



TAURANGA TAUPANGA REVA
CLIMATE CHANGE COOK ISLANDS
Office of the Prime Minister

2018 – 2031

THE COOK ISLANDS CLIMATE CHANGE COUNTRY PROGRAMME

MAY 2026 REVIEW · CLIMATE CHANGE COOK ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Executive Summary

COUNTRY PROGRAMME 2018

In 2018 the Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI) office formalised the first Cook Islands Climate Change Country Programme (CP). The CP identified 11 priority areas for climate change activities to be undertaken. These were:

- Renewable Energy Development
- Coastal Protection and Restoration
- Water Security
- Disaster Risk Management
- Waste Management
- Climate Proofing Infrastructure
- Integrated Flood Management
- Agriculture and Ecosystem Based Adaptation
- Ocean Management
- Livelihoods of People and Communities
- Knowledge, Research and Innovation

Since its establishment, the Country Programme has progressed significantly in achieving the main objectives of giving guidance to sectors and agencies for their planning of climate change related projects and providing assurance to Development Partners that climate change projects are aligned with Cook Islands national priorities.

FUNDING 2018–26

Table One shows that the GCF remains the significantly largest climate change funding source for the Cook Islands with approximately US\$72 million out of a total of over US\$109 million dollars of climate change funding over the period 2018–2026.

11**PRIORITY AREAS**

since 2018

US\$109M+**TOTAL CLIMATE FUNDING**

2018–2026

US\$72M**FROM THE GCF**

largest single source

Executive Summary (continued)

COUNTRY PROGRAMME 2026

The stakeholder context, policy environment and climate science have all changed since 2018. These were all reviewed, updated and assessed to see how that impacted on the CP. During the period from July 2025 to May 2026, stakeholders from the Pa Enua islands were consulted. Over the same time-period on Rarotonga, consultations were held with Non-Government Organisations (NGO), Government agencies and stakeholders attending the Climate Change Platform meeting. Details of these consultations are included in Appendix Three. As well, an analysis was conducted of the Vulnerability and Adaptation Studies completed for each inhabited island in 2024/25. The studies reported on the communities' identified climate change issues and priority areas for activities.

REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The review recommendations for the CP are based on:



Inclusive Prioritisation



Stakeholder Priorities



Climate Science



Mitigation Benefits



Climate Ambitions



Emerging Areas



M&E Framework



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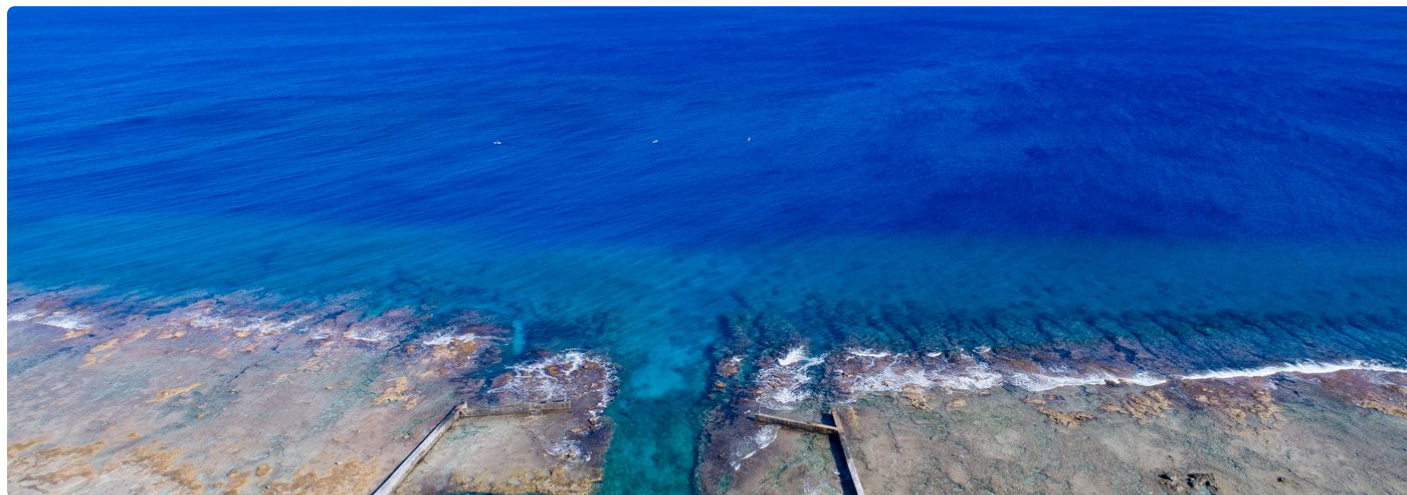
ADB Asian Development Bank	AE Accredited Entity	AF Adaptation Fund	ATOM Akamatutu'anga To Tatou Ora'anga Meitaki
BCI Bank of the Cook Islands	BTR Biennial Transparency Report	CBIT Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency	CCCI Climate Change Cook Islands
CCTWG Climate Change Technical Working Group	CFAN Climate Finance Access Network	CICCP Cook Islands Climate Change Policy	CIG Cook Islands Government
CP Climate Change Country Programme	DAE Direct Access Entity	DCD Development Coordination Division	EDA Enhanced Direct Access
EDS Economic Development Strategy	ENAP Enhancing the National Adaptation Programme	GCF Green Climate Fund	GDP Gross Domestic Product
GEF Global Environment Facility	GgCO₂e Gigagrams of CO ₂ Equivalent	GHG Greenhouse Gas	GIZ German Corp. for International Cooperation
IPCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	L&D Loss and Damage	M&E Monitoring and Evaluation	MFEM Ministry of Finance & Economic Management
MOA Ministry of Agriculture	NDA National Designated Authority	NDC Nationally Determined Contributions	NES National Environment Service
NGO Non-Governmental Organisation	NIIP National Infrastructure Investment Plan	NOP No Objection Procedure	NSDA National Sustainable Development Agenda
NSDC National Sustainable Development Committee	NSDP National Sustainable Development Plan 2016–20	NZD New Zealand Dollar	ODA Official Development Assistance
OPM Office of the Prime Minister	PEARL Pa Enea Action for Resilient Livelihoods	R9 Readiness Nine	RCP Representative Concentration Pathway
RPACA Regional Programmatic Approach on Climate Action	SPC The Pacific Community	SPCZ South Pacific Convergence Zone	SPREP Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SRIC-CC Strengthening the Resilience of our Islands & Communities to Climate Change	STAR System for Transparent Allocation of Resources	TAG Technical Advisory Group	UBPP Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity
UNDP UN Development Programme	UNFCCC UN Framework Convention on Climate Change	USD United States Dollar	V&A Vulnerability and Adaptation
WMO World Meteorological Organisation			

Country Profile

The Cook Islands is a large Ocean State situated in the central-south Pacific Ocean and is bordered by French Polynesia to the east, Kiribati to the north, and Niue, American Samoa and Tokelau to the west. The fifteen islands are commonly divided into the Northern Group and the Southern Group.

