

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT SERVICE 2024 SNAPSHOT & 2025 OUTLOOK

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Kia Orana Kotou Katoatoa,

As the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution continue to impact every part of our daily lives, the protection and management of our environment and fragile ecosystems become more important than ever before. We are starting to see the integration of environmental management into infrastructure and development plans, the mainstreaming of biodiversity and pollution into our everyday thinking, recognition of indigenous knowledge and local practices in multilateral environment agreement negotiations, and the participation of the community in raising environmental degradation concerns. As we have seen extreme weather patterns faced by many communities around the world, events such as bushfires, cyclones, floods and droughts, are shaping the way we manage and use our resources. The National Environment Service (NES) plays a pivotal role in this process to ensure national efforts are cohesive and coherent. NES is the mandated

Government agency to protect, conserve and manage the sustainable use of our natural resources. This includes areas such as protecting of species, manage the pollution of air, water and land, manage damages to beaches, inland waters and safe disposal of toxic chemicals and waste. NES is highly engaged in multilateral environment agreements, technical developments and negotiations under the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), particularly on biodiversity, plastic pollution, land degradation, ozone protection, chemicals and transboundary waste.

NES operates across nine islands in the Pa Enea, with an additional officer position for Manihiki currently being advertised. Mangaia is the most recent island to come under the Environment Act 2003 and is on par with the remaining islands in the Southern Group, while current efforts are underway for Rakahanga to come on board. The NES Phase II Strategy 2023-28 emphasizes decarbonization and zero waste as core goals. The overarching 2023-2028 strategy adopts a bottom-up approach, centered on six priorities - Pa Enea, research initiatives, legislative updates, education, technical capacity, and enforcement improvements through the following key objectives - capacity development, environmental stewardship, policy integration, stakeholder engagement, research advancement, and sustainable practices.

In 2024, NES embarked on its first consultation phase of the new bill to replace the Environment

Act 2003. Bold efforts include cabinet approval to consolidate and streamline the environmental functions within Government, and strong lobbying for Government and multilateral funds to support NES's plans and ambition for a clean environment. NES is investing heavily in it's people, with five staff set to graduate with a Post Graduate Diploma in Environmental Management and Sustainability from the University of Newcastle (Australia), and three staff moving to the Master of Environmental Management and Sustainability programme. Technical experts have been attached to NES in the areas of freshwater management, seabed minerals, environmental compliance and monitoring, and coastal development.

In 2025, as we celebrate 60 years of self-governance in free association with New Zealand, we embark on a year of pride, reflection, and unity. This milestone is a profound reminder of our shared journey and resilience, encapsulated in the unifying theme: "I know who I am, I have a homeland - Kua kite au i toku turanga, e avaiki toku." As we honor our identity and heritage, we also reaffirm our responsibility to protect and nurture our environment, ensuring that our home thrives for generations to come.

Kia manuia,

Halatua Fua

Director

2024 IN A SNAPSHOT

KEY EVENTS FOR 2025:

- **World Wetland Day** – 2 February: Highlighting wetland conservation and biodiversity importance.
- **World Press Freedom Day** – 3 May: Advocating for transparent environmental news dissemination.
- **World Biodiversity Day** – 22 May: Promoting conservation of biological diversity.
- **World Environment Day** – 5 June: Championing global environmental action.
- **World Ocean Day** – 8 June: Focusing on marine protection initiatives.
- **50 Years of Cook Islands Environment** - 15 September 1975 - Cook Islands enacted the Conservation Act 1975 as its first legislation to protect, conserve and manage the environment
- **World Ozone Day** – 16 September: Raising awareness of ozone layer protection efforts.
- **Clean Up the World Day** – 17 September: Community-driven waste cleanup activities.

PRIORITIES FOR 2025

Focus Areas: Pa Enea, research initiatives, legislative updates, education, technical capacity, and enforcement improvements.

Waste Management:

- Remove legacy waste and improve waste collection in the Pa Enea
- Collaborate with Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI) to transport recyclables to Rarotonga.
- Conduct annual visits to Northern Group islands to address persistent waste challenges.

Merger Plans

- Full integration of Climate Change and Marae Moana functions for streamlined coordination and funding opportunities.



First OECM Site Takitumu Conservation Area

Launched as the first Officially Established Conservation Area in the Cook Islands and the Pacific Region



74 Approvals Granted

(64 Consents, 10 Permits)
NES received over 120 applications in 2024



Rat Free Palmerston



33 Newsletters Released



286,101 kgs

of legacy waste removed through the Tita ki te Tita-Kore project: 52 containers in total.

2025 PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

PRIORITIES FOR 2025

Waste Management and Environmental Efforts

- Continued projects under PacWaste and GEF-7 to advance recycling and waste reduction systems.
- Sustainable waste financing and infrastructure improvements.

Budget and Capacity Building

- Secure investment comparable to Seabed Minerals Authority funding to enhance NES's regulatory capacity.
- Launch the National Environment Forum in 2025 to foster stakeholder collaboration and policy development.
- Strengthen water testing and data coordination to support cohesive environmental monitoring and policymaking.

International Collaboration and Policy Development

- Active participation in multilateral agreements (e.g., CBD, UNCCD, Montreal Protocol, BRS, INC).
- Leverage provisions in the Environment Bill to centralize data processes and bolster compliance and stewardship.

FUTURE PLANS AND PRIORITIES

Pa Enea Development:

- Continued focus on sustainable waste management solutions.
- Strengthen technical capacity for local officers.

Legislation and Policy:

- Conduct public consultations for the Environment Bill.
- Develop the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

Marine and Coastal Planning:

- Advance marine spatial planning to address seabed issues and protected area mapping.
- Undertake a feasibility study for coastal development.

Conservation and Resilience:

- Implement the Rarotonga Southern Passages Management Plan.
- Launch a water security project to ensure sustainable access.
- Partner with SPREP for the national invasive species project focusing on resilient ecosystems and weed eradication.

Community Engagement:

- Foster resilient communities in Rarotonga, Atiu, and Mauke through targeted environmental programs.

