

# **Cook Islands Ridge to Reef Exit and Sustainability Strategy**

**Prepared for UNDP and Ridge to Reef Project**

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**February 2021**

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Citation:

Twyford, K. & Weeks, H. (2021) Cook Islands Ridge to Reef Exit and Sustainability Strategy.  
Prepared for UNDP and Ridge to Reef Project.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

BD	Biodiversity
CCA	Community Conserved Area
CIMP	Cook Islands Marine Park
CIT	Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EoP	End-of-Project
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographic information system
HoA	House of Ariki
IW	International waters
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
KPIs	Key performance indicators
Marae Moana	Cook Islands Maori term for the Cook Islands marine estate (synonymous with CIMP)
MER	Monitoring, evaluation and reporting
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MMCO	Marae Moana Coordination Office
MMR	Ministry of Marine Resources
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoH	Ministry of Health
MPA	Marine protected area
MSP	Marine spatial plan
NEP	National Environment Policy
NES	National Environment Service
NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NSDA	National Sustainable Development Agenda
OECM	Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PA	Protected area
PAMP	Protected Areas Management Policy
PACS	Protected Areas Classification System
PMU	Project Management Unit
ProDoc	Project Document
Ra'ui	traditional form of resource management and conservation as used in Cook Islands
R2R	Ridge to Reef
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SRF	Strategic results framework
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
TCA	Takitumu Conservation Area
TTV	To Tatou Vai
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose and aims

A project exit strategy describes how a project intends to withdraw its resources while ensuring that achievement of the project goals is not jeopardised and that progress towards these goals will continue. An exit strategy can also be seen as a 'sustainability strategy' for a program or project (Rogers and Macias 2004; Gardner et al. 2005).

This ***Cook Islands Ridge to Reef Exit and Sustainability Strategy*** aims to:

- Ensure the sustainability of project goals and impacts after the project ends.
- Inform stakeholders and beneficiaries of project closure and outline their roles and responsibilities to sustain post-project activities.
- Ensure the orderly closure of the project.

### 1.2 Context

A project/program "exit" refers to the withdrawal of all externally provided resources from an entire program or project (Rogers and Macias 2004). In the context of Ridge to Reef (R2R), project exit refers to the withdrawal of external support by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP), coincident with the end of the project funding cycle.

The R2R project started in July 2015 upon signature of the project document and was originally intended to be completed and close in July 2019. However, approval was provided in early 2019 for a no-cost project extension to 6 January 2021. In December 2020, UNDP and GEF approved a further no-cost extension of five months due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated impacts on project implementation. The project closure date is 6 June 2021.

For R2R, a two-stage project exit will be adopted:

- Stage 1: Exit and completion of all activities by implementation partners<sup>3</sup> - by 6 January 2021. (this was the most recent approved closure date for R2R and has been the basis upon which partners and R2R operated throughout 2020).
- Stage 2: Continued operation of the R2R Project Management Unit (PMU) with an emphasis upon:
  - (a) completion of a small number of high priority consultancies
  - (b) project closure activities including terminal evaluation study (commissioned by UNDP) and development of key closure documents (project performance report, this ESS).This stage would occur up to full project closure on 6 June 2021.

## 2. Approaches to exit strategies

The development literature identifies three exit approaches: phase down, phase out and phase over (eg. Levinger & McLeod 2002; Rogers & Macias 2004; Gardner et al. 2005). These are described below.

### 2.1 Phasing down

Phasing down is the gradual reduction of project/program inputs and/or activities. Phase down can utilise local organisations to sustain project benefits while the original sponsor (or implementing agency or donor) deploys fewer resources. It can also involve a conscious and strategic reduction in project activity such that existing activities are completed and no new ones started. Phasing down is often a preliminary stage to both phase out and phase over (Rogers & Macias 2004; Gardner et al. 2005).

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<sup>3</sup> National Environment Service (NES), Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR), Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Marae Moana Coordination Office (MMCO), Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT), House of Ariki (HoA)

## 2.2 Phasing out

Phase out refers to the withdrawal of project inputs (eg. funding, service provision, technical assistance, other resources) and involvement without making explicit arrangements for the inputs or activities to be turned over and continued by another entity. Interventions that have already created permanent changes and do not require the ongoing provision of services or resources to maintain that state (ie. it is self-sustaining) are suitable for phase out. In such cases, the project changes are self-sustaining, the impact of the changes continues, and there is no need for additional external inputs (Rogers & Macias 2004).

