



United Nations Development Programme Global Environmental Facility

FINAL REPORT (July 6, 2021)

Terminal Evaluation of the UNDP-Supported GEF-Financed Project

Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Function
through a "Ridge to Reef" Approach in Cook Islands

GEF Project ID: 5348

UNDP PIMS ID: 5168



Birdman George near Kopeka Caves (Atiu) and Ngatere George, Market Gardener (Aitutaki). Photo: M. Hilyard (2021)

Country:

Cook Islands

Region:

Asia and the Pacific

GEF Focal Area:

Multi-focal area: Biodiversity and International Waters (GEF-5)

GEF Agency:

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Project Executing Agencies:

National Environment Service (NES)

Evaluation Time Frame:

25 January – 6 July 2021

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Acknowledgements

The evaluators thank all those who patiently took part in interviews and generously took time out of their busy days to share their perspectives and information crucial to the conduct of this evaluation.



Ra'ui signage beside the bonefish spawning grounds, Aitutaki. Photo: Maureen Hilyard (2021)

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APR	Annual Progress Report
AWP	Annual Work Plan
BI	Birdlife International
BTOR	Back to Office Report
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CCF	Country Cooperation Framework (UNDP)
CDA	Capacity Development Assessment
CIMP SC	Cook Islands Marine Park Steering Committee
CIT	Cook Islands Tourism Corporation
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EoP	End of Project
ESSP	(UNDP's) Environmental and social screening procedure
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HoA	House of Ariki
IC	International Consultant
ICI	Infrastructure Cook Islands
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
LMPA	Locally Managed Productive Area
LPAC	Local Project Appraisal Committee
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCO	(UNDP) Multi-Country Office
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MESV	Marine Ecosystem Services Valuation
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MFEM	Ministry of Finance & Economic Management
MMR	Ministry of Marine Resources
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture

MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MSP	Marine Spatial Planning
NBSC	National Biodiversity Steering Committee
NC	National Consultant
NES	National Environment Service
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHT	Natural Heritage Trust
NIM	National Implementation Modality
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PA	Protected Area
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PC	Project Coordinator
PM	Project Manager
PMU	Project Management Unit
PNA	Protected Natural Area
PoWPA	Programme of Work on Protected Areas
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QPR	Quarterly Progress Report
RTA	(UNDP) Regional Technical Adviser
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPREP	Secretariat for Pacific Regional Environment Programme
TCA	Takitumu Conservation Area
TE	Terminal Evaluation
TET	Terminal Evaluation Team
TETL	Terminal Evaluation Team Leader
TGA	Takitumu Growers Association
TIC	Tourism Industry Council
TIS	Te Ipukarea Society
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Brief Project Description (including Project Information Table)

Table 1: Project Information Table

Project Title:	Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Function through a Ridge to Reef Approach in Cook Islands		
UNDP Project ID (PIMS #):	5168	PIF Approval Date:	14 June 2013
GEF Project ID (PMIS #):	5348	CEO Endorsement Date:	23 Feb 2015
Award ID:	84399	Project Document (PRODOC) Signature Date (date project began):	6 July 2015
Country(ies):	Cook Islands	Date project manager hired:	7 Sept 2015
Region:	Asia and the Pacific	Inception Workshop date:	20-21 Oct 2015
Focal Area:	Multifocal	Midterm Review date:	1 Aug 2017 – 28 Feb 2018
		Terminal Evaluation date:	28 May 2021
GEF-5 Focal Area Objectives:	BD-1, BD-2, IW-1	Planned closing date:	6 July 2019
Trust Fund:	GEF TF	If revised, proposed closing date:	6 June 2021
Executing Agency:	National Environment Service (NES)		
Other execution partners:	Ministry of Marine Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Cook Islands Tourism Corporation		
NGO/CBO Involvement	Through consultation and sub-contracts to produce Project outputs		
Private Sector Involvement	Through consultation and participation in eco-certification scheme initiated by the Project		
Geospatial Coordinates of Project Sites:		Latitude	Longitude
	Rarotonga		
	Coral Planting – Dive Raro	S21.12.100	W159.45.959
	TCA	S21.261558	W159.767127
	<u>Atiu</u> Binocular Station	S19.978929	W158.12967
	Mokoero	S20.00.181	W158.120131
	Raui (Puna Rakanui)	S19.96905	W158.11130
	Crop Bank	S19.9887045	W158.120131
	Takutea	S19.81084	W158.120131
	<u>Palmerston</u>	S18.054278	W163.189511
	<u>Aitutaki</u>		
	Eco toilet – Maina Landing	S18.876603	W163.189511
	Eco toilet – Base 1	S18.827511	W159.777304
	Eco toilet – Vaipae Wharf	S18.87084	W156.777521
	Eco toilet – Tautu Wharf	S18.881258	W159.773924
Crop bank	S18.869843	W159.786751	
Financial Information:			
PDF/PPG	at approval (US\$M)		at PDF/PPG completion (US\$M)
GEF PDF/PPG grants for project preparation	150,000		150,000
Co-financing for project preparation	0		0

Project	at CEO Endorsement (US\$M)	at TE (US\$M)
[1] GEF financing (excl. PPG):	4,267,431	4,267,431
[2] UNDP contribution:	50,000	33,693
[3] Government:	13,500,000	6,195,062
[4] Other partners:	1,400,000	1,355,000
[5] Total Co-financing [2 + 3+ 4]:	14,950,000	7,583,755
PROJECT TOTAL COSTS [1 + 5]	19,217,431	11,851,186

**Cut-off date for figures presented at Terminal Evaluation is 25 January 2021 (date TE began).*

[1] The “Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Function through a Ridge to Reef Approach in the Cook Islands” project, approved under the GEF-5 replenishment cycle, started in July 2015 and is now in its 6th and final year of implementation with (at the time of submission of the TE inception report) approximately four months left until project operational closure on 6 June 2021. This US\$19,217,431 (\$4,267,431 of which is GEF grant financing), full-sized UNDP-supported, GEF-financed project was intended “To build national and local capacities and actions to ensure effective conservation of biodiversity, food security and livelihoods and the enhancement of ecosystem functions within the Cook Islands Marine Park”. This project is a child project under the regional “R2R – Pacific Islands Ridge to Reef National Priorities – Integrated Water, Land, Forest and Coastal Management to Preserve Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods” project funded by the GEF. This project had two components. *Component 1* to strengthen the management of protected areas was to receive the bulk of the GEF financing, approximately 73% (\$2,958,431), not counting management costs.

[2] Four key outputs were expected that would contribute to five anticipated outcomes which are:

1. 1.1 million sq. km. of Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP) legally designated and effectively managed with dedicated staff implementing planning and coordination of the entire CIMP (as measured using Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT), with a score of at least 60 by the end of project).
2. National agencies responsible for protected area (PA) management are effectively delivering PA management functions (capacities tracked by Capacity Scorecard).
3. Inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group managed for biodiversity conservation through Island Development Plans, covering 15,110 ha of terrestrial ecosystems and 16,174 ha of marine ecosystems.
4. Effective community and private conservation of protected areas sites, including Protected Natural Areas (PNA), Community Conservation Areas, and Ra’ui sites, covering 6.7% of all terrestrial landscapes and 12.3% of all inshore marine seascapes (as measured using METT for 5 PNAs, with average score of at least 50 by end of project).
5. Stable or increased populations of critically endangered and/or endemic species, including Green, Hawksbill and Loggerhead Turtles, Napoleon Wrasse, Atiu swiftlet, Rarotongan Monarch, Mitiaro fan palm and Mangaian kingfisher.

[3] Component 2 to mainstream biodiversity in key production-oriented sectors to mitigate

threats to biodiversity related to production landscapes was to receive slightly more than a quarter (27%) of the GEF funds (not counting management costs). Three key outputs were expected that would contribute to six anticipated outcomes which are:

1. At least a 15% reduction in the use of agricultural chemicals (fertilizers and pesticides), based on value of annual imports.
2. EIAs for infrastructure development in or around PAs are subject to independent review, and development plans are adapted as necessary to conserve biodiversity.
3. No decline in current forest cover of 13,245 ha (baseline to be confirmed in Year 1) as measured by satellite/aerial imagery by the end of the project.
4. At least 10 sites within CIMP where water quality will be improved through measures to control water pollution and sedimentation (from agriculture or other sources).
5. No increase in algal levels on coral reefs by end of project as measured by Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) algal surveys (baseline to be established in Year 1).
6. At least 20 tourism businesses are implementing biodiversity (BD) management programs that comply with conservation guidelines developed through the project and included in national accreditation system.

[4] A total of 24 activities and 131 “actions” were envisaged in this project, which was originally planned as a four-year (48 months) project but was subsequently granted two (no cost) extensions, the first extending the project 18 months (until 6 January 2021) and the second extending the project another 5 months until 6 June 2021.

1.2 Evaluation Ratings Table

[5] Ratings for various aspects of the project, including monitoring and evaluation, implementation, impact, and sustainability are presented in Table 2. Ratings were assigned to the project using the obligatory GEF rating scale (see Annex 6).

Table 2. Terminal Evaluation Ratings Assigned to the Project

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating
M&E design at entry	MU
M&E Plan Implementation	MU
Overall Quality of M&E	MU
Implementing Agency (IA) Implementation & Executing Agency (EA) Execution	
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	U
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	U
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	U
Assessment of Outcomes	
Relevance	S
Effectiveness	MU
Efficiency	U
Overall Project Outcome Rating	MU
Sustainability	
Financial sustainability	U

Socio-political sustainability	MU
Institutional framework and governance sustainability	MU
Environmental sustainability	MU
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	U

In accordance with UNDP guidelines for GEF project evaluations, Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation/Oversight & Execution, and Relevance are rated on a 6-point scale: HS = Highly Satisfactory (exceeds expectations and/or no shortcomings); S = Satisfactory (meets expectations and/or no or minor shortcomings); MS = Moderately Satisfactory (more or less meets expectations and/or some shortcomings); MU = Moderately Unsatisfactory (somewhat below expectations and/or significant shortcomings); U= Unsatisfactory; HU = Highly Unsatisfactory (substantially below expectations and/or major shortcomings); Sustainability is rated on a 4-point scale: L= Likely; ML = Moderately Likely; MU= Moderately Unlikely; U = Unlikely.

1.3 Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Lessons

1.3.1 Findings and Conclusions

[6] At a critical juncture in Cook Islands’ history when important decisions are being made regarding many matters that may significantly affect biodiversity, this project could have, and should have, contributed significantly more. In the void of several products that were anticipated from the project, activities, including seabed mineral exploration, are being pursued whose impact on biodiversity is unknown.

[7] Although the project made numerous important contributions that provide information necessary for the management of biodiversity (surveys, assessments, identification of SUMA) and other contributions that are fundamental to planning for PAs (MSP Policy paper, Protected and Managed Areas Policy Discussion Paper, proposed PA classification system), less was done to enhance national capacity to implement these plans or to ensure the buy-in was there to do so. Institutional responsibilities regarding marine and terrestrial protected areas are still not sorted out, and MMR, a key stakeholder, believes instead of clarifying institutional responsibilities, the Project has further “muddied the waters”.

[8] Despite the focus in the Project document on strengthening traditional resource management systems, there is little difference in how these areas are managed now compared to how they were six years ago when the project began, and there are still looming questions regarding the legal status of these areas¹. Yes, the CIMP was enlarged during the project period and is now the largest marine park in the world, but that is not attributable to this project. What *should* be attributed to this project but cannot be because it is not yet a reality, is management of the CIMP based on an approved marine spatial plan, clear institutional arrangements regarding management responsibilities, and the technical and financial capacity to ensure sound management of biodiversity within the CIMP. This would have in and of itself been a tremendous feat, but the project promised more. Not only would it result in effectively managing the vast CIMP, it would also develop and implement management plans for lagoons, as well as for cloud forests and a diversity of other terrestrial ecosystems. Much of this is left undone, in some cases not even started at project end.

[9] On the other hand, good progress was made with the development of an eco-certification scheme for tourism operators and that scheme is now operational with some 40 tourism businesses participating. As it did in some other areas of the project, the global COVID-19 pandemic has had an

¹ The Project has not helped to sort out what the optimal legal status, if any, should be for some important sites. Just as was the case at project start, at project end, Ra’ui are not legislated, nor is Moekero. Takutea is designated as a CCA under Env Regs. MPAs exist under S24 of MM Act. The legal status of Suwarrow is not 100% clear. Manuae and Cloud Forests have no legal designation.

impact on the Mana Tiaki Eco-certification scheme and may affect the sustainability of this scheme depending on how long the pandemic persists. The project had little impact on improving the EIA process. So little attention was given to this that most forget it was even supposed to be done.

[10] Promoting healthier agriculture had some good results, with reduced import of some harmful pesticides (although no decrease in overall pesticide import) and no reduction in the import of fertilizers (2017 to 2020²). Trainings on use of organic fertilizers and pesticides helped to bring greater awareness and use of these alternatives, and the project brought about the added benefit that Government now collects data and reports on import of agrochemicals (something not done prior to the project). The NGO-run programme for youth to promote organic agriculture made an important contribution. If only the project had provided even greater support for youth initiatives including the effort on organic agriculture and the “Ra’ui Monitors” nascent programme which ended prematurely because this innovative and popular project-supported programme on Atiu did not have adequate funding to keep it going.

[11] Inter-institutional collaboration had significant challenges, but as a result of the project effort, there is greater awareness in the various entities involved in the project of what others are doing, and the project has helped to build relationships, even if challenges certainly remain. Finally, there are those basics, the things that perhaps don’t inspire but which make putting things into action possible – the refurbished NES toilets on Atiu, the new eco-toilets for visitors on Aitutaki, equipment and supplies to enable the joint MMR and NES water quality monitoring to keep going, and the unplanned (as per the PRODOC) yet useful boat for MMR which will also be available for use by others with relevant business related to marine conservation.

[12] This project received ratings of Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU) for both IP and DO for every year for which Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs) were completed. The overall rating of MU assigned by the MTR was in line with the ratings given to the project by both UNDP MCO, the Project Manager/Coordinator, and the UNDP RTA in all PIRs done prior to the MTR. Ratings subsequent to the MTR did not improve. Despite this, until the TE, UNDP MCO senior management was under the impression that the project was going well and considered it one of their more successful projects, indicating a lack of full awareness by senior management of project performance and a possible need to review internal communication systems regarding project performance.

[13] Relevance. Overall, the project was relevant and responsive to national needs, even though lack of efficiencies, and in some cases poor planning, detracted somewhat from that relevance in certain areas. It was timely and strategic in some ways, yet not in others.

[14] Effectiveness. The project accomplished quite a lot despite many shortcomings. It was, however, not nearly as effective as it might have been if it had been managed better from the start and if the design had been more realistic.

[15] Project Design. The design of the project was seriously flawed. The Project was overly ambitious for the time frame (originally anticipated for 4 years), budget, and existing capacity to implement. Although all activities were relevant, project design must have focus to represent a strategic intervention. This project was far too broad in scope to truly represent a strategic intervention. It misinterpreted what is meant by a “ridge to reef” project. Yes, ridge to reef may encompass all, but a project cannot.

² According to MoA, records related to import of pesticides and fertilizers was not kept prior to 2017.

[16] Implementation suffered because of lack of project focus (too many dispersed activities to be undertaken at once), a weak PMU (often understaffed or staffed with underqualified individuals) during much of the project period which was not given adequate strategic direction and oversight by the committee tasked with steering it (the NBSC). This was compounded by a lack of adequate oversight by the GEF Agency responsible for the project.

[17] Efficiency. The Project was not very efficient in use of resources. Slow implementation exacerbated inefficiencies such as the additional US\$ 144,832 spent on project management costs that was originally planned to be spent on project activities. Project extensions are never truly “no-cost”. They come at a cost to the natural world that will receive less support in its struggle for survival than what was promised.

[18] Sustainability is in serious question as so much of what was to be achieved during the project is left to be done as part of the Project “exit/sustainability” strategy, with technical and financial capacity still a significant constraint. Political will, a necessary element to ensure sustainability may be lacking as evidenced from the lack of action taken to date on some of the project’s most important outputs including a comprehensive (and expensive) report presenting sustainable financing options on which no action has been taken and which seems to have been mostly forgotten.

1.3.2 Lessons

[19] Many lessons are scattered throughout this report, presented directly following the relevant text which logically leads to the lesson, and are easily located as they are in blue. To avoid duplication, only those lessons that relate to “big picture” issues are presented here. The End of Project (EoP) report prepared by the PM and CTA also describes useful lessons that may be learned from the Project.

[20] **Lesson 1.** This R2R project had 7 outputs, a number of which could have been an entire project in and of themselves. Take, for example, any of the following: Output 2.1: Ridge to Reef approaches integrated into land use and development planning, Output 2.2: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into agriculture sector, Output 2.3: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into tourism sector. Even some of the individual activities, such as ecosystem valuation, could have been an entire project (as was the case in the GEF-supported Piloting Natural Resource Valuation in Jamaica project, for example). **Lesson:** Simply because a project’s approach is “ridge to reef” does not mean it should encompass everything. R2R in its truest sense encompasses all. A project is not a programme. A project cannot possibly succeed if it is all-inclusive. R2R projects should choose a specific R2R issue (as one example, agricultural practices in a given watershed that affect a globally significant marine ecosystem) and focus exclusively on that.

[21] **Lesson 2.** Simplify. Successful BD projects are usually focused on addressing a few specific barriers/problems rather than attempting to address *all* the problems affecting biodiversity that may be identified in a threats analysis. Especially in countries where capacity constraints are significant, as is often the case in SIDS with small populations, limiting the scope of a project and the number of entities involved in implementation is best. Longer than normal time frames may also be needed.

[22] **Lesson 3.** Many project activities were viewed as “add-ons” by RPs, not part of their core programme and therefore not of equally high priority. Project activities need to be built into regular work programmes of government entities. For this to happen, decision makers need to be very much involved in the design of projects and understand the commitment being made when a PRODOC is

signed. There must also be adequate time in between the signing of a PRODOC and the time when IPs and RPs are expected to begin implementation as there is little flexibility to modify annual government work programmes once agreed. [Lesson: Build Projects into Regular Work Programmes of IPs and RPs to enhance national buy-in and implementation.](#)

[23] **Lesson 4.** Given the capacity constraints in country, it was a good approach for the project to pay for additional technical people in the various Responsible Partner (RP) agencies and it was appropriate to house them in those entities instead of in a central PMU unit. Nevertheless, it is clear that some of their time, indeed in some cases, a significant amount of their time, was devoted to matters that were not project-related. The TE believes the solution is not to house all technical resource persons in a PMU, but rather to put a reporting system in place where monthly meetings happen during which all gather at the PMU to report on progress made to the PM, and to use achievement benchmarks with clear consequences that are discussed and agreed by the PSC and monitored by the IP. The PRODOC specified that “The NES Project Officer and the MMR Project Officer will report to the Project Coordinator, as well as to their respective supervisors within each Ministry” but in actual fact, there was little reporting done to the PM. If during regular PMU meetings it is clear that benchmarks are not being met due to lack of time dedicated to project efforts, resources should be reallocated. [Lesson: Clear reporting lines \(in this case to both the RP and the PMU\), regular and official reporting to the PMU \(instead of irregular and casual reporting\), and use of achievement benchmarks motivates progress and helps ensure GEF-paid staff outposted in RPs dedicate their time to GEF project tasks.](#)

[24] **Lesson 5.** Consideration should have been given to beginning with a Medium Size Project (MSP) before undertaking to manage a Full-Size Project (FSP). This would have reduced risk and would have been more congruent with existing capacity and experience which could have been built over the project so that NES could successfully play the role of IP in future larger projects. The biggest project the IP (NES) had managed prior to this one was less than one fourth the size, and far less complex.

[25] **Lesson 6.** Limit the number of Government RPs on a project. Involving numerous Government agencies on a project may reduce ownership of the project by all of them and may create a complex political environment, one that junior and inexperienced staff in a PMU cannot manage.

[26] **Lesson 7.** Projects must plan realistically based on known challenges. Existing known challenges (such as weather, logistical constraints, capacity constraints) should not be excuses for not achieving what was committed in a PRODOC. Instead, these challenges must be taken into account in the project design.

[27] **Lesson 8.** Effective participation of UNDP on the PSC. UNDP is accountable to the GEF when it is designated as the GEF Agency for a project. As such, it must actively participate in PSCs and must play an important role in resolving issues and ensuring that PSCs are effectual. Poor PIR ratings that do not improve from year to year is one indication that a PSC is not effectively steering a project. [Lesson: Although UNDP must respect the role of the IP in NIM projects, it must also serve effectively in its oversight role to ensure accountability to the primary donor, in this case, the GEF.](#)

Lessons Related to Systemic Issues Not Specific to this Project but Which Affected this Project

[28] **Lesson 9.** Reported GEF Secretariat (GEFSEC) pressures to make projects commit to being more ambitious is causing projects, including this one, to commit to do more than they are able to do. This negatively affects project performance and results.

[29] **Lesson 10.** Results Frameworks may not be the best format for tracking progress of biodiversity projects. Although they may work well for monitoring progress in more quantitative types of projects (e.g., POPs), RFs have been shown to be problematic in many GEF biodiversity projects. UNDP and the GEF should consider a different approach for monitoring and evaluating the progress and impact of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed biodiversity projects.

[30] **Lesson 11.** Submitting PIFs for future projects before TEs of current projects are completed nullifies an important objective of conducting TEs, which is to help inform the design of future initiatives taking lessons identified in TEs into account. This is especially important in the case (such as this one) when a project has either received less than satisfactory ratings in the MTR and/or in the case (also such as this one) when a project has consistently received less than satisfactory ratings in annual PIRs with no improvement in such ratings over the years of the project. The TET understands that deadlines for submitting PIFs are not aligned with TEs for any individual project and that the TE for a project may still be underway, or perhaps not even begun, when deadlines for submission of PIFs for new projects must be met.

[31] As happened in this case, the PIF had been in development for a long time prior to this project's TE – it was not possible to optimally synchronize the timelines for these two projects. Given this, UNDP has committed to consider and incorporate the relevant lessons and recommendations during the PPG stage, if the PIF is approved. The TET reminds that the PIF may be one of the shorter GEF documents but is really one of the most important. It is difficult to make fundamental changes to a project design once the PIF is approved. The TET believes in this case, given the consistent poor ratings received over the years, it would have been more appropriate to abstain from submitting a PIF for a future project at this point and instead to wait until the next opportunity to do so, allowing for the full integration of lessons from this project into the design of the next, especially given that the PIF for the next project includes numerous activities of relevance to this project as well as several that were included in this project but not successfully completed.

1.4 Recommendations Summary Table

[32] Given that the Project is only two months from closure (6 June 2021), TE recommendations mainly relate to follow-on actions that could help to ensure that the foundation built by this project is further built upon and that the project investment is not lost where further actions are required to sustain what has been achieved to date with project support.

Table 3: Summary of Key Recommendations

#	TE Recommendation	Entity Responsible	Time- frame
1	Draft key marine spatial plans and management plans that were supposed to be produced (and implementation of these begun) during the project period but which have not yet been completed (CIMP, Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan). Management plans do not all need to be finalized in this period, but at a minimum, drafts for discussion by stakeholders should be produced. In the case of some of the critically important areas for biodiversity that were supposed to have had management plans developed but for which no such plans were developed (i.e., Te Manga Te Kou Cloud Forest and Manuae Wildlife Sanctuary), effort should be placed on sorting out tenure issues. Only once these issues are resolved, will it be possible to develop management plans. For these two areas, considerations should be given to adopting (at least initially) a less formal, more innovative, and simplified approach to developing a type of agreement with landowners as to priority actions to be undertaken rather than the more formal PA management plan.	MMCO, MMR	Within 18 months
2	Ensure the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meets to discuss the various project-produced reports that have not yet been reviewed/discussed by the TAG (see Table 9).	TAG, MMCO	Within 4 months
3	NES and MFEM to meet to discuss the Sustainable Financing Mechanisms (SFM) report and the Marine Ecosystem Services Valuation (MESV) report (within 3 months) and decide on what follow-on actions to take on each. NES to organize an event to launch the reports (within 6 months) – preferably co-hosted by MFEM.	MFEM, NES	Within 6 months
4	Future GEF-supported projects should place much greater emphasis on working with Cook Islands youth on R2R issues, both in and out of school. Do this through seeking partnerships with local NGOs involved in R2R issues and provide the necessary resources to enable those NGOs to not only continue with their ongoing programmes, but to strengthen them substantially.	UNDP	During planning for next GEF-supported project
5	UNDP and IP to ensure lessons identified from this project are incorporated in the re-design of the Project Identification Form (PIF) for the next GEF project. Some key lessons are: Narrow project scope. Limit the breadth of issues tackled. Don't over-complicate things -- simplify. Fewer plans, more direct action. Templates that may work elsewhere can effectively be used as guidance, but one size does not fit all, and a home-grown approach complemented by-- but not led by -- external expertise may work best.	UNDP RTA, IP for next GEF project	Before final submission of the PIF for GEF-7
6	UNDP MCO Samoa Senior Management to meet with UNDP RTA to discuss this TE and how to improve awareness by senior management regarding performance of GEF projects they are responsible for overseeing.	UNDP Senior Management, UNDP MCO Samoa, RTA	Within 1 month
7	Institute measures to enhance the functioning of the TAG (consider options such as payment for non-Government TAG members who actively contribute, as well as other measures).	MMCO	Within 3 months
8	Discuss whether maintaining the technical resource positions in MMR, HoA, and NES -- established and paid for with GEF support-- is important to sustaining project outcomes, and if so, how these positions will be maintained (or, in the case of HoA, re-established). Note: This recommendation does not refer to individuals but rather to positions.	MMR HoA NES	Before project end

9	Involve independent experts who are familiar with ongoing or recently completed relevant projects in the country in the review of planned future projects at an early stage of their development (i.e., during the development of the PIF). This may help ensure lessons from prior projects are incorporated into the design of future ones.	UNDP GEF	During planning for next GEF project
10	Future GEF-supported projects should collaborate much more with local NGOs and with the local private sector as part of a long-term strategy to build CI capacity related to biodiversity conservation.	UNDP GEF	During planning for next GEF project
11	Strengthen the exit/sustainability strategy produced by the PM and CTA by making it more practical and more detailed. Ensure this is reviewed and discussed by the PSC prior to project closure.	PMU	Immediately
12	Compile (online) all technical documents produced with project support and keep these together in one place which is easily accessible to all (Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Individuals). Institute a system for referencing documents produced with project support that makes them easy to locate and which acknowledges UNDP and gives full credit to the GEF.	PMU	Before project end
13	Strengthen financial capacity related to project management so that future projects do not encounter the same financial management issues this one did (consider options for more intensive mentoring and oversight by MFEM, establishing internships with MFEM, etc.).	MFEM	Before next GEF project begins
14	Ensure whenever projects have planned for a Technical Advisor (in this case a Chief Technical Advisor - CTA) that the CTA is brought on board early on during the project rather than towards the later stages of the project.	UNDP	Future GEF projects

2. Introduction

2.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Evaluation

[33] The evaluation was initiated by UNDP as the GEF Agency for this project in accordance with evaluation requirements set forth by the GEF. UNDP and GEF Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) policies and procedures require that all full-sized UNDP-supported GEF-financed projects undergo a Terminal Evaluation (TE). The purpose of conducting a TE is “to promote accountability and transparency; to synthesize lessons that can help to improve the selection, design and implementation of future UNDP-supported GEF-financed initiatives; and to improve the sustainability of benefits and aid in overall enhancement of UNDP programming; to assess and document project results, and the contribution of these results towards achieving GEF strategic objectives aimed at global environmental benefits; and to gauge the extent of project convergence with other priorities within the UNDP country programme, including poverty alleviation; strengthening resilience to the impacts of climate change, reducing disaster risk and vulnerability, as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, empowering women and supporting human rights”. In accordance with the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the TE, the TE report will assess the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. According to the TOR for the TE, the TE is “in line with the UNDP CKI’s current evaluation plan and was also conducted to document best practices, challenges and capacities that are at hand and that are

missing that can inform UNDP CO Programming going forward”. The TOR also provide assurance that the UNDP CO Management and the Implementing Partner/Executing Agency will act on the TE Results.

2.2 Scope of the Evaluation

[34] The focus of the TE is a single UNDP-supported, GEF-financed project, the “Conserving Biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Function through a Ridge to Reef Approach in Cook Islands”. There is no particular geographic focus of the TE within CKI as the project has many elements intended to bring about national benefits. The project consists of two components and the scope of the TE encompasses both components.

