; (b) zero reported use of glyphosate, paraquat, and imidacloprid, based on updated MOA agricultural census; (c) 80% increase from baseline in the number of tourism operators certified under the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification Scheme.

109. The Outcome 2 results will be achieved through the implementation of the following three outputs.

Output 2.1. Audits completed for priority catchments, with key pollutant sources (including nutrients) and responsible parties identified and interventions prescribed

110. Led by the University of Newcastle Australia (UON), catchment audits will be designed and conducted in the Avana, Avatiu, Takuvaine and Turangi catchments in Rarotonga. The UON team will work closely with national counterparts, delivering training on the audit process and interpretation of results obtained. In collaboration with the activities under Output 1.1, local capacity will be further built up through development of e-courses on freshwater ecology and water resource management. These audits will consider/be conducted in alignment with the requirements and objectives of UNDP SES 1. The project will convene community meetings with landowners and local communities, including women, youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, to communicate the purpose and results of the catchment audits. Resources are also allocated under this output for technical and investment assistance on strengthening capacities and systems for conducting catchment audits and performing follow-up monitoring and evaluation.

111. Indicative activities under Output 2.1 include:

2.1.1. Design and conduct catchment audits of four priority catchments (in alignment with the requirements and objectives of UNDP SES 1), and deliver training to key stakeholders on interpretation of results, including development of e-courses (linked with Output 1.1) on freshwater ecology and water resource management.
2.1.2. Convene community meetings (including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups) to communicate the results of the catchment audits.
2.1.3. Provide technical and investment assistance (e.g., field analytical equipment for freshwater quality and ecology assessment and monitoring) on strengthening capacities in conducting catchment audits, as well as follow-up monitoring and evaluation.

Output 2.2. Intersectoral catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area developed and implemented in partnership with key stakeholders

112. The results of the catchment audits completed in Output 2.1 will inform the development of gender-responsive intersectoral catchment management plans for the four priority catchments, through participatory consultations with NES, MOA, CIT, ICI and other stakeholders. Development of a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area is also included under this output, as Manuae is not yet classified as a protected area. The Manuae management plan will also be developed through participatory processes and based on an updated resource inventory of the area.

113. The project will support advocacy and awareness-raising of the management plans to key stakeholders, including landowners, community groups, women groups, women led CSOs, women, youth and people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. And training sessions will be delivered to key institutional stakeholders, including NES, MOA, CIT, ICI and others, on implementation of the management plans.

114. In response to the increasing threat of invasive plants on Rarotonga, the project will work in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture in building capacities, strengthening systems, and demonstrating management of invasive alien species, including development of guidelines on best practice planting, use and handling of agrochemicals, flood management, erosion prevention, etc., development and dissemination of communication materials on biosecurity.

115. For the Manuae Managed Area, specific management measures will be implemented, including eradication of invasive rats in target sites to protect globally significant biodiversity, using proven, cost-efficient and effective methods. A rat eradication plan will be developed for the intervention based on best practice and a site-specific risk assessment. NES and UNDP will review and approve the eradication plan for compliance with UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (SES) and government regulations. Experienced service providers will be contracted to carry out the work, based on competitive bidding. The project Technical Officer will support intervention oversight, and the service provider will be required to conduct invasive species monitoring during and after the eradication intervention.

116. With respect to the planned eradication intervention, the GEF funds are meant to be catalytic, i.e., used to demonstrate cost effective and innovative methods for eradication of invasive rat species, through partnerships with enabling stakeholders, such as Department of Conservation or Landcare Research in New Zealand, University of Newcastle in Australia, Te Ipukarea Socieity (a local environmental NGO that collaborates with BirdLife International), etc. It is also important to note that the definition of "site" may, for example, refer to a single motu, not the entire terrestrial area of Manuae. The eradication plan will cover the entire island – which will help facilitate funding from other sources. Moreover, certain cost efficiency gains will be applied, e.g., the use of the Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) boat in Aitutaki (subject to scheduling with MMR and availability) that was procured as part of the GEF-5 project.

117. Proposed methods and existing strategies are described in **Annex 16** (*Rat eradication background information*). The GEF funding provides the opportunity to implement locally appropriate and innovative methods, including application of eradication agents that are specifically relevant for the Pacific rats, e.g., utilizing natural lures (such as coconut oil), using baits that are not attractive to land crabs, and possibly using drones to deliver baits when rats are most active, such as during the nighttime. The likelihood of reintroduction is considered low, as access to Manuae is only by small boats, in which inadvertent transport of rats is unlikely.

118. A few species that are expected to benefit from the rat eradication activities include but are not limited to the following: Atiu Swiftlet (*Aerodramus sawtelli; IUCN Red List: Vulnerable VU*); Kākerōri-Rarotonga Flycatcher (*Pomarea dimidiata; IUCN Red List: VU*); and Rarotonga Starling (*Aplonis cinerascens; IUCN Red List: VU*).

119. Indicative activities under Output 2.2 include:

2.2.1. Develop gender responsive intersectoral catchment management plans for the priority catchments in Rarotonga.
2.2.2. Develop a gender responsive management plan for the Manuae Managed Area, through inclusive, participatory processes and based on an updated resource inventory.

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2.2.3. Provide advocacy and awareness-raising of the management plans to key stakeholders, including landowners, community groups, women groups, women led CSOs, women, youth and people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.
2.2.4. Design and deliver train-the-trainer sessions with key stakeholders, including NES, MOA, CIT, ICI, and others, on implementation of the management plans.
2.2.5. In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, build capacities, strengthen systems, and demonstrate management of invasive alien species, including development of guidelines on best practice planting, use and handling of agrochemicals, flood management, erosion prevention, etc., development and dissemination of communication materials on biosecurity.
2.2.6. Implement specific management measures in the Manuae Managed Area, including eradication of invasive rats to protect locally and globally significant biodiversity using proven, cost-efficient and effective methods (process to include a risk assessment, approval for project from relevant agencies, and before, during, and after eradication monitoring); etc.

Output 2.3. Improved gender sensitive natural resource management in priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area achieved through adoption of innovative practices

The focus of Output 2.3 is on building capacities and implementing innovative natural resource management practices, according to the priorities identified in the catchment management plans and the management plan for Manuae Managed Area. Capacity building will be delivered in cooperation with NES, MOA, ICI, CIT and other enabling stakeholders, and targeted sessions will be provided to women and youth on skills development, financial management, and learning-by-doing activities. The project team will facilitate the development of MOUs between the GEF-7 institutional partners, landowners and other stakeholders as appropriate, on the implementation of specific actions outlined in the catchment management plans.

120. Through a low-value grant modality, investment assistance will be provided to local community groups and landowners for implementing innovative practices. e.g., soil conservation, climate resilient crops, water conservation, erosion control, organic fertilizers, community nurseries, invasive plant control with youth volunteers and/or women's groups, eco-tourism experiences, etc. NES, as Implementing Partner and administrator of the low-value grants, will be required to adhere to the UNDP On-Granting Provisions described in **Annex 27**. The low-value grant process will follow the Grant Management Policies and Procedures of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) that are presented in **Annex 32**. Grant agreements will be reviewed by UNDP prior to signature by the Implementing Partner and the grantees. The project team will monitor and evaluate the activities in the field for compliance with UNDP SES, as well as other specifications described in the grant agreements. Progress and completion reports submitted by the grantees will document compliance.

121. As part of the selection of grant recipients under Output 2.3, the proposed activities will be individually screened for compliance with the environmental and social standards of UNDP using the UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP) template in order to ensure that any potential unwanted impacts of these activities are anticipated, avoided, reduced, or mitigated. Each grant request will be rated by risk category (low, moderate, high) in line with the SES requirements for the SESP, which will determine what further action is required. Any proposed activities categorized as High will be disqualified (unless the activities can be redesigned to fully avoid the High risk) and will *not* be undertaken.

122. Furthermore, grant proposal selection will adhere to the following *exclusionary criteria*; i.e., the Project Board shall not approve demonstration projects that involve any of the following elements:

- Forced evictions of individuals or communities (as prohibited by the SES);
- Any forms of employment or livelihoods that may fail to comply with national and international labour standards;
- Alteration, damage, or removal of cultural heritage
- Potential violations of the human rights of indigenous peoples (as broadly defined in the UNDP SES) as affirmed by Applicable Law and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);

- Activities that affect the human rights, lands, natural resources, territories, and traditional livelihoods of indigenous peoples (IPs) in an adverse way.
- Large dams or other large-scale infrastructure;
- Support for extractive industries, including logging;
- Cultivation or processing of tobacco and tobacco products; Use, sale, or distribution of wildlife or other products regulated under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Site-specific assessments and management plans will be prepared for any activities supported under Output 2.3 that trigger those requirements (per the SES); for those projects, no activities that could cause harm can commence until those management measures are approved and put in place. All social and environmental risks will be subject to monitoring and follow-up to ensure that planned mitigation measures are implemented and effective.

123. According to the knowledge management and communications plan developed under Output 3.1, case studies on the low-value grant interventions will be developed and disseminated to share lessons and to advocate for fund-raising for upscaling the innovative practices.

124. Indicative activities under Output 2.3 include:

2.3.1. Deliver capacity building on innovative natural resource management practices in cooperation with NES, MOA, ICI, CIT and other enabling stakeholders.
2.3.2. Develop MOUs between the GEF-7 institutional partners, landowners and other stakeholders as appropriate, on the implementation of specific actions outlined in the catchment management plans.
2.3.3. Targeted capacity building delivered to women and youth on skills development, financial management, and learning-by-doing capacity building.
2.3.4. Provide technical and low-value grant assistance for implementing innovative practices. e.g., soil conservation, climate resilient crops, water conservation, erosion control, organic fertilizers, community nurseries, invasive plant control with youth volunteers and/or women's groups, eco-tourism experiences, etc.
2.3.5. Develop and disseminate case studies, share lessons learned, advocate for fund-raising for upscaling of innovative practices.

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

Total Cost: USD 9,780,000; GEF project grant requested: USD 1,100,000; Co-financing: USD 8,680,000

125. 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 landowners, traditional leaders, Island Councils and local communities, as appropriate, supported by government agencies and NGOs.

126. Apart from strengthening the existing PA system, the project will facilitate establishment of a new protected area, a community conserved area in Rarotonga, protecting globally significant and unique biodiversity in the higher elevations (cloud forest) of the island.

Outcome 3: Globally significant biodiversity protected across Cook Islands through effective selection, design, management, monitoring and enforcement of its PAs system

127. 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.

128. The PA's selected for improved management effectiveness are Suwarrow National Park, Takutea Nature Reserve and the Takitumu Conservation Area in Rarotonga. More information on baseline management effectiveness assessments is provided in **Annex 14***: METT baseline assessments*. Manuae is included in the baseline METT assessments; however, this site is not officially classified as a protected area and, hence, Manuae interventions are included under Outcome 2.

129. 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 some of the sites this will include eradication of invasive rats that threaten both terrestrial and marine biodiversity. 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 project opportunities at improving management effectiveness of the target PA's are described in **Annex 15**: *Report on assessment of management planning status of target and planned protected areas.*

130. Under Outcome 3, management tools and systems will also be updated or developed to improve management effectiveness, including the feasibility of using innovative technologies for remote monitoring and surveillance of these geographically dispersed PA's 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.

131. Additionally, it is planned to increase the PAs system by 118 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 Cloud Forest PA is envisaged to be established under a community conserved area modality. Collaborative arrangements will be developed to secure the long-term involvement of landowners, local communities, and government in best practices.

132. Recommendations in the 2021 review of Cook Islands PAs system and its "managed areas" estate will be followed up, including incorporation of these data into NEIS (Outcome 1) and development of a spatial layer defining each "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)[37], thereby enhancing cooperation in PA monitoring and surveillance in line with regional and international goals and other initiatives.

133. Results expected through achievement of Outcome 3 include:

- Improved science-based protected area management, as measured by the NEIS fully adopted, serving as platform to share biodiversity information.
- Biodiversity threats reduced, as measured by two sites reporting absence of invasive rats after eradication interventions.

134. The Outcome 3 results will be achieved through the implementation of the following three outputs.

Output 3.1. Management plans updated / developed and operational in target PAs, with legitimate governance structures in place that are inclusive of traditional management systems (i.e., House of Ariki), gender mainstreaming objectives, and collaborative arrangements with landowners and local communities

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

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135. The activities under Output 3.1 will start with updating and/or developing new management plans for the Suwarrow National Park, Takutea Nature Reserve and the Takitumu Conservation Area, through participatory processes and based on updated resource inventories. As part of the management planning process, the project will deliver training on the project social and environmental safeguard instruments, gender mainstreaming, UNDP SES, and relevant national standards and regulations.

136. With the aim of achieving landowner engagement in the management of protected areas, traditional management systems will be integrated through inclusive consultations with traditional leaders and through obtaining free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). The project will also provide technical and investment assistance for implementation of specific management measures to protected globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity, e.g., replanting of native species, establishing sustainable harvesting best practices, community beach clean-ups, rehabilitating coastal and near-shore vegetation, etc. The specific measures will be described in the management plans.

137. Invasive rats also present a significant threat to biodiversity of the target protected areas. Eradication interventions are planned to protect globally significant biodiversity using proven, cost-efficient and effective methods. The process of development and approval of the eradication plans, oversight, and monitoring and evaluation is the same as described under Output 2.2 for the intervention planned in Manuae.

138. The eradication activities will be implemented in collaboration and/or partnership with enabling stakeholders, such as the Department of Conservation or Landcare Research in New Zealand, University of Newcastle in Australia, Te Ipukarea Socieity (a local environmental NGO that collaborates with BirdLife International and has extensive experience in rat eradication in the Cook Islands).

139. Proposed methods and existing strategies are described in **Annex 16** *(Rat eradication background information)*. The GEF funding provides the opportunity to implement locally appropriate and innovative methods, including application of eradication agents that are specifically relevant for the Pacific rats, e.g., utilizing natural lures (such as coconut oil), using baits that are not attractive to land crabs, and possibly using drones to deliver baits when rats are most active, such as during the nighttime.

140. The likelihood of reintroduction at the target sites is considered low. Access to Takutea, for example, is only by small boats, in which inadvertent transport of rats is unlikely. Larger boats can travel to Suwarrow; however, there are limited numbers of vessels travelling there due to the remoteness of the atoll. Moreover, there are rangers stationed at Suwarrow six months out of the year. One of the objectives of the remote surveillance systems planned under Output 3.2 is to support NES in prohibiting unauthorized travel to Suwarrow and other protected areas.

141. A few species that are expected to benefit from the rat eradication activities include but are not limited to the following: Atiu Swiftlet (*Aerodramus sawtelli; IUCN Red List: Vulnerable VU*); Kākerōri-Rarotonga Flycatcher (*Pomarea dimidiata; IUCN Red List: VU*); and Rarotonga Starling (*Aplonis cinerascens; IUCN Red List: VU*).

142. Indicative activities under Output 3.1 include:

3.1.1. Develop new or updated gender responsive management plans for the target protected areas, through inclusive, participatory processes and based on updated resource inventories.
3.1.2. Deliver training on project social and environmental safeguard instruments, gender mainstreaming, UNDP social and environmental standards, and national standards and regulations.
3.1.3. Integrate traditional management systems into protected area management through inclusive consultations with landowners and traditional leaders, and through obtaining FPIC.
3.1.4. Provide technical and investment assistance for implementation of specific management measures to protected globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity, e.g., replanting of native species, establishing sustainable harvesting best practices, community beach clean-ups, rehabilitating coastal and near-shore vegetation, etc.

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3.1.5. Implement eradication of rats in target sites to protect globally significant biodiversity using proven, cost-efficient and effective methods; process will include a risk assessment, rat eradication plan, approval of the plan and for agent release, and post-release monitoring.

Output 3.2. Management capacities in target PAs strengthened through application of PACS, PAMP and tools (e.g., NEIS), and training and systems on biodiversity conservation, surveillance and monitoring

143. Output 3.2 focuses on strengthening capacities of the target protected areas through application of PACS, PAMP and other tools, including the NEIS, and delivering training and systems on biodiversity conservation, surveillance and monitoring. The project will design and deliver a series of capacity building workshops and seminars/webinars to and staff, local communities, and landowners on application of PACS, PAMP, emerging conservation approaches gender issues in protected area management, and management and monitoring of protected areas.

144. Resources are allocated for providing technical and investment assistance for strengthening monitoring and surveillance capacities and systems of the target protected areas. Based on recommendations of a feasibility study, remote surveillance systems for one or more of the target protected areas will be established. Training will be delivered to rangers and local stakeholders on the operation of the systems, performance will be assessed during the initial operation phase of the systems, and adaptive management adjustments will then be made in building out the full systems.

145. The remote systems proposed is to provide NES with strengthened surveillance capability, e.g., to control unauthorized anchoring of vessels in Suwarrow, particularly during the six months of the year when the ranges are not stationed on the atoll. Other monitoring equipment, for both the NES managed PA's and the community-managed areas, may include cameras, acoustic recording devices, camera traps, etc. Deployment of the equipment will include training in operation and maintenance. For community-managed areas, the selection of equipment will be consistent with local capacities, durability, etc.

146. Indicative activities under Output 3.2 include:

3.2.1. Deliver a series of capacity building workshops and seminars/webinars to protected area management and staff, local communities, and landowners on application of PACS, PAMP, emerging conservation approaches gender issues in protected area management, and management and monitoring of protected areas.
3.2.2. Provide technical and investment assistance for strengthening monitoring and surveillance capacities of the target protected areas.
3.2.3. Based on a feasibility assessment, establish remote surveillance systems for the target protected areas; deliver training to rangers and local stakeholders; assess performance of initial operation; and make adaptive management adjustments in building out the full systems.

Output 3.3. Effective community conserved area demonstrated through a newly established Rarotonga Cloud Forest PA with collaborative agreements involving government, traditional leaders and communities

147. Achievement of the proposed Rarotonga Cloud Forest community conserved area will require steadfast consultations with landowners and other involved stakeholders. The higher slopes of the Rarotongan mountains, including where the Cloud Forest PA is proposed, are classified as "un-investigated land", meaning that there are no individual landowners. The steep terrain restricts productive land use and, consequently, these areas harbour rich biodiversity resources. The PPG team consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including community groups and NGOs, and the overwhelming sentiment was that conserving the proposed Cloud Forest area would be a good idea. It should also be noted that the proposed Cloud Forest PA would be established as a community conserved area, where the community will make decisions regarding access based on a culturally appropriate community decision-making process that reflects voluntary, informed consensus (in line with the requirements of UNDP SES 5, para. 15).

148. Stakeholder consultations during the implementation phase will be supplemented with an updated resource inventory, focusing on surveying globally significant biodiversity. Consultations will adhere to the

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requirements and objectives of UNDP SES (most specifically in this case, those of SES 5 and 6). An information package, translated to Cook Islands Māori, will be developed to help explain the underlying principles and benefits of the establishment of the proposed protected area. Project resources are also allocated for a best practice learning exchange where similar collaborative conservation arrangements are in place, for example in New Zealand where Māori communities have declared similarly conceptualised conserved areas.

149. Substantial budget resources are allocated for a facilitation consultant (or local NGO) to guide the process of stakeholder engagement. Technical and environmental law and policy assistance will be provided for formulating collaborative agreements involving landowners, government, and traditional leaders – including obtaining FPIC for the establishment of the community conserved area. And a gender-sensitive management plan for the community conserved area and support implementation of specific actions, e.g., posting signage, developing a website.

150. Indicative activities under Output 3.3 include:

3.3.1. Facilitate a series of consultations with landowners and other involved stakeholders on the declaring an agreed part of the Rarotonga Cloud Forest as a community conserved area.
3.3.2. Update the resource inventory of the proposed community conserved area, focusing on surveying globally significant biodiversity.
3.3.3. Prepare an information package (translated to Cook Islands Māori) to help explain the underlying principles and benefits of the proposed community conserved area.
3.3.4. Organize best practice learning exchange where similar collaborative conservation arrangements are in place.
3.3.5. Facilitate formulation of collaborative agreements involving landowners, government, and traditional leaders – including obtaining FPIC for the establishment of the community conserved area.
3.3.6. Draft a gender-sensitive management plan for the community conserved area and support implementation of specific actions, e.g., posting signage, developing a website.

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

Total Cost: USD 3,287,700; GEF project grant requested: USD 369,700; Co-financing: USD 2,918,000

151. 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: Globally significant biodiversity protected across Cook Islands through effective selection, design, management, monitoring and enforcement of its PAs system

152. Outcome 4 will be underpinned by a Knowledge Management and Communications 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 and updated annually.

153. Importantly, formulation of the Strategy will be informed by the findings of the rapid Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) survey conducted during the PPG phase of a representative sample of the project's stakeholders, and an updated review at project inception. A KAP survey will be conducted at the end of project

to provide feedback on changes achieved over the course of the 6-year implementation timeframe. The key stakeholders will be reviewed and quantified at project inception to ensure reliable baseline feedback is established, against which future progress can be assessed.

154. 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)[38] to support science-based decision making. Species-related data will continue to strengthen existing platforms, such as the Cook Islands Biodiversity Database[11] to which NEIS can be linked subject to trilateral agreements.

155. The NES website and social media will be utilised as project communication platforms, where information on project activities and results can be shared, encouraging stakeholder interaction and feedback.

156. 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[39]. 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 landowners, 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 and enforce appropriate safeguard measures within an integrated holistic context.

157. Results expected through achievement of Outcome 4 include:

- Level of agreement to the following statement: conservation areas/*Ra'ui* have improved the status of ecological systems in the Cook Islands: strongly agree >50%; disagree <5%.
- Increase in flow of knowledge and information on best practices, as measured by (a) 1,000 visits (between project start and terminal evaluation) to the website and social media platforms; (b) 20 knowledge products generated and disseminated (PANORAMA solutions/case studies, EXPOSURE photo-stories, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc., including at least three focusing on gender mainstreaming.