Gardner et al. (2005) emphasised that funding cycles don't always coincide with needs. Donor support and funding cycles may impose artificial timelines on program phase-out.

## 2.3 Phasing over

A phase over approach is most appropriate for interventions that require specific activities to continue and where there is an existing entity (government organisation, NGO, and/or communities) to take responsibility for implementation. During project design and implementation, emphasis is placed on institutional capacity building so that the services provided can continue through local organisations (Rogers & Macias 2004).

Often, phase over aims to integrate program activities into existing public sector programs. In many ways, obtaining government commitment to maintain a project seems ideal, especially in those cases where continued resource, staff, or infrastructure inputs are needed. This approach implicitly assumes that the government will be able to support activities aimed at accomplishing and expanding program goals. But some governments find it difficult to provide the level of resources required or lack the technical capacity needed to take over activities in a sustainable way (Rogers & Macias 2004).

An exit strategy that involves phase over to government organisations must be based on a realistic assessment of capacity, commitment and resources. There are several considerations:

- How strong is the sense of ownership and commitment to continue program activities?
- To what extent do government agencies value program activities? What is the level of demand for the "phased over" services?
- Do government officers, managers and executives have the knowledge and skills needed to implement the phased over activities?
- Do the government organisations implementing the phased over activities have sufficient institutional and human resource capacity?
- Are the government organisations responsible for implementing phased over programs resilient to shocks and changes in the political and social environment? (adapted from Rogers & Macias 2004; Gardner et al. 2005).

## 3. Application to R2R

### 3.1 Exit levels

At the time of writing this strategy (February 2021), R2R is in an active stage of **phase down** with a strategic approach towards any further interventions (very limited activities post 6 January 2021). This active phase down is being driven by (a) imminent operational closure of the project, and (b) very limited funding remains for individual activities (interventions) (which has already been budgeted and allocated accordingly).

Exit planning and selection of exit approach for R2R will occur at two levels:

- At **whole of project level**, R2R will be phased out; it will cease to exist as a project after 6 June 2021 and there will not be handover or transfer to another institution.

- Conversely, at the level of **individual activities and interventions** – which is where this Exit and Sustainability Strategy concentrates - R2R will use both phase out and phase over approaches.

### 3.2 Sustainability building blocks

The R2R project design established a Strategic Results Framework (SRF) comprising an overall project objective, two 'components' (outcomes) and 34 key performance indicators (KPIs) with targets. The SRF has been the key tool for project management throughout the life of R2R: it provides the basis for monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) and performance assessment. The SRF, its KPIs and targets, and actual project outputs, are used as the building blocks for this ESS.

Different types of project activities lend themselves to different approaches to ensure sustainability. Many R2R SRF indicators and targets are “one-offs”, project-specific interventions with no life beyond project closure and therefore there is no requirement for sustainability as the target and change has already been fully attained, or will be by closure. In these cases, the initiative comes to a complete stop. The exit approach of “phase out” is applied to these indicators.

For some indicators<sup>4</sup>, there was limited progress due to design flaws and/or failure to establish a baseline. In these cases, phase out is also applied.

In other cases, very few or no explicit activities are needed to sustain impact. In others (a relatively small number of cases), a higher level of resourcing will be required for the activity to be sustained. The exit approach category of “phase over” is applied to these indicators.

The following section applies the exit and sustainability approach to the R2R SRF. As per the EoP Performance Report (Twyford & Weeks 2021), an end-of-project completion category is identified for each KPI and target:

1. By EoP, target will be achieved or exceeded (*target achieved*).
2. By EoP, target will not be achieved in full (*target partially achieved*).
3. *Not achievable* (due to no baseline and/or indicator being poorly designed)

The major output arising from each KPI is highlighted and an exit category (either phase down, or phase over, or phase out), and the organisation with post-project responsibility for the output/s.

