



**COOK ISLANDS  
CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY  
2018-2028**





# Appreciation

The Cook Islands Climate Change Office would like to express its sincere appreciation to all those who provided the input on which this policy is based. While the development of this policy is in the context of our country's sustainable development, we recognise that financial support from sources of climate financing, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Adaptation Fund is an integral part of implementing the Cook Island's development agenda and our commitments to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. This policy has been prepared with funding provided through the GCF Readiness Programme.





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# 1.0 Foreword

Kia Orana,

The changes that are occurring to the global climate as a result of human activities are not something that the Cook Islands can evade, and the impacts of Climate Change are increasingly being seen within our borders.

Whether it is changes in rainfall patterns, changes in our lagoons, or increased frequency and strength of cyclones, the effects of Climate Change are becoming more and more evident.

Our government is committed to meeting the challenges presented by Climate Change and we want to ensure that we do so in a manner that takes account of our people and our culture. We also want to ensure that the climate change activities that are implemented are carried out within our prioritised development agenda and as much as possible, in conjunction with civil society groups and the private sector.



This policy will guide the multi-sectoral approach to climate change which is built on an inclusive and equitable approach. The policy has been developed after extensive consultations and the words contained in this document reflect the thoughts of all those people.

The Cook Islands acknowledges that we are not alone in our endeavours and that we will continue to work closely with the Green Climate Fund and our other development partners to implement our adaptation and mitigation activities.

Climate Change is the defining issue of our generation, and how we as a country confront it will determine what legacy we leave for the next generation.

Kia Manuia,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Henry Puna'.

The Honourable Henry Puna,  
Prime Minister and Minister of Climate Change,  
Cook Islands

## 2.0 Acronyms and Definitions

### Acronyms

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| AF      | Adaptation Fund                                       |
| CCCI    | Climate Change Cook Islands                           |
| CIG     | Cook Islands Government                               |
| COP     | Convention of Parties                                 |
| GCF     | Green Climate Fund                                    |
| GHG     | Greenhouse Gas  |
| IPCC    | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change             |
| JNAP II | Joint National Action Plan 2016-20                    |
| NDC     | Nationally Determined Contributions                   |
| NGO     | Non-Governmental Organisation                         |
| PA      | Paris Agreement                                       |
| UNFCCC  | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |

### Definitions

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Abatement               | Refers to reducing the degree or intensity of greenhouse-gas emissions.  |
| Adaptation              | Adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities.   |
| Anthropogenic           | (chiefly of environmental pollution and pollutants) originating in human activity  |
| Climate Change          | A change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. |
| Co-benefits             | Where an activity in climate change adaptation results in a mitigation positive benefit and vice-versa.  |
| Emissions               | The release of greenhouse gases and/or their precursors into the atmosphere over a specified area and period of time.  |
| Mitigation              | In the context of climate change, a human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases.   |
| No regrets              | No regret climate adaptation strategies are practices that are beneficial even in the absence of climate change.   |
| Precautionary approach  | Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.                              |
| Sustainable development | Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.  |

## 3.0 Vision

*“A climate resilient and sustainable Cook Islands”*

*“Akatere rangatira kia roa e te turanga ketaketa o te Kuki Airani  
ki te tauī’anga reva”*

## 4.0 Purpose

To strengthen climate resilience to protect lives, livelihoods, economic, infrastructural, cultural and environmental assets in the Cook Islands, while ensuring sustainable development.

*Noatu te tauī’anga o te reva  
Noatu te manako hēkōkō,  
Ka kimi tatou i te rāvenga  
Kia akapuapingaia to tatou ipukarea.*

*Regardless of the changing climate,  
Despite the scientific uncertainty,  
We will search for the way,  
To further our country’s development.*

The Climate Change Policy is a part of the Government’s efforts to achieve our national goals in the climate change area, which are:

- 1. To contribute to the sustainable development of the Cook Islands.**  
Climate change may be the focus, but the over-arching theme for all our activities is the sustainable development of the country. The NSDP is the Cook Islands guiding document at that level and this policy will enable linkages to the NSDP for activities in the climate change area.
- 2. To strengthen resilience to the impacts of climate change through a coordinated, inclusive, culturally appropriate adaptation and mitigation programme.**  
Our national response to the climate change challenge will include activities to increase resilience (Adaptation) and to reduce emissions (Mitigation), although Adaptation activities will predominate. This national goal also expresses that it is not just about what the activities are, but just as importantly, the approach that is used to develop, design and implement the activities.
- 3. To work collaboratively in climate change activities domestically and internationally.**  
As a country, we continue to develop our ability to meet the challenge of climate change, with the assistance of the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, Global Environment Fund and our other development partners. As well as maintaining the country’s commitment to international efforts in the climate change area, we should share our experiences with other Pacific Islands countries and contribute to the regional response to climate change.

