



# **NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY**

## **2022-32**







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# MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT







Kia Orana kotou katoatoa,

I am pleased to present the National Environment Policy (NEP) 2022-32 as the overarching guiding policy for environmental management in the Cook Islands. The NEP 2022-32 is issued by the National Environment Service, the mandated agency to protect, manage and conserve our environment and natural resources.

The NEP 2022-32 encompasses key national environmental priorities that will help achieve an integrated approach to addressing environmental concerns across all of the Cook Islands and its marine estates.

The Cook Islands' environment is fragile and is being severely tested by pressures of development growth and a concentrated population. We are seeing the impacts of climate change further eroding the state of our environment.

The protection, conservation and management of the environment through initiatives, policies and legislation is a matter of public interest. It is a global and national responsibility on humanity to combat issues pertaining to the environment through a robust legal framework. We uphold the intrinsic values the biophysical environment has on our existence and our culture.

The Cook Islands, a Small Island Developing State, recently graduated to a high-income country have relied upon the environment as a path of growth and economic development. Our access to the natural resources will continue to have many environmental consequences, hence we must implement control measures to ensure sustainability. The success of the Cook Islands activities is not possible if environmental sustainability is compromised.

Land degradation, biodiversity loss and waste pollution to name a few, require our most urgent and immediate attention.

I invite you, to be an environment champion, let us all work together to look after our ipukarea tumanava for our generations to come.

Kia manuia

Honourable Mark Brown  
Minister of Environment  
Prime Minister of the Cook Islands



An aerial photograph of a tropical landscape. In the center, a light-colored, unpaved road or path runs horizontally. A small white vehicle is parked on this path. Above the path is a dense forest of tall palm trees and other green foliage. Below the path is a large, open grassy field with several palm trees scattered across it. The overall scene is lush and green.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

**2 SCOPE AND TIMELINE**





## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Cook Islands is known for its lush tropical mountains, pristine atolls, white sandy beaches and turquoise lagoons that contribute to a thriving tourism sector and a sustainable economy. But underneath this tranquil beauty, is a fragile ecosystem that is under pressure and susceptible to the impacts of natural disasters, climate change and increasing human activities and developments. The need to provide a clear national environment policy is instrumental for the sustainable development of the Cook Islands as a Small Island Developing State, which is central to our identity as a large ocean state.

Balancing social and economic development with environmental needs is outlined in the 'Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui' National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+ and the Cook Islands Economic Development Strategy (EDS) 2030. The Environment is a key goal under Goal 4 (Manage Solid & Hazardous Waste), Goal 10 (Agriculture & Food Security), Goal 11 (Our Biodiversity & Natural Environment) and Goal 12 (Climate Change, Resilience & Energy) of the NSDA+ and Objective 5 (Greening our Economy) of the EDS 2030.

The National Environment Service (NES) has consulted with multiple stakeholders since 2019 to develop a policy instrument that will strengthen the protection and management of its ecological systems and use of natural resources in the Cook Islands. It is a renewed commitment by Government to collaborate with its people and key stakeholders to effectively manage the environment for the present and future generations. This has led to the development of the National Environment Policy (NEP 2022-32) to repeal the Environment Act 2003 and replace with a new Environment Act that is fit-for-purpose.

The NEP 2022-32 outlines the course of actions required to protect, conserve and manage the Cook Islands environment. It will drive stronger collaboration and partnerships based on a holistic approach to national planning that integrates environmental concerns. A set of guiding principles establish the fundamental values that the NEP 2022-32 intends to deliver and calls for environmental accountability. Environmental concerns and challenges were identified to support the policies formed. The delivery of the NEP 2022-32 requires a set of instruments ranging from legal and institutional to financial and capacity development.

There are six Environmental Policy Objectives and Instruments outlined in the NEP 2022-32 based on Land, Marine, Biodiversity, Water, Air & Climate Change and Waste. These strategic areas are linked to the environmental concerns and challenges, with identified goals and policy directives for action. These policy instruments will be measured over time using a Monitoring and Evaluation framework focusing on the six strategic areas.

Environmental degradation will likely escalate within the next decade as the impacts of climate change intensify. Therefore, the implementation of the NEP 2022-32 will be critical in addressing the environmental concerns and challenges faced by the Cook Islands. The necessary legal and institutional frameworks outlined in the policy instruments will deliver the tools required to ensure the Cook Islands' environment is protected and will sustain the next generations.

## 2.1 SCOPE AND TIMELINE

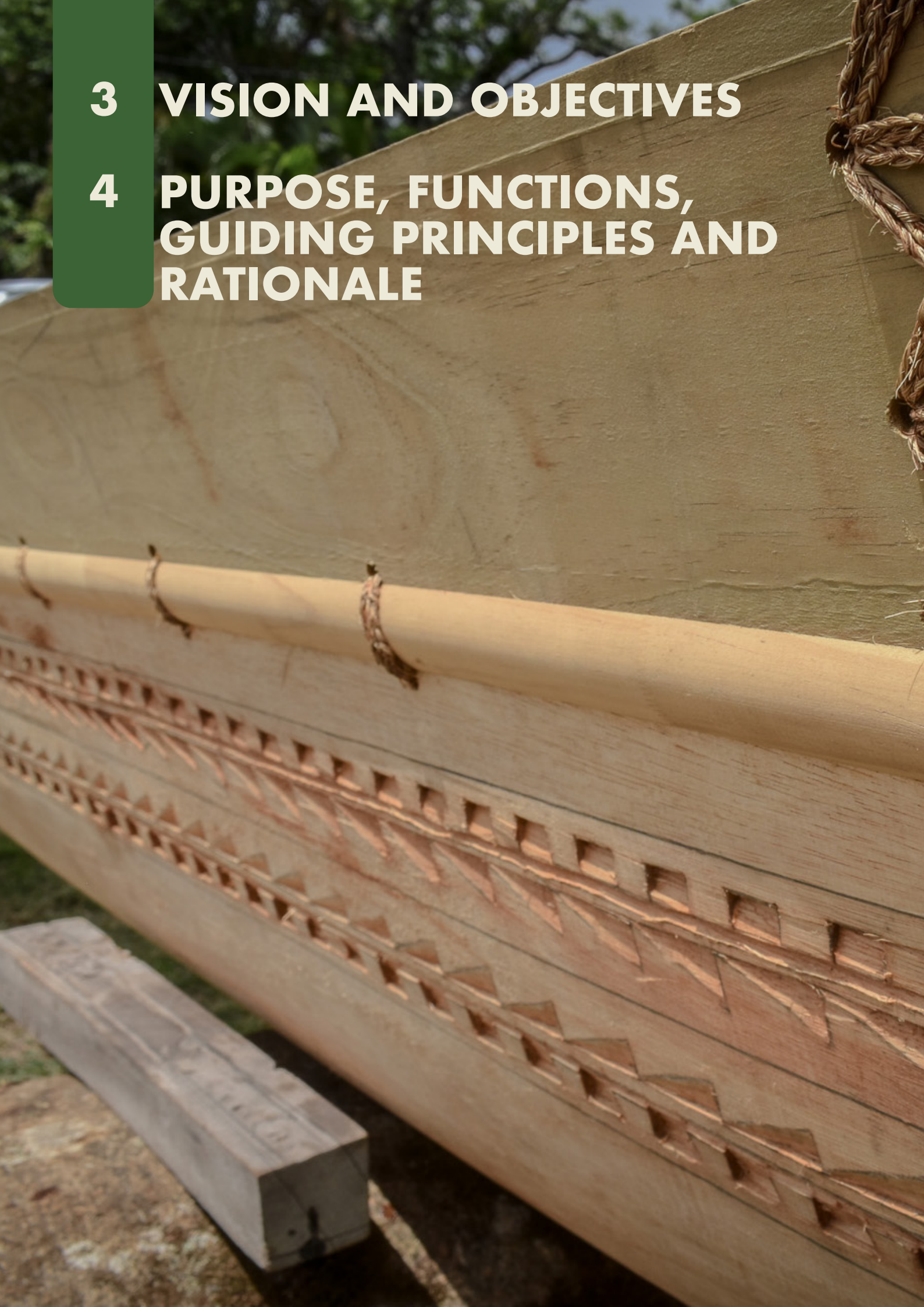
The NEP 2022-32 applies throughout the Cook Islands in the areas of terrestrial, internal waters, territorial sea, Exclusive Economic Zone and continental shelf. This document is applicable for a period of 10 years, which will be reviewed every 5 years for fundamental changes and every 2 years for the Monitoring & Evaluation framework or any other technical changes. Consultations with key stakeholders will continue within a 3-year period as a lead up to the mid-term review.

