FACTSHEET 6

Littering

1. What is littering?

Littering is when you dispose rubbish on public or private land without consent.

2. What are the types of litter?

Litter can be domestic or commercial waste. It may include general rubbish, food scraps, plastic, animal remains, glass, metal, debris, rubble, ballast, sewage, or any other items of a similar nature.

3. What are some examples of littering in the Cook Islands?

- Plastics thrown out of vehicles on public roads
- Rubbish disposed near streams
- Rubbish disposed in wetlands and foreshores
- Glass bottles and nappies left on the beach
- Whiteware disposed on vacant or swamp land

4. Is littering an offence? If yes, how?

It is an offence to litter in public areas or private land without consent from landowner.
This is specified in the Public Health Act 2004 and Part 4 of the Environment Act 2003.

5. Why is littering an issue? What are the negative impacts?

These are some of the negative impacts;

- land, air and ocean pollution
- Hazardous toxins inhaled and ingested by humans, animals and plants;
- Increase the risk of mosquito- borne diseases;
- Adverse impact on the surrounding environment;
- Threat to biodiversity and ecosystems

6. What can we do to stop littering?

- Dispose rubbish in the assigned bins
- Take rubbish home after a day out
- Encourage family and friends to dispose litter properly;
- Practice the 5Rs to minimise waste: Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Re-thinking

7. Who can you call to report littering?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck

FACTSHEET 7

Burning of Hazardous Waste

1. What is hazardous waste?

Hazardous waste in the Cook Islands is mostly made from industrial manufacturing processes in the form of liquids, solids, gasses and sludges.

2. What are the types of hazardous waste in the Cook Islands?

The types of hazardous wastes include: medical waste, e-waste, batteries, chemicals, sewage, sludge and other products from facilities and treatment plants.

3. What are examples of hazardous waste that are mostly reported to have been burnt?

The common examples of hazardous wastes that are mostly reported to NES include; vehicle tyres, vehicles, plastics including black polystyrene, medical wastes and batteries.

4. Is burning hazardous waste an offence in the Cook Islands?

Burning of hazardous waste is an offence in the Cook Islands. The Public Health Act 2004 prohibits the burning of all forms of plastic waste and tyres unless authorised by Te Marae Ora.

5. Why is burning hazardous waste dangerous?

Burning of hazardous waste releases highly toxic chemicals into the air, soil and oceans. It is dangerous and capable of harming human health and the environment.

6. What can we do to stop burning hazardous waste?

- We can adopt best environmental practices in our homes and workplaces
- Reduce our use of hazardous products by choosing other less toxic alternatives
- Seek advice from NES or TMO on the disposal methods if you are not sure

7. Who can you call if you see burning of hazardous waste?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck

FACTSHEET 8

The 5R's of waste management

1. What are the 5R's of Waste Management?

The "5R" represent Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose and Recycle.

2. Why are the 5R's important?

The 5R will help us manage waste effectively.

The 5R can be practiced by everyone at home or work to reduce the amount of waste in our ecosystem. (e.g. landfill, lagoon, beaches etc)

3. What can I do to Refuse?

You can practice by refusing to purchase or use products that will be harmful to the ecosystem. E.g. Use tote shopping bags instead of plastic bags.

4. What can I do to Reduce?

You can reduce purchasing and the use of non- recyclable products to save money and to protect the environment. E.g. Reduce printing on paper.

5. What can I do to Reuse and Recycle?

You can reuse and recycle by investing in re-useable products. E.g. Re-useable coffee cups and hydro-flask bottles.

6. What can I do to Re-purpose?

You can be innovative by creating new ways of using products for other purposes than what they are originally intended for. Re-purposing waste is a great way to make the most of something! How about, re-purposing those empty boxes by donating this to the Papa's in your community who will re-purpose these on their pai-taro. Decomposing cardboard will provide food and organic material for plants.

7. Who can I contact for more information?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck

FACTSHEET 9

Cutting of Trees

1. Why are trees important?

Trees are vital to maintain the existence of humans, animals and plants.

2. What are the role of trees?

Trees provides life as it is a source of food, shelter, oxygen and strength and is vital for our ecosystem.