## 5.0 Scope

The scope of the Climate Change Policy 2019 covers all climate change related activities within the Cook Islands.

## 6.0 Horizon and Review

The horizon of the vision is 10 years. After coming into effect, the Policy mid-term review should be conducted in 2023 to assess its application and effectiveness. A sample of climate change activities could be reviewed to assess whether the policy assisted and enabled their implementation. A full review should be conducted after the full 10-year period based on the policy measures. The Policy will be updated pending the full review and continue for a further 10 year period.



Climate Change Workshop October 2017. Photo: Krystina Tatuava

## 7.0 Policy Context

Increasing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere are having a major impact on global, regional and local climate systems. Many countries in the Pacific region and globally already experience a high level of risk from the effects of extreme weather and climate variability. These risks will be exacerbated as a result of Climate change.

Climate change has been the subject of international discussion and negotiations for many years defining the need for global action to *“stabilize the elevating greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that will prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.* Such a level should be achieved within a time frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.” (UN, 1992). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was established in 1992 to spearhead and coordinate global efforts to address climate change. The Cook



Islands is a part of the global community and is interested in ensuring its people and environment remain as a long-term critical component of that community. Since early 1989, the Cook Islands has been active in the climate change arena under the auspices of the United Nations, up until the historic agreement in Paris in 2015.

The Cook Islands produces few greenhouse gases, but faces high risks of being badly impacted by climate change. The Cook Islands geographical and topographical situation reflects its own high vulnerability to weather related disasters and extremes. With climate change exacerbating those events, then it is in the national interest to look to the international community to assist and support the country to meet the challenge of addressing its climate change related activities. The climate convention clearly outlines how the international community could undertake this work with all similar nations, and the Paris Agreement likewise is specific about the flows of finance, technology, and capacity development activities to a vulnerable country to assist it to cope with climate change.

The challenge that climate change presents to our country is felt on many levels and across many sectors namely: – human welfare and wellbeing, environment, agriculture, marine, water, waste, transport, energy and so forth. The Cook Islands have experienced severe droughts and floods, coral bleaching, migration of pelagic fishes, ciguatera poisoning, salt water intrusion of agriculture land (in Rakahanga and Pukapuka), the erosion of coastlines throughout the Cook Islands from rising sea levels all of which can impact ecosystems, food and water security, public health, infrastructure and economic development. It serves to remind us of the ongoing anthropogenic-driven climate change that can exacerbate the impacts of natural climate variability.

Climate change is a national priority under the ‘Te Kaveinga Nui - The National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP)’. The NSDP is the overarching national guide for development in the Cook Islands and the Climate Change policy will serve as an implementing tool in achieving the national goal 13: *“to strengthen resilience to combat the impacts of climate change and natural disasters”*. The Climate Change policy will be a national level policy and align with other crosscutting issue policies like the Gender policy and the Environmental and Social Safeguards policy. Policy statements however, are required to enable linkages between the NSDP goals and sector outputs and activities. Climate change is a crosscutting issue in the Cook Islands development activities, but because of the potential magnitude of the social, physical and environmental impact from climate change, it is having a broader reach. The impacts of climate change will affect the achievement of the NSDP. How we meet that challenge will have a significant influence on our national development over the next few decades.

This climate change policy development was prepared through an extensive process of consultations with a wide range of CIG agencies<sup>1</sup>, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) and individuals. The consultations provided information on possible areas for future climate change activities<sup>2</sup> and this policy facilitates the Cook Islands Climate Change Country Programme. The Climate Change Policy also sets out how the Cook Islands Government seeks to implement the United Nations Framework on Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) as well as its Paris Agreement.

## 7.1 The Cook Islands Climate

The Cook Islands is an ocean state with an estimated population of 14,802 people (2016) and an annual population growth of -2.79% (2017 est.)<sup>3</sup>. It consists of 15 small islands scattered over approximately two million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean with a land mass of 240 square kilometres. Twelve of these islands are inhabited and seven islands have a highest point of less than 15 metres.

<sup>1</sup> Unless specified as belonging to the Cook Islands Government, the use of the term “agencies” means both governmental and non-governmental organisations.