2.3 Methodology for Data Collection and Analysis

[35] The evaluation was conducted by one International Consultant/Team Leader (IC) and one National Consultant (NC) intermittently over a four-month period extending from 25 January 2021 to 28 May 2021, beginning approximately four months before anticipated project closure and three years after the Mid-Term Review (MTR) was concluded. Both team members were given 25 workdays to complete the TE. The IC acted as Team Leader (TL). Travel to the CKI for the IC was not possible due to the global COVID–19 pandemic. Thus, the NC undertook the visits to project sites with the IC joining in these meetings virtually whenever possible.

[36] The TE was conducted in accordance with the “UNDP Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-financed Projects (July 2020)”, and the “*GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Policy*”, and in line with GEF principles including impartiality, transparency, and participation. The TE sought to provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable, and useful. In this regard, the Terminal Evaluation Team (TET) followed a participatory and consultative approach, and used a variety of evaluation instruments including:

[37] **Evaluation Matrix:** An evaluation matrix was developed based on the set of questions covering the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact which were included in the TOR for the TE, and which were amended by the TET to be most useful to this particular TE. The matrix (presented in Annex 5) served as a general guide for the interviews conducted by the TET.

[38] **Documentation Review:** The TET reviewed documents including the project document (PRODOC), project reports including all annual APR/PIRs, the project budget, procurement plan, the Mid-Term Review (MTR) report, the GEF Tracking Tools prepared by the project, project files, Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting minutes, policy and national strategy documents, and other relevant documents. A complete list of documentation reviewed by the TET is included as Annex 4 to this report.

[39] **Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with more than 60 stakeholders. Several of these meetings took place with small groups of up to 5 people such as, for example, with community members who had participated in project activities. Many interviews took place virtually (via Zoom,

Skype, WhatsApp) when in-person interviews were not possible. The complete list of stakeholders interviewed is included in Annex 3.

[40] **Project Visits:** The NC on the TE Team visited two project sites on Rarotonga (Turama Reusable Drink Bottles, Takitumu Conservation Area), several project sites on the island of Atiu (NES office, Moko'ero Reserve, Takutea Binocular Station, and Atiu Villas) and sites on the island of Aitutaki (Offices of NES, MOA and MMR (including the new MMR boat and Ra'ui signage), eco-toilets, Etu Moana, Aitutaki Lagoon Resort).

[41] **Sources of information:** These included documents (as described above and as detailed in the annex of documents reviewed), and consultations with a wide range of stakeholders (as described above and as detailed in the annex of stakeholders consulted). Stakeholders consulted were selected to ensure that representatives of all key stakeholders and beneficiaries were consulted. Information obtained from these sources was intended to address questions outlined in the Evaluation Criteria Matrix as well as other questions which arose during the course of the evaluation. In order to ensure maximum validity and reliability of data, the TET triangulated the various data sources by asking the same questions to at least three different stakeholders and often asking the same question, posed in a different way, to individual stakeholders.

[42] **Terminal Evaluation Mission Itinerary:** The TE mission itinerary is presented in Annex 2 along with a summary of project site visits made.

2.3.1 Evaluation Criteria and Ratings

[43] In accordance with GEF guidelines for project evaluations, achievement ratings as well as sustainability and relevance ratings were assigned by the Terminal Evaluation Team (TET) using the GEF ratings scale (Annex 6). The TET rated project achievements and outcomes according to the GEF project review criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Results and Sustainability), using the obligatory GEF ratings of: Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), and Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). A full description of these ratings and other GEF rating scales is provided in Annex 6. The TET also rated various dimensions of sustainability of project outcomes using the GEF obligatory rating scale of: Likely (L), Moderately Likely (ML), Moderately Unlikely (MU), and, Unlikely (U).

2.4 Ethics and Code of Conduct Adhered to by the Terminal Evaluation Team

[44] The TE Team reviewed and agreed to adhere to the UNEG "Ethical Guidelines for Evaluations". The "Evaluation Consultant Code of Conduct and Agreement Form" signed by both members of the TE Team is attached as Annex 9.

2.5 Limitations of the Evaluation

[45] There were several limitations which affected the evaluation: 1) The IC was not able to travel to CKI due to COVID-related travel restrictions. 2) The NC's background is not in a technical field related

to the project and she had no previous project evaluation experience. Her familiarity with the GEF was also limited. Given that the IC was unable to travel to CKI, this meant that the conduct of project site visits was conducted solely by the NC. 3) Due to limited flights to the Outer Islands to be visited by the NC, there was little opportunity to have internal TE discussions regarding site visits before these began. 4) Although the plan had been to connect the IC/TETL remotely in consultations undertaken during these visits, this did not happen as logistics did not permit. The TETL held virtual meetings with most key stakeholders outside of those consulted during site visits and with almost all contractors, with the NC joining in many of these meetings. 5) There had been high turnover in key project-related positions including in the PMU, the Implementing Partner (NES), and the various RPs (MMR, MFEM, MoA), resulting in the TE having to interview several individuals who may have held the same position at different times. In some cases, it was not possible for the TE to reach individuals who had played key roles earlier on in the project. 6) Some documents that would normally be included in the project information package (to be shared with the TET immediately after contracting) were not shared until well after the TE was initiated.

2.6 Structure of this Report

[46] This terminal evaluation report documents the achievements, successes, shortcomings and constraints encountered by the project and includes four sections as required in the standard TOR for terminal evaluations. Section 1 is the executive summary. Section 2 briefly describes the purpose, scope, methodology and limitations of the evaluation. Section 3 presents an overview of the project. Section 4 presents the key findings of the evaluation related to project design, implementation, and results and impacts. Conclusions, recommendations, and lessons are presented in Section 5. Annexes are found at the end of the report. The TE Audit Trail and the GEF/LDCF/SCCF Core Indicators and TE Tracking Tools are annexed in a separate file.

3. Project Description

3.1 Project Start, Duration & Milestones

Project Cycle Milestones:

Preparation Grant Approved (PIF approved):	14 June 2013
CEO Endorsement:	23 Feb 2015
Start Date (project document signed by government):	6 July 2015
Project Inception Workshop:	20-21 Oct 2015
Midterm Review:	1 Aug 2017 – 28 Feb 2018
Closing Date:	6 June 2021
Terminal Evaluation:	25 Jan 2020 – 21 June 2021

3.2 Development Context

[47] To avoid duplication of effort, the description of the development context in which the project operates is taken from the MTR report in which it was previously and very adequately described (A. Laurie, Final MTR Report, Feb 2018).

Environmental Context

[48] “On land, the mountains of the interior of Rarotonga support some of the best remaining examples of montane rainforest in the tropical Pacific. *Homalium acuminatum* dominates the lower slopes. It is a particularly hard wood and this attribute, and the rugged terrain, have protected the forest from over-exploitation. At higher levels, above 400m, a cloud forest ecosystem has survived, and, although small in extent, is both relatively intact, and poorly studied. The most common tree species in the cloud forest are Polynesian *Metrosideros* (*Metrosideros collina*) and Rarotonga *Fitchia* (*Fitchia speciosa*). Poor access due to the steepness of the terrain and the presence of only rudimentary tracks has led to whole taxonomic groups being almost overlooked. Vascular plants, whether indigenous or introduced, are relatively well known. Eighteen plant species are endemic to the island of Rarotonga, of which 12 occur in cloud forest habitats, and two are solely found in cloud forest (*Cyrtandra lillianae* and *Radiogrammitis cheesemani*). Rarotonga’s cloud forests are critical for the conservation of endemic flora, providing habitat for eight of the island’s 10 endemic flora listed by the IUCN as “Critically Endangered”, “Endangered”, or “Vulnerable”¹⁵. Little is known regarding the non-vascular flora, and further study is likely to result in the addition of many new indigenous moss, lichen, and liverwort species, some of which are likely to be undescribed endemics. The Cook Islands are home to six endemic breeding birds, including the Rarotonga Starling (*Aplonis cinerascens*), and the Rarotonga Flycatcher (*Pomarea dimidiata*), which has been introduced to the island of Atiu as a conservation measure.” “The unique features of the islands' biodiversity have led to international recognition. Birdlife International has identified nine Important Bird Areas (IBA) within the country. WWF has listed the southern Cook Islands Forests as a Global 200 Ecoregion.”

Socio-economic Context

[49] “Montane habitats of the interior of Rarotonga, southern Cook Islands, are critical to the health and well-being of the island’s people, and its indigenous biota. The steep mountain slopes, isolated and at least partly protected by their extreme terrain, support one of the best remaining examples of montane rainforest in the tropical Pacific and are critical habitat for many of the island’s endemic species. For these reasons, the montane and cloud forests of Rarotonga are internationally significant. Rainfall increases dramatically with altitude, and cloud forest on the mountain summits intercepts, filters, and releases water that supplies the island’s streams, which are the sole water supply for the island. Cloud forest habitats, with their abundance of non-vascular plant species such as lichens, can increase water yield relative to other vegetation types, because lichens can absorb water from moisture-laden air in the absence of precipitation.” “Biodiversity supplies a wide range of resources used for subsistence or commercial purposes by society and is hence of value to the nation’s economic development,

and in poverty alleviation, food security, and the good health, nutrition and wellbeing of people. Without clean forests, reefs and lagoons, there will be shortages of water and food. Agriculture, water storage, housing, tourism, light industry, schools, and recreation compete for use of scarce land around the coastline. The threats to biodiversity and livelihoods¹⁶ from invasive alien species (IAS) are growing as the number of visitors, and trade, increase. The small size of catchment areas and the close proximity of lagoon ecosystems make it difficult to prevent or mitigate marine pollution emanating from the land. There is a growing risk that environmental damage will feed back into discouraging overseas visitors, to the detriment of the economy. Tourism accounts for well over 60% of GDP so environmental conservation is an important consideration for national and local economies. Marine resource harvesting has been controlled for centuries under the Ra'ui system, and more recently under the Marine Resources Act (2005) and management of sport fishing within lagoons (eg for Bonefish (*Albula glossodonta*)). Building of houses and infrastructure on sensitive lands is controlled through an EIA system that does not always take biodiversity into account sufficiently, and the project aims to improve the EIA system, including the introduction of independent review. Agrochemicals have been linked to lagoon water pollution, including eutrophication, and the project aims to introduce incentives and stimulate farmers to change their use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides.”

Institutional and Policy Context

[50] “.. most of the land in the Cook Islands is in customary ownership, so the development of a protected area system, and the planning and implementation of individual site management regimes, requires extensive community consultations and sensitive and creative approaches on behalf of the relevant governmental agencies. Areas of both land and sea have been set aside for protection under diverse customary practices, private initiatives, and governmental orders. Several categories appear on lists of the Cook Islands' protected areas, both marine and terrestrial. Many are *ad hoc* categories for specific sites known as *Ra'ui*, aimed at banning collection of marine species used for food or trade for set periods of months or years. One example of a protected area focused on biodiversity conservation, the Takitumu Conservation Area, is privately owned, and managed, with great dedication, by highly motivated volunteers with rather insecure financial assistance from various sources. Others include Suwarrow National Park (1978) which is the Cook Islands' only National Park, and Takutea Wildlife Sanctuary (1903) which is managed by the traditional leaders of nearby Atiu to protect its nesting seabirds. Published lists of protected areas vary in both PA categories used and numbers of sites reported. The project foresees the passing of a Protected and Managed Areas Act that will formalize the various categories of protected area. The project works with national government and island councils and with landowners, both individually and through associations such as the House of Ariki, in order to facilitate the acceptance of the concept of a national system to standardize categories and management aims. It is not unusual for national protected area systems to include private and publicly owned protected areas with a wide range of ownership and management regimes. They are on the one hand subject to various levels of restrictions of use under national or local laws or regulations and at the same time rely on the motivation of individuals or groups in civil society to manage sites for biodiversity conservation and to ensure that any use or harvest is sustainable. At present the categories are not defined and are being used loosely.” “NES deals with all issues concerning biodiversity conservation and

servicing the UN Biodiversity Convention (CBD), including IAS issues following Article 8h of the Convention. MMR deals with marine resources and has been heavily involved in strengthening regulations for Ra'ui and providing enforcement for by-laws. There are complex differences in jurisdiction, such that the Environment Act does not apply on some islands. And Ra'ui administered by traditional chiefs, and recently again by the Koutu Nui, are not enforced legally, and rules may be being broken. The Ministry of Agriculture takes the lead on alien species -- both prevention of entry and control and decisions on whether to attempt control measures for established species." (Mid-Term Review Report, A. Laurie, February 2018)

[51] Since the drafting of the MTR report, there have been several important changes: 1) Government has a new draft National Environment Policy (Final Draft, 2021) which refers to sustainable financing for PAs, development of a protected area policy, a classification system for PAs, and a strengthened EIA process. 2) the Seabed Minerals Authority began accepting applications for licenses for seabed minerals exploration in 2020 and these are currently under review. 3) The COVID-19 pandemic essentially closed down the tourism industry from March 2020 until present with significant economic consequences even if health consequences have not been documented (the Cook Islands is COVID-free).

3.3 Problems the Project Sought to Address: Threats and Barriers Targeted

[52] According to the PRODOC, threats to biodiversity in the Cook Islands can be categorized as habitat destruction/fragmentation, habitat degradation, over-exploitation, invasive species, and climate change. Specific threats to biodiversity mentioned include: 1) Expansion of residential settlement reducing forest cover on Rarotonga, 2) Land clearance for housing, infrastructure and agriculture on other islands resulting in loss of habitat for native species, 3) Resorts, hotels and smaller accommodations constructed in the coastal fringes of Rarotonga and Aitutaki resulting in sedimentation and marine pollution, 4) Removal of coral heads to provide rock free swimming areas in lagoons degrading lagoon ecosystems, 5) Runoff of agrochemicals and piggeries waste resulting in degradation of aquatic and lagoon habitats, 6) Use of harmful chemicals (e.g. Paraquat) resulting in poisoning aquatic and marine species, causing some fish to become poisonous themselves, and causing population explosions of invasive species like the Crown of Thorns starfish which leads to declines in coral reef habitat, 7) Sewage going to the sea from coastal developments, 8) Mining of sand and gravel for construction resulting in erosion and sedimentation, and altering hydrologic flows in lagoons and transforming beach and foreshore areas, 9) Snorkelers/divers, boat anchors, and cruise ships causing reef damage, 10) Fires threatening stands of the endemic Mitiaro fan palm and the cloud forests on Rarotonga, 11) Overharvesting of parrotfish, Giant Clams, Sooty Terns, and Coconut crabs causing population declines in these species., 12) Bycatch of whales, turtles and juvenile tuna resulting from the use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) by the purse seine fleet, 13) Indian Mynah birds are thought to be interfering with the nesting of the endemic Mangaia kingfisher. The African ant is thought to have directly caused extinction of endemic snail species on Rarotonga, and the Oriental Fruit Fly has impacted agricultural production on many islands, 14) Introduced exotic species such as the "Mile a Minute" vine has spread widely impacting the nesting habitats of birds. The Java Plum and the Acacia have both taken over large areas of arable land on some of the Outer Islands, crowding out native species, threatening agricultural production, and reducing freshwater flows into wetlands (including those used for taro production) and into drinking water reservoirs; on

Rarotonga, the Albizia tree has become the dominant species in large areas of the upland forests. Feral pigs and goats prey on coconut crabs and also damage turtle nesting areas.

[53] The PRODOC then explained the “long-term” solution to these threats which was “to implement a ridge-to-reef approach that combines a functional, representative and sustainable national system of terrestrial, coastal and marine protected and managed areas (including protected natural areas, community conservation areas, and Ra’ui sites) that are complemented by appropriate sectorial practices in adjoining / upstream watersheds to mitigate threats to conservation from outside protected areas”. Two critical barriers were identified to achieving that solution: Barrier 1: Limited national and local capacities and systemic mechanisms (including financing) for protected areas and Ridge to Reef management approaches, and Barrier 2: Key economic sectors from outside protected areas do not sufficiently integrate biodiversity conservation into their activities and could thus undermine PA integrity.

[54] Lesson: Although a comprehensive threats analysis must certainly be done as a first step in defining the project intervention, it is not up to any one project to address all threats. Indeed, it would be impossible. The next step after doing a comprehensive threats analysis is to define which of those threats your project will try to address. This is done by understanding what the donor can fund in principle (and what they cannot), doing a gap analysis to see who else is doing what to address the threats identified, and considering several other factors. Instead, the project identification stage of this project seems to have gone from a listing of all threats to a description of an all-encompassing “solution”. The result is a project that does not have a well-defined scope/focus and is far too ambitious for the time frame, budget, and existing capacity to implement.

3.4 Immediate and Development Objectives of the Project

[55] The stated project objective is, “To build national and local capacities and actions to ensure effective conservation of biodiversity food security and livelihoods and the enhancement of ecosystem functions that contribute to food security and livelihoods within the Cook Islands Marine Park”. No development or immediate objective is stated in the PRODOC, CEO endorsement or PIF, but the PRODOC indicates that “The proposed Ridge to Reef project will enhance the Cook Islands’ capacities to effectively manage its protected area estate and sustainably manage its productive landscapes at local scales while taking into account food security and livelihoods, including operationalization of the CIMP, and the establishment and strengthening of various forms of protected and locally managed areas within the CIMP, including Protected Natural Areas, Community Conservation Areas, and Ra’ui Sites. In so doing, the project will support the Cook Islands in maintaining traditional resource management and conservation systems and approaches, including a leading role for traditional and local leaders and the local communities that they represent in the declaration and management of protected areas, while also integrating these traditional systems into a formal legal and institutional system of protected areas. The project will support the Government in tailoring policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks to suit the specific characteristics of the Cook Islands and of the new CIMP, recognizing that protection and sustainable use will need to be zoned and planned carefully, and that tenure over most land areas is vested in local communities through a traditional tenure system. Finally, the project has been designed to engineer a paradigm

shift in the management of marine and terrestrial PA sites from a site centric approach to a holistic “ridge to reef” management approach, whereby activities in the immediate production landscapes adjacent to marine and terrestrial protected areas will be managed to reduce threats to biodiversity stemming from key production activities (tourism and agriculture).”

3.5 Theory of Change & Expected Results

[56] No Theory of Change (TOC) was developed. At the time this project was being designed, use of TOCs was not common. This was also true at the time of the MTR. Expected project results are described in the PRODOC. The project is divided into two components. *Component 1* is to strengthen the management of protected areas. According to the CEO endorsement request, this component was to receive the bulk of the GEF financing, approximately 73% (\$2,958,431), not counting management costs. Four key outputs were expected under this component:

- [57] Output 1.1: Strengthened legal/regulatory and policy frameworks for protected areas.
- Output 1.2: Expanded and strengthened management systems for protected areas.
- Output 1.3: Strengthened institutional coordination and capacities at the national and local levels for the participatory management of protected areas.
- Output 1.4: Financial sustainability framework developed for system of protected areas.

[58] These four outputs were expected to contribute to five anticipated outcomes which are:

- 1.976 million sq. km. of Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP) legally designated and effectively managed with dedicated staff implementing planning and coordination of the entire CIMP (as measured using Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT), with a score of at least 60 by the end of project).
- National agencies responsible for protected area (PA) management are effectively delivering PA management functions (capacities tracked by Capacity Scorecard).
- Inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group managed for biodiversity conservation through Island Development Plans, covering 15,110 ha of terrestrial ecosystems and 16,174 ha of marine ecosystems.
- Effective community and private conservation of protected areas sites, including Protected Natural Areas (PNA), Community Conservation Areas, and Ra’ui sites, covering 6.7% of all terrestrial landscapes and 12.3% of all inshore marine seascapes (as measured using METT for 5 PNAs, with average score of at least 50 by end of project).
- Stable or increased populations of critically endangered and/or endemic species, including Green, Hawksbill and Loggerhead Turtles, Napoleon Wrasse, Atiu swiftlet, Rarotongan Monarch, Mitiaro fan palm and Mangaian kingfisher.

[59] Component 2 is to mainstream biodiversity in key production-oriented sectors to mitigate threats to biodiversity related to production landscapes. This component was to receive slightly more than a quarter (27%) of the GEF funds (not counting management costs). Three key outputs were expected:

[60] Output 2.1: Ridge to reef approaches integrated into land use and development planning
 Output 2.2: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into agriculture sector.
 Output 2.3: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into tourism sector is developed and continuously updated.

[61] These outputs were expected to contribute to six anticipated outcomes which are:

- At least a 15% reduction in the use of agricultural chemicals (fertilizers and pesticides), based on value of annual imports.
- EIAs for infrastructure development in or around PAs are subject to independent review, and development plans are adapted as necessary to conserve biodiversity.
- No decline in current forest cover of 13,245 ha (baseline to be confirmed in Year 1) as measured by satellite/aerial imagery by the end of the project.
- At least 10 sites within CIMP where water quality will be improved through measures to control water pollution and sedimentation (from agriculture or other sources).
- No increase in algal levels on coral reefs by end of project as measured by Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) algal surveys (baseline to be established in Year 1).
- At least 20 tourism businesses are implementing biodiversity (BD) management programs that comply with conservation guidelines developed through the project and included in national accreditation system.

3.6 Main Stakeholders: Summary List

[62] The Table below is extracted from the MTR Report with a column added to include updates at the time of the TE.

Table 4: Stakeholder Participation in Project Implementation Updated at TE

Stakeholders	Anticipated Roles and Responsibilities in Project Implementation as in PRODOC	Update at MTR	Update at TE
National Government			
National Environment Service (NES)	Lead Executing Agency. Primary agency responsible for coordination and management of the project. Facilitate linkages with other related national and regional projects under implementation in the Cook Islands.	No change	No change.
Cook Islands Marine Park Steering Committee (CIMP SC)	Ensure coordination among key stakeholders involved in the Cook Islands Marine Park and any other stakeholders involved in the wider Protected Areas system.	No meeting for last 12 months	Mostly dysfunctional for the past year although there is a recent effort to re-activate it and the MMCO has now called for monthly meetings of the TAG beginning in early 2021
Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR)	Implementation of the project's activities related to marine and	No change	No change

	coastal area conservation.		
Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)	Implement activities to reduce the levels of agro-chemicals, sediments and nutrients coming from agricultural areas into aquatic and inshore marine environments	No change	No change
Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC)	Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into the operations and practices of the tourism industry	No change	No change
Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)	Marae Moana Office as the coordinating hub for protected areas activities throughout the Southern Group of islands. Outer Islands Governance Unit to have key role in supporting the integration of R2R approaches and biodiversity conservation into Island Development Plans.	Active part in Steering Committee and some project activities. Potential here of project to strengthen relationship and involve more, possibly in cross-sectoral coordination	The Marae Moana Coordination Office, under the OPM, has played a significantly larger role in the Project compared to the role it was originally envisaged to play as per the PRODOC.
Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI)	Through the SRICCC project work with the R2R project to strengthen resilience to climate change in the protected areas system.	SRICCC Project is completing soon, but relationship will continue	This project ended. There was no significant collaboration between the two projects.
Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM)	Development Cooperation Division (DCD) will manage the disbursement of project funds within the country, oversee the managing, reporting, and auditing of financial accounts	Disbursement now done by NES and MMR	The two account system was ended and the Project now operates with a single account
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	The Water, Waste and Sanitation Unit (WATSAN) through its national waste and sanitation improvement programme on Rarotonga and Aitutaki aimed at reducing the flow of pollution, nutrients, and sediments into freshwater and marine ecosystems	Less involvement - not attending PSC. Important partner	No change
Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)	Responsible for the national biodiversity database and will be a repository for new biodiversity related information as it becomes available, participate in species conservation programs for endemic birds and flora.	Database being developed and could be speeded up with assistance given by the project. Collaborated on plant surveys on outer islands	Implemented project activity to develop Takutea and Mokoero Terrestrial Assessments. Database has been developed and continues to be strengthened.
Seabed Minerals Authority (SMA)	Consultations with project as part of the zoning process and management planning for the CIMP. <u>Project</u> will facilitate consultations between the CIMP Steering Committee and the SMA to determine whether to allow any seabed exploration, pilot	Not involved much at this stage	SMA began granting seabed minerals exploration licenses in late 2020.

	operations and mining, and under what conditions, within the CIMP.		
Local & Traditional Leaders			
Island Councils	Key partners in Island Conservation Strategies integrated into each Island Development Plan, facilitating management of inhabited outer islands as Managed Conservation Areas, declaring/strengthening Community Conservation Areas	Meetings to discuss but actual progress slow. Inception report listed 5 outer island Enea specifically as stakeholders	Little involvement in the project as the anticipated project investment in strengthening aspects of Island Development Plans has not happened.
Island Executives	Support coordination between national government agencies (e.g. NES, MMR, MoA) and the Island Councils and local communities for implementation of project activities.	As above	No change
House of Ariki and Koutu Nui	Support in establishing and managing Community Conservation Areas and Ra'ui sites	Meetings to discuss but actual progress slow	HoA has been involved in organizing several forums for traditional leaders from several islands to meet to discuss CCAs and Ra'ui. This has happened largely with support of other projects but the R2R project has also provided some support. Koutu Nui have been less involved in the project but do sit on the NBSC.
Environmental NGOs			
Te Ipukarea Society (TIS)	Important partner in implementation of the Marae Moana Programme for the operationalization of the CIMP. Support throughout on biodiversity and biosecurity issues.	Co-chairs the PSC, but only marginally involved in project activities. Much expertise in TIS and associated agencies and should be brought in to implementation more	Continues to Co-Chair the PSC. Involved in several project activities including as a sub-contractor for the development of the Mana Tiaki Eco Certification Scheme, development of the Palmerston Island Natural Resource Management Plan, development of several species status reports including Kakerori Species Status Report, Kopeka Species Status Report, Tanga'eo Species Status Report, Iniao Species Status Report
Muri Environment Care	Potential partner in application of R2R approaches to wastewater management and marine protection in the Muri lagoon area		Support was given to the Muri Environment Care group to support coastal rehabilitation of their beach following flooding.
Local Stakeholder Groups & Private Sector			

Tourism Industry Council	Participate in all work under the tourism sector related to accreditation, education and awareness, use of organic products, sponsoring of biodiversity conservation projects undertaken by tour operators.	Has attended PSC. Slow on biodiversity criteria for green accreditation.	Involved in Tourism Accreditation Biodiversity Report prepared by Tourism Recreation Conservation (TRC)
Private Tourism Operators	As above	Some conservation projects, but what are the criteria for approval?	Participating in Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification Scheme. Have participated in some trainings provided through the Project
Titikaveka Growers Association (TGA)	Provide assistance to MoA in promoting sustainable agricultural practices	No particular focus on that area	TGA was not involved but some members attended MoA trainings on organic agriculture.
Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW)	Key role in ensuring participation of women in project activities and in the sharing of benefits produced by the project	?	No involvement in the project
Local communities	Will be deeply involved during and post project in community conservation areas and Ra'ui sites, biodiversity friendly agricultural practices, sustainable fisheries systems and developing and implementing a vision for the Cook Islands Marine Park and protected areas within it	Consulted	On Rarotonga, wider communities have had little involvement in project activities except where youth and their families together were involved with the Korero o te Orau, or included when MoA visited schools to promote their agricultural activities. In the Pa Enua there has been greater community involvement and as people wear many hats within the community, they have represented different interests. Such involvements have included land owners who are also aronga mana during the data collection activities related to Moko'ero Nui Leeward Forest Reserve in Atiu, or the Manuae Committee meetings that involve land owners, traditional leaders and the Island Council of Aitutaki.
Added during Inception Phase (IR p10)			
Ministry of Health	Not specified		No involvement in the project. Improvements to MOH water quality assessments have been made with support from another project (the PEARL project).
Pacific Islands Conservation Initiative	Not specified		No involvement in the project

4. Findings

4.1 Project Design/Formulation

4.1.1 Analysis of Results Framework

[63] The design of a good RF is key to project success and serves as an essential foundation for monitoring and evaluating a project. If the RF is weak, this affects every aspect of M&E. The Results Framework was analyzed thoroughly as part of the MTR and specific alternatives were suggested for those indicators that were considered not to be SMART (See Annex 20, MTR Report). The TE agrees with the comprehensive MTR assessment of the RF and therefore will not re-analyze it. The MTR recommended that the RF be modified including refined indicators and revised targets and institutional responsibilities (MTR Recommendation #5). The Management Response to the MTR recommendations indicated agreement with the need to modify the RF (Management Response 5: Agree with recommendation 5 to be undertaken in conjunction with Recommendation #1). No significant changes were, however, made to the RF following the MTR.