The capital of Avarua is on the main island of Rarotonga which holds more than 70% of the resident population and is the site of the major international airport and harbour. Rarotonga is also the administrative centre and the location for the main offices of all the Cook Islands Public Service Ministries and State-Owned Enterprises.

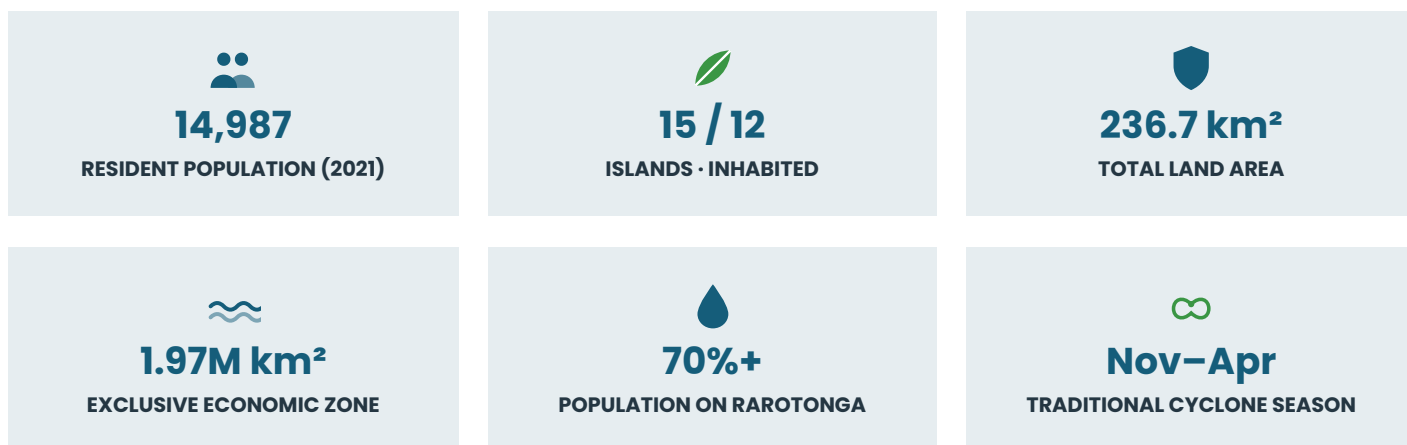
Figure One: Location of the Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone — source: Tuna Pacific Magazine, Forum Fisheries Agency, December 2017. Figure Two: Map of the Cook Islands — source: ResearchGate.net. (Original map graphics not reproduced here.)



Reef and lagoon channel, Cook Islands. Photo: Alisha Street.

The islands in the Cook Islands are a geological mix of sand cays, low-lying coral atolls, raised coral islands, and small volcanic islands. Only the main island of Rarotonga has peaks over 200 metres above sea level and the total land mass for the country is 236.7 square kilometres.

The Cook Islands Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) measures 1.97 million square kilometres. The winds blow predominantly through the EEZ from the south-east during May to October and from the North and West during November to April. The country lies in the cyclone belt, with the traditional cyclone season being from November to April.



Social Characteristics

At the last Census in December 2021, the resident population of the Cook Islands was 14,987. Twelve of the 15 islands of the Cook Islands are inhabited. Apart from Rarotonga and Aitutaki, the communities have less than 500 people, and income is predominantly from central and local government jobs.

The Cook Islands has a CIG funded health system that provides free health services including public health services, primary care, and some secondary care. The main hospital is on Rarotonga, which provides most of the primary and secondary care for the country.

The traditional leadership structure of the Cook Islands is still in existence and is recognised by the local communities. On some islands, access to land and other resources is still controlled by the ariki (high chief). Traditional leaders are supported by the elected Government through two entities: the Are Ariki (the forum for High Chiefs) and the Koutu Nui (the forum for the lesser title-holders known as rangatira and mataiapo). Both organisations are involved in the development process, particularly during stakeholder consultations.



**Are Ariki
(High Chiefs)**



**Koutu Nui
(Rangatira & Mataiapo)**



**Free CIG
Health System**

Religious beliefs are an important part of Cook Islanders' daily lives and the Church is a significant social influence. Over 84% of the population assign themselves as belonging to a religious group.



84%+

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION



<500

TYPICAL PA ENUA COMMUNITY SIZE



Country Programme Context 2018

To develop the Country Programme and identify the priority areas, in 2018 a consultant carried out:

- a review of the national and international stakeholders,
- a series of in-country stakeholder engagements,
- an assessment of national policy and planning documents and
- a synthesis of the available climate science.

From these activities, a long-list of 18 potential priority areas was developed and further consultations were carried out. These consultations resulted in the 18 areas being refined down to the 11 described in the Executive Summary.

2018 STAKEHOLDERS

The institutional arrangement supporting the implementation of the CP in 2018 included:

-  the GCF National Designated Authority (NDA), which is the CCCI office,
-  the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for the NDA,
-  the National Sustainable Development Committee (NSDC), and
-  the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management Platform, which met on a quarterly basis.

International organisations involved in funding projects at that time were: the Adaptation Fund (AF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the GCF, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Countries providing direct assistance were: Australia, China, Japan, and New Zealand.

ENGAGEMENT

Regular stakeholder engagement was done primarily through the Platform meeting. Annual updates were also provided to Pa Enua Mayors and Island Government Executives when they met as a group in Rarotonga. More stakeholder engagements were held as part of the consultations for climate change projects that were being developed.



2018 Policy Environment



NSDP 2016–20



JNAP II 2016–20



Intended NDCs 2015



**Infrastructure Plan
2015**



**State of Environment
2016**

The key guiding national policy documents for the CP in 2018 were the National Sustainable Development Plan 2016–2020 (NSDP) and the Joint National Action Plan II 2016–2020 (JNAP II). At the time the NSDP was the primary multi-sectoral national development strategy which informed Cook Islands Government (CIG) planning and spending. The continuation of the NSDP is the NSDA 2020+.

The JNAP II combined the activities for climate change and disaster risk management under one plan and reflected a similar approach at the regional level through the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP) 2017–2030. The two sectors are now separated at the policy level in-country but continue to coordinate implementation of projects when there is an overlap.

In 2015 the Cook Islands submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs). These set the first targets for mitigation and adaptation action and influenced the development of the priority areas in the CP. At the sectoral level, the Cook Islands National Infrastructure Investment Plan 2015 (NIIP) provided the priorities and planning that was incorporated into the relevant CP priority areas. Similarly, the Cook Islands National State of the Environment Report 2016 provided some recommendations that were incorporated into the CP.