158. The Outcome 4 results will be achieved through the implementation of the following three outputs.

Output 4.1. Gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy developed and implemented, including annual action plans with targeted public awareness programmes to promote the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services

159. Activities under Output 4.1 include development and implementation of a project specific knowledge management and communications strategy, building upon the knowledge management and communications strategy framework prepared during the PPG phase (see **Annex 33**) and including annual action plans with targeted public awareness programmes to promote the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

160. The knowledge management and communications strategy will be developed based on the results of the rapid knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey completed during the PPG phase (see **Annex 17**) and an updated survey or similar inquiries made at project inception. The KAP survey will be used as one of the project's monitoring and evaluation performance tools, comparing feedback obtained at the end of the project.

161. Resources are allocated for establishing and maintaining inclusive knowledge sharing systems, including Internet and social media platforms. The project will organize awareness and advocacy campaigns, focused on specific themes and aimed at defined target groups, such as women's groups, youth, and other vulnerable groups, through methods identified in the knowledge management and communications strategy, e.g., social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.), print media, radio, local television, etc.,

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

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

and supported by advocacy materials, such as short videos, factsheets, guide books, photo exhibits, Māori language books and cartoons, etc. Communication workshops / events will be convened on the project-level grievance mechanism including gender-based violence prevention and response and other social and environmental safeguard instruments.

162. Output 4.1 also includes implementation of citizen science activities, including women, youth, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, e.g., on identification of priority species, etc.

163. Indicative activities under Output 4.1 include:

4.1.1. Building upon the rapid knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey completed during the PPG phase, carry out start-up and end-of-project surveys to assess knowledge gaps and behaviour and gender issues hindering progress towards improving biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources.
4.1.2. Based on the results of the surveys completed in Activity 4.1.1 and building upon the knowledge management and communications strategy framework developed during the PPG phase, develop and oversee the implementation of a gender-responsive project knowledge management and communication strategy and annual action plans.
4.1.3. Establish and maintain equal and accessible information and knowledge sharing systems, including internet platforms, social media, etc.
4.1.4. Organise awareness and advocacy campaigns, focused on specific themes and aimed at defined target groups, such as women's groups, youth, and other vulnerable groups, through methods identified in the knowledge management and communications strategy, e.g., social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc.), print media, radio, local television, etc., and supported by advocacy materials, such as short videos, factsheets, guide books, photo exhibits, Māori language books and cartoons, etc.
4.1.5. Carry out communication workshops / events on the project-level grievance mechanism including gender-based violence prevention and response and other social and environmental safeguard instruments.
4.1.6. Citizen (including women, youth, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups) science activities, e.g., identification of priority species, invasives, etc.

Output 4.2. Gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings developed and disseminated to stakeholders

164. Under this output, knowledge generated on the project will be shared through production and dissemination of knowledge products on processes, best practices, innovations, and lessons learned, as well as documentation of traditional knowledge on biodiversity conservation, international knowledge transfer exchanges, and advocating for global environmental benefits by participating in national, regional and international conferences, workshops, seminars and other events. Activities also include development of sector-specific guidance on implementing sustainable practices and distribution to private sector stakeholders, e.g., tourism operators, as appropriate. Further guidance is provided in the knowledge management and communications strategy framework prepared during the PPG phase (see **Annex 33**).

165. Documentation of traditional knowledge will be initiated only after obtaining FPIC from traditional leaders, landowners and local communities, following procedures described in the project *Stakeholder Engagement Plan* (see **Annex 7**).

166. Resources are also allocated under Output 4.2 for supporting tertiary education courses, seminars and webinars, and other learning experiences.

167. Indicative activities under Output 4.2 include:

4.2.1. Develop and disseminate case studies, including lessons learned, on innovative approaches implemented on the project.

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4.2.2. Develop sector-specific guidance on implementing sustainable practices and distribute these to private sector stakeholders (e.g., tourism operators) as appropriate.
4.2.3. Produce and promote case studies on women's role in participatory conservation and resource management.
4.2.4. In collaboration with landowners, communities, and local peoples, and upon obtaining FPIC, document traditional knowledge in biodiversity conservation using culturally important methods, ensuring voices of both females and males.
4.2.5. Organize international knowledge transfer and learning exchanges.
4.2.6. Support tertiary education courses, seminars and webinars, and other learning experiences.
4.2.7. Advocate the global environmental benefits generated through the project by participating in national, regional and international conferences, workshops, seminars and other events.

Output 4.3. Participatory monitoring and evaluation, including gender mainstreaming, informs project implementation, decision-making and lessons learned

168. The activities under this output are designed to put in place procedures and protocols to facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation. The project inception workshop, to be held within three months of signing of the project document, is a critical milestone on the implementation timeline, providing an opportunity to validate the project document, including the screening of social and environment risks; confirming implementation arrangements; assessing changes in relevant circumstances and making adjustments to the project results framework accordingly; verifying stakeholder roles and responsibilities; updating the project risks and agreeing to mitigation measures and responsibilities; and agreeing to the multi-year work plan. An inception workshop report will be prepared and disseminated among the project steering committee members. According to GEF requirements, two independent evaluations will be carried out of the project, a midterm review and terminal evaluation.

169. Under this output, the project safeguard assessments and management plans will be regularly reviewed and updated. These include the SESP, Gender Analysis and Gender Action Plan, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, as well as any other management measures prepared during implementation. A prolonged or recurrent COVID-19 pandemic (or similar crisis) may create challenges for the implementation of the project, i.e., associated with activities involving physical stakeholder workshops, delivering training in the field, convening community meetings, missions to the Cook Islands by international consultants and other partners, etc. The project will institute adaptive management as needed to reduce the risks of community spread. For example, meetings will be held remotely using virtual platforms as much as possible, health hazard assessments will be required for gatherings of multiple people, and mitigation measures will be implemented, e.g., ensuring physical distancing, providing personal protective equipment, avoiding non-essential travel, delivering trainings on risks and recognition of symptoms, etc. The SESP includes risks associated with COVID-19, and specific mitigation measures are described in the *COVID-19 Analysis and Action Framework* in **Annex 12**.

170. This output also includes development of a sustainability plan for the project, providing a practical framework for facilitating further progress towards achievement of longer-term outcomes and global environmental benefits, as outlined in the project Theory of Change. Implementation of the Sustainability Plan will be initiated during the project's lifespan.

171. Indicative activities under Output 4.3 include:

4.3.1. Design and convene the project inception workshop and prepare the inception report.
4.3.2. Develop and initiate the implementation of the project sustainability plan
4.3.3. Carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of the GEF core indicators (including the midterm and terminal METT assessments) and other metrics included in the project results framework and the gender action plan.

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4.3.4. Prepare the GEF Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) and other progress reports, with gender results highlighted in the reports.
4.3.5. Conduct regular monitoring and evaluation of the Gender Action Plan, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, COVID-19 Action Framework, Climate and Disaster Risk Screening, and other safeguards frameworks and management plans.
4.3.6. Conduct supervision and learning missions.
4.3.7. Procure and support the independent midterm review (MTR) of the project.
4.3.8. Procure and support the terminal evaluation (TE) of the project.
4.3.9. Prepare the final report for the project, including the PIR for the last year of implementation, the terminal evaluation report, the management response to the terminal evaluation report, and summary of gender mainstreaming and other social inclusion results achieved.

Partnerships:

172. The intersection of the contributions and complimentary activities of the project co-financing partners with the planned project results are presented below.

Co-financing source	Co-financing type	Co-financing amount	Included in project results?	If yes, list the relevant outputs
National Environment Service (NES)	In-kind	$2,512,500	No	N/A
	Public investment	$2,512,500	No	N/A
Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM)	Public investment	$3,596,656	No	N/A
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	In-kind	$798,823	No	N/A
	Public investment	$8,512,290	No	N/A
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	In-kind	$804,000	No	N/A
	Public investment	$723,600	No	N/A
Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT)	In-kind	$2,008,797	No	N/A
	Public investment	$6,007,762	No	N/A
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	In-kind	$167,712	No	N/A

173. The project will also coordinate with complementary projects and initiatives, including:

- **GEF-IUCN-Conservation International. Inclusive Conservation Initiative,** a global initiative to support the leadership of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in stewarding land, water and natural resources. The local partner in the Cook Islands is the House of Ariki. The GEF-7 project will coordinate with this initiative on strengthening landowner governance, protection of traditional knowledge, and increased inclusion of landowners and local communities in conservation measures.
- **Green Climate Fund (GCF) Country Programme for the Cook Islands.** The GCF Country Programme includes interventions on energy efficiency, renewable energy, building resilient infrastructure, coastal management and water resources, and strengthening engagement of the private sector. The GEF-7 project will coordinate with the Cook Islands National Designated Authority (NDA) to ensure alignment with the GCF Country Programme.
- **GEF-UN Environment-SPREP. Implementing Sustainable Low and Non-Chemical Development in SIDS (ISLANDS) (GEF ID 10267).** The project will coordinate with the Pacific Child Project (*To prevent the build-up of POPS and mercury materials and to manage and dispose of existing harmful chemicals and wastes across Pacific SIDS*) of the GEF-financed ISLANDS programme.
- Existing collaborative partnerships and connections with enabling stakeholders will also be fostered during the project implementation phase. For example, organisations such as the New Zealand Department of Conservation and Landcare Research may provide expert advice on best practices in remote surveillance, rat eradication, information management systems, etc.

Risks:

174. The identified risks that could affect the implementation and results of the project are described in the risk register in **Annex 5**, along with proposed mitigation measures and recommended risk owners who would be responsible to manage the risks during the project implementation phase. The social and environmental risks that were assessed as part of the *Social and Environmental Screening Procedure* (SESP) are also consolidated into the risk register. The SESP (see **Annex 4**) was updated during the PPG phase, as required by UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards (SES). The SESP identified ten (10) risks for this project that could have potential negative impacts in the absence of safeguards and adequate assessment and management measures. The overall project risk has been rated "moderate".

175. In accordance with UNDP's SES guidelines, the following safeguard assessments and management plans were completed during the PPG phase:

- A Stakeholder Engagement Plan including a description of the project level Grievance Redress Mechanism to address concerns raised by affected stakeholders from the project (see **Annex 7**)
- A Gender Analysis and Gender Action Plan (see **Annex 9**)
- Climate and Disaster Screening Report (see **Annex 11**)
- Covid-19 Analysis and Action Framework (see **Annex 12**)

Risk Assessment and Management Procedures:

176. In addition to the above listed assessments and management plans that were conducted during the PPG phase, the following project **procedures** will serve as an avenue for further SES integration (and shall be conducted during project implementation:

- **Scoped SESA**: To adequately assess the potential social and environmental impacts associated with upstream activities supported by the project, a scoped SESA will be required to be undertaken. The SESA will follow UNDP SES requirements and shall include within its scope **Activities 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 1.3.3.** The SESA will be carried out by independent experts in accordance with UNDP's SES policy and the UNDP SES Guidance Note on Assessment and Management to identify and assess social and environmental impacts associated with the proposed regulations in a participatory manner with stakeholders as follows:
    1. Identify social and environmental priorities to be included in planning and policy processes
    2. Assess gaps in the institutional, policy, and legal frameworks to address these priorities
    3. Identify potential adverse social and environmental impacts associated with policy options
    4. Engage decision makers and stakeholders to ensure a common understanding and broad support for implementation
    5. Formulate policy and institutional measures needed to close policy and legal gaps, address institutional weaknesses, and avoid adverse social and environmental impacts.

  The SESA process will ensure that impacts to local communities, their livelihoods, rights, resources and the biophysical receptor environment are taken into consideration in the decision-making process while developing legislative tools and strategies. Any institutional and capacity gaps identified during this process will be addressed through the training that will be conducted for the specified activities.
  The SESA will be comprised of a concise report that summarizes the main findings and results of SESA, including (a) SESA stakeholder engagement process; (b) key social and environmental priorities and issues associated with chosen policy/strategy initiative; (c) institutional arrangements for coordinating integration of social and environmental issues into chosen policy/strategy initiative; (d) legal, regulatory, policy, institutional and capacity recommendations to address any identified gaps for managing the social and environmental priorities and implementing applicable social and environmental policies; (e) results of assessment of social and environmental risks/impacts associated with the implementation of the proposed regulations; (f) identification of measures (e.g. policies, institutional strengthening, governance reform) to address and manage anticipated adverse social and environmental risks and impacts, including a summary Action Matrix.
- **Rat eradication risk assessment and management plan:** Before the implementation of **Activities 2.2.6 and 3.1.5** a Rat Eradication risk assessment will be required to be undertaken. This risk assessment shall include an analysis of alternative pest management options and shall assess (amongst others); the

potential impacts on non-target species (examining both primary and secondary poisoning), impacts on human health, and receptor environmental impacts (i.e., on vegetation, soil, water, marine environment etc.). The risk assessment will be undertaken using UNDP SES requirements as the part of the basis of assessment (most notably SES 1, 3, 7 and 8). To manage the identified risks, a Rat Eradication plan will be developed that is based on the findings of the risk assessment. The plan will include baseline monitoring in preparation for the rodent eradication programme, as well as post-release monitoring (both during and after the eradication programme). In adhering to the requirements of UNDP SES 7, the rat eradication management plans will also include applicable elements of labour management procedures in order to ensure that labour and working conditions for project workers are compliant with UNDP SES requirements.

- **Training on EIA best practices and SES requirements (for project proponents)** under **Activity 1.1.1:** Project proponents will be trained on EIA best practice which will include key material and guidance on identifying impacts (including cumulative) and formulating mitigation measures for wetland, riparian and costal ecosystems. This training on EIA best practice will be informed by the SES policy of UNDP.
- **Intersectoral Catchment Management Plans:** Only pesticides, herbicides and insecticides meeting internationally accepted standards will be supported by the project. Their storage and application will be subject to the health and safety guidelines. Management measures will include but are not limited to the following: 1) internationally or nationally banned or restricted agrochemicals will not be used, 2) workers and farmers working with agrochemical will be trained and equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment, and 3) national, provincial, and local guidelines and regulations on use and handling of agrochemicals will be followed.
- **Islands Environmental Management Plans:** The development of these management plans will be based on the requirements of UNDP SES 1, ensuring compliance with the necessary stipulations and principles of the SES and most notably those relating to Biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of living natural resources.
- **Ecosystem Audits:** Ecosystem audits will be undertaken at 4 priority catchments covered by the project. UNDP SES 1 requirements will serve as a basis for the conduct of these audits. The project has also been designed to include collaborative/community driven intersectoral catchment management plans **(Output 2.2),** that will seek to utilize best practice in terms of sustainable land management, the safe use and handling of agrochemicals, erosion prevention etc.
- **Continuous Disaster Risk screening of project interventions:** Climate and disaster risk mitigation will be incorporated in the intersectoral catchment management plans developed under **Output 2.2,** as well as in the updated protected area management plans prepared in **Output 3.1.** The Climate and Disaster Risk Screening (i.e., following UNDP SES 2 requirements) will continue to be monitored and updated (where necessary) as prescribed by Activity 4.3.5 of the project.
- **Screening (i.e., via the application of the SESP) of low-value grant assistance activities:** The Implementing Partner will be obliged to follow the On-Granting Provisions, which are annexed to the Project Document and require adherence to the requirements of UNDP's SES. As part of the grant process under **Activity 2.3.4**, all proposals will be screened using the SESP (see Para 118 for more detail), The project team will monitor and evaluate the activities in the field for compliance with UNDP SES, as well as other specifications described in the grant agreements. Progress and completion reports submitted by the grantees will document compliance.

177. Consistent with UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (SES), namely Standard 1 (SES 1) on Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management, project activities in or near environmentally sensitive areas require an abundance of caution. Overall, the project is expected to result in major long term positive biodiversity impacts. The project team will implement the processes outlined below in **Table 5** to ensure social and environmental risks associated with field interventions are properly assessed and managed during the project implementation phase.

Table 5: Management of social and environmental risks of field interventions

Intervention	Relevant risks as identified in SESP	Assessment	Management
Eradication of invasive rats Outputs 2.2, 3.1; Activities 2.2.6, 3.1.4 UNDP SES 1, 3, 7, 8	Risk 6	Rat eradication risk assessments will be made and incorporated into the rat eradication plans.	Experienced service providers will be contracted to carry out the work, based on competitive bidding. The project Technical

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Intervention	Relevant risks as identified in SESP	Assessment	Management
		NES and UNDP will review and approve the plans for compliance with UNDP SES and governmental regulations.	Officer will support intervention oversight, and the service provider will be required to conduct monitoring before, during and after the eradication intervention. To manage the identified risks, a Rat Eradication plan will be developed that is based on the findings of the risk assessment described above. As per the ProDoc, the rat eradication plan itself, as well as the agent (poison) release, will be required to be approved before the conduct of Activities 2.2.6 and 3.1.5. The plan will include baseline monitoring in preparation for the rodent eradication programme, as well as post-release monitoring (both during and after the eradication programme). In adhering to the requirements of UNDP SES 7, the rat eradication management plans will also include applicable elements of labour management procedures in order to ensure that labour and working conditions are aligned
Low-value grants for implementing innovative practices (e.g., soil conservation, climate resilient crops, water conservation, erosion control, organic fertilizers, community nurseries, invasive plant control with youth volunteers and/or women's groups, eco-tourism experiences, etc). Output 2.3, Activity 2.3.4. UNDP SES: all principles, standards	Risk 10	Catchment audits (which shall use UNDP SES requirements as their basis) will be conducted of the four priority catchments, to provide an updated assessment of ecosystem health. Field interventions under Output 2.3 will be based upon the findings of the catchment audits (Output 2.1) and the priorities described in the intersectoral catchment management plans (Output 2.2). The NES, as Implementing Partner, will be required to adhere to UNDP On-Granting Provisions. As part of the grant process under Activity 2.3.3, all proposals will be screened using the SESP.	The grant proposals will be reviewed by the project Technical Officer, supported by the Chief Technical Advisor and other team members for technical content and relevance, and for compliance with UNDP SES. Grant agreements will be reviewed by UNDP prior to signature by the Implementing Partner and the grantees. The project team will monitor and evaluate the activities in the field for compliance with UNDP SES, as well as other specifications described in the grant agreements. Progress and completion reports submitted by the grantees will document compliance.
Implementation of specific management measures to protect globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity, e.g., replanting of native species, establishing sustainable harvesting best practices,	Risk 3 Risk 9	Updated and new management plans will be prepared for the target protected areas. The management planning process will be supported by updated resource inventories.	Specific management measures will be described in the updated and new management plans for the protected areas. The project Technical Officer will provide monitor and evaluate progress of the implementation activities, including assessing compliance to

Intervention	Relevant risks as identified in SESP	Assessment	Management
community beach clean-ups, rehabilitating coastal and near-shore vegetation, etc. Output 3.3, Activity 3.1.5 UNDP SES 1, 3, 4, 7, 8			UNDP SES and relevant government regulations.
Intersectoral catchment management plans will be developed that promote reduction and minimization of the use of agrochemicals. Output 2.2, Activities 2.2.1, 2.2.2, and 2.2.5 SES 1, 3, 7, 8	Risk 5	Only pesticides, herbicides and insecticides meeting internationally accepted standards (and complying to SES requirements and relevant exclusion lists) will be supported by the project. Their storage and application will be subject to the health and safety guidelines. NES (in coordination with UNDP) will review and approve the release/use of any agrichemicals within the framework of the project.	Management measures will include but are not limited to the following: 1) internationally or nationally banned or restricted agrochemicals will not be used; 2) workers and farmers working with agrochemical will be trained and equipped with appropriate personal protective equipment; and 3) national, provincial, and local guidelines and regulations on use and handling of agrochemicals will be followed. In addition, Activity 2.2.5 of the project has been designed to support capacity building and knowledge management activities for the safe handling and use of agrochemicals.

178. In addition to the above-listed assessment and management procedures, that will be followed during project implementation, certain elements of the project have been designed to manage and address UNDP SES 5 (Displacement and Resettlement) and SES 6 (indigenous peoples) requirements and the related risks that were identified during the conduct of the project's SESP. In this regard, it should be noted that all protected areas (except Suwarrow) supported by the project are community conserved areas, with affected communities instigating the restrictions on their own behalf. The majority of project interventions will occur at pre-existing protected areas, as well as within catchments in Rarotonga. The exception will be the newly proposed Rarotonga Cloud Forest PA (Output 3.3). Under this output, a key activity (i.e., Activity 3.3.5) has been formulated to ensure that FPIC is obtained before the implementation or initiation of any restrictions is undertaken (a description/overview of the FPIC process that shall be followed by this project is included within **Annex 7**: *Stakeholder Engagement Plan*).

179. The project has also been designed with FPIC and consultation requirements embedded into relevant activities that may have UNDP SES 6 risks associated with them (i.e., as identified in the project's SESP). For example, at a policy/upstream level, Activity 1.3.2 will require the project to facilitate *Pa Enua* consultations (which will adhere to UNDP SES 6 requirements on FPIC as outlined in the project's Stakeholder Engagement Plan) in the socialization of the Islands Environmental Management Plans with local stakeholders. For downstream activities, FPIC requirements have been explicitly embedded into the design of Activities 3.3.5 and 4.2.3. FPIC has also been required and embedded into project activities that will involve the use/or may impact traditional knowledge (i.e., Activities 3.1.3 and 4.2.3).

180. As outlined in the *Climate and Disaster Risk Screening* (see **Annex 11**), and identified in the SESP (see **Annex 4**, Risk 7), the Cook Islands is susceptible to a certain climate and disaster hazards, including tsunami and coastal flooding. The project will implement a series of measures to mitigate the risks associated with climate and disaster hazards on outcome/service delivery, consistent with the requirements and guidelines outlined in UNDP SES Standard 2 on *Climate and Disaster Risks*.

181. Project implementation will also ensure full adherence to government and UNDP directives related to COVID-19, as outlined in the *COVID-19 Analysis and Action Framework* in **Annex 12**. The project will institute adaptive management as needed to reduce the risks of community spread. For example, meetings will be held remotely using virtual platforms as much as possible, health hazard assessments will be considered for

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gatherings of multiple people, and mitigation measures will be implemented, e.g.,ensuring physical distancing, providing personal protective equipment, avoiding non-essential travel, delivering trainings on risks and recognition of symptoms, etc. As part of the regular review of the Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP), COVID-19 related risks will be addressed, and specific mitigation measures will be updated and implemented.