Following the 120 consultations conducted with stakeholders on the NEP 2022-32, the Cabinet of the Cook Islands approved the NEP 2022-32 in December 2022.



**3 VISION AND OBJECTIVES**

**4 PURPOSE, FUNCTIONS,  
GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND  
RATIONALE**







### 3.1 VISION

"Ipukarea Tumanava" - A Clean, Green and Sustainable Cook Islands.

### 3.2 OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the National Environment Policy (NEP 2022-32) are to:

1. Protect, conserve and manage the ecological systems, biodiversity and environmental resources throughout the Cook Islands;
2. Provide a clear national environmental policy that will drive collaboration within Government, Island Government, NGOs, private sector and members of the public;
3. Foster strong partnerships across all sectors to meet sustainable development agendas for the present and future generations;
4. Integrate environmental concerns into economic and social policies and programmes as a holistic approach to national planning;
5. Promote stewardship and responsible care for the environment.

### 4.1 PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

The NEP 2022-32 is aligned to the primary purpose and function of the Environment Act 2003:

PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENT ACT 2003		
<b>PROTECT</b> the environment and its eco-systems from harmful activities.	<b>CONSERVE</b> the environment through responsible use of natural resources.	<b>MANAGE</b> the environment to minimise and restore degradation from human activities.

The main functions of NES include:

(1) To protect, conserve and manage:

- sustainable use of natural resources;
- wildlife, in particular protected species;
- in relation to the Cook Islands waters;
- pollution of air, water, and land;
- damage to any beach, land, internal waters, inland waters, drain, building, market place and public spaces;
- safe disposal of toxic chemicals and wastes.

(2) To monitor and evaluate activities that significantly affect the environment. This includes reporting and investigating areas relevant to the protection and conservation of natural resources.

(3) To enforce the Environment Act 2003 and recommend new regulations under the Act.

(4) To implement, coordinate and recommend regional or institutional conventions, treaties, protocols or agendas relating to the environment.

(5) To provide secretarial and administrative services to each Island Environment Authority and the National Environment Council. The institutional strengthening of the Service through training and development will provide a strong support system.





## 4.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These principles will guide the National Environment Service's policy as a statutory agency of the Cook Islands Government, irrespective of any changes to its goals or strategies.

**4.2.1 TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES** - are the blueprint of environmental custodianship and promote nature-based solutions to address environmental issues. These practices must be respected when developing contemporary environmental management systems.

**4.2.2 POLLUTION PREVENTION** - protection of the environment through key measures that will avoid or minimise the impacts of pollution at the source.

**4.2.3 POLLUTER PAYS** - to promote a circular economy for accountability and sustainable development. The polluter should pay the cost of pollution impacts to ensure sustainability is achieved.

**4.2.4 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS** - consideration of projects must be carried out cohesively with robust environmental compliance and monitoring processes to manage cumulative environmental effects.

**4.2.5 SCIENCE AND DATA** - Decision making processes concerning the environment should be supported by science and data. Accessibility of this information is important for public use and transparency.

**4.2.6 PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE** - Decisions will be made on areas that may cause harm to the environment, consistent with the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

**4.2.7 SUSTAINABILITY** - Sustainable development meets the present needs of the Cook Islands and should not hinder the needs of the future generations. The environment must be used in a way that is sustainable for our children as the future leaders of the Cook Islands. The NSDA+ outlines the broad environment national goals.

**4.2.8 ADAPTABILITY** - Environmental management systems need to meet and respond to dynamic challenges, such as climate change, invasive species and new emerging issues.

**4.2.9 GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY** - Good governance, accountability and transparency are integral to delivering the NEP 2022-32.

**4.2.10 RESPONSIBILITY** - Encourage collective stewardship for the Cook Islands natural environment. It is the responsibility of all persons, government agencies and island governments to consider future generations, to maintain ecological processes and to use resources in an ecologically sustainable manner.

**4.2.11 ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND AWARENESS** - empower the community to support the protection of the environment and practice sustainable and environmentally friendly actions on a day-to-day basis.

**4.2.12 INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS** - Multilateral Environment Agreements and Treaties relating to environmental management are honoured. The regional and international commitments will support national policy and capacity development.

**4.2.13 GENDER** - The need to address any gender gaps or inequalities is important to achieve ecosystems management and conservation goals.





## 4.3 RATIONALE FOR A NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY

Emerging environmental issues relating to biodiversity loss, climate change, unsustainable land-use, waste, increased tourism activities and the use of natural resources, drive the need to implement a coherent national policy to protect, conserve and manage the environment across sectors. This NEP gives NES a consolidated focus to lead collaborative environmental work through a robust and clear policy. The rationale for a NEP is as follows:

**4.1 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT** - Sustainability is one of the most important agendas faced globally today including the Cook Islands as a Small Island Developing State. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA 2020+) and the Economic Development Strategy 2030 outline the pathway for sustainability and underpin the NEP 2022-32. The Cook Islands graduated to a high-income country in 2020, whereby sustainable consumption from increased economic activities become a concern given the growing pressures on the environment.

**4.2 DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES** - Cumulative impacts and pressures from economic activities elevate environmental issues as a major concern. The success of the Cook Islands' economic activities into the future is not possible if environmental sustainability is compromised. It is in the Cook Islands' best interest that the true costs of pollution and waste are prioritised and addressed. The acknowledgement of these environmental concerns cannot end in national planning alone, as it will require a call to action to address at the operational level.

**4.3 LOCAL OWNERSHIP** - Protection of the environment must be driven locally. Empowering of Government Agencies, Island Governments and communities by providing them with more resources and increased responsibilities to protect the environment will strengthen the outcomes of environmental management. Particularly, in relation to legacy waste management and land degradation as immediate impacts of development challenges.


**4.4 GROWING ENVIRONMENT SECTOR** - the Environment Sector is expanding due to the global movements towards de-carbonisation, plastic-free and zero waste goals and strategies. Investment in environmental solutions and innovative industries such as renewable energy will support environmental protection and effective management.

**4.5 AWARENESS AND EDUCATION** - Lack of awareness and education for environmental causes is a concern. Environmental education is an effective tool to gain community consensus. NES's Environmental Communications Strategy 2022-27 provides the tools and resources to deliver awareness and education. Increasing environment concerns, like biodiversity loss and pollution, require urgent dialogue with key stakeholders and the community to promote environmental protection. Encourage partnerships with Academia to support capacity building.

**4.6 COLLABORATION** - All Government agencies and stakeholders need to work collaboratively and cooperatively as a Cook Islands community to achieve national goals. Government will work with island communities, businesses, civil society organisations, non-Government organisations, funding agencies and other development partners in genuine and durable partnerships to implement the principles of this Policy.

**4.7 TRANSBOUNDARY ISSUES** - The Cook Islands is a party to legally binding international agreements, or Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs), that cover transboundary issues such as hazardous waste, pollution and biodiversity conservation. The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) called for the development of a legally binding treaty on plastic pollution that addresses the full life cycle of plastics. It is important that the NEP supports the MEAs to address growing environmental concerns including the global plastic pollution crisis, as well as providing for implementation of MEAs in the national context.