At the same time as the CP was being established, the Cook Islands Climate Change Policy 2018–2028 (CICCP) was also being developed. The link to the nascent document was recognized in the CP but was not an influence in the design of the Country Programme.



Country Programme Priority Activities

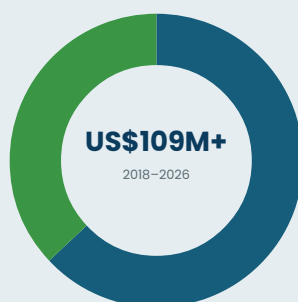
As described above, the current country programme has eleven priority areas. Appendix One shows the priority areas with climate change funded projects that have been approved in those areas since 2018. This is not an exhaustive list but only what the CCCI was able to identify.

Some of these projects have been funded wholly through climate finance and some projects have been combined with funding through other development channels. Some of the projects are also cross-cutting and link to several CP priority areas.

Table One describes the breakdown of the identified projects in Appendix One by the Development Partners supporting the project. These projects do not include those that could not be linked specifically to a CP priority area – such as capacity building under Readiness projects, or UNFCCC reporting (the NDC and the Biennial Transparency Report). It also does not include the GEF funding under the System for Transparent Allocation of Resources (STAR) allocation, estimated at US\$6.1 million over 2018–2026.

Table One shows that the GCF remains the significantly largest climate change funding source for the Cook Islands with approximately US\$72 million out of a total of over US\$109 million dollars of funding over the period 2018–2026. Part of the reason for this is that the GCF is the largest climate finance organization. The next two largest funding sources in the table, the ADB and New Zealand, both have multi-sector support programmes providing a range of funding assistance to the Cook Islands, only part of which is climate change related.

TABLE ONE: FUNDING SOURCES FOR CLIMATE CHANGE PROJECTS, 2018–2026

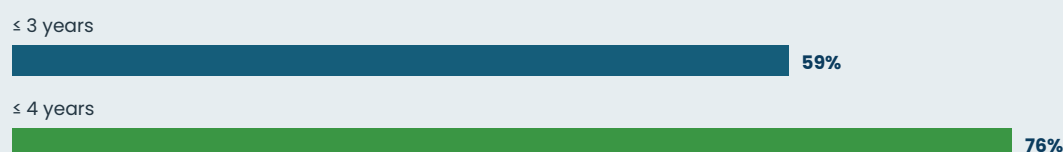


● GCF ~US\$72M ● ADB, New Zealand & other multi-sector sources

Project Implementation Periods

The time to implement the CP projects identified in Appendix One is expressed in Table Two below. It is based on the proposed period at the beginning of the projects, and some may have had these times extended. Just under 59% of the projects were expected to be implemented in three years or less and this rises to 76% for projects expected to be implemented in four years or less.

TABLE TWO: COUNTRY PROGRAMME PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PERIODS



5 yrs

ATOM PROJECT

a longer-term example

9 yrs

EDA PROJECT

longest to date

CONTEXT 2018 SUMMARY

Since its establishment, the Country Programme has progressed significantly in achieving the main objectives of giving guidance to sectors and agencies for their planning of climate change related projects, and providing assurance to Development partners that climate change projects are aligned with Cook Islands national priorities. This is illustrated by the level of GCF funding achieved, as a key element of the GCF evaluation process for funding applications is whether the project is in the applicant's Country Programme.



Country Programme Present Context

The Country Programme was developed over a two-year period from 2016 to 2018 and, as described in the previous section, reflected the milieu at the time. Any revision of the CP priorities now must take account of how that context has changed.

PRESENT CLIMATE SCIENCE — GLOBAL CONTEXT

Human activity is causing a global warming of the atmosphere, ocean and land and this change is being experienced in every region and on every continent. The average global temperature for 2011–2020 is 1.1°C above the 1850–1900 baseline. Consequently, there is more evidence of changes in extremes of heatwaves, rainfall, droughts, and tropical cyclones being observed.

+1.1°C

GLOBAL AVG. TEMPERATURE

2011–2020 vs 1850–1900

2024

WARMEST YEAR ON RECORD

since records began

>1.5°C

THRESHOLD CROSSED

for the first time, 2024



Storm surge breaching a coastal structure — the extremes described in the climate science are already being felt.

It also appears that the changes in global temperatures are occurring earlier than projected. The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has confirmed that 2024 was the warmest year on record. This means that we have just experienced a calendar year with a global mean temperature exceeding the 1.5°C threshold for the first time.

When the global average warming is at a defined level, some regions of the world will show warming lower than this average, and some areas will be higher. The warming for the Pacific Islands is projected to be lower than the global average as warming is less over the ocean regions than over land. Even within the Cook Islands, climate impacts will be variable as seen in the different projected climate change scenarios for the Northern and Southern Group. While the rate of warming may be slightly less, the severity of the climate change impacts are also determined by the type of hazard, the exposure and the vulnerability of the country. Overall, this results in the Cook Islands being more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change than many other countries.

Climate change impacts on economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism are affecting individual livelihoods. Destruction of homes and infrastructure, loss of property and income, and food insecurity are just some of the impacts leading to adverse effects on our communities. All these impacts are projected to intensify.

Cook Islands Context & Emissions Levels



Coastal exposure on Mangaia's makatea coastline. Photo: Taniera.

In the Cook Islands, two of the main determinants for climate are associated with the movement of the South Pacific Convergence Zone (SPCZ), and how much the region around the equator becomes hotter and wetter. Despite the various climate change scenarios, there is still uncertainty around the direction of change of the SPCZ and the strength of the warming around the equator.

Table Three describes a range of possible future changes in annual and seasonal rainfall, determined by what direction the SPCZ moves and by the strength of the warming along the equator, based on two scenarios – a low emissions pathway and a high emissions pathway. While changes in annual rainfall are equivocal, other impacts are consistent across all four projected outcomes:

- annual temperatures will continue to rise,
- sea level will continue to rise,
- there will be more heatwaves,
- there will be heavier rainfall events, and
- there will be greater tropical cyclone impacts.

For cyclones, greater impacts are expected because of an increased intensity of cyclones combined with sea level rise and increased rainfall rates – this may be associated with less frequency of cyclones in the Southwestern Pacific.



