



Biodiversity in the Cook Islands

What is Biodiversity?

'Biological Diversity' or Biodiversity, 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 that benefits us all.

What are the types of Biodiversity?

- Genetic Diversity – the variety of genes within a plant or animal species. Individual plants and animals of the same species have different genetic makeup or variations, making us all different and unique.
- Species Diversity – the variety of species in a habitat or ecosystem. Some habitats such as coral reefs, forests, mountains and wetlands have many species within them.
- 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.

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.

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

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

What can I do to support Biodiversity efforts?

- **Protect our species**
 - When walking in the lagoon or on the reef avoid stepping on live corals
 - Harvest matured species only and avoid harvesting juveniles and females species with eggs
 - Take photos and not take the plant
- **Plant a tree**
 - Plant a coconut tree, native 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
 - plant native trees
 - Use trees to mark your land boundaries
- **Hiking**
 - Before and after your hike, ensure your shoes are clean from plant debris or seeds. This will stop invasive species entering new areas.
 - Stay on the track when hiking to minimize tramping over native plants
 - Avoid unnecessary tagging of trees
 - Avoid unnecessary cutting of branches when maintaining hiking tracks

- Report to NES or the Ministry of Agriculture of any unusual plant, insect or animals that you have not seen before. This could be new invasive species introduced to the Cook Islands.
- Ensure new plants or flowers brought into the Cook Islands go through proper biosecurity processes.

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.

Who can I contact to get more information?



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