3. What are the issues of cutting trees in the Cook Islands?

Tree cutting can lead to many environmental issues such as; deforestation, habitat loss, soil erosion, food insecurity and increase global warming.

4. What can I do instead of cutting trees?

- Plant trees
- Prune or trim trees
- Reduce importation of wood products

5. Where can I plant trees?

You can plant trees anywhere on your land. Ensuring that the tree do not interfere with existing infrastructure.

6. What type of trees should I plant?

- Plant native tree species rather than introduced species
- Plant trees that can provide a multi-purpose. e.g. mango trees provide food, shade and a wind barrier.
- Plant trees that absorb water. E.g. Bananas trees are great to plant along stream banks and slopes due to their high moisture requirements and high demand for organic rich soil.
- Plant trees that protect coastal areas. E.g. Toa trees

7. Who can I contract for more information about trees?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck OR the Cook Islands Natural Heritage Trust website https://cinature.org/ for more information on trees.

FACTSHEET 10

Foreshore Development

1. What is a foreshore?

A foreshore is an area of land adjacent to the sea, stream, river or estuary.

2. What are some examples of foreshore development?

- Infrastructure development for recreational, residential and commercial purposes
- Excavation and dredging
- Boat ramps, jetty and wharf infrastructure

3. What is the environmental impact of foreshore development?

- Loss of natural habitats
- Change to the natural environment
- Sand or soil erosion
- Loss of marine ecosystems
- Increase of waste
- Pollution in our lagoon

4. How can I ensure foreshore development does not impact the environment?

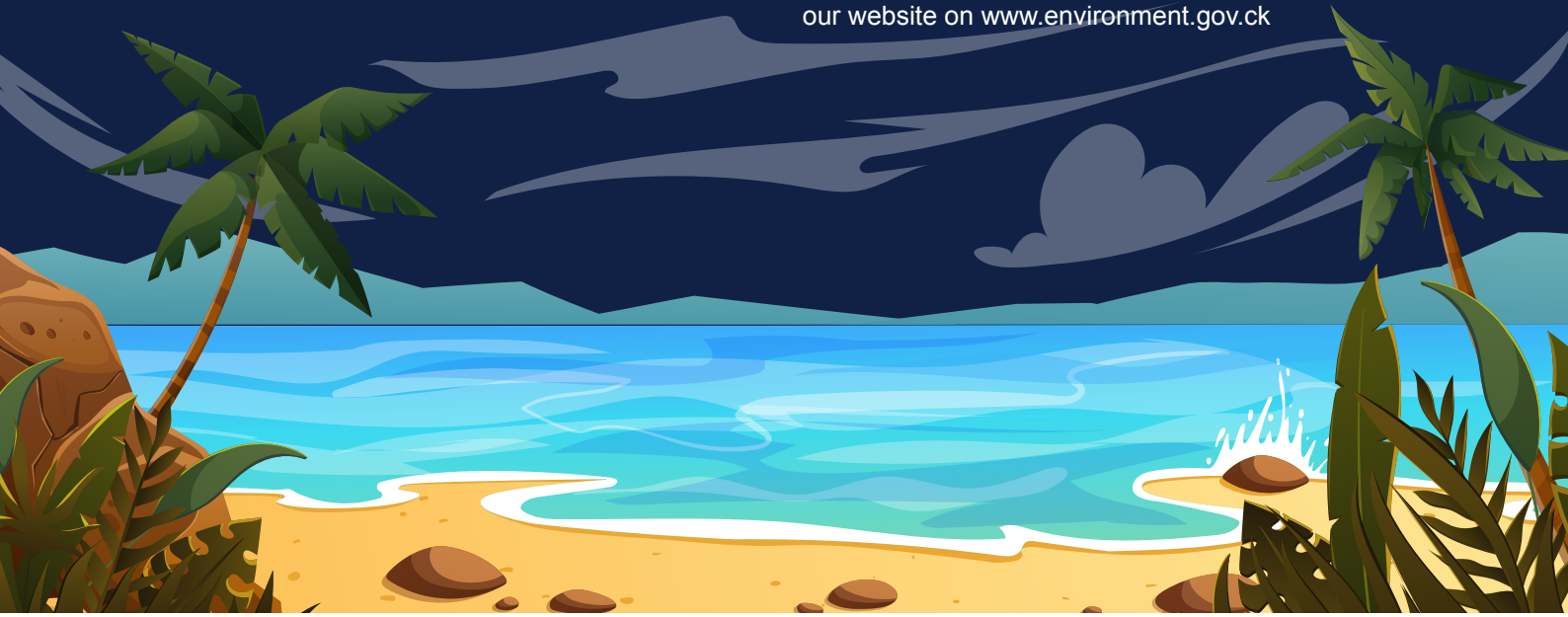
All types of foreshore developments must go through the Environment Compliance process by NES. Please contact NES if you are unsure of any development.