Stakeholder Engagement and South-South Cooperation:

182. A stakeholder analysis was undertaken during project preparation to identify key stakeholders, consult with them regarding their interests in the project and define their roles and responsibilities during project implementation.

183. Extensive stakeholder consultations were completed during the PPG phase (see **Annex 8:** *Stakeholder consultations during project preparation phase*), including landowners and local communities in the locations of target catchments and protected areas. A total of 44 meetings were convened: Rarotonga (38), Aitutaki (five in person and one by zoom) and Atiu (one by zoom), involving 362 participants. 43% of the participants were female, 69% were indigenous Cook Islanders, 5% were traditional leaders and 24% were community members. 71% were government participants which included the PPG and NES personnel who attended every meeting, as well as relevant government personnel who attended the Inception workshop and other meetings as interested observers. Before each PPG meeting, information about the project stakeholder engagement programme was shared with prospective attendee groups in English and Cook Islands Māori, to promote better awareness and understanding of the project's strategies, policies, and operations. Consultation meetings were undertaken in accordance with the GEF Policy on Public Involvement in GEF projects and included an explanation of the Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) process to ensure that consultations were open and transparent and encouraging free and open expression of community concerns in relation to the project aims.

184. The key government agencies (ICI, CIT and MOA) were consulted throughout the formulation to ensure a cohesive, shared vision and approach to project planning and to secure their full support in project execution. These agencies also met as a team at the PPG Inception Workshop. Additionally, consultations were held 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 in **Table 6**.

Table 6: Project stakeholders

Stakeholders	Expected role in the project
Implementing Partner (Executing Agency)	
National Environment Service (NES)	NES is the central government agency mandated with protecting, managing and conserving the environment of Cook Islands, on behalf of, and for the benefit of, present and future Cook Islanders. One of the core functions of NES under the Environment Act 2003 is to 'protect, conserve, and manage the environment to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources'. NES is responsible for coordination and implementation of GEF projects in the Cook Islands. NES will house the GEF-7 Project Management Unit (PMU), which is responsible for reporting to UNDP and GEF, and takes responsibility for financial management, oversight, and monitoring of the project The NES Director (the GEF Operational Focal Point for the Cook Islands) will be the National Project Director, having overall responsibility of the project, and will serve as the executive function on the Project Board, chairing the Project Board meetings. NES is also one of the project's governmental co-financing partners.
GEF Agency	
UNDP	The UNDP will serve as the GEF Agency for the project, with the Resident Representative of the Samoa Multi-Country Office serving as Development Partner function on the Project Board, ensuring global environmental benefits are generated as planned. The UNDP will also deliver project assurance, overseeing the effective and efficient implementation of the project, and provide limited execution support services, e.g., procure international consultants. UNDP is one of the project's co-financing partners.
Landowners and local communities	
Landowners and local communities	Landowners and local communities in the target sites are among the primary project beneficiaries and stakeholders.

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Stakeholders	Expected role in the project
	Landowners are a vital element of communities targeted by project and require strong engagement, consultation and information sharing. This applies especially for Manuae, Takutea, Takitumu and the proposed community conserved area (Cloud Forest).
Takitumu Conservation Area Coordinating Committee	The TCA Coordinating Committee consists of the heads of the Kainuku, Karika and Manavaroa families plus Ian Karika who is their manager and who represents their interests as the landowners of the area of land they designated to protect as the Takitumu Conservation Area. Ian works as a volunteer and tour guide, carrying out conservation work as required with the help of other volunteers or the occasional overseas conservation worker – maintaining the tracks and buildings, counting birds and rat-baiting. Income to sponsor these activities comes from fundraising, grants and guiding for tourists. While some of the lower hillside is being leased for orange plots the landowners are adamantly opposed to any housing development that might impact negatively on the conservation of the native trees and birds found on the reserve.
Key partner agencies	
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	The principal function of MOA is to promote and encourage the development of all phases of agricultural, pastoral, and horticultural industries. MOA has extended its functions to include strengthening household and national food security and nutrition, research and development into crop and tree species, and improved agricultural production methods, including livestock, as well as improving biosecurity to cope with border protection challenges. MOA's mandate for SLM is specific to land areas utilised for agricultural production. MOA will have a 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. MOA will be a member of the Project Board and is one of the project's co-financing partners.
Cook Islands Tourism (CIT)	CIT promotes tourism in the country and accredits tourism-related businesses (accommodation, restaurants, tour operators, etc.). CIT's primary environmental role is to ensure that tourism activities do not degrade the natural environment. The agency aims to achieve this by marketing the natural environment and PAs, highlighting the importance of biodiversity for tourism; promoting ecotourism experiences; and developing a Tourism Charter to better regulate the industry and apply environmental standards. CIT leads progress towards the national Sustainable Tourism Development Policy Framework. CIT will be closely engaged in Component 1 and 3 activities, including the intersectoral catchment management plans, implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy, facilitating involvement of the private sector, participating in capacity building activities, and involved in project communications and knowledge management. CIT will be a member of the Project Board and is one of the project's co-financing partners.
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	ICI is responsible for the majority of the Government capital infrastructure projects across the Cook Islands, and also includes some regulatory responsibilities and projects. ICI works with donor partners, Island Governments, other Government departments, the private sector and the community to implement activities and projects and carry out operations and maintenance of public infrastructure assets it is responsible for and infrastructure projects in the Pa Enua. ICI is largely responsible for controlling erosion and sedimentation from source to sea through technical advice and design and is involved in EIA processes regarding environmental standards (cited in the Building Code 2019) to reduce negative impacts of development. ICI supports private sector training to increase understanding and awareness of environmental considerations and best practices. ICI will be closely engaged in Component 1 and 3 activities, including the intersectoral catchment management plans (e.g., promoting green engineering to safeguard riparian zones, lagoons and PAs from erosion and sedimentation impacts), facilitating involvement of the private sector, participating in capacity building activities, and involved in project communications and knowledge management ICI will be a member of the Project Board and is one of the project's co-financing partners.
Other governmental and public entities	
Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) Development Coordination Division (DCD) of the MFEM	MFEM is the central agency in the Cook Islands that is responsible for advising the Government in financial and economic issues. MFEM requires government to produce statements of economic policy; confirmation of adherence to fiscal disciplines prescribed under the MFEM Act; budget policy statements; economic and fiscal forecasts and updates; financial management information and comprehensive annual reports. Within the GEF-7 project, MFEM will be the financial intermediary between UNDP as the GEF Implementing Agency and the NES as the GEF Executing Agency.

Stakeholders	Expected role in the project
	DCD will provide technical support to the project team, including alignment of multiple project objectives with national priorities. DCD oversees all ODA (official development assistance) to ensure coordination of all programmes, projects, activities are aligned to our national sustainable development goals. MFEM-DCD will be a member of the Project Board.
Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)	OPM Central Policy & Planning Division is responsible for development, monitoring and reporting against the National Sustainable Development Plan. OPM is home to the National Research Council, which approves international research permits including those related to biodiversity. OPM also houses the Coordination Office (MMCO) of Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park), and the Climate Change Cook Islands office (CCCI). The OPM will provide oversight, tracking and reporting on project implementation Identifying and facilitating opportunities for co-financing and sharing lessons learned.
Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI)	CCCI is a division within the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). It has an oversight role of all climate change activities to ensure co-ordination of the multi-sectoral approach to climate change. The co-ordination role ensures alignment of the various activities with the Cook Islands national goals. The CCCI Office also makes sure that there is no duplication and facilitates activities for issues that may not have been addressed.
National Biodiversity Steering Committee (NBSC)	The NBSC was established specifically as the Project Steering Committee for GEF-5 R2R project. It includes heads of ministries, NGOs and traditional leader representatives, meets quarterly and also provides a platform to discuss other national biodiversity matters, some of which directly relate to the project. The NBSC will be available to operate as a technical advisory panel to the GEF-7 projects.
Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR)	MMR is the leading agency for marine resource management. MMR's role includes science and research, monitoring, advisory, consultative, and regulatory activities. Significantly for this project, MMR undertakes regular water quality monitoring at the mouths of major waterways on Rarotonga and Aitutaki. MMR will provide *ad hoc* support, as required, e.g., to monitor changes in water quality at selected sites resulting from project interventions, and to deliver technical advice on marine species and ecosystems.
Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)	NHT is a partner agency to NES and assists the NES and other agencies including, but not limited to MMR, MOA, MM, and TIS, with biodiversity related matters and biodiversity outreach programmes. The NHT collects and integrates scientific and traditional information on Cook Islands flora and fauna and has a database available to the general public. The NHT will provide technical support to the execution of project activities and participate in the development operationalization of the NEIS.
Ministry of Cultural Development (MOCD)	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 the House of Ariki in project activities, with technical and financial resources, knowledge and liaison with island communities and leaders.
Crown Law Office (CLO)	CLO are responsible for reviewing and providing legal advice on any legislative proposals in the Cook Islands. Any work to strengthen SLM and PA governance systems through regulations and other legislative instruments will involve input and review from CLO.
Tō Tātou Vai (TTV)	TTV is responsible to provide potable drinking water as a public service for the people of Rarotonga and Aitutaki. TTV manages the water catchments in the montane areas of Rarotonga and is establishing catchment committees representing landowners, *Aronga Mana* (traditional leaders) and community members for input into this management.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (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. MAFI will provide political oversight of this GEF-7 project.
Aronga mana (Traditional leaders)	
House of Ariki (HOA)	HOA is a constitutional and statutory agency of the Cook Islands that comprises all principal Indigenous paramount Ariki (High Chiefs) from the nation's 24 tribes. Given the strong traditional land tenure system, HOA exercises significant influence over land management, including traditional conservation environmental management practices. Given the strong traditional land tenure system, their support for landowner and community conservation areas is critical. HOA is highly respected and will be key to awareness raising in their communities and resolving any conflicts. As such, HOA may be represented on the sub-committee of the project level grievance redress mechanism.

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Stakeholders	Expected role in the project
Island Governments / Councils	
Island Governments / Councils	Island Governments (or Councils) are responsible for administration on their respective islands as mandated by the Island Government Act 2012-2013. The Island Governments also work in collaboration with each Island Environment Authority (apart from Rarotonga) on environmental management issues. They will be closely engaged in development of Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs) under Output 1.3, as well as in project capacity building activities, communications, and knowledge management.
Non-governmental organizations	
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 and restoration of biodiversity. Project implementation includes successful initiatives include eradication of rats on Suwarrow (only 1 islet left to complete in June 2022) in collaboration with BirdLife International; "Save Our Suwarrow" campaign; and key species assessments. Has an anticipated GEF-7 role in local capacity building, public awareness and invasive species eradication.
Kōrero o te ʻŌrau (KOTO)	Environmental and 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. Has an anticipated GEF-7 role in local capacity building, public awareness and implementation of project activities, in particular in Rarotonga's Takuvaine catchment.
Red Cross	The local Red Cross office coordinates the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) in the Cook Islands.
Takitumu Growers Association (TGA)	TGA promotes organic agriculture among local farmers in Rarotonga. Potential technical agency to support local activities on sustainable agriculture under Outcome 2.
Natura Kuki Airani (NKA)	Natura Kuki Airani (NKA) is an incorporated society and the active focal point for organics in the Cook Islands. It is licensed to certify organic crops, livestock, and secondary products (e.g., handcrafts, processed foods), through a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). Production and processing methods are certified to the (Pacific) regional Pacific Organic Standard, managed by the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (PoetCom) under the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). Products certified by NKA can be labelled with the Organic Pasifika mark.
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.
Au Vaine	Local CSO. Opportunities on the project to introduce best practices to restore riparian zones in *Po Enua* (Outer Islands), with inclusion of women (Components 1 and 3).
Academic and International Non-profit Organisations	
University of Newcastle Australia (UON)	UON is a project responsible party, primarily responsible for delivering Output 2.1 on catchment audits of the four priority catchments in Rarotonga. UON will engage with local stakeholders, delivering learning-by-doing capacity building and advising on other project activities, and helping to facilitate women's participation in natural resource management through increased enrolment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics programmes.
University of South Pacific (USP)	The USP Campus in the Cook Islands provides tertiary education, promoting Pacific learning and innovation for sustainable development.
Cook Islands Tertiary Training Institute (CITTI)	CITTI is the vocational training centre of the Cook Islands, delivering courses in business, tourism and hospitality, and other trades.
Seacology	Seacology is a non-profit charitable organisation. Seacology's mission is to protect threatened island ecosystems all over the world, working directly with communities, helping them to preserve their cultures and improve their lives while saving precious island habitats.

185. The roles and responsibilities of NES, the Lead Implementing Partner (Executing Agency) and the other key agencies (namely, MOA, CIT and ICI) and coordination among these institutional partners at the output level are outlined below.

Stakeholder	Role in project outputs
National Environment Service (NES)	**Output 1.1** NES will coordinate the creation and/or amendment of national legislation, policies, strategies, and plans by the four institutional partners, including developing and implementing protocols to ensure coordination in policy development and implementation. Within its own mandate, NES will lead development of EIA (permitting and consent) regulations and Protected Area (PA) regulations under the

	new Environment Act. NES will coordinate the four institutional partners to delivery capacity building and awareness raising on relevant legislation, policies, regulations, and strategies to stakeholders. **Output 1.2** NES will coordinate the development and institutionalisation of the National Environment Information System (NEIS), including leading a gender-sensitive feasibility assessment, providing technical expertise for the development and delivery of the system, and assisting other agencies to utilise the system appropriately. **Output 1.3** NES will lead the development of Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs) and their integration into Island Development Plans, including facilitating *Pa Enua* consultations and socialising the IEMPs among stakeholders. NES will also lead the integration of regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguards KBAs and ecosystem services into catchment management plans. (See also Outputs 2.2 and 3.1.) **Output 2.1** NES will lead the design and delivery of catchment audits, including training stakeholders to interpret results and providing communication of results at the community level. NES will provide technical and investment assistance on strengthening capacities and will coordinate the other agency partners to provide expertise within their mandates. **Output 2.2** NES will lead the development of intersectoral catchment management plans for priority catchments on Rarotonga, and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area. NES will lead awareness-raising of management plans to stakeholders and will train the other three GEF-7 institutional partners on implementation of the management plans. NES will work closely with MOA on the development and implementation of agriculture-related management actions. NES will also directly implement specific management measures in the Manuae Managed Area, according to the management plan as agreed with stakeholders. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 3.1.) **Output 2.3** NES will coordinate and deliver capacity building on innovative natural resource management practices, alongside the GEF-7 institutional partners and other stakeholders. NES will lead the development of MOUs between the GEF-7 institutional partners, landowners, and other stakeholders relating to the implementation of management plans. NES will coordinate and deliver the provision of technical and low-value grant assistance for implementing innovative practices and develop and disseminate case studies and lessons learned. **Output 3.1** NES will lead the development of gender responsive management plans for the target protected areas, including the integration of traditional management systems, and will draw on the expertise of other institutional partners as necessary. NES will deliver training on project social and environmental safeguard instruments, gender mainstreaming, UNDP social and environmental standards, and national standards and regulations. NES will also lead the implementation of specific management measures to protect globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity, including eradication of rats from target sites. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 2.2.) **Output 3.2** NES will design and deliver a series of capacity building workshops and seminars/webinars to selected stakeholders on the application of PACS, PAMP, emerging approaches to gender in protected area management, and management and monitoring of protected areas. NES will also provide technical and investment assistance for strengthening monitoring and surveillance capacities of target protected areas, including implementing remote surveillance systems as appropriate. **Output 3.3** NES will facilitate conversations with landowners and other stakeholders on future governance arrangements for the Rarotonga Cloud Forest. NES will also update the inventory of globally significant biodiversity within the Cloud Forest, prepare a bilingual information package about this biodiversity for landowners and communities. If appropriate, NES will facilitate the creation of collective agreements and a management plan for a landowner conserved area based on FPIC. **Output 4.1** NES will lead the development and implementation of a gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy for the GEF-7 project, including annual action plans with targeted public awareness programmes to promote the values of biodiversity and ecosystem service and communication around the project-level grievance mechanism. **Output 4.2** NES will lead the development of gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings, and the dissemination of these knowledge and information products to stakeholders. This will include sector-specific guidance on implementing sustainable practices in collaboration with relevant institutional partners, documentation

	of traditional knowledge through culturally appropriate methods, and engagement with educational and research institutions. **Output 4.3** NES will lead participatory monitoring and evaluation across the project, ensuring that lessons learned inform project implementation and decision-making. This includes regular monitoring and evaluation of all metrics indicated in the project results framework and the gender action plan, and preparation of all mandatory GEF reports including the final report. In addition to the above, NES will incorporate project outputs into NES work plans in line with Cook Islands national planning procedures and timeframes.
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	**Output 1.1** MOA will have input into the creation and/or amendment of national legislation, policies, strategies and plans by the four institutional partners. Within its own mandate, MOA will lead the redevelopment of updated agrichemical regulations under the Pesticides Act 1987. MOA will collaborate with the other three institutional partners to delivery capacity building and awareness raising on relevant legislation, policies, regulations, and strategies to stakeholders. **Output 1.2** MOA will provide appropriate information to NES for the development of the NEIS, including access to relevant datasets and providing technical expertise when necessary. MOA will participate fully in training on how to utilise the NEIS for its own management decisions, including leading sector-specific training for stakeholders as necessary. **Output 1.3** MOA will contribute expertise to the development of Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs) and catchment management plans, as appropriate and when requested by NES. (See also Outputs 2.2 and 3.1.) **Output 2.1** At the request of NES, MOA will contribute technical expertise to the design and delivery of catchment audits, including communication of results and capacity building. **Output 2.2** MOA will contribute expertise to the development of intersectoral catchment management plans for priority catchments on Rarotonga, and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area. MOA will participate in trainings with other GEF-7 institutional partners on implementation of the management plans. MOA will work closely with NES on the development and implementation of agriculture-related management measures, according to the relevant management plans. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 3.1.) **Output 2.3** MOA will participate in (and in some cases, deliver) capacity building on innovative natural resource management practices. MOA will participate in the development of MOUs between the GEF-7 institutional partners, landowners, and other stakeholders relating to the implementation of management plans. MOA will contribute expertise within its mandate towards a programme of technical and low-value grant assistance for implementing innovative practices, as requested by NES. **Output 3.1** MOA will contribute expertise to the development of gender responsive management plans for the target protected areas, as requested by NES. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 2.2.) **Output 3.2** Selected MOA staff will participate in or contribute to capacity building activities to selected stakeholders on the application of PACS, PAMP, emerging approaches to gender in protected area management, and management and monitoring of protected areas. **Output 3.3** MOA will participate in conversations facilitated by NES on future governance arrangements for the Rarotonga Cloud Forest, if and when expertise in its mandate is required. **Output 4.1** MOA will contribute to the development and implementation of a gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy for aspects of the GEF-7 project within its mandate. **Output 4.2** MOA will contribute to the development of gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings, and the dissemination of these knowledge and information products to stakeholders. This will include guidance on implementing sustainable practices in the agricultural sector. **Output 4.3** MOA will contribute to monitoring and evaluation across the project as requested by NES, including sharing relevant information and datasets.

	In addition to the above, MOA will incorporate project outputs into MOA work plans in line with Cook Islands national planning procedures and timeframes.
Cook Islands Tourism (CIT)	**Output 1.1** CIT will have input into the creation and/or amendment of national legislation, policies, strategies and plans by the four institutional partners, including updating its own internal strategies to reflect the evolving national environmental policy context. CIT will collaborate with the other three institutional partners to delivery capacity building and awareness raising on relevant legislation, policies, regulations, and strategies to stakeholders. **Output 1.2** CIT will provide appropriate information to NES for the development of the NEIS, including access to relevant datasets and providing technical expertise when necessary. CIT will participate fully in training on how to utilise the NEIS for its own management decisions, including leading sector-specific training for stakeholders as necessary. **Output 1.3** CIT will contribute expertise to the development of Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs) and catchment management plans, as appropriate and when requested by NES. (See also Outputs 2.2 and 3.1.) **Output 2.1** At the request of NES, CIT will contribute technical expertise to the design and delivery of catchment audits, including communication of results and capacity building. **Output 2.2** CIT will contribute expertise to the development of intersectoral catchment management plans for priority catchments on Rarotonga, and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area if appropriate. CIT will also participate in trainings with other GEF-7 institutional partners on implementation of the management plans. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 3.1.) **Output 2.3** CIT will participate in (and in some cases, deliver) capacity building on innovative natural resource management practices. CIT will participate in the development of MOUs between the GEF-7 institutional partners, landowners, and other stakeholders relating to the implementation of management plans. CIT will contribute expertise within its mandate towards a programme of technical and low-value grant assistance for implementing innovative practices, as requested by NES. **Output 3.1** CIT will contribute expertise to the development of gender responsive management plans for the target protected areas, as requested by NES. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 2.2.) **Output 3.2** Selected CIT staff will participate in or contribute to capacity building activities to selected stakeholders on the application of PACS, PAMP, emerging approaches to gender in protected area management, and management and monitoring of protected areas. **Output 3.3** CIT will participate in conversations facilitated by NES on future governance arrangements for the Rarotonga Cloud Forest, if and when expertise in its mandate is required. **Output 4.1** CIT will contribute to the development and implementation of a gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy for aspects of the GEF-7 project within its mandate. **Output 4.2** CIT will contribute to the development of gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings, and the dissemination of these knowledge and information products to stakeholders. This will include guidance on implementing sustainable practices in the tourism sector. **Output 4.3** CIT will contribute to monitoring and evaluation across the project as requested by NES, including sharing relevant information and datasets. In addition to the above, CIT will incorporate project outputs into CIT work plans in line with Cook Islands national planning procedures and timeframes.
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	**Output 1.1** ICI will have input into the creation and/or amendment of national legislation, policies, strategies and plans by the four institutional partners. In particular, ICI will collaborate with NES to develop the EIA (permitting and consent) regulations under the new Environment Act and have input into training on EIA best practices. CIT will collaborate with the other three institutional partners to delivery capacity building and awareness raising on relevant legislation, policies, regulations, and strategies to stakeholders. **Output 1.2**

	ICI will provide appropriate information to NES for the development of the NEIS, including access to relevant datasets and providing technical expertise when necessary. ICI will participate fully in training on how to utilise the NEIS for its own management decisions, including leading sector-specific training for stakeholders as necessary. **Output 1.3** ICI will contribute expertise to the development of Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs) and catchment management plans, as appropriate and when requested by NES. (See also Outputs 2.2 and 3.1.) **Output 2.1** At the request of NES, ICI will contribute technical expertise to the design and delivery of catchment audits, including communication of results and capacity building. **Output 2.2** ICI will contribute expertise to the development of intersectoral catchment management plans for priority catchments on Rarotonga, and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area if appropriate. ICI will also participate in trainings with other GEF-7 institutional partners on implementation of the management plans. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 3.1.) **Output 2.3** ICI will participate in (and in some cases, deliver) capacity building on innovative natural resource management practices. ICI will participate in the development of MOUs between the GEF-7 institutional partners, landowners, and other stakeholders relating to the implementation of management plans. ICI will contribute expertise within its mandate towards a programme of technical and low-value grant assistance for implementing innovative practices, as requested by NES. **Output 3.1** ICI will contribute expertise to the development of gender responsive management plans for the target protected areas, as requested by NES. (See also Outputs 1.3 and 2.2.) **Output 3.2** Selected ICI staff will participate in or contribute to capacity building activities to selected stakeholders on the application of PACS, PAMP, emerging approaches to gender in protected area management, and management and monitoring of protected areas. **Output 3.3** ICI will participate in conversations facilitated by NES on future governance arrangements for the Rarotonga Cloud Forest, if and when expertise in its mandate is required. **Output 4.1** ICI will contribute to the development and implementation of a gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy for aspects of the GEF-7 project within its mandate. **Output 4.2** ICI will contribute to the development of gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings, and the dissemination of these knowledge and information products to stakeholders. This will include sector-specific guidance on implementing sustainable infrastructure. **Output 4.3** ICI will contribute to monitoring and evaluation across the project as requested by NES, including sharing relevant information and datasets. In addition to the above, ICI will incorporate project outputs into ICI work plans in line with Cook Islands national planning procedures and timeframes.