**5 POLICY INSTRUMENTS AND  
STAKEHOLDERS**

**6 KEY ENVIRONMENTAL  
CHALLENGES**



## 5.1 NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS

The National Environment Policy will require effective implementation to promote and sustain a healthy environment. Limited resources and capacities need to be broadened. While a command-and-control approach is applied to the NEP, market-based approaches also need to be considered. The following instruments are integral policy tools that will support the implementation of the NEP.

**5.1.1 LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL INSTRUMENTS** - amendments to and repealing of the Environment Act 2003 are required to meet the changing environment landscape. Regulations will need to be passed under the Environment Act 2003 (Section 70) to strengthen environmental compliance and monitoring, biodiversity protection, hazardous waste and other areas.

**5.1.2 GUIDELINES, STANDARDS AND MANAGEMENT PLANS** - a list of guidelines, standards and management plans will be drafted to support certain regulations planned. This will support public education and awareness on environmental practices, enforcement and monitoring systems.

**5.1.3 FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS** - engage with Government, donor partners and the private sector on critical funding needs to address environmental degradation from issues such as legacy waste. Technical assistance is required to broaden NES's capacity to ensure effective policy implementation. Allow the establishment of an Environment Trust Account under the Environmental Act 2003.

**5.1.4 COMMUNICATION INSTRUMENTS** - effective communication will promote stronger understanding of environmental sustainability and conservation. The continuation of funding and capacity development to deliver the Environmental Communication Strategy (ECS 2022-27) is critical to support the NEP consistently.

**5.1.5 CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH** - support the delivery of environmental research and capacity development programmes to expand capabilities within NES and other key stakeholders. Embed capacity development and plans into NES's Performance Management Review systems.

**5.1.6 MARKET-BASED INSTRUMENTS** - encourage Government to use incentives and other market-based instruments to support more sustainable alternative products and practices. Disincentives such as tariffs and taxes may be applied to environmental practices and products that are harmful to the environment, supporting the polluter pays principle.

## 5.2 KEY STAKEHOLDERS - ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Key stakeholders have a role to play in supporting the implementation of the NEP 2022-32 through various mechanisms: governance, infrastructure, economic, social and environmental obligations.

**Refer Appendix "A" for Key Stakeholders Across Policy Goals**

**5.2.1 COOK ISLANDS GOVERNMENT (GOVERNANCE, REGULATORY, INFRASTRUCTURE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL)** - Cook Islands Investment Corporation (CIIC), Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT), Islands Governments (Pa Enea), Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI), Crown Law Office (CLO), Office of the Public Service Commissioner (OPSC), Office of the Prime Minister (including Marae Moana and Climate Change Divisions), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Finance & Economic Development (MFEM), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration (MFAI), Ministry of Health - Te Marae Ora (TMO), Ministry of Justice (MOJ), Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR), Ministry of Transport (MOT), Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA) and State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) such as Ports Authority, Airport Authority and To Tatou Vai (TTV).

**5.2.2 NON GOVERNMENT** - Traditional leaders - Aronga Mana (Ui Ariki & Koutu Nui), environment non-Government organisations (NGOs) - such as Te Ipukarea Society (TIS) and Korero o te Orau, private sector and the wider community.

**5.2.3 OTHER** - Regional bodies - such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), international environment bodies, technical experts and educational institutions.





## 6.0 KEY ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS & CHALLENGES

This chapter summarises the main environmental concerns and challenges that are increasing the environmental vulnerability of the country. The Cook Islands face the following constraints and challenges:

### 6.1 LAND

The Cook Islands has a limited area of land suitable for development with a variety of competing users. Key issues of concern include:

1. Land development permit applications are individual and site-specific, and do not address complex and cumulative environmental impacts;
2. Land-use activities on residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, national parks and reserves lack planning and co-ordination;
3. Congested tourism development in prime coastal areas;
4. Filling of wetlands for residential, commercial or tourism purposes;
5. Lack of urban planning to ensure sustainable development;
6. Deterioration of land quality (soils) and ecosystems due to chemicals and waste pollution;
7. Protected and conserved land areas are classified in different ways that are not clear.
8. Land is a commodity that is subject to developments and environmental impacts.

### 6.2 MARINE

The Cook Islands must protect and conserve the wider marine environment to have sustainable oceans, lagoons and marine resources. The scope extends to internal waters, territorial sea and the Cook Islands exclusive economic zone which covers 1.9 million square kilometres. Key issues of concern include:

1. Legislative framework related to marine activities is fragmented and divided between various Acts;
2. Inadequately planned development and infrastructure management especially in coastal areas;
3. Cumulative impacts from land-based activities such as infrastructure development and agriculture affects lagoon health and ecosystems;
4. Limited capacity to effectively monitor and manage marine activities and pollution;
5. Lack of environmental baseline data on marine-related activities to make sound policy decisions;
6. Protected and conserved marine areas are classified in different ways that is not clear.

### 6.3 BIODIVERSITY

The Cook Islands is home to a diverse range of plants, animals and ecosystems. Cook Islanders are connected and dependent on the land and sea to sustain livelihoods. Biodiversity is a core component of the Cook Islands culture, and it must be protected. Key issues of concern include:

1. No integrated approach to biodiversity management;
2. Vegetation and natural habitats are cleared or reduced for residential properties, tourist accommodation, commercial and public infrastructure;
3. Changes to key habitats e.g. loss of wetlands, foreshore and natural sloping lands;
4. Loss of biodiversity caused by human activities such as conventional agriculture, sand mining and poor sanitation systems;
5. Harassment or disturbance of wildlife from increased tourism activities;
6. Lack of knowledge and limited research of biodiversity and ecosystems in the Cook Islands;
7. Invasive species present a significant threat to natural species;
8. Exploitation and overharvesting leads to resource depletion and loss of biodiversity.





## 6.4 WATER

The management of water resources in the Cook Islands includes freshwater, stormwater and wastewater. The Cook Islands National Water Policy 2016 led to new legislation in management systems and drinking water standards. However, gaps remain recording the environmental impact of activities on the water cycle. Key environmental concerns and challenges include:

1. No integrated approach to the management and conservation of the quality and quantity of water resources across all islands;
2. Impact of climate change on limited water resources from longer dry periods and groundwater contamination from sea level rise;
3. High consumption of water resources and significant wastewater from human activities, horticulture and agriculture;
4. Lack of water conservation measures adopted at the end user's level leads to water wastage;
5. Lack of water management systems to address stormwater and wastewater impacts on the environment.

## 6.5 AIR & CLIMATE CHANGE

An intact and healthy ozone layer is essential to our wellbeing and the natural ecosystems. It is an area that needs further data collection to inform decision making processes. Emissions of Greenhouse Gases (GHGs) is the main cause of global warming and climate change, which continue to rise. Temperature extremes and climate related events like cyclones and droughts are becoming more frequent. Key environmental concerns and challenges include:

1. Lack of awareness and data on the main sources of air pollution in the Cook Islands;
2. Lack of data on the health and environmental impact of air pollution in the Cook Islands;
3. Lack of air quality modelling to clearly identify air quality issues;
4. Legislative framework to address air quality and pollution is limited in the Cook Islands;
5. High dependency on fossil fuels and energy efficiency to strengthen the economic and tourism sectors;
6. Negative impact of climate change on the natural systems, human health and food security;
7. Slow climate change adaptation in some key areas e.g. transition to low carbon transportation.

## 6.6 WASTE

Waste generated (solid, gaseous or liquid) in the Cook Islands has an impact on our environment and wellbeing. The principles of a circular economy must be applied to improve how we manage waste in the Cook Islands. Key issues of concern include:

1. Legacy waste has reached unsustainable levels (End-of-life vehicles, whiteware and e-waste);
2. Burning, littering and dumping of waste is a problem in the Cook Islands;
3. Slow implementation of phasing out unnecessary plastics and other wastes;
4. Principles of a circular economy and recycling are not fully understood and implemented;
5. Limited waste management infrastructure to cope with the high volume of waste generated from development activities, consumers and the tourism sector;
6. Lack of importation controls and resource recovery mechanisms which lead to unsustainable levels of waste generated;
7. Limited communication and awareness on the issues of waste reduction and management;
8. Limited capacity, resources and finances to manage and mitigate waste impacts in the Cook Islands;
9. Gaps in data collection relating to waste;
10. Insufficient budget and mechanisms to properly manage waste.



