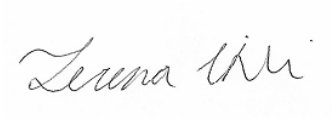
Cook Islands GEF 7 Project ENUA

2nd Quarter Progress Report 2025

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Project Number/Code:	10780
PIMS #:	6565
Executing Agency:	Cook Islands National Environment Service
Full Project Title:	Enhancing biodiversity considerations and effective protected area management, to safeguard the cook islands integrated eco-systems and species



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SECTION 1: SUMMARY OF PROGRESS AND HIGHLIGHTS

1.1 Meeting with NES Biodiversity Technical Specialist Cenon

UNDP-Samoa engaged an international Biodiversity Technical Specialist who visited the Cook Islands for a week in April to provide direct support to the Project ENUA Team. During his visit, he helped develop coordination protocols, led the preparation of 10 consultant Terms of Reference (TORs), and supported the project's Knowledge Management and Communication Strategy.

He also provided technical input on project activities, helped align work plans with project goals, and contributed to developing knowledge products. Weekly meetings were held to track progress, and consultancy roles were shared among team members to ensure fairness and build capacity. This support has strengthened the team and prepared us for upcoming consultant recruitment.

1.2 Rarotonga Southern Passages Management Plan Review

The National Environment Service (NES) is pleased to announce the release of the Rarotonga Southern Passages Environmental Management Plan 2025–2028 for public consultation and comment.

In 2024, NES initiated public consultation on the Plan, with our local consultants taking the lead on community consultations and NES providing support. This approach, backed by Project ENUA (a GEF-funded programme), ensured the Plan is grounded in community insights and aligned with national priorities.

The Plan offers a strategic framework to conserve and manage key marine turtle habitats in Rarotonga's Ava'avaroa, Rutaki, and Papua passages, balancing ecological protection with sustainable tourism, stakeholder engagement, and compliance.

To review the eDM written to notify the public and encourage feedback click here.

1.3 Global Environment Facility (GEF) Constituency Meeting

The Cook Islands National Environment Service (NES) hosted the GEF Asia-Pacific Operational Focal Point (OFP) Training Workshop on 13–14 May 2025 at the Edgewater Resort in Rarotonga. The workshop brought together representatives from across the region to strengthen their capacity in accessing, managing, and overseeing GEF-funded projects. The event highlighted the Cook Islands' active role in environmental leadership, with NES currently executing three major GEF projects: Project ENUA (GEF-7), Project RESPONSE (GEF-8), and GEF Islands. High-level guests, including regional ministers and GEF officials, attended the opening. The first day featured technical sessions on project management, while day two included a field visit to the Takitumu Conservation Area to showcase past and ongoing GEF

initiatives. The workshop concluded with preparations for the GEF Pacific Constituency meetings and discussions ahead of the upcoming GEF Council.



To review the eDM for the GEF Constituency Meeting click here.

1.5 Recruitment of interim Chief Technical Advisor

The April project steering committee meeting agreed to transfer procurement responsibility of the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) from UNDP to NES. An interim CTA was contracted by NES shortly afterwards in May to support immediate project activity priorities until August 2025. These include developing Management Effectiveness Tracking Tools (METT) implementation plans, capacity scorecard implementation plans, Project Implementation Report (PIR) 2025 input, and general technical and strategic support to the team.

The consultant, Keith Twyford, supported the Cook Islands GEF5 Ridge to Reef (R2R) project as CTA, so has good background knowledge and understanding of the Cook Islands biodiversity and protected areas context. Keith visited the Cook Islands from 3–10 June 2025 to support the team. During his stay,

he provided helpful training and shared expert advice on how we can better protect and manage our environment. His visit was a great opportunity for the team to learn and plan next steps for the project. We're thankful for his support and look forward to continued work with him.

1.6 Advertisement of the Gender Safeguards Consultant

The GEF 7 Project ENUA advertised the Gender Safeguards Consultant position through Cook Islands News, NES social media platforms (including the NES Facebook page), the Government Procurement Portal, and the NES Careers webpage to ensure wide visibility. The role seeks an experienced consultant to provide strategic guidance on gender integration, including the development of a Gender Action Plan, delivery of stakeholder training, and input into gender-related aspects of project documents and reporting. The Project ENUA team is currently in the process of reviewing applications as part of the selection process.