[64] Regarding the statement of the project objective (i.e., “To build national and local capacities and actions to ensure effective conservation of biodiversity, food security and livelihoods and the enhancement of ecosystem functions within the Cook Islands Marine Park”), a more refined project objective statement would have helped to focus the project. It is also noteworthy that the project objective limits the project focus to the Cook Islands Marine Park whereas many of the planned project activities (as per the PRODOC) had to do with terrestrial environments rather than the CIMP.

4.1.2 Assumptions and Risks

[65] Assumptions and risks were generally well-articulated in the PIF and PRODOC and were logical and robust with few exceptions as described below.

Assumptions

“Capacity for technical delivery of management regimes and enforcement is in place”. It is difficult to understand why this assumption was made, as lack of capacity in biodiversity conservation has been a recurring theme throughout the project and was well known prior to it.

The assumption that “legal gazettement of new Protected Areas is not held up in the executive or legislative branches” has not been an issue because no new PAs were proposed for gazettal.

Risks

[66] Most risks were realistically assessed, with a few being under-estimated (see Table 5 below which provides the TE assessment of identified risks). One risk was overlooked which should have been included as it has been an issue under discussion in the Cook Islands for many years and came to a head during the project period. This is the risk potentially posed to biodiversity

if seabed mineral exploration/exploitation were to be pursued, including the risk that exploration/exploitation of seabed minerals would begin without a marine spatial plan in place to guide activities to minimize negative impacts on biodiversity. The Minister for Seabed Minerals reopened licensing for seabed mineral exploration activities in October 2020. The Authority is currently processing exploration licence applications received.

Table 5. Risk Matrix with Assessment at TE

IDENTIFIED RISKS AND CATEGORY	IMPACT	LIKELIHOOD	RISK ASSESSMENT IN PRODOC	TE ASSESSMENT
ORGANIZATIONAL: Poor collaboration between programme partners leads to fragmented approach to protected areas management	High	Moderately likely	Medium	Risk well known but was, nevertheless, underestimated in terms of likelihood. This risk did materialize even from the early stages of the project.
STRATEGIC: Stakeholders, particularly local communities, are not able to perceive benefits from conservation during programme duration	Medium	Moderately Likely	Low	TE agrees with “low” risk assessment but phrasing of risk was poor. “Local communities are not sufficiently motivated to undertake biodiversity conservation measures” might have been a better phrasing of this risk.
OPERATIONAL: Poor accessibility to the Outer Islands from Rarotonga will make it difficult to generate equitable benefits to the Outer Islands from the project	Medium	Unlikely	Negligible	Likelihood of this risk was underestimated as travel costs and logistics were cited as reasons why more visits could not be made to some of the Outer Islands (e.g., MMR inshore marine assessments may likely have benefitted from return visits but were usually not made because of cost and logistical constraints).
ENVIRONMENTAL: Climate change related impacts could undermine conservation efforts	Medium	Moderately Likely	Low	Risk was appropriately assessed.
FINANCIAL: Financial resources are not sufficient to support effective protected area planning and operations over the long-Term	Medium	Very Likely	High	Risk was appropriately assessed. This risk has materialized as despite the project effort to enhance financial sustainability through the single most expensive consultancy awarded by the project, that project output (finalized more than a year ago) has not been given consideration by Government. Existing financial resources are not sufficient to support effective PA operations over the long-term.

The risk assessment guiding matrix used by UNDP is included in Annex 14.

4.1.3 Lessons from Other Relevant Projects Incorporated into Project Design

[67] There is no evidence that lessons from other projects were incorporated into project design, indeed quite the contrary. UNDP has ample experience with lessons “learned” documented in many UNDP-supported, GEF-financed BD projects indicating that many BD projects are overly ambitious for the time-frame, budget and implementing capacity. This important lesson was not taken into account in the design of this project, which suffers from the same thing.

[68] There could have usefully been exchange of experiences and learning from other ongoing and recently-completed projects. The GEF funds R2R projects all over the world, including a number in the South Pacific and in the Caribbean, some of which were completed at the time this project was being designed and some of them ongoing. The Papua New Guinea “R2R Strengthening the Management Effectiveness of the National System of Protected Areas” project which was ongoing at the same time as this project would have been fairly easy to share lessons with, and being a country where, like Cook Islands, most land in PAs is customarily owned rather than owned by the Government, opportunities for exchange and for learning from each other would have been good. Another R2R project from which lessons may have been learned/shared is the “Implementing a Ridge to Reef Approach to Protecting Biodiversity and Ecosystem functions within and around Protected Areas in Grenada” supported by UNDP and the GEF.

4.1.4 Planned Stakeholder Participation

[69] Far too many RPs were involved in this Project, making it much too complex to manage compared with the existing capacity for project management in the IP (NES). Institutional territorialities, which were known to exist even during project design stage, further complicated matters for an IP who had never previously managed such a large project (the largest project NES had managed prior to this one was less than one fourth the size). The choice of IP could itself be legitimately questioned as so much of the project had to do with the CIMP. The focus of MMR and MMCO is on the marine environment whereas NES, previous to this project, has a much lesser role in the marine environment.

[70] Greater emphasis should have been placed on the participation of traditional leaders. Although the HoA was given an important role in the project, and this was a logical way to engage traditional leaders, given the important role traditional leaders should have played in this project, and given the reality of the limited capacity of the HoA (which was not fortified as imagined by providing a project-paid “HoA Coordinator”), a strategy to engage traditional leaders both through the HoA as well as more directly may have yielded better results.

[71] There appears to be general agreement that capacity regarding BD conservation in the Cook Islands is severely limited (there are some very qualified individuals but there are not enough of them). Although the project worked with TIS, and to a very limited degree with Kōrero o te ‘Ōrau, a local NGO that adopts a R2R approach in its activities and amongst many other things, works with school students and youth on R2R activities, even greater emphasis should have been placed from the design stage on working with local NGOs and the private sector.

[72] Lesson: In countries where capacity is severely limited, ensure project efforts support enhancing capacity in both Government as well as Non-Governmental entities.

[73] For similar reasons, much greater involvement of youth in almost every facet of the project should have been planned. One example would have been to plan for youth to be involved in activities related to the development, and continual updating, of the Marae Moana Outlook Report. This was the first ever such report for the Cook Islands. It could have been so much more meaningful. Outlook refers to the future. Youth are the future. Through gathering their own data through field projects in which they learn by doing about marine biodiversity, and through youth encounters with elders and traditional leaders who could provide historical perspective, youth could have played a tremendous role in making this report so much more than just another report. Although many tourists who visit the CKI come to snorkel and dive, these are not common activities for Cook Islands youth. Engaging youth through teaching about the marine environment, doing so by engaging them in fun and exciting marine ventures, would have helped to engage Cook Islands youth in conserving BD, generating more interest in this field (leading to enhanced national capacity), and creating much greater local ownership of the report. And all of this might well have been done in partnership with an existing NGO whose focus is precisely this. This was a real missed opportunity for the project and an oversight in planned stakeholder participation.

[74] Lesson: Give youth a real chance to engage in conserving biodiversity. They are in the truest sense, the present and the future. This project should have focused much more on youth and partnered with local NGOs whose focus in on youth and the environment.

4.1.5 Linkages Between the Project and Other Interventions Within the Sector

[75] During the project cycle, other projects were completed or were still in place that also focused on the conservation of biodiversity and protected areas. The Cook Islands Ridge to Reef project, as with Ridge to Reef projects in other Pacific countries aimed to “address the high level recognition and calls for results-based approaches to the management of development assistance programmes and projects and to support the coordination, capacity building, technical assistance, and monitoring and evaluation of the broader”³ UNDP-GEF Regional Ridge to Reef Project “Pacific Islands Ridge-to-Reef National Priorities – Integrated Water, Land, Forest and Coastal Management to Preserve Ecosystem Services, Store Carbon, Improve Climate Resilience and Sustain Livelihoods”.. At a national level, the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan and an associated Biodiversity Clearinghouse Mechanism, were underway within the same timeframe. In 2018, the Ridge to Reef Project Management Unit was assigned a section of the CI National Biodiversity website but the Ridge to Reef project preferred to operate via social media (their Facebook page). Community notification of partner activities were managed within their own silos. While the Climate Change Cook Islands unit (CCCI) did not actively participate in any Ridge to Reef activities, the office had earlier participated in a number of related projects, such as the development of the Joint National Action Plan (JNAP) for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction (2010) where information and lessons learned would have been helpful to the Ridge to Reef planning process, especially as their role was to provide technical guidance on integrating climate change resilience into decisions on the siting and management of protected areas. James Cook University provided post-graduate

³ Referenced from: <https://www.pacific.undp.org/content/pacific/en/home/projects/regional-r2r.html>

study for potential Ridge to Reef leaders under the Ridge to Reef STAR programme. As they continue their project activities post- Ridge to Reef, the Ministry of Marine Resources has considered approaching BIOPAMA (Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management Programme) to strengthen support of the House of Ariki's ra'ui objectives and to support dive operators to remove invasive Taramea from the reefs of Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

[76] The PRODOC listed several opportunities for vulnerable groups including women and youth to engage in participatory processes that would not only encourage their voices and concerns to be heard, but it would also ensure that their interventions would be accepted and owned by communities, would be gender sensitive and equitable and that outputs or targets would be clearly communicated and understood. While the number of women in Project Management roles was highlighted and details kept about gender participation in meetings and workshops, there was no specific project activity that featured or even included the role of women in any of the identified Ridge to Reef projects from a gender perspective.

[77] The development of Island Management Plans was considered an ideal opportunity to support positive social as well as economic and environmental impacts. It was recommended that these plans should include: 1) More participation of women in decision-making; 2) Provide men and women with equal opportunities to realise their potential; 3) Empower men and women through training opportunities to given them the confidence and to help them achieve their full potential; 4) Promote participation of women in community and economic development programmes; and 5) Encourage the participation of women and youth in wealth creating activities including handicrafts, coconut oil production, etc. There was also strong support given to capacity building for local leaders (Island Councils and their Executive Officers) and local community members in Ridge to Reef approaches to overall island-level management as well as to specific activities that would give particular attention to identifying and minimising the gender-differentiated consequences of environmental degradation. Unfortunately, not all Island Management Plans were completed satisfactorily, especially as they did not incorporate these important recommendations.

Table 6: Linkages Between the Project and Other Relevant Initiatives Within the Country

Project/Programme	Funder	Time Frame	Project Objective	Collaboration with this project
R2R STAR	GEF National Environment Service	2018-2021	The national R2R STAR Projects are part of the Pacific R2R Program, by building on nascent national processes from the previous GEF IWRM project to foster sustainability and resilience for each island through: reforms in policy, institutions, and coordination; building capacity of local institutions to integrate land, water and coastal management through on-site demonstrations; establishing evidence-based approaches to ICM planning; improved consolidation of results monitoring and information	R2R STAR sponsored 6 students to obtain a graduate "Certificate of Ridge to Reef Sustainable Development" through James Cook University in Australia. One student dropped out to return to NZ, whilst the remaining 5 completed the programme. Only two of these remain in the Cook Islands.

			and data required to inform cross-sector R2R planning approaches. (PIMS 5221)	
R2R IW projects	GEF Infrastructure Cook Islands	2015-2021	The objective of collaboration between the R2R project and ICI Water and Waste Water Management were to support five key components: 1) National Demonstrations to Support R2R ICM/IWRM Approaches for Island Resilience and Sustainability; 2) Island-based Investments in Human Capital and Knowledge to Strengthen National and Local Capacities for R2R ICM/IWRM approaches, incorporating CC adaptation; 3) Mainstreaming R2R ICM/IWRM Approaches into National Development Frameworks; 4) Regional and National “Ridge to Reef” Indicators for Reporting, Monitoring, Adaptive Management and Knowledge Management; and 5) R2R Regional and National Coordination	Despite the potential for greater integration and coordination between ICI and the other implementing agencies, this was minimal. ICI replaced culverts in areas that were to support the reduction of lagoon pollution caused by unmanaged storm water, and incorporated water protection and efficiencies for private and business buildings into the Building Code 2019. Integrated water resource management is now being achieved under To Tatou Vai (TTV) as a coordinated approach to water resource management. TTV was set up in 2018 as a State-owned Enterprise (SOE) responsible for managing and maintaining the public water supply on Rarotonga. ICI has established the GIS user group and the development of the Spatial Information Management
PEARL Project Pa Enuu Action for Resilient Livelihoods	Office of the Prime Minister (Climate Change)	2018-2021	The objective of the programme is to build and implement an integrated approach to further increase the adaptive capacity of remote island communities and ecosystems to disaster risk and climate change impacts. The sub- objectives for the programme are: *Strengthening national and local capacity for monitoring and decision making to respond and to reduce risks associated with climate change *Establishing climate resilient water management instruments using integrated and community based approach. *Raising awareness and establish a knowledge exchange platform to increase adaptive capacity to revitalise agriculture production systems.	The PEARL project was funded by the Adaptation Fund and is housed at Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI) and its activities to support R2R water management activities . It has been handling water security in the outer islands by providing infrastructure such as water tanks. • The 2019 NSDP indicator report states “major improvements made with improved water storage capacity for the Pa Enuu through aid-funded water tank projects”. • The Cook Islands Building Code 2019 developed by ICI includes elements of water protection and efficiency for both private and public buildings (parts D5/6/7 and NF5/6/7). • CCCI have a project proposal with Green Climate Fund (GCF) to help implement these parts of the building code for enhanced water security. • Improvements to Ministry of Health (MOH) water quality assessments have been made based on support from the PEARL project

			<p>The project consists of three components:</p> <p>Component 1: Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction</p> <p>Component 2: Integrated Water Security Management Planning and Implementation</p> <p>Component 3: Revitalised agricultural production systems strengthening island food sources and livelihoods in the Pa Enea</p>	
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4.2 Project Implementation & Management

4.2.1 Adaptive Management

[78] There were significant deficiencies in the project design as presented in the PRODOC (overly ambitious for the time8frame, the budget, and the existing capacity to implement), but little was done to address these deficiencies through adaptive management at critical points where this might have been anticipated (PPG, inception workshop, following monitoring visits made by UNDP, immediately following the MTR, following completion of PIRs – all of which rated the project as MU— indicating a need for strong adaptive management). Some instances where adaptive management was required but not exercised are described below:

1. As described in Section 4.2.3, the two-account system under which the project operated for the first two plus years was known to cause many problems from early on yet no action was taken to resolve this until after the MTR (which included a recommendation to “revert to a single source for disbursement of project funds”). This shows poor adaptive management.
2. The need for a CTA was evident from early on in the project. The project design included a CTA for the project but the PRODOC lacked clarity regarding this position for which no TOR were included and for which no budget had been assigned. Having a project CTA was discussed at the project inception workshop. No action was however taken to recruit a CTA until the project extension period, despite UNDP awareness much earlier on regarding the difference this could make to the project. In December 2018, three and ½ years after project start (July 2015), UNDP was still inquiring from NES if the project was considering a CTA for the project, indicating “it would be good to have this support” (email communication between UNDP and NES shared with the TE). Agencies were not supportive as they saw this as taking funds that could be used for other activities.
3. During the last year of project operations, the PSC (and all the RPs) were under the mistaken impression that there were more funds remaining to be spent than there actually were (See Section 4.2.3 for details), and therefore decided to adopt a strategy to spend as much as possible instead of returning unused funds to the GEF (TE communications with PSC members). This resulted in decisions that may not otherwise have been taken, including the PSC decision

to approve spending almost twice as much as originally approved to purchase a boat (which had not even been included in the original procurement plan for the project). It is perhaps a matter of opinion of whether this could be considered good adaptive management or not by the PSC but UNDP as the GEF Agency should have questioned this approach.

4. The PMU went without being fully staffed for extended periods of time (more than half of the original project period). Despite repeated attempts, NES was unable to recruit a Finance/Administrative Officer for more than a year, leaving this critically important position -- responsible for the financial management of the largest project NES had ever managed -- vacant. Better adaptive management should have been exercised (consideration of recruiting an international staff if no national staff were available, consideration to budget re-allocation to increase salary if low salary was detracting potential applicants).
5. The critically important position of HoA Coordinator was not appropriately budgeted for in the PRODOC. As a result, an unqualified individual filled this post as the salary was not sufficient to attract qualified candidates. Better adaptive management would have re-allocated resources to ensure this position was appropriately budgeted for once this constraint was recognized.
6. The Marae Moana Outlook Report was seriously under-budgeted, and the approach adopted to its development was lacking (lack of partnering of local entity with international entity with experience drafting these types of reports, lack of involvement of youth). This should have been recognized before the exercise to write the initial report was undertaken. Better adaptive management could have prevented the need for the subsequent total re-write of this report (this is both an adaptive management and an efficiency issue).
7. The MTR recommended a "consolidation phase" during which time the project scope and strategic results framework would be reviewed, objectives clarified, and changes made to project management, specifically through recruitment of long-term technical staff for the PMU and improvements in how the PMU works with partners and other stakeholders. The "consolidation" phase was in essence a phase to consider adaptive management. A CTA was eventually recruited (in November 2019, more than a year and a half after the Final MTR report recommended that one be hired) to advise on modifications, but the length of time it took to act on the MTR recommendation affected the time remaining to implement many important activities identified (e.g., instead of producing a Protected and Managed Areas Policy –PAMP-- there was only time and budget left to produce a *discussion paper* that could contribute to the development of a policy).

[79] Despite missing opportunities for adaptive management as described above, there were instances where adaptive management was applied, especially in the CTA-led exercise to develop the 2020 Project Strategy that concentrated time, effort, minds, and funding on what was attainable in the remainder of the project. In addition, the impetus to direct greater effort to the Marae Moana as this was closely aligned with R2R outcomes and because it was thought greatest impact and long term benefits could be gained is another example of adaptive management applied during the project.

4.2.2 Actual Stakeholder Participation and Partnership Arrangements

[80] Four entities are listed on the cover page of the PRODOC as "Implementing Entity/ Responsible Partner" including NES, MMR, MoA, and the Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC). HoA, the MMCO under the OPM, and ICI, all also played important roles in the project. Annex 14 describes planned versus actual stakeholder participation for the various entities involved (and originally anticipated to be involved) in the project.

4.2.3 Project Finance, Co-Finance & Financial Management

[81] The cut-off date of January 25, 2021, for the financial information provided in this TE report was established by the TE in consultation with the PMU and reflects the start date for the TE.

[82] US\$3,819,915.34 or 89.5% of the total GEF budget of \$4,267,431 allocated to the project was expended as of January 25, 2021, with approximately four months remaining until project operational closure on June 6, 2021. No funds had yet been disbursed for 2021 at the time of the onset of the TE, thus no expenditure information for 2021 is presented in Table 7 (below). The PMU had not yet received Quarter 1 2021 funds even as of mid-February 2021, well into that quarter. This is because the 2021 AWP had not yet been finalized, thus, funds for the quarter, could not be disbursed. The delay in the approval of the 2021 AWP was due to problems with bank reconciliation. Tables 7 and 8 (below) present annual project expenditures (by Component and project management costs) for the years 2015 through 2020, and approved annual work plan budgets for all years in which the project operated. Figures for 2021 approved budget were added in the final TE report but had not been included in the draft TE report as at that time no budget had yet been approved as noted above. Incorrect budget figures were provided by UNDP MCO Samoa on more than one occasion and caused significant delay in the submission of the final TE report.

Table 7: Project Expenditures as of the time of the TE

Component	Expenditures (USD)						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Component 1	13,852	234,985	291,756	431,610	772,535	800,301	2,545,039
Component 2	975	49,218	177,146	217,223	409,056	230,646	1,084,264
Project Management	24,349	38,476	49,883	42,571	29,337	5,997	190,612
Total	39,176	322,679	518,785	691,404	1,210,928	1,036,943	3,819,915
							Balance of \$443,464.66[1]

[1] Amount remaining as of February 11, 2021. This includes the amount remaining with the PMU from the unexpended 2020 Q4 funds disbursed in Dec 2020.

Table 8. Approved Annual Work Plan Budgets

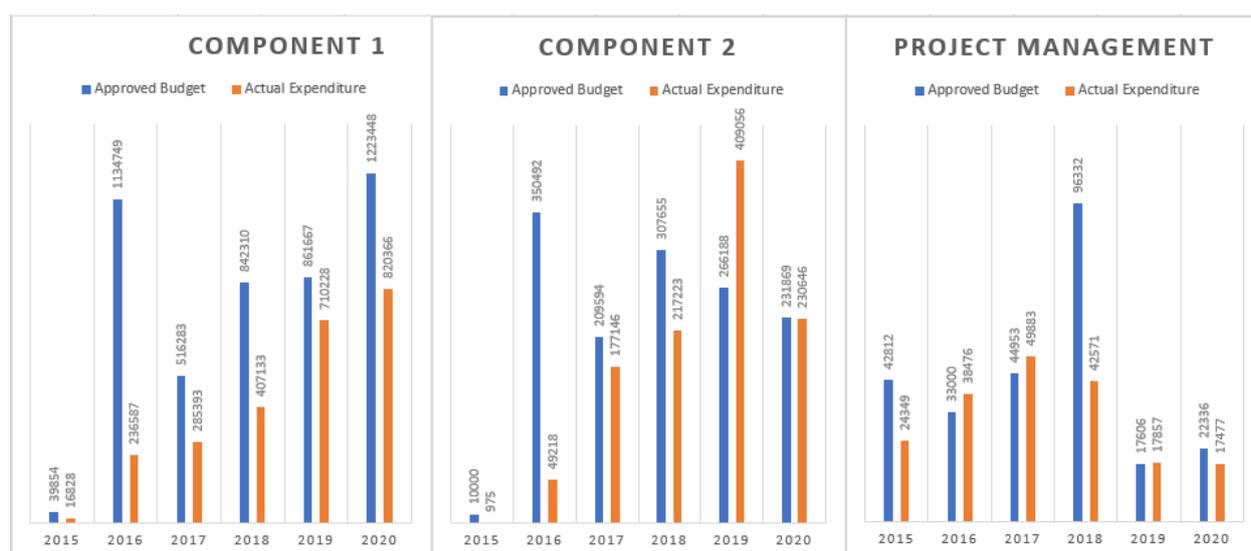
Component	Budget According to Approved Annual Work Plan (USD)							Total
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Component 1	37,354	828,189	514,912	511,880	957,978	972,600	407,636	4,230,549
Component 2	10,000	271,483	210,965	247,655	242,167	249,764	11,441	1,243,475
Project Management	42,812	32,000	69,953	71,541	37,606	29,710	24,388	308,010
Total	90,166	1,131,672	795,830	831,076	1,237,751	1,252,074	443,465	5,782,034

[83] The USD 2,545,039 spent under Component 1 represents 86% of the indicative budget of USD 2,958,431 for this component. Under Component 2, USD 1,084,264 was spent, representing 99% of the budget of USD 1,094,000 allocated for that component. Project management costs totaled USD 190,612 or 87% of the USD 215,000 allocated for project management in the PRODOC budget.

[84] Financial delivery was 70% or less for all years with the exception of 2019 when expenditures exceeded the approved annual budget. Financial delivery on an annual basis (actual delivered compared to approved annual work plan budget) for Component 1 ranged from as low as 21% in 2016 to 82% in 2019 (42% in 2015, 21% in 2016, 55% in 2017, 48% in 2018, 82% in 2019, 67% in 2020). For Component 2, financial delivery ranged from as low as 10% in 2015 to as high as 154% of the approved budget in 2019 (10% in 2015, 14% in 2016, 85% in 2017, 71% in 2018, 154% in 2019, 99% in 2020).

[85] Actual expenditures until the time of the TE versus planned budget according to approved annual work plans is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Actual Expenditures at the Time of TE versus Approved Planned Budget



Financial Management

[86] There were numerous financial management issues:

- Operating with two separate accounts caused significant problems. The normal approach is to advance funds (on a quarterly basis) to a single account for the IP for a Project – in this case, NES. In the case of this project, two accounts were established because a large percentage (approximately 40%) of the GEF funds were destined for a different Government agency, MMR. Operating with two accounts caused serious problems for the project. It made one organizations' ability to proceed with their activities reliant on the performance of another. UNDP rules do not allow a project to request additional funds until 80% of the amount already disbursed is expended. Whereas NES was able to deliver 100% before the end of a quarter, MMR was not, thus holding back implementation of NES, MoA, and CIT activities (all of which

were under the NES account). This issue was not resolved until after the MTR even though the problem was recognized well before that time. The issue slowed implementation and also made it difficult for the PMU to plan ahead as it was difficult to know how much remained to be spent.

- Improper financial recording and inaccurate tracking of financial progress by the PMU. The lack of proper financial recording caused significant problems in 2021 (as well as in other years). Until mid-January 2021, due to incorrect bank reconciliation by the PMU, the PMU believed it had US\$ 639,822 to spend in 2021 when, in reality, only US\$ 194,379 remained to be spent (a difference of US\$ 445,444). The problem was lack of knowledge by the PMU of how to do proper bank reconciliation. The UNDP MCO Finance Officer undertook to do bank reconciliation for the PMU as a way of demonstrating how to do this correctly. Notwithstanding this extraordinary support, the problem with bank reconciliation continued.
- UNDP MCO asked the PMU to provide all bank statements, but they were unable to do so. As of mid-February 2021, the PMU had still not reported on the funds remaining with them⁴.
- PMU did not adequately track expenditures by the RPs. The PMU should have been keeping track of expenditures by agency (e.g., MMR, NES, MoA, CIT), but this was not done. UNDP found that actual expenditures were significantly higher than planned. There was inadequate monitoring/control by NES over funds given to MMR.
- High turnover of PMU Finance Officers combined with sometimes extended time periods without any Finance Officer in place had a significant negative impact on the project. There was high staff turnover in the PMU with extended periods of time in which there was no finance officer in place. Vacancies were not filled in a timely manner. Handover was poor -- including poor record sharing and inadequate orientation/training of new finance officers by the previous one.
- Inadequately prepared financial reports which were sometimes incomplete (without annexes) and sometimes reflecting previous quarter instead of current quarter information.
- Inadequate advance notice by UNDP Samoa when requesting financial information from the PMU and slow response times to PMU communications contributed to poor PMU performance related to financial management. According to the PMU, draft Quarterly Progress Reports were routinely sent to UNDP well before the deadline but comments from UNDP on the drafts were normally only received a few days before the deadline, thereby not giving the PMU much time to do what they needed to do to make corrections and get the reports back to UNDP on time.
- Problems with timely payment of consultants by UNDP and Cook Islands Government. Numerous consultants repeatedly experienced long delays (of up to four months) in receiving payment for deliverables.

[87] UNDP has devoted far more time to financial management of this project than what is normally anticipated. Although training regarding financial reporting was provided to the current PMU, this does not appear to have been adequately absorbed, perhaps because the Finance Officer in the PMU does not have a qualification in accounting. All members of the current PMU attended the annual project management workshop/training provided by UNDP in Samoa in 2019. The workshop included a session on financial management. Although a one-on-one session was held during the workshop with all other project finance officers who attended from different projects around the

⁴ 2020 Final CDR shows US\$ 214,891.68 in cash in Project account.

region, the one-on-one session for this project's Finance Officer was repeatedly postponed by UNDP, and ultimately not conducted, despite PMU requests to have it – the PMU being brand new at the time. The previous PMU Finance Officer did the online finance courses offered through UNDP. Although the current PMU Finance officer does not have a qualification in accounting, she is currently studying part-time at the University of South Pacific in Cook Islands to obtain a diploma in accounting. A minimum of a diploma in accounting is normally required as a qualification for a finance officer in a PMU. Upon the approval of the NES Director and the PSC, the PMU took the decision to use project funds to pay for university courses in accounting that would help to build the capacity of the Finance Officer. Upon reviewing the ledger, UNDP rejected the transactions as being ineligible given that capacity building supported by the project was to focus on biodiversity conservation (not accounting) and given that when a PMU is recruited, the expectation is that people who are hired will have the required expertise. The TET concurs with the decision of UNDP. Nevertheless, consideration might well have been given to using some committed Government co-financing to pay this cost.

[88] DCD is represented on the NBSC (which serves as the PSC) but has not been very active in this forum and could have contributed more to help ensure proper accounting. The problem associated with the creation of two accounts might have been resolved much earlier if DCD had felt sufficiently empowered to make recommendations at the PSC. Even though there was an account in NES specifically for this project, DCD indicated it was difficult for them to have a full grasp on how funds were being spent.