7

## ENVIRONMENT POLICY OBJECTIVES & INSTRUMENTS







## 7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY OBJECTIVES

**CROSS-CUTTING GOALS:** Goals that have environmental impact but are implemented under the mandate of various agencies outside of the National Environment Service.

**ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS:** Environment policies that are implemented within the mandate of the National Environment Service.

**POLICY OBJECTIVES:** Six Policy Objectives as follows:



### 1: LAND

Effective land-use planning for sustainable development



### 2. MARINE

Protect and conserve the marine environment for sustainable oceans, lagoons and marine resources



### 3. BIODIVERSITY

Conserve threatened plants and animals, and ensure sustainable use of biodiversity



### 4. WATER

Effective management of water resources for a healthy environment and water security



### 5. AIR & CLIMATE CHANGE

Clean air is essential to our environment. Mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change



### 6. WASTE

The impact of waste on the environment must be managed effectively





## **7.1 POLICY GOAL #1: LAND**

### **7.1.1 CROSS-CUTTING GOALS**

The Cook Islands has a total land area of 240 square kilometers that requires effective land-use planning given its limited size and various needs. A strategic approach to land-use planning will promote sustainable use for economic and social development outcomes. Cross-cutting goals across key Government agencies and sectors for the sustainable use of land include:

1. Holistic planning to address complex land development impacts
2. Mechanisms to protect and conserve the land are integrated into the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA 2020+);
3. Retention of cultural heritage and traditional ecological knowledge e.g. inclusion of cultural sites in the Permits and Consents process;
4. Address environmental challenges to national planning that includes sustainability, resilient infrastructure and tourism;
5. Policy and legal instruments on land activities also address effective management of solid and hazardous waste;
6. Promote sustainable land-related practices and standards in core economic sectors e.g. tourism and agriculture;
7. Terrestrial Protected Areas are appropriately classified, designated and managed.

### **7.1.2 ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS**

To achieve these, the Government will (through NES):

1. Repeal and replace the Environment Act 2003 to strengthen land-use provisions;
2. Develop and pass Environmental Consents and Permits regulations to strengthen environmental management, compliance systems, control & monitoring, including but not limited to, development of moratoriums, fines, carrying capacity and/or ecological ceilings for each environment area;
3. Strengthen technical capacity at NES to undertake effective compliance, enforcement and monitoring programmes required under the Consents and Permits Regulations;
4. Enhance governance capacity at the Island Environment Authority and the National Environment Council levels for sound decision making on land-use consents and permits;
5. Develop a strategic land-use planning policy and legal framework for effective management that also include the defining and management of conserved and protected areas;
6. Develop a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEAs) framework and conduct feasibility studies to address complex land development or climatic impacts;
7. Review with key Government agencies the importation of certain substances for agriculture or horticulture purposes that may have a detrimental impact on soil and land resources;
8. Application of Environment Legislation to all islands in the Cook Islands;
9. Establish strategic alliances and partnerships with other Government agencies, Non-Government Organisations, and regional and international organisations to provide technical assistance and capacity development. Furthermore, to cooperate in sharing of data, information, research and publications;
10. Investigate Sustainable Financing Mechanisms (SFM) to support ongoing and effective management;
11. Review environmental compliance fees to reflect the real cost of services and impact to the environment.





## **7.2 POLICY GOAL #2: MARINE**

### **7.2.1 CROSS-CUTTING GOALS**

The Cook Islands' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covers 1.9 million square kilometers of ocean. The National Environment Service's mandate and scope includes the Cook Islands waters (internal waters, territorial sea and EEZ). Cross-cutting goals across key Government agencies and sectors for marine-use include:

1. Effective implementation of the Marae Moana (Marine Park) Act 2017 to protect and conserve the ecological, biodiversity and heritage values of the Cook Islands Marine environment;
2. Strong collaboration between multiple agencies mandated to regulate marine activities;
3. Sustainable use and development of coastal areas and marine resources;
4. Prevent, minimise and mitigate the environmental impacts of marine pollution;
5. Deliver an adaptive and technically feasible environmental compliance and legal framework for any Seabed Mineral Activities;
6. Promote sustainable marine-related practices and standards in the economic sectors e.g. tourism and fisheries;
7. Robust research and environmental baseline data collected on marine environment and activities;
8. Health of lagoon ecosystems are improved from effective land use management and coastal development measures.

### **7.2.2 ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS**

To achieve these, the Government will (through NES):

1. Repeal and replace the Environment Act 2003 to strengthen provisions on marine pollution;
2. Support the implementation of coastal protection systems, including nature-based solutions, to mitigate coastal erosion;
3. Develop and pass appropriate Environmental Regulations to strengthen management and compliance systems relating to Cook Islands waters, including Seabed Mining Activities;
4. Effective collaboration with agencies mandated for marine activities to address marine pollution;
5. Expand jurisdiction of the Environment Act to cover beyond the Economic Exclusive Zone to the Continental Shelf to be in line with other key agencies;
6. Enhance technical capacity at NES to undertake effective compliance, enforcement and monitoring programmes;
7. Enhance governance capacity at the Island Environment Authority and the National Environment Council levels for sound decision making on marine-based consents and permits;
8. Establish strategic alliances and partnerships with other Government agencies, Non-Government Organisations, and regional and international organisations to provide technical assistance and capacity development. Furthermore, to cooperate in sharing of data, information, research and publications;
9. Support the development of Sustainable Financing Mechanisms (SFMs) for marine based activities.





## **7.3 POLICY GOAL #3: BIODIVERSITY**

### **7.3.1 CROSS-CUTTING GOALS**

Since the Cook Islands ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992, there have been great efforts to conserve threatened and native plants and animals, use sustainably and reduce negative effects of invasive species. Cross-cutting goals across key Government agencies and sectors for biodiversity conservation include:

1. Provisions in place for the protection of specified species e.g. Cook Islands biodiversity database by the Natural Heritage Trust. This relates to plants and animals that are endemic, native, threatened, endangered or migratory;
2. Strong collaboration between agencies and relevant stakeholders for mitigation, early detection and rapid response plans on invasive species;
3. Strong collaboration and control by mandated agencies on the mitigation and management of biodiversity exploitation, overharvesting and depletion;
4. Public and private partnerships with specific stakeholders and the Pa Enua on biodiversity conservation and invasive species eradication programmes;
5. Robust systems for detection of pests and management of biosecurity, both inter-island and into the Cook Islands;
6. Establish biosafety considerations into import and export processes;
7. Major disturbances such as infrastructure development and mining shall be avoided in threatened or protected habitats and ecosystems and in Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs).

### **7.3.2 ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS**

To achieve these, the Government will (through NES):

1. Repeal and replace the Environment Act 2003 to strengthen definitions and provisions on biodiversity conservation and management (including the Consents and Permits process) and obligations to support relevant regional and global Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs);
2. Develop and pass an Environmental Regulations to designate at risk, rare or threatened animals, plants and their habitats as protected species;
3. Develop guidelines or management plans to support Regulations on the interaction with specific types of wildlife;
4. Develop a legal instrument to preserve, protect and conserve trees, including the prevention and or control of vegetation clearance;
5. Designate Significant Biodiversity Areas (SBA) at the national level;
6. Update the Cook Islands National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) to address the current landscape and threats relating to the Cook Islands biodiversity e.g. endangered and invasive species;
7. Ensure bioprospecting, access and benefit sharing mechanisms and permits are established for any exportation of Cook Islands biodiversity to optimise research outcomes and protect sovereign and local rights;
8. Research and data collection on Cook Islands biodiversity are strategically planned and developed for capacity building and sound decision making.