1.7 Advertisement of the Social and Environmental Safeguards Assessment (SESA) Consultant

The GEF 7 Project ENUA also advertised the Social and Environmental Safeguards Assessment (SESA) Consultant position through Cook Islands News, NES social media platforms, the Government Procurement Portal, and the NES Careers webpage. The primary objective of this consultancy is to conduct a comprehensive assessment to ensure the project complies with national policies and UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards. The assessment will identify potential risks and impacts associated with project activities and recommend mitigation measures. The consultant will deliver a final SESA report with actionable recommendations. The Project Enua Team is currently reviewing the applications received for this role.

1.8 Project Steering Committee Meeting

Two Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings were held this quarter, one on 30th April and again on 19th June, which helped keep the project on track and ensure good communication with all partners. During these meetings, the revised 2025 Annual Work Plan was approved, allowing NES to move forward with hiring important consultants. Members also reviewed the latest project and financial updates covering activities from late 2024 to mid-2025. The meetings included useful discussions about upcoming work, like the catchment audits, the Rarotonga Southern Passages Management Plan, and ways to involve students in environmental projects through a partnership with Tereora College and Korero o te Orau. Draft documents on how the project team and partners work together, and how to handle any complaints, were shared for feedback. These two meetings helped tick off outstanding tasks and build stronger coordination for the rest of the year.

1.9 UNDP Social and Environmental Safeguards (SES) Training

From June 25th to 27th, we participated in a UNDP training in Apia, Samoa focused on Social and Environmental Standards (SES). The training emphasized managing project risks while ensuring inclusive development and safeguarding vulnerable groups. We covered key areas such as risk screening, grievance mechanisms, and obtaining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. We also reviewed how our project activities align with SES requirements, including gender and environmental safeguards. Site visits showcased government initiatives in electric vehicle infrastructure, biosecurity, and environmental management. Overall, the training reinforced the importance of inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and good governance to support effective and sustainable project outcomes.



To review the eDM for the GEF SES Training held in Apia, Samoa click here.

SECTION 2: OUTPUT RESULTS DESCRIPTION & TRACKING

This quarter's activities contributed towards the following project components, outcomes and outputs:

Output	***Activity***
Component 1: Mainstreaming safeguards to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services across key development sectors.	
Outcome 1: Biodiversity and ecosystems services safeguards embedded in national and island governance frameworks, and policies, and institutional capacities strengthen across key development sectors (i.e., agriculture, infrastructure, tourism)	
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.	• Meeting with NES Biodiversity Technical Specialist Cenon • Rarotonga Southern Passages Environmental Management Plan Review • Project Steering Committee Meeting • GEF Constituency Meeting • Gender Safeguards Consultant • SESA Consultant • UNDP Social and Environmental Safeguards Training
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 development processes.	• Visit by the Biodiversity Technical Specialist (Cenon) • Development of METT & Capacity Scorecard Implementation Plans (with CTA Keith)
Output 1.3: Execution and communication of the catchment audits	• Inter-agency Lagoon & Stream Monitoring Meeting • Technical discussions on monitoring tools

Outcome 2: Ecosystems services restored, maintained and enhanced, and globally significant biodiversity safeguarded in priority catchments and managed areas	
Output 2.1: Audits completed for priority catchments, with key pollutant sources (including nutrients) and responsible parties identified and interventions prescribed (linked to output 1.1).	• Biodiversity Technical Specialist and Chief Technical Advisor provided guidance on audit planning • Project Steering Committee • GEF meetings helped inform audit focus and priorities
Output 2.2: Intersectoral catchment management plans and a management plan for the Manuae Managed Area developed and implemented in partnership with key stakeholders.	• Recruitment of Gender Safeguards and Social & Environmental Safeguards consultants is in progress to support audit and intervention activities.
Output 2.3: Improved gender sensitive natural resource management in priority catchments and the Manuae Managed Area achieved through adoption of innovative practices	• Gender Safeguards Consultant position advertised • Training and technical support provided by Chief Technical Advisor Keith
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 systems	
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.	• Rarotonga Southern Passages Environmental Management Plan 2025–2028 • Biodiversity Technical Specialist and Chief Technical Advisor, working to align management plans with project goals, gender mainstreaming, and traditional governance systems including the House of Ariki. • Consultations continue with landowners and local communities to ensure collaborative governance arrangements.
Output 3.2: Management capacities in target Pas strengthened through application of PAC, PAMP, and tools (e.g., NEIS), and training and systems on	• Biodiversity Technical Specialist and Chief Technical Advisor provided training and guidance to the Project ENUA team on tools and systems such as the Protected Area Category (PAC), Protected Area Management