<sup>2</sup> “Activities” in this document includes projects, initiatives, actions carried out by Government and Non-Government organisations.

<sup>3</sup> Source: CIA World Factbook



Takutea Island. Photo: Jacqui Evans

The climate in the Cook Islands is generally categorised as an oceanic tropical climate. The Cook Islands is prone to range of both natural and man-made hazards with the most common being cyclones and droughts due to our position on the cyclone belt and the current El Nino conditions.

## 7.2 Climate Variability

In the past decades, we have come to better understand the influence of climate variability. Climate change events occurring in the Cook Islands are the increasing temperatures, increasing rainfall, rising sea levels, severe droughts, intense tropical cyclones and ocean acidification. These events varies over different timescales driven by the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon that occurs every two to seven years, four years on average; the South Pacific Convergence Zone; and the trade winds.

## 7.3 Climate Trends and Projections

The latest body of scientific information provided by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the September 2018, IPCC Special Report on 1.5 degrees, highlighted the following global and regional climate scenarios: *“Climate models project robust differences in regional climate characteristics between present-day and global warming of 1.5°C, and between 1.5°C and 2°C. These differences include increases in: mean temperature in most land and ocean regions (high confidence), hot extremes in most inhabited regions (high confidence), heavy precipitation in several regions (medium confidence), and the probability of drought and precipitation deficits in some regions (medium confidence)”*

By 2100, global mean sea level rise is projected to be around 0.1 metre lower with global warming of 1.5°C compared to 2°C (*medium confidence*). Sea level will continue to rise well beyond 2100 (*high confidence*), and the magnitude and rate of this rise depends on future emission pathways. A slower rate of sea level rise enables greater opportunities for adaptation in the human and ecological systems of small islands, low-lying coastal areas and deltas (*medium confidence*).

On land, impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, including species loss and extinction, are projected to be lower at 1.5°C of global warming compared to 2°C. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C is projected to lower the impacts on terrestrial, freshwater, and coastal ecosystems and to retain more of their services to humans (*high confidence*).

Limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C is projected to reduce increases in ocean temperature as well as associated increases in ocean acidity and decreases in ocean oxygen levels (high confidence). Consequently, limiting global warming to 1.5°C is projected to reduce risks to marine biodiversity, fisheries, and ecosystems, and their functions and services to humans, as illustrated by recent changes to Arctic sea ice and warm water coral reef ecosystems (*high confidence*)

Specific Cook Islands studies and climate scenarios are based upon older data and information (2002, ADB CLIMAP), and updated and newer information, based upon the IPCC Special Report, above will be undertaken during 2019.

## 8.0 Principles

The following principles guide our national approach to climate change. Some of the principles relate to international commitments and Government-level initiatives. Others set the environment for local activity as guiding principles that activity managers must consider in the designing of climate change activities.

### 8.1 Research and Development

The Cook Islands will continue to identify the potential impacts on the Cook Islands of climate change with recognition that sustainable development includes allowing for the impacts of climate change.

### 8.2 Finance Sustainability

The Cook Islands recognises that meeting the challenges of climate change needs a coordinated global response. It also recognises that the Cook Islands is particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and will utilise climate financing and other international funding opportunities to assist the Cook Islands to meet the challenge. Notwithstanding this, the Cook Islands Government will also commit national financial and human resources to addressing climate change issues.

### 8.3 Integrated Planning and Management

The Cook Islands will maximise the use of national systems to implement projects in the climate change area. Direct access to climate financing will be strengthened while also continuing to participate in regional initiatives as appropriate. Maximising the utilisation of Cook Islands public and private sector resources in climate activities is essential to the intention to build and retain capacity.

### 8.4 Community Participation

The Cook Islands national response acknowledges that climate change can impact differentially on the various sectors of society, recognises that there is a broad spectrum of interests, and commits to working in an inclusive and integrated manner to ensure equity in the planning, participation and outcomes of activities. Applying environmental and social risk assessment to achieve positive sustainable development outcomes and avoid unreasonable harm is a priority. Advocating for a partnership role of the private sector and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in climate change activities is also a priority.



Local Fisherman. Photo: Celine Dyer

## 8.5 'No Regrets' Approach

The climate change policy is based on a no regrets approach and should, where possible, attempt to deliver co-benefits. The policy aims to further the mainstreaming of climate change in policy documents and include considerations of climate change throughout the project activity cycle.

## 8.6 Other Principles

The climate change policy is also based on principles of equity and inclusiveness in the planning and implementation of our activities. The climate change activities will be gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent and will be based on an integrated, multi-sectoral approach to sustainable development. As well, we should also be guided by what is culturally appropriate in each specific situation and be aware that this may vary from island to island.