186. Based on the stakeholder analyses made during the PPG phase, a *Stakeholder Engagement Plan* (**Annex 7**) has been developed to guide the implementation team. The project design has a strong emphasis on inclusive stakeholder participation, particularly with respect to women, youth and other vulnerable groups.

187. Stakeholder consultation is required to continue throughout the project implementation phase, and a transparent project-level grievance redress process is freely available. The *Stakeholder Engagement Plan* also includes a description of the project's grievance redress mechanism (GRM) and information on UNDP's Accountability Mechanism. The *Stakeholder Engagement Plan* is an integral part of the project design and will be communicated to project stakeholders during the inception workshop and referenced in each of the terms of reference developed for implementation of project activities.

188. **Engagement with the Private Sector**. Companies are vital for driving economic development, therefore need to be on board and supported to be able to do so sustainably through innovative solutions to existing problems. Private sector partners will be key stakeholders in the development and promotion of ecotourism, in

development of economic activities, and in finding ways to enhance the value of natural resources. They will also be key participants in the enforcement efforts of the development sectors (especially infrastructure, tourism and agriculture) and engaged in capacity building and information sharing activities.

189. Project sponsored capacity building activities 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 emphasise 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 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.

190. **South-South Cooperation:** The project will connect with similar country projects based on similar approaches to share resources combined and collective knowledge management products, and to facilitate dissemination through global ongoing South-South and global platforms, the UN South-South Galaxy knowledge sharing platform and PANORAMA[40].

191. In addition, to bring the voice of the Cook Islands to global and regional fora, the project will explore opportunities for meaningful participation in specific events where UNDP could support engagement with the global development discourse on wildlife conservation. The project will furthermore provide opportunities for regional cooperation with countries that are implementing innovative conservation initiatives in geopolitical, social, and environmental contexts relevant to the proposed project in the Cook Islands.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

192. 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[41]. In 2015 the 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 were nationalised through Cook Islands' National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP)[42], in which Goal 9 is to *"Accelerate gender equality, empower all women and girls, and advance the rights of youth, the elderly and disabled"*. These commitments have been reaffirmed in the updated National Sustainable Development Agenda 5-year scorecard.[43].

[40] https://panorama.solutions/en

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

[42] Te Kaveinga Nui. National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020

[43] Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui NSDA 2020+, Te Kaveinga Iti 5 Year Score Card. (2022)

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193. 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 local communities 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.

194. 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. A Project Communication Strategy will be included with ideas to incorporate into project activities, to ensure inclusive participation where the involvements and inputs of men, women, youth, elderly, and people with disabilities, are incorporated into project activities. Regular communications will be encouraged to highlight ongoing progress of activities that achieve project goals. A Gender Marker System would also highlight the importance of incorporating gender initiatives into project workplan strategies, and also to track allocations to project activities that specifically incorporate and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Through these increased opportunities for enhanced 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.

195. More information on gender mainstreaming is included in **Annex 9** (*Gender Analysis and Gender Action Plan*) to the project document. Gender equality and women's empowerment targets are integrated into the project results framework with an aim to promote equitable representation of men and women in project decision-making bodies; ensure that there is equitable proportion of benefits realized from the project and delivered to both men and women; and produce results of gender mainstreaming, equality and women's empowerment extending beyond good project performance. Such involvement will empower women and give them a stronger sense of ownership and a more definite interest in the success of the project. These could include: strengthening the evidence base and understanding of the importance of biodiversity conservation and the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women; encouraging leadership of indigenous women to highlight the solutions and ways of enhancing effective participation in biodiversity conservation policy and action; strengthening the monitoring and reporting on women in leadership positions across the project, including case studies; encourage the private sector to engage in the Gender Equality Seal to support a more fair, inclusive, healthier and equal work environment for women and men.

Knowledge management

196. 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 Knowledge Management and Communication Strategy, with annual action plans to guide adaptive management during project implementation.

197. 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).

198. 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[11]. 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 user generated.

199. 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.

200. The knowledge management and communications strategy framework prepared during the PPG phase (see **Annex 33**) provides guidance on how the project will document and share lessons learned. These include documenting success stories, lessons learned and good practices, and disseminating these through email distributions, uploading to the project website as well as the National Environment Information System, posting on social media platforms, distributing to stakeholders during seminars and conferences, and sharing with national and regional media outlets.

201. 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[44] and IBAT[45] to raise the profile of Cook Islands biodiversity.

Innovativeness, Sustainability and Potential for Scaling Up:

Innovativeness:

202. **Innovation** is particularly pertinent in conserving biodiversity on small islands due to the wide spectrum of scales over which interventions are required (i.e., small islands distributed across vast stretches of ocean) and the limited resources available within small island state economies. There is an urgent requirement for smarter, intelligent solutions to maximize potential benefits and ensure sustainability and legacy post-project. Innovative technologies currently achievable at small island scales are often completely different to approaches available for continental areas, for example, invasive species eradications (as opposed to control) are most often the appropriate and innovative approach for small islands, as the results are both profound (environmentally revolutionary) and the enduring. Many of these innovative approaches (that were originally developed for small islands) are later applied to continental areas successfully, making small islands ideal laboratories for testing ideas and technologies that later have world-wide applications for biodiversity conservation.

203. **Applying integrated catchment 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 the aim of tackling 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.

204. Building on Cook Islands government commitments and investments in **innovative technology**, increasing access to information and communications technology (ICT) and its engagement with communities and the private sector are reflected in this project:

- Establishment of a National Environment Information System (NEIS) to assist with integration between sectors through increased access and sharing of data, information and knowledge.
- Enhanced use of mapping and spatial data to better inform decision making processes regarding protected area management, EIAs, etc.

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

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

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- Online knowledge platforms (e.g., EXPOSURE, PANORAMA, Google Story Maps, etc.) to support flexible and accessible learning opportunities for different sectors, including public, private and civil.
- 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.
- Remote monitoring/surveillance of geographically isolated PA's too difficult/costly to visit regularly.

205. **The project will demonstrate cost effective and innovative methods for eradication of invasive rat species**, through partnerships with enabling stakeholders, e.g., Landcare Research in New Zealand, University of Newcastle in Australia, etc. The GEF funds will help build upon eradication efforts completed to date, catalysing the implementation of approaches that are suited for the unique ecosystems in the Cook Islands, based on state-of-the-art research and development and successful application in similar South Pacific islands.

206. Building on, and benefiting from, **UNDP's SIDS offer**, in particular the blue economy and digital transformation pillars.

207. **Low-value grants** to incentivize landowners, communities, local NGOs/CSOs and academia to develop creative solutions to known environmental pressures within the project's scope (key development sectors).

208. **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:

209. 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.

210. **Financial sustainability**. Through development of the intersectoral catchment management plans, key government agencies, including NES, MOA, ICI and CIT, are expected to mainstream priority actions into their work programmes and budgets. Application of remote surveillance systems will not only contribute towards improved management of PA's, but also increase cost-efficiency, particularly for those PA's that are costly to travel to. The NEIS will help reduce redundancy in data and information management and facilitate timely and science-based management decisions.

211. **Institutional sustainability**. The project strategy includes strengthening the institutional capacities of NES, MOA, ICI and CIT, particularly with respect to implementation of sustainable land management. The proposed policy and regulatory reforms and management planning for protected and managed areas, catchments, and outer islands will further contribute towards institutional sustainability.

212. **Socioeconomic sustainability**. The project design recognises the importance of increasing engagement of landowners and local communities in natural resource governance in the Cook Islands. Establishment of the proposed new Cloud Forest PA, a community conserved area, will have important sustainability ramifications, through demonstration of this modality of protected area management. Increased uptake of sustainable land management practices in the priority catchments will generate durable livelihood benefits for the local communities there.

213. **Environmental sustainability**. The project will facilitate improved management of protected and managed areas, contributing to the sustainable conservation of globally significant terrestrial and marine

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biodiversity. Through intersectoral catchment management of the priority catchments, some of the main threats to biodiversity, including pollution and unsustainable development, will be reduced. Strengthening the enabling environment and demonstrating best practices and innovation in management of invasive alien species, will reduce these substantial threats and help ensure the durability of the project results.

Potential for scaling up:

214. **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, low-value grants made available to stakeholders under this project may present further opportunities for continued development through other channels (e.g., the GEF Small Grants Programme). The project aims to develop four IEMPs, which will be integrated into the IDPs. Replicating this approach to the other *Pa Enua* will be a major step towards mainstreaming environmental priorities among island development priorities. Considering the important role of landowners across the Cook Islands, establishment of the Cloud Forest community conserved area in Rarotonga would provide a replicable model in the Cook Islands and other Pacific Countries and Territories. Moreover, the innovations in implementing eradication of invasive rats could be replicated in other sites in the Cook Islands and provide important best practice guidance for similar ecosystems in the Pacific.

V. PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK

This project will contribute to the following Sustainable Development Goal (s): SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15 and SDG 17

United Nations Pacific Strategy 2018-2022, Outcome 1: Climate change, disaster resilience, and environmental protection; Output 1.5: Number of PICTs coverage of terrestrial and marine areas that are protected.

Aligned with **UNDP Strategic Plan (2022-2025)** Output Signature Solution #4 (Environment); contributing to UNDP SP Result 4.1: Natural resources protected and managed to enhance sustainable productivity and livelihoods; and Result 4.2: Public and private investment mechanisms mobilized for biodiversity, water, oceans, and climate solutions

	Objective and Outcome Indicators	Baseline	Mid-term Target	End of Project Target
Project Objective: To safeguard globally significant biodiversity and core ecosystem services through mainstreaming environmental issues in key development sectors, facilitating more inclusive natural resource governance, and improving the management effectiveness of conservation areas	**Indicator 1 (GEF-7 CI 1; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use** (hectares) (Sub-Indicator 1.1: Terrestrial protected areas newly created; Sub-Indicator 1.2: Terrestrial protected areas under improved management) SDG 15.1; SDG 15.5	1,260 ha, including (Sub-Indicator 1.1 N/A) METT scores: (Sub-Indicator 1.2) Suwarrow NP (980 ha): 60% Takutea NR (125 ha): 36% Takitumu CA (155 ha): 64%	1,260 ha, including Proposed Cloud Forest PA under review / consent (Sub-Indicator 1.1) METT scores: (Sub-Indicator 1.2) Suwarrow NP (980 ha): 70% Takutea NR (125 ha): 50% Takitumu CA (155 ha): 70%	1,378 ha, including: Rarotonga Cloud Forest PA: 118 ha (Sub-Indicator 1.1) METT scores: (Sub-Indicator 1.2) Suwarrow NP (980 ha): 80% Takutea NR (125 ha): 67% Takitumu CA (155 ha): 80%
	Indicator 2 (GEF-7 CI 2; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (hectares) (Sub-Indicator 2.2: Marine protected areas under improved management) SDG 14.2; SDG 14.5	14,453 ha METT scores: Suwarrow NP (12,995 ha): 60% Takutea NR (55 ha): 36% Manuae MPA (1,403 ha): 24%	14,453 ha METT scores: Suwarrow NP (12,995 ha): 70% Takutea NR (55 ha): 50% Manuae MPA (1,403 ha): 40%	14,453 ha METT scores: Suwarrow NP (12,995 ha): 80% Takutea NR (55 ha): 67% Manuae MPA (1,403 ha): 55%
	Indicator 3 (GEF-7 CI 4; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares; excluding protected areas) (Sub-Indicator 4.1: Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity; qualitative assessment, non-certified) SDG 15.5; SDG 15.9; SDG 15.c; SDG 14.5; SDG 17.17	Under the GEF-5 R2R project, improved management for biodiversity achieved through Island Development Plans in six inhabited islands in the Southern Group having a cumulative terrestrial area of 8,172 ha.	3,130 ha Avana (Rarotonga): 591 ha Avatiu (Rarotonga): 675 ha Takuvaine (Rarotonga): 890 ha Turangi (Rarotonga): 357 ha Manuae Managed Area: 617 ha Management plans developed for the four priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area.	3,130 ha Avana: 591 ha Avatiu: 675 ha Takuvaine: 890 ha Turangi: 357 ha Manuae Managed Area: 617 ha Management plans under implementation for the four priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area.
	Indicator 4 (GEF CI 5; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (hectares; excluding protected areas) SDG 14.1	Rarotonga coastal ecosystems provide important habitat for globally significant biodiversity, represent substantial economic value, and help safeguard against the impacts of climate change.	157.5 ha Avana (Rarotonga): 97.5 ha Avatiu (Rarotonga): 13 ha Takuvaine (Rarotonga): 35 ha Turangi (Rarotonga): 12 ha Management plans developed for the four priority catchments.	157.5 ha Avana (Rarotonga): 97.5 ha Avatiu (Rarotonga): 13 ha Takuvaine (Rarotonga): 35 ha Turangi (Rarotonga): 12 ha Management plans under implementation for the four priority catchments.

	Objective and Outcome Indicators	Baseline	Mid-term Target	End of Project Target
	Indicator 5 (GEF-7 CI 6): Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated (metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent – tCO2e) (Sub-Indicator 6.1: Carbon sequestered, or emissions avoided in the AFOLU sector) **SDG 13.1; SDG 13.2; SDG 13.3**	As documented in the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), the Government of Cook Islands has committed to a pathway of low carbon development.	End target of 288,638 tCO2e of lifetime direct project GHG emissions mitigated confirmed through information contained the management plans for the target protected areas, priority catchments and managed area.	288,638 tCO2e (lifetime direct project GHG emissions mitigated)
	Indicator 6 (GEF-7 CI 11; IRRF Indicators 4.1.1, 4.2.1): Number of direct project beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as a co-benefit of GEF investment (individual people) **SDG 1.4; SDG 1.b; SDG 5.a**	N/A	3,000 direct beneficiaries, of whom 1,500 are women	9,588 direct beneficiaries, of whom 4,892 are women (based on 75% of resident population of Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Atiu).
Project Component 1	**Mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across key development sectors**			
Outcome 1: Biodiversity and ecosystem services safeguards embedded in national and island governance frameworks, and policies, and institutional capacities strengthened across key development sectors (i.e., agriculture, infrastructure, tourism)	**Indicator 7:** Legislation, policies and safeguard measures adopted and under implementation in catchment management plans; PA management plans; and Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs, within Island Development Plans [IDPs]).	Formal catchment management plans not in place; PA management plans either require updating or do not exist; IEMPs currently not part of the IDPs.	New management plans drafted and under review, including four catchment management plans, four PA management plans, and four IEMPs (within IDPs).	Formal adoption and initial implementation of four catchment management plans, four PA management plans, and four IEMPs (within IDPs).
	Indicator 8: Regulations developed or updated to reflect strengthened biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards: (a) EIA (permitting and consent) regulations under the new Environment Act (b) Agrichemical regulations under the Pesticides Act 1987 (c) Protected Area (PA) regulations under the new Environment Act, aligning with the new Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP)	Key regulations on EIA permitting and consent, agrichemicals, and protected areas not yet developed.	New regulations drafted and under legislative review: (a) EIA (permitting and consent) regulations (b) Agrichemical regulations (c) PA regulations	New regulations formally adopted and under implementation: (a) EIA (permitting and consent) regulations (b) Agrichemical regulations (c) PA regulations
	Indicator 9: Improved capacities of key development sectors, as measured by improvements in capacity development scorecard assessments of (a) NES, (b) Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT); (c) Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI), and (d) Ministry of Agriculture (MOA); across the following capacity results (CRs): CR1: Capacities for Engagement; CR2: Capacities to Generate, Access and Use Information and Knowledge; CR3: Capacities for Strategy, Policy and Legislation Development; CR4: Capacities for Management and Implementation; CR5: Capacities to Monitor and Evaluate	(a) **NES:** CR1: 44%; CR2: 33%; CR3: 33%; CR4: 33%; CR5: 33% (b) **CIT:** CR1: 67%; CR2: 60%; CR3: 22%; CR4: 50%; CR5: 50% (c) **ICI:** CR1: 56%; CR2: 27%; CR3: 44%; CR4: 0%; CR5: 17% (d) **MOA:** CR1: 33%; CR2: 40%; CR3: 56%; CR4: 33%; CR5: 33%	(a) **NES:** CR1: 67%; CR2: 60%; CR3: 56%; CR4: 50%; CR5: 50% (b) **CIT:** CR1: 75%; CR2: 67%; CR3: 44%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 67% (c) **ICI:** CR1: 67%; CR2: 60%; CR3: 56%; CR4: 33%; CR5: 50% (d) **MOA:** CR1: 56%; CR2: 60%; CR3: 80%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 67%	(a) **NES:** CR1: 89%; CR2: 80%; CR3: 89%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 67% (b) **CIT:** CR1: 89%; CR2: 80%; CR3: 56%; CR4: 83%; CR5: 83% (c) **ICI:** CR1: 89%; CR2: 93%; CR3: 89%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 100% (d) **MOA:** CR1: 67%; CR2: 93%; CR3: 100%; CR4: 100%; CR5: 100%
Outputs to achieve Outcome 1:	**Output 1.1.** National legislation, policies, strategies and plans amended or created to include gender issues and safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services from unsustainable land use activities of key development sectors **Output 1.2.** National Environment Information System (NEIS) developed and institutionalized to support intersectoral coordination, monitoring and integration of biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards in land use planning and development processes			

	Objective and Outcome Indicators	Baseline	Mid-term Target	End of Project Target
	Output 1.3. Regulatory and policy frameworks to safeguard KBAs and ecosystem services elaborated in Island Environmental Management Plans and applied to relevant catchment management plans and PA management plans			
Outcome 2: Ecosystem services restored, maintained and enhanced, and globally significant biodiversity safeguarded in priority catchments and managed areas	**Indicator 10:** Priority actions in the intersectoral catchment management plans reflected in the work programmes / budgets of NES, MOA, ICI and CIT by the end of the project.	Intersectoral catchment management plans not in place.	Priority actions identified in the four catchment management plans (see Indicator 6) are integrated into the work programmes and budgets of the designated agencies.	Work programmes and budgets of the designated agencies adopted and priority catchment management actions under initial implementation.
	Indicator 11: Increased adoption of sustainable natural resource management, as measured by (a) number of innovative practices piloted in the priority catchments; (b) reduction in the use of glyphosate, paraquat, and imidacloprid, and (c) number of tourism operators certified under the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification Scheme.	(a) N/A; (b) MOA agricultural census 2021 results will provide baseline information at project inception; (c) 53 tourism operators certified under the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification Scheme.	(a) 10 low-value grants under implementation, piloting innovative practices in the priority catchments; (b) same as baseline figures from MOA agricultural census; (c) 30% increase in certified operators from baseline.	(a) 20 low-value grants implemented, piloting innovative practices in the priority catchments; (b) zero reported use of glyphosate, paraquat, and imidacloprid, based on updated MOA agricultural census; (c) 80% increase in certified operators from baseline.
Outputs to achieve Outcome 2:	**Output 2.1.** Audits completed for priority catchments, with key pollutant sources (including nutrients) and responsible parties identified and interventions prescribed **Output 2.2.** Intersectoral catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area developed and implemented in partnership with key stakeholders **Output 2.3.** Improved gender sensitive natural resource management in priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area achieved through adoption of innovative practices			
Project Component 2	**Improving the management framework to effectively conserve a national protected areas system representative of Cook Islands biodiversity**			
Outcome 3: Globally significant biodiversity protected across Cook Islands through effective selection, design, management, monitoring and enforcement of its PAs system	**Indicator 12:** Improved science-based protected area management, as measured by information on biodiversity resource inventories and vegetative area/cover systematically compiled, analysed and updated to the National Environmental Information System (NEIS).	Lack of centralized environmental information system; biodiversity survey results and information on vegetative area/cover not systematically analysed and disseminated.	NEIS under pilot operation.	NEIS fully adopted, serving as platform to share biodiversity information.
	Indicator 13: Biodiversity threats reduced, as measured by the number of sites reporting absence of invasive rats after eradication interventions.	Rats present in Manuae, Takutea, Suwarrow and Takitumu protected areas	Rat eradications under implementation at two sites.	Two sites free of rats
Outputs to achieve Outcome 3:	**Output 3.1.** Management plans updated / developed and operational in target PAs, with legitimate governance structures in place that are inclusive of traditional management systems (i.e., House of Ariki), gender mainstreaming objectives, and collaborative arrangements with landowners and local communities **Output 3.2.** Management capacities in target PAs strengthened through application of PACS, PAMP and tools (e.g., NEIS), and training and systems on biodiversity conservation, surveillance and monitoring **Output 3.3.** Effective community conserved area demonstrated through a newly established Rarotonga Cloud Forest PA with collaborative agreements involving government, traditional leaders and communities			
Project Component 3	**Raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender and monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results**			
Outcome 4: Greater understanding of values of conserving Cook Islands	**Indicator 14:** Level of agreement to the following statement: Conservation areas/Ra'ui have improved the status of ecological systems in the Cook Islands.	Feb 2022 survey (N=24): Strongly agree: 29.2% Disagree: 16.7%	Feb 2022 survey (N=24): Strongly agree: 29.2% Disagree: 16.7%	End-of-project survey: Strongly agree: >50% Disagree: <5%