biodiversity conservation, surveillance and monitoring.	Plans (PAMP), and the National Environment Information System (NEIS).
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.	• Progress continues on establishing the Rarotonga Cloud Forest Protected Area (PA) as a community conserved area. • Work is underway to align management plans with community priorities and support sustainable conservation efforts in the Cloud Forest area.
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 biodiversity and ecosystem services; adaptive management informed by M&E results; and dissemination of knowledge gained, and lessons learned.	
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	• Gender-responsive Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy.
Output 4.2: Gender-sensitive knowledge and information products on processes, best practices, innovations, lessons learned, and project findings developed and disseminated to stakeholders.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Output 4.3: Participatory monitoring and evaluation, including gender mainstreaming, informs project implementation, decision-making and lessons learned	• Strengthening gender-sensitive monitoring with help from technical advisors. • Project Steering Committee and GEF meetings reviewed progress. • Gender and safeguards consultants recruitment underway. • Lessons from management plan review used to improve project actions.

SECTION 3: INDICATOR RESULTS DESCRIPTION & TRACKING

46% (7/15) of project indicators.

Indicator #	Indicator Description	Progress
Indicator 1	Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use. - Cloud Forest - Suwarrow - Takutea - Takitumu Conservation Area	The following activities contribute to this indicator: the Biodiversity Specialist's visit to support Project ENUA and prepare consultant TORs; the Rarotonga Southern Passages Management Plan released for public consultation; the Project Steering Committee meeting reviewing progress and finances; NES hosting the GEF regional training workshop in May, including a site visit to Takitumu; Chief Technical Advisor Keith's visit in June, providing training and guidance; and the advertisement and ongoing review of applications for the Gender Safeguards and SESA Consultant positions.
Indicator 2	Marine protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use. - Suwarrow - Takutea - Manuae	No changes this period; ongoing efforts continue to support management and conservation at Suwarrow, Takutea, and Manuae marine protected areas.
Indicator 3	Area of landscapes under improved practices - Avana - Turangi - Avatiu	No significant changes reported this period; ongoing planning and support activities are laying

	- Takuvaine	the groundwork for future improvements in these catchments.
Indicator 4	Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (hectares; excluding protected areas) - Avana - Turangi - Avatiu - Takuvaine	No new improvements reported yet for marine habitats outside protected areas
Indicator 5	Greenhouse emissions mitigated.	No specific greenhouse gas mitigation activities reported this period
Indicator 6	Number of direct project beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as a co-benefit of GEF investment	Project ENUA engaged local teams and stakeholders through training sessions and consultations, with efforts underway to integrate gender considerations in upcoming activities. Beneficiary data disaggregated by gender is being tracked as part of ongoing project monitoring.
Indicator 7	Legislation, policies and safeguard measures adopted and under implementation in - catchment management plans; - PA management plans; and - Island Environment Management Plans (IEMPs, within Island Development Plans [IDPs]).	Rarotonga Southern Passages Management Plan released for public consultation, integrating community input and aligning with national priorities.
Indicator 8	Regulations developed or updated to reflect strengthened biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.

Indicator 9	Improved capacities of key development sectors, as measured by improvements in capacity development scorecard assessments of (a) NES, (b) CIT, (c) MOA, (D) ICI.	New rules to better protect nature are currently being made.
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.	Work is ongoing to include priority actions in the work plans and budgets of NES, MOA, ICI, and CIT.
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.	The activities from this quarter support sustainable resource management by encouraging innovative conservation practices, reducing harmful chemical use, and promoting eco-certified tourism, helping protect the environment while supporting local communities
Indicator 12	Improved science-based protected area management, as measured by information on biodiversity resource inventories and vegetative area/cover systematically compiled.	The engagement of the Biodiversity Technical Specialist and the Rarotonga Southern Passages Management Plan review.
Indicator 13	Biodiversity threats reduced, as measured by the number of sites reporting absence of invasive rats after eradication interventions.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Indicator 14	Level of agreement to the following statement: Conservation areas/Ra'ui have improved the status of ecological systems in the Cook Islands.	No activities conducted this quarter directly contributed towards this indicator.
Indicator 15	Increase in flow of knowledge and information on best practices, as	The Project Enua webpage has been performing well, ranking among the top 10 most viewed

	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.)	pages on the NES website from 01 May 2023 to 30 June 2025, with a total of 742 views. Out of these, 425 unique visitors interacted with the page, averaging 1.75 views per user, which indicates that visitors are engaging with the content multiple times. The average engagement time per active user was 48 seconds, suggesting a reasonable level of attention to the page. As for the communications materials developed under the project, notable products include the Careers Expo students brochure, two NES pull-up banners, and four A3 factsheets. These efforts contribute to the visibility and outreach of Project Enua.