As an approach to development activities, the principles described above are not unique to climate change. During the concept planning stage of any activity, consideration of crosscutting issues and environmental and social safeguards is mandatory, and planners will need to describe how they are taking account of these in the design of their activity.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>The CIG Activity Management Cycle system (Te Tarai Vaka) has templates to assist in carrying this out.



# 9.0 Policy Objectives

The following are the policy objectives for the Cook Islands Climate Change Policy:

## 9.1: Adaptation and Mitigation

### Issue:

Fragmented approach to design, implementation and coordination of appropriate climate change related activities that improve climate adaptation and mitigation; at times resulting in loss of funding opportunities.

### Policy Objective:

Facilitate activities in the climate change area that improve adaptation to and mitigation of, the impacts of climate change, to make the country more resilient.

### Rationale:

The Cook Islands Government will continue to evaluate funding options to find the ‘best fit’ for facilitating our climate change activities. Climate financing, along with funding support from our development partners will be utilised to help the country achieve its development aspirations. The Cook Islands has been successful in gaining direct access to the Adaptation Fund and more recently, to the GCF. Through this policy, agencies that are proposing activities with a climate change linkage, may be able to receive technical and financial assistance to assist with design and implementation of activities.

### Policies:

To address the issue and objective stated, we will endeavour to ensure that:

### Mitigation

- 9.2.1 Promote a low carbon development approach toward development goals and SDGs.
- 9.2.2 Achieve 100% renewable energy generation in all islands by 2025.
- 9.2.3 Achieve 100% Energy Efficiency across the country by 2025.
- 9.2.4 Confirm a zero emissions target for the Cook Islands by 2040.



Solar Plant, Rarotonga Airport.

## Adaptation

- 9.2.5 Increase climate resilience through greater health related activities, including reducing NCDs.
- 9.2.6 Promote climate risk assessment and climate proofing within the development framework.
- 9.2.7 Achieve a greater understanding on climate loss and damage and how it may apply at national level.
- 9.2.8 Strengthen community based and ecosystem approaches to climate resilience building.

## 9.2: Mainstreaming

**Issue:** The range of climate change activities implemented in the Cook Islands up till now have been largely developed on an ad-hoc basis.

**Policy Objective:** Achieve our national climate change goals by providing direction to the national response to the impacts of climate change and strengthening the mainstreaming of climate change in development planning.

**Rationale:** There has not been a national climate change policy nor a climate change country programme. By enabling linkages with sectoral activities, the policy should facilitate a more coordinated approach to climate change. This is important to avoid duplication but also to ensure that we do not fail to address any climate change issues.

Enabling linkages to activities also improves climate change mainstreaming. A recent study found that just under 60% of CIG sector policies and plans illustrated an awareness of climate change by including it in their policy.<sup>5</sup> The more that climate change can be mainstreamed in to sector activities, the greater the likelihood of achieving our national goals.

### Policies:

To address the issue and objective stated, we will endeavour to ensure that:

### Cross Cutting Areas

- 9.1.1 **Mainstreaming:** through this policy and other relevant tools, seek to achieve 100% climate mainstreaming within the development agenda across all key sectors.
- 9.1.2 **Capacity development:** Strengthen capacity and capabilities of Cook Islands peoples in all climate financed programs and projects.
- 9.1.3 **Innovation and research:** Foster innovation in a climate context for technology application, as well as increased research for quantitative analyses on Cook Islands vulnerability and adaptation assessments.
- 9.1.4 **Education and Public Awareness:** Strengthen education and public awareness on climate change at all levels, including through school curricula.
- 9.1.5 **Gender:** Aim to achieve 100% involvement for gender issues across all climate related activities.
- 9.1.6 **Technology Transfer:** Complete a technology needs assessment for both mitigation and adaptation prior to investing into new climate technologies.
- 9.1.7 **Provision of Green Investment:** Establish a set of standards and procedures that foster green investment in the Cook Islands.
- 9.1.8 **Climate Financing:** Increase the total access to climate financing as an integral part of development expenditures. Identify incentives and tools to promote additional climate financing through the private sector.

<sup>5</sup> A SWOT Assessment of Climate Change Mainstreaming within Sector Plans and Policies, Climate Change Cook Islands Office, Office of the Prime Minister, May 2018

## 9.3: International Engagement

**Policy Objective:** Support meeting our international obligations by providing a domestic focus to our international commitments in the climate change area.