The real cost of “no-cost” project extensions

[89] Although they are commonly referred to as “no-cost” extensions (despite official UNDP terminology having changed over the past few years), there are indeed costs related to extending projects beyond the time frame originally approved. This project received two extensions, the first for 18 months and the second for an additional five, for a total of 23 months, thereby adding half again the originally approved time for the project to implement activities and achieve outcomes. In the case where project management costs will exceed the originally approved budget for project management if an extension is granted, the IP must clearly specify in their letter to UNDP requesting project extension that these will be covered by co-financing or other non-GEF fund resources. In the case of this project, even though there were additional project management costs⁵ associated with the extensions, these did not exceed the original budget for project management. Even if there were no additional project management costs over and above those originally envisaged, there may have been intangible conservation costs associated with the project extensions when one considers that conservation measures, sometimes urgent ones, could have been in place earlier had extensions not been required due to implementation issues.

[90] There were several reasons why the first extension was required, including the PMU had been short-staffed for many months, significantly affecting the ability to deliver. Positions were promptly advertised but applicants were found to be not suitable, thus there was significant period of time in which little progress was being made. Other factors included lack of experienced personnel in the PMU, inability to procure consultants, breakdown in relationships between NES/PMU and MMR, and performance of RPs.

⁵ It cost NZ\$ 31,000 to pay 3 people in the PMU for a 3-month period, thus the 23-month extension cost the project US\$ 144,832 in added project management costs.

Financial Audits and Spot Checks

[91] The project operates under HACT policies and uses two of the three cash transfer modalities which are possible under HACT, direct cash transfer (UNDP advances cash funds on a quarterly basis based on agreed work plan to the IP, who in turn reports back expense through FACE forms), and direct payment (The IP carries out the procurement activity but requests UNDP to make the disbursement directly to vendors through FACE. In this arrangement, UNDP is undertaking only the fiduciary function on behalf of the IP).

[92] Financial audits and Spot Checks have been conducted in accordance with UNDP policy. Over the course of the six-year project, one annual audit was conducted of NES (2016) as well as one annual Spot Check (October 2019). NES does annual internal spot checks. The UNDP Country Office underwent a HACT audit in 2020 for 2019 financial records. It is not known by the TET if all recommendations made in audit reports from project start through 2020 have been fully implemented.

Table 9: Issues highlighted in Audit Reports

Issues highlighted in Audit & Year Audit Covered	Status of implementation of auditor's recommendation
2016. The submission of the FACE forms for the R2R programme for the second quarterly report (April – June 2016), was not done within two weeks after the end of the quarter. Submission was on 28 July 2016, due date was 20 July 2016, so one week late.	No recommendation
2016. The preparation and review of the monthly R2R bank reconciliations, for the five months from August to December 2016, was not done within two weeks after the end of the month. The monthly reconciliations were done on 1 March 2017, approximately 6 weeks overdue.	No recommendation
2016. Submission of FACE forms for disbursement were not consistent with the periodicity of disbursement requirement in the HACT framework.	The audit covered the R2R project as well as 2 others being executed by NES. It is not clear to the TE if any of the 3 instances found (of a total of 47 sampled) relate to the R2R project.

Co-Financing

[93] A total of almost US\$15 million in co-financing was committed at project signing. Table 10 indicates the amount of co-financing committed by each entity at PRODOC signature compared with the amount actually accounted by the time of the TE. Based on the most recent information provided to the TE team by UNDP⁶, the cumulative total of co-financing contributions is USD 7,536,920 which is approximately 51% of the amount committed at project signing.

⁶ Earlier information provided by UNDP MCO/Samoa suggested that only 10% of the amount committed at project signing had been accounted.

Table 10. Co-Financing Table

	UNDP		Government		Partner Agency		Total	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Grants	50,000	33,693	13,500,000	6,195,062	1,350,000	1,248,849	14,900,000	7,477,603
Loans/Concessions								
In-Kind Support					50,000	59,316		59,316
Other								
Total	50,000	33,693	13,500,000	6,195,062	1,400,000	1,308,165	14,900,000	7,536,920

[94] Co-financing information (with evidence for figures derived) should normally be provided by the IPs to the PMU. UNDP is responsible for keeping track of its own co-financing commitment and sharing this information with the PMU. The TE made numerous requests to both the PMU and UNDP to provide co-financing data (which should normally be provided in the project information package shared with the TE soon after contract signing). It is clear co-financing information is not being well tracked by the PMU. Long delays were encountered, and different figures provided which, in some cases, did not mesh. There is no verification process undertaken by the PMU to ensure amounts reported by co-financing entities are accurate. The breakdown of co-financing that was accounted was made available to the TE for some of the entities (UNDP, NES) but not for others (MFEM).

Table 11. Confirmed Sources of Co-Financing at TE Stage

Source of Co-Financing	Name of Co-Financier	Type of Co-Financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount (US\$)
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grant	Recurrent expenditure	33,692.81
Government	Government of Cook Islands	Grant	Investment mobilized	4,652,540.82
Government	Government of Cook Islands	Grant	Recurrent expenditure	1,542,521.28
Private Sector	Oceans 5	Grant	Investment mobilized	1,200,000.00
Civil Society Organisation	Te Ipukarea Society	Grant	Investment mobilized	48,848.57
Civil Society Organisation	Te Ipukarea Society	In-Kind	Recurrent expenditure	59,316.12
Total Co-Financing				7,536,919.60

**Investment Mobilized means Co-Financing that excludes recurrent expenditures.*

***Recurrent expenditures can generally be understood as routine budgetary expenditures that fund the year-to-year core operations of the entity (they are often referred to as 'running costs' - they do not result in the creation or acquisition of fixed assets). They would include wages, salaries and supplements for core staff; purchases of goods and services required for core operations; and/or depreciation expenses.*

[95] UNDP TRAC co-financing was to be used to pay the cost of UNDP monitoring visits to the Cook Islands (in the main Island and outer islands) and to hire an IC to conduct the NES-HACT micro assessment and R2R Spot Check in 2020. On 10 July 2019, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) graduated the Cook Islands to the category of High-Income Country, ending eligibility for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), including from TRAC funds, beginning 1 January 2020. Given that not all (only 67%) of the UNDP committed co-financing amount was spent, the TE asked UNDP to clarify if the change affected TRAC funding already

committed in this project or only makes it ineligible for future TRAC funding. No response was received from UNDP thus it is not clear if the full committed amount could have been spent or not. This is an issue because the TE's assessment is that, even though UNDP MCO Finance Officer made more monitoring visits to CKI than normally are made to other countries (R2R records confirm that monitoring mission visits were conducted in 2017, 2019 and 2020 in which the Finance officer was involved), additional visits by the UNDP MCO Finance Officer and the Programme Officer responsible for the project would have been helpful in clarifying issues before these issues could negatively affect the project. According to TE interviews, communication between UNDP and DCD was mostly "too little, too late". Visits by the MCO Finance Officer usually resolved issues quickly.

[96] Lesson: A more proactive approach by both UNDP and DCD to ensure that the full committed amount of UNDP's co-financing was spent would have been helpful. Only 67% of the co-financing committed by UNDP, which was specifically to pay for monitoring visits to the CIs, was spent. Thus, more visits could have been made by UNDP, and likely would have been, if DCD had requested UNDP to do so.

[97] Most (10 out of 16) contracts over NZ\$5,000 (see Table 11) were awarded to international consultants/entities, with the largest being a contract which included regular technical advisory services and the preparation of a Protected Areas Classification System (PACS) policy paper and a Marae Moana Marine Spatial Planning policy paper. The next largest contract was to prepare a report on sustainable financing mechanisms (SFM). The SFM report, finalized over a year ago, has not yet been reviewed by the TAG and no action has been taken on it by Government. Indeed, the Director of NES was apparently unaware of its existence. The PMU explained that the report had been incorporated in the new draft National Environment Policy (2021) but the TE found only scant reference to sustainable financing in that draft policy. The third biggest contract was awarded to international consultants to re-draft the Marae Moana Outlook Report which had initially been drafted by Cook Islands consultants. This was not a cost-effective approach and important opportunities for building capacity and buy-in were missed. The fourth largest contract was to develop a Protected and Managed Areas Policy discussion paper (including literature review), which was to serve as an important input towards developing a policy regarding the management of PAs in the Cook Islands. The policy itself was also to be developed, under a separate contract, and GEF funds had been provided for this, but no policy (not even in draft) was developed due to lack of funding as funds had been spent for other things, some of which had not been budgeted for in the PRODOC. The TE notes that even though a literature review was included as an output of this consultancy focused on PA policy, the consultant was not aware that the Marae Moana policy (2016-2020) existed. The fifth largest contract was awarded to produce a report on marine ecosystem services valuation. Both an IC and a NC were involved in this effort. The report was very recently finalized (March 2021) and has not yet been reviewed officially by the TAG (although several members of the TAG participated in this effort).

Table 12: Contracts (greater than NZ\$ 5,000) Awarded by the Project

Product	Contract Amount	International Consultant (IC)/International Entity (IE) or National Consultant (NC)/National Entity (NE)
Protected Areas Classification System (PACS) Policy Paper & Marae Moana Marine Spatial Planning Policy Paper includes CTA's regular duties	NZ\$175,500	IC
Sustainable Financing Mechanism Report	NA\$98,000	IE
Second Marae Moana Outlook Report (re-do of first report) ⁷	NZ\$68,000	IC
Protected and Managed Areas Policy Discussion Paper (including literature review)	NZ\$54,000	IC
Marine Ecosystem Services Valuation (MESV) report	NZ\$54,000	IC
Tourism Accreditation Biodiversity Report	NA\$45,000	IC
Cook Islands SUMA report; Cook Islands Bioregions report	NZ\$33,250	IC
Takutea and Mokoero Terrestrial Assessment Report	NZ\$25,000	NE
Palmerston Island Natural Resource Management Plan Kakerori Species Status Report Kopeka Species Status Report Tanga'eo Species Status Report Iniao Species Status Report	NZ\$21,280	NE
Mana Tiaki Eco Certification scheme	NZ\$20,000	NE
TCA Management Plan	NZ\$20,000	IC
Cook Islands Marae Moana: Marine Outlook Report	NZ\$19,378	NE
Tourism Eco Branding Guidelines	NZ\$ 7,000	NE
Mid-Term Review	US\$18,000	IC
Terminal Evaluation (Team Leader/International Consultant)	US\$15,050	IC
Terminal Evaluation (National Consultant)	US\$10,400	NC

Lessons

[98] Given that, with the exception of one year (2019), expenditures in all other years amounted to at most 70% of the approved budget, the experience of this project would suggest that in addition to better oversight by PSC & UNDP of the project to help ensure that workplans and timelines are adhered to including hiring of key consultants and project staff earlier in a project to enable increased implementation, a smaller annual budget might be more realistic for future projects implemented by this IP.

[99] A minimum of a diploma in accounting is normally required as a qualification for a Finance Officer in a PMU. Having at least this would have been important even for a much smaller and less complex project, but was essential for a project such as this one which was large for the Cook Islands, and

⁷ Marae Moana Outlook Report was re-written by a different team of consultants, making the total cost of this report = NZ\$ 87,378. It was originally budgeted at US\$20,000.

complex for any project. The same constraints related to lack of qualified finance officers are likely to affect any future GEF projects in the Cook Islands unless action is taken to train more individuals.

[100] Establishing separate project accounts for different Government entities is not a good approach and can, as it did in this project, cause major problems (as described elsewhere in this report).

[101] It is important for the PMU and UNDP to keep DCD “in the loop” instead of contacting them for help only once a problem exists. Earlier and more frequent contact could avoid problems, or at least make them easier to resolve. A more proactive participation of DCD and UNDP on the PSC could have resolved the problem of the two accounts much earlier on in the project.

[102] So-called “no-cost” project extensions are actually quite costly. They often come at a financial cost as well as an environmental cost. They are not, as the commonly-used term suggests, without cost.

[103] Given that problems with financial reporting is not a new issue in UNDP’s experience in the Cook Islands (similar problems existed with the previous “Adaptation Funds” project), and recognizing that the pool of qualified accountants in the Cook Islands is a limiting factor that is likely to affect future GEF projects in the country, UNDP might well have given further consideration to the use of funds to pay university courses for the PMU Finance Officer, approaching the GEFSEC for advice if needed. It is also true, however, that the PMU should have first consulted with UNDP regarding use of GEF funds for this purpose, and UNDP was correct to question this expenditure.

4.2.4 Monitoring and Evaluation: Design at Entry (MU*), Implementation (MU*), and Overall Assessment (MU*)

The Overall M&E Plan

[104] The PRODOC indicates that “The project's Monitoring and Evaluation Plan will be presented and finalized in the Project's Inception Report following a collective fine-tuning of indicators, means of verification, and the full definition of project staff M&E responsibilities”. No fine tuning of indicators or Means of Verification (MoV) took place at the inception workshop. The inception workshop report shows insignificant change from the M&E plan presented in the PRODOC with the exception that it includes quarterly issues, risks and lessons learned logs. Aside from what is normally presented in PIRs, the TET saw no evidence that such logs were actually produced.

[105] M&E design at entry was standard in that all common elements of an M&E plan were planned for including MTR, TE, Project Terminal Report, audits, PIRs, etc. A number of these were, however, underbudgeted, including the MTR (at \$18,000) and the TE (at \$27,000). No adjustments were made to address these shortcomings during the inception workshop. Annual audits were also included in the M&E plan but were not actually conducted on an annual basis.

The Results Framework

[106] Analysis of the Project RF is presented in Section 4.1.1 (Project Design). As pointed out in that section, there were weaknesses in this project’s RF including indicators (not all of which were SMART), and some ill-defined targets and baselines. No significant changes were made to the RF despite the in-depth MTR assessment of the RF which indicated that numerous changes should be made (MTR report). According to TE interviews, no changes were made because UNDP MCO felt it was too late to do so by that time (2017-18). The opportunity to refine the RF at a critical early stage (at the inception workshop) was missed. Thus, the RF that the project used throughout its “life” was not a tool that was well articulated to enable monitoring progress and results and tracking progress toward the achievement of outcomes and objectives.

Completion and Effective Use of GEF TTs

[107] According to the PRODOC, the TTs and UNDP assessments which should have been prepared for this project were: 1) the GEF BD-1 Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool, 2) the GEF BD-1 Financial Scorecard for Protected Area Systems, 3) the GEF BD-2 Biodiversity Mainstreaming Tracking Tool, 4) the GEF International Waters Tracking Tool, and, 5) the UNDP Capacity Development Assessment Scorecard. Not all of the required TTs and assessments were completed at the various stages they should have been.

Table 13: GEF Tracking Tools and UNDP Assessments Completed During the Project

Tracking Tool or Assessment	Project inception	Mid-Term	At time of TE
UNDP Capacity Development Assessment Scorecard	Apparently completed (as indicated in PRODOC it is attached in a separate file) but it cannot be located by either UNDP or the PMU	Not completed	A Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) and a Capacity Strengthening Action Plan (CSAP) were done by the CTA in September 2019. The completion of the assessment at this late stage (although completed in a timely manner by the CTA) meant there was little opportunity for the project to address identified capacity needs. More targeted training might have been offered and capacity actually strengthened during the project had the assessment been done much earlier. Since capacity related to BD conservation is a major constraint in the CKI, this was a significant deficiency.
METTs for individual PAs	Completed for 1) CIMP, 2) Cloud Forest, 3) Manuae, 4) Takutea, 5) Takitumu, 6) Moko’ero Nui	Only done for CIMP and Manuae. No METTs done for the majority of PAs (Takitumu, Te Manga Te Kou Cloud Forest, Moko’ero Nui, Takutea)	Completed for all areas for which METTs were done at inception stage including: 1) Takitumu Conservation Area, 2) Te Manga Te Kou Cloud Forest (proposed), 3) Manuae Wildlife Sanctuary/Marine Reserve (proposed), 4) Moko’ero Nui Forest Reserve (proposed), and

			5) Takutea Community Conserved Area. 6) CIMP
BDTT#1 Financial Sustainability Scorecard	Completed	Not completed	Not completed. The PM and CTA indicated in the Tracking Tools report that this was not done because comprehensive data was not available. Nevertheless, enough data was collected to allow for performance assessment against the relevant indicators (#12a, 12J).
BDTT#2	Completed	Not completed	Completed
IW TT	Completed	Not completed	Completed

[108] The TTs done at EoP were completed by the CTA and the PM. As many of these protected areas are privately owned, landowners should have been integrally involved in the process. This would not only help to raise awareness of the status of BD in those areas as well as buy-in for the effort, but would also help to enhance capacity related to management of those areas. Annex 13 includes detailed TE comments on TTs prepared at project end.

[109] Lesson: The reason why these “tools” are referred to as “tracking” is because that is how they are intended to be used. They are not primarily intended to present a snapshot in time but rather to enable tracking trends. If no comparison is made at EoP between the baseline and the EoP situation then the time and effort dedicated to the exercise represents a missed opportunity for gaining much more information compared with merely gaining a picture in time. In the case of this project, no analysis was presented comparing the baseline and the EoP TTs. Such a comparison should include not merely the scores for the different TTs at the various stages of the project but also an in-depth discussion regarding the change (if any) related to the various threats identified for each PA.

Monitoring Visits by the PMU to Project Sites

[110] No monitoring schedule was developed by the PMU and no record kept of when monitoring visits were done. Indeed, according to the PM, the PMU made very few monitoring visits. Monitoring was informal and ad hoc with the PM mostly inquiring about progress from IPs when she met individuals at meetings or elsewhere. There was little verification by the PMU of progress reported by IPs. The current PM has not undertaken monitoring visits to sites on any of the Outer Islands and has only visited one site on Rarotonga (TCA) for this purpose. No BTORs were drafted.

UNDP Monitoring Visits

[111] Despite poor ratings on PIRs (never exceeding ratings of Moderately Unsatisfactory for either DO or IP across all years for which PIRs were done, and with overall risk ratings usually ranging from “substantial” to “high”), only four field monitoring visits were made by UNDP during the six-year project. The first visit by UNDP was made in September 2015 to plan for the inception workshop, followed by a visit one month later (October, 2015) to participate in the project inception workshop (these, of course, are not technically monitoring visits). The first real monitoring visit was made in May 2016 (9 months after the inception workshop), followed slightly more than a year later (June/July 2017 --2 years after the project began) by the next visit to attend the NBSC meeting and to prepare

for the MTR (a comprehensive BTOR was prepared). That visit was made by the UNDP RTA together with the Programme Officer responsible for the project in the UNDP MCO/Samoa. One more visit was made in May 2018 by the RTA to follow up on MTR recommendations. The most recent visit was more than a year ago (January, 2020) and was made a joint visit by the UNDP Programme Officer and the UNDP Finance Officer to attend the Cook Islands R2R Project Consolidation workshop and PSC meeting and follow up on project implementation progress and reporting. During that trip, UNDP visited the MOA Office and the “crop bank” managed by MOA. If only a limited number of project RPs and sites could be visited, the TE questions the priority given to visiting MOA and MOA sites instead of visiting MMR which had a larger role in the project and where progress had been more problematic on some key expected project outputs. Due to the global COVID pandemic, travel to the CI was restricted during the last 15 months of project (March 2020 – June 2021), all of which time fell within the project extension. UNDP was thus not able to undertake in-person monitoring visits during that time period. Annex 15 includes a complete list of monitoring visits made by UNDP.

[112] RTA support over the project life has been of good quality despite the high turn-over of RTAs which is less than ideal. Five different RTAs have supported the project over the 6-year project period. Perhaps in part because of this high turnover, there has been some confusion in the PMU regarding the role of the RTA as compared with the CTA.

[113] According to records shared, RTAs made four visits (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) to the CI during the project. The first RTA participated in the project inception workshop.

[114] See Section 4.2.1 for TE assessment related to monitoring the implementation of MTR recommendations agreed in the Management Response to the MTR.

[115] The M&E plan did not specify how the project would keep the GEF OFP informed. Notwithstanding, the current GEF OFP is very well informed as he is the Co-Chair of the PSC for this project and the Director of the IP (NES).

4.2.5 UNDP Implementation/Oversight (U*) and Implementing Partner Execution (U*), Overall Project Implementation (U*), Project Management & Coordination

UNDP Implementation/Oversight

[116] The TE considered 18 factors in assessing the quality of project oversight provided by UNDP as the GEF Agency for this project. A color-coding system was adopted, with green indicating satisfactory, brown indicating less than satisfactory; and white indicating that aspect of project oversight cannot be assessed by the TE at this time. As can be seen in the summary below, only 2 of the 19 tasks were completed satisfactorily, with 14 others considered less than satisfactory. A detailed and quantified TE assessment of UNDP oversight as the GEF Agency for this project is presented in Annex 13.

Oversight Tasks for Which a GEF Agency is Responsible
Convene/participate in LPAC meeting
Ensure project inception workshop is held on time with all project executing agencies and all topics expected to be covered are adequately discussed
Ensure experiences/lessons from other relevant projects around the world are shared
Ensure annual PIRs and a Project Terminal Report and Exit Strategy (if indicated in the PRODOC or inception workshop report) are prepared that provide a comprehensive and candid picture of progress, risks
Manage independent MTR process
Timely preparation and submission of Management Response and oversee follow-up of MTR recommendations agreed in Management Response to MTR
Manage independent TE process
Ensure TTs/Core Indicators are prepared for all relevant GEF Focal Areas at project inception, mid-term, and prior to the TE
Ensure proper composition of PB
Ensure proper functioning of PB and timely conduct of PB meetings
Ensure audits/spot checks are conducted as required
Ensure recommendations in audit reports are addressed
Ensure project is included in portfolio discussed during annual meetings of the Country Programme Board (Board responsible for oversight of the UNDP Country Programme implementation)
Conduct field monitoring visits to verify progress reported and to manage any risks identified
Ensure project risks are properly managed and mitigation measures and management plans are in place
Ensure UNDP and GEF “mainstreamed issues” are adequately addressed
Oversee timely preparation of Management Response to TE
Ensure PMU coordinates annual work planning workshop to discuss challenges, share lessons and good practices between executing agencies, and to strategize for the following year

Implementing Partner Execution

[117] NES, as the lead executing agency (GEF IP) for the project responsible for project management and for coordinating and collaborating with other implementation partners, was not effective in this role. There were serious shortcomings in the extent to which the IP managed and administered the project’s day to day activities. There was inadequate focus on results and timeliness. Institutional territorialities, lack of ownership of the project by many of the IPs, and a weak PMU led to poor collaboration and coordination between Government entities which contributed significantly to this failure. We do not believe that this matter would be effectively addressed by efforts to enhance capacity related to inter-institutional collaboration/coordination (as suggested in the EoP report). The root cause of this problem is not lack of capacity but rather lack of will/motivation to work together. If future projects are to involve numerous IPs, none of whom report to the main IP (outside of the project), then incentives must be put in place to motivate inter-institutional collaboration. One such incentive is the use of achievement benchmarks (these are different from implementation benchmarks). Achievement benchmarks were not used in this project. Detailed MOUs between all agencies are needed and should have been drafted at project inception stage.

[118] Significant progress in terms of work related to international consultancies and MSP and PA classification was made once a CTA was hired and a new PM brought on board. The project would have benefitted from bringing a CTA on board much earlier on. The IP should have acted on this, and UNDP should have insisted on it much earlier and more rigorously than they did.

[119] There were significant delays in project implementation, some of which had serious consequences:

- A CTA was not recruited until 4.5 years into the project (in November 2019). He was originally contracted (in July 2019) to do the Capacity Needs Assessment and Capacity Strengthening Action Plan Report at that time and several months later became the CTA.
- There were only 12 months left in the project when the consultant (who later became the CTA) was hired to do the CNA, leaving very little time after the report was finalized for anything to be done to actually address the capacity needs that were identified in the CNAR. This should have been done much earlier on in the project. The only capacity assessment conducted was during the PPG in which all scores were aggregated (rendering them meaningless) and the actual assessment report cannot be found so only the brief summary presented in the PRODOC is available.
- Activities related to the development of a Protected and Managed Areas Policy (PAMP) were initiated close to project end when these should have been initiated at the beginning of the project.
- As with the PAMP, activities related to “updating and consolidating the legal framework for management of the Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP) and all other protected areas in the country” were initiated very late in the project. A policy paper on National protected areas classification system (PACS) was prepared in 2021 which is intended to contribute to the development of a PAMP.
- Marae Moana (CIMP) marine spatial planning policy paper was only developed in 2021, very close to the end of the project. Although numerous prior steps had to be undertaken in the process of preparing this paper, the process itself did not begin until very late. As a result, there is no agreed policy and, of course, no actual marine spatial plan for the CIMP after six years.
- RPs were asked to cut significant amounts from their budgets in the last year of the project because of a PMU reporting mistake (MMR asked to cut NZ\$32,000). Given that a number of activities were late, and thus left to the last year and ½ of the project, this error made a difference in what activities could be completed.

[120] NES oversight of use of GEF funds by the RPs was not good, with occasional expensive purchases sometimes made by RPs without prior consultation. The quality of risk management was poor, with the risk of poor inter-institutional collaboration/coordination never satisfactorily mitigated.

Overall Project Implementation

[121] Project implementation was fraught with problems from the start even though implementation significantly improved during the last two years of the project (i.e., during the project extension), but by that time it was too late to actually act upon many of the reports produced, thus much of this is left to be addressed as part of the project’s exit strategy. Effectiveness and sustainability are at risk when so much is left to be done after project end which was anticipated to be done during the project. COVID had some effect on implementation, but the project should have already ended according to the original time frame even before COVID began (moreover, the project was granted a 5-month extension specifically to address some of the delays caused by COVID).

[122] In addition to its oversight role as GEF Agency for the project, the UNDP MCO in Samoa supports NES in implementing this project which is implemented as a “full-support National Implementation Model (NIM)”. A Programme Officer for Environment and Climate Change, a Finance Officer, and a

M&E Analyst assist this project (and several others) in the region with procurement of goods and services, development of some TORs (Capacity assessment, Cloud Forest Management plan, MTR, TE), contracting of some consultants, monitoring & evaluation, arranging for audits/Spot Checks, providing financial services, and arranging for independent evaluations. In addition, the UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Advisor (RTA) provides technical support to the Project.

[123] Procurement and contracting of goods and services (whether through Government or UNDP) was delayed significantly in many cases (see Table 9 in Section 4.3.1) leaving at project end a partial and incomplete foundation with no building yet on top of it. There were struggles with recruitment because of limited local consultants available and engaging international consultants also had challenges. Tender processes took a long time, affecting in some cases implementation of project activities. Government procurement sought to use “cheaper” consultants which in some cases affected the quality of project-produced products. In the case of the Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan, a consultant was contracted but not kept on due to quality concerns. There were sometimes long delays in reimbursement of salaries of the “Project Officers” placed with MMR and other RPs (Reimbursement of the MMR Officer took over a year).

[124] A weak PMU, weak due to lack of full staffing, high turnover, and lack of good hand over, and inadequate experience and training, was a major contributing factor to the inability of NES and UNDP to turn the project around at least until the last two years of the project (basically, the project extension period).

Project Management & Coordination

The Project Management Unit (PMU)

[125] There were many issues with project management. Project management improved significantly during the last one third of the project, which basically represents the project extension period. During its first four years the project rarely had a full PMU contingent, often missing a Finance/Administrative officer for extended (more than a year) time periods. There was high turnover in the PMU and lack of good hand over. The project had a total of 3 PMs (including 1 PC) and 2 Finance/Administrative Officers. There was also significant turn over in the full time, GEF-paid “Project Officers” in MMR, NES and HoA. PMU staff had inadequate experience and training for this size and type of project. All GEF projects are complex to administer given the reporting requirements, on top of this, UNDP has its own complex reporting requirements, recruitment procedures are also complex and in a project such as this one, the PMU must be familiar with both Government as well as UNDP procedures, yet the first PM did not have a background in any technical area of relevance to the project and did not have experience managing large size projects. The current Finance officer, responsible for the single biggest project that NES has ever had, does not have a degree in accounting and had little previous experience.

[126] There were numerous, significant financial management issues (described in detail in Section 4.2.3) some of which should not have taken nearly as long as they did to sort out and others which should have never happened in the first place if qualified finance officers had been in place throughout the project time period.

The Project Steering Committee (PSC)

[127] The NBSC serves as the PSC for this project. In principle, use of an existing committee is preferable to establishing a new one as this may strengthen national governance mechanisms and avoid duplicating existing mechanisms. This is especially important in a country like CI where the

population is small and people in both Government and Non-Government institutions are already overwhelmed with Committees. The Director of NES indicated to the TET that he is to attend 60 regular meetings.