5. What happens when I do not meet legislation regarding foreshore development?

It is an offence if a person does not comply with the law with possibility of penalties imposed.

6. Who can I contact for foreshore development?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck or visit our website on www.environment.gov.ck



FACTSHEET 11

Development on slopes

1. What is a sloping land?

A land that is elevated at a vertical angle or lying at an increased gradient. E.g. Hills, Valleys, Mountains, plateau etc.

2. What are some examples of development on slopes?

Land excavations on slopes, land clearance using heavy machineries, any infrastructure constructions for residential and commercial purposes.

3. What are some impacts of the development on slopes?

Any form of development and constructions that changes the natural form of a slope land could have adverse impacts if not done properly. Some of these impacts include soil erosion, biodiversity loss, storm water runoffs, poor drainage, sedimentation etc.

4. How can I ensure the development on slopes does not impact the environment?

All types of development on slope lands is required by law to go through a vetting process by the Environment Services, to ensure safety for the developer and neighbouring properties. E.g. Technical Reports and EIA.

5. What happens when I don't meet legislation regarding development on slopes?

Any developments on slope lands that do not meet the required environment process is an offence with potential penalties imposed.

6. Who can I contact for development on slopes?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck or visit our website on www.environment.gov.ck

FACTSHEET 12

Wetland developments

1. What is a wetland?

A wetland is an area that is natural or artificial, permanently, seasonally or temporarily flooded or an area with water that is static or flowing whether fresh or salty.

2. Examples of a wetland?

Taro patches, swamps, lakes, ponds, marshes and water storage reservoirs are some examples of a wetland.

3. What are some common examples of wetland developments?

- Backfilling of Wetlands for residential or commercial developments
- Artificial Ponds

4. What is the environmental impact of wetland developments?

- Loss of ecosystem habitat
- Threatens food security
- Pollutes the water table
- Affects the natural water filter system for our lagoons