**Rationale:** The Cook Islands is a party to many international agreements in which climate change considerations are being mandated. The country gives climate change commitments in a range of diverse areas such as health, labour and transport. This policy will enable the domestic actions that support those international commitments. The Cook Islands has also identified our Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) as part of our responsibilities under the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC. We are committed to being ambitious and to keep progressing those contributions.

# 10.0 Policy Measures

This policy is an integrated approach to how the country can address both mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The consolidation of climate change and disaster risk management into high level national and regional documents has been achieved, however, the need to outline a separate climate change policy is high. The Climate Change policy will enable national climate change initiatives such as the Country Programme, which in turn enables access to climate financing to implement the measures of both the policy and the Country Programme.

While responsibility for the implementation of this policy will belong to the Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI) office, it is not an operational policy only for that office. This is a national policy to guide a multi-sectoral approach to an issue impacting on every individual in the Cook Islands over time.

The guiding principles in this policy describe how we should implement our climate change activities. Facilitating activities in the climate change area is also a key objective of this policy and the following policy measures are designed to enable the climate change activities by linking the multi-sectoral agencies to a common purpose.

Specific policy indicators are described below each policy statement. Climate change activities that can link to that policy measure are not limited only to the indicators however. The indicators are a sample taken of the potential activities to facilitate measuring the effectiveness of the policy.

### *Policy Measure A: Low carbon approach to national development*

***Adopting a low carbon approach to national development and a commitment to the reduction of national Greenhouse Gas emissions.***

**NSDP Linkage:** Goal Six - Improve access to affordable reliable, sustainable modern energy and transport.

The target of 100% of electricity generation to be from renewable energy sources, is a central component of mitigation initiatives in the Cook Islands. Attention is also being given to our land transport being powered by renewable energy as well. Agencies planning activities should adopt strategies to make their projects carbon neutral.

| Indicators                       | Assessment  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| GHG Inventory                    | Inventory updated.  |
| Infrastructure development       | New builds are carbon neutral.  |
| Abatement action                 | Re-forestation activities occur, number of wetlands maintained and increased.     |
| Transport emissions              | Number of Electric vehicles registered, number of re-charging stations increases. |
| Renewable electricity generation | 100% by 2025  |

***Policy Measure B: Strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change  
Enhancing adaptive capacity including Loss and Damage, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development.***

**NSDP Linkage:**

Goal 5 Build resilient infrastructure and Information Communication Technologies to improve our standard of living.

Goal 7 Improve health and promote healthy lifestyles

Goal 9 Accelerate gender equality, empower all women and girls, and advance the rights of youth, the elderly and disabled

Goal 13 Strengthen resilience to combat the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Adaptation activities are multi-sectoral and will constitute the majority of climate change activities in the Cook Islands. The level of adaptation should be based on exceeding the assessed climate risk.

Some climate change impacts cannot be mitigated or adapted to, and there needs to be an assessment of what the loss and damage may be from these impacts and how the country will cope with this challenge.

Building resilient infrastructure is an essential component of our sustainable development. Climate risk analysis needs to be conducted for existing infrastructure and any planned infrastructure developments.

The CIG recognises that strengthening resilience includes building socially cohesive, physically and mentally healthy communities enabled to meet the challenge of climate change. Activities to reduce vulnerability to climate change must respect human rights and allow for those most at risk such as children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.

| Indicators                      | Assessment  |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Number of Adaptation Activities | Number of Activities implemented and completed.     |
| Funding approvals               | Total value of climate change funding increases.    |
| Number of people                | Number of people engaged in activities increases.   |
| Climate Risk Analysis.          | Climate Risk Analysis included in activity process. |



*Policy Measure C: Water and food security*

***Ensuring water and food security and protecting food production systems from the adverse impacts of climate change is essential to sustainable development.***

**NSDP Linkage:** Goal 4 – Sustainable management of water and sanitation

Goal 10 - Achieve food security and improved nutrition and increase sustainable agriculture.

Ensuring a consistent supply of clean water to meet the country's needs will be challenging given proposed rainfall variability and increased flooding events. Present activities to safeguard our water supply and storage need to be supplemented.