Rising Temperatures



Sea Level Rise



More Heatwaves



Heavier Rainfall



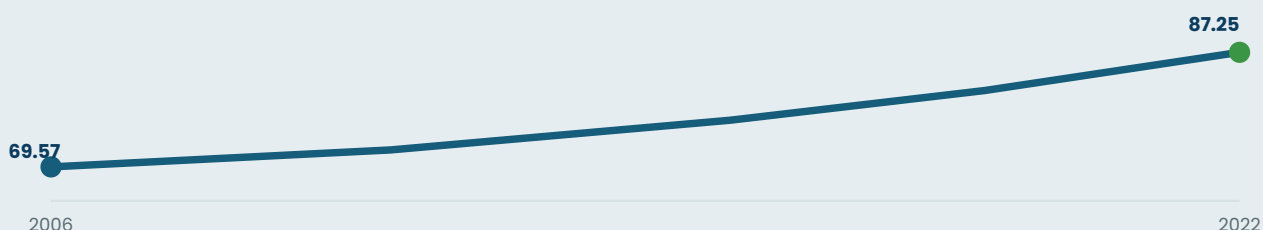
**Greater Cyclone
Impacts**

As a result of the impacts, some of the predicted changes will involve more sea surges, increased coastal erosion, soil erosion, and invasive species, and changes to growing periods for agriculture. Ocean acidification is also occurring which will affect the coral reefs and in particular, the shellfish on our reefs.

Emissions Levels

In 2018 the CP described our national total emissions as 69.57 GgCO₂e, based on a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) inventory conducted in 2006. The inventory was updated in 2025 and by 2022 the Cook Islands total national emissions had reached 87.25 GgCO₂e – a 25.41% increase from 2006 to 2022.

FIGURE FOUR: COOK ISLANDS TOTAL EMISSIONS 2000 TO 2022 (GGCO₂E)



The increasing emissions levels reflect the extra activity from a growing economy, as Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 37.93% from 2006 to 2019, when the Covid-19 pandemic impacted on the Cook Islands economy. Following the Covid recession, the economy is growing again and Cook Islands total emissions levels have also begun to increase again. Since 2015 the largest contributors to this upward trend were fossil fuel combustion and waste-related activities.

+37.93%

REAL GDP GROWTH

2006–2019, pre-COVID

+25.41%

EMISSIONS GROWTH

2006–2022

2015

FUEL & WASTE LEAD DRIVERS

largest contributors since



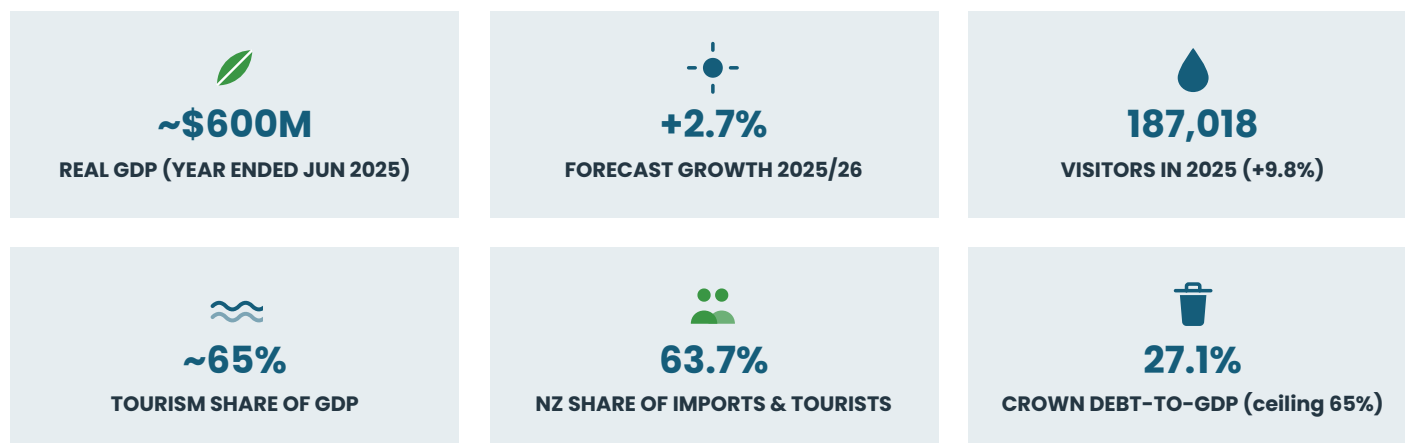
Present Economic & Policy Environment

PRESENT ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The Cook Islands economy has been growing steadily since the downturn from the impacts of the Covid pandemic and the economy has bounced back quickly. Real GDP is estimated at \$600 million for the year ended June 2025 and was forecast to grow 2.7 per cent in the financial year 2025/26. Tourist numbers continue to grow, with a record number of 187,018 visitors arriving in 2025 — a 9.8% increase on 2024 — and tourism-related earnings are estimated to contribute about 65% of the Cook Islands GDP.

The Cook Islands economy remains closely linked to the New Zealand economy. The New Zealand dollar (NZD) is the Cook Islands' main currency and fluctuations in the NZD can greatly impact on the returns of the Cook Islands' main foreign exchange earner, the tourism industry. In 2025, New Zealand was the main source of imports into the Cook Islands and also the source of the largest tourist numbers (63.7%).

As part of the CIG response to the Covid pandemic in 2021, the net debt rule was revised upward from 35% to 65% of GDP. For 2025/26, the net debt to GDP ratio is 27.1 per cent, and is expected to gradually decrease over the medium-term, remaining well below the 65% debt threshold. Despite the available debt headroom, the CIG maintains a prudent approach to taking on more debt.



Present Policy Environment

The present policy environment for the CP has changed significantly since 2018 and is determined predominantly by three main policies:



NSDA 2020+ (2021–2021)



Economic Development Strategy 2030



Climate Change Policy 2018–28

The NSDA 2020+ is now the overarching sustainable development policy document, setting a broad 100-year timeframe broken into four 25-year blocks, supported by five-year plans (the first ran 2021–2025). Goal Twelve covers Climate Change, Resilience, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency, though the crosscutting nature of climate change links CP activities to many of the NSDA's 15 goals.

The EDS has five objectives with focus areas for activities described within each objective. Objective Five: Greening our economy, has two focus areas that support various priority areas of the CP:

- Transitioning to a low carbon economy by improving our eco-efficiency so we grow while using fewer resources and generate fewer emissions;
- Preparing for climate change to mitigate the economic and social risks of a more extreme climate.

The CICCPC established three national goals in the climate change area:

- To contribute to the sustainable development of the Cook Islands.
- To strengthen resilience to the impacts of climate change through a coordinated, inclusive, culturally-appropriate adaptation and mitigation programme.
- To work collaboratively in climate change activities domestically and internationally.

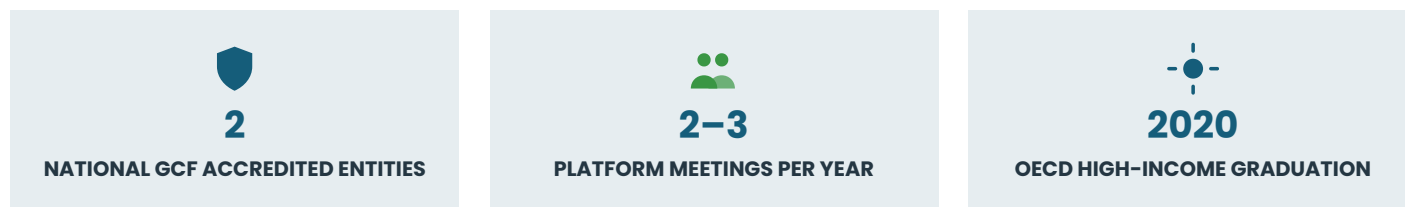
The CP is the main programme for designing and implementing activities that give effect to the Climate Change Policy.