5. How can I ensure the wetland development does not impact the environment?

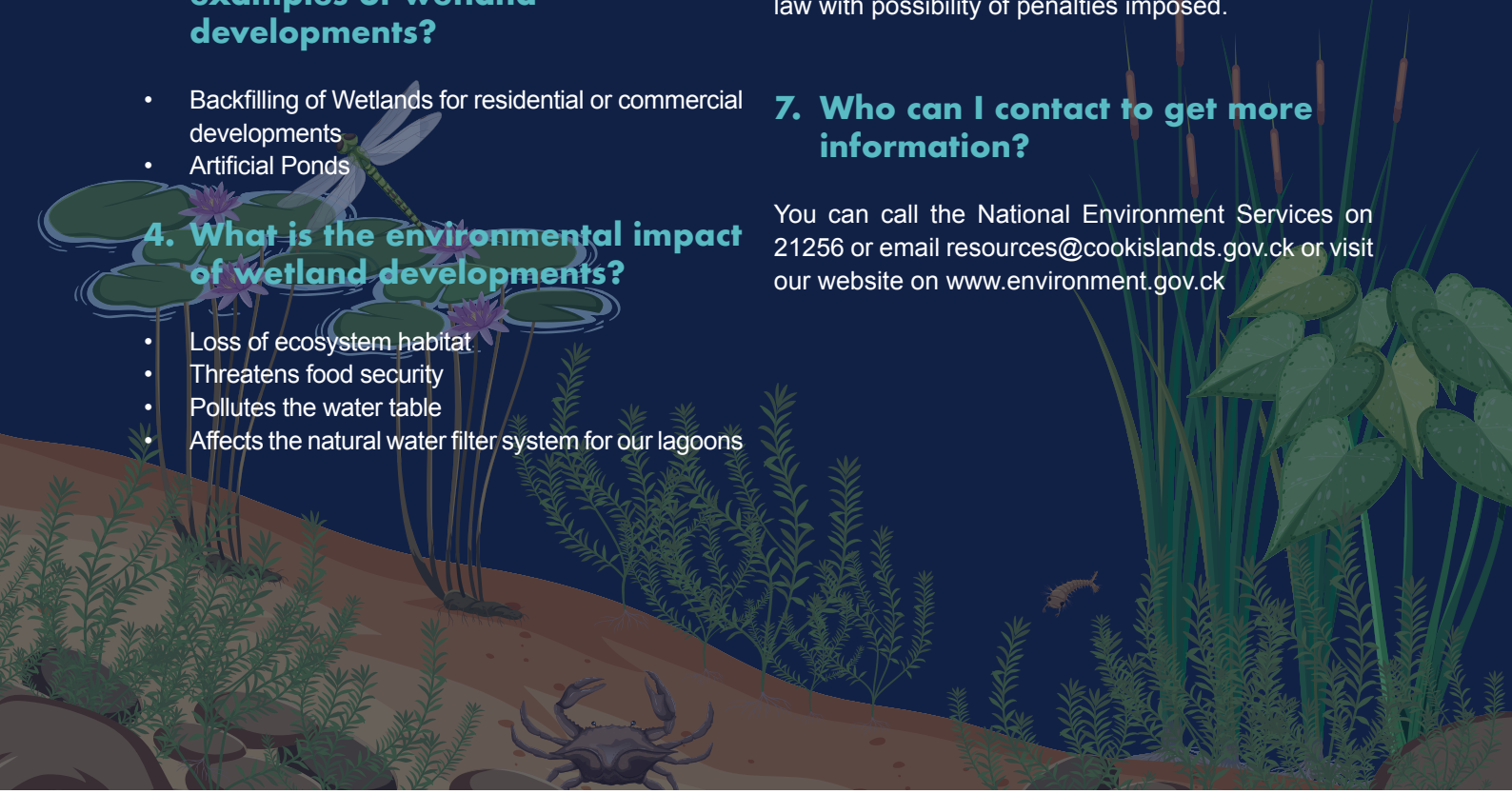
All types of developments on wetlands must go through the Environment Compliance process by NES. Please contact NES if you are unsure of any development.

6. What happens when I do not meet legislation regarding wetland development?

It is an offence if a person does not comply with the law with possibility of penalties imposed.

7. Who can I contact to get more information?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck or visit our website on www.environment.gov.ck



FACTSHEET 13

Protected Areas & Conserved Areas

1. What is a Protected Area?

A protected area is a clearly defined geographic and spatial space that aims to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. ‘

Conservation of nature is the primary objective but there can also be additional reasons the area is protected such as food security.

2. Examples of Protected Areas

- Suwarrow
- Takutea
- Marae Moana (50 nautical miles from each island)

3. What is a conserved area?

A conserved area is or managed area can be somewhere that doesn’t fall within the definition of a protected area, but still plays an important role in resource stewardship. Conserved or managed areas can be designated for any purpose, where biodiversity conservation outcomes occur regardless of the management objectives.

75%

of land areas have been significantly altered by human actions

66%

of marine areas have been significantly altered by human actions

1,000,000+

species are at risk of extinction

4. What are some examples of Conserved Areas?

- Raui
- Takitumu Conservation Area
- Takuvaine Water Catchment Managed Area

5. Why is a Protected Area important?

Protected areas are important to ensure that essential parts of nature are protected for future generations and to sustain our ways of living and livelihoods.

A recent global report found that:

- 75% of land areas and 66% of marine areas have been significantly altered by human actions;
- Nearly 1 million species are at risk of extinction, more than ever before in human history.

If we take care of nature, nature takes care of us. Our clean air, waters and soils, plus pollinating insects, animals and forests all help to protect our food and water security. Our general happiness, wellbeing and enjoyment are key outcomes. Healthy environments will also be more resilient to climate change.

6. Who is responsible for managing protected areas?

a. The management committee of the area (i.e. landowners).
b. NES provides a supporting and regulatory role - the Environment Act 2003 established NES with the mandate to provide for the protection, conservation, and management of the environment in a sustainable manner.