Climate change will also impact on global food production and efforts should be made to sustain and increase local production as part of improving our resilience. Climate-ready commercial crops are already a focus but there is also a significant subsistence harvesting agricultural and marine sector, which needs to be protected. Activities in this area could also explore how some of our native foods have adapted to local conditions and remained resilient.

| Indicators          | Assessment  |
|---------------------|---|
| Water security      | Increase in water harvesting and storage capacity.                                      |
| Import substitution | Decrease in value of fresh food imports, outer islands supply chains improved.          |
| Climate ready crops | Climate ready crops distributed.  |
| Subsistence sector  | Land area under subsistence cultivation increases, artisanal fisheries catch increases. |



Salt Inundation, Pukapuka. Photo: Celine Dyer

***Policy Measure D: Resilient socioeconomic and ecological systems***

***Build the resilience of socioeconomic and ecological systems, including through economic diversification and sustainable management of natural resources.***

**NSDP Linkage:**

Goal 2 Expand economic opportunities, improve economic resilience and productive employment to ensure decent work for all.

Goal 11 Promote sustainable land use, management of terrestrial ecosystems and protect biodiversity

Goal 12 Sustainable management of oceans, lagoons and marine resources.

Maintaining the health of our ecosystems and biodiversity despite the impacts of climate change is a key part of building our resilience. Resource managers need to factor climate variability risk in to management plans for our natural resources.

However, the impacts of climate change are not confined only to the environment and we need to take a broader view that includes looking at how we can build resilience in to our businesses and our social structures as well as our ecosystems. As an example, building resilience should include having more resilient privately-owned assets as well as publicly owned assets.

| Indicators                            | Assessment   |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| More resilient businesses             | Business vulnerability assessments conducted.                  |
| Sustainably managed natural resources | Resource Management plans include climate variability impacts. |
| Biodiversity                          | Monitoring programmes implemented.                             |
| Economic diversification              | Employment numbers in non-tourism related sectors increases.   |

***Policy Measure E: Community participation***

***Participation of the private sector and civil society is a significant aspect of achieving our national climate change goals and the Cook Islands Government will seek ways to incentivise their participation.***

**NSDP Linkage:**

Goal 15: Ensure a sustainable population, engaged in development for Cook Islanders by Cook Islanders

Government needs to have clear plans in place for engaging with civil society and the private sector prior to beginning an activity. The ability to participate as a supplier, contractor or implementing agency means that both the private sector and civil society organisations can play a significant role in our climate change activities.

| Indicators    | Assessment   |
|---------------|--|
| Consultations | Private sector and civil society consulted before activity begins. |
| Procurement   | Local supplier/contractor as preferred option.                     |

*Policy Measure F: Akono'anga Māori*

***Work with traditional leaders and utilise traditional methods and knowledge to assist in minimising the impacts of climate change.***

**NSDP Linkage:**

Goal 13 Strengthen resilience to combat the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Goal 14 Preserve our heritage and history, protect our traditional knowledge, and develop our language, creative and cultural endeavours

Utilising traditional knowledge and a nature-based approach to an activity will be done where appropriate. These approaches can be more cost-effective and generate different local and national socio-economic benefits to purely scientific approaches. We must also use international scientific data to help us make the best decisions.

| Indicators   | Assessment   |
|--|--|
| Community consultations  | Traditional leaders included in community consultations.           |
| Traditional knowledge incorporated in to climate change activities | Activity Reports showing inclusion of traditional knowledge.       |
| Nature-based approach  | Increase in activities using a nature-based approach.              |
| International data   | Information gained from attendance at IPCC meetings is distributed |



Passing on Traditional Knowledge, Rarotonga. Photo: Teina Rongo



**Policy Measure G: Build capacity and educate**

***Implementation of climate change activities requires increased capacity across all government and non-government sectors, with particular emphasis in the field of climate change science.***

**NSDP Linkage:**

Goal 8 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities

Goal 13 Strengthen resilience to combat the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Goal 15 Ensure a sustainable population, engaged in development for Cook Islanders by Cook Islanders

Our capacity to implement climate change activities is constrained by a shortage of human resources in the relevant technical areas. Capacity building should also include both private sector and civil society as well as CIG agencies. The country needs to build capacity generally, but particularly in the scientific area to ensure timely access to locally relevant information. This could begin with an increased profile for climate change at primary and secondary schools along with more tertiary students in science subjects studying climate change. More funding support for recruitment can also assist in addressing this issue.

| Indicators                    | Assessment  |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Science Graduates             | Number of graduates in the fields of science, including climate change, increases.      |
| Recruitment                   | Funding support for recruitment to climate change research agencies.                    |
| Broad-based Capacity building | Civil society and private sector included in training and capacity building activities. |

**Policy Measure H: Implementing adaptation and mitigation activities**

***A response to climate change is based on implementing adaptation and mitigation activities. Some activities may provide an opportunity to generate benefits for the country.***

**NSDP Linkage:**

Goal 13 Strengthen resilience to combat the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Goal 15 Ensure a sustainable population, engaged in development for Cook Islanders by Cook Islanders.