	Objective and Outcome Indicators	Baseline	Mid-term Target	End of Project Target
biodiversity and ecosystem services; adaptive management informed by M&E results; and dissemination of knowledge gained, and lessons learned			Updated KAP survey to be made at end of project. At midterm, project knowledge management and communications strategy developed and under implementation.	
	Indicator 15: Increase in flow of knowledge and information on best practices, as measured by (a) the cumulative number of visits to the NES website and social media platforms, and (b) the number of knowledge products generated and disseminated (case studies, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc. (gender disaggregated).	N/A	a) 250 visits (between project start and mid-term review) to the website and social media platforms; (b) 5 knowledge products generated and disseminated (PANORAMA solutions/case studies, EXPOSURE photo-stories, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc., including at least one focusing on gender mainstreaming.	a) 1,000 visits (between project start and terminal evaluation) to the website and social media platforms; (b) 20 knowledge products generated and disseminated (PANORAMA solutions/case studies, EXPOSURE photo-stories, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc., including at least three focusing on gender mainstreaming.
Outputs to achieve Outcome 4:	**Output 4.1.** Gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy developed and implemented, including annual action plans with targeted public awareness programmes to promote the values of biodiversity and ecosystem services **Output 4.2.** Gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings developed and disseminated to stakeholders **Output 4.3.** Participatory monitoring and evaluation, including gender mainstreaming, informs project implementation, decision-making and lessons learned			

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VI. MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) PLAN

215. Project-level monitoring and evaluation will be undertaken in compliance with UNDP requirements as outlined in the UNDP POPP (including guidance on GEF project revisions) and UNDP Evaluation Policy **The UNDP Country Office is responsible for ensuring full compliance with all UNDP project M&E requirements including project monitoring, UNDP quality assurance requirements, quarterly risk management, and evaluation requirements.**

216. Additional mandatory GEF-specific M&E requirements will be undertaken in accordance with the GEF Monitoring Policy and the GEF Evaluation Policy and other relevant GEF policies[46]. The M&E plan and budget included below will guide the GEF-specific M&E activities to be undertaken by this project.

217. In addition to these mandatory UNDP and GEF M&E requirements, other M&E activities deemed necessary to support project-level adaptive management will be agreed – including during the Project Inception Workshop - and will be detailed in the Inception Report.

Minimum project monitoring and reporting requirements as required by the GEF:

218. Inception Workshop and Report: A project inception workshop will be held within 2 months from the First disbursement date, with the aim to:

a. Familiarize key stakeholders with the detailed project strategy and discuss any changes that may have taken place in the overall context since the project idea was initially conceptualized that may influence its strategy and implementation.
b. Discuss the roles and responsibilities of the project team, including reporting lines, stakeholder engagement strategies and conflict resolution mechanisms.
c. Review the results framework and monitoring plan.
d. Discuss reporting, monitoring and evaluation roles and responsibilities and finalize the M&E budget; identify national/regional institutes to be involved in project-level M&E; discuss the role of the GEF OFP and other stakeholders in project-level M&E.
e. Update and review responsibilities for monitoring project strategies, including the risk log; SESP report, Social and Environmental Management Framework (where relevant) and other safeguard requirements; project grievance mechanisms; gender strategy; knowledge management strategy, and other relevant management strategies.
f. Review financial reporting procedures and budget monitoring and other mandatory requirements and agree on the arrangements for the annual audit.
g. Plan and schedule Project Board meetings and finalize the first-year annual work plan. Finalize the TOR of the Project Board.
h. Formally launch the Project.

GEF Project Implementation Report (PIR):

219. The annual GEF PIR covering the reporting period July (previous year) to June (current year) will be completed for each year of project implementation. UNDP will undertake quality assurance of the PIR before submission to the GEF. The PIR submitted to the GEF will be shared with the Project Board. UNDP will conduct a quality review of the PIR, and this quality review and feedback will be used to inform the preparation of the subsequent annual PIR.

GEF Core Indicators:

220. The GEF Core indicators included as **Annex 22** will be used to monitor global environmental benefits and will be updated for reporting to the GEF prior to MTR and TE. Note that the project team is responsible for updating the indicator status. The updated monitoring data should be shared with MTR/TE consultants prior to required evaluation missions, so these can be used for subsequent ground-truthing. The methodologies to be used in data collection have been defined by the GEF and are available on the GEF website.

[46] See https://www.thegef.org/gef/policies_guidelines

Independent Mid-term Review (MTR):

221. The terms of reference, the review process and the final MTR report will follow the standard UNDP templates and UNDP guidance for GEF-financed projects available on the UNDP Evaluation Resource Center (ERC).

222. The evaluation will be 'independent, impartial and rigorous'. The evaluators that UNDP will hire to undertake the assignment will be independent from organizations that were involved in designing, executing or advising on the project to be evaluated. Equally, the evaluators should not be in a position where there may be the possibility of future contracts regarding the project under review.

223. The GEF Operational Focal Point and other stakeholders will be actively involved and consulted during the evaluation process. Additional quality assurance support is available from the BPPS/NCE-VF Directorate.

224. The final MTR report and MTR TOR will be publicly available in English and will be posted on the UNDP ERC by August 2025. A management response to MTR recommendations will be posted in the ERC within six weeks of the MTR report's completion.

Terminal Evaluation (TE):

225. An independent terminal evaluation (TE) will take place upon completion of all major project outputs and activities. The terms of reference, the evaluation process and the final TE report will follow the standard templates and guidance prepared by the UNDP IEO for GEF-financed projects available on the UNDP Evaluation Resource Center.

226. The evaluation will be 'independent, impartial and rigorous'. The consultants that will be hired by UNDP evaluation specialists to undertake the assignment will be independent from organizations that were involved in designing, executing or advising on the project to be evaluated. Equally, the consultants should not be in a position where there may be the possibility of future contracts regarding the project being evaluated.

227. The GEF Operational Focal Point and other stakeholders will be actively involved and consulted during the terminal evaluation process. Additional quality assurance support is available from the BPPS/GEF Directorate.

228. The final TE report and TE TOR will be publicly available in English and posted on the UNDP ERC by August 2028. A management response to the TE recommendations will be posted to the ERC within six weeks of the TE report's completion.

Final Report:

229. The project's terminal GEF PIR along with the terminal evaluation (TE) report and corresponding management response will serve as the final project report package. The final project report package shall be discussed with the Project Board during an end-of-project review meeting to discuss lessons learned and opportunities for scaling up.

230. Agreement on intellectual property rights and use of logo on the project's deliverables and disclosure of information: To accord proper acknowledgement to the GEF for providing grant funding, the GEF logo will appear together with the UNDP logo on all promotional materials, other written materials like publications developed by the project, and project hardware. Any citation on publications regarding projects funded by the GEF will also accord proper acknowledgement to the GEF. Information will be disclosed in accordance with relevant policies notably the UNDP Disclosure Policy[47] and the GEF policy on public involvement[48].

[47] See http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/operations/transparency/information_disclosurepolicy/

[48] See https://www.thegef.org/gef/policies_guidelines

Monitoring Plan:

231. The project results, corresponding indicators and mid-term and end-of-project targets in the project results framework will be monitored by the Project Management Unit annually, and will be reported in the GEF PIR every year, and will be evaluated periodically during project implementation. If baseline data for some of the results indicators is not yet available, it will be collected during the first year of project implementation. Project risks, as outlined in the risk register, will be monitored quarterly.

Table 7: Monitoring plan

Results Monitoring	Indicators	Targets	Description of indicators and targets	Data source / Collection Methods	Frequency	Responsible for data collection	Means of verification	Risks/Assumptions
Project objective: To safeguard globally significant biodiversity and core ecosystem services through mainstreaming environmental issues in key development sectors, facilitating more inclusive natural resource governance, and improving the management effectiveness of conservation areas	**Indicator 1 (GEF-7 CI 1; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use** (hectares) (Sub-Indicator 1.1: Terrestrial protected areas newly created; Sub-Indicator 1.2: Terrestrial protected areas under improved management)	**Midterm:** 1,260 ha, including Proposed Cloud Forest PA under review / consent (Sub-Indicator 1.1) METT scores: (Sub-Indicator 1.2) Suwarrow NP (980 ha): 70% Takutea NR (125 ha): 50% Takitumu CA (155 ha): 70% **End of project:** 1,378 ha, including: Rarotonga Cloud Forest PA: 118 ha (Sub-Indicator 1.1) METT scores: (Sub-Indicator 1.2) Suwarrow NP (980 ha): 80% Takutea NR (125 ha): 67% Takitumu CA (155 ha): 80%	The indicator and end targets are based on METT assessments and approval of the proposed new Cloud Forest PA.	METT assessments, government gazette records (or similar), ground-truthing; information gathered by the project team, governmental agencies and other sources	Verify at project inception, assess progress annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of midterm and terminal METT assessments, government gazette records (or similar), ground-truthing information gathered by the project team, governmental agencies and other sources.	Risks: Formalized gazettement is delayed; improvements in management effectiveness not as successful as envisaged. Assumptions: Sufficient momentum and stakeholders' ownership are in place for achieving gazettement of Cloud Forest PA; improvements in management effectiveness are achieved as envisaged.
	Indicator 2 (GEF-7 CI 2; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (hectares) (Sub-Indicator 2.2: Marine protected areas under improved management) SDG 14.2; SDG 14.5	**Midterm:** 14,453 ha METT scores: Suwarrow NP (12,995 ha): 70% Manuae MPA (1,403 ha): 40% Takutea NR (55 ha): 50% **End of Project:** 14,453 ha METT scores: Suwarrow NP (12,995 ha): 80% Manuae MPA (1,403 ha): 55% Takutea NR (55 ha): 67%	The indicator and end targets are based on METT assessments.	METT assessments, ground-truthing; information gathered by the project team, governmental agencies and other sources	Verify at project inception, assess progress annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of midterm and terminal METT assessments, ground-truthing information gathered by the project team, governmental agencies and other sources.	Risks: Improvements in management effectiveness not as successful as envisaged. Assumptions: Improvements in management effectiveness are achieved as envisaged.

Results Monitoring	Indicators	Targets	Description of indicators and targets	Data source / Collection Methods	Frequency	Responsible for data collection	Means of verification	Risks/Assumptions
	Indicator 3 (GEF-7 CI 4; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares; excluding protected areas) (Sub-Indicator 4.1: Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity; qualitative assessment, non-certified) **SDG 15.5; SDG 15.9; SDG 15.c; SDG 14.5; SDG 17.17**	**Midterm:** **3,130 ha** Avana: 591 ha Avatiu: 675 ha Takuvaine: 890 ha Turangi: 357 ha Manuae: 617 ha Management plans developed for the four priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area. **End of Project:** **3,130 ha** Avana: 591 ha Avatiu: 675 ha Takuvaine: 890 ha Turangi: 357 ha Manuae: 617 ha Management plans under implementation for the four priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area	Improved management proposed in the four priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area.	Intersectoral catchment plans and management plans, ground-truthing by the project team and other sources.	Verify at project inception, assess progress annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of approved intersectoral catchment plans and management plans, ground-truthing by the project team and other sources.	Risks: Limited coordination among agencies; lack of engagement or commitment by landowners. Assumptions: Assume effective intersectoral coordination, and proactive engagement by landowners.
	Indicator 4 (GEF CI 5; IRRF Indicator 4.1.2): Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (hectares; excluding protected areas) **SDG 14.1**	Midterm: **157.5 ha** Avana: 97.5 ha Avatiu: 13 ha Takuvaine: 35 ha Turangi: 12 ha Management plans developed for the four priority catchments. End of Project: **57.5 ha** Avana: 97.5 ha Avatiu: 13 ha Takuvaine: 35 ha Turangi: 12 ha Management plans under implementation for the four priority catchments.	Coastal ecosystems benefit from the improved practices within the four priority catchments.	Intersectoral catchment plans and management plans, ground-truthing by the project team and other sources.	Verify at project inception, assess progress annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of approved intersectoral catchment plans and management plans, ground-truthing by the project team and other sources.	Risks: Limited coordination among agencies; lack of engagement or commitment by landowners. Assumptions: Assume effective intersectoral coordination, and proactive engagement by landowners.
	Indicator 5 (GEF-7 CI 6): Greenhouse Gas Emissions	Midterm: End target of 288,638 tCO2e of lifetime direct project GHG	The estimations of GHG emissions avoided are presented in FAO Ex-Ante	Estimations using EX-ACT	Verify at project inception,	Project Manager, Project	Review of estimations using EX-ACT	Risks: project activities are delayed or reduced in scope

Results Monitoring	Indicators	Targets	Description of indicators and targets	Data source / Collection Methods	Frequency	Responsible for data collection	Means of verification	Risks/Assumptions
	Mitigated (metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent – tCO2e) (Sub-Indicator 6.1: Carbon sequestered, or emissions avoided in the AFOLU sector) SDG 13.1; SDG 13.2; SDG 13.3	emissions mitigated confirmed through information contained the management plans for the target protected areas, priority catchments and managed area. End of project: 288,638 tCO2e (lifetime direct project GHG emissions mitigated)	Carbon Balance Tool (EX-ACT) annexed to the Project Document.		assess progress annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Coordinator, Technical Officer		and scale; inadequate or insufficient monitoring. Assumptions: project targets are achieved as planned. Effective monitoring and maintenance continue after the GEF funding ceases (post-project).
	Indicator 6 (GEF-7 CI 11; IRRF Indicators 4.1.1, 4.2.1): Number of direct project beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as a co-benefit of GEF investment (individual people) SDG 1.4; SDG 1.b; SDG 5.a	Midterm: 3,000 direct beneficiaries, of whom 1,500 are women. End of project: 9,588 direct beneficiaries, of whom 4,892 are women (based on 75% of resident population of Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Atiu)	Direct beneficiaries include the local communities living within and benefiting from the ecosystem services provided by the priority catchments, people benefitting from the biodiversity resources and ecosystem services of the target protected areas, and management and staff members of NES, MoA, CIT, and ICI, as well as other stakeholders benefitting from strengthened capacities.	Annual review of direct project beneficiaries, through training records, interventions under implementation, participation in sustainable livelihood initiatives, etc.	Verify at project inception, assess annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer, Gender-Safeguards Consultant	Information summarized in project M&E reports, training records, etc.	Risks: Local communities are reluctant to participate in project sponsored activities; women are not actively engaged in project activities. Assumptions: Local communities, including women are actively involved in project activities.
Outcome 1: Biodiversity and ecosystem services safeguards embedded in national and island governance frameworks, and policies, and institutional capacities strengthened	**Indicator 7**: Legislation, policies and safeguard measures adopted and under implementation in catchment management plans; PA management plans; and Island Environmental Management Plans (IEMPs, within Island Development Plans [IDPs]).	Midterm: New management plans drafted and under review, including four catchment management plans, four PA management plans, and four IEMPs (within IDPs). End of project: Formal adoption and initial implementation of four catchment management plans, four PA management	This indicator measures the extent to which updated legislation, policies and safeguard measures are integrated into PA management plans, catchment management plans, and IEMPs.	Approved PA management plans, catchment management plans, and IEMPs (integrated into IDPs).	Verify at project inception, assess annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of approved PA management plans, catchment management plans, and IEMPs (integrated into IDPs).	Risks: Approval and adoption of plans delayed. Assumptions: Timely approval plans.

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Results Monitoring	Indicators	Targets	Description of indicators and targets	Data source / Collection Methods	Frequency	Responsible for data collection	Means of verification	Risks/Assumptions
across key development sectors (i.e., agriculture, infrastructure, tourism)		plans, and four IEMPs (within IDPs).						
	Indicator 8: Regulations developed or updated to reflect strengthened biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards: (a) EIA (permitting and consent) regulations under the new Environment Act (b) Agrichemical regulations under the Pesticides Act 1987 (c) Protected Area (PA) regulations under the new Environment Act, aligning with the new Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP)	Midterm: New regulations drafted and under legislative review: (a) EIA (permitting and consent) regulations (b) Agrichemical regulations (c) PA regulations End of project: New regulations formally adopted and under implementation: (a) EIA (permitting and consent) regulations (b) Agrichemical regulations (c) PA regulations	This indicator measures the success of strengthening biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards into the regulatory framework	Approved and adopted regulations.	Verify at project inception, assess annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of approved and adopted regulations.	Risks: Approval and adoption of legislation and regulations, delayed. Assumptions: Timely approval and adoption of legislation and regulations.
	Indicator 9: Improved capacities of key development sectors, as measured by improvements in capacity development scorecard assessments of (a) NES, (b) Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT); (c) Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI), and (d) Ministry of Agriculture (MOA); across the following capacity results (CRs): CR1: Capacities for Engagement; CR2: Capacities to Generate, Access and Use Information and Knowledge; CR3: Capacities for Strategy, Policy and Legislation Development; CR4: Capacities for Management and Implementation; CR5: Capacities to Monitor and Evaluate	Midterm: (a) **NES:** CR1: 67%; CR2: 60%; CR3: 56%; CR4: 50%; CR5: 50% (b) **CIT:** CR1: 75%; CR2: 67%; CR3: 44%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 67% (c) **ICI:** CR1: 67%; CR2: 60%; CR3: 56%; CR4: 33%; CR5: 50% (d) **MOA:** CR1: 56%; CR2: 60%; CR3: 80%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 67% End of project: (a) **NES:** CR1: 89%; CR2: 80%; CR3: 89%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 67% (b) **CIT:** CR1: 89%; CR2: 80%; CR3: 56%; CR4: 83%; CR5: 83% (c) **ICI:** CR1: 89%; CR2: 93%; CR3: 89%; CR4: 67%; CR5: 100%	The indicator measures improvements in the institutional capacities of NES, MOA, ICI and CIT, particularly with respect sustainable land management (SLM) approaches.	Capacity development scorecard assessments.	Verify at project inception, evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Technical Officer, service provider	Review of capacity development scorecard assessments.	Risks: Lack of sustained involvement of partner agencies. Assumptions: Partner agencies are proactively engaged throughout project implementation.

Results Monitoring	Indicators	Targets	Description of indicators and targets	Data source / Collection Methods	Frequency	Responsible for data collection	Means of verification	Risks/Assumptions
		(d) **MOA**: CR1: 67%; CR2: 93%; CR3: 100%; CR4: 100%; CR5: 100%						
Outcome 2: Ecosystem services restored, maintained and enhanced, and globally significant biodiversity safeguarded in priority catchments and managed areas	**Indicator 10:** Priority actions in the intersectoral catchment management plans reflected in the work programmes / budgets of NES, MOA, ICI and CIT by the end of the project.	Midterm: Priority actions identified in the four catchment management plans (see Indicator 6) are integrated into the work programmes and budgets of the designated agencies. End of project: Work programmes and budgets of the designated agencies adopted and priority catchment management actions under initial implementation.	This indicator measures the level of mainstreaming the catchment management plans among the partner agencies.	Work programmes and budgets of the partner agencies (NES, MOA, ICI and CIT); ground-truthing examples of initial implementation.	Verify at project inception, assess annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of work programmes and budgets of the partner agencies (NES, MOA, ICI and CIT); reports on ground-truthing.	Risks: Lack of agency commitment to mainstream the catchment management plans. Assumptions: Priority actions in the catchment management plans are integrated into the work programmes and budgets of the partner agencies.
	Indicator 11: Increased adoption of sustainable natural resource management, as measured by (a) number of innovative practices piloted in the priority catchments; (b) reduction in the use of glyphosate, paraquat, and imidacloprid, and (c) number of tourism operators certified under the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification Scheme.	Midterm: (a) 10 low-value grants under implementation, piloting innovative practices in the priority catchments; (b) same as baseline figures from MOA agricultural census; (c) 30% increase in certified operators from baseline. End of project: (a) 20 low-value grants implemented, piloting innovative practices in the priority catchments; (b) zero reported use of glyphosate, paraquat, and imidacloprid, based on updated MOA agricultural census; (c) 80% increase in certified operators from baseline.	This indicator measures progress towards effective catchment management.	Low-value grant proposals and completion reports; MOA agricultural census; Information compiled by the CIT; ground-truthing activities of tourism operators	Verify at project inception, evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Technical Officer, MOA, CIT	Low-value grant proposals and completion reports; MOA agricultural census; Information compiled by the CIT; ground-truthing activities of tourism operators.	Risks: Approval and adoption of regulations delayed; limited compliance; economic downturn discourages operators from being certified; unclear incentives for becoming certified. Assumptions: Timely approval of regulations, and widespread compliance; tourism operators are incentivized to become certified.
Outcome 3: Globally significant biodiversity	**Indicator 12:** Improved science-based protected area management, as measured by information on biodiversity resource inventories	Midterm: NEIS under pilot operation. End of project:	This indicator measures progress in strengthening science-based systems	Resource inventories reported, analysed and	Verify at project inception, assess	Project Manager, Project Coordinator, Technical Officer	Review of resource inventory reports,	Risks: Limited capacity for analysing data and information; lack of data sharing.