## **7.4 POLICY GOAL #4: WATER**

### **7.4.1 CROSS-CUTTING GOALS**

Water is an essential human need. However its development must be managed and controlled to ensure it is ecologically sustainable. Water quality standards need to define environmental impacts. Cross-cutting goals across key Government agencies and sectors for water management include:

1. Sustainable management of water sources to manage environmental impacts;
2. Water conservation is balanced with the rights of traditional landowners as guardians of land and waterways;
3. Develop Integrated Water Resource Management systems across agencies;
4. Effective systems in place to minimise stormwater and wastewater impacts on the environment and human health;
5. Robust standards, testing and control mechanisms for wastewater and stormwater quality;
6. Implement effective monitoring and control measures on water usage for commercial purposes e.g. agriculture and horticulture, tourism, etc;
7. Water systems are resilient to the impacts of climate change and disasters. Islands are self-sufficient;
8. Management Plans for water resources recognise customary and traditional practices;
9. Promote water conservation measures for commercial and private users;
10. Encourage the collection of rainwater for agriculture purposes like irrigation systems.

### **7.4.2 ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS**

To achieve these, the Government will (through NES):

1. Repeal and replace the Environment Act 2003 to strengthen definitions and provisions water conservation, groundwater, stormwater and wastewater impacts on the environment;
2. Develop and pass an Environmental Regulation to protect water resources and mitigate damage or contamination to internal waters and groundwater from land-use practices like water bores;
3. Establish a Water Sector Group to provide strategic oversight and co-ordination of intersectoral activities within the water cycle;
4. Review with key Government agencies the importation of certain substances for agriculture or horticulture purposes that may have a detrimental impact on water resources;
5. Promote research on the application of water conservation: techniques, technology, water conscious product design and re-use of wastewater.





## **7.5 POLICY GOAL #5: AIR & CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **7.5.1 CROSS-CUTTING GOALS**

The Cook Islands have made efforts to slow emissions by phasing out Ozone depleting substances like Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in 2010 and Hydrochlorofluocarbons (HCFCs) in 2015. Increased activities from vehicle emissions and the energy sector will continue to increase GHG levels in the Cook Islands. These mitigation activities, as well as adaptation responses, are critical for the Cook Islands. Cross-cutting goals across key Government agencies and sectors for air management and climate change include:

1. Promote use of renewable energy sources by facilitating adequate infrastructure;
2. Set national standards on vehicle emissions to reduce over time and energy efficient products;
3. Create public awareness on the use of low emission transport, including fuel efficiency, e-vehicles, active transport and public transport;
4. Develop partnerships with the Ministry of Health - Te Marae Ora on the joint impacts of air pollution on the environment and health of the resident population;
5. Legal instruments to clearly define substances and regulate the burning of hazardous waste;
6. Review the need to regulate air quality from an environmental perspective;
7. Adaptation and mitigation measures to combat the impacts of climate change;
8. Enhance natural carbon sinks by conserving forests and protecting natural ecosystems.

### **7.5.2 ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS**

To achieve these, the Government will (through NES):

1. Repeal and replace the Environment Act 2003 to strengthen definitions and provisions on air quality standards and management systems;
2. Implement the Environment (Montreal Protocol) Regulations 2021 relating to the prohibition of controlled substances, permits and registration of refrigerant imports;
3. Consider developing and passing environmental regulations to manage mercury releases to air and water;
4. Develop a National Environmental Standards for Air Quality (NESAQ);
5. Monitoring of air pollutants through a comprehensive national monitoring tool;
6. Conduct air modelling to inform environmental compliance consents and permit applications for land-use and developments;
7. Research and collect data on climate change, air quality and air pollution;
8. Create public awareness programmes on climate change, air quality and air pollution;
9. Link Map Review Process at ICI with NES permitting process.





## 7.6 POLICY GOAL #6: WASTE

### 7.6.1 CROSS-CUTTING GOALS

The cost component of waste management from the daily products and services bought by consumers is relatively small, however on a national and economic level it is a significant cost that should not be ignored. The Cook Islands Government is developing tighter legislative controls to curb the volumes and types of waste imported to meet sustainable development goals. Cross-cutting goals across key Government agencies and sectors for waste include:

1. Strengthen solid waste management systems in Rarotonga and the Pa Enua, including the establishment of waste depots in the Pa Enua;
2. Strengthen legislation relating to waste management and resource recovery mechanisms;
3. Ensure environmentally safe disposal of toxic chemicals and waste;
4. Publish guidelines on environmental quality to include standards on solid waste and wastewater;
5. Prevention and control of pollution and waste;
6. Implement a national campaign to eliminate legacy waste;
7. Establish sustainable financing for end of life management of products and packaging;
8. Return all recyclables and waste to Rarotonga for further processing, disposal and repatriation to recycling facilities

### 7.6.2 ENVIRONMENT POLICY INSTRUMENTS

To achieve these, the Government will (through NES):

1. Repeal and replace the Environment Act 2003 to strengthen definitions, roles, responsibilities, and provisions for waste management, to complement other legislation relating to solid and hazardous waste;
2. Pass necessary Regulations that will assist in reducing certain types of waste generated;
3. Develop effective communications on the circular economy, waste management and the different types of waste;
4. Develop technical capacity on specific waste management areas such as plastic science policy;
5. Phase out unnecessary and problematic plastics and other wastes;
6. Develop strategic partnerships with key Government agencies and the private sector that are involved in Waste Management;
7. Support the development of Sustainable Financing Mechanisms (SFMs) for waste management, end of life management of products and packaging;
8. Lead the negotiations in the new plastic pollution legally binding global treaty;
9. Support innovation in finding alternatives and industry solutions.
10. Strengthen commitment to regional waste MEA's such as BRS, Noumea and Waigani Convention.



# MONITORING & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK





## 8.0 MONITORING & EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework is an essential component of the National Environment Policy cycle to ensure evidence-based policy design and implementation is achieved. The M&E will increase the National Environment Policy's transparency and accountability, while continuously assessing policy effectiveness and efficiency.

There are three stages in implementing the Monitoring & Evaluation framework of the National Environment Policy 2022-32: (1) Design (2) Delivery (3) Review.

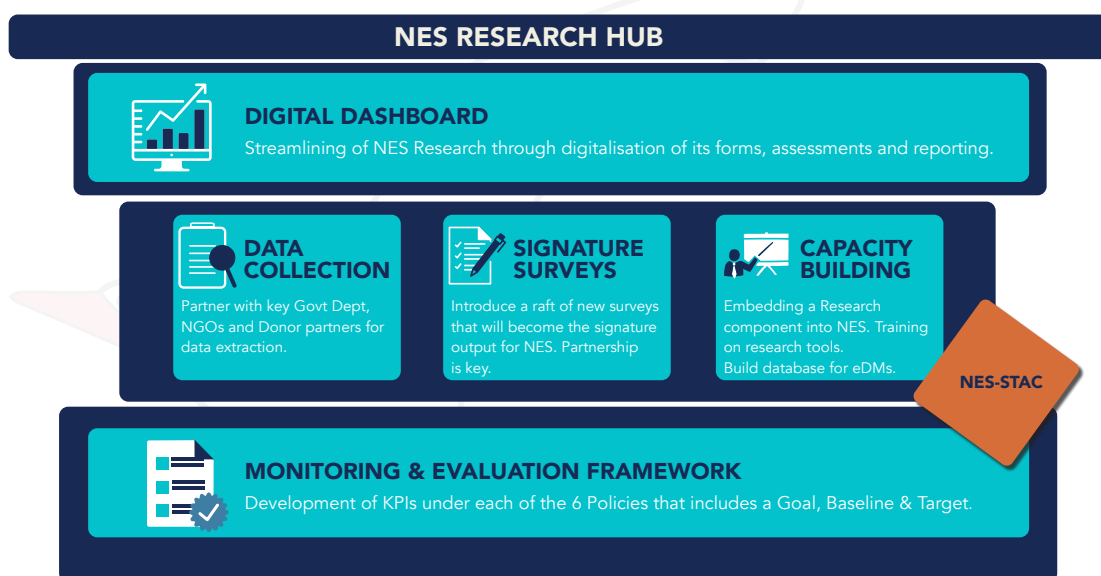
### STAGE 1: M&E DESIGN

A rigorous public consultation process was undertaken on the NEP 2022-32 design of more than 100 consultations with key stakeholders and the public from 2020 to 2021. This included 171 participants in Pa Enua Tonga, 181 participants in Pae Tokerau, 67 participants in Rarotonga and other consultations with Government agencies, House of Ariki, Koutu Nui and the Opposition Party. This led to the design of key Policy Goals and Objectives.