The challenge of climate change also presents the Cook Islands with opportunities and can create benefits. If the climate change activities are contributing to sustainable development, then there is a contribution to improving people's lives. Making the country more resilient is a benefit, even in the absence of climate change. Increasing the awareness of climate change allows people to make better decisions through being well informed and being more prepared.

Economic opportunities may also arise from climate change. Growing time and harvest periods for some agricultural crops appears to be lengthening. Building capacity is upskilling our workforce and introducing them to new technology which helps drive business development.

| Indicators                | Assessment   |
|---------------------------|--|
| Climate Change Activities | Climate change activities contribute to achieving NSDP goals. Increase in number of community-level resilience activities. |
| Agricultural activity     | Food production increases.   |
| Business development      | Increased locally funded investment in climate change activities by private sector.  |



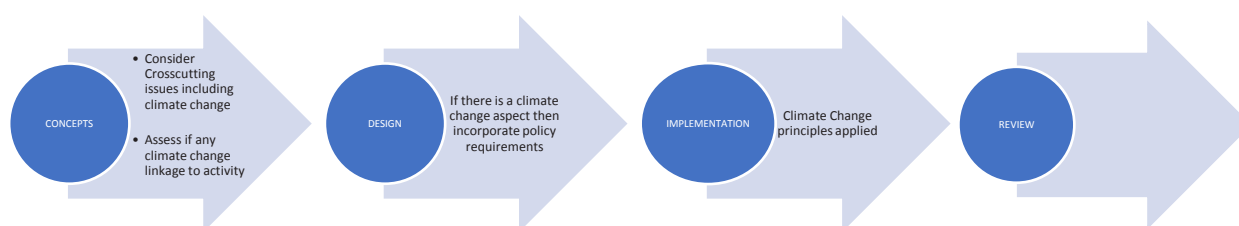
## 11.0 Institutional Arrangements

The Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI) was established in 2011 to coordinate and implement climate change related activities in an integrated manner. Current governance and management arrangements involve buy-in and participation of government agencies, communities, traditional leaders and local partners in the implementation of this policy. CCCI shall coordinate, implement and ensure that the Policy is achieving its objectives; and gains consensus on a Climate Change action plan.

## 12.0 Implementation Framework

The onus for the development of climate change activities is with the various agencies of the CIG, and with civil society organisations. If there is a climate change aspect to the activity, then the guidelines and measures in this policy must be considered in the planning, design and implementation of the activity. The chart below illustrates this process.

Linking the Climate Change Policy to the Activity Management Cycle



The range of climate change activities is broad and varied by sector and scale. As a crosscutting issue, climate change should be taken in to account as part of every development activity scoping. If there is a climate change linkage, then this policy should be considered by the activity planners regardless of the funding source. Whether or not an activity receives climate financing, is not the determining factor in categorising it as a climate change activity.

In addition, while the NSDP guides our overall socio-economic development, our JNAP also guides how the country responds to and addresses disaster risk reduction and the impacts of climate change.

## 13.0 Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Individual activities will have their own performance measures, but these may not be wholly climate change related. The focus for this policy is in the cumulative effect of the activities and how this contributes to the national climate change objectives. The indicators described for each policy statement should allow an assessment of how successful the policy has been overall in achieving its objectives.

For a longer-term assessment, the Cook Islands can draw on a wealth of climate change information on which to compare indicators for assessing the progress in our climate change efforts over the last 20 years. The Initial and Second National Communications summarise this information and work is in progress on completing the Third National Communications.

## 14.0 Financing the Climate Change Policy Implementation

The climate change policy is also closely aligned with the Cook Islands Country Programme prepared with GCF support. Any climate change related initiative by any stakeholder can be potentially financed through the GCF provided it meets the country's priority areas, which is clearly elaborated upon in the Country Programme. Thus the policy itself can be implemented through any agency, organisation or stakeholder via the Country Programming approach.

## 15.0 Stakeholders

### 15.1 Role of Climate Change Cook Islands

The CCCI Office will have the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of this policy and carrying out any reviews. The Office will also advocate for the inclusion of climate change in to agency policies and plans, in order to further the mainstreaming of climate change.

