



Management response to the Midterm Review of the *Conserving Biodiversity and enhancing Ecosystem functions through a “Ridge to Reef” approach in the Cook Islands Project*

Project Title: Conserving Biodiversity and enhancing Ecosystem functions through a “Ridge to Reef” approach in the Cook Islands

PIMS ID #: 5168

UNDP Project ID #: 00092426

Project Award ID #: 00084399

Evaluation Mission Completion Date: 25th August 2017

Evaluation Final Report Completion Date: 19th October 2017

Date of Issue of Management Response: 14th February 2019

Prepared by: *Ms. Louisa Karika – Cook Islands R2R Project Manager, Ms. Maria Tuoro – Cook Islands R2R Ms. Anne Trevor, UNDP project focal point MCO Samoa*

Contributors: *Mr. Michael Green – UNDP GEF RTA, Mr. Gabriel Jaramillo – UNDP GEF RTA,*

Cleared by: *Cook Islands National Biodiversity Steering Committee, UNDP MCO and UNDP GEF RTA*

Context, background and findings

The Cook Islands R2R project was designed to enhance Cook Islands’ capacities to effectively manage its protected areas (PAs) and sustainably manage its productive landscapes at local scales while considering food security and livelihoods. This will include supporting the operationalisation of the Cook Islands Marae Moana Act (specifically in an area covering approximately 1.1 million km² in the southern part of the Cook Islands exclusive economic zone (EEZ)) and the establishment and strengthening of various forms of protected and locally managed areas, including Protected Natural Areas (PNA), Community Conservation Areas (CCA), and ra’ui sites.

In so doing, the project will support the Cook Islands in maintaining traditional resource management and conservation systems and approaches, including a leading role for traditional and local leaders and the local communities that they represent in the declaration and management of protected areas, while also integrating these traditional systems into a formal legal and institutional system of protected areas.

The project will support the Government in tailoring policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks to suit the specific characteristics of the Cook Islands and of the Marae Moana, recognising that protection and sustainable use will need to be zoned and planned carefully, and that tenure over most land areas is vested in local communities through a traditional tenure system.

Finally, the project has been designed to engineer a paradigm shift in the management of marine and terrestrial PAs from a site centric approach to a holistic “ridge to reef” land and seascape approach, whereby activities in the immediate production areas adjacent to marine and terrestrial PAs will be managed to reduce threats to biodiversity stemming from key production activities (tourism and agriculture). The project has 2 components concerned with (1) strengthening PAs management and (2) mainstreaming biodiversity across production land and seascapes; and 7 outputs as follows:



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

- Output 1.1: Strengthened Legal / Regulatory and Policy Frameworks for Protected Areas
- Output 1.2: Expanded and strengthened management systems for Protected Areas
- Output 1.3: Strengthened institutional coordination and capacities at the national and local levels for the participatory management of Protected Areas
- Output 1.4: Financial sustainability framework developed for system of Protected Areas
- Output 2.1: Ridge to Reef approaches integrated into Land Use and Development Planning
- Output 2.2: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into agriculture sector
- Output 2.3: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into tourism sector

The expected results of the project include:

- Legal designation and management of the 1.1 million sq. km. of the Cook Islands Marine Park
- Development of Island Development plans for biodiversity conservation
- Capacity strengthening national agencies responsible for protected area management ;
- Development and enactment of the Protected and Managed Areas Act
- Development and implementation of management plans for protected areas on islands in the Southern Group
- Improved management effectiveness of priority terrestrial and marine conservation zones
- Conservation of critical habitats and priority marine and terrestrial species within the CIMP
- 15% reduction in values of agricultural chemicals imports
- Review of EIA legislation for infrastructure development in and around PA areas
- No decline in forest cover by end of project (baseline 13,245Ha)
- At least 10 sites within the CIMP with improved water quality through measure to control water pollution and sedimentation
- No increase in algal levels on coral reefs by end of project
- At least 20 tourism businesses implementing biodiversity management programmes that comply with conservation guidelines developed through the project and included in the national accreditation system
- At least 15 biodiversity conservation project implemented by tourism operators

The project document was signed on the 7th July 2015, and is now in its third year of implementation with a planned end date of 6th July 2019 as per signed Project Document.

The objective of the Mid-term review (MTR) was to gain an independent analysis of the progress mid-way through the project. The MTR focused on identifying potential project design problems, assessing progress towards the achievement of the project objective, and identifying and documenting lessons learned about project design, implementation and management. Findings of this review will be incorporated as recommendations for enhanced implementation during the final half of the project's term.

The recommendations of the MTR report have been proposed with the aim of improving project effectiveness and enhancing the likelihood of project results being sustained after the GEF project funding ends.