The CP also supports actions at the sectoral level, enabling access to climate finance across areas including the Agriculture Sector Action Plan, the National Infrastructure Investment Plan, and the Energy Policy — all currently under review.



Present Stakeholder Context

The CCCI office remains the implementing agency and NDA, working closely with the Development Coordination Division (DCD) within MFEM. The Cook Islands now has two national GCF Accredited Entities: MFEM (accredited October 2018) and the Bank of the Cook Islands (accredited October 2024), giving the country the ability to apply directly for project funding using national systems. The planned NDA TAG function was not activated; peer reviews are co-opted case-by-case, and no dedicated annual GCF stakeholder workshop occurs – but the Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management Platform now meets two to three times a year as the main forum for discussion of climate change activities.



Internationally, the Cook Islands officially graduated to "high-income country" status under OECD standards on 1 January 2020, removing its eligibility for Official Development Assistance (ODA); while CIG is seeking a review, this has not significantly affected access to climate finance. All 2018 international partners remain active, with the GCF the dominant funding source. The main change in international stakeholder groupings has been the emergence of philanthropic agencies – in 2018 linked mainly to small-scale community and NGO-led activities, now showing increased interest in larger, multi-country funding.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS REMAINING ACTIVE SINCE 2018



Reviewing the Priority Areas

CLIMATE SCIENCE

Based on the climate science, the climate change predictions show more confidence than seven years ago of the outcomes for the different scenarios. It also seems that the predicted changes will happen more quickly. This presents a problem for planning our response and expressing this in the CP priority areas.

The Cook Islands is facing immediate impacts from climate change events. As well, we are also experiencing the gradual impacts of slow on-set climate change events. Table Four relates these impacts to the CP priority areas. The Country Programme should find a balance between activities to address the immediate impacts and continuing to build our response to slow-onset events. Some of the existing priority areas are relevant to both types of events, but the specific projects being implemented are more focused on immediate impacts.



Storm surge inundating coastal infrastructure – an immediate climate change impact.

The Cook Islands has stated its mitigation ambitions in the draft NDC 3.0 and aims to reduce overall GHG emissions by 24.24 GgCO₂e by 2035 compared to a baseline of the 2022 gross GHG emissions of 82.26 GgCO₂e – a 29.5% reduction compared to 2022 gross GHG emissions. The most relevant of the present CP priority areas to achieving the NDC target are Waste Management and Renewable Energy. Activities in these two would aim to reduce the methane coming from the landfill and aim to lower fossil fuel consumption by reducing their use in energy production and road transportation.

82.26

2022 GHG BASELINE

GgCO₂e, gross emissions

-24.24

TARGETED REDUCTION

GgCO₂e by 2035

-29.5%

NDC 3.0 TARGET

vs 2022 gross emissions

Stakeholder Priorities

During the period from July 2025 to May 2026, stakeholders from the Pa Enua islands were consulted. Over the same time-period on Rarotonga, consultations were held with Non-Government Organisations (NGO), Government agencies and stakeholders attending the Climate Change Platform meeting (full detail in Appendix Three). Stakeholders were given a table listing the 11 priority areas; while all eleven remain a priority, they were asked to identify their (unordered) top six.

The participants in the consultations for the review of the CP came from a cross-section of our community. Most of the engagements were organized as a community meeting and participation numbers were dominated by Pa Enua community representatives. This is reflected in the emphasis on everyday issues in the stakeholders' top six selected priority areas:



Water Security



Waste Management



Agriculture & Ecosystem Based Adaptation



Livelihoods of People & Communities



Coastal Protection



Renewable Energy Development

From the stakeholders consulted, a breakout sample of six CIG agencies on Rarotonga identified their top six priority areas as:

- Livelihoods of People and Communities,
- Water security
- Coastal Protection,
- Disaster Risk Management,
- Knowledge, Research and Innovation,
- Climate Proofing Infrastructure

Similarly, from Island Government representatives attending a forum on Rarotonga, five of their top six priority areas were the same as the CIG agencies:

- Renewable Energy Development
- Water Security
- Climate Proofing Infrastructure
- Livelihoods of People and Communities
- Knowledge, Research and Innovation
- Disaster Risk Management

Waste management and Agriculture/EBA are not in the Government Agency and Island Government list. Their appearance in the overall top six listed areas indicates that these two areas are much more of a priority for the communities.

Northern Group Pa Enuu Consultations

To complete the Pa Enuu Consultations, the final round of consultations took place in the northern group islands. Water security ranked as the first priority which is consistent with the priorities from Southern Group Islands; the remaining top priority areas were similar to those identified through earlier stakeholder consultations as listed below:



Water Security



Renewable Energy Development



Agriculture



Coastal Protection



Climate Proofing



Disaster Risk Management



Manihiki, Northern Group. Photo: Cook Islands Tourism / Daniel Fisher.



Vulnerability & Adaptation Studies and Funding by Area

The Vulnerability and Adaptation (V&A) studies conducted during 2024 and 2025 also engaged directly with the communities on each inhabited island. They assessed climate vulnerabilities and asked the people to prioritise and identify future adaptation measures.

The description of the CP priority areas is slightly different to the area descriptions used for the V&A studies. Waste, flood management and infrastructure were included under Buildings for the V&A engagements.

Apart from Rarotonga, the breakdown of stakeholders consulted for the V&As were very similar to those consulted as part of the CP engagements on each island. Their top six selected priority areas were:

- Water security
- Food security
- Coastal protection
- Biodiversity
- Buildings,
- Connectivity



Coastal edge, Mauke — one of the islands engaged through the 2024/25 V&A studies.



Funding Received by Priority Area

FUNDING RECEIVED BY PRIORITY AREA, 2018–2026

In terms of funding that has been provided for activities in the eleven priority areas, Figure Seven shows the percentage of the overall total funding during the period 2018–2026 which has been provided for each CP priority area. The top six areas that received funding are:



Climate Proofing Infrastructure



Water Security



Knowledge, Research & Innovation



Renewable Energy Development



Coastal Protection & Restoration



Integrated Flood Management

By its nature, funding infrastructure development is an expensive activity and only a few projects will result in the largest percentage of available funding. Apart from Knowledge, Research and Innovation, the other five of the top six areas by funding allocation include an infrastructure component; some, such as coastal protection and flood management, can be combined with more nature-based adaptation options.