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<sup>4</sup> Identified in the End-of-Project Performance Report (Twyford & Weeks 2021)

#### 4. Exit and Sustainability Strategy (ESS)

##### 4.1 Objective: To build national and local capacities and actions to ensure effective conservation of biodiversity, food security and livelihoods and the enhancement of ecosystem functions within the Cook Islands Marine Park

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>5</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
1	Overall framework in place for conservation in the Southern Group of the Cook Islands	1.1 million sq. km. of CIMP legally designated and actively managed, with dedicated staff implementing planning and coordination of the entire CIMP by end of year 2	1	1.9 million sq. km. of CIMP has been legally designated and is actively managed	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ MSP Policy, MSP Regulations and associated changes to the Act ✓ Marine Spatial Planning ✓ Outlook Report
2a	Area of inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group managed for biodiversity conservation through traditional systems and island bylaws and supported through capacity development of traditional leaders and communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrestrial</li> </ul>	By end of project: 6 islands totalling 15,110 ha.	3	5,942 ha of inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group is managed for terrestrial biodiversity conservation	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ Establishment of a nationally comprehensive and representative system of terrestrial protected areas and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs).
2b	Area of inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group managed for biodiversity conservation through traditional systems and island bylaws and supported through capacity	By end of project: 6 islands totalling 16,174 ha.	1	MPAs around each of 15 islands (total area of 13,560,930 ha)	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ Establishment of a comprehensive and representative system of marine protected areas (MPAs) across Marae Moana (CIMP) through

<sup>5</sup> As per EoP performance report status categories: 1. Target achieved; 2. Target partially achieved; 3. Not achievable (Twyford & Weeks 2021)

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>5</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
	development of traditional leaders and communities <sup>6</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marine</li> </ul>					marine spatial planning and zoning. Lead responsibility is with Marae Moana Technical Advisory Group (TAG).
3	Tracking Tool IW1: Innovative solutions implemented for reduced pollution, improved water use efficiency, sustainable fisheries with rights-based management, IWRM, water supply protection in SIDS, and aquifer and catchment protection	Water quality improved through small demonstrations and monitoring mechanisms in place for project related indicators	1	Monthly lagoon water quality assessments (NES & MMR)	Phase over	To Tatou Vai (TTV), MMR and MoH supported by NES

<sup>6</sup> Revised indicator as per project extension request to UNDP.

## 4.2 Outcome 1: Strengthening protected areas management

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>7</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
4	Improved management effectiveness of Cook Islands Marine Park, as measured by GEF BD 1 Tracking Tool (METT)	METT score > 60 by end of project Baseline 30	1	Result: METT score of 61 at end of project (Twyford & Weeks 2021)	Phase out	Nil
5a	National agencies responsible for PA management are effectively delivering PA management functions (as measured by the capacity development indicator score for protected area system): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systemic</li> </ul>	By end of project: 70% Baseline 42%	3	Issue with baseline methodology not being available from UNDP hence not repeatable (see Twyford & Weeks 2021)	Phase out	Nil
5b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutional</li> </ul>	By end of project: 70% Baseline 46%	3		Phase out	Nil
5c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual</li> </ul>	By end of project: 70% Baseline 52%	3		Phase out	Nil
6	Updated and consolidated legal framework for management of the Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP) and all other protected areas in the country	<i>Review of legislative framework for protected areas and development of a Protected and Managed Areas Policy, national protected areas classification system developed through policy<sup>8</sup></i>	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marae Moana Act 2017</li> <li>• Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP) – Stage 1 Discussion Paper (Sheppard 2020)</li> <li>• National protected areas classification</li> </ul>	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP) – Stage 2, including PACS and improved governance mechanisms.

<sup>7</sup> As per EoP performance report status categories: 1. Target achieved; 2. Target partially achieved; 3. Not achievable (Twyford & Weeks 2021)

<sup>8</sup> Revised indicator as per project extension request to UNDP.

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>7</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
				system (PACS) (Twyford 2021a) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marae Moana (CIMP) marine spatial planning (Twyford 2021b)</li> </ul>		
7	Consolidated management authority for protected areas in the Cook Islands	Legislative review and policy identifies appropriate mechanisms for coordination and management of protected areas by end of project <sup>9</sup>	2	Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP) – Stage 1 Discussion Paper (Sheppard 2020)	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ As for KPI#6 above
8	Management of protected area sites on islands in the Southern Group	Management plans for at least 15 protected area sites under implementation by end of project	2	Four management plans	Phase out	Nil
9a	% Area of Southern Group islands managed as Protected Areas (protected natural areas, community conservation areas, ra’ui sites): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Terrestrial</li> </ul>	By end of project: 6.7%	1	At least 6,471 ha of “protected areas” (30% of the total island area)	Phase out	Nil
9b	% Area of Southern Group islands managed as Protected Areas (protected natural areas, community conservation areas, ra’ui sites):	12.3%	1	174,965 km <sup>2</sup> is managed MPA (15.9% of the total area)	Phase out	Nil