The goals outlined in the M&E are aligned to the Cross-cutting Policy Goals. These are inter-sectoral cross-cutting national goals across various agencies and sectors, identified from the consultation process. The M&E framework was developed to centralise environmental baseline data under NES as a central repository.

### STAGE 2: M&E DELIVERY

The delivery of the M&E framework will contribute to the NES Research Hub (refer diagram below). The data collection component is a key step to collect environmental baseline data across Government agencies, NGOs, private sector and the community. The NES Science & Technical Advisory Committee (NES-STAC) will continue to review the M&E framework as part of the 2-year review cycle of the NEP 2022-32. The Digital Dashboard allows information gathered to be shared and accessible to stakeholders.



### STAGE 3: M&E REVIEW

The Review stage is a fundamental step in adaptive management to identify the long-term effects and impacts missed in the Design stage. There may be new Monitoring Indicators to replace existing ones or added through the 2-year evaluation cycle to strengthen the M&E framework and its impacts. Furthermore, sub-policies may be identified on specific issues that require a separate policy and a legislative framework to be established. Policy transparency is a key objective to ensure the NEP 2022-32 is relevant and applicable to the changing landscapes over time and accountable to stakeholders.

The next section will outline the cross-cutting goals and the monitoring indicators.





## 8.1 POLICY GOAL #1: LAND

Goal #	Monitoring Indicators
8.1.1 Holistic planning to address complex land development impacts.	8.1.1.1 Number of plans, policies or agreements (e.g. MOUs) that have been produced providing holistic coverage of affected areas 8.1.1.2 Number of Environmental Compliance Tier 1, 2 and 3 issued per annum
8.1.2. Mechanisms to protect and conserve the land are integrated into the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA 2020+)	8.1.2.1. Regular monitoring and reporting of progress against mechanisms integrated into the National Sustainable Development Agenda 8.1.2.2. Regular monitoring of forest areas, naturally vegetated areas and trends 8.1.2.3. Regular monitoring of wetlands areas and trends 8.1.2.4. Regular monitoring of soil health and trends
8.1.3. Retention of cultural heritage and traditional ecological knowledge e.g. inclusion of cultural sites in the Permits and Consents process.	8.1.3.2. Liaise with traditional leaders to keep informed about the Ra'ui imposed and species involved 8.1.3.3. Regular monitoring of land use and number of people engaged in traditional agriculture 8.1.3.4. Numbers of Marae, historical and cultural sites in Permits and Consents process 8.1.3.5. Regular monitoring of land used for local food production 8.1.3.6. Regular monitoring of the practice and production of traditional medicines, knowledge and crafts
8.1.4. Address environmental challenges to national planning that includes sustainability, resilient infrastructure and tourism.	8.1.4.1. Number of national planning groups and assessment of meeting outputs with integrated environmental considerations 8.1.4.2. Promote and research sustainable land-related practices, nature based solutions and standards in core economic sectors. Accredited training is encouraged;
8.1.5. Policy and legal instruments on land activities also address effective management of solid and hazardous waste;	8.1.5.1. Regular monitoring of the importation, collection and management of hazardous wastes: E-waste, End of Life Vehicles (ELVs), medical waste, Oils and chemicals, and Asbestos 8.1.5.2. Regular monitoring of waste separation, collection, recycling and management 8.1.5.3: Number of policy and legal instruments implemented for effective management of solid and hazardous waste
8.1.6. Promote sustainable land-related practices and standards in core economic sectors e.g. tourism and agriculture.	8.1.6.1. Number and engagement of educational and communication outputs promoting sustainable practices 8.1.6.2. Number of effective mechanisms developed to promote sustainable practices 8.1.6.3. On-going dialogue with economic sectors to improve practices, standards and accredited training
8.1.7. Terrestrial Protected Areas (TPAs) are appropriately classified, designated and managed.	8.1.7.1. Number of TPAs given statutory designation and overall portion of land under TPAs 8.1.7.2. Management plans in place for all TPAs 8.1.7.3. Regular monitoring of TPAs carried out with data and reports managed under the NES Inform Portal to ensure management effectiveness and environment objectives met. 8.1.7.4 Regular monitoring of land areas that may provide Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs)

**Key Implementing Partners:** Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Cultural Development, Infrastructure Cook Islands, Cook Islands Investment Corporation, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, Island Governments, Cook Islands Tourism Corporation and the Ministry of Marine Resources.



## 8.2 POLICY GOAL #2: MARINE

Goal #	Monitoring Indicators
8.2.1. Effective implementation of the Marae Moana (Marine Park) Act 2017 to protect and conserve the ecological, biodiversity and heritage values of the Cook Islands Marine environment.	8.2.1.1. Regular monitoring of compliance to the Act 8.2.1.2. Number of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) given statutory designation and overall portion of MPAs 8.2.1.3. Management plans in place for all MPAs 8.2.1.4. Regular monitoring of MPAs to ensure management effectiveness and environment objectives are being met
8.2.2. Strong collaboration between multiple agencies mandated to regulate marine activities.	8.2.2.1. Number of MOUs in place to allow cooperation in regulating marine activities 8.2.2.2. Number of regulatory changes implemented to regulate marine activities 8.2.2.3. Regular monitoring of turtle abundance, movement and nesting 8.2.2.4. Regular monitoring of cetacean movement and abundance 8.2.2.5. Regular monitoring of shark movement and abundance
8.2.3. Sustainable use and development of coastal areas and marine resources.	8.2.3.1. Regular monitoring of coastal areas 8.2.3.2. Regular monitoring of tuna, sharks and other targeted species 8.2.3.3. Number of cross-agency dialogue focusing on EEZ monitoring 8.2.3.4 Regular monitoring of threats to marine biodiversity and ecosystems
8.2.4. Prevent, minimise and mitigate the environmental impacts of marine pollution.	8.2.4.1. Regular management and monitoring of marine pollution incidents 8.2.4.2. Number of effective responses to marine pollution incidents 8.2.4.3. Monitoring against South Pacific Region Protocol on Pollution Emergencies
8.2.5. Deliver an adaptive and technically feasible environmental compliance and legal framework for Seabed Mineral Activities.	8.2.5.1. Number of compliance and legal mechanisms implemented 8.2.5.2. Regular monitoring of the impact on the seabed and oceanic species 8.2.5.3 Regular marine science research conducted
8.2.6. Promote sustainable marine-related practices and standards in the economic sectors e.g. tourism and fisheries	8.2.6.1. Number of working groups targeting sustainable marine-related practices and standards 8.2.6.2. Number of published standards and practices 8.2.6.3. Number of organisations successfully adopting those standards and practices
8.2.7. Robust research and environmental baseline data collected on marine environment and activities.	8.2.7.1. Outputs and numbers of working groups of key stakeholders 8.2.7.2. Number of baseline data requirements defined and implemented
8.2.8. Health of lagoon ecosystems are improved from effective land-use management and coastal development measures.	8.2.8.1. Regular monitoring of lagoons and streams water quality 8.2.8.2. Regular monitoring of coastal development areas 8.2.8.3. Regular monitoring of the status of live corals and the presence of ephemeral algae and cyanobacteria blooms

**Key Implementing Partners:** Marae Moana - Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Marine Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Transport, Seabed Minerals Authority, Island Governments and the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation.