Key recommendations and management response

MTR recommendation 1				
Announce and launch a 10 week Consolidation Phase (CP) during which project scope and strategic results framework will be reviewed and objectives clarified, and changes will be made to project management, specifically through recruitment of long term technical staff for the PMU and improvements in how the PMU works with partners and other stakeholders. This will require a team of two Consolidation Phase consultants, one international and one national, who will work together with PMU on all aspects of the CP.				
Management Response 1				
A shortened consolidation phase to proceed as soon as Chief Technical Adviser is recruited				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
1. Develop TORs and recruit	Feb 2019	UNDP MCO		
2. Review of Project strategic results framework and project institutional arrangements	Mar 2019	R2R project team with CTA	Review of activities has already commenced during 2018	
MTR recommendation 2				
Begin recruitment of two senior technical advisers to guide, advise and work together with PMU staff, partners and other stakeholders after the Consolidation Phase				
(a) A long term, highly experienced and qualified Chief Technical Adviser (CTA)				
(b) A long term, highly experienced and qualified Protected Area Management Expert				
NES PMU, UNDP MCO				
Management Response 2				
Agreed with management recommendation 2.				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
a) Develop TORs for Chief Technical Advisor (CTA), Protected Area Systems & Management Specialist/Advisor, and Sustainable Tourism Specialist	Jan 2019	UNDP MCO with R2R PMU	Drafts completed for CTA and PAM.	
b) Recruit Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) – 120 days on an intermittent basis for up to a further 120 days (or as budget permits) spread over a remaining duration of the project. NB: Crucial to ensure this assignment starts with an intensive 3 months of continuous input for the consolidation phase.	Feb 2019	UNDP MCO with R2R PMU		
c) Recruit Protected Area Systems & Management Specialist/Advisor – 100 days spread over 12 months (i.e. intermittent), with option to extend this for a further 100 days spread over 12-18 months. Two key tasks: (i) to	Feb 2019	UNDP MCO with R2R PMU		



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

support (policy formulation) the development of CI's PAs system, with the establishment of a comprehensive spatial database of all PAs (including ra'ui), and apply the IUCN PAs categories to the system or an alternate agreed national classification system; and (ii) to provide technical support in the development of all management plans developed by the project, including the Aitutaki Lagoon Master Plan.				
d) Recruit Sustainable Tourism Specialist 80 days spread over 8 months (i.e. intermittent) with extension option for a further 80 days spread over 12-18 months. ToR to include: strengthening accreditation schemes and environmental safeguards within the sector; support the implementatin of the accreditation scheme, and to develop policies/mechanisms that will underpin sustainable financing for nature conservation from tourism sector.	Mar 2019	R2R PMU, UNDP MCO		
MTR Recommendation 3				
PMU and the two CP Consultants hold a series of individual and small group meetings with partners and other stakeholders to establish a shared vision of project scope and implementation and institutional sustainability of project outcomes post project.				
Management Response 3				
Agreed with MTR recommendation 3				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
a) Undertake in conjunction with #1; building on the Dec. 2017 R2R Retreat and its shared R2R vision.	Mar 2019	R2R PMU UNDP	Planned	
MTR recommendation 4				
Revert to a single source (the PMU) for disbursement of project funds.				
Management response 4				
All finances have been consolidated into one account.				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments



Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

a) MMR account consolidated into one R2R account based at NES and all funds disbursed from there.	Sept 2018	R2R PMU	Completed	

MTR Recommendation 5

Review project progress, refine the SRF and its indicators, define revised targets and institutional responsibilities, and draw up a Project Workplan to achieve revised targets by end of October 2020 (ie 15 months beyond current expected end of project).

Management Response 5

Agree with recommendation 5 to be undertaken in conjunction with Recommendation #1

Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
a) Revised Project progress, refine SRF and indicators, define SRF target and institutional responsibilities	Mar 2019	R2R PMU UNDP MCO	Planned	
b) Revise workplan for 2019 and planned extension period	Feb 2019	R2R PMU UNDP MCO	Planned	

MTR Recommendation 6

Hold a two day multi-stakeholder Consolidation Workshop¹ (CW) to build on the stakeholder/partner consultations and reach agreement on targets, revised indicators, key activities, project work plan to December 2020, roles of consultants, and new arrangements for routine work planning by project partners. The CP consultants will play a leading role in the CW, possibly with the support of a suitably qualified external facilitator². Much of the groundwork will be done previous the CW so that progress can be made during the workshop itself.