Results Monitoring	Indicators	Targets	Description of indicators and targets	Data source / Collection Methods	Frequency	Responsible for data collection	Means of verification	Risks/Assumptions
protected across Cook Islands through effective selection, design, management, monitoring and enforcement of its PAs system	and vegetative area/cover systematically compiled, analysed and updated to the National Environmental Information System (NEIS).	NEIS fully adopted, serving as platform to share biodiversity information.	for supporting PA management.	interpreted; vegetative area / cover systematically compiled, analysed and interpreted; functioning NEIS.	annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.		vegetative cover surveys, and management decision tools available on the NEIS.	Assumptions: Capacities are strengthened for analysing environmental data and information; agencies are proactively sharing data.
	Indicator 13: Biodiversity threats reduced, as measured by the number of sites reporting absence of invasive rats after eradication interventions.	Midterm: Rat eradications under implementation at two sites. End of project: Two sites free of rats.	This indicator measures the success of reducing threats from invasive rats.	Post-intervention monitoring of the presence or absence of rats.	Verify at project inception, assess annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	Technical Officer, service provider	Review of post-intervention monitoring reports on the presence or absence of rats.	Risks: Unsuccessful interventions. Assumptions: Interventions are designed and implemented successfully.
Outcome 4: Greater understanding of values of conserving Cook Islands biodiversity and ecosystem services; adaptive management informed by M&E results; and dissemination of knowledge gained, and lessons learned	**Indicator 14:** Level of agreement to the following statement: Conservation areas/Ra'ui have improved the status of ecological systems in the Cook islands.	Medium term: Feb 2022 survey (N=24): Strongly agree: 29.2% Disagree: 16.7% Updated KAP survey to be made at end of project. At midterm, project knowledge management and communications strategy developed and under implementation. End of project: Strongly agree: >50% Disagree: <5%	This indicator measures the effectiveness of the project in helping to facilitate changes in stakeholder attitudes.	Baseline and end-of-project KAP survey results.	Verify at project inception, evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	KM-Communications Officer, service provider	Review of baseline and end-of-project KAP survey results.	Risks: Communications ineffective in shifting attitudes. Assumptions: Project communications are sufficient to shift stakeholder attitudes.
	Indicator 15: Increase in flow of knowledge and information on best practices, as measured by (a) the cumulative number of visits to the NES website and social media platforms, and (b) the number of knowledge products generated and disseminated (case studies, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc. (gender disaggregated)	Medium term: a) 250 visits (between project start and mid-term review) to the website and social media platforms; (b) 5 knowledge products generated and disseminated (PANORAMA solutions/case studies, EXPOSURE photo-stories, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc.,	This indicator measures the effectiveness of knowledge sharing, through tracking visits and production and dissemination of knowledge products	Statistical functions on social media, project's website, and Internet platforms; distribution lists; etc.	Verify at project inception, assess annually, and evaluate at midterm review and terminal evaluation.	KM-Communications Officer	Review of statistics generated on social media, project's website, and Internet platforms.	Risks: Ineffective knowledge dissemination, delays in setting up online systems. Assumptions: Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy effectively implemented.

Results Monitoring	Indicators	Targets	Description of indicators and targets	Data source / Collection Methods	Frequency	Responsible for data collection	Means of verification	Risks/Assumptions
		including at least one focusing on gender mainstreaming. End of project: a) 1,000 visits (between project start and terminal evaluation) to the website and social media platforms; (b) 20 knowledge products generated and disseminated (PANORAMA solutions/case studies, EXPOSURE photo-stories, factsheets, short videos, guidance documents, etc., including at least three focusing on gender mainstreaming.						

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Monitoring and Evaluation Budget for project execution:

232. The M&E budget presented below in **Table 8** provides a breakdown of costs for M&E activities to be led by the Project Management Unit during project implementation. These costs are equivalent to those of the M&E Component of the Results Framework and TBWP. Other project M&E activities can be added to this budget if they are included under the M&E component of the results framework. The oversight and participation of the UNDP Country Office/Regional technical advisors/HQ Units in these M&E activities and in performing standard UNDP M&E requirements are not included as these are covered by the GEF Fee.

Table 8: Monitoring and evaluation budget

GEF M&E requirements to be undertaken by Project Management Unit (PMU)	Indicative costs (USD)	Time frame
Inception Workshop and Report	15,085	Inception Workshop within 2 months of the First Disbursement
M&E required to report on progress made in reaching GEF core indicators and project results included in the project results framework	18,980	Annually and at mid-point and closure.
Preparation of the annual GEF Project Implementation Report (PIR)	15,000	Annually typically between June-August
Monitoring of SESP, Stakeholder Engagement Plan, Gender Action Plan, Climate and Disaster Risk Screening, COVID-19 Action Framework	18,320	On-going
Supervision missions	7,000	Annually
Independent Mid-term Review (MTR): ***costs associated with conducting the independent review/evaluation to be commissioned by UNDP not the Implementing Partner or PMU.***	38,740	August 2025
Independent Terminal Evaluation (TE): ***costs associated with conducting the independent evaluation to be commissioned by UNDP not the Implementing Partner or the PMU.***	38,740	August 2028
TOTAL indicative COST	$151,865	Equivalent to TBWP Component 3, Output 4.3

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VII. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

Section 1: General roles and responsibilities in the project's governance mechanism

233. Implementing Partner: The Implementing Partner for this project is the **National Environment Service (NES)**. The NES Director is the GEF operational focal point (OFP) 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 Implementing Partner (Executing Agency), working closely with other key partner agencies. The overall risk assessment conducted in the Partner Capacity Assessment Tool (PCAT) and the HACT assessment (see **Annex 25**) concluded a Low risk for NES.

234. The Implementing Partner is the entity to which the UNDP Administrator has entrusted the implementation of UNDP assistance specified in this signed project document along with the assumption of full responsibility and accountability for the effective use of GEF resources and the delivery of outputs, as set forth in this document.

235. The Implementing Partner is responsible for executing this project. Specific tasks include:

- Project planning, coordination, management, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. This includes providing all required information and data necessary for timely, comprehensive and evidence-based project reporting, including results and financial data, as necessary. The Implementing Partner will strive to ensure project-level M&E is undertaken by national institutes and is aligned with national systems so that the data used and generated by the project supports national systems.
- Risk management as outlined in this Project Document.
- Procurement of goods and services, including human resources.
- Financial management, including overseeing financial expenditures against project budgets.
- Approving and signing the multiyear workplan.
- Approving and signing the combined delivery report at the end of the year.
- Signing the financial report or the funding authorization and certificate of expenditures.

236. Responsible Parties: Responsible parties include the **University of Newcastle Australia** for delivering Output 2.1 (Audits completed for priority catchments, with key pollutant sources (including nutrients) and responsible parties identified and interventions prescribed).

237. Project Stakeholders and Target Groups: The project stakeholders and target groups include the local communities living within and benefiting from the ecosystem services provided by the priority catchments, people benefitting from the biodiversity resources and ecosystem services of the target protected areas, and management and staff members of NES, MoA, CIT, and ICI, as well as other landowners and stakeholders benefitting from strengthened capacities.

238. UNDP: UNDP is accountable to the GEF for the implementation of this project. This includes overseeing project execution undertaken by the Implementing Partner to ensure that the project is being carried out in accordance with UNDP and GEF policies and procedures and the standards and provisions outlined in the Delegation of Authority (DOA) letter for this project. **The UNDP GEF Executive Coordinator, in consultation with UNDP Bureaus and the Implementing Partner, retains the right to revoke the project DOA, suspend or cancel this GEF project.** UNDP is responsible for the Project Assurance function in the project governance structure and presents to the Project Board and attends Project Board meetings as a non-voting member.

Section 2: Project governance structure

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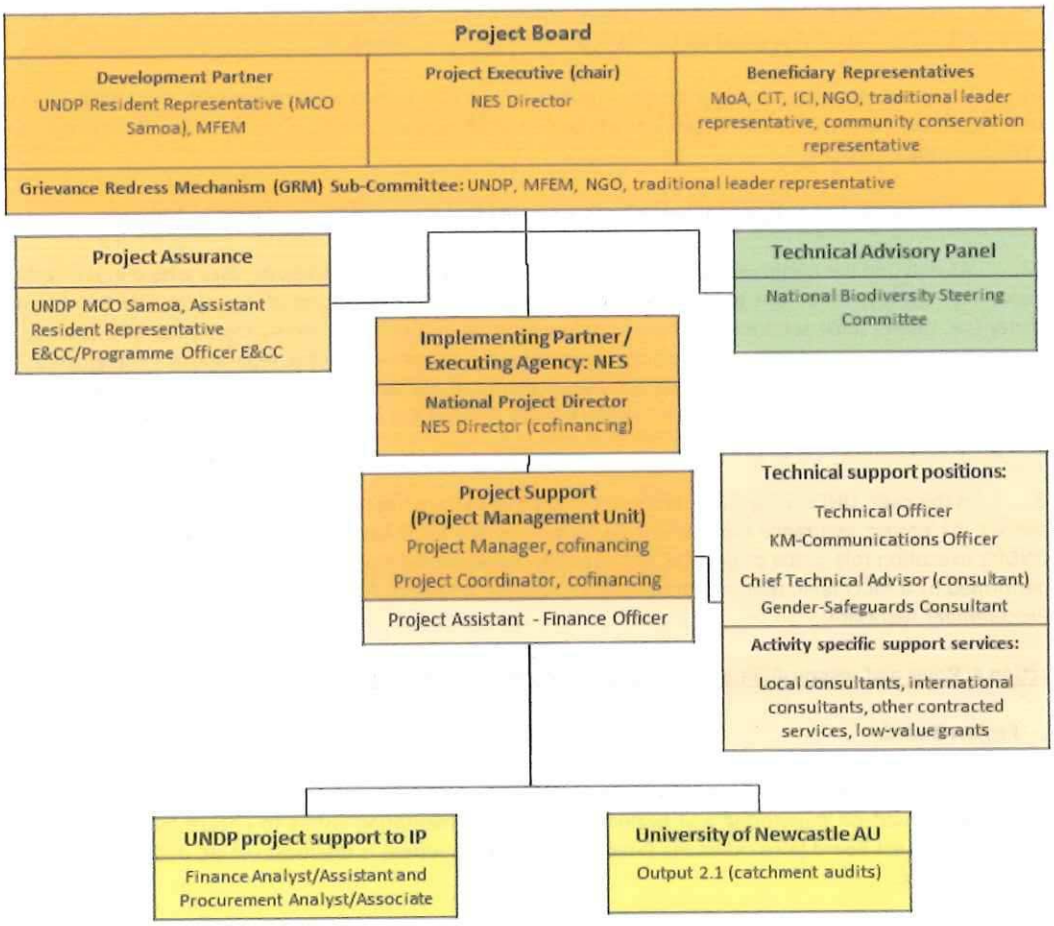


Figure 4: Project Organization Structure

First line of defense:

- UNDP oversight of project support to IP cannot be UNDP staff providing project assurance or providing programmatic oversight support to the RR.

Second line of defense:

- Regional Bureau oversees RR and Multi-Country Office compliance at portfolio level.
- BPPS NCE RTA oversees technical quality assurance and GEF compliance. BPPS NCE PTA oversees RTA function.
- UNDP GEF Executive Coordinator and Regional Bureau Deputy Director can revoke DOA/cancel/suspend project or provided enhanced oversight.

239. The UNDP Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific or his delegate assumes full responsibility and accountability for oversight and quality assurance of this Project and ensures its timely implementation in compliance with the GEF-specific requirements and UNDP's Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP), its Financial Regulations and Rules and Internal Control Framework. A representative of the UNDP Country Office will assume the assurance role and will present assurance findings to the Project Board, and therefore attends Project Board meetings as a non-voting member.

240. **UNDP project support**: The Implementing Partner and GEF OFP have requested UNDP to provide support services in the amount of **USD 8,615** for the full duration of the project, and the GEF has agreed for UNDP to provide such execution support services and for the cost of these services to be charged to the project

budget. The execution support services – whether financed from the project budget or other sources - have been set out in detail and agreed between UNDP Country Office and the Implementing Partner in a Letter of Agreement (LOA). This LOA is attached to this Project Document in **Annex 29**.

241. To ensure the strict independence required by the GEF and in accordance with the UNDP Internal Control Framework, these execution services will be delivered independent from the GEF-specific oversight and quality assurance services.

Section 3: Segregation of duties and firewalls vis-á-vis UNDP representation on the Project Board

242. As noted in the Minimum Fiduciary Standards for GEF Partner Agencies, in cases where a GEF Partner Agency (i.e. UNDP) carries out both implementation oversight and execution of a project, the GEF Partner Agency (i.e. UNDP) must separate its project implementation oversight and execution duties, and describe in the relevant project document a: 1) Satisfactory institutional arrangement for the separation of implementation oversight and executing functions in different departments of the GEF Partner Agency; and 2) Clear lines of responsibility, reporting and accountability within the GEF Partner Agency between the project implementation oversight and execution functions.

243. In this case, UNDP's implementation oversight role in the project – as represented in the project board and via the project assurance function - is performed by the MCO Resident Representative or his delegate. UNDP's execution role in the project (as requested by the implementing partner and approved by the GEF) is performed by a MCO team that includes a Finance Analyst, a Finance Assistant, a Procurement Analyst, and a Procurement Associate.

Section 4: Roles and responsibilities of the project organization structure

a) **Project Board:**

244. All UNDP projects must be governed by a multi-stakeholder board or committee established to review performance based on monitoring and evaluation, and implementation issues to ensure quality delivery of results. The Project Board (also called the Project Steering Committee) is the most senior, dedicated oversight body for a project.

245. The two main (mandatory) roles of the Project Board are as follows:

1) **High-level oversight of the execution of the project by the Implementing Partner** (as explained in the "Provide Oversight" section of the POPP). This is the primary function of the project board and includes annual (and as-needed) assessments of any major risks to the project, and decisions/agreements on any management actions or remedial measures to address them effectively. The Project Board reviews evidence of project performance based on monitoring, evaluation and reporting, including progress reports, evaluations, risk logs and the combined delivery report. The Project Board is responsible for taking corrective action as needed to ensure the project achieves the desired results.
2) **Approval of strategic project execution decisions of the Implementing Partner** with a view to assess and manage risks, monitor and ensure the overall achievement of projected results and impacts and ensure long term sustainability of project execution decisions of the Implementing Partner (as explained in the "Manage Change" section of the POPP).

246. Requirements to serve on the Project Board:

- ✓ Agree to the Terms of Reference of the Board and the rules on protocols, quorum and minuting.
- ✓ Meet annually; at least once.
- ✓ Disclose any conflict of interest in performing the functions of a Project Board member and take all measures to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest. This disclosure must be documented and kept on record by UNDP.
- ✓ Discharge the functions of the Project Board in accordance with UNDP policies and procedures.

- ✓ Ensure highest levels of transparency and ensure Project Board meeting minutes are recorded and shared with project stakeholders.

247. Responsibilities of the Project Board:

- ✓ Consensus decision making:
  - o The Project Board provides overall guidance and direction to the project, ensuring it remains within any specified constraints, and providing overall oversight of the project implementation.
  - o Review project performance based on monitoring, evaluation and reporting, including progress reports, risk logs and the combined delivery report;
  - o The Project Board is responsible for making management decisions by consensus.
  - o In order to ensure UNDP's ultimate accountability, Project Board decisions should be made in accordance with standards that shall ensure management for development results, best value money, fairness, integrity, transparency and effective international competition.
  - o In case consensus cannot be reached within the Project Board, the UNDP representative on the Project Board will mediate to find consensus and, if this cannot be found, will take the final decision to ensure project implementation is not unduly delayed.
- ✓ Oversee project execution:
  - o Agree on project manager's tolerances as required, within the parameters outlined in the project document, and provide direction and advice for exceptional situations when the project manager's tolerances are exceeded.
  - o Appraise annual work plans prepared by the Implementing Partner for the Project; review combined delivery reports prior to certification by the implementing partner.
  - o Address any high-level project issues as raised by the project manager and project assurance;
  - o Advise on major and minor amendments to the project within the parameters set by UNDP and the donor and refer such proposed major and minor amendments to the UNDP BPPS Nature, Climate and Energy Executive Coordinator (and the GEF, as required by GEF policies);
  - o Provide high-level direction and recommendations to the project management unit to ensure that the agreed deliverables are produced satisfactorily and according to plans.
  - o Track and monitor co-financed activities and realisation of co-financing amounts of this project.
  - o Approve the Inception Report, GEF annual project implementation reports, mid-term review and terminal evaluation reports.
  - o Ensure commitment of human resources to support project implementation, arbitrating any issues within the project.
- ✓ Risk Management:
  - o Provide guidance on evolving or materialized project risks and agree on possible mitigation and management actions to address specific risks.
  - o Review and update the project risk register and associated management plans based on the information prepared by the Implementing Partner. This includes risks related that can be directly managed by this project, as well as contextual risks that may affect project delivery or continued UNDP compliance and reputation but are outside of the control of the project. For example, social and environmental risks associated with co-financed activities or activities taking place in the project's area of influence that have implications for the project.
  - o Address project-level grievances.
- ✓ Coordination:
  - o Ensure coordination between various donor and government-funded projects and programmes.
  - o Ensure coordination with various government agencies and their participation in project activities.

248. **Composition of the Project Board:** The composition of the Project Board must include individuals assigned to the following three roles:

1. **Project Executive:** This is an individual who represents ownership of the project and chairs (or co-chairs) the Project Board. The Executive usually is the senior national counterpart for nationally implemented projects (typically from the same entity as the Implementing Partner), and it must be UNDP for projects that are direct implementation (DIM). In exceptional cases, two individuals from different entities can co-share this role and/or co-chair the Project Board. If the project executive co-chairs the project board with representatives of another category, it typically does so with a development partner representative. The Project Executive (National Project Director) is the NES Director.
2. **Beneficiary Representatives:** Individuals or groups representing the interests of those groups of stakeholders who will ultimately benefit from the project. Their primary function within the board is to ensure the realization of project results from the perspective of project beneficiaries. Often representatives from civil society, industry associations, or other government entities benefiting from the project can fulfil this role. There can be multiple beneficiary representatives in a Project Board. The Beneficiary representatives are:
    i. Official from the Ministry of Agriculture
    ii. Official from Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
    iii. Official from Infrastructure Cook Islands
    iv. Representative from a non-governmental organization
    v. Traditional leader representative
    vi. Community conservation representative
3. **Development Partners:** Individuals or groups representing the interests of the parties concerned that provide funding, strategic guidance and/or technical expertise to the project. The Development Partners are:
    i. Official from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM)
    ii. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

249. **Technical Advisory Panel.** The National Biodiversity Steering Committee (NBSC) will be available to operate as a Technical Advisory Panel for the project. A terms of reference will be developed for the Technical Advisory Panel at project inception. The NBSC was established during the GEF-5 R2R project, includes heads of ministries, NGOs and traditional leader representatives, meets quarterly, providing a platform to discuss other national biodiversity matters.

b) Project Assurance:

250. Project assurance is the responsibility of each project board member; however, UNDP has a distinct assurance role for all UNDP projects in carrying out objective and independent project oversight and monitoring functions. UNDP performs quality assurance and supports the Project Board (and Project Management Unit) by carrying out objective and independent project oversight and monitoring functions, including compliance with the risk management and social and environmental standards of UNDP. The Project Board cannot delegate any of its quality assurance responsibilities to the Project Manager. Project assurance is totally independent of project execution.

251. A designated representative of UNDP playing the project assurance role is expected to attend all board meetings and support board processes as a non-voting representative. It should be noted that while in certain cases UNDP's project assurance role across the project may encompass activities happening at several levels (e.g., global, regional), at least one UNDP representative playing that function must, as part of their duties, specifically attend board meeting and provide board members with the required documentation required to perform their duties. The UNDP representative playing the main project assurance function is the Assistant Resident Representative E&CC/Programme Officer E&CC.

c) Project Management – Execution of the project:

252. 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,

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specific staff will be assigned to focus on the management of this project for effective implementation, delivery and reporting, including a Project Manager and Project Coordinator.

253. 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. The costs of the Project Manager and Project Coordinator are funded through the government co-financing in-kind (recurrent expenditures) contributions. The PMU 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 (MOA, CIT, ICI), as well as the other key public and private entities, such as NGOs, traditional leaders, landowners and communities.

254. The Project Manager is the senior most representative of the Project Management Unit (PMU) and is responsible for the overall day-to-day management of the project on behalf of the Implementing Partner, including the mobilization of all project inputs, supervision over project staff, responsible parties, consultants and sub-contractors. The Project Manager typically presents key deliverables and documents to the board for their review and approval, including progress reports, annual work plans, adjustments to tolerance levels and risk registers.

255. Roles and responsibilities of the PMU members are detailed in the **Annex 6**. A designated representative of the PMU is expected to attend all board meetings and support board processes as a non-voting representative.

256. The primary PMU representative attending board meetings is the Project Manager.

257. **Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) Sub-Committee**: A GRM Sub-Committee will be established and convened on an *ad hoc* basis, to attempt to resolve the grievance, request further information to clarify the issue, refer the grievance to independent mediation, or determine the request is outside the scope and mandate of the Projecct Board and refer it elsewhere. The GRM is described in the project *Stakeholder Engagment Plan* (**Annex 7**).

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VIII. FINANCIAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

258. The total cost of the project is USD 31,147,608. This is financed through a GEF grant of USD 3,502,968 administered by UNDP, and additional support of USD 27,644,640. UNDP, as the GEF Implementing Agency, is responsible for the oversight of the GEF resources and the cash co-financing transferred to UNDP bank account only.