[128] The NBSC is very large, currently comprised of 27 members representing 14 institutions/organizations most of which are represented by 1 or 2 staff at each meeting. Although senior-level Government staff are on the PSC, it is more common for junior staff to participate in PSC meetings. Many members of the PSC are also beneficiaries in that they have been assigned project funds and are responsible for implementing project activities. The PSC also includes members who were engaged by the Project as consultants (NHT, TIS), a potential conflict of interest which should have been openly discussed and procedures put in place to avoid any potential conflict of interest should this arise. There is one NGO represented on the PSC which serves as the Co-Chair along with NES, the IP for this project. Interestingly, all members of the PMU are also members of the NBSC and as such members of the PSC that oversees the project they manage. This is not considered best practice.

[129] NBSC oversees all biodiversity projects in the country. During the R2R project period, in addition to overseeing this project, NBSC also oversaw two other projects (National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2020, Access & Benefit Sharing 2016-2019). Updates of other projects as they relate to biodiversity, such as GCF projects with CCCI, GEF SGP projects with TIS, and others are provided at NBSC meetings.

[130] The NBSC was not effective in steering this project. UNDP's participation on the PSC could have been stronger. Lack of in-country presence was one (but not the only) factor in UNDP's inability to participate effectively in PSC meetings. Participation at a more senior level would have been helpful. Clarification from the start that UNDP was indeed a member of the PSC, not just an invitee, would have been important as TE interviews with other PSC members suggest that other than the UNDP Finance Officer, there was little substantive participation of UNDP on the PSC and the impression was that their participation was mostly protocol. Several key members of the NBSC report that they understood the role of the NBSC/PSC to be mostly "rubber-stamping" AWP's and budgets presented to them and that the meetings were mostly for sharing information and updates on progress. They did not view their role as being the responsible entity for steering the project. It is therefore understandable that junior-level staff were left to attend NBSC meetings. Some of the RPs, even though represented on the PSC, viewed the project as being NES' project and therefore did not participate as actively as they might have had ownership of the project been stronger.

4.2.6 Risk Management, including Social and Environmental Standards

[131] Risk management in the PRODOC included risks related to climate change, yet there was little inclusion of any activities that could have enhanced resilience in relation to climate change nor other risks related to other cross cutting features such as poverty alleviation, reducing disaster risk and vulnerability, notwithstanding any identification with gender equality and women's empowerment.

[132] An overarching principle of SES is a focus on human rights; gender equality and women's empowerment; sustainability and resilience; and accountability. UNDP's Social and Environmental Standards (SES) underpin UNDP's commitment to sustainable development and required the project to enhance positive social and environmental opportunities and benefits as well as to ensure that adverse social and environmental risks and impacts were avoided, minimized, mitigated, and managed. The Environmental and Social Screening Procedure assessed the R2R project as Category 3

where impacts and risks were considered “limited in scale, identifiable with a reasonable degree of certainty, and requiring the use of standard best practice.” However, by the end of the project there were still gaps in published environmental and social assessments or plans that identified any risk management of the islands’ social and environmental resources nor any mitigation measures that could have been introduced to detail how any social or environmental impacts of project activities, even if they were not considered risks, affected communities or individuals in any way. The Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan was a prime example. Difficulties are still yet to be resolved in relation to getting agreement between landowners, traditional leaders, and island councils about locally-controlled, time-bound exclusion of access to natural resources (ra’ui) on Manuae. Some local landowners demonstrate an obvious conflict of values about the sustainability of their biodiversity resources by ignoring the traditional customs and the practice of ra’ui, citing access to these resources as their right. At the same time, other similar private landowning groups on Atiu where their reserves (Moko’ero and Takutea Reserves) remain owned and under the jurisdiction of private landowners. They employed a model of inclusive and collaborative community participation in decision making relating to governance of the reserves along with technical support from the Environment Service, to build and sustain community commitment to the objectives of the reserves as national protected areas.

4.2.7 COVID-19 Impacts

[133] COVID had some effect on implementation. The project was granted a 5-month extension specifically to address some of the delays caused by COVID.

[134] International tourism was basically eliminated during the pandemic even though CKI itself did not have any reported cases. This affected project activities related to the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification scheme in that it was not possible to gauge the interest of tourists in this type of certification (i.e., did it make any difference to them) and although it was planned that the project would only pay the fee to participate in the scheme during the first year, because lodging facilities and tour operators were not earning revenue, the project (rightly) paid the fees for them again the second year. COVID also affected import of some agrochemicals. MoA imported more than the normal amount of slow-release fertilizers because they did not know if future supply would be available. At the outset (March 2020) some planned internal (within CKI) consultations were delayed for a few months while the Government of Cook Islands assessed the situation within the country. Because of COVID, no international consultants could travel to the Cook Islands for the last year of the project (March 2020 – March 2021). This affected the work of the MESV consultancy, the preparation of the second (revamped) Marae Moana Outlook Report, and the TE as all ICs involved in this work had to engage exclusively by virtual means.

4.3 Project Results and Impacts

4.3.1 Progress Towards Objectives and Expected Outcomes (*)

[135] The TE assessed project results against the RF indicator targets. Annex 8 presents a detailed assessment of progress towards the project objectives and expected outcomes. Annex 8 includes both

the assessment done by the PM and CTA as well as the TE’s own assessment of progress against the targets. In the event that indicators or targets were not well-defined in the RF, the TE attempted to interpret what was intended in order to enable a fair assessment rather than simply indicating that the target was not achievable.

[136] An overall summary of RF target status at TE is presented in Table 15 (below). As can be seen in the Table, no (0%) objective level targets were fully achieved/exceeded, whereas two (50%) were partially achieved and no appreciable progress was made towards one target (25%). It was not possible for the TE to assess progress made towards one (25%) of the objective-level indicators. One objective-level target (target for indicator #3 and related sub-indicators) was not assessed by the TE as information was lacking to enable such an assessment. Regarding outcome-level indicators, 5 (20%) Component/Outcome 1 level targets were fully achieved/exceeded, whereas 6 (24%) were partially achieved and no appreciable progress was made towards another 6 (24%). Eight (32%) could not be assessed by the TE. Finally, regarding Outcome/Component 2 indicator targets, 4 (50%) were fully achieved or exceeded, one (13%) was not achieved, and 3 (38%) could not be assessed.

Table 14. Summary of Results Framework Target Status at TE

Target Status	Target Fully Achieved or Exceeded		Target Partially Achieved		No Appreciable Progress Made to Target		Target Not Assessed by the TE	
	Indicator Reference Number	% of total # of targets achieved	Indicator Reference Number	% of total # of targets partially achieved	Indicator Reference Number	% of total number of targets not achieved	Indicator Reference Number	% of total number of targets not assessed
Objective		0%	1, 2b	50%	2a	25%	3	25%
IRRF Sub-indicators								
Outcome 1	9b,12b,14c,14d,14e	20%	4,6,8,10d,16b,10a	24%	5b,7,10b,10c,11,16a	24%	5a,5c,9a,10c,12a,13,14a,14b	32%
Outcome 2	15a,15b,21,22	50%		0%	17	13%	18,19,20	38%
Total	9	24%	8	22%	8	22%	12	32%

4.3.2 Relevance (S*)

[137] In assessing the relevance of the project, the TE considered the following:

Relevance to the analysis of threats and to the problem statement

[138] Threats and drivers of change to terrestrial and marine biodiversity and ecosystems were identified in the PRODOC as habitat destruction/fragmentation, habitat degradation, over-exploitation, invasive species, and climate change. The project was designed to address most of these threats, with the exception of climate change, through its many activities, a number of which were to reduce threats through the development of biodiversity-friendly policies, legislation/regulations,

plans, data gathering, and direct on-the-ground, in-the-sea conservation measures. It is worth noting that a project can be highly relevant, but this alone does not mean it represents a *strategic* intervention.

Alignment with national policies and plans

[139] The project's objectives were well aligned with national policies and plans in place at the time the project was designed, as described in sections 3.2 and 4.1.1 of this report. Its *planned* (but not all realized) contributions in developing a policy on protected and managed areas, developing a Marine Spatial Plan, revising regulations to ensure greater protection of biodiversity, and strengthening traditional management of biodiversity, as well as its *actual* contributions related to developing management plans for some PAs, collecting information to enable better management of fisheries and marine and terrestrial biodiversity, and the efforts it supported in water quality monitoring are relevant to national priorities as reflected in the National Sustainable Development Plan (2011-2015), the National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (NBSAP), the National Environment Strategic Framework (2013-2017), the Joint National Action Plan (JNAP) for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction, and the National Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) Policy. The TE found that the description of project consistency with national policies/plans as presented in the PRODOC was accurate and comprehensive (Annex 12 provides more details). It is worth noting that a project can be relevant but not necessarily a priority for the IP or RPs.

Alignment with UNDP and GEF strategic priorities

[140] The project design was well aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan, CPD, UNDAF, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), SDGs and GEF BD-1 and BD-2 strategic programmes, as described in sections 3.2 and 4.1.1 above.

Stakeholder engagement

[141] The project was relevant to the various stakeholder groups identified to participate in the project. It was also very relevant to youth, but this group was, unfortunately, not involved nearly as much as they could have been with better planning and budgeting for their participation.

4.3.3 Effectiveness (MU*)

[142] The extent to which the project contributed to the UNDP country programme outcomes and outputs, the SDGs, CBD Aichi targets, the UNDP Strategic Plan, GEF strategic priorities, and national development priorities is briefly described below.

1. The project made contributions towards UNDP, GEF, global MEA and national development plans and priorities. Although it cannot be legitimately claimed that significant global environmental benefits were achieved during the project period, the project did help set the stage for future contributions in that regard.
2. Through its support for strengthening the management of PAs, production of policy discussion papers related to PAs, efforts to support sustainable organic agriculture, the project contributed towards the UNDAF for the Pacific Sub-region 2013-2017 – Outcome Area 1: Environmental management, climate change and disaster risk management.
3. The project contributed to Sub-regional Programme Document for the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (SRPD) Outcome(s) (2012-2016): Improved resilience of PICTs, with a particular

focus on communities, through the integrated implementation of sustainable environmental management, climate change adaptation and/or mitigation and disaster risk management through its efforts to strengthen capacities of government departments for effective, participatory environmental governance and through demonstration projects such as small-scale household organic agricultural projects which have potential for being scaled-up, and formulation of policy discussion papers that may eventually contribute to policy formulation.

4. The project contributed towards the GEF-5 Focal Area Strategies: BD 1.1 Improved management of existing and new protected areas. BD 2.1: Increase in sustainably managed landscapes and seascapes that integrate biodiversity conservation. BD 2.2: Measures to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity incorporated in policy and regulatory frameworks. IW 1.3: Innovative solutions implemented for reduced pollution, improved water use efficiency, sustainable fisheries with rights-based management, IWRM, water supply protection in SIDS, and aquifer and catchment protection.
5. The project contributed towards Aichi targets 5, 11 and 12. It contributed to Aichi Target #5 through the expansion of the PA system and support for PA management effectiveness. It contributed to #11 by increasing the PA system's area of coverage through the expansion of the CIMP. Finally, it contributed to Aichi Target #12 through contributing to gaining knowledge that could potentially strengthen management of several CCAs and other PAs that harbour endemic and globally threatened species.
6. The project contributed towards SDG 14 (Life below Water) through its work in the CIMP and to SDG 15 (Life on Land) through the same results that supported the above-mentioned Aichi targets.
7. The project contributed towards national development needs include supporting the development of the new draft National Environment Policy (although this was not expected from this project), reviewing national legislation related to the Marae Moana (Marae Moana Act 2017), contributing to Marine Spatial Planning, and contributing initial steps to the process of developing a PA classification system.

[143] Information related to the extent to which the project's actual outcomes/outputs were commensurate with what was planned is presented in the table of progress against RF indicator targets (in Annex 8).

Areas in which the project had the greatest and fewest achievements:

[144] Overall, the project had its greatest achievements in:

- contributions to marine spatial planning which, if built upon, could make a significant positive difference to conserving marine biodiversity,
- the conduct of good inshore marine assessments and surveys (which include practical resource management recommendations which if acted upon have potential for contributing to biodiversity conservation),
- surveys conducted of endemic and endangered species which give better understanding of their population and distribution,
- the development of an eco-certification scheme for the tourism industry that has the potential to reduce harmful practices to biodiversity and promote helpful ones if it is sustained.

[145] Those areas where least was achieved include the advancement of financial sustainability for PA management (although a comprehensive research and options report was produced), development of management plans for PAs and other areas of critical importance for conserving biodiversity (including the Aitutaki Lagoon), enhancing the implementation of management plans in PAs, modifying the EIA process to include independent review of development proposals, sorting out institutional responsibilities related to PA management, strengthening traditional management systems (including of Ra'ui sites).

Constraining factors, such as socio-economic, political and environmental risks; and how they were overcome:

[146] The design and implementation of this project did not experience significant constraining socio-economic or political⁸ factors with the exception of the COVID-19 pandemic which began in March 2020, and which slowed implementation of some activities, made travel by International Consultants impossible and had other negative impacts (See Section 4.2.7 for further detail).

Alternative strategies that would have been more effective in achieving the project's objectives:

[147] An alternative strategy that would have been more effective would have been to focus exclusively on the marine environment, as indeed the project objective indicates, and on fewer issues within the marine environment (maybe just on marine spatial planning for the CIMP). A project is only a project. It is not a programme. Focus is important to enable achievement. When a project tries to do too much it may contribute a little here and there, but this scattered approach with limited resources often results in minor contributions without perceptible impact at the end of a project. If the idea was to adopt a Ridge to Reef approach involving both terrestrial and marine ecosystems, it would have been best to focus on one R2R issue, e.g. reducing the use of agrochemicals in a certain watershed which is known to negatively impact a critically important marine environment.

Extent to which the project contributed to gender equality, the empowerment of women and a human rights-based approach

[148] The focus on gender equality, the empowerment of women and a human rights-based approach that was promoted by the Project Appraisal Committee and the PRODOC before the project began, to ensure that the voices of women and other potentially vulnerable groups might be included into consultations and activities, was not acted upon during the project activities. While it was acknowledged that women held leadership and management roles within the project and making up acknowledged that women comprised several of the management and community leadership roles within the project and some of the training sessions, these were often mentioned in gender evaluations with some assumption that this was considered adequate, yet there were no specific activities which focused on women's potential contribution to biodiversity conservation or to the development and management of protected areas. The inclusion of youth was also an opportunity lost to the development of R2R principles and goals where early buy-in would result in important advantages for the future wellbeing of the environment.

⁸ The inter-ministry disputes experienced in early stages of the Project were significant but there were no national political influencing factors.

4.3.4 Efficiency (U*)

[149] The Project was not efficient in use of resources. There were significant shortcomings in the level of outcomes achieved.

- Many key project-supported inputs into policy making (such as work related to MSP), were not produced until close to the end of the project. Because of the Government policy that policy must be in place before legislation is drafted, this also affected the project's ability to contribute in that regard. Without legislation in place, it is difficult to pursue certain elements of PA planning, such as marine zoning (which is a critical element of any PA management plan). Thus, lack of efficiency affected progress in policy making, drafting of legislation, and planning for biodiversity conservation.
- Some project reports were produced with time enough for review and action during the project life, but were not acted upon (e.g., Sustainable Finance Mechanism Options, Final March 2020)
- A total re-write of the Marae Moana Report was deemed necessary, which can in part be attributed to numerous factors including (but not limited to⁹) initially seriously under-funding this effort. This resulted in ultimately using even more funds than what would have been required to produce this report had it been appropriately budgeted from the start (see list of R2R contracts issued in Table 11 of this report). The approach to the re-write of the report was also not efficient.
- It took 16 months to finalize the management response to the MTR recommendations instead of the normal 3 weeks. In a project where implementation was rated as moderately unsatisfactory for all years prior to the MTR, taking this long to finalize the management response to the MTR recommendations which were intended to help address problems experienced by the project took away even more time from the project.
- The 23-month extension cost the project US\$ 144,832 in added project management costs. This means a sum equal to that is not available to be spent on approved project activities. In summary, funds approved to implement conservation measures are instead directed to project management. This is not an efficient use of GEF resources.
- Institutional territorialities and inter-institutional frictions, compounded by a weak PMU, led to often poor collaboration between Government entities which resulted in inefficiencies.
- Significant progress in terms of implementation was made once a CTA was hired. The project would have benefitted from bringing a CTA on board much earlier on. It was inefficient to wait until the period of the project extension to bring a CTA on board when this position was called for in the PRODOC and highlighted again by the MTR.
- During its first four years the project rarely had a full PMU contingent, often missing a Finance/Administrative officer for extended time periods. There was high turnover in the PMU and lack of good hand over. This led to many inefficiencies that may have been avoided had the PMU been fully staffed throughout the project period.

⁹ Other factors included poorly developed TOR, poor contract management of the consultant by MMCO, and a product that did not meet the standards required.

4.3.5 Overall Outcome (MU*)

[150] According to UNDP guidance, the calculation of the overall project outcome rating is based on the ratings for relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency, of which relevance and effectiveness are critical. Overall project outcome is assessed using a six-point scale, described in Section 1.1

4.3.6 Sustainability: financial (U*), socio-economic (MU*), institutional framework and governance (MU*), environmental (MU*), and overall likelihood (U*)

Financial Sustainability

[151] One important product of this project (prepared under the single most expensive contract awarded) was the preparation of an assessment of options regarding a sustainable financing mechanism for Ridge to Reef approaches and PA management within Marae Moana. According to the report, finalized over a year ago in March 2020, “a preliminary cost model analysis indicates that meaningful action, comparable to other global efforts, can be achieved at reasonable cost. However, implementation of more robust frameworks may require upwards of NZD 1.8 million a year, and a ‘best practice’ framework, more still.” Key recommendations made in the report included: 1) Pursue an arrival/departure tax or green fee with appropriate branding, 2) Continue development of sustainable tuna fisheries, 3) Consider establishment of an independent conservation trust fund (CTF). Additionally, it was recommended that the country: 4) “Consider the use of environmental compensation fees to be assessed on developers and assess if these types of policies could apply to seabed mineral extraction plans, should those continue”, 5) Explore the use of other tourism related fees (e.g. site access entry fees, dive fees, bed levies, etc.) for management of sensitive areas. 6) Consider cultivating and pursuing relationships with external donors to secure additional financing that could accelerate any of the above activities”.

[152] Financial sustainability of the project outcomes is in question. No action has been taken on the SFM report (neither the TAG nor the MM Council have discussed the report) which may have contributed significantly to financial sustainability of PAs in the CKI. The Cook Islands continues efforts towards developing a sustainable “gold standard” tuna fisheries which if obtained could contribute to financial sustainability of some of the project outcomes depending on how revenues would be used.

[153] UNDP recently submitted a PIF for a GEF-7 project in the Cook Islands. If approved, that project may contribute to paying some costs that would allow certain project-supported activities to continue in future. The TE believes it is worth questioning if financial sustainability can legitimately be defined as continued dependence on GEF funding.

Socio-Political Sustainability

[154] The involvement of traditional leaders and communities in further pursuing and sustaining some of the main outcomes of the project is key, yet the same issues which existed at project start regarding management of CCAs and Ra’ui sites, still exist at end of project, with enforcement responsibilities still not clarified and with many of these sites poorly managed. Some surveys and assessments (both terrestrial and marine) were done by MMR, NES and TIS which involved participation of local community members, helping to build buy-in for conserving the biodiversity surveyed and thus leading to greater potential for sustaining conservation efforts but to ensure this result, more of these participatory exercises had to have taken place so that communities themselves could continue with the surveys. Many of the inshore marine assessments conducted included recommendations related

to management of the areas surveyed but, unfortunately, the project did not monitor to see which if any of the recommendations were acted upon.

[155] Capacity of local communities was enhanced through some of the trainings related to use of agrochemicals and beekeeping which were delivered with project support (Biosecurity training- 4 trainings on Rarotonga, Mangaia, Mauke and Mitiaro with 67 farmers attending; Pesticides training – 3 trainings, 2 held in Rarotonga and 1 in Aitutaki with 75 farmers attending; Beekeeping training – 5 trainings conducted on Mauke, Mangaia, Atiu, Rarotonga and Aitutaki. 125 farmers attended this training, 71 of whom were women. There does appear to be local community interest, both for cost and access reasons as well as for environmental and human health reasons, in sustaining and even building further upon organic agriculture efforts supported by the project.

[156] A much greater focus on youth would have helped to ensure greater social sustainability. Revival of the “Ra’ui Monitors” on Atiu (and perhaps expansion of this innovative youth-centered programme to other islands in the CKI) as well as ensuring continued support for youth involved in R2R activities through the local NGO Kōrero o te ‘Ōrau would help solidify support required for social sustainability of the project outcomes.

Institutional Framework and Governance Sustainability

[157] The institutional framework related to the management of both terrestrial and marine PAs has not, as expected, been clarified by the project effort. No new regulations were actually developed with project support as anticipated. Who should do what according to existing legislation has not changed but the perceptions may have. According to MMR, the project has “muddied the waters” regarding institutional responsibilities. This certainly affects institutional and governance sustainability. The MMCO has been strengthened but the TAG and the MM Council, both critical to institutional sustainability related to the CIMP are not yet fully functional and it could be said of these entities that they have been in large part dysfunctional during the second half of the project although there is now an effort by the MMCO to re-activate the TAG.

[158] Given the lack of progress and results made over the project period compared with what was expected, the level of ownership of the project by some of the RPs could legitimately be questioned (See Section 4.3.7). This Especially because the issue regarding so many of the main outcomes of the project is not actually how to sustain them but rather how to achieve them. This puts tremendous onus on Government entities that have their own core work programmes with scarce additional monetary or human resources to work towards additional outcomes not included in those core work programmes.

Environmental Sustainability

[159] Although not attributable to the project, the CIMP was significantly extended in size during the project period which will contribute to environmental sustainability of this marine area but only if MSP is completed and implemented. Seabed mineral exploration has moved forward in the void of any MSP for the CIMP. This may affect environmental sustainability. This is not yet known. Unfortunately, the project did little in regard to strengthening the EIA process as it was expected to do. Thus, potential threats to the project’s environmental sustainability still include many of the same threats identified at project design stage: habitat destruction/fragmentation, habitat degradation, over-exploitation, invasive species, and climate change.

Sustainability	Rating
Financial resources	U
Socio-political	MU
Institutional framework and governance	MU
Environmental	MU
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	U

4.3.7 Country Ownership

[160] Although in principle, given the relevance of the project to national policies, country ownership should be strong, the TE found that ownership of the project by several key Government entities is not strong while ownership of the project by civil society is somewhat stronger but still lacking.

[161] Lesson: Unless project activities are incorporated into regular work programmes, ownership may be lacking even if interest exists. Especially in small countries where capacity is limited, the few people involved in biodiversity conservation are usually over-stretched. In the case of Government entities, if activities are not in the regular work programme, they may naturally be seen as “add-ons” and not be assigned priority.

[162] In the case of civil society, TIS, an important NGO in the country, has strong ownership of the project. Its Director sits on the PSC as the Co-Chair. Nevertheless, it, like another important NGO in CKI, Kōrero o te ‘Ōrau, has limited staff and are kept very busy implementing their own ongoing programmes and priorities, making it sometimes challenging for these NGOs to devote scarce human resources to project activities even if grant funding is made available.

[163] Lesson: Although the project paid for additional resource persons in several Government entities (MMR, NES) as well as for the HoA, it did not pay for additional resource persons in any NGO. Doing so may have enhanced ownership and sustainability.

[164] The Government has decided to pursue seabed mineral exploration in the Marae Moana despite not having in place either a Marae Moana Marine Spatial Planning Policy, MSP Regulations and Act changes, or a Marine Spatial Plan, key anticipated (and budgeted) deliverables of this project (As indicated elsewhere in this report, the Marae Moana Marine Spatial Planning Policy Paper was just finalized in January 2021 and has not yet been reviewed by the TAG although an earlier draft was tabled at a TAG meeting in 2020). This can be interpreted as lack of Government buy-in into these project activities and expected outputs. The MMCO explained to the TE that it took the Project so long to even start on these important efforts that the Government decided to move forward with the licensing application process for exploration of seabed minerals without waiting for this critical foundation to be in place.

[165] Although lack of significant progress regarding strengthening the management of Ra’ui sites may in part be attributable to lack of ownership of these project elements, it is also attributable to other factors including lack of capacity to undertake the planned activities and a continuing (since at least project design stage but truly much before) lack of agreement between traditional leaders and

Government entities regarding management authority (something the project was not successful in helping to sort out).

[166] One of the most expensive project products, the Sustainable Financing Mechanism Options paper, appears to have been shelved with no action taken on it after one full year of its finalization, indicating lack of ownership by NES, MFEM, MMCO, TAG, and OPM of this key deliverable.

[167] MMR ownership of some key anticipated project products such as the Aitutaki Lagoon Management plan does not appear to be strong despite keen MMR interest in this area. The TE understands that developing well-consulted management plans for PAs takes time but disagrees with the assertion that it takes ten years. After all, there are many equally complex situations on the planet where well-consulted and well-designed management plans have been developed in far less time and are continually adapted over time (as all good plans must be). There have been many delays in pursuing this project activity and, as of the time of the TE, no draft plan is yet available. The TE was informed that the plan is now being drafted by the Secretary of MMR herself as MMR could not identify a qualified consultant to do this.

[168] There appears to be stronger ownership by CIT and MoA. CIT ownership is strong of a key project output, the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification programme. Due to this programme being developed shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic (which has severely affected tourism in the Cook Islands), there is no way of knowing at this time how strong Government and private sector ownership will be when it comes to implementing the programme without project support (the project has paid 100% of the fees for everyone participating in the programme). MoA ownership is strong related to project activities to reduce agrochemicals. This is in part attributable to shortage of Government funds to purchase agrochemicals (and therefore the need to reduce their use), but no matter what the reason, the ownership of these activities is stronger than some others.

[169] There was an important missed opportunity which could have led to much stronger ownership of the Marae Moana Outlook Report. The contracting of a local Cook Island NGO to develop the report was an excellent approach – at this initial stage it may have been helpful to also contract someone who had experience with the Australian Barrier Reef Outlook Report to work together with the local expert team if the MM Outlook report was expected to follow the same model. Ensuring the effort was funded sufficiently to also allow for the long-term participation of school students (of different ages) and other youth so that they could also learn from the process of preparing the report and contribute to the information contained therein may have helped to ensure ownership of the report by Cook Islanders. If the report is not considered to be “our report” from the perspective of Cook Islanders, then it will have little utility. If after review, the initial report was judged to be unsatisfactory, it would have been preferable to adopt an approach whereby the same initial team could be kept on (with additional funding) and complemented by others (either local or international) rather than starting over from scratch with a team comprised solely of international consultants. In the event that international expertise was deemed necessary to complement, and work together with, national expertise, we would have preferred that instead of hiring individual consultants, some institutional partnership be formed, preferably between the local NGO and an international NGO or academic institution. Proper citations must be made throughout all reports produced with project funds, and proper credit given. This is also key to ownership.

4.3.8 Gender equality and women's empowerment

[170] R2R objectives relating to conservation of both marine and terrestrial biodiversity and food security and environmental strategies and activities were particularly relevant to the improved health and well-being of women and their families. The introduction of crop banks and the distribution of free seeds and seedlings by the Ministry of Agriculture offered opportunities for women and children to grow fresh vegetables in their home gardens, yet little acknowledgement was given within the project for women's empowerment as farmers, especially in the Pa Enea. Women and children were involved in traditional agricultural learning opportunities with Korero o to Orau, as well as in videos promoting safe environmental practices for Tourism. Reports during the project lifetime commented on the number of women in project management roles as well as government, community and traditional leadership and women were generally well represented in workshops and training opportunities offered.