7. What can I do to support Protected Areas?

Respect protected areas and the rules that apply.

- Play your part t support the areas by
- picking up rubbish
- volunteer in clean-up programmes
- participate in surveys
- report any activities that are not allowed in the area.

8. What international conventions apply to protected areas?

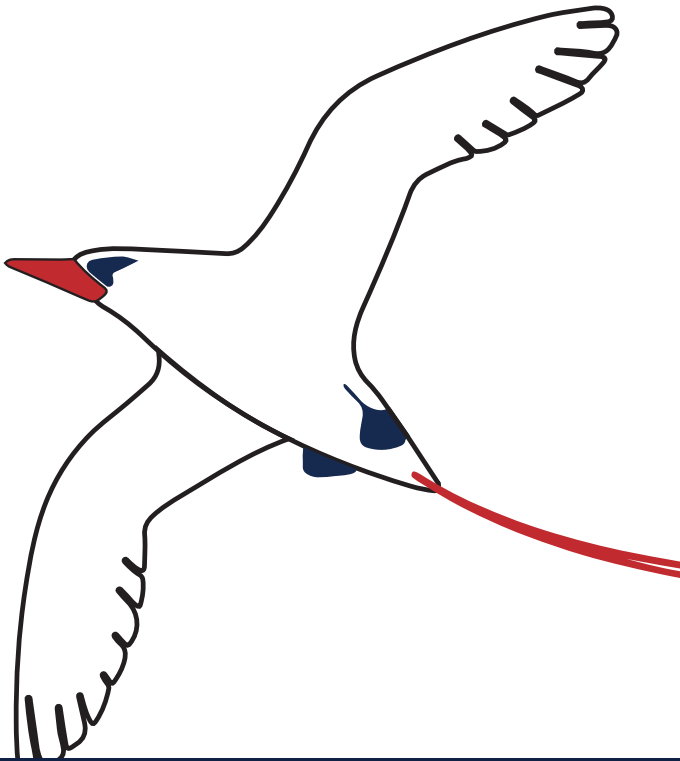
The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) calls to protect 30% of land and marine areas globally as either protected or conserved areas by 2030 under its draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

These international goals may be difficult for us in the Cook Islands due to our limited land area.

This is indicated nationally under our National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+, which aims for 25% of land to be protected by 2031 under Goal 11.2.

9. Who can I contact to get more information?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck or visit our website on www.environment.gov.ck



FACTSHEET 14

BIODIVERSITY in the Cook Islands

1. What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity or 'biological diversity', is the variety of life on earth like plants, animals and micro-organisms. Their interactions and interdependence to survive will help create a rich and thriving environment.

2. What are the types of Biodiversity?

- Genetic Diversity – the variety of genes within a plant or animal. Individuals, plants and animals of the same species have different genetic makeup or variations, making us all look different to each other.
- Species diversity– the variety of species in a habitat

or island. species are grouped together according to their shared characteristics. Some habitats such as coral reefs, forest, mountains and wetlands have many species within them:
  - o Wetlands – eels, fish, dragonflies, worms and various plant species
  - o Coral reefs – fish, corals, seaweeds, shellfish and starfish
- Ecosystem diversity – The variety of plants and animals and their relationship with each other in an area forms an ecosystem. Each ecosystem is unique, providing for different groups of living things that depend on another to survive. For example, a coral reef ecosystem is made up of diverse marine organisms such as fish, star fish, molluscs, crustaceans and corals.

3. Why is Biodiversity important?

Biodiversity supports everything in nature that we need to survive. Each species has a value and right to exist whether or not it is known to have value to humans.

- Ecological Life support - in supplying oxygen, clean water and air and natural ecosystem services
- Cultural identity – Cook Islanders have strong connections and obligations to biodiversity arising from spiritual beliefs about plants and animals
- Recreation – bird watching, sustainable fishing and photography to name a few.
- Economic – Provide raw materials for production and food consumption. Many livelihoods like farmers depend on biodiversity
- Scientific – ecological data helps us understand the earth and its origin

4. What are threats to our biodiversity?

- Habitat loss from land clearance, cutting of trees and developments
- Soil erosion and run off can lagoon pollution and impact living organisations
- Over-exploitation of species or natural resources
- Climate change
- Invasive species
- Pollution from burning of hazardous waste and littering

5. Who is responsible for managing Biodiversity?

- Government is responsible for the conservation of biodiversity by developing laws and regulations for its management.
- Each island produces its own policies for conserving biodiversity
- Environment NGOs have programs for conserving and protecting biodiversity
- Communities are responsible for maintaining their villages and islands

You and I have a role to play in ensuring that we are all looking after our biodiversity.