## 8.3 POLICY GOAL #3: BIODIVERSITY

Goal #	Monitoring Indicators
8.3.1. Provisions in place for the protection of specified species e.g. plants and animals that are endemic, native, threatened, endangered or migratory.	8.3.1.1. Number of effective mechanisms established to protect biodiversity 8.3.1.2. Cook Islands biodiversity database showing status of endemic and introduced species and number threatened or endangered species 8.3.1.3. Management plans in place for each species of concern 8.3.1.4. Status reports for all protected species or species of concern
8.3.2. Strong collaboration between agencies and relevant stakeholders for early mitigation, detection and rapid response plans on invasive species.	8.3.2.1. Response plans and monitoring reports on spread and control of invasive species. 8.3.2.2. Number and engagement of education and communications outputs warning impacts of invasive species
8.3.3. Strong collaboration and control by mandated agencies on the management of biodiversity risks, including exploitation, overharvesting and depletion.	8.3.3.1. Maintain status reports on risks to biodiversity 8.3.3.2. Number of inter-agency MOUs in place and interventions taken to protect biodiversity
8.3.4. Public and private partnerships with specific stakeholders and the Pa Enua on biodiversity conservation and invasive species eradication programmes.	8.3.4.1. Number of partnerships in place for biodiversity initiatives 8.3.4.2. Status reports for invasive species eradication 8.3.4.3. Investments leveraged to support biodiversity conservation and their effectiveness
8.3.5. Robust systems for detection of pests and management of biosecurity, both inter-island and into the Cook Islands.	8.3.5.1. Number of effective mechanisms in place to detect and monitor pests 8.3.5.2. Biosecurity plans and monitoring reports
8.3.6. Establish biosafety considerations into import and export processes.	8.3.6.1 Biosecurity risk species identified 8.3.6.2. Biosafety regulations in place
8.3.7. Major disturbances such as infrastructure development shall be avoided in threatened or protected habitats and ecosystems.	8.3.7.1. Status of threatened habitats continuously monitored 8.3.7.2. Oversight on development permits impacting threatened habitats

**Key Implementing Partners:** Island Governments, Natural Heritage Trust, Ministry of Marine Resources and the Ministry of Agriculture.



## 8.4 POLICY GOAL #4: WATER

Goal #	Monitoring Indicators
8.4.1. Sustainable management of water sources to manage environmental impacts.	8.4.1.1. Regular monitoring of the availability, access to and quality of drinking water 8.4.1.2. Number of effective mechanisms in place to manage water resources
8.4.2. Water conservation is balanced with the rights of traditional landowners as guardians of land and waterways.	8.4.2.1. Regular dialogue with traditional landowners with reporting mechanism on water conservation issues 8.4.2.2. Customary and traditional rights and practices are recognized within water resource management plans
8.4.3. Develop Integrated Water Resource Management systems across agencies.	8.4.3.1. Number of effective cross-stakeholder mechanisms for Water Resource Management
8.4.4. Effective systems in place to minimise storm water and wastewater impacts on the environment and human health.	8.4.4.1. Regular monitoring of human health indicators 8.4.4.2. Regular monitoring of access to and quality of sewage treatment systems 8.4.4.3. Regular monitoring of rainfall and storm water incidents 8.4.4.4. Number of effective mechanisms in place to manage storm water and waste water issues
8.4.5. Robust standards, testing and control mechanisms for wastewater and storm water quality.	8.4.5.1. Regular monitoring of stream water quality 8.4.5.2. Reporting of storm water and wastewater incidents
8.4.6. Implement effective monitoring and control measures on water usage for commercial purposes.	8.4.6.1 Periodic recording of water consumption to identify irregular patterns
8.4.7. Water systems are resilient to the impacts of climate change and disasters. Islands are self-sufficient.	8.4.7.1. Regular monitoring of stream water flow 8.4.7.2. Number of effective mechanisms in place to adapt or mitigate climate change impacts
8.4.8. Management Plans for water resources recognise customary and traditional practices	8.4.8.1 Report and research traditional and customary water management plans or practices 8.4.8.2 Number of community based water management plans or systems
8.4.9. Promote water conservation measures for commercial and private users.	8.4.9.1. Number and engagement of education and communications outputs promoting water conservation. 8.4.9.2. Number of effective mechanisms in place to promote water conservation
8.4.10. Encourage the collection of rainwater, e.g. for agriculture purposes like irrigation systems.	8.4.10.1. Number and engagement of education and communications outputs promoting collection of rainwater 8.4.10.2. Number of effective mechanisms in place to encourage rainwater collection

**Key Implementing Partners:** Te Marae Ora Ministry of Health, To Tatou Vai, Cook Islands Investment Corporation, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Climate Change Cook Islands, Ministry of Education, Island Governments and Office of the Prime Minister.





## 8.5 POLICY GOAL #5: AIR & CLIMATE CHANGE

Goal #	Monitoring Indicators
8.5.1. Promote use of renewable energy sources by facilitating adequate infrastructure.	8.5.1.1. Number and engagement of education and communications outputs promoting renewable energy sources 8.5.1.2. Regular monitoring of the number of renewable energy sources 8.5.1.3. Regular monitoring of energy consumption and availability 8.5.1.4. Regular monitoring of the establishment of infrastructure to enable renewable energy sources
8.5.2. Set national standards on vehicle emissions to reduce over time and energy efficient products.	8.5.2.1. Regular monitoring of Greenhouse Gas emission trends and mitigation efforts 8.5.2.2. Regular monitoring of Ozone Depleting Substance consumption trends and reduction efforts
8.5.3. Create public awareness on the use of low emission transport, including fuel efficiency, e-vehicles, active transport and public transport.	8.5.3.1. Number and engagement of education and communications outputs promoting use of fuel-efficient vehicles 8.5.3.2. Regular monitoring of the number of electric vehicles imported 8.5.3.3. Number of effective mechanisms in place to reduce overall emissions in the transport sector
8.5.4. Develop partnerships with the Ministry of Health Te Marae Ora on the joint impacts of air pollution on the environment and health of the resident population.	8.5.4.1. Regular monitoring of the medical conditions related to air pollution 8.5.4.2. Number of effective mechanisms in place to address air pollution
8.5.5. Legal instruments to clearly define substances and regulate the burning of hazardous waste.	8.5.5.1. Number and engagement of education and communications outputs advising risks of burning hazardous waste 8.5.5.2. Number of legal instruments implemented 8.5.5.3 Reduction of reported incidents of burning hazardous waste
8.5.6. Review the need to regulate air quality from an environmental perspective.	8.5.6.1. Review completed and recommendations documented
8.5.7. Adaptation and mitigation measures to combat the impacts of climate change.	8.5.7.1. Number of climate adaptation projects implemented 8.5.7.2. Mitigation measures identified on the impacts of climate change
8.5.8. Enhance natural carbon sinks by conserving forests and protecting natural ecosystems.	8.5.8.1. Regulation passed relating to Protected or Conserved Areas 8.5.8.2. Number of protected and conserved areas 8.5.8.3 Regular monitoring of forest area, naturally vegetated areas and trends

**Key Implementing Partners:** Te Marae Ora Ministry of Health, Climate Change Cook Islands, Office of the Prime Minister and the Island Governments.