Table 15: Training offered by Ridge to Reef Project

Name of Training	Date and Location	Target Audience	# Trainees Participating	# Females Involved	# Males Involved	Gender Data not recorded
Scuba Diving Training	2016		1		1	
R2R STAR Project Postgraduate Programme	2017 Remotely with James Cook University Australia	R2R participants	9	2	7	
MOA crop bank & pesticides training	30 May 2017 Atiu	Farmers	35			x
GIS/Scoping IT Evaluation (for Mauke Fisheries Officer)	22-25 Sept 2017	Pa Enea Fisheries Officer	1		1	
MMR Technical Pa Enea training – invertebrate surveys	29 Sept – 7 Oct 2017	Outer island fisheries staff	8	2	6	
GIS/Scoping IT Evaluation (for Atiu Fisheries Officer)	27-29 Jan 2018 MMR, ATIU	Outer island fisheries staff	1		1	
GIS/Scoping IT Evaluation (for Mitiaro Fisheries Officer)	1-4 June 2018 MMR, Mitiaro	Outer island fisheries staff	1		1	
Turtle Monitoring	Jan 2019	Snorkel tour operators	8	5	3	
Drone training	Jan 2019 Rarotonga	R2R NES Project officer	1	1		
Turtle Monitoring	March 2019 Aitutaki	Tour operators	6	3	3	
Drone training	March 2019 Aitutaki	MMR staff	4	3	1	
R2R Capacity Needs Assessment	18 July 2019 Rarotonga		11			x
Sustainable Finance Mechanism	16 July 2019 Rarotonga		22	10	12	
Marine Spatial Plan workshop	25-27 July 2019 Rarotonga		24	10	14	
National Capacity Needs Assessment	17-18 Sept 2019 Rarotonga		15	8	7	
Spatial Planning Management	1 October 2019 Rarotonga		26	12	14	

Consolidation Workshop	8 January 2020 Rarotonga		23	11	12	
GEF7 National Dialogue	22-23 January 2020 Rarotonga		73	31	42	
MSP – to identify Special Unique Marine areas	June 2020 Rarotonga		56	27	25	
Aitutaki Lagoon Management plan consultations	19-20 August 2020 Aitutaki		?			x
MSP Policy Paper	21 September 2020 Rarotonga		13			x
PACS Workshop	24 September 2020 Rarotonga		8	4	4	
HOA Forum to discuss Island MSP work (from BSC minutes Oct 2020)	25 Nov-4 Dec 2020 Atiu		?			x

[171] Women members of the House of Ariki and the Koutu Nui contributed traditional leadership views during TE discussions. Youth were involved in conservation development activities in the Pa Enua as well as in the development of ra’ui monitors to support the traditional management of locally protected conservation areas. The Gender Assessment and Action Plan was not completed but should be developed as a national policy document for use across all national projects. More activities could have been assigned to women’s non-governmental organisations, particularly, The National Council of Women, which was not employed as much within project activities as the PRODOC outlined that they might be. Their involvement appeared to be indirectly through their attendance at community meetings, but there was no direct engagement in any of the project activities. Also, there were no project activities that incorporated any specificity for the engagement of women which it might have been assumed during project design that the National Council of Women would have proposed.

4.3.9 Other Cross-cutting Issues

[172] Capacity Building. The R2R Capacity Needs Assessment and the R2R Capacity Strengthening Action Plan did not eventuate until September 2019. If produced at the outset, they would have provided the framework on which to identify capacity gaps and deficiencies and facilitated the achievement of project goals by more targeted and coordinated action. Community based learning provided a practical setting and assistance for conservation experts to count birds, nesting areas and plants in the Moko’ero Reserve in Atiu, as well as for communities including youth and women to participate in and understand conservation processes. An agricultural workshop involving farmers and growers from both genders and across the southern group islands also provided opportunity to get a good grounding in the reasons for the reduction in the use of chemical-based pesticides with a view towards the use of greener products. There was also hands-on practice for the workshop team as they visited various farms on the island to study best practice in farming techniques. Many farmers spoke highly of the courses held on Atiu and Rarotonga. Much of other R2R training opportunities focused on building technical capacity of NES and MMR staff on Rarotonga and the Pa Enua in the requirements of their roles on the outer islands.

[173] Climate Change. Climate change was not assigned as a specific activity area, but project partners were able to incorporate climate change resilience into some of their own projects.

- Agriculture has ensured that different climate-resilient crops are more available in their crop banks, including varieties of taro and other that could be better accommodated by the soil and weather conditions of the different islands.
- Tourism has incorporated greater awareness of climatic conditions and biodiversity conservation into their Mana Tiaki Eco Certification programme through an expectation for candidates to incorporate at least one special project into their annual programme.
- MMR surveys of marine life identify the impacts of climate change on the degeneration of the reef environment, on marine life in the lagoon, as well as depleting stocks of finfish. A reef regeneration project will remain in progress even after the closure of the project, in an attempt to support building back our reefs.
- NES has been surveying populations of bird and plant life on its outer islands, watching carefully for any changes in weather patterns that might have consequential impacts on our biodiversity.

[174] The Poverty-Environment Nexus. The Ministry of Agriculture initiated more innovative ways of mainstreaming biodiversity conservation, supporting landscape management and ecosystem connectivity to alleviate poverty. MOA offices on Rarotonga and the Pa Enua, set up crop banks to encourage home growers to transform some of their properties to grow crops for their families. They distributed seeds and seedlings as well as initiated vegetable crops and trees that would support home garden supplies. This initiative provides a nature based solution for the social, health economic and environmental challenges brought about by COVID-19. Supporting families to become subsistence farmers offers some potential for them to improve their ability to withstand these challenges by taking on the role of providers for themselves. The marine environment is not so fortunate when traditionally managed ra’ui sites and other protected areas on the lagoons which have provided sea foods for generations, are plundered by poachers who will ignore ra’ui and protected area conservation signs. More work by NES and MMR is required, to get some agreement between landowners and traditional leaders on traditional values and management practices related to the social and economic as well as environmental impact of non-compliant access and use of the natural resources in their lagoons.

4.3.10 GEF Additionality

[175] There were numerous global environmental benefits accrued over the project period. To meet the definition of GEF additionality these outcomes should be directly associated with the GEF-supported project. We list various global environment benefits below which were accrued over the course of the project but few of these were directly attributable to the project with the exception of CIMP where R2R attribution for improved management is strong: marine biodiversity surveys, policy work, Outlook Report, MSP data consolidation, SUMA, bioregions. Those benefits accrued over the course of the project but not directly attributable to the project cannot truly be considered GEF additionality but are included here as the project played a role even if only in documenting outcomes.

Table 16: Quantitative & Verifiable Data Demonstrating Project Global Environmental Benefits

No.	Global Environmental Benefit	Quantitative and verifiable data demonstrating GEBs
1	Marae Moana (CIMP) expanded from 1065 sq. km. in 2012 to 1.976 million sq. km. in 2017	The Project is not directly responsible for the expansion of the CIMP, however MMCO and the former PC have indicated that the fact the project existed encouraged decision makers to support the expansion.

2	Improved management effectiveness of the targeted PAs	METTs undertaken at project start compared with METTs undertaken at TE indicate improved management effectiveness in some of the targeted PAs.
3	Population status of several globally significant terrestrial species maintained or increased	Surveys conducted with project support indicate that the population status of several globally significant species including Kakerori (<i>Pomarea dimidiata</i>) and Kopeka (<i>Aerodramus sawtelli</i>) on Atiu has been maintained and may have increased. It should be noted that this is not attributable to the project (as the project only conducted surveys, it did not support management actions with the exception of rat control in TCA. See Section 4.3.12 for more information.
4	Population status of several globally significant marine species maintained or increased	See Section 4.3.12

4.3.11 Catalytic/Replication Effect

[176] To date, the Project cannot claim to have directly catalysed any conservation actions not already supported by the project other than the Mana Tiaki eco-certification scheme, which if it is sustained, could eventually be scaled up once tourism resumes post-COVID pandemic.

4.3.12 Progress to Impact

[177] No Theory of Change (TOC) was prepared for this project. Nevertheless, the TE attempted to assess progress towards long-term impact and the extent to which long-term impact can be attributed to the project. Environmental stress reduction, environmental status change, contributions to changes in policy/legal/regulatory frameworks and capacities (including governance) and changes in socio-economic status are reported on below.

[178] The project did not contribute significantly to directly reducing environmental stress as very few direct actions were undertaken by the Project to reduce environmental stresses with the exception of activities to reduce use of agrochemicals. The Project did perhaps bring about increased awareness regarding some of the sources of environmental stress (e.g., negative impacts of use of plastic bottles). A number of useful recommendations were made in the assessments conducted by MMR with project support which, if implemented, would reduce environmental stresses, but no information was available regarding which of those recommendations have been adopted or are being implemented. There is no tracking of action taken on recommendations made.

[179] Lesson: Recommendations made in assessments supported by GEF projects should be tracked to see which ones are being implemented.

Environmental stress reduction

[180] Monitoring changes in the various environmental stresses would have been helpful but was not done by the project. There were no indicators in the Project RF related directly to environmental stressors. Some of the stresses that may well have usefully been monitored include input of agrochemicals into lagoons, quantity of plastic bottles discarded, pressures on coral reefs, waste discharge to the sea, etc. It would not be valid for the TE to guess if such stresses have been reduced or not, therefore we have not ventured to do more than to identify some sources of environmental stress.

Environmental status change

[181] The TE format requires reporting on environmental status change and asks that an assessment be made of which changes can be attributed to the project. Given the relatively short time frame of most GEF projects, it is, in many cases, not reasonable to expect a detectable change in environmental status related to biodiversity projects. Even if project interventions have been effective, it may not be possible to detect trends over such a short period of time. And, attribution is also difficult unless there are no other interventions during the project period and no external factors (climatic changes, etc.) influencing survey and other scientific study results to try to quantify environmental status. Different methodologies applied may also significantly influence results. With the above caveats, the information presented below has been extracted from various reports produced with project support.

Water Quality in Lagoons.

[182] MMR monitors water quality in numerous lagoons on a monthly basis. The TET requested information from MMR on water quality assessments conducted as this data could provide helpful insights into environmental status change. This information was unfortunately not provided thus it is not possible for an assessment to be presented in this report.

Coastal Birds Nesting on Mokoero and Takutea.

[183] The Mokoero Takutea Assessment Report (Sept. 2019) produced by NHT with Project support conducted bird nest counts and vegetation surveys on these two islands. The tally of active nest counts for five species of coastal nesting birds indicate reduction in the number of active nests for 3 of the 5 species (Tavake, Rakia, Kena) in 2019 compared with previous surveys done in 1990 and 1989 and an increase in the number of active nests for that same period for 2 of the 5 species ((Species Nest Count 2019 (Aug) 1990 (Sept) 1989 (May) Tavake 438 ≈2000 ≈900 Kena 6 18 22 Lulu 9 0 0 Kōta’a Nui 5 0 0 Rakia 0 3 26). “The number of Tavake and Kena nests on Takūtea in 2019 is considerably less than those numbers recorded 30 years earlier. It could be an accurate reflection of the nesting population, which had declined substantially and recent measures prohibiting the capture and consumption of Tavake have not yet resulted in a restoration of the population, or it could be a result of under-sampling. The survey methodology or sample size may not be robust enough to accurately estimate and compare results. Although actual declines are a possibility, the author believes that human error may have played a role in an underestimation of the population.”

Vegetation Changes on Mokoero and Takutea.

[184] Results of vegetation surveys on Mokoero and Takutea suggest vegetation groupings on Takūtea remain similar to that recorded in previous surveys. “Survey site D2 represents an expansion of native forest into a previously recorded mixed forest, further survey and evaluation would be useful to determine the full extent of this expansion. Coastal vegetation on the northern coast has fluctuated over time, with less Tau’unu present than on earlier visits (pers comm G. Mateariki, 2019)” “Although previously recorded as rare on Takūtea, the observation of a single Romanzoff shrub on the island is less than expected. Discussions with Gerald McCormack upon return from Takūtea suggested that the survey effort should have focused within the first 100m of coastal vegetation band on the northern coast rather than the open, sparsely vegetation periphery.” The assessment on Mokoero indicates, “The number of survey sites does provide an indication of what species are in the Reserve but is not sufficient to characterise the vegetative communities. The northern area does contain many native species across all strata. The southern area is again predominantly native vegetation with the exception of survey point MK4 which has Pitipiti’o in the shrub layer. Pitipiti’o, not to be confused with the Rarotongan native

Pitipiti'ō (Crab's-eye Vine⁴⁴), is a recently introduced, fast-growing tree. It is very common on Ātiu and considered invasive, especially in agricultural areas". The TE notes that the report indicates there are some issues with methodologies used in conducting some of the above cited surveys.

Parrotfish around Palmerston Island.

[185] The Palmerston Island Natural Resource Management Plan (2020) produced by TIS with project support indicates, "anecdotal reports indicate that a number of fishermen persist in using the 3 inch mesh, and are therefore catching smaller fish (B. Marsters, pers.comm). For example, the Pacific Longnose Parrotfish (*Hipposcarus longiceps*, (rei), the most commonly exploited species, are now often caught at 15 to 17cm fork length (FL), with the fillets of around 10 fish required to make 1kg (B. Marsters, pers comm). In 1988, the average size from catch sampling the catch was around 36 cm (inferred from graph, figure 4.1 in Preston et al, 2005). In 2007, the average size was 30cm (Pinca et al, 2009)".

Mitiaro Fan Palm (*Pritchardia mitiarioana*).

[186] The species status report (2020) produced by TIS with Project support indicates, "The *Iniao*, or Mitiaro Fan Palm, was previously considered to be endemic to Mitiaro. However, a fan palm found in the Tuamotu group of islands in French Polynesia was reclassified in 2007 as the same species. Despite this, it is still considered a threatened species within the Cook Islands due to its limited national range and population size, although it is not listed on the IUCN Red List to provide an internationally recognized threat ranking. As such, it was included in the project design of the Ridge to Reef (R2R) project as one of four terrestrial priority species requiring conservation support. Baseline information for the start of the R2R project in 2015 put the number of *Iniao* plants found in Mitiaro at 375, with an end-of-project target of 'no net decline' in population size. A survey in 2017 updated this figure to 395 (McCormack, pers.comm). Following a further survey in 2019 by the National Environment Service (NES) R2R team, the number of plants is now estimated to be between 500 and 600. The increase is largely attributed to more efficient survey technology, i.e. the use of a drone in place of Google Images, which allowed for higher resolution images of clusters in very difficult terrain. The range of *Iniao* clusters was also confirmed to stretch further south than in earlier surveys. As such, the project targets of no net decline in the Mitiaro population have been achieved."

Kakerori or Rarotonga Flycatcher (*Pomarea dimidiata*).

[187] The Kakerori species status report (2020) produced by TIS, and the TCA Management Plan produced by NZDOC, with Project support indicates, "Conservation work in the form of rat baiting to control rat numbers within the Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) has been ongoing since 1989, to protect 7 of the then 13 breeding pairs of the Rarotonga Flycatcher (*Pomarea dimidiata*), known locally as *kakerori* (Robertson et al 1998). More than 20 years later, a desk-based assessment of the Cook Islands Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) and Important Bird Areas (IBA) was developed (Evans 2012). In this report, it was identified that the *kakerori* was 1 of 8 threatened national land bird species found in the Cook Islands. *Kakerori* are still predominantly found within the Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) on Rarotonga, also identified as a KBA. The bird is currently listed as 'Vulnerable' under the IUCN Red List of threatened species (Birdlife International 2018). The *kakerori* was included in the Strategic Results Framework (SRF) of the Ridge to Reef project (R2R) as a priority species for continued management and conservation actions. The R2R baseline figures at the start of the project in 2015 recorded *kakerori* population numbers at 428 individuals on Rarotonga and a translocated population of 125 individuals on Ātiu . The project's target goal for the species over the programme period aimed to achieve 'no net decline in *kakerori* population numbers' (UNDP project document, undated). The R2R project (2015-19, later extended to 2021) provided funds to assist the TCA in their ongoing recovery programme, including biennial population surveys, continued rat control programmes, an updated management plan and guidebook, materials and equipment to support management operations including an electric vehicle, amongst

others. The most recent 2017 census recorded an increase in *kakerori* numbers to 471 on Rarotonga. A 2018 survey found a minimum of 123 birds in Ātiu, however this was considered to be an underestimate due to surveying difficulties associated with inaccessible terrain. A full census was planned for August 2020 to inform the R2R terminal evaluation, but is pending Covid-19 travel restrictions. Thus, the total population of *kākerōri* is currently estimated at around 600 birds. This demonstrates that the overall project target of no net decline in *kakerori* numbers from 428 has been achieved, with populations continuing to increase as a result of ongoing management actions supported by the R2R project.”

Atiu Swiftlet, *Kopeka (Aerodramus sawtelli)*

[188] Species Status Report (2020) produced by TIS with Project support indicates, “The Atiu swiftlet (*Aerodramus sawtelli*), known locally as the *kopeka*, is endemic to the island of Atiu within the Cook Islands and is listed under the IUCN Red List as ‘Vulnerable’ (BirdLife International, 2016; IUCN 2020). Under the Ridge to Reef project (R2R), the Atiu Swiftlet was listed as a key terrestrial species for conservation activities (UNDP Project document, undated). Projects relevant to the *kopeka* that were initially planned to be implemented under R2R included: support for the *kopeka* conservation effort; support collaborative work amongst key stakeholders such as National Environment Service (NES), National Heritage Trust (NHT), the Atiu Island Council and Traditional Leaders to create and implement a Species Conservation Plan for this species; and to measure the population at the end of the project to gauge the overall results of the species conservation plan. The R2R baseline figures for the *kopeka* were recorded at 420 individuals in 2015. Species target goals upon completion of the R2R project were for ‘no net decline in population numbers’. During the four-year R2R programme 2015-19, later extended to 2021, no updated population surveys were conducted. In 2016 -2017, estimated population numbers were around 600 adults (M. Humphreys pers. comm, 2020), but questions remain over the methodology used and these figures have not been corroborated. Based on this, Gerald McCormack, Director of the Natural Heritage Trust, advised in 2020 that “no total counts for both caves have been [confirmed] above 420” but that the population was stable (pers. comm, 2020). This supports an assumption that the R2R project’s target goals were achieved in that ‘no net decline in population numbers’ is likely to have occurred over the programme period”.

Mangaia Kingfisher, *Tanga’eo (Todiramphus ruficollaris)*

[189] Species Status Report (2020) produced by TIS with Project support indicated, “The Mangaia Kingfisher, known locally as *Tanga’eo*, is one of the eight threatened land bird species identified within the Cook Islands Key Biodiversity Areas and Important Bird Area assessment made in 2012 (Evans, 2012). Consequently, it was included in the project design of the Ridge to Reef project (R2R) as one of four terrestrial priority species for conservation activities (UNDP Project document, undated). *Tanga’eo* baseline population data identified at the start of the R2R project (2015) was estimated around 1000 individuals. Since 2015, R2R funding has contributed to projects that have supported the activities of a recently formed Site Support Group (included in the Mangaian Forest Ecosystem Restoration Plan) to assess threats towards the species (including nest damage from Myna birds (*Acridotheres tristis*), habitat degradation from the spread of invasive plants species, and habitat destruction from the spread of agriculture) as well as developing a strategic plan to address those threats. R2R target goals for the *Tanga’eo* consisted of ‘no net decline in population’ numbers by the end of the project period, initially planned for 2019 but later extended to 2021. Remarkably, most recent population surveys completed in 2019 found *Tanga’eo* population numbers were recorded at 4,106, a 400% increase over previous estimates over a four-year period (Thacker 2019). This indicates that there has been no net decline in species population by the end of the project period (2020), therefore fulfilling the project targets”.

Seabirds on Palmerston Atoll.

[190] The Seabird Survey Report on Palmerston Atoll (2018) produced by TIS with Project support indicates, “Only a few species were found breeding on Palmerston during the surveying period. This low number can be explained by the seasonal timing of the survey, where Greater frigate juveniles were already flying and the mating characteristics of the White tern and Brown noddies had only just begun. A survey, conducted between March and August would document the presence of most nesting seabirds, which would provide a closer estimate. *Red tailed tropic harvesting*. Palmerston is known within the Cook Islands for their annual harvest of the Red-tailed Tropicbird. The harvesting season typically runs from June through till the end of August, or when the quota of two persons (includes new born to oldest resident) to a bird is met. The juvenile Red-tailed Tropicbird is the harvested choice. They are picked for their meat and feathers to make beddings and costumes. It has been difficult to obtain past pickings records from Goodly Taipai collected in the early 2000s, as it was mentioned the records would only be made available upon the discretion of the Palmerston Island council. These past records will provide a better insight into how the Red-tailed Tropicbird numbers compares with the current 2018 data. From what information we have, we know that preferred harvesting sites are Bird Island, North Island, Lee To Us, Aron’s point and Primrose. Primrose had been a prime harvesting site since the late 90s but since the 2005 cyclone, numbers were said to have dropped, and it was feared the population would not recover. However, it was interesting to note that Primrose had the highest number of breeding pairs of all the islets surveyed, even after a completed harvesting season two months prior. This may suggest, that the current quota in place maybe a sustainable management tool that is already being applied. Nevertheless, it would still be beneficial to see past picking numbers to gain a better insight to compare past records to current population surveys.” “Until past pickings records have been made available, it is difficult to provide appropriate management recommendations for the harvest of the Red-tailed Tropicbird. A request on behalf of Te Ipukarea Society has been lodged to the Palmerston Island Council to obtain access to these records. It was also raised in a final presentation meeting towards the local community from the ‘Ridge to Reef’ team on the 3rd November 2018 that it was believed the nesting season for the Red-tailed Tropicbird may now be occurring earlier on in the year around March. It can be recommended that a sea bird survey be carried out during the month of March to validate this assumption of a shift in nesting season. A survey in March would also better capture other nesting sea birds that are more likely to be nesting at this time. It would also be of significant importance to the Red-tailed Tropicbird nesting population to carry out annual Red-tailed Tropicbird surveys on harvested islets prior to the actual harvesting season “

[191] Hard Coral Cover, Mitiaro.

The Mitiaro Nearshore Invertebrate & Finfish Assessment (2018) by MMR with Project support indicates, “Over the reef average hard coral cover ranged from 15% to 44% and had an overall average of 25% (Figure 13). In comparison to Rongo *et al* (2013), Okarava showed a 5% increase equalling the same average cover of 29% by Lyon in 2002. Kovea showed a 10% decrease in hard coral cover since 2013, though this was still greater than 19% in 2002. Recent climatic events occurred during this period. In 2016, a coral bleaching event was noted during a coral reef survey in Rarotonga where (ignoring recovery of bleached corals); 80% mortality was found (Rongo *et al*. 2017). The warm waters during this period may have had an adverse effect on the fore reef of Mitiaro. A large proportion of dead coral substrate (Figure 10) may be remnants of a bleaching event that also impacted not only Rarotonga but Mitiaro as well. Sites over the reef with the highest coral cover were located on the west side, the leeward side of Mitiaro. In descending order from the highest coral cover; Tiara had an average of 44%, followed by Kovea 32%, Patiare 30% and Okarava 29% (Figure 15). With the exception of Okarava, high biodiversity on the leeward side provides good shelter from strong wave action, oceanic currents, and prevailing trade winds. This high diversity of corals is the greatest in Cook Island waters to date (Rongo *et al*. 2013). Private SCUBA charters may provide some benefit to the community and add to business ventures for locals. “

Invertebrates, Finfish, Pa'ua and Coral Substrate, Mangaia.

[192] The Mangaia Nearshore Marine Assessment conducted in 2018 by MMR indicates, "With the opening of the Keia Ra'ui, paua density declined from 29.69 ± 9.18 ind./100 m² before harvest to 12.50 ± 4.20 ind./100 m² after harvest, but this decline was not significant ($p = 0.111$, Fig. 4). Differences in the distribution of paua sizes were detected with average paua length decreasing significantly from 141.45 ± 5.35 mm before harvest to 69.7 ± 7.89 mm after harvest ($p < 0.001$, Fig. 5)." "Across all sites, live coral cover averaged less than 20%. Live coral cover was greatest at Tamarua Control. Hard corals were more frequently observed than soft corals. Bleached corals were rarely observed. Macroalgae, such as the calcified green alga *Halimeda* spp., had a relatively large presence, averaging 31% coverage across all survey sites (Fig. 6)." No comparative data regarding changes in densities of finfish or invertebrates over time were provided in this report.

Contributions to changes in policy/legal/regulatory frameworks, including observed changes in capacities (awareness, knowledge, skills, infrastructure, monitoring systems, etc.) and governance architecture, including access to and use of information (laws, administrative bodies, trust-building and conflict resolution processes, information-sharing systems, etc.);

[193] The project has made contributions that may eventually lead to policy/legal/regulatory changes but such changes have not happened during the project period. Assessments were conducted by the project at project start and at the time the CNAR was conducted in 2019, but as pointed out in the CNAR, due to methodological differences and other factors, comparing these scores is really not legitimate. The TET does not believe it would be appropriate to provide anecdotal evidence related to institutional capacity changes.

[194] Contributions to changes in socio-economic status (income, health, well-being).

[195] No data on changes over the project period in socio-economic status including income, health or well-being was collected by the Project. Although data certainly exists at the national level regarding some of these parameters, the TET does not believe it would be valid to present such data from the year the project began and ended and attribute any of that change to the project.

5. Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations & Lessons

5.1 Main Findings

[196] The main findings from this evaluation are summarized in Table 17 (below) based on the detailed findings presented in Section 4. The Table includes ratings for each of the required evaluation criteria.

Table 17 - Evaluation Ratings table

Evaluation Criteria	Rating	TE Comments
Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)		
M&E design at entry	MU	M&E design at entry was standard in that all common elements of an M&E plan were planned for including MTR, TE, Project Terminal Report, audits, PIRs, etc. A number of these were, however, underbudgeted, including the MTR (at \$18,000) and the TE (at \$27,000). There were weaknesses in this project's RF including indicators (not all of which were SMART), and some ill-defined targets and baselines.
M&E Plan Implementation	MU	<p>No significant changes were made to the RF despite the in-depth MTR assessment of the RF which indicated that numerous changes should be made (MTR report). The opportunity to refine the RF at a critical early stage (at the inception workshop) was missed. Thus, the RF that the project used throughout its "life" was not a tool that was well articulated to enable monitoring progress and results and tracking progress toward the achievement of outcomes and objectives.</p> <p>Completion and Effective Use of GEF TTs is part of implementing an M&E plan. Not all of the required TTs and assessments were completed at the various stages they should have been. A Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) and a Capacity Strengthening Action Plan (CSAP) was done by the CTA in September, 2019. The completion of the assessment at this late stage meant there was little opportunity for the project to address capacity needs that had been identified. More targeted training might have been offered and capacity actually strengthened during the project had the assessment been done much earlier on. Since capacity related to BD conservation is a major constraint in the CI, this was a significant deficiency. METTs were completed for six PAs at project inception. At mid-term, METTs were only done for 2. No METTs were done for the majority of PAs at that stage. METT for CIMP was done by CTA with MMCO and NES as part of CNAR in late 2019. At TE, METTs were completed for all areas for which METTs were done at inception. The BDTT#1 Financial Sustainability Scorecard was completed at project inception but not completed at any stage after that. BDTT#2 was completed at project inception and again at TE but not at mid-term. The IWTT was completed at project inception and again at EoP (by the PMU). The TTs done at EoP were completed by the CTA and the PM. As some of these protected areas are privately owned, landowners should have been integrally involved in the process. This would not only help to raise awareness of the status of BD in those areas, as well as buy-in for the effort, but would also help to enhance capacity related to management of those areas.</p>
Overall Quality of M&E	MU	M&E design at entry was standard in that all common elements of an M&E plan were planned for including MTR, TE, Project Terminal Report, audits, PIRs, etc. A number of these were, however, underbudgeted, including the MTR (at \$18,000) and the TE (at \$27,000). No adjustments were made to address these shortcomings during the inception workshop. Annual audits were also included in the M&E plan but were not actually conducted on an annual basis.
Implementation & Execution		

Evaluation Criteria	Rating	TE Comments
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	MU	Table 8 provides a detailed assessment of the quality of UNDP oversight as GEF Agency. Although it fulfilled its obligations satisfactorily in 2 of the 18 areas assessed related to oversight, it did not totally fulfill its obligations in 13 other areas related to oversight.
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	U	NES, as the lead executing agency (GEF IP) for the project responsible for project management and for coordinating and collaborating with other implementation partners, was not effective in this role. There were serious shortcomings in the extent to which the IP managed and administered the project's day to day activities. There was inadequate focus on results and timeliness. Institutional territorialities, lack of ownership of the project by many of the IPs, and a weak PMU led to poor collaboration and coordination between Government entities which contributed significantly to this failure. NES oversight of use of GEF funds by the RPs was not good. The quality of risk management was poor, with the risk of poor inter-institutional collaboration/coordination never satisfactorily mitigated.
Overall quality of Implementation /Execution	U	Project implementation was fraught with problems from the start even though implementation significantly improved during the last two years of the project (i.e., during the project extension), but by that time it was too late to actually act upon many of the reports produced, thus much of this is left to be addressed as part of the project's exit strategy. There were significant delays in project implementation, some of which had serious consequences as described in Section 4.2.5
Assessment of Outcomes		
Relevance	S	The project was relevant to the analysis of threats. The project's objectives were well aligned with national policies and plans in place at the time the project was designed, as described in sections 3.2 and 4.1.1 of this report. The project design was well aligned with the UNDP Strategic Plan, CPD, UNDAF, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), SDGs and GEF BD-1 and BD-2 strategic programmes, as described in sections 3.2 and 4.1.1. The project was relevant to the various stakeholder groups identified to participate in the project. It was also very relevant to youth, but this group was, unfortunately, not involved nearly as much as they could have been with better planning and budgeting for their participation.
Effectiveness	MU	The project's actual outcomes/outputs were not fully commensurate with what was planned as presented in detail in the table of progress against RF indicator targets (in Annex 11).
Efficiency	U	The Project was not efficient in use of resources. There were significant shortcomings in the level of outcomes achieved as described in Section 4.3.4.
Overall Project Outcome Rating	MU	
Sustainability		

Evaluation Criteria	Rating	TE Comments
Financial resources	U	Financial sustainability of the project outcomes is in question.
Socio-political/economic	MU	The involvement of traditional leaders and communities in further pursuing and sustaining some of the main outcomes of the project is key, yet, the same issues which existed at project start regarding management of CCAs and Ra'ui sites, still exist at end of project, with enforcement responsibilities still not clarified and with many of these sites poorly managed
Institutional framework and governance	MU	The institutional framework related to the management of both terrestrial and marine PAs has not, as expected, been clarified by the project effort.
Environmental	MU	Although not attributable to the project, the CIMP was significantly extended in size during the project period which will contribute to environmental sustainability of this marine area but only if MSP is completed, properly resourced and implemented. Seabed mineral exploration has moved forward in the void of any MSP for the CIMP. This may affect environmental sustainability. This is not yet known. Unfortunately, the project did little in regards to strengthening the EIA process as it was expected to do. Thus, potential threats to the project's environmental sustainability still include many of the same threats identified at project design stage: habitat destruction/fragmentation, habitat degradation, over-exploitation, invasive species, and climate change.
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	U	Overall, likelihood of sustainability using the required rating scale for sustainability is "Unlikely".