6. What can I do to support Biodiversity efforts?

- **Protect our species**
  - o When walking in the lagoon or on the reef avoid stepping on live corals
  - o Harvest matured species only and avoid harvesting juveniles and females species with eggs
  - o Take photos and not take the plant

- **Plant a tree**
  - o Plant a coconut tree or any fruit tree. Coconut trees provide a place for birds to nest and rest. They also house various insects that assist with pollination and breaking down of waste
  - o plant native trees
  - o Use trees to mark your land boundaries

- **Hiking**
  - o Before and after your hike, ensure your shoes are clean from plant debris or seeds. This will stop invasive species entering new areas.
  - o Stay on the track when hiking to minimize tramping over native plants
  - o Avoid unnecessary tagging on trees
  - o Avoid unnecessary cutting of branches when maintaining hiking tracks

- Report to NES or the Ministry of Agriculture of any unusual plant, insect or animal that you have not seen before. This could be a new invasive species introduced to the Cook Islands.

- Ensure new plants or flowers brought into the Cook Islands go through proper biosecurity processes.

7. What international conventions apply to biodiversity in the Cook Islands?

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) calls to protect 30% of land and marine areas globally as either protected or conserved areas by 2030 under its draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

8. Who can I contact to get more information?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck or visit our website on www.environment.gov.ck

FACTSHEET 16

LEGISLATION RELATING TO NES

1. What are the functions and objectives of the Environment Act 2003?

The Environment Act 2003 is administered by the National Environment Service (NES). It is a statutory agency headed by a Director of Service with the obligation to protect, conserve and ensure the Cook Islands environment is managed sustainably.

2. What is the difference between the Environment Act and the Environment Regulations?

The Environment Act 2003 is the primary legislation that sets out all environmental aspects of the Cook Islands. It provides the distribution of powers of the implementing branch or agency, its functions, environmental requirements and management procedures. A Regulation provides extensive details about the primary legislation specific to the authorising provision in the primary legislation.

3. What areas can be regulated under the Environment Act?

An Environment Regulation can be created under Section 70 of the Environment Act 2003 in the following areas;

a. Soil erosion and siltation
b. Removal of gravel, sand, soil, rock and coral
c. Establish protected areas
d. Hazardous waste
e. Disposal of recyclable or non-recyclable products;
f. Protect species and wildlife
g. Protect and control trees and its removal

4. What are the current Environment Regulations?

REGULATIONS	YEAR	PURPOSE
Environment (Mitiaro) Order	2004	This Order allows for the application of the Act to apply to the island of Mitiaro with more implementation details provided in the Environment Act (Mitiaro) Regulations 2008.
Environment (Takuvaine Water Catchment Management Plan) Regulations	2006	This was created for the management of the Takuvaine Catchment Management Plan by establishing a Management Committee with functions to implement the Regulation.
Environment (Application to Mauke) Order	2007	This Order allows for the application of the Act to apply to the island of Mauke.
Environment (Mitiaro) Regulations	2008	The regulations make provisions for the protection of species and habitats on the Island of Mitiaro, identify the right to declare a raui, provide for the appointment of officers, and make provisions on general environmental health and the protection of marine resources.
Environment (Atiu and Takutea) Regulations	2008	The regulations designate Takutea as a Community Conserved Area is managed by the local community in accordance to a management plan.
Prohibition on Importation of Plastic Shopping Bags Regulations	2012	The regulations are made to manage the importation of non- biodegradable plastic shopping bags into the Cook Islands.
Environment (Montreal Protocol) Regulations	2021	This regulation is to ban and manage the use of ozone depleting substances (ODS) within the Cook Islands.

5. Who can I contact to get more information?

You can call the National Environment Services on 21256 or email resources@cookislands.gov.ck or visit our website on www.environment.gov.ck