Coastal erosion at the shoreline — the kind of impact Coastal Protection & Restoration funding addresses.



RATIONALE

There is a much-changed landscape now for the Country Programme. In 2018, few climate change projects had been funded, mostly implemented by external regional or international agencies. The GCF had only been operational for three years and bi-lateral commitments to climate change were still emerging. Fast-forward to 2026 and the Cook Islands has developed a multi-sectoral approach to implementing climate change activities based around building local capacity and expertise.

The purpose of the CP is prioritisation and alignment and this remains unchanged. With the present inclusive approach describing a wide range of areas, it makes it easier for potential projects to align to the priorities. However, if everything is a priority, how do we allocate resources and effort — especially in a funding environment that is changing as other issues such as national security take precedence for Development Partners?

The review recommendations for the CP are based on retaining the inclusive approach to prioritisation while allowing greater focus on specific areas, identified stakeholder priorities, the climate science, increasing mitigation benefits, strengthening the link to our climate ambitions, and recognising emerging areas of emphasis. The seven recommendations that follow are:



A — Priority Areas



B — Reducing Emissions



C — Immediate & Slow-onset



D — Biodiversity



E — Emerging Areas



F — Project Design



G — Programme Term

Recommendation A

A — PRIORITY AREAS

Retain the inclusivity promoted by eleven areas but have six priority areas to focus activity on for the next five years. That top six would be:

- Water Security,
- Agriculture and Ecosystem Based Adaptation,
- Waste Management,
- Renewable Energy Development,
- Coastal Protection and Restoration,
- Climate Proofing Infrastructure.

Five of the top six priority areas identified by stakeholders during the consultations are included in this list. This list is also based in part on the climate science and key impacts described above. Climate proofing infrastructure will always be a priority for the CIG. It also supports two of the other CP priority areas: Integrated Flood Management and Livelihoods of People and Communities. It was also identified through the V&A studies as a key area for the Pa Enua communities.



Household food garden, Cook Islands. Photo: Cook Islands Tourism / Daniel Fisher.



Recommendations B & C

B — REDUCING EMISSIONS LEVELS

Climate change funding agencies consistently ask whether a potential project proposal supports the country's NDC. Emissions reduction targets have been identified in our NDC 3.0 and the CP should be more directly linked to achieving those targets rather than have mitigation subsumed as a co-benefit.

The key driver of the increasing emission levels is the growing Cook Islands economy. Increasing the focus on the Renewable Energy and Waste Management priority areas can hopefully assist to reduce the emission levels without impacting on economic development.



B — Reducing Emissions



C — Immediate & Slow-onset Impacts

C — RESPONDING TO IMMEDIATE AND SLOW-ONSET CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

Within all the priority areas, we need to incorporate a better balance in our planning between projects addressing immediate impacts and projects that can contribute to longer term slow-onset impacts. The challenge provided by slow-onset events may have to be met with an incremental approach that puts into place the building blocks for a response. An initial focus could be on gathering the data through analyses such as the Atoll Impacts Analysis, and aligning the financial requirements to the long-term response such as establishing a climate change fund.



Cyclone damage to housing — the kind of immediate impact this recommendation responds to.

These areas are not exclusive but should be taken into account when allocation of effort and funding are required. If a project is developed for a focus area, then another of the 11 original areas can replace it. Emphasising these areas also facilitates structuring of the project pipeline for the same period.

Recommendations D & E



D – Biodiversity



E – Emerging Areas

D – BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity is not a priority area in the present CP. The Country Programme concentrates on climate change impacts on our people and communities. Climate change events also cause impacts on our ecosystems and biodiversity which have consequential impacts on our people, and a greater focus needs to be put on this link.

The emphasis has been on the National Environment Service (NES) to access climate change funding to conduct activities in the biodiversity area. However, the CP is a national document setting priorities for the country, so including Biodiversity as a priority area should be considered for the next implementation period of the CP.

E – EMERGING AREAS

The climate change space up to now has been a rapidly evolving area which could be entering a phase of consolidation, particularly in the availability of climate finance. Despite the potential slow-down, there are emerging areas that can be considered as priorities in the next CP period along with Biodiversity. Three of these are Health, Loss and Damage, and Climate Migration.

The Cook Islands is currently implementing a GCF project in the Health sector, but the main focus of that project is on health infrastructure. The emerging area in Health will be the climate change impacts on people of all ages, not just the socio-economically most vulnerable, and how climate change is creating long-term health-related issues. The Cook Islands is doing some work as well on Loss and Damage and Climate Migration, but it is at the preliminary stage. The attention and resources are likely to expand in both areas.



Recommendations F & G



F — Project Design



G — Programme Term

F — PROJECT DESIGN

The analysis of project timelines in Table Two showed that more than three-quarters of the projects (76%) had initial implementation periods in their design of four years or less. Some consideration needs to be given to reducing this percentage and achieving a better balance with longer term projects.

Moving to longer periods of implementation represents a better return on the time and investment to develop and design a project. This is already beginning as the last two GCF funded projects have implementation periods of five years for the Akamatutu'anga To Tatou Ora'anga Meitaki (ATOM) and nine years for the Enhanced Direct Access (EDA) project.

The recommendation is that a balanced approach will have a few key long-term projects but still retain shorter-term activities. The emphasis for the shorter-term projects needs to be on quicker access to funding and simpler projects to implement — a good example has been the NZ Flexible Finance initiative, well suited to the community-level projects of the Pa Enua. An example could be for Water Security, where a long-term project focussed on water collection and storage could be designed for Rarotonga and Aitutaki, while a short-term response could be designed for the other islands with smaller populations.

Capacity building is not a specific focus of the CP but has been included across all the priority areas. This needs to continue to be incorporated into project design and to reflect the changing capacity building aspects of what is required for the short-term and the long-term.

G — COUNTRY PROGRAMME TERM

The present CP term is for 12 years from 2018 to 2030. As the mid-term review has been slightly delayed, it is suggested that the CP be extended by one year to 2031. This will allow five years for the recommendations to be implemented. Following that, the next CP should run for a 10-year period from 2031 to 2041 with a review during 2036. Having a shorter period than 10 years does not seem suitable given the time to develop, design and implement projects.

Policy Alignment

The alignment of the whole Country Programme within the present policy environment is discussed in detail above. The identification of six priority areas to be the focus of activity for the next five years does not affect that updated policy alignment. Table Five describes the alignment of the six revised priority areas to the three major relevant policies.