5.2 Conclusions

[197] Project Contribution. Despite the project being overly ambitious, it did contribute in a number of ways to the objective set forth which was "To build national and local capacities and actions to ensure effective conservation of biodiversity, food security and livelihoods and the enhancement of ecosystem functions within the Cook Islands Marine Park".

[198] Quality of Products. Most reports produced with project support were of good quality, although the approach to producing some of these reports could have been improved to ensure building national capacity and buy-in.

[199] Effectiveness of the project investment and sustainability are at risk when so much is left to be done as part of a project exit strategy. Project implementation was fraught with problems from the start even though implementation significantly improved during the last two years of the project (i.e., during the project extension) but by that time it was too late to actually act upon many of the reports produced, thus much of this is left to be addressed as part of the project's exit strategy. Many key expected project-supported inputs into policy making and planning were not produced until close to the end of this twice-extended project, severely curtailing progress in other areas dependent on this foundation.

[200] Project Management. Institutional territorialities, lack of ownership of the project by many of the RPs, a weak PMU, and an IP inexperienced with such a large and complex project all contributed significantly to project management challenges which were not adequately surmounted during the project period. A weak PMU, weak due to lack of full staffing, high turnover, and lack of good hand over, and inadequate experience and training, was a major contributing factor to NES's inability to turn the project around at least until the last two years of the project (basically, the project extension period).

[201] Project Oversight. There were significant issues related to project oversight, with an ineffectual PSC and the UNDP MCO less than exacting in assuming its project oversight responsibilities as the GEF IA for the project. Support from individual UNDP Regional Technical Advisers (RTAs) was good but the high turnover of RTAs (there were 5 during the course of the project) was not helpful. Even though most boxes could be ticked in terms of fulfilling its obligations, UNDP was simply not effective in supporting this project to be successful.

[202] Expediency in agreeing on the management response to the MTR may have made a difference in what the project was able to achieve. It took well over a year (16 months) to finalize the management response to the MTR recommendations. In a project where implementation was rated as moderately unsatisfactory for all years prior to the MTR, taking this long to finalize the management response to the MTR recommendations which were intended to help address problems experienced by the project took away even more time from the project.

[203] Financial Management. There were numerous, significant financial management issues (described in detail in the report) some of which should not have taken nearly as long as they did to sort out and others which should have never happened in the first place if qualified finance officers had been in place throughout the project time period.

[204] Cross-Cutting Issues. There was inadequate focus on "cross-cutting" issues such as gender equality and empowerment of women.

[205] Reporting was satisfactory but more detailed reporting by the PMU would have been helpful in some cases and in some cases more candid reporting was warranted along with oversight by senior officials and questioning and validation of project reports to ascertain the actual situation.

[206] The exit/sustainability strategy prepared by the PM and the CTA requires strengthening for it to be a practical guide that will help ensure this project investment is further built upon and that the project outcomes achieved to date are sustained.

5.3 Recommendations

[207] Given that the Project is only two months from closure (6 June 2021), TE recommendations mainly relate to follow-on actions that could help to ensure that the foundation built by this project is further built upon and that the project investment is not lost where further actions are required to sustain what has been achieved to date with project support.

Table 18: Key Recommendations

Rec #	TE Recommendation	Entity Responsible	Time- frame
1	Draft key marine spatial plans and management plans that were supposed to be produced (and implementation of these begun) during the project period but which have not yet been completed (CIMP, Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan, Te Manga Te Kou Cloud Forest, Manuae Wildlife Sanctuary). Management plans do not all need to be finalized in this period, but at a minimum, drafts for discussion by stakeholders should be produced. In the case of some of these plans (e.g. Te Manga Te Kou Cloud Forest), consideration should be given to adopting a less formal, more innovative, and simplified approach to developing a type of agreement with landowners as to priority actions to be undertaken rather than the more formal PA management plan.	MMCO, MMR	Within 18 months
2	Ensure the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meets to discuss the various project-produced reports that have not yet been reviewed/discussed by the TAG (see Table 9).	TAG, MMCO	Within 4 months
3	NES and MFEM to meet to discuss the Sustainable Financing Mechanisms (SFM) report and the Marine Ecosystem Services Valuation (MESV) report (within 3 months) and decide on what follow-on actions to take on each. NES to organize an event to launch the reports (within 6 months) – preferably co-hosted by MFEM.	MFEM, NES	Within 6 months
4	Future GEF-supported projects should place much greater emphasis on working with Cook Islands youth on R2R issues, both in and out of school. Do this through seeking partnerships with local NGOs involved in R2R issues and provide the necessary resources to enable those NGOs to not only continue with their ongoing programmes, but to strengthen them substantially.	UNDP	During planning for next GEF-supported project
5	UNDP and IP to ensure lessons identified from this project are incorporated in the re-design of the Project Identification Form (PIF) for the next GEF project. Some key lessons are: Don't over-complicate things. Simplify. Fewer plans, more direct action. Templates that may work elsewhere can effectively be used as guidance, but one size does not fit all, and a home-grown approach complemented by-- but not led by -- external expertise may work best.	UNDP RTA, IP for next GEF project	Before final submission of the PIF for GEF-7
6	UNDP MCO Samoa Senior Management to meet with UNDP RTA to discuss this TE and how to improve awareness by senior management regarding performance of GEF projects they are responsible for overseeing.	UNDP Senior Management, UNDP MCO Samoa, RTA	Within 1 month
7	Institute measures to enhance the functioning of the TAG (consider options such as payment for non-Government TAG members who actively contribute, as well as other measures).	MMCO	Within 3 months
8	Halt issuance of licenses for seabed minerals exploration until a marine spatial plan for the Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP), a key output of this project investment, is in place.	SBA	Immediately
9	Discuss whether maintaining the technical resource positions in MMR, HoA, and NES -- established and paid for with GEF support-- is important to sustaining project outcomes, and if so, how these positions will be maintained (or, in the case of HoA, re-established). Note: This recommendation does not refer to individuals but rather to positions.	MMR HoA NES	Before project end
10	Involve independent experts who are familiar with ongoing or recently completed relevant projects in the country in the review of planned projects at an early stage of their development (i.e., during the	UNDP GEF	During planning for next GEF project

	development of the PIF). This may help ensure lessons from prior projects are incorporated into the design of future ones.		
11	Future GEF-supported projects should collaborate much more with local NGOs as part of a long-term strategy to build CI capacity related to biodiversity conservation.	UNDP GEF	During planning for next GEF project
12	Strengthen the exit/sustainability strategy produced by the PM and CTA by making it more practical and more detailed. Ensure this is reviewed and discussed by the PSC prior to project closure.	PMU	Immediately
13	Compile (online) all technical documents produced with project support and keep these together in one place which is easily accessible to all (Government, Non-Governmental Organizations, Individuals). Institute a system for referencing documents produced with project support that makes them easy to locate and which acknowledges UNDP and gives full credit to the GEF.	PMU	Before project end
14	Strengthen financial capacity related to project management so that future projects do not encounter the same financial management issues this one did (consider options for more intensive mentoring and oversight by MFEM, establishing internships with MFEM, etc.).	MFEM	Before next GEF project begins

Other Recommendations

In addition to the above-described key recommendations, the following recommendations should be considered:

[208] **Design smaller and less complex projects.** The evidence from this project suggests that this project may be too large and too complex (not just one or the other) for the main IP. Smaller and less complex projects should be considered in future.

[209] **Use achievement benchmarks.** Use benchmarks to promote accountability and to help with project management including financial planning. Achievement benchmarks should be established (with specific time frames attached to these) and when these are not met, funds programmed for those activities should be reprogrammed towards those that are achieving expected results within planned time-frames.

[210] **Address the issue related to accounting constraints.** 1) Until such a time as professional, experienced accountants are available for recruitment as project finance officers, consideration should be given to housing the PMU Finance Officer at DCD and DCD should provide strong financial oversight to ensure proper financial reporting. 2) Ensure PMU Finance Officers have at least the basic qualification in accounting even if this means hiring international staff. 3) Consider including a “junior” finance officer in PMUs. Consult University of South Pacific (USP) about the possibility of offering university credit for USP students studying finance/accounting who would do a semester of practical study under the project finance officer. 4) Ensure all finance officers take and pass all relevant UNDP online financial courses.

[211] **Do not authorize project extensions simply because budgets are not fully disbursed.** Unless extraordinary circumstances exist, project extensions should not be authorized simply because a project did not implement what it committed to implement within the agreed time frame (as per the signed PRODOC). Unless extraordinary circumstances exist, projects should end on time and unused

funds should be returned to the GEF at project end. In places where severe climatic events regularly occur or where other conditions such as difficult travel conditions are known to exist that routinely affect the ability to get things done, these should be planned for realistically in the PRODOC and should not serve as justification for extending a project.

[212] **Ensure at project start that IPs are aware that if project extensions are ultimately required (and granted), any additional cost of project management associated with extensions will not be paid by the GEF.** This could serve as an added incentive to get things done on time and to be more realistic in the project design stage.

[213] **Reduce bureaucracy associated with recruitment and procurement.** This relates to both UNDP bureaucracy as well as Government bureaucracy. Although not specific to this project, this issue did significantly impact the ability of this project to implement activities.

[214] **Ensure timely requests and timely response.** Requests made by UNDP of PMUs should be made with sufficient time to allow for responses/corrections to be made prior to submission of final reports.

5.4 Lessons

[215] Lessons that might be learned from the project experience are included in the relevant section of the report in order to provide the overall context from which the lesson emerged and are also collated in Annex 17 for ease of reference.

6. Annexes

Annex 1. TOR for the Terminal Evaluation (International and National Consultants)

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR TERMINAL EVALUATION OF THE CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY AND ENHANCING ECOSYSTEM FUNCTION THROUGH A “RIDGE TO REEF” APPROACH IN THE COOK ISLANDS PROJECT (INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANT/TEAM LEADER)
<p>A. INTRODUCTION:</p> <p>In accordance with UNDP and GEF M&E policies and procedures, all full- and medium-sized UNDP-supported GEF-financed projects are required to undergo a Terminal Evaluation (TE) at the end of the project. This Terms of Reference (ToR) sets out the expectations for the TE of the full-sized project titled <i>Conserving biodiversity and Enhancing Ecosystem Function through a “Ridge to Reef” Approach in the Cook Islands</i> (PIMS 5168) implemented through the Cook Islands National Environment Service. The project started on the 6th July 2015 and is in its sixth year of implementation. The TE process must follow the guidance outlined in the document ‘Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects’.</p>
<p>B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION OR CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:</p> <p>The project was designed to enhance Cook Islands’ capacities to effectively manage its protected areas (PAs) and sustainably manage its productive landscapes at local scales while considering food security and livelihoods. This will include the operationalization of the Cook Island Marine Park (covering approximately 1.1 million km² of Cook Islands southern Exclusive Economic Zone) and the establishment and strengthening of various forms of protected and locally managed areas within the CIMP, including Protected Natural Areas, Community Conservation Areas, and Ra’ui Sites.</p> <p>In so doing, the project was to support the Cook Islands in maintaining traditional resource management and conservation systems and approaches, including a leading role for traditional and local leaders and the local communities that they represent in the declaration and management of protected areas, while also integrating these traditional systems into a formal legal and institutional system of protected areas.</p> <p>The project was to support the Government in tailoring policy, regulatory and institutional frameworks to suit the specific characteristics of the Cook Islands and of the new CIMP, recognizing that protection and sustainable use will need to be zoned and planned carefully, and that tenure over most land areas is vested in local communities through a traditional tenure system.</p> <p>Finally, the project was designed to engineer a paradigm shift in the management of marine and terrestrial PAs from a site centric approach to a holistic “ridge to reef” land and seascape approach, whereby activities in the immediate production areas adjacent to marine and terrestrial PAs were to be managed to reduce threats to biodiversity stemming from key production activities (tourism and agriculture). The project has 2 components concerned with (1) strengthening PAs management and (2) mainstreaming biodiversity across productions land and seascapes; and 7 outputs as follows:</p> <p>Output 1.1: Strengthened Legal / Regulatory and Policy Frameworks for Protected Areas Output 1.2: Expanded and strengthened management systems for Protected Areas</p>

Output 1.3: Strengthened institutional coordination and capacities at the national and local levels for the participatory management of Protected Areas

Output 1.4: Financial sustainability framework developed for system of Protected Areas

Output 2.1: Ridge to Reef approaches integrated into Land Use and Development Planning

Output 2.2: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into agriculture sector

Output 2.3: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into tourism sector

The total GEF trust funds for this project is US\$4,267,431 with in-kind co-financing of US\$14,950,000. The project document was signed in July 2015. The executing agency for this project is the National Environment Service and responsible parties are the Ministry of Marine Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, and Cook Islands Tourism Corporation. The project was granted an extension to the 6th January 2021.

Cook Islands in COVID-19

As of 5 August 2020, the Cook Islands does not have any confirmed cases of COVID-19. The country's health response to COVID-19 was initiated on 22 January 2020 and the National Health Emergency Taskforce (NHET) chaired by the Secretary of Health was activated on 27 January 2020. The health response included the opening of a coughs, colds and flu clinic on 3 February 2020 and re-organisation of health services to community settings, along with the establishment of an Isolation (COVID-19) ward at Rarotonga Hospital on 23 March 2020. The Cook Islands closed its international border to Australia, Tahiti and the US on 15 March 2020 and closed its international border to New Zealand (except for cargo) on 24 March 2020. The Cook Islands moved to Code Yellow-Alert stage and enacted the COVID-19 Act on 25 March 2020.

Due to the travel restrictions, the Team Leader will be home-based and will work closely with the National Team expert in engaging stakeholders via virtual consultations via telephone or online meetings (Zoom, Skype, etc.). Field work will be conducted by the national Team expert with guidance from the team leader/lead evaluator and findings shared with the Team Leader. Furthermore, all stakeholder engagements will be strongly supported by the PMU and the UNDP MCO in Samoa. Consideration should be taken for stakeholder availability, ability and willingness to be interviewed remotely and the constraints this may place on the Terminal Evaluation. These limitations must be reflected in the final Terminal Evaluation report. No stakeholders, consultants or UNDP staff should be put in harms way and safety is the key priority.

C. TE PURPOSE:

The TE report will assess the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. The TE report promotes accountability and transparency and assesses the extent of project accomplishments.

The TE will cover the full project and will be conducted according to the guidance, rules and procedures established by UNDP and GEF as reflected in the [‘Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects’](#).

D. DETAILED SCOPE OF THE TE:

The TE will assess project performance against expectations set out in the project's Logical Framework/Results Framework (see ToR Annex A). The TE will assess results according to the criteria outlined in the [‘Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects’](#).

The Findings section of the TE report will cover the topics listed below. A full outline of the TE report's content is provided in ToR Annex C.

The asterisk “(*)” indicates criteria for which a rating is required.

Findings

i. Project Design/Formulation

- National priorities and country driven-ness
- Theory of Change
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Social and Environmental Standards (Safeguards)
- Analysis of Results Framework: project logic and strategy, indicators
- Assumptions and Risks
- Lessons from other relevant projects (e.g. same focal area) incorporated into project design
- Planned stakeholder participation
- Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector
- Management arrangements

ii. Project Implementation

- Adaptive management (changes to the project design and project outputs during implementation)
- Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements
- Project Finance and Co-finance
- Monitoring & Evaluation: design at entry (*), implementation (*), and overall assessment of M&E (*)
- Implementing Agency (UNDP) (*) and Executing Agency (*), overall project oversight/implementation and execution (*)
- Risk Management, including Social and Environmental Standards (Safeguards)

iii. Project Results

- Assess the achievement of outcomes against indicators by reporting on the level of progress for each objective and outcome indicator at the time of the TE and noting final achievements
- Relevance (*), Effectiveness (*), Efficiency (*) and overall project outcome (*)
- Sustainability: financial (*), socio-political (*), institutional framework and governance (*), environmental (*), overall likelihood of sustainability (*). Note that the TE team is expected to provide comments/recommendations to the project exit strategy and sustainability plan draft.
- Country ownership
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Cross-cutting issues (poverty alleviation, improved governance, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster prevention and recovery, human rights, capacity development, South-South cooperation, knowledge management, volunteerism, etc., as relevant)
- GEF Additionality
- Catalytic Role / Replication Effect
- Progress to impact

Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- The TE team will include a summary of the main findings of the TE report. Findings should be presented as statements of fact that are based on analysis of the data.
- The section on conclusions will be written in light of the findings. Conclusions should be comprehensive and balanced statements that are well substantiated by evidence and logically connected to the TE findings. They should highlight the strengths, weaknesses and results of the project, respond to key evaluation questions and provide insights into the identification of and/or solutions to important problems or issues pertinent to project beneficiaries, UNDP and the GEF, including issues in relation to gender equality and women’s empowerment.
- Recommendations should provide concrete, practical, feasible, properly timed and targeted guidance directed to the intended users of the evaluation about what actions to take and decisions to make. The recommendations should be specifically supported by the evidence and linked to the findings and conclusions around key questions addressed by the evaluation. Ideally these recommendations should be linked to the project exit strategy and sustainability plan.
- The TE report should also include lessons that can be taken from the evaluation, including best practices in addressing issues relating to relevance, performance and success that can provide knowledge gained from the particular circumstance (programmatic and evaluation methods used, partnerships, financial leveraging, etc.) that are applicable to other GEF and UNDP interventions. When possible, the TE team should include examples of good practices in project design and implementation.
- It is important for the conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned of the TE report to incorporate gender equality and empowerment of women.

The TE report will include an Evaluation Ratings Table, as shown below:

ToR Table 2: Evaluation Ratings Table for Cook Islands R2R Project

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating
M&E design at entry	
M&E Plan Implementation	
Overall Quality of M&E	
Implementation & Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	
Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	
Effectiveness	
Efficiency	
Overall Project Outcome Rating	
Sustainability	Rating
Financial resources	
Socio-political/economic	
Institutional framework and governance	
Environmental	
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	

E. TIMEFRAME:

The total duration of the TE will be approximately 26 working days over a time period of 8 weeks starting on 4 September 2020. The tentative TE timeframe is as follows:

Timeframe	Activity
28 August 2020	Application closes
4 September 2020	Selection of TE team
7 September 2020	Preparation period for TE team (handover of documentation)
9 September 2020	Document review and preparation of TE Inception Report
11 September 2020	Finalization and Validation of TE Inception Report; latest start of TE field work
14 – 25 September 2020 (10 days)	TE field work: stakeholder meetings, interviews, field visits, etc.
24 September 2020	TE field work wrap-up meeting & presentation of initial findings; earliest end of TE field work
25 – 30 September 2020	Preparation of draft TE report
30 September 2020	Circulation of draft TE report for comments
20 October 2020	Incorporation of comments on draft TE report into Audit Trail & finalization of report
28 October 2020	Preparation and Issuance of Management Response
31 October 2020	Expected date of full TE completion

Options for site visits should be provided in the TE Inception Report.

F. TE DELIVERABLES:

#	Deliverable	Description	Timing	Responsibilities
1	Terminal Evaluation Inception Report	TE team clarifies objectives, methodology and timing of the TE; Options for site visits by the national consultant should be provided in the Inception Report.	Target date for signing contract & commencement of work is 4th September 2020. Inception report due no later than one week after contract signing 11 September 2020	Evaluation team submits to the Commissioning Unit and Project Management Unit
2	Presentation	Initial Findings (this includes a PPT that summarizes Initial findings and preliminary recommendations)	24 September 2020	Evaluation team presents to the Commissioning Unit and the Project Management Unit. Sent for information only to Commissioning Unit, RTA, Project Management Unit, GEF OFF
3	Draft Final Evaluation Report	Full report (using guidelines on report content in ToR Annex C) with annexes	Within 3 weeks of the TE field work. 30 September 2020	Sent for review to the Commissioning Unit, RTA, Project Management Unit, GEF OFF

4	Final Evaluation Report	Revised final report and TE Audit trail in which the TE details how all received comments have (and have not) been addressed in the final TE report	Within 2 weeks of receiving UNDP comments on draft: 31 October 2020	Sent to the Commissioning Unit (not RTA, Project Management Unit, GEF OFF?)
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*All final TE reports will be quality assessed by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). Details of the IEO's quality assessment of decentralized evaluations can be found in Section 6 of the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines.

G. TE ARRANGEMENT:

The principal responsibility for managing this Terminal Evaluation resides with the Commissioning Unit. The Commissioning Unit for the National Consultant of this Terminal Evaluation is the UNDP Multi-country office for Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau based in Samoa (UNDP Samoa MCO).

The UNDP Multi-country office for Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau based in Samoa and the Cook Islands R2R Project Management Unit (PMU) will be responsible for liaising with the Evaluation team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews, and arrange field visits for the National Consultant, etc.

The Commissioning Unit will contract the evaluators and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the country for the TE team. The Project Management Unit will be responsible for liaising with the TE team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews, and arrange field visits.

H. TE TEAM COMPOSITION:

A team of two independent evaluators will conduct the TE – One Team Leader (with experience and exposure to projects and evaluations in other regions) and One National Team Expert, usually from the country of the project.

The team leader will be responsible for;

- Completion of the inception report in coordination with the National Team Expert
- Conduct TE interviews with coordination with the National Team expert and PMU
- The overall design, writing and completion of the TE report inclusive of audit trail and including all comments from project partners and stakeholders
- Overall TE report quality assurance and adherence to the [‘Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-Financed Projects’](#).

The national team expert will;

- Work closely with the Team Leader and the PMU;
- Contribute to the inception report including a detailed plan for interview and project site visits
- Develop and confirm TE interview schedule in coordination with the PMU and the Team Leader
- Translate questionnaires if needed and share list of questions with interviewees in preparation for the TE interviews
- Facilitate virtual (and translate if needed) interviews for the TE and conduct interviews where virtual means are unavailable
- Conduct data collection for the TE

- Conduct field visits to verify impact of project interventions at project sites in coordination with the Team Leader and PMU
- Work with PMU to confirm co-financing for the project
Contribute to the TE report
- Conduct and confirm any follow up data/information requirements to complete the Terminal evaluation report including audit trail.

The evaluator(s) cannot have participated in the project preparation, formulation and/or implementation (including the writing of the project document), must not have conducted this project's Mid-Term Review and should not have a conflict of interest with the project's related activities.

The selection of Team Leader will be aimed at maximizing the overall "team" qualities in the following areas:

Education:

- A Master's degree in Environmental Management, Biodiversity and ecosystems management or other closely related field (20 points);

Experience:

- Minimum of 10 years of relevant professional experience in providing management or consultancy services to the multi focal area projects; in developing national and regional capacities and enabling conditions for global environmental protection and sustainable development (20 points);
- Five years' experience in project evaluations, results-based management, and/or evaluation methodologies (20 points);
- Technical knowledge in the targeted GEF focal areas: Biodiversity and International Waters (20 points);
- Project evaluation experience within the United Nations system will be considered an asset (5 points);
- Experience working in biodiversity conservation and protected areas elsewhere in the Pacific region (ideally Cook Islands) or SIDS (5 points)
- Fluency in English (oral and written) is a requirement, with excellent written and presentation skills (10 points)

I. EVALUATOR ETHICS:

The TE team will be held to the highest ethical standards and is required to sign a code of conduct upon acceptance of the assignment. This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation'. The evaluator must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes governing collection of data and reporting on data. The evaluator must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses without the express authorization of UNDP and partners.

J. DUTY STATION:

Home-based. It is expected that the consultant/team leader will conduct remote stakeholder interviews and site visit via virtual means (Zoom, skype etc.) in lieu of a mission in Cook Islands due to COVID19 travel restrictions

K. SCOPE OF BID PRICE & SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS:

DELIVERABLES	DUE DATE (%)	AMOUNT IN USD TO BE PAID AFTER CERTIFICATION BY UNDP OF SATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE OF DELIVERABLES
Upon approval and certification by the Commissioning Unit of the TE Inception Report	11 September 2020 (20%) (6 days after contract signing)	\$xxx
Upon approval and certification by the Commissioning Unit of the draft Terminal Evaluation report	30 September 2020 (40%)	\$xxx
Upon approval and certification by the Commissioning Unit and UNDP-GEF RTA of the final Terminal Evaluation report and completed Audit Trail	31 October 2020 (40%)	\$xxx
TOTAL	26 working days	\$xxx

Criteria for issuing the final payment of 40%:

L. APPLICATION PROCESS

Complete proposals must be submitted by **28 August 2020** electronically via email: procurement.ws@undp.org. Incomplete applications will not be considered and only candidates for whom there is further interest will be contacted. Proposals must include:

- [Letter of Confirmation of Interest and Availability](#) using template provided by UNDP;
- CV or [P11 Form](#) indicating all past experience from similar projects, as well as the contact details (email and telephone number) and at least three (3) professional references (most recent)
- Statement of capabilities addressing the evaluation criteria of why the you consider yourself the most suitable for the assignment,
- A brief methodology on how you will approach and conduct the work (2 pages maximum),
- Financial Proposal specifying the daily rate in US Dollars and other expenses, if any (Annex II)

Queries about the consultancy can be directed to the UNDP Procurement Unit procurement.ws@undp.org

M. Criteria for Selection of Best Offer

- Only those applications which are responsive and compliant will be evaluated. Incomplete applications will not be considered;
- Offers will be evaluated according to the Combined Scoring method – where the technical criteria (section H.) will be weighted at 70% and the financial offer will be weighted at 30%;
- Only the top 3 candidates that have achieved a minimum of 70 points (70% of 100 points) from the review of education, experience and language will be deemed technically compliant and considered for the financial evaluation;

- The financial proposal shall specify an all-inclusive lump sum fee. In order to assist the requesting unit in the comparison of financial proposals, the financial proposal must additionally include a breakdown of this daily fee (including all foreseeable expenses to carry out the assignment);
- Applicant receiving the Highest Combined Score and has accepted UNDP's General Terms and Conditions will be awarded the contract.

Annex 2. TE Mission Itinerary & Site Visit Notes by National Consultant

Date	From	To	Comments
10 February 2021	Rarotonga visit		Turama Pacific Tourism
12 February 2021	Rarotonga visit		Takitumu Conservation
16-17 February 2021	Rarotonga	Atiu	Flight to Atiu (16 Feb). Visit NES, Landowners/Traditional leaders, Atiu Villas, Birdman George. Return flight to Rarotonga (17 Feb)
24-26 February 2021	Rarotonga	Aitutaki	Flight to Aitutaki (24 Feb). Visit Offices of NES, MMR and MOA; Aronga Mana, Manuae Committee, tourism operator/eco toilets, Etu Moana, Aitutaki Lagoon Resort. Return to Rarotonga (26 Feb)

Annex 3. List of Stakeholders Consulted

Several calls were held with UNDP MCO Samoa. These are not included in the list below.