259. **Co-financing**: The actual realization of project co-financing amounts will be monitored by the UNDP Country Office and the PMU on an annual basis in the GEF PIR and will be reported to the GEF during the mid-term review and terminal evaluation process as follows.

Co-financing source	Co-financing type	Co-financing amount
National Environment Service (NES)	In-kind	$2,512,500
	Public investment	$2,512,500
Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM)	Public investment	$3,596,656
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	In-kind	$798,823
	Public investment	$8,512,290
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	In-kind	$804,000
	Public investment	$723,600
Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT)	In-kind	$2,008,797
	Public investment	$6,007,762
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	In-kind	$167,712

260. **Budget Revision and Tolerance**: As per UNDP POPP, the project board may agree with the project manager on a tolerance level for each detailed plan under the overall multi-year workplan. The agreed tolerance should be written in the project document or approved project board meeting minutes. It should normally not exceed 10 percent of the agreed annual budget at the activity level, but within the overall approved multi-year workplan at the activity level. Within the agreed tolerances, the project manager can operate without intervention from the project board. Restrictions apply as follows:

261. Should the following deviations occur, the Project Manager/IP through UNDP Country Office will seek the approval of the BPPS/NCE-VF team to ensure accurate reporting to the GEF. It is **strongly encouraged** to maintain the expenditures within the approved budget at the budgetary account and at the component level:

a) Budget reallocations must prove that the suggested changes in the budget will not lead to material changes in the results to be achieved by the project. A strong justification is required and will be approved on an exceptional basis. Budget re-allocations among the components (including PMC) of the approved Total Budget and Work Plans (TBWP) that represent a value greater than 10% of the total GEF grant.

b) Introduction of new outputs/activities (i.e. budget items) that were not part of the agreed project document and TBWP that represent a value greater than 5% of the total GEF grant. The new budget items must be eligible as per the GEF and UNDP policies.

c) Project management cost (PMC): budget under PMC component is capped and cannot be increased.

262. Any over expenditure incurred beyond the available GEF grant amount will be absorbed by non-GEF resources (e.g. UNDP TRAC or cash co-financing).

263. **Project extensions:** The UNDP Regional Deputy Director for Asia and the Pacific or his/her delegated authority and the UNDP-GEF Executive Coordinator must approve all project extension requests. Note that all extensions incur costs and the GEF project budget cannot be increased. A single extension may be granted on an exceptional basis and subject to the conditions and maximum durations set out in the UNDP POPP; the project management costs during the extension period must remain within the originally approved amount, and any increase in PMC costs will be covered by non-GEF resources; the additional UNDP oversight costs during the extension period must be covered by non-GEF resources, in accordance with UNDP's guidance set out in UNDP POPP

264. Audit: The project will be audited as per UNDP Financial Regulations and Rules and applicable audit policies. Audit cycle and process must be discussed during the Inception workshop. If the Implementing Partner is an UN Agency, the project will be audited according to that Agencies applicable audit policies.

265. **Project Closure**: Project closure will be conducted as per UNDP requirements outlined in the UNDP POPP. All costs incurred to close the project must be included in the project closure budget and reported as final project commitments presented to the Project Board during the final project review. The only costs a project may incur following the final project review are those included in the project closure budget.

266. **Operational completion**: The project will be operationally completed when the last UNDP-financed inputs have been provided and the related activities have been completed. This includes the final clearance of the Terminal Evaluation Report (that will be available in English) and the corresponding management response, and the end-of-project review Project Board meeting. **Operational closure must happen at the end date calculated by the approved duration after the Project Document signature or at the revised operational closure date as approved in the project extension. Any expected activity after the operational date requires project extension approval.** The Implementing Partner through a Project Board decision will notify the UNDP Country Office when operational closure has been completed. At this time, the project should have completed the transfer or disposal of any equipment that is still the property of UNDP.

267. **Transfer or disposal of assets**: In consultation with the Implementing Partner and other parties of the project, UNDP is responsible for deciding on the transfer or other disposal of assets. Transfer or disposal of assets is recommended to be reviewed and endorsed by the project board following UNDP rules and regulations. Assets may be transferred to the government for project activities managed by a national institution at any time during the life of a project (it is strongly encouraged to be done before the operational closure date). In all cases of transfer, a transfer document must be prepared and kept on file[49]. The transfer should be done before Project Management Unit complete their assignments.

268. **Financial completion (closure)**: The project will be financially closed when the following conditions have been met: a) the project is operationally completed or has been cancelled; b) the Implementing Partner has reported all financial transactions to UNDP; c) UNDP has closed the accounts for the project; d) UNDP and the Implementing Partner have certified a final Combined Delivery Report (which serves as final budget revision).

269. The project will be financially completed **within 6 months of operational closure or after the date of cancellation**. If Operational Closure is delayed for any justified and approved reason, the Country Office should do all efforts to Financially Close the project within 9 months after TE is completed. Between operational and financial closure, the implementing partner will identify and settle all financial obligations and prepare a final expenditure report. The UNDP Country Office will send the final signed closure documents including confirmation of final cumulative expenditure and unspent balance to the BPPS/NCE-VF Unit for confirmation before the project will be financially closed in Atlas by the UNDP Country Office.

270. Refund to GEF: Should a refund of unspent funds to the GEF be necessary, this will be managed directly by the BPPS/NCE-VF Directorate in New York. No action is required by the UNDP Country Office on the actual refund from UNDP project to the GEF Trustee.

[49] See https://popp.undp.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/UNDP_POPP_DOCUMENT_LIBRARY/Public/PPM_Project%20Management_Closing.docx&action=default.

IX. TOTAL BUDGET AND WORK PLAN

Total Budget and Work Plan		
Atlas Award ID:	00136472	Atlas Output Project ID: 00127363
Atlas Proposal or Award Title:	Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species	
Atlas Business Unit	CKI 10	
Atlas Primary Output Project Title	Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management to safeguard the Cook Islands integrated ecosystems and species	
UNDP-GEF PIMS No.	6565	
Implementing Partner	National Environment Service	

Atlas Activity (GEF Component)	Atlas Implementing Agent	Atlas Fund ID	Donor Name	Atlas Budgetary Account Code	ATLAS Budget Description	Amount 2023 (USD)	Amount 2024 (USD)	Amount 2025 (USD)	Amount 2026 (USD)	Amount 2027 (USD)	Amount 2028 (USD)	Total (USD)	See Budget Note:
Component 1: Mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across key development sectors	UNDP	62000	GEF	71200	International Consultants	20,400	79,500	47,400	26,100	12,600	0	186,000	1
	NES	62000	GEF	71300	Local Consultants	18,800	91,100	67,900	22,700	11,500	0	212,000	2
				71600	Travel	7,830	140,424	82,734	22,302	4,750	0	258,040	3
				71800	Contractual Services - Impl. Partner	21,080	39,644	41,888	44,132	46,376	26,350	219,470	4
				72100	Contractual Services - Companies	5,000	138,500	146,500	76,250	41,250	7,500	415,000	5
				72200	Equipment and Furniture	5,000	25,000	25,000	0	0	0	55,000	6
				72400	Communic & Audio Visual Equip	0	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	30,000	7
				72600	Grants	0	0	60,000	105,000	105,000	30,000	300,000	8
				72800	Information Technology Equipment	0	20,000	7,500	0	12,500	0	40,000	9
				74200	Audio Visual & Print Prod Costs	0	12,100	16,100	14,180	14,570	0	56,950	10
				75700	Training, Workshops and Confer	0	32,000	38,000	14,000	10,000	0	94,000	11
	Sub-total, Component 1 GEF					78,110	584,268	539,022	330,664	264,546	69,850	1,866,460	
Total Component 1						78,110	584,268	539,022	330,664	264,546	69,850	1,866,460	
Component 2: Improving the management framework to effectively conserve a national protected areas system representative of Cook Islands biodiversity	UNDP	62000	GEF	71200	International Consultants	1,800	37,800	28,200	16,200	0	0	84,000	12
	NES	62000	GEF	71300	Local Consultants	12,000	26,600	26,600	25,400	25,400	0	116,000	13
				71600	Travel	9,000	63,420	130,380	21,380	8,460	0	232,640	14
				71800	Contractual Services - Impl. Partner	11,540	21,902	23,144	24,386	25,628	14,455	121,055	15
				72100	Contractual Services - Companies	0	35,500	67,500	132,000	120,000	30,000	385,000	16
				72200	Equipment and Furniture	0	0	22,500	52,500	15,000	0	90,000	17
				74200	Audio Visual & Print Prod Costs	0	5,000	10,000	5,000	11,305	0	31,305	18
				75700	Training, Workshops and Confer	4,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	9,000	0	40,000	19
	Sub-total, Component 2 GEF					38,340	199,222	317,324	285,866	214,793	44,455	1,100,000	
Total Component 2						38,340	199,222	317,324	285,866	214,793	44,455	1,100,000	
Component 3: Raising awareness, managing knowledge, mainstreaming gender and	UNDP	62000	GEF	71200	International Consultants	0	1,950	1,650	1,650	750	0	6,000	20
	NES	62000	GEF	71300	Local Consultants	0	3,000	3,000	7,000	7,000	0	20,000	21
				71600	Travel	0	8,450	17,450	10,650	19,650	200	56,400	22
				71800	Contractual Services - Impl. Partner	3,860	6,628	6,996	7,364	7,732	4,730	37,310	23

Atlas Activity (GEF Component)	Atlas Implementing Agent	Atlas Fund ID	Donor Name	Atlas Budgetary Account Code	ATLAS Budget Description	Amount 2023 (USD)	Amount 2024 (USD)	Amount 2025 (USD)	Amount 2026 (USD)	Amount 2027 (USD)	Amount 2028 (USD)	Total (USD)	See Budget Note:
monitoring, evaluating and disseminating project results (excluding M&E: Output 4.3)				72100	Contractual Services - Companies	4,000	4,000	6,500	6,500	7,000	2,000	30,000	24
				72400	Communic & Audio Visual Equip	0	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	5,000	25
				72600	Grants	0	0	7,500	7,500	0	0	15,000	26
				74200	Audio Visual & Print Prod Costs	0	5,000	5,000	9,875	8,250	0	28,125	27
				75700	Training, Workshops and Confer	0	3,750	3,750	6,250	6,250	0	20,000	28
	Sub-total, Component 3 GEF (Outputs 4.1 and 4.2)					7,860	33,778	52,846	57,789	57,632	7,930	217,835	
Monitoring and Evaluation (Output 4.3)	UNDP	62000	GEF	71200	International Consultants	3,000	3,000	21,000	3,000	3,000	21,000	54,000	20
	UNDP	62000	GEF	71300	Local Consultants	0	2,500	12,500	2,500	2,500	10,000	30,000	21
				71600	Travel	4,610	1,680	14,010	1,680	1,680	9,400	33,060	22
				71800	Contractual Services - Impl. Partner	3,180	5,914	6,248	6,582	6,916	3,965	32,805	23
				75700	Training, Workshops and Confer	2,000	0	0	0	0	0	2,000	28
	Sub-total, Monitoring and Evaluation (Output 4.3)					12,790	13,094	53,758	13,762	14,096	44,365	151,865	
Total Component 3						20,650	46,872	106,604	71,551	71,728	52,295	369,700	
Project Management	NES	62000	GEF	71600	Travel	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	6,000	29
				71800	Contractual Services - Impl. Partner	16,320	17,136	17,952	18,768	19,584	18,360	108,120	30
				72500	Supplies	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	6,000	31
				72800	Information Technology Equipment	2,073	0	0	0	0	0	2,073	32
	UNDP	62000	GEF	74100	Professional Services	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	36,000	33
				74596	Services to projects - GOE	1,115	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	8,615	34
	Sub-total, Project Management GEF					27,508	26,636	27,452	28,268	29,084	27,860	166,808	
Total Project Management						27,508	26,636	27,452	28,268	29,084	27,860	166,808	
					PROJECT TOTAL	164,608	856,998	990,402	716,349	580,151	194,460	3,502,968	

Budget Note No.	Project output (Description)
Component 1:	
1	**71200. International consultants.** **Chief Technical Advisor**, for 34 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (sub-total: USD 102,000), providing technical and strategic advisory support to the development of new and amended policies, legislation, and strategies (Output 1.1); to the development and roll-out of the national environmental information system (NEIS) (Output 1.2); to the development and capacity building corresponding to the Island Environmental Management Plans (Output 1.3); to the execution and interpretation of the catchment audits (Output 2.1); development and implementation of the catchment management plans and the management plan for Manuae (2.2); and implementation of innovative practices (Output 2.3). **International Environmental Law and Policy Consultant**, providing environmental law and policy assistance in updating legislation and preparing draft derivative regulations and providing guidance for the conduct of the scoped SESA (Output 1.1), for 13 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (USD 39,000). **International Environmental Information Management Consultant**, carrying out a gender-sensitive feasibility assessment for the NEIS (Output 1.2), for 8 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (USD 24,000). **International IAS and Biosecurity Consultant**, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, build capacities, strengthen systems, and demonstrate management of invasive alien species, including developing guidelines on best practice planting, use and handling of agrochemicals, flood management, erosion prevention (Output 2.2), and providing advisory support for the planning and implementation of eradication of invasive rats (Output 2.3), for 7 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (USD 21,000).

Budget Note No.	Project output (Description)
	Total: USD 186,000
2	**71300. Local consultants.** **Gender-Safeguards Consultant**, for 23 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (sub-total: USD 46,000), providing gender mainstreaming and safeguards inputs to policy and legislation development and delivering gender mainstreaming training sessions (Output 1.1); to the development and implementation of the NEIS (Output 1.2); to the development and capacity building corresponding to the Island Environmental Management Plans (Output 1.3); to the development and communication of the catchment audits (Output 2.1); to the development and implementation of catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area (Output 2.2); and to the implementation of the innovative practices (Output 2.3). **Interpreter-Translator**, for 24 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (sub-total: USD 48,000), providing interpretation and translation services for stakeholder consultations, legislation development, and capacity building sessions (Output 1.1); for development and implementation of the NEIS (Output 1.2); for preparation and dissemination of Island Environmental Management Plans (Output 1.3); for the execution and communication of the catchment audits (Output 2.1); for the catchment management plans and management plan for Manuae (Output 2.2). **Environmental Law, Policy and Planning Consultant**, conducting the scoped SESA and providing technical and strategic advisory support to the development of new and amended policies, legislation, and strategies, finalizing the PAMP and facilitating consultations on the PACS, for 19 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (sub-total: USD 38,000); developing and integrating gender-responsive Island Environmental Management Plans into Island Development Plans (Atiu and 3 other outer islands – *Pa Enua*) (Output 1.3) for 20 weeks at USD 2,000 (sub-total: USD 40,000). **National Environmental Information Management Consultant**, supporting the development and roll-out of the NEIS, and assisting with populating data and information into the system (Output 1.2), for 20 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (USD 40,000). **Total: USD 212,000**
3	**71600. Travel.** Output 1.1. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (8 x USD 700: USD 5,600); international return flights (3 x USD 3,000: USD 9,000); national DSA (60 days x USD 200 per day: USD 12,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (30 days x USD 322 per day: USD 9,660); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga (20 days x USD 322: USD 6,440); other travel including ground transportation (USD 1,000). Output 1.2. International return flights (4 x USD 3,000: USD 12,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (20 days x USD 322 per day: USD 6,440); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga (30 days x USD 322: USD 9,660); other travel including ground transportation (USD 1,000). Output 1.3. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (16 x USD 700: USD 11,200); domestic return flights to the northern group of islands (16 x USD 3,000: USD 48,000); national DSA (60 days x USD 200 per day: USD 12,000). Output 2.1. International return flights (9 x USD 3,000: USD 27,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (15 days x USD 322 per day: USD 4,830); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga (80 days x USD 322: USD 25,760); other travel including ground transportation (USD 1,000). Output 2.2. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (4 x USD 700: USD 2,800); international return flight (1 x USD 3,000: USD 3,000); national DSA (20 days x USD 200 per day: USD 4,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga (10 days x USD 322: USD 3,220); boat travel to Manuae, including landing fees (2 x USD 1,500: USD 3,000); other travel including ground transportation (USD 2,000). Output 2.3. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (8 x USD 700: USD 5,600); international return flight (1 x USD 3,000: USD 3,000); national DSA (40 days x USD 200 per day: USD 8,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (15 days x USD 322: USD 4,830); boat travel to Manuae, including landing fees (8 x USD 1,500: USD 12,000); other travel including ground transportation (USD 4,000). **Total: USD 258,040**
4	**71800. Contractual Services – Implementing Partner.** **Technical Officer**, for 36 months out a total of 66 months at a gross salary of USD 2,500 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 101,880), supporting the development of amended and new policies, legislation and regulations, facilitating stakeholder engagement, etc. (Output 1.1); development and implementation of the NEIS (Output 1.2); development and capacity building corresponding to the Island Environmental Management Plans (Output 1.3); to the execution and interpretation of the catchment audits (Output 2.1); to the development and implementation of catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area (Output 2.2); and to the implementation of the innovative practices (Output 2.3). **KM-Communications Specialist**, for 32 months out a total of 60 months at a gross salary of USD 2,500 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 90,560), supporting communications and knowledge management associated with policy and legislation development (Output 1.1); development and implementation of the NEIS (Output 1.2); development and communications corresponding to the Island Environmental Management Plans (Output 1.3); to the execution and communication of the catchment audits (Output 2.1); to the development and implementation of catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area (Output 2.2); and to the implementation of the innovative practices (Output 2.3).

Budget Note No.	Project output (Description)
	Project Assistant-Finance Officer, for 12 months out of a total of 72 months at a gross salary of USD 2,000 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 27,030), providing support for the procurement, administration, partnership management, and other execution support for activities under Component 1. **Total: USD 219,470**
5	**72100. Contractual services – Companies.** Output 1.1. Develop and deliver capacity building e-courses, available for public sector officials, practitioners, NGOs and other stakeholders (USD 25,000). Output 1.2. Provide technical assistance for development of the inclusive NEIS; formulation of a sustainability roadmap for continuous improvement of the system, and delivery of training on the use of the system; interpretation of data, and management decisions (USD 100,000). Output 2.1. Design and conduct catchment audits of four priority catchments and deliver training to key stakeholders on interpretation of results, including development of e-courses (linked with Output 1.1) on freshwater ecology and water resource management (USD 120,000). Output 2.1. NGO or other contracted service provider, facilitating community meetings, providing technical assistance on catchment audits (USD 20,000). Output 2.2. Develop catchment management plans; provide advocacy and awareness-raising; design and deliver train-the-trainer sessions to key stakeholders (USD 60,000). Output 2.2. Develop of a gender responsive management plan for the Manuae Managed Area, through inclusive, participatory processes and based on an updated resource inventory (USD 15,000). Output 2.3. Implement specific management measures in the Manuae Managed Area, including eradication of invasive rats in target sites to protect globally significant biodiversity using proven, cost-efficient and effective methods (process to include a risk assessment, approval for agent release, and post-release monitoring), etc. (USD 75,000). **Total: USD 415,000**
6	**72200. Equipment and furniture.** Output 1.2. Technical equipment supporting the NEIS, including drones for aerial surveys, etc. (USD 15,000); workstations (USD 10,000). Output 2.1. Field analytical equipment for freshwater quality and ecology assessment and monitoring (USD 25,000). Output 2.3. Electric motorbike for transport to project sites (USD 5,000). **Total: USD 55,000**
7	**72400. Communication and Audio Visual Equipment.** Output 1.2. Information management system subscription services (e.g., ArcGIS) (USD 6,000 for 5 years: USD 30,000). **Total: USD 30,000**
8	**72600. Grants.** Output 2.3. Provide technical and low-value grant assistance for implementing innovative practices (e.g., soil conservation, climate resilient crops, water conservation, erosion control, organic fertilizers, community nurseries, invasive plant control with youth volunteers, women's groups, etc.). Low-value grants expected to be from USD 5,000-20,000 per grant. Estimate cost includes grant administration (USD 300,000). Grant activity will follow UNDP Low-Value Grants Policies and the Implementing Partner will be required to adhere to the on-granting provisions outlined in **Annex 27**. **Total: USD 300,000**
9	**72800. Information technology equipment.** Output 1.2. IT hardware components of the NEIS, including tablet computers for compliance team, etc. (USD 25,000). Output 2.1. IT equipment supporting the catchment monitoring and assessment capacities (USD 15,000). **Total: USD 40,000**
10	**74200. Audio visual & print production costs.** Output 1.1. Print production costs supporting capacity building efforts and dissemination of new and amended policies, legislation and regulations (USD 9,000). Output 1.2. Print production costs associated with development and communication of the NEIS (USD 5,000). Output 1.3. Print production costs associated with the Island Environmental Management Plans (USD 2,000). Output 2.1. Print production costs, disseminating audit results (USD 10,000). Output 2.2. Audio-visual and print production costs for advocating and awareness raising of the management plans (USD 10,000). Output 2.3. Audio-visual and print production costs, showcasing case studies of the innovative practices completed through the low-value grants (USD 20,950). **Total: USD 56,950**
11	**75700. Training, Workshop, Conference.** Output 1.1. Capacity building training sessions, workshops on policy and legislation, etc. (USD 20,000).