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>7</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Marine (to the outer reef)</li> </ul>					
10a	<p>Improved management effectiveness of priority conservation zones, as measured by the GEF BD 1 Tracking Tool (METT):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Takitumu Conservation Area (Rarotonga)</li> </ul>	<p>By end of project: METT score &gt;70</p> <p>Baseline 64%</p>	2	METT score of 65	Phase over	TCA landholders with support from NES
10b	<p>Improved management effectiveness of priority conservation zones, as measured by the GEF BD 1 Tracking Tool (METT):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cloud Forest Nature Reserve (Rarotonga)</li> </ul>	<p>METT score &gt;50</p> <p>Baseline 26%</p>	2	<p>METT score of 13</p> <p>Important to recognise that this area is not designated in any way; an aspirational aim from R2R ProDoc</p>	Phase over	<p><b>High priority for phase over</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of this area as a protected area remains a very important priority; NES to lead and coordinate with communities.</li> </ul>
10c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manuae Wildlife Sanctuary / Marine Reserve (Manuae)</li> </ul>	<p>By end of project: METT score &gt;50</p> <p>Baseline 12%</p>	2	<p>METT score of 25</p> <p>Important to recognise that the terrestrial areas of Manuae are not designated as a reserve or protected area in any way; Manuae Sanctuary is an aspirational aim from R2R ProDoc</p>	Phase over	<p><b>High priority for phase over</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of the entire island as a protected area remains a very important priority.</li> <li>Integrated and sensitive resource management across the island, lagoon and inshore waters is crucial to protect significant biodiversity values of this area.</li> <li>NES in conjunction with island landholders, Aitutaki Council and MMR.</li> </ul>

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>7</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
10d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moko Ero Nui Leeward Forest Reserve (Atiu)</li> </ul>	METT score >50 Baseline 26%	2	METT score of 30	Phase over	Ongoing management: Atiu landholders committee with NES and NHT.
10e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Takutea Wildlife Sanctuary / Marine Reserve (Takutea)</li> </ul>	METT score >50 Baseline 29%	2	METT score of 37	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ Ongoing management is essential to maintain and protect the island's very significant biodiversity values. Lead role for Takutea Trust with NES, MMR and Seacology.
11	Lagoon ecosystems are managed in a coordinated manner and with clear ecological conservation objective	Aitutaki Lagoon Master Plan in place, with conservation zoning, goals and targets	2	Management plan under development	Phase over	MMR
12a	Funds available for management of Protected Areas, as reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Non-governmental financing mechanisms</li> </ul>	By end of project: US\$523,800	2	NA	Phase out	Nil
12b	Funds available for management of Protected Areas, as reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government budget allocations</li> </ul>	US\$148,750	1	US\$6,435,838 NZ\$9,034,214	Phase out	Nil

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>7</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
13	Conservation of critical coral reef habitat within the CIMP, as measured by finfish populations at coral reefs around Rarotonga and Aitutaki	No decrease in finfish populations by end of project	3	Not known	Phase out	Conservation of critical coral reef habitat within the CIMP is routine business for MMR
14a	Conservation of priority species at selected sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green Turtle (Takutea and Manuae)</li> <li>• Hawksbill turtle (Takutea and Manuae)</li> <li>• Loggerhead Turtle (Palmerston)</li> <li>• Napoleon (Humphead) Wrasse (Rarotonga &amp; Aitutaki)</li> </ul>	By end of project: No net decline in population	3	Not known	Phase out	Conservation of threatened and other priority marine species is routine business for NES and MMR
14b	Conservation of priority species at selected sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Atiu Swiftlet (Atiu) (baseline 420)</li> <li>• Mangaian Kingfisher (Mangaia) (1000)</li> <li>• Rarotongan Monarch (Rarotonga - 428 &amp; Atiu - 125)</li> <li>• Mitiaro Tree Palm (Mitiaro) (375 mature trees)</li> </ul>	By end of project: No net decline in population	1	>420 individuals >1000 individuals Rarotonga - >428 individuals Atiu - >125 individuals >375 mature trees	Phase out	Conservation of threatened and other priority terrestrial species is routine business for NES, NHT, island councils and landholders.