SECTION 4: FINANCIAL SUMMARY AND PROGRESS

On 31st March 2025 we received an in-country balance of NZ$992,063.92, representing $494,365.29 for Q1 and Q2 Advance of $497,698.63. We also received on 1st April 2025 $101,146.19 which was a reimbursement for funds fully utilised and liquidated within the Q4 2024.

A summary of this expenditure across components and budget lines was initially reported to the Project Steering Committee (PSC) on 30th April 2025 and forms part of the endorsed PSC meeting minutes (refer to Annex 1), with a summary provided below:

Narration	*NZ$ Amount*	*% budget*
Total amount received Q1 & Q2	$ 992,063.92	100%
Q1 liquidation	$ 21939.41	2%
Remaining balance Q1 &Q2	**$ 970,124.51**	98%
Q2 expenditure	$ 101,788.95	21%
	$ 868,335.56	
Remaining balance		59%

Component	***Expenditure (NZ$)***		***%***
Comp 1	$ 59,080.88		58%
Comp 2	$ 4026.75		4%
Comp 3	$ 22,091.67		22%
M&E	$ 10,703.35		11%
PMU	$ 5886.30		6%
Total	***$ 101788.95***		***100%***

Budget line	***Expenditure (NZ$)***	***%***
Contractual Services - company		34%
Contractual Services - implementing partner		49%
Supplies		.0%
Advertising		9%
Trainings & workshops		3%
Travel		5%
Total		***100%***

As can be seen from the information presented above, the majority of this expenditure was on Component 1 and Contractual Services - Company, which consisted of Small Grant payments to the Korero O te Orau, MEC, TIS & TPVM for the delivery of services in the Youth Environment & Turtle Management Environment Plan activities.

The project team expended & liquidated the additional advance requested for remaining Q4 funds to UNDP, amounting to **$101,146.19**.

SECTION 5: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT & GENDER

From April to June, our Project ENUA and NES team were busy progressing different parts of the GEF7 work, holding and attending over 12 meetings with more than 60 participants in total, more than half of whom were women. We caught up with our biodiversity consultant, Cenon Padolina, to go over METT scoring and upcoming activities, and spent time reviewing our 2025 work plan and the Rarotonga Southern Passage Turtle Management Plan. We also had some great discussions with stakeholders like Cook Islands Tourism, Muri Environment Care, and MECT to align efforts and explore where we can provide support. One of the key highlights was a lagoon and stream monitoring workshop that brought together agencies to share updates and look at ways to collaborate more effectively. Additionally, the Project ENUA webpage performed well, ranking in the top 10 most viewed pages on the NES website from 01 May 2023 – 30 June 2025, with a total of 742 views. Over this period, 425 unique visitors interacted with the page, averaging 1.75 views per user, and spending an average of 48 seconds on the page, a solid indicator of engagement. We also reviewed applications for our gender and SESA consultants, and part of our team travelled to Samoa for a week-long UNDP training on Social and Environmental Standards, a really valuable learning opportunity for the team. Across all of this work, our team, especially our women, were central to the planning, coordination, and decision-making.

In terms of communications, we produced three eDMs for this quarter, helping us keep stakeholders informed and engaged with ongoing project developments.

SECTION 7: LESSONS LEARNED, GOOD PRACTICES & SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING

These past few months, we saw how important it is to have good support and teamwork. The Biodiversity Specialist visited to help guide our work and make sure everyone knows what to do. We also involved the community in sharing their ideas about protecting important places like the Rarotonga Southern Passages. The team had to manage some last-minute plans and stay in touch with international experts, which was challenging, but working closely together made our relationships stronger. Meetings with the project team and training workshops helped us stay on track and learn from each other. We are also bringing in experts to help with issues like gender equality and protecting the

environment for everyone. These steps are helping us build strong, lasting ways to take care of our natural resources and grow our conservation efforts.