Management Response 6

Agree with recommendation 6; undertake in conjunction with recommendation with #1 and #5

Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
a) organise and conduct 2-3 day workshop to reach agreement on targets, revised indicators, key activities, project work plan to December 2020, roles of consultants, and new arrangements for routine work planning by project partners	Mar 2019	R2R PMU, UNDP MCO	Planned	

MTR Recommendation 7

Establish the strengthened PMU, in an office dedicated to the project, with workspace for the long term CTA and Protected Area Consultant, short term consultants, out-posted PMU staff and liaison officers.

¹ similar in scope to an Inception Workshop

² Preferably with experience on theory of change processes

Management Response				
PMU will investigate options for office space for the Project CTA and PAM expert and look for suitable options.				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
a) Options for Project office space determined	Mar 2019	NES	Planned	
MTR Recommendation 8				
Introduce and operate a more pro-active, R2R project-centred, inclusive approach to quarterly work-planning led by PMU and increasing the involvement of NHT, TIS, MMCO and possibly others, as full partners.				
Management Response 8				
MMCO is already a part of the implementation technical team that reviews each others workplans during planning phases.				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
a) Project technical implementation team have joint work planning sessions, at least once every quarter, to develop QWPs/AWPs and align activities wherever possible.	Mar 2019 June 2019 Sep 2019 Dec 2019 Mar 2020 June 2020 Sep 2020 Dec 2020	PMU	Planned	
MTR Recommendation 9				
Increase international technical exchange				
Management Response 9				
Agree with MTR recommendation 9.				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
To be addressed through recommendation 11	Jun 2019	PMU	Planned	
MTR Recommendation 10				
Select a small number of activities that are almost ready for implementation as pilots to a high standard and "fast-tracking" to demonstrate good practice in application of the R2R approach and to produce lasting tangible products.				
(a) Preparation of the Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan				
(b) Work to complete the Cook Islands Biodiversity and Ethnological Database (CIBED)				
(c) Drafting of biodiversity criteria for tourism accreditation				
Management Response 10				

R2R support to the update of the Cook Islands Biodiversity and Ethnological Database (CIBED) and to the Biodiversity Eco-certification for tourism accreditation has already commenced in 2018 and will continue into 2019.

Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	Comments
			Status	
a) Develop TORs and fast track procurement for; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan • Terrestrial assessments of Takutea and Manuae • Development of Management Plans for Takitumu Conservation Area, Mokoero, Takutea and Manuae • R2R Capacity and capabilities needs assessment • Natural Heritage Trust Technical Assistance to support CIBED succession planning and support to the R2R project 	Jan/Feb 2019	R2R PMU, UNDP MCO	Draft TORs developed for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Takutea and Mokoero Assessments and Management Plans ▪ R2R Capacity Needs Assessment 	

MTR Recommendation 11

Carry out needs assessments and prepare comprehensive capacity development and communication plans for the project while ensuring that the project's activities take place as part of overall training and communications for biodiversity conservation and the environment in the country and for the long term.

(a) Training needs assessment based on analysis of requirements in each relevant agency and what training has been done so far.

(b) Comprehensive communication plan for the project aimed at informing and involving all stakeholders, including the general public and government staff.

Management Response 11

Agree with recommendation 11

Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	Comments
			Status	
a) Training needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop TOR for capacity needs assessment • Prepare a comprehensive capacity development plan • Implement priority training needs where possible 	Dec 2018 Apr 2019 Jun 2019	R2R PMU, UNDP MCO	Draft TOR prepared.	
b) Comprehensive communication plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop annual communications plan 	Feb 2019	R2R PMU, UNDP MCO	Planned	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Communications plan 				
MTR Recommendation 12				
Plan for and support government in providing technical counterpart staff to sustain the work of the project in biodiversity conservation, including protected area management				
Management Response 12				
Capacity needs assessment and training throughout the project will target Government staff to upskill/train in R2R related areas as well as in planning and implementing				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
a) Include training of local counterparts in CTA and PAM areas of expertise	Feb 2019	PMU	Planned	
b) Identify key staff to undertake training, skills and professional development based on Capacity Needs Assessment, including local counterparts to learn from CTA, PAM and ST TAs	June 2019	PMU	Planned	
MTR Recommendation 13				
Apply for a no-cost extension of the project for 15 months until Dec 2020.				
Management Response 9				
Apply as soon as possible. Given slow/delayed follow up to MTR, 18 month extension is preferred and will be requested.				
Key Actions	Due Date (month/year)	Responsible Unit	Tracking	
			Status	Comments
Apply for 18 month extension of the project; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete Extension request form Letter of request from GEF Operational Focal Point/Implementing partner Revised budget/workplan for extension period 	Feb 2019	R2R PMU	Draft extension request and workplan prepared.	