## 8.6 POLICY GOAL #6: WASTE

Goal #	Monitoring Indicators
8.6.1. Strengthen solid waste management systems in Rarotonga and the Pa Enua.	8.6.1.1. Number of islands in the Pa Enua that have established a Waste Depot 8.6.1.2 National data collected on waste: End-of-life vehicles, plastics, metal, cans, glass bottles, etc. 8.6.1.3 National data collected on movement of waste from the Pa Enua to Rarotonga
8.6.2. Strengthen legislation relating to waste management and resource recovery mechanisms	8.6.2.1 Number of new legislation passed that relates to the development and enhancement of waste management in the Cook Islands 8.6.2.2 Implementation of an Advanced Recovery Disposal Fee (ARDF) 8.6.2.3 Implementation of National Action Plans relating to waste management
8.6.3. Ensure environmentally safe disposal of toxic chemicals and waste	8.6.3.1. National survey of disposal sites for hazardous waste with appropriate scientific testing 8.6.3.2. Regular monitoring of import/export/disposal of all consumer waste (including e-waste and white ware waste, end-of-life vehicles) 8.6.3.3. Regular monitoring of the importation, collection and management of hazardous waste (including medical waste, e-waste, fuels, asbestos and chemicals) 8.6.3.4. Regular monitoring of incidents related to spillage of hazardous chemicals and waste 8.6.3.5. Number of effective mechanisms in place to ensure environmentally safe disposal of toxic chemicals and waste
8.6.4. Publish guidelines on environmental quality to include standards on solid waste and wastewater	8.6.4.1. Number and effectiveness of guidelines published in each area of standards 8.6.4.2. Waste water standards developed and endorsed by Government
8.6.5. Prevention and control of pollution and waste	8.6.5.1. Percentage of population with access to adequate wastewater treatment systems 8.6.5.2. Regular monitoring of the number of medical conditions related to polluted water 8.6.5.3. Regular monitoring of the number of leakage incidents causing pollution 8.6.5.4. Survey of all waste disposal sites with appropriate scientific testing 8.6.5.5 Number of waste permits and litter fines issued 8.6.5.6 Number and engagement of communications relating to pollution and waste management 8.6.5.7. Regular monitoring and reporting of washed up waste on coasts 8.6.5.8: Number of clean-up campaigns or projects by island or nationally
8.6.6. Implement a national campaign to eliminate legacy waste	8.6.6.1 National data collected on waste exported: End-of-life vehicles, plastics, metal, cans, glass bottles, etc. 8.6.6.2 Funding dedicated for the exportation of legacy waste 8.6.6.3 Effective monitoring of the disposal or removal of legacy waste in the most environmentally sustainable method. 8.6.6.4 Return all recyclables and waste to Rarotonga for further processing, disposal and repatriation to recycling facilities.

**Key Implementing Partners:** Infrastructure Cook Islands, Te Marae Ora Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration and the Island Governments.









## 9.1 CONCLUSION

The National Environment Service has adapted its systems and practices to drive a coherent environmental movement in the Cook Islands. The NEP 2022-32 serves to enhance environmental protection, but also to mainstream all environmental challenges into the Cook Islands' development agendas and future infrastructure planning.

Environmental sustainability is a key focus for the Cook Islands to achieve its indicators in the NSDA 2020+. The integration of social, economic and environmental objectives is critical for the implementation of this policy. It is essential that the impacts from developments and economic growth are environmentally sustainable.

The NEP 2022-32 is a call-to-action to strengthen the Environment Sector. All stakeholders will need to come together and work collaboratively to strengthen the state of the environment. Increasing environment concerns, like biodiversity loss and pollution, require urgent dialogue with key stakeholders and the community to promote environmental management.

To this end, NES has developed a comprehensive policy framework that will lead and strengthen legal and institutional instruments. The guiding principles and policy instruments identified in the NEP 2022-32 will support its implementation with a command-and-control approach while exploring market-based approaches to foster innovation and partnerships.

The six Cross-cutting Policy Goals and Instruments are aligned with NES's broad mandate to address environmental challenges and concerns in the most holistic manner. The Policy Instruments outline the commitment by NES and its respective partners that will further enhance the national goals with its agency efforts.

The Monitoring and Evaluation framework sets the pace for the NEP 2022-32 to be delivered. The opportunity to review the monitoring indicators will continue to strengthen the outcomes of the NEP 2022-32 and adapt to the changing social and economic landscape.

Finally, it is imminent that the Cook Islands' prospects and trajectory is no longer possible without environmental sustainability. The global ecological crisis is rapidly increasing and the call for national solidarity on addressing environmental issues is at its most critical time. The NEP2022-32 is centred on a strong foundation for sustainable development and is aligned with the Cook Islands aspirations set out in the NDSA 2020+.

In conclusion, NES would like to thank all members of the public, stakeholders, Pa Enua communities, local and international partners who have contributed to the stakeholder consultations. Your input and feedback helped shape the NEP 2022-32 for the sustainability of the Cook Islands' natural resources and environmental protection.

Kia manuia  
Director, Management and All Staff  
National Environment Service



# 10 GLOSSARY







## 10.1 GLOSSARY

**Biodiversity** - short for biological diversity; the variety of living organisms, plants and animals in the Cook Islands

**Circular economy** - a production and consumption model that circulates goods at their highest quality for as long as possible

**Command and control approach** - the use of legislation by policy makers to regulate particular sectors or activities to protect the quality of the environment

**Ecosystems** - a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment interacting as a functional unit

**Ecosystem services** - the benefits people obtain from ecosystems e.g. water filtration and nutrient cycling

**Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** - the area covering the sea, seabed, and subsoil that are beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea.

**Greenhouse gases** - the atmospheric gases responsible for causing global warming and climate change

**Hazardous waste** - waste in the form of solid, liquid, or gaseous, that is likely to be harmful to human health or the environment

**Internal waters** - any area of the sea that is on the landward side of the baseline of the territorial sea (that baseline being determined in relation to the island concerned in accordance with the Maritime Zones Act 2018)

**Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)** - a public process of analysing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives

**Market based approach** - to incentivise environmentally friendly alternatives by using economic variables, e.g. markets and costs.

**Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs)** - legally binding International Agreements between three or more state parties to reach a common environmental goal

**Nature based solutions** - actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems. It addresses societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously benefiting people and nature

**Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECM)** - areas that are achieving the long term and effective in-situ conservation of biodiversity outside of protected areas

**Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS)** - chemicals that contribute to the loss of ozone molecules (O<sub>3</sub>) in the Earth's stratosphere

**Protected areas** - a geographically defined area which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives

**Significant Biodiversity Areas (SBA)** - areas recognised to contain important biodiversity values, e.g. Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA), Important Bird Areas (IBA), Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMA), Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) and Biophysically Special, Unique Marine Areas (SUMA), etc






















**Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA)** - a tool to support integrated environmental policy, planning or assessment for informed decision making

**Sustainable Financing Mechanisms (SFM)** - instruments designed to create a way to sustainably finance environmental initiatives









# SCHEDULE "A"

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS POLICY GOALS

KEY STAKEHOLDERS	PARTNERSHIPS WITH NES	1: LAND 	2: MARINE 	3: BIODIVERSITY 	4: WATER 	5: AIR & CLIMATE CHANGE 	6: WASTE 
Infrastructure Cook Islands	Technical advice, Infrastructure project applications, data & research, reporting, service delivery, emergency works						
Ministry of Marine Resources	Technical advice, data & research						
Ministry of Agriculture	Biosecurity, data & research						
Ministry of Transport	Compliance, information sharing						
Seabed Minerals Authority	Technical advice, compliance, information sharing						
Cook Islands Investment Corporation & State Owned Enterprises	Infrastructure project applications, data & research, reporting, service delivery, emergency works						
Te Marae Ora - Ministry of Health	Technical advice, information sharing, data & research						
Departments: Education, Tourism, Culture	Public awareness, research and information sharing						
Central and Support Services Office of the Prime Minister, Office of the Public Service Commissioner, Crown Law Office, Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Immigration, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Cook Islands Audit Office and the Office of the Ombudsman Cook Islands.							



KEY STAKEHOLDERS	PARTNERSHIPS WITH NES						
		1: LAND 	2: MARINE 	3: BIODIVERSITY 	4. WATER 	5. AIR & CLIMATE CHANGE 	6. WASTE 
Aronga Mana	Customary knowledge & advice, information sharing, project implementation						
Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)	Peer review, advocacy, technical advice and support						
Secretariat of the Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP)	Technical advice, data & research, capacity development, training, partnership funding and information sharing						
Academia	Science & research, capacity development, project implementation and technical advice						
Cook Islands public	Public awareness, reporting, information sharing, advocacy						