#### 4.3 Outcome 2: Effective mainstreaming of biodiversity in key sectors to mitigate threats within production landscapes

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Forecast status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>10</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
15a	Landscape/seascape area covered by the project (ha), as measured by GEF BD 2 Tracking Tool • Directly covered	1.1 million sq. km. (CIMP)	1	1.1 million sq. km. covered by the project	Phase out	Nil
15b	• Indirectly covered	0.83 million sq. km. (Northern Group)	1	0.83 million sq. km. (Northern Group) covered by the project	Phase out	Nil
16a	Pressures from resources uses in the land- and seascape are reduced through Ridge to Reef management approaches, including: • Reduced use of agricultural chemicals, based on value of annual imports • Fertilizers (baseline NZ\$339,554)	At least 15% reduction in value of imports of agricultural chemicals by the end of the project	1	25% reduction	Phase over	MoA
16b	• Pesticides (baseline NZ\$406,701)		2	13% reduction	Phase over	MoA
17	Planning approval process for infrastructure and other development	EIAs for infrastructure development in or around PAs are subject to independent review, and development plans are	2	NA	Phase over	NES – improvements to EIA procedures as part of the National Environment Policy (NEP) currently under

<sup>10</sup> As per EoP performance report status categories: 1. Target achieved; 2. Target partially achieved; 3. Not achievable (Twyford & Weeks 2021)

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Forecast status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>10</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
		adapted as necessary to conserve biodiversity				development, and/or in the revised Environment Act.
18	Forest cover on the 9 islands within the Cook Islands Marine Park	Baseline: 13,245 ha No decline in forest cover by the end of the project	1	At least 13,245 ha	Phase out	Nil
19	Sedimentation and pollution of aquatic and marine habitats	At least 10 sites within CIMP where water quality will be improved through measures to control water pollution and sedimentation (from agriculture or other sources)	2	More than 10 water monitoring sites in place; not known if there is improved water quality	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ Significant changes are required to land use and development systems To Tatou Vai (TTV), MMR and MoH supported by NES
20	Reduced impacts of human activities on land on the health of inshore marine ecosystems, as measured by algal levels (coralline algae, turf algae, and macro-algae) on coral reefs around Rarotonga and Aitutaki	No increase in algal levels on coral reefs by end of project	3	NA	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ As for KPI #19
21	Impact of tourism businesses on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning in targeted KBAs	At least 20 tourism businesses are implementing BD management programs that comply with conservation guidelines developed through the project and included in national accreditation system	1	40 tourism businesses	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ R2R funded a consultancy to identify improvements to the Mana Tiaki Eco Accreditation Scheme so it better met the needs of commercial tour operators accessing

SRF #	Indicator	Target	Forecast status at EoP		Exit strategy	
			Category <sup>10</sup>	Major R2R outputs	Approach	Responsibility
						protected and managed areas; these changes need implementation. CIT to progress with tourism industry groups and individual operators.
22	# of projects by tourism operators that support biodiversity conservation (e.g. creating Ra'ui sites / CCAs; coral gardens; beach clean-up; sponsored species conservation)	At least 15 projects operating by the end of the project	1	At least 20 projects	Phase over	<b>High priority for phase over</b> ✓ As for KPI #21

## 5. High priority activities requiring phase over

The overall question to answer through this Exit and Sustainability Strategy is:

*What project outcomes, activities and initiatives do we want to sustain after the R2R project has ended and what activities are to continue?*

Those activities that are highest priority for effective phase over are highlighted in Section 4. These have been identified on the basis that these activities have:

- very significant strategic implications for protected areas – either individual areas or the national system
- been the subject of significant time, effort and cost through R2R and there is a risk that this investment will be lost or wasted if not continued.

These initiatives are a high priority for phase over and continuation through national and island government programs and through other development projects, particularly any Cook Islands GEF-7 projects.