Focus Area	NSDA 2020+	EDS 2030	CICCP 2018–28
 Water Security	✓	✓	✓
 Agriculture & Ecosystem Based Adaptation	✓	✓	✓
 Waste Management	✓	✓	✓
 Renewable Energy Development	✓	✓	✓
 Coastal Protection & Restoration	✓		✓
 Climate Proofing Infrastructure	✓	✓	✓

17/18

POLICY ALIGNMENT CHECKS

across 6 focus areas × 3 policies

3

GUIDING POLICIES

NSDA, EDS, CICCP

6/6

AREAS ALIGNED TO CICCP

full alignment

The Cook Islands has set a conditional target to reduce its GHG emissions by 29.5% by 2035 compared to the 2022 gross GHG emissions. Conducting activities to manage our waste and increase the usage of renewable energy will support achieving that target. In a similar manner, achieving the NDC Adaptation targets set for Infrastructure and Agriculture will be assisted by activities in three priority areas: Climate Proofing Infrastructure, Coastal Protection and Restoration, and Agriculture and Ecosystem Based Adaptation.



Cook Islands Climate Change Project Pipeline

The deliverable for the consultant was to develop "the GCF pipeline for 2024–2028". The pipeline of upcoming projects for the GCF however, should be drawn from a national climate change project pipeline which is available for all potential funding agencies to support. This national pipeline in turn should be linked to the priority areas of the Country Programme.

CURRENT PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Eleven projects are currently being implemented with a total value of US\$67.0 million, with approximately US\$63.0 million being provided by the GCF.

PROPOSED NATIONAL PIPELINE

If we base the timeline for the country pipeline on the country programme implementation, then our next project pipeline will be for a five-year period from 2027 to 2031, and will include current projects continuing past 2026. The estimated value of the pipeline is US\$136.20 million: the GCF-funded portion is estimated at US\$86.0 million and the non-GCF funded projects have an approximate value of US\$50.20 million. The timelines for the pipeline include the project design phase.



NATIONAL PIPELINE NOTES

The projects are described by the agency proposing the project or the funding modality; further categorisation isn't needed as some are only concept ideas that haven't begun the project design stage, and don't need to be split by type of project or geography. These will emerge as ideas become concept notes. Capacity limitations must remain front of mind when defining pipeline projects, since they affect the choice of Accredited Entity and the ability to use national agencies and systems for implementation. The national pipeline must stay flexible and not set in stone: new project ideas that are a greater priority than a proposal already in the pipeline should still be developed.



Concept Idea



Concept Note



Full Funding Proposal

Country Programme Priority Area Linkage

The six priority areas recommended above to be the main focus of the CP can be linked to potential projects in the pipeline. Table Six shows that at this time, only Renewable Energy does not have a project likely to emerge — this is likely to change once development of the Energy Policy is completed.

Priority Area	Pipeline Project	Notes
 Water Security	NZ Flexible Finance, EDA, ATOM	Health clinic & household water storage
 Agriculture & Ecosystem Based Adaptation	MOA, AF-Country project, RPACA	AF Proposal; SPC component
 Waste Management	EDA, RPACA	Septic tanks option; SPREP component
 Renewable Energy Development	—	No project yet identified
 Coastal Protection & Restoration	RPACA, UBPP	Ngaputoru Airports; coastal regeneration
 Climate Proofing Infrastructure	RPACA	Ngaputoru Airports



The Green Climate Fund Pipeline

The Country Programme extension for the period from now until 2031 also ties in with the next four-year GCF replenishment period of 2028–2031. The proposed pipeline of projects for the GCF is shown in Table Seven along with information on the proposed focus or sector, possible AE, the estimated value and the current state of development.

There are five existing GCF-funded projects being implemented — EDA, ATOM, Climate Services, R9, and Pacific Islands Tuna — with a total project value to the Cook Islands of US\$63.5 million. The GCF Pipeline of projects will add to these with a combination of Readiness Support and Full Funding Proposals (FPs). The Readiness will be two DAE proposals and one national project under the Readiness country window allocation. Another six FPs are proposed at the time of writing, of which the three RPACA-initiative projects are the most advanced in their preparation.

Pipeline Project	Focus/Sector	Potential AE	Est. US\$M	Current State
BCI FP	Private Sector Financing	BCI	15.0	Concept Idea
MMR FP	Marine Resources	Unknown	15.0	Concept Note
MOA FP	Agriculture	MFEM	15.0	AF Concept Note
RPACA FP	Infrastructure/Health/Waste	ADB/SPC/SPREP	35.0	ADB-FP; SPREP/SPC Concept Note
Full Funding Proposals Total			80.0	
BCI DAE Readiness	Capacity Building	BCI	1.0	Concept Note draft
MFEM DAE Readiness	Capacity Building	MFEM	1.0	GCF Review
Readiness 12	Unknown	MFEM	4.0	Concept Idea
Readiness Total			6.0	
GRAND TOTAL			86.0	

\$80.0M

FULL FUNDING PROPOSALS

4 projects

\$6.0M

READINESS SUPPORT

3 projects

\$86.0M

GRAND TOTAL

GCF pipeline 2027–2031

In early 2025, the CCCI finalised a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework for the Adaptation projects within the Climate Change Country Programme. As part of this review, the Consultant was tasked to expand that M&E framework to enable the monitoring and evaluation of Mitigation projects under the CP.

COUNTRY PROGRAMME MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The purpose of the M&E framework is to enable CCCI to regularly assess the extent to which the CP is influencing climate action planning, prioritisation, investment, and implementation decisions in the Cook Islands. The assessment is facilitated by measuring two focus areas: Programme Usefulness and Programme Progress. Within these, seven key evaluation elements have been identified with indicators supporting the assessment of progress and usefulness. Usefulness indicators assess how well the CP is integrated into existing planning systems and whether it is influencing key stakeholder decisions; Progress indicators monitor and evaluate progress in climate change projects through information on activities under the CP's eleven Programmatic Areas.



Programme Usefulness



Programme Progress

The M&E framework does not measure the impact of specific projects – whether they increase resilience or reduce GHGs is measured through each project's own dedicated M&E processes. The framework requires input from key stakeholders via two survey forms: a project progress form every six months, and a usefulness survey once a year. CCCI uses this data to update a dashboard of measures for regular evaluation, supplemented by MFEM's financial reporting on climate finance from CIG agencies, supported by an updated climate finance tracking system being installed under a Readiness project.

INCLUDING MITIGATION PROJECTS

As the M&E framework was originally resourced under an Adaptation funding stream, its text does not currently account for mitigation activities. A few simple amendments would remove any exclusive or specific reference to adaptation. The key evaluation elements apply at project level regardless of whether a project is mitigation or adaptation, so the relevancy of usefulness and progress indicators is unaffected; the source data for Programme Usefulness is similarly unaffected, though some changes can be made to Programme Progress data.

On the Programme Progress tracking form, a respondent lists one of 52 suggested project areas relevant to the CP priority area – significantly fewer of these currently cover mitigation than adaptation. Renewable Energy already has eight mitigation-linkable project areas; more can be developed for Waste Management, Agriculture and Ecosystem Based Adaptation, and Climate Proofing Infrastructure to enable better reporting of mitigation activities. The proposed frequency of data collection does not need to change.