Budget Note No.	Project output (Description)
	Output 1.2. Workshops, training sessions on the NEIS (USD 15,000). Output 1.3. Stakeholder workshops, socializing the IEMPs in the Pa Enua (two events for each of the four islands) (USD 4,000). Output 2.1. Training, workshops on catchment audits (USD 15,000). Output 2.2. Capacity building training sessions, seminars regarding the development and implementation of the catchment management plans and the management plan for Manuae (USD 20,000). Output 2.3. Training workshops, capacity building on innovative practices (USD 20,000). **Total: USD 94,000**
Component 2:	
12	**71200. International consultants.** **Chief Technical Advisor**, for 18 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (sub-total: USD 54,000), providing technical and strategic advisory support to the development and implementation of PA management plans (Output 3.1); to building monitoring and surveillance capacities among PA's (Output 3.2); to the consultations and development of the proposed Cloud Forest PA (Output 3.3). **International PA Management Consultant**, providing technical assistance on capacity building activities involving best practices in PA management, monitoring and surveillance (Output 3.1), for 10 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (USD 30,000). **Total: USD 84,000**
13	**71300. Local consultants.** **Gender-Safeguards Consultant**, for 14 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (sub-total: USD 28,000), providing gender mainstreaming and safeguards inputs to the development and implementation of PA management plans (Output 3.1); to building monitoring and surveillance capacities among PA's (Output 3.2); to the consultations and development of the proposed Cloud Forest PA (Output 3.3). **Facilitation Consultant**, facilitating a series of consultations with both female and male landowners and other involved stakeholders on the declaring an agreed part of the Rarotonga Cloud Forest as a community conserved area (Output 3.3), for 30 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (USD 60,000). **Interpreter-Translator**, providing interpretation and translation services for the consultations and development of the proposed Cloud Forest PA (Output 3.3), for 4 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (USD 8,000). **Environmental Law, Policy and Planning Consultant**, providing technical assistance regarding the preparation of collaborative agreements and the management plan for the proposed Cloud Forest PA, for 10 weeks at USD 2,000 (sub-total: USD 20,000). **Total: USD 116,000**
14	**71600. Travel.** Output 3.1. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (10 x USD 700: USD 7,000); international return flight (1 x USD 3,000: USD 3,000); national DSA (200 days x USD 200 per day: USD 40,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (20 days x USD 322 per day: USD 6,440); one return travel to Suwarrow (USD 50,000); boat travel to Manuae and Takutea, including landing fees (2 x USD 1,500: USD 3,000). Output 3.2. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (8 x USD 700: USD 5,600); international return flights (2 x USD 3,000: USD 6,000); national DSA (60 days x USD 200 per day: USD 12,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (20 days x USD 322 per day: USD 6,440); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for IC (10 days x USD 322 per day: USD 3,220); one return travel to Suwarrow (USD 50,000); boat travel to Manuae and Takutea, including landing fees (4 x USD 1,500: USD 6,000). Output 3.3. International return flight for CTA (1 x USD 3,000: USD 3,000); international return flights for learning exchanges (5 x USD 3,000: USD 15,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (20 days x USD 322 per day: USD 6,440); international DSA-abroad (25 days x USD 300 per day: USD 7,500); other travel expenses including ground transportation (USD 2,000). **Total: USD 232,640**
15	**71800. Contractual Services – Implementing Partner.** **Technical Officer**, for 22 months out a total of 66 months at a gross salary of USD 2,500 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 62,260), supporting the development and implementation of PA management plans (Output 3.1); to building monitoring and surveillance capacities among PA's (Output 3.2); to the consultations and development of the proposed Cloud Forest PA (Output 3.3). **KM-Communications Specialist**, for 16 months out a total of 60 months at a gross salary of USD 2,500 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 45,280), supporting the development and implementation of PA management plans (Output 3.1); to building monitoring and surveillance capacities among PA's (Output 3.2); to the consultations and development of the proposed Cloud Forest PA (Output 3.3). **Project Assistant-Finance Officer**, for 6 months out of a total of 72 months at a gross salary of USD 2,000 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 13,515), providing support for the procurement, administration, partnership management, and other execution support for activities under Component 2. **Total: USD 121,055**

Budget Note No.	Project output (Description)
16	**72100. Contractual services – Companies.** Output 3.1. Develop an updated gender responsive management plan for the Suwarrow National Park, through inclusive, participatory processes and based on updated resource inventories (USD 15,000). Output 3.1. Develop a gender responsive management plan for the Takutea CCA, through inclusive, participatory processes and based on updated resource inventories (USD 15,000). Output 3.1. Support implementation of specific management measures to protected globally significant terrestrial and marine biodiversity, e.g., replanting of native species, establishing sustainable harvesting controls, community beach clean-ups, rehabilitating coastal and near-shore vegetation, etc. (USD 150,000). Output 3.1. Implement eradication of invasive rats in target sites areas to protect globally significant biodiversity using proven, cost-efficient and effective methods; process will include a risk assessment, rat eradication plan, approval of the plan and for agent release, and post-release monitoring (USD 150,000). Output 3.2. Conduct feasibility study, deliver remote surveillance systems, deliver training, assess initial operation, and build out full systems (USD 40,000). Output 3.3. Update the resource inventory of the proposed community conserved area, focusing on surveying globally significant biodiversity (USD 15,000). **Total: USD 385,000**
17	**72200. Equipment and furniture.** Output 3.2. Remote surveillance systems (up to three PA's) (USD 75,000); monitoring equipment for PA's (USD 15,000). **Total: USD 90,000**
18	**74200. Audio visual & print production costs.** Output 3.1. Print production for the management plans (USD 5,000). Output 3.2. Print production costs on the surveillance and monitoring systems (USD 6,305). Output 3.3. Print production costs for an information package for socializing the proposed community conserved area (USD 20,000). **Total: USD 31,305**
19	**75700. Training, Workshop, Conference.** Output 3.1. Workshops for launching the management plans (USD 10,000). Output 3.2. Training sessions, workshops delivered to PA management and staff, local communities, and landowners (USD 10,000). Output 3.3. Workshops with landowners and other stakeholders (USD 20,000). **Total: USD 40,000**
Component 3:	
20	**71200. International consultants.** **Chief Technical Advisor**, for 8 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (sub-total: USD 24,000), providing technical and strategic advisory support to the development and implementation of the knowledge management and communications plan (Output 4.1); to the development and dissemination of knowledge products (Output 4.2); to the project inception workshop and report, project progress reports, and monitoring and evaluation of project performance (Output 4.3). **International Midterm Review Consultant**, leading the project midterm review (Output 4.3), for 6 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (USD 18,000). **International Terminal Evaluation Consultant**, leading the project terminal evaluation (Output 4.3), for 6 weeks at USD 3,000 per week (USD 18,000). **Total: USD 6,000**
21	**71300. Local consultants.** **Gender-Safeguards Consultant**, for 11 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (sub-total: USD 22,000), providing gender mainstreaming and safeguards inputs to development and implementation of the knowledge management and communications plan (Output 4.1); to the development and dissemination of knowledge products (Output 4.2); to the project inception workshop and report, project progress reports, and monitoring and evaluation of project performance (Output 4.3). **Facilitation Consultant**, facilitating traditional knowledge consultations (Output 4.2), for 4 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (USD 8,000). **National Midterm Review Consultant**, supporting the project midterm review (Output 4.3), for 5 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (USD 10,000). **National Terminal Evaluation Consultant**, supporting the project terminal evaluation (Output 4.3), for 5 weeks at USD 2,000 per week (USD 10,000). **Total: USD 50,000**
22	**71600. Travel.** Output 4.1. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (4 x USD 700: USD 2,800); domestic return flights to the northern group of islands (4 x USD 3,000: USD 12,000); national DSA (16 days x USD 200 per day: USD 3,200); other travel expenses including ground transportation (USD 1,000).

Budget Note No.	Project output (Description)
	Output 4.2. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (2 x USD 700: USD 1,400); international return flights abroad (8 x USD 3,000: USD 24,000); international DSA abroad (30 days at USD 300 per day: USD 9,000; boat travel to Manuae and/or Takutea, including landing fees (2 x USD 1,500: USD 3,000). Output 4.3. Domestic return flights to the southern group of islands (6 x USD 700: USD 4,200); international return flight for CTA (2 x USD 3,000: USD 6,000); international return flight for MTR and TE consultants (2 x USD 3,000: USD 6,000); national DSA (20 days at USD 200 per day: USD 4,000); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga for CTA (10 days x USD 322 per day: USD 3,220); international-UNDP DSA Rarotonga (20 days at USD 322 per day: USD 6,440); boat travel to Manuae and/or Takutea, including landing fees (2 x USD 1,500: USD 3,000); other travel expenses including ground transportation (USD 200). **Total: USD 89,460**
23	**71800. Contractual Services – Implementing Partner.** **Technical Officer**, for 8 months out a total of 66 months at a gross salary of USD 2,500 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 22,640), supporting the development and implementation of the knowledge management and communications plan (Output 4.1); to the development and dissemination of knowledge products (Output 4.2); to the project inception workshop and report, project progress reports, and monitoring and evaluation of project performance (Output 4.3). **KM-Communications Specialist**, for 12 months out a total of 60 months at a gross salary of USD 2,500 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 33,960), supporting the development and implementation of the knowledge management and communications plan (Output 4.1); to the development and dissemination of knowledge products (Output 4.2); to the project inception workshop and report, project progress reports, and monitoring and evaluation of project performance (Output 4.3). **Project Assistant-Finance Officer**, for 6 months out of a total of 72 months at a gross salary of USD 2,000 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6 (sub-total: USD 13,515), providing support for the procurement, administration, partnership management, and other execution support for activities under Component 3. **Total: USD 70,115**
24	**72100. Contractual services – Companies.** Output 4.1. Local KM and communications support, administering the KAP survey, developing the KM and Communications Strategy and Action Plans, website and social media support and analysis, organizing advocacy and awareness-raising events and workshops (USD 20,000). Output 4.1. Organizing citizen science events, e.g., for youth groups on identification of priority species, invasives, etc. (USD 5,000). Output 4.2. Support in the preparation of knowledge products, including case studies, traditional biodiversity, gender mainstreaming, etc. (USD 5,000). **Total: USD 30,000**
25	**72400. Communication and Audio Visual Equipment.** Output 4.2. Connectivity charges, email subscriptions, etc. (USD 5,000). **Total: USD 5,000**
26	**72600. Grants.** Output 4.2 Support tertiary education courses and other learning experiences (USD 15,000). Grant activity will follow UNDP Low-Value Grants Policies and the Implementing Partner will be required to adhere to the on-granting provisions outlined in **Annex 27**. **Total: USD 15,000**
27	**74200. Audio visual & print production costs.** Output 4.1. Communication materials, such as short videos, factsheets, guide books, photo exhibits, Māori language books and cartoons, etc. (USD 20,000). Output 4.2. Audio visual and print production costs for KM products (USD 8,125). **Total: USD 28,125**
28	**75700. Training, Workshop, Conference.** Output 4.1. Workshops, awareness-raising events (USD 15,000). Output 4.2. Workshops, conferences for disseminating knowledge products generated by the project (USD 5,000). Output 4.3. Inception workshop (USD 2,000). **Total: USD 22,000**
Project Management:	
29	**71600. Travel** Local travel expenses associated with the operations of the Project Management Unit during the 6-year implementation timeframe, at USD 1,000 per year.

Budget Note No.	Project output (Description)
	Total: USD 6,000
30	**71800. Contractual services – Implementing Partner.** **Project Assistant-Finance Officer,** for 66.7% of the time for this full-time position, at a gross salary of USD 2,000 per month, with a 5% cost of living adjustment starting from year 2 and extending through year 6. **Total: USD 108,120**
31	**72500. Supplies.** Costs of office supplies for the Project Management Unit during the 6-year implementation timeframe, at USD 1,000 per year **Total: USD 6,000**
32	**72800. Information technology equipment.** Information technology equipment (e.g., workstation, including laptop, printer-scanner, projector, etc.) for the Project Assistant-Finance Officer. **Total: USD 2,073**
33	**74100. Professional services.** Financial audits and spot-checks during the 6-year project implementation timeframe, at USD 6,000 per year. **Total: USD 36,000**
34	**74596. Services to projects - GOE** UNDP support services to the Government (IP) for the recruitment and recurrent management services of international consultants and other services on the project. The support services will be provided based on the IP request and are calculated on the basis of estimated actual or transaction-based costs. See Agreement in Annex 29 for details. **Total: USD 8,615**

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X. LEGAL CONTEXT

271. The project document shall be the instrument envisaged and defined in the Supplemental Provisions to the Project Document, attached hereto and forming an integral part hereof, as "the Project Document".

272. This project will be implemented by the **National Environment Service** ("Implementing Partner") in accordance with its financial regulations, rules, practices and procedures only to the extent that they do not contravene the principles of the Financial Regulations and Rules of UNDP. Where the financial governance of an Implementing Partner does not provide the required guidance to ensure best value for money, fairness, integrity, transparency, and effective international competition, the financial governance of UNDP shall apply.

273. The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations or UNDP concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

XI. RISK MANAGEMENT

1. Consistent with the Article III of the Supplemental Provisions to the Project Document, the responsibility for the safety and security of the Implementing Partner and its personnel and property, and of UNDP's property in the Implementing Partner's custody, rests with the Implementing Partner. To this end, the Implementing Partner shall:
   a) put in place an appropriate security plan and maintain the security plan, taking into account the security situation in the country where the project is being carried out.
   b) assume all risks and liabilities related to the Implementing Partner's security, and the full implementation of the security plan.

2. UNDP reserves the right to verify whether such a plan is in place, and to suggest modifications to the plan when necessary. Failure to maintain and implement an appropriate security plan as required hereunder shall be deemed a breach of the Implementing Partner's obligations under this Project Document.

3. The Implementing Partner agrees to undertake all reasonable efforts to ensure that no UNDP funds received pursuant to the Project Document are used to provide support to individuals or entities associated with terrorism and that the recipients of any amounts provided by UNDP hereunder do not appear on the list maintained by the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999). The list can be accessed via http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/aq_sanctions_list.shtml.

4. The Implementing Partner acknowledges and agrees that UNDP will not tolerate sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse of anyone by the Implementing Partner, and each of its responsible parties, their respective sub-recipients and other entities involved in Project implementation, either as contractors or subcontractors and their personnel, and any individuals performing services for them under the Project Document.
   a. In the implementation of the activities under this Project Document, the Implementing Partner, and each of its sub-parties referred to above, shall comply with the standards of conduct set forth in the Secretary General's Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13 of 9 October 2003, concerning "Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse" ("SEA").

   b. Moreover, and without limitation to the application of other regulations, rules, policies and procedures bearing upon the performance of the activities under this Project Document, in the implementation of activities, the Implementing Partner, and each of its sub-parties referred to above, shall not engage in any form of sexual harassment ("SH"). SH is defined as any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offense or humiliation, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

5. a) In the performance of the activities under this Project Document, the Implementing Partner shall (with respect to its own activities), and shall require from its sub-parties referred to in paragraph 4 (with respect to their activities) that they, have minimum standards and procedures in place, or a plan to develop and/or improve such standards and procedures in order to be able to take effective preventive and investigative action. These should include: policies on sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse; policies on whistleblowing/protection against retaliation; and complaints, disciplinary and investigative mechanisms. In line with this, the Implementing Partner will and will require that such sub-parties will take all appropriate measures to:

i. Prevent its employees, agents or any other persons engaged to perform any services under this Project Document, from engaging in SH or SEA;

ii. Offer employees and associated personnel training on prevention and response to SH and SEA, where the Implementing Partner and its sub-parties referred to in paragraph 4 have not put in place its own training regarding the prevention of SH and SEA, the Implementing Partner and its sub-parties may use the training material available at UNDP;

iii. Report and monitor allegations of SH and SEA of which the Implementing Partner and its sub-parties referred to in paragraph 4 have been informed or have otherwise become aware, and status thereof;

iv. Refer victims/survivors of SH and SEA to safe and confidential victim assistance; and

v. Promptly and confidentially record and investigate any allegations credible enough to warrant an investigation of SH or SEA. The Implementing Partner shall advise UNDP of any such allegations received and investigations being conducted by itself or any of its sub-parties referred to in paragraph 4 with respect to their activities under the Project Document, and shall keep UNDP informed during the investigation by it or any of such sub-parties, to the extent that such notification (i) does not jeopardize the conduct of the investigation, including but not limited to the safety or security of persons, and/or (ii) is not in contravention of any laws applicable to it. Following the investigation, the Implementing Partner shall advise UNDP of any actions taken by it or any of the other entities further to the investigation.

6. b) The Implementing Partner shall establish that it has complied with the foregoing, to the satisfaction of UNDP, when requested by UNDP or any party acting on its behalf to provide such confirmation. Failure of the Implementing Partner, and each of its sub-parties referred to in paragraph 4, to comply of the foregoing, as determined by UNDP, shall be considered grounds for suspension or termination of the Project.

7. Social and environmental sustainability will be enhanced through application of the UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (http://www.undp.org/ses) and related Accountability Mechanism (http://www.undp.org/secu-srm).

8. The Implementing Partner shall: (a) conduct project and programme-related activities in a manner consistent with the UNDP Social and Environmental Standards, (b) implement any management or mitigation plan prepared for the project or programme to comply with such standards, and (c) engage in a constructive and timely manner to address any concerns and complaints raised through the Accountability Mechanism. UNDP will seek to ensure that communities and other project stakeholders are informed of and have access to the Accountability Mechanism.

9. All signatories to the Project Document shall cooperate in good faith with any exercise to evaluate any programme or project-related commitments or compliance with the UNDP Social and Environmental Standards. This includes providing access to project sites, relevant personnel, information, and documentation.

10. The Implementing Partner will take appropriate steps to prevent misuse of funds, fraud or corruption, by its officials, consultants, responsible parties, subcontractors and sub-recipients in implementing the project or using UNDP funds. The Implementing Partner will ensure that its financial management, anti-corruption and anti-fraud policies are in place and enforced for all funding received from or through UNDP.

11. The requirements of the following documents, then in force at the time of signature of the Project Document, apply to the Implementing Partner: (a) UNDP Policy on Fraud and other Corrupt Practices and (b)

UNDP Office of Audit and Investigations Investigation Guidelines. The Implementing Partner agrees to the requirements of the above documents, which are an integral part of this Project Document and are available online at www.undp.org.

12. In the event that an investigation is required, UNDP has the obligation to conduct investigations relating to any aspect of UNDP projects and programmes in accordance with UNDP's regulations, rules, policies and procedures. The Implementing Partner shall provide its full cooperation, including making available personnel, relevant documentation, and granting access to the Implementing Partner's (and its consultants', responsible parties', subcontractors' and sub-recipients') premises, for such purposes at reasonable times and on reasonable conditions as may be required for the purpose of an investigation. Should there be a limitation in meeting this obligation, UNDP shall consult with the Implementing Partner to find a solution.

13. The signatories to this Project Document will promptly inform one another in case of any incidence of inappropriate use of funds, or credible allegation of fraud or corruption with due confidentiality.

14. Where the Implementing Partner becomes aware that a UNDP project or activity, in whole or in part, is the focus of investigation for alleged fraud/corruption, the Implementing Partner will inform the UNDP Resident Representative/Head of Office, who will promptly inform UNDP's Office of Audit and Investigations (OAI). The Implementing Partner shall provide regular updates to the head of UNDP in the country and OAI of the status of, and actions relating to, such investigation.

15. UNDP shall be entitled to a refund from the Implementing Partner of any funds provided that have been used inappropriately, including through fraud or corruption, or otherwise paid other than in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Project Document. Such amount may be deducted by UNDP from any payment due to the Implementing Partner under this or any other agreement. Recovery of such amount by UNDP shall not diminish or curtail the Implementing Partner's obligations under this Project Document.

16. Where such funds have not been refunded to UNDP, the Implementing Partner agrees that donors to UNDP (including the Government) whose funding is the source, in whole or in part, of the funds for the activities under this Project Document, may seek recourse to the Implementing Partner for the recovery of any funds determined by UNDP to have been used inappropriately, including through fraud or corruption, or otherwise paid other than in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Project Document.

Note: The term "Project Document" as used in this clause shall be deemed to include any relevant subsidiary agreement further to the Project Document, including those with responsible parties, subcontractors and sub-recipients.

17. Each contract issued by the Implementing Partner in connection with this Project Document shall include a provision representing that no fees, gratuities, rebates, gifts, commissions or other payments, other than those shown in the proposal, have been given, received, or promised in connection with the selection process or in contract execution, and that the recipient of funds from the Implementing Partner shall cooperate with any and all investigations and post-payment audits.

18. Should UNDP refer to the relevant national authorities for appropriate legal action any alleged wrongdoing relating to the project, the Government will ensure that the relevant national authorities shall actively investigate the same and take appropriate legal action against all individuals found to have participated in the wrongdoing, recover and return any recovered funds to UNDP.

19. The Implementing Partner shall ensure that all of its obligations set forth under this section entitled "Risk Management" are passed on to each responsible party, subcontractor and sub-recipient and that all the clauses under this section entitled "Risk Management Standard Clauses" are included, *mutatis mutandis*, in all sub-contracts or sub-agreements entered into further to this Project Document.

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XII. MANDATORY ANNEXES

Annex 1: GEF Budget template
Annex 2: Project map and geospatial coordinates of project sites
Annex 3: Multiyear Workplan
Annex 4: UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP)
Annex 5: UNDP Risk Register
Annex 6: Overview of Project Staff and Technical Consultancies
Annex 7: Stakeholder Engagement Plan
Annex 8: Stakeholder consultations during project preparation phase
Annex 9: Gender analysis and gender action plan
Annex 10: Procurement plan
Annex 11: Climate and disaster screening report
Annex 12: COVID-19 analysis and action framework
Annex 13: Baseline report on the target catchments, managed areas, and protected areas
Annex 14: METT baseline assessments
Annex 15: Report on assessment of management status of target protected and managed areas
Annex 16: Rat eradication background information
Annex 17: Report on rapid knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey
Annex 18: Institutional and governance profile
Annex 19: Capacity baseline and needs assessment
Annex 20: Report on rapid socioeconomic assessment
Annex 21: Estimation of greenhouse gas emissions mitigated
Annex 22: GEF 7 Core Indicator Worksheet
Annex 23: GEF 7 taxonomy
Annex 24: Additional agreements (co-financing letters)
Annex 25: Partner capacity assessment tool and HACT assessment
Annex 26: UNDP checklist for all projects pending GEF approval
Annex 27: On-granting provisions applicable to the Implementing Partner
Annex 28: GEF execution support letter
Annex 29: Signed LOA between UNDP and IP requesting UNDP Support Services
Annex 30: Design & appraisal stage quality assurance report
Annex 31: Project cooperation agreement signed with the University of Newcastle Australia
Annex 32: MFEM Grant Management Policy and Procedures
Annex 33: Knowledge management and communications strategy framework