The CCCI Office has an oversight role of all climate change activities to ensure coordination of the multi-sectoral approach to climate change. The coordination role will ensure alignment of the various activities with our national climate change goals. The CCCI Office can also make sure that there is no duplication and facilitate activities for issues that may not have been addressed. Assistance with technical advice and funding proposals can be provided where possible.

During the consultations for the development of this policy, participants were asked about climate change areas that they thought were not being addressed and that could have activities conducted in them. The list of responses was provided separately to the CCCI office and can be a tool for the office in carrying out the oversight role. The list is also an attempt to make sure that the policy is forward-looking and can achieve its objective of facilitating activities.

The climate change policy is not only about enabling imminent activities, despite activity planners tending to respond predominantly to immediate needs. Part of our national response to climate change however, must include the monitoring and preparing for slow-onset events like sea level rise, ocean acidification and an increase in some climate related health disorders. The CCCI office should take the lead in ensuring that activities are implemented to mitigate and adapt to the longer-term impacts of climate change.

The CCCI office will also take the lead in establishing longer-term targets related to climate change, such as a zero emissions target by 2040, or similar. More work needs to be done around setting these targets and a discussion paper should be developed outlining what the targets could be and what activities would need to be implemented to achieve them.

The discussion paper could also look at whether or not climate change legislation is required. This could be in relation to the mitigation targets but also as a broader assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of having specific climate change legislation.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of how wide-spread our efforts to build resilience are, it would be useful to collate some activity-level information. As part of its overview, CCCI can compile activity level information such as: the types of activities being implemented by sector; the activities completed; the activity outcomes, and the number of people engaged in the activity. Some of this information will feed in to the assessment of the policy indicators.

From an investment perspective, information could also be collected on the total value of climate change related activities, the sources of funding, and the CIG contribution to climate change by department appropriation. The CIG contribution could also include indirect costs to Government such as reduced levies or other incentives. Current climate financing is provided through the financial mechanisms of the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, namely, the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility's climate change focal area, as well as other multilateral and bilateral sources. The Climate Change Cook Islands Office carries the facilitation and coordination of all climate financing from these sources, although at present is ad-hoc and not consolidated as a focal point for the identified sources. This policy aims to consolidate all climate financing from the UNFCCC through the Climate Change Cook Islands office, as a means for mainstreaming climate activities across both the public and private sectors of Cook Islands society, and facilitating implementation amongst stakeholders.

There are different types of climate change activities being implemented and some activities will require more analysis than others. There will be specific activities where climate change is the focus and data from these should be simple enough to access. There may however be activities whose focus is another development area, but it contains a climate change aspect, and data from these will need to be separated out.

As the Cook Islands' main contact point with international climate change organisations, the CCCI office should also take on an information sharing and distribution role. This is not only for information from the normal channels of communications, but also by looking at the climate change experiences of other countries to see what we can learn from them.

The specific monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements for each of the various agencies and organisations are outlined below.

## **15.2 Role of Government Agencies**

1. Use the targets and indicators from relevant policy instruments in the annual business plan and budget submission as a basis for internal government monitoring and management;
2. Indicate which of the actions within their annual business plan, budget submission and performance reports contribute to the implementation plan;

## **15.3 Role of Non-government and Civil Society Organisations**

Shall be invited by the Climate Change Cook Islands to provide input for consolidation into the Climate Change Annual Progress Report.

## 16.0 Risk Assessment

As part of the planning process a general risk assessment relevant to each specific activity will be carried out by the implementing agency. This is when all the crosscutting issues are evaluated, and potential climate change risks would be considered at that stage. If the climate change related risks are deemed high enough, then a more detailed climate change focussed risk assessment should be carried out.<sup>6</sup>

More generally, the greatest risk for the Cook Islands lies in not being proactive in meeting the challenge of climate change. Regardless of our response, the changing climate will have an impact on our development, but by our actions we can ameliorate the outcomes. As we implement activities however, we should minimise the social risk of meeting that challenge by approaching it in the manner described in the guiding principles above.



Cyclone Meena, Rarotonga, 2005

## 17.0 Conclusion

As a country with inhabited coral atolls and limited larger land masses, the immediacy of the changes occurring to the global climate make the need for action more acute, both internationally and domestically. Therefore it is important that the people of the Cook Islands take precautions so everyone is prepared for climate change and help reduce potential damages by adapting.

<sup>6</sup>An example of this risk assessment is in pp 43-48, National Infrastructure Investment Plan, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Government of the Cook Islands.





# Brilliant Resilient

National Seminar on :  
Building a Resilient Cook Islands







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CLIMATE CHANGE COOK ISLANDS

Office of the Prime Minister