**Table 1. High priority initiatives for phase over and continuation**

KPI (from R2R SRF)	Initiative	Justification	Responsibility
1	Active management of Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park - CIMP)	<p>R2R made substantial investments into the active management, institutional capacity and knowledge bank of the Marae Moana (refer Twyford &amp; Weeks 2021 for details). Significant additional support will be required to continue important initiatives set up through R2R funding and fully realise legislative commitments.</p> <p>These initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of MSP Policy, MSP Regulations and associated changes to the Act.</li> <li>• Use of spatial information resources and other planning outputs (generated through R2R intervention) to commence and complete Marine Spatial Planning (MSP).</li> <li>• Use of the 2021 Outlook Report as a strategic guide for ongoing operational management, resource allocation, research, and MER.</li> </ul>	<p>Lead: Marae Moana TAG Others: OPM/MMCO, Marae Moana implementation agencies</p>
2a	Establishment of a nationally comprehensive and representative system of terrestrial protected areas and OECMs	<p>Total area of terrestrial protected and managed areas across all of the Cook Islands is approximately 7,300 ha (Twyford 2021b; Twyford &amp; Weeks 2021). Expansion of this network into a national system would require a strong commitment from the national government (eg. through the NSDA 2020+) and/or specific government policy.</p> <p>This initiative is related to PAMP Stage 2 (see KPI# 6-7 below).</p>	<p>Lead: NES, OPM Others: MMCO, MMR, HoA, CIT</p>
2b	Establishment of a comprehensive and representative system of marine protected areas (MPAs) across Marae Moana (CIMP) through marine spatial planning (MSP) and zoning.	<p>Legislative establishment of MPAs around each of the 15 islands (total area of 13.5 million ha) provides a very strong foundation for subsequent development of a comprehensive and representative system of MPAs across Marae Moana. The mechanism to undertake this is the National MSP.</p> <p>This initiative is covered within the active management of CIMP (see KPI#1 above).</p>	<p>Lead: Marae Moana TAG Others: OPM/MMCO</p>
6, 7	Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP) – Stage 2	<p>Substantial resources were placed into PAMP Stage 1 and PACS throughout R2R. There are real risks of this investment being lost and need not being met without effective phase over of the activity to NES. There remains significant need and demand for a</p>	<p>Lead: NES, OPM Others: MMCO, MMR, HoA</p>

KPI (from R2R SRF)	Initiative	Justification	Responsibility
		government-approved final PAMP that encompasses PAMP Stage 1, PACS and improved governance mechanisms; this would set the scene for legislative and organisational change.	
10b	Establishment of Rarotonga Cloud Forest Nature Reserve	Establishment and protection of the Rarotonga Cloud Forest as a protected area remains a particularly important priority.	Lead: NES Others: NHT, HoA/Koutu Nui
10c	Establishment and improved management of Manuae Island Nature Reserve and MPA	Establishment of the entire island as a protected area remains an important priority; if established, this would result in an integrated protected area across the island and adjoining marine waters. Improved management with emphasis on biodiversity conservation and protection of inshore marine resources is also needed.	Lead: Manuae Island Trustees Others: Aitutaki Island Council, NES, MMR
10e	Improved management of Takutea Nature Reserve and MPA	Integrated and sensitive resource management across the island, lagoon and inshore waters is crucial to protect the significant biodiversity values of this area.	Lead: Takutea Island Trust Others: NES, Atiu Council, MMR
19, 20	Integrated suite of measures to control water pollution and sedimentation (from agriculture and other land-based sources) and improve water quality entering Marae Moana.	Significant changes are required to land use and development systems (with priority to Rarotonga and Aitutaki) that better recognise the interconnected nature of land and sea. Reforms to legislation, policy and practice are essential to minimise the impacts of land-based activities on the adjoining Marae Moana.	Lead: To Tatou Vai (TTV), MMR and MoH Others: NES
21, 22	Continued development of working relationships between protected area managers and tourism industry, and the provision of sensitive and ecologically sustainable tourism operations and programs within protected areas and the CIMP.	R2R funded a consultancy to identify improvements to the Mana Tiaki Eco Accreditation Scheme so it better met the needs of commercial tour operators accessing protected and managed areas; these changes need implementation. Support was also provided for tourism businesses to develop and implement projects and operations in ways that maintain, enhance and promote biodiversity conservation. These initiatives need continued encouragement and expansion.	Lead: CIT Others: individual tourism operators, NES, MMCO

## 6. Conclusions

In conjunction with the end-of-project performance report (Twyford & Weeks 2021), this R2R exit and sustainability strategy forms an important part of the project closure process. It describes how the project intends to withdraw its resources while ensuring the sustainability of project goals and key activities after the project ends. The strategy provides the basis upon which to inform stakeholders and beneficiaries of project closure, and to undertake consultation so that important activities can proceed post-project.

## 7. References

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