Evaluating mitigation activities should be simpler than adaptation because results are more easily quantified. One difficulty may be separating mitigation data from cross-cutting projects, which increasing the number of relevant mitigation project areas should help address. For example, an Agriculture project area currently reading "Promote reforestation and protecting soil against erosion, with activities including: replanting of native and fruit trees; practice mulching as erosion prevention; eradication of invasive species" could be split into a dedicated reforestation area and a separate soil-erosion area, each more easily evaluated individually as a mitigation activity. The major barrier to this expansion is capacity: nobody is currently assigned to run the surveys, so no mitigation baseline has yet been established.

“

CONCLUSION

The Country Programme and the prioritisation of projects should be one of the tools that we use to manage our limitations.

The Climate Change Country Programme was developed and formalized in 2017–2018.

Since then, awareness of the impacts of climate change has increased significantly, contributing to a similar growth of climate change projects being implemented across the country. This review compared the initial context for the CP to the present context to evaluate how new insights, policies and developments may require changes in the CP priority areas, supported by extensive stakeholder consultations. The recommendations

include focusing activity on six priority areas for the next five years, aligned to the current policy environment; a new GCF country pipeline for 2027–2031; and suggestions for expanding the M&E Framework to include mitigation activities. In the climate change area, the Cook Islands is rapidly approaching a threshold for project implementation – once reached, implementing a new project will depend on completing an existing one, and unrespected, project implementation will become delayed and fragmented.



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Some Climate Change Projects by Country Programme Priority Areas 2018–2026

In the source document this appendix lists individual approved projects since 2018 by priority area (not exhaustive – only what CCCI could identify). Some projects are cross-cutting and link to several priority areas. Use the template below to record current projects.

WATER SECURITY

Project Name	Funding Source
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RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Project Name	Funding Source
--------------	----------------

COASTAL PROTECTION & RESTORATION

Project Name	Funding Source
--------------	----------------

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Project Name	Funding Source
--------------	----------------

CLIMATE PROOFING INFRASTRUCTURE

Project Name	Funding Source
--------------	----------------

AGRICULTURE & ECOSYSTEM BASED ADAPTATION

Project Name	Funding Source
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Water Security

Renewable Energy

Coastal Protection

Waste Management

Climate Proofing Infrastructure

Agriculture & EBA



Sample Country Programme Survey Form

APPENDIX TWO: SAMPLE COUNTRY PROGRAMME SURVEY FORM

Cook Islands Climate Change Country Programme — Stakeholder Survey Questions. Example: Mauke Writeshop, October 2025. Respondents were asked to select six priority areas from the eleven listed, unordered, and indicate their choice with a tick or a cross.

Mauke Priorities	Please Select Six
Renewable Energy Development	
Coastal Protection and Restoration	
Water Security	
Disaster Risk Management	
Waste Management	
Climate Proofing Infrastructure	
Integrated Flood Management	
Agriculture and Ecosystem Based Adaptation	
Ocean Management	
Livelihoods of People and Communities	
Knowledge, Research and Innovation	



BACKGROUND

As part of a Green Climate Fund Readiness project, the Consultant was tasked to conduct a review of the Cook Islands Climate Change Country Programme (CP). A Terms of Reference set out a list of deliverables to be achieved through a desktop review and a process of stakeholder consultations. The desktop review has been reported on separately.

METHODOLOGY — MEETINGS

The stakeholder consultations took place from July 2025 to April 2026. On Rarotonga, consultations were held with:

-  Non-Government Organisations (NGO),
-  Cook Islands Government agencies,
-  Pa Enua Island Government representatives at the Mayoral Forum and,
-  Stakeholders attending the Climate Change Platform meeting.

In the Pa Enua, meetings were held with the communities on Aitutaki, Mauke, Mitiaro and Atiu. Travel disruptions prevented meetings from being held in the Northern Group, however Island Government representatives from those islands were part of the survey conducted at the Mayoral Forum.



Pa Enua airstrip — inter-island travel underpins consultation logistics.

METHODOLOGY — SURVEY

Various techniques were used to engage stakeholders. For island communities, the Pa Enua Forum and the Platform meeting, a presentation on the Country Programme preceded a Q&A, followed by a survey form (Appendix Two) listing the 11 priority areas, asking stakeholders to select six as most important, unordered. For the NGO meeting, the Consultant spoke to attendees without a presentation before survey forms were completed. For CIG agencies, the survey was transcribed into a Microsoft Forms survey and emailed to 14 agencies, of which six responded.



Stakeholder Breakdown

The participants came from a cross-section of our community; most engagements were community meetings and participation numbers were dominated by Pa Enea community representatives. A total of 139 people took part in the surveys. Table One below describes respondents by gender – the unassigned figure is where the space on the meeting attendance/registration form was left blank.

Stakeholder Engagement	Women	Men	Unassigned
Aitutaki Community	26	10	1
Atiu Community	17	12	1
Mauke Community	17	5	—
Mitiaro Community	1	9	—
Climate Change Platform	9	4	—
Pa Enea Forum	3	12	—
NGO Meeting	4	2	—
CIG Agencies	3	3	—
TOTALS	80	57	2

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS BY GENDER (N=139)



● Women — 80 (57.6%)
 ● Men — 57 (41.0%)
 ● Unassigned — 2 (1.4%)

Stakeholder Participants

Participants in the island community engagements were a mix of Island Government workers, business people, NGO representatives, and interested individuals including some elderly and retired people, as well as youth including some college students.



A resident secures a coconut palm during flooding — the everyday reality behind the survey numbers.



Participating Organisations & Appreciation

6

NGOs REPRESENTED

NGOS PRESENT AT THEIR MEETING WERE

- Cook Islands National Council of Women
- Korero o te Orau
- Koutu Nui
- Muri Environment Care
- Te Ara o te Akau
- Te Ipukarea Society

6

CIG AGENCIES RESPONDED

CIG AGENCIES THAT RESPONDED WERE

- Cook Islands Investment Corporation
- Infrastructure Cook Islands
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
- Ministry of Marine Resources
- National Environment Service

APPRECIATION

The Consultant was only able to carry out the stakeholder consultations because of the assistance of other Climate Change office staff. On Aitutaki, Mereana Bishop organised the attendees into small groups for each meeting. On Atiu, Mauke and Mitiaro, the Consultant was part of a team consisting of Celine Dyer, Terito Story, Charlene Akaruru and Ngametua Mokoroa. The engagement for the Pa Enea Forum was conducted by Krystina Tatuava and Vaine Viviani, and for the Platform meeting, Vaine also conducted the survey.



Household on the outer islands. Photo: Cook Islands Tourism / Sandee Cook.

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Together, safeguarding the Cook Islands'
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Source: Cook Islands Climate Change Country Programme review, May 2026



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