Name and Position	Institution/ Organization (acronym)	Gender (F/M)	Date Met (mo/day)	TE Team Members who met the stakeholder (initials)	Virtual or In Person (V or IP)
Hayley Weeks	PMU	F	1/25	VR, MH	V
Gabriel Jaramillo	UNDP RTA	M	2/1	VR, MH	V
David Sheppard	Consultant	M	2/3	VR	V
Keith Twyford	CTA	M	2/3	VR, MH	V
Anne Trevor	UNDP MCO Samoa	F	2/4	VR, MH	V
Taufao Taufao	"	M			
Hayley Weeks	PMU	F	2/4	VR, MH	V
Muraai Herman	PMU	M			
Debora Mataiao	PMU	F	2/5	VR	V
Robert Skews	Turama	M	2/10	MH	IP
Gabriel Jaramillo	UNDP RTA	M	2/10	VR	V
Inela Weeks	UNDP RTA	F			
Ioane Iosefo	UNDP MCO Samoa	M	2/11	VR	V
Ian Karika	TCA	M	2/12	MH	IP
Keith Twyford	CTA	M	2/11 2/16	VR VR	V
Kau Henry	NES, Atiu	M	2/16	MH	IP
Tiraa Turaro	Aronga Mana, Atiu	F	2/16	MH	IP
Lucy Mateariki	Aronga Mana, Atiu	F	2/16	MH	IP
Jackey Tanga	Atiu Villas, Atiu	F	2/16	MH	IP
George Mateariki	Bird Conservation	M	2/17	MH	IP
Mani Mate	DCD	F	2/17	VR	V
Tatiana Paulo	DCD	F		VR	
Maria Tuoro	MMCO	F	2/18	VR, MH	V, IP
Dan-Olaf Rasmussen	Former PMU	M	2/18	VR, MH	V, IP
Kelvin Passfield	TIS, NBSC, TAG, Project Design	M	2/19	VR, MH	V
Kate McKessar	TIS	F		VR, MH	
Temarama Anguna	MoA	F	2/19	VR, MH	V, IP
Sanjinita Sunish	MoA	F		VR, MH	
Kori Raumea	MMR	M	2/19	VR	V

Kirby Morejohn	MMR	M			
Lara Ainsley	MMR	F			
Sieni Tiraa	CIT	F	2/19	MH	IP
Joseph Brider	NHT, NBSC, TAG	M	2/22	VR, MH	V
Gerald McCormick	NHT	M			
Pam Maru	MMR	F	2/23	VR, MH	V, IP
Imogen Ingram	Koutu Nui	F	2/23	VR, MH	V, IP
Noeline Brown	Koutu Nui	F			
Teina Rongo	Consultants, Initial Marae Moana Report	M	2/24	VR	V
Jackie Rongo	"	F			
Puna Rakanui	House of Ariki	M	2/24	VR	V
Tiraa Arere	NES, Aitutaki	M	2/24	MH	IP
Hugh Henry	NES, Aitutaki	M			
Richard Story	MMR, Aitutaki	M	2/24	MH	IP
Pepe Raela	MOA, Aitutaki	M	2/24	MH	IP
Louisa Karika	Former Deputy Director, NES & Former Project Manager	F	2/25	VR	V
Daniela Ceccarelli	Consultant, Bioregions Report & SUMA report & 2 nd Marae Moana Report (rewrite)	F	2/25	VR	V
Jessica Flomen	Etu Moana, MTEC, Aitutaki	F	2/25	MH	IP
Paul Green	Lagoon Resort, MTEC, Aitutaki	M	2/25	MH	IP
Onu Hewitt	CIT, Aitutaki Eco-toilets	M	2/25	MH	IP
Manarangi Tutai Opore Ariki	Aronga Mana. Aitutaki	F	2/26	MH	IP
Janet Maki	Manuae Committee, Aitutaki	F	2/26	MH	IP

Tiraa Arere	NES, Aitutaki	M	2/26	MH	IP
Hugh Henry	NES, Aitutaki	M	2/26	MH	IP
Neil Davison	Dive Raro Rarotonga	M	3/1	MH	IP
Nga Puna	Director, NES	M	3/2	VR, MH	V, IP
Louisa Karika	As above		3/3	VR	V
Luke Brander	Consultant, Marine Ecosystems Services Valuation Report	M	3/4	VR	V
Maria Tuoro	Director, MMCO	F	3/10	VR	V

Annex 4. List of Documents Reviewed

The Terminal Evaluation Team (TET) reviewed all relevant sources of information that the team considered useful for this evidence-based review. A list of the key documents reviewed is included here.

Folder #	Item
PROJECT DOCUMENTS	
1	Project Identification Form (PIF)
2	Final UNDP-GEF Project Document (PRODOC) with all annexes
3	CEO Endorsement Request
4	UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP) and associated management plans (if any)
5	Project Inception Workshop Report (complete with all annexes)
PROJECT MONITORING DOCUMENTS	
6	The Project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan with associated budget
7	Mid-Term Review report & management response to MTR
8	All Project Implementation Reports (PIRs)
9	BTORs/mission reports and management memos, minutes or correspondence relevant to the effective delivery of the project
10	Minutes of all Project Board Meetings and Project Appraisal Committee meetings
11	Completed GEF Tracking Tools for all relevant GEF Focal Areas (at CEO Endorsement, midterm and terminal stages)
12	Completed UNDP Capacity Development Indicator Scorecards (baseline and most recent)
FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS	
13	All Combined Delivery Reports (CDRs)
14	Financial data including actual expenditures by project outcome and description of any budget revisions
15	Co-financing data provided
16	All Audit reports & Management Responses to audit recommendations
PROJECT OUTPUTS	
17	All technical deliverables/reports paid for with project funds along with the TOR for the consultancies to develop those reports
CONTRACTS, INFRASTRUCTURE, EQUIPMENT	

19	List of all infrastructure (including new construction as well as infrastructural repairs) paid for with project funds
20	List of all equipment (including vehicles, boats, computers, printers, cameras, etc.) purchased with project funds
	TORs
23	TORs for Project Manager, Finance/Administrative Officer, and CTA
24	TOR for the Project Board/Steering Committee and list of PB members
	WORKPLANS
25	All approved annual workplans
	RESULTS FRAMEWORK
26	The original RF and any amendments that have been made to it
	TRAININGS
27	Training agendas and participant lists (including gender breakdown summary for each training) and any impact-assessment that may have been conducted regarding trainings
	KNOWLEDGE SHARING MATERIALS
29	Communications materials produced with project support
30	Knowledge sharing platforms including the project website if one exists
	RELEVANT INITIATIVES & PARTNER AGREEMENTS
31	All partner agreements (Small Scale Fund Agreements, Partner Cooperation Agreements, UN-to-UN Agreements etc.)
	OTHER
33	Project Exit/Sustainability Strategy
34	Project Terminal Report (EoP report) prepared by PM and CTA
35	Existing Policies & Legislation relevant to Protected Areas (Marae Moana Policy 2016-2020, Marae Moana Act of 2017, draft National Environment Policy (2021)
36	Management plans for all PAs/Conservation Areas included in the project
37	UNDAF for the country
38	Protected Areas Classification System (PACS) Policy Discussion paper
39	Marae Moana Management Plan (not developed)
40	Island Management Plans (not developed)
41	Sustainable financing mechanisms report
42	Marae Moana Outlook report (first)
43	Marine Ecosystem Valuation report

Annex 5. Evaluation Question Matrix

Evaluative Criteria	Questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
<p>Relevance: How does the project relate to the main objectives of the UNCBD and to the GEF Biodiversity and International Waters focal areas, and to the environment and development priorities at the local, regional and national levels for biodiversity and international waters in the Cook Islands?</p>				
<p>Is the project relevant to the UNCBD & UNCCD objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the project support the objectives of the UNCBD and/or UNCCD? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNCBD & UNCCD priorities and areas of work incorporated in project design Extent to which the project is implemented in line with incremental cost argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents National policies and strategies to implement the UNCBD, other international conventions, or related to environment more generally UNCBD and other international convention web sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with project team, UNDP and other partners
<p>Is the project relevant to the GEF biodiversity & IW focal areas?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the project support the GEF biodiversity and/or land degradation focal areas and strategic priorities related to biodiversity conservation and land degradation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence of a clear relationship between the project objectives and GEF biodiversity and land degradation focal areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents GEF focal areas strategies and documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses GEF website Interviews with UNDP and project team
<p>Is the project relevant to the Cook Island's environment and sustainable development objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the project support the environment and sustainable development objectives of CIS? Is the project country-driven? What was the level of stakeholder participation in project design? What was the level of stakeholder ownership in implementation? Does the project adequately take into account the national realities, both in terms of institutional and policy framework in its design and its implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which the project supports national environmental objectives Degree of coherence between the project and national priorities, policies and strategies Appreciation from national stakeholders with respect to adequacy of project design and implementation to national realities and existing capacities Level of involvement of government officials and other partners in the project design process Coherence between needs expressed by national stakeholders and UNDP-GEF criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents National policies and strategies Key project partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with UNDP and project partners
<p>Is the project addressing the needs of target beneficiaries at the local and regional levels?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the project support the needs of relevant stakeholders? Has the implementation of the project been inclusive of all relevant stakeholders? Were local beneficiaries and stakeholders adequately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of the link between expected results from the project and the needs of relevant stakeholders Degree of involvement and inclusiveness of stakeholders in project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project partners and stakeholders Needs assessment studies Project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews with relevant stakeholders

	involved in project design and implementation?	design and implementation		
Is the project internally coherent in its design?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there logical linkages between expected results of the project (log frame) and the project design (in terms of project components, choice of partners, structure, delivery mechanism, scope, budget, use of resources etc)? Is the length of the project sufficient to achieve project outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of coherence between project expected results and project design internal logic Level of coherence between project design and project implementation approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program and project documents Key project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Key interviews
How is the project relevant with respect to other donor-supported activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the GEF funding support activities and objectives not addressed by other donors? How do GEF-funds help to fill gaps (or give additional stimulus) that are necessary but are not covered by other donors? Is there coordination and complementarity between donors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which program was coherent and complementary to other donor programming nationally and regionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents from other donor supported activities Other donor representatives Project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analyses Interviews with project partners and relevant stakeholders
Does the project provide relevant lessons and experiences for other similar projects in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the experience of the project provided relevant lessons for other future projects targeted at similar objectives? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis
Effectiveness: To what extent have the expected outcomes and objectives of the project been/be achieved?				
Has the project been effective in achieving the expected outcomes and objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the project been effective in achieving its expected outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See indicators in project document results framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project team and relevant stakeholders Data reported in project annual and quarterly reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents analysis Interviews with project team Interviews with relevant stakeholders
How is risk and risk mitigation being managed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well are risks, assumptions and impact drivers being managed? What was the quality of risk mitigation strategies developed? Were these sufficient? Are there clear strategies for risk mitigation related with long-term sustainability of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completeness of risk identification and assumptions during project planning and design Quality of existing information systems in place to identify emerging risks and other issues Quality of risk mitigations strategies developed and followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents UNDP, project team, and relevant stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
What lessons can be drawn regarding effectiveness for other similar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What lessons have been learned from the project regarding achievement of outcomes? What changes could have been made (if any) to the design of the project in order to improve the achievement of 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis

projects in the future?	the project's expected results?			
Efficiency: Was the project implemented efficiently, in-line with international and national norms and standards?				
Was project support provided in an efficient way?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use? Did the project Results framework and work plans and any changes made to them use as management tools during implementation? Were the accounting and financial systems in place adequate for project management and producing accurate and timely financial information? Were progress reports produced accurately, timely and responded to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes? Was project implementation as cost effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual)? Did the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happen as planned? Were financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources have been used more efficiently? Was procurement carried out in a manner making efficient use of project resources? How was results-based management used during project implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and quality of financial and progress reports Timeliness and adequacy of reporting provided Level of discrepancy between planned and utilized financial expenditures Planned vs. actual funds leveraged Cost in view of results achieved compared to costs of similar projects from other organizations Adequacy of project choices in view of existing context, infrastructure and cost Quality of results-based management reporting (progress reporting, monitoring and evaluation) Occurrence of change in project design/ implementation approach (i.e. restructuring) when needed to improve project efficiency Cost associated with delivery mechanism and management structure compare to alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP Project team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Key interviews
How efficient are partnership arrangements for the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent partnerships/linkages between institutions/ organizations were encouraged and supported? Which partnerships/linkages were facilitated? What was the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? Which methods were successful or not and why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific activities conducted to support the development of cooperative arrangements between partners, Examples of supported partnerships Evidence that particular partnerships/linkages will be sustained Types/quality of partnership cooperation methods utilized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations Project partners and relevant stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
Did the project efficiently utilize local capacity in implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was an appropriate balance struck between utilization of international expertise as well as local capacity? Did the project take into account local capacity in design and implementation of the project? Was there an effective collaboration between institutions responsible for implementing the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proportion of expertise utilized from international experts compared to national experts Number/quality of analyses done to assess local capacity potential and absorptive capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews

<p>What lessons can be drawn regarding efficiency for other similar projects in the future?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What lessons can be learnt from the project regarding efficiency? • How could the project have more efficiently carried out implementation (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements etc...)? • What changes could have been made (if any) to the project in order to improve its efficiency? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis
<p>Results: What are the current actual, and potential long-term, results of activities supported by the project?</p>				
<p>How is the project effective in achieving its long-term objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the project achieve its overall objective ? • Is the globally significant biodiversity of the target area likely to be conserved? • What barriers remain to achieving long-term objectives, or what necessary steps remain to be taken by stakeholders to achieve sustained impacts and Global Environmental Benefits? • Are there unanticipated results achieved or contributed to by the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in capacity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To pool/mobilize resources ○ For related policy making and strategic planning ○ For implementation of related laws and strategies through adequate institutional frameworks and their maintenance • Change in use and implementation of sustainable livelihoods • Change in the number and strength of barriers such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Knowledge about biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity resources, and economic incentives in these areas ○ Cross-institutional coordination and inter-sectoral dialogue ○ Knowledge of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use practices by end users ○ Coordination of policy and legal instruments incorporating biodiversity conservation and environmental strategies ○ environmental economic incentives for stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • Key stakeholders • Monitoring data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents analysis • Meetings with UNDP, project team and project partners • Interviews with project beneficiaries and other stakeholders
<p>How is the project effective in achieving the objectives of the UNCBD?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the impacts or likely impacts of the project? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ On the local environment; ○ On economic well-being; ○ On other socio-economic issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide specific examples of impacts at species, ecosystem or genetic levels, as relevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • UNCBD documents • Key Stakeholders • Monitoring data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis • Interviews with key stakeholders

Future directions for results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can the project build on its successes and learn from its weaknesses in order to enhance the potential for impact of ongoing and future initiatives? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis
Sustainability: Are the conditions in place for project-related benefits and results to be sustained?				
Are sustainability issues adequately integrated in project design?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were sustainability issues integrated into the design and implementation of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence / quality of sustainability strategy Evidence / quality of steps taken to ensure sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP and project personnel and project partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
Financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues? Are the recurrent costs after project completion sustainable? What are the main institutions/organizations in country that will take the project efforts forward after project end and what is the budget they have assigned to this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level and source of future financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities after project ends Evidence of commitments from international partners, governments or other stakeholders to financially support relevant sectors of activities after project end Level of recurrent costs after completion of project and funding sources for those recurrent costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP and project personnel and project partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
Institutional and governance sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were the results of efforts made during the project implementation period well assimilated by organizations and their internal systems and procedures? Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support? What degree is there of local ownership of initiatives and results? Were laws, policies and frameworks addressed through the project, in order to address sustainability of key initiatives and reforms? What is the level of political commitment to build on the results of the project? Are there policies or practices in place that create perverse incentives that would negatively affect long-term benefits? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which project activities and results have been taken over by local counterparts or institutions/organizations Level of financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities by in-country actors after project end Efforts to support the development of relevant laws and policies State of enforcement and law making capacity Evidences of commitment by government enactment of policies and laws and resource allocation to priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP and project personnel and project partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
Social-economic sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there adequate incentives to ensure sustained benefits achieved through the project? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations UNDP, project personnel and project partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews Documentation review

Environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there risks to the environmental benefits that were created or that are expected to occur? • Are there long-term environmental threats that have not been addressed by the project? • Have any new environmental threats emerged in the project's lifetime? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of potential threats such as infrastructure development • Assessment of unaddressed or emerging threats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiaries • Project documents and evaluations • Threat assessments • Government documents or other external published information • UNDP, project personnel and project partners • Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Documentation review
	Individual, institutional and systemic capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the capacity in place at the regional, national and local levels adequate to ensure sustainability of the results achieved to date? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements in place in those different management functions, at the appropriate levels (regional, national and local) in terms of adequate structures, strategies, systems, skills, incentives and interrelationships with other key actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • UNDP, project personnel and project partners • Beneficiaries • Capacity assessments available, if any
Replication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there potential to scale up or replicate project activities? • Did the project's Exit Strategy actively promote replication? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number/quality of replicated initiatives • Number/quality of replicated innovative initiatives • Scale of additional investment leveraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Exit Strategy • UNDP, project personnel and project partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews
Challenges to sustainability of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main challenges that may hinder sustainability of efforts? • Have any of these been addressed through project management? • What could be the possible measures to further contribute to the sustainability of efforts achieved with the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges in view of building blocks of sustainability as presented above • Recent changes which may present new challenges to the project • Education strategy and partnership with school, education institutions etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents and evaluations • Beneficiaries • UNDP, project personnel and project partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Interviews
Future directions for sustainability and catalytic role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results? • What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of the project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collected throughout evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis

Annex 6. Terminal Evaluation Rating Scales

Ratings for Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, Implementation/Oversight, Execution, Relevance	Sustainability ratings:
<p>6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS): exceeds expectations and/or no shortcomings</p> <p>5 = Satisfactory (S): meets expectations and/or no or minor shortcomings</p> <p>4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS): more or less meets expectations and/or some shortcomings</p> <p>3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): somewhat below expectations and/or significant shortcomings</p> <p>2 = Unsatisfactory (U): substantially below expectations and/or major shortcomings</p> <p>1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): severe shortcomings</p> <p>Unable to Assess (U/A): available information does not allow an assessment</p>	<p>4 = Likely (L): negligible risks to sustainability</p> <p>3 = Moderately Likely (ML): moderate risks to sustainability</p> <p>2 = Moderately Unlikely (MU): significant risks to sustainability</p> <p>1 = Unlikely (U): severe risks to sustainability</p> <p>Unable to Assess (U/A): Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability</p>

Annex 7. Signed UNEG Code of Conduct Forms (IC and NC)

7(A) Signed Code of Conduct for International Consultant

Independence entails the ability to evaluate without undue influence or pressure by any party (including the hiring unit) and providing evaluators with free access to information on the evaluation subject. Independence provides legitimacy to and ensures an objective perspective on evaluations. An independent evaluation reduces the potential for conflicts of interest which might arise with self-reported ratings by those involved in the management of the project being evaluated. Independence is one of ten general principles for evaluations (together with internationally agreed principles, goals and targets: utility, credibility, impartiality, ethics, transparency, human rights and gender equality, national evaluation capacities, and professionalism).

Evaluators/Consultants:

1. Must present information that is complete and fair in its assessment of strengths and weaknesses so that decisions or actions taken are well founded.
2. Must disclose the full set of evaluation findings along with information on their limitations and have this accessible to all affected by the evaluation with expressed legal rights to receive results.
3. Should protect the anonymity and confidentiality of individual informants. They should provide maximum notice, minimize demands on time, and respect people's right not to engage. Evaluators must respect people's right to provide information in confidence, and must ensure that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source. Evaluators are not expected to evaluate individuals, and must balance an evaluation of management functions with this general principle.
4. Sometimes uncover evidence of wrongdoing while conducting evaluations. Such cases must be reported discreetly to the appropriate investigative body. Evaluators should consult with other relevant oversight entities when there is any doubt about if and how issues should be reported.
5. Should be sensitive to beliefs, manners and customs and act with integrity and honesty in their relations with all stakeholders. In line with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, evaluators must be sensitive to and address issues of discrimination and gender equality. They should avoid offending the dignity and self-respect of those persons with whom they come in contact in the course of the evaluation. Knowing that evaluation might negatively affect the interests of some stakeholders, evaluators should conduct the evaluation and communicate its purpose and results in a way that clearly respects the stakeholders' dignity and self-worth.
6. Are responsible for their performance and their product(s). They are responsible for the clear, accurate and fair written and/or oral presentation of study imitations, findings and recommendations.
7. Should reflect sound accounting procedures and be prudent in using the resources of the evaluation.
8. Must ensure that independence of judgement is maintained, and that evaluation findings and recommendations are independently presented.
9. Must confirm that they have not been involved in designing, executing or advising on the project being evaluated and did not carry out the project's Mid-Term Review.

Evaluation Consultant Agreement Form

Agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System:

Name of Evaluator: A. Virginia Ravndal

Name of Consultancy Organization (where relevant): NA

I confirm that I have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation. Signed at Fort Collins, CO, USA on February 12, 2021

Signature: *A. Virginia Ravndal*

7(B) Signed Code of Conduct for National Consultant

Independence entails the ability to evaluate without undue influence or pressure by any party (including the hiring unit) and providing evaluators with free access to information on the evaluation subject. Independence provides legitimacy to and ensures an objective perspective on evaluations. An independent evaluation reduces the potential for conflicts of interest which might arise with self-reported ratings by those involved in the management of the project being evaluated. Independence is one of ten general principles for evaluations (together with internationally agreed principles, goals and targets: utility, credibility, impartiality, ethics, transparency, human rights and gender equality, national evaluation capacities, and professionalism).

Evaluators/Consultants:

1. Must present information that is complete and fair in its assessment of strengths and weaknesses so that decisions or actions taken are well founded.
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Evaluation Consultant Agreement Form

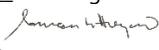
Agreement to abide by the Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System:

Name of Evaluator: Maureen Hilyard

Name of Consultancy Organization (where relevant): _____

I confirm that I have received and understood and will abide by the United Nations Code of Conduct for Evaluation.

Signed at Rarotonga, Cook Islands (Place) on 14/02/2021 (Date)

Signature: 

Annex 8. TE Assessment of Progress Towards Objective and Outcome Indicator Targets

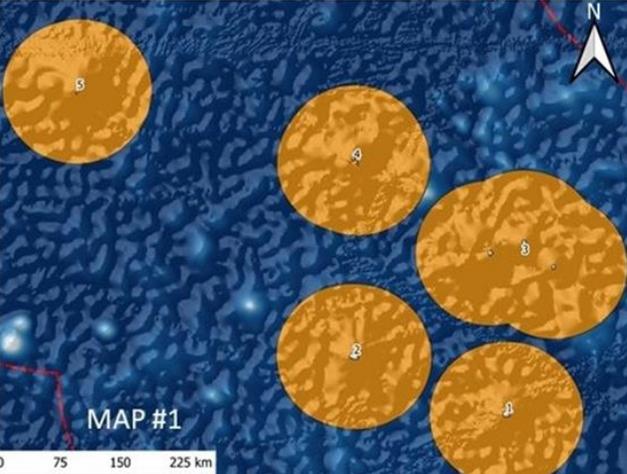
Progress towards Objective Level Indicator Targets

Objective-Level Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM and CTA)	Progress at TE (as per TET)
#1 Overall framework in place for conservation in the Southern Group of the Cook Islands	Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP) declared as protected, but with no legal designation or active management	1.1 million sq. km. of CIMP legally designated and actively managed, with dedicated staff implementing planning and coordination of the entire CIMP by end of year 2	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>This output was in place and the target achieved upon dedication of the Marae Moana Act 2017 and the establishment of the Marae Moana Coordination Office (MMCO) and staff. The Marae Moana (CIMP) covers all of the Cook Islands' waters of 1.9 million km², thus exceeding the project target of 1.1 million sq. km by a further 72%.</p> <p>The CIMP is being actively managed including through a range of government and R2R-supported policy and planning activities.</p> <p>The 2020 R2R Project Strategy identified there were opportunities for substantial investment into the institutional capacity and knowledge bank for Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park) (outlined in Twyford 2020a). Management activity included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for conduct of Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and Marae Moana Council meetings. • Support for Marae Moana communications. • Establishment of GIS user group and Spatial Information Management Policy, with dedicated division housed at Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI). • Inshore marine resource assessments of Southern Group islands: Palmerston, Atiu and Takutea, Mitiaro, Aitutaki and Manuae, Mangaia. • Research into and completion of a sustainable financing options report for Marae Moana. • Completion of inaugural draft Marae Moana Outlook Report. 	<p>Target Partially Achieved</p> <p>TE Note: This is a very poorly written target which combines several different things</p> <p>1.9 million sq. km. of has been legally designated as the Marae Moana, also known as, Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP). This exceeds the expected target size by .8 million sq. km. Very little of the CIMP is, however, being "actively managed". MMR continues with its regular activities (which were ongoing before this project) complemented by some (7) additional inshore marine assessments which were conducted with project support and some applied research activities (Pa'ua genetics) which will help determine management actions related to that and other species, but otherwise there is no enhanced management of the CIMP. There is now one full-time staff dedicated to coordination activities in the MMCO and the MMCO has been strengthened with project support but this has not yet translated to any differences at sea. CIMP has no staff dedicated to implementing a management plan for CIMP. A marine spatial planning policy paper was developed which may eventually lead to a marine spatial plan for the CIMP but neither a policy nor a plan are yet in place. Staffing for the CIMP has not yet been defined. No new staff (other than project-paid temporary staff in MMR) have been recruited to strengthen management of this huge area. The exact roles and responsibilities of each of the four Government</p>

Objective-Level Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM and CTA)	Progress at TE (as per TET)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent scientific review of the draft Outlook Report as required by the Marae Moana Act 2017. A subsequent process is underway to rewrite the draft report through a new scientific team (final report will be completed before EoP). Support for Island Marine Spatial Planning (IMSP) workshops held in the outer islands. These were led by House of Ariki, traditional leaders and island governments, including collaboration with other donor partners such as Nia Tero and Conservation International. Development of a marine spatial planning (MSP) policy paper to inform and guide development of Regulations and amendments to the Act. Development of special and unique marine areas (SUMA), bioregional assessment, and marine ecosystem services valuation (MESV) reports (key inputs for MSP). Collection, collation and analysis of substantial spatial data and information management packages as the basis for MSPs. Commencement of marine spatial plans (MSPs) for Cook Islands offshore waters and Suvarrow. <p>Beyond the R2R project, significant additional support will be required to Marae Moana Coordination Office (MMCO) and implementation agencies to fully realise legislative commitments, develop MSPs and begin effective operational management of Marae Moana.</p>	<p>entity/ies which are, according to the MM Act, responsible for managing the CIMP (i.e., NES, MMR, SBMA, MoT) is still unclear. GIS capabilities have been enhanced (in ICI) through a long-term project-paid GIS expert who has collected data and produced maps which will be essential for planning management of the CIMP (although some important information collected cannot be located). Substantial information has been collected which has contributed to identifying SUMA which is eventually to be used as one input in zoning the CIMP but no zones have yet been designated and zonation itself (in terms of what types of zones should exist) is still not agreed. Many important foundational reports produced with project support are either still in draft (MM Outlook Report, Bioregional Assessment Report, SUMA report) or were finalized some time ago but with no action yet taken on them by Government (SFM, MESV, MSP Policy paper, PACS discussion paper). A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) has been established to provide technical advice regarding CIMP management but it has been dysfunctional for part of the project and has not yet reviewed most of the significant products related to CIMP which were developed with project support. Without a marine spatial plan (and zoning) in place for the CIMP, seabed mineral exploration activities have begun in the CIMP.</p>
<p>#2a Area of inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group managed for biodiversity conservation</p>	<p>0 ha</p>	<p>6 islands totalling 15,110 ha.</p>	<p>Not achievable</p> <p>Significant progress can be reported: 5,942 ha (42.6%) of inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group is managed for terrestrial biodiversity conservation (Twyford 2021b) but area target will not be met in full.</p> <p>The target indicator is indicative of poor project design as it is beyond what can possibly be achieved. The target of 15,110 ha</p>	<p>Target Not Achieved</p> <p>The TE considers the EoP situation as described in the EoP report far from comprehensive reporting on what was achieved and what wasn't. We agree the target was not well described (the target of 15,110 ha exceeds the total island area of the 6 inhabited outer islands in the Southern Group) but this does not</p>

Objective-Level Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM and CTA)	Progress at TE (as per TET)																																								
<p>through traditional systems and island bylaws and supported through capacity development of traditional leaders and communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrestrial 			<p>exceeds the total island area of the six inhabited outer islands in the Southern Group (area is 13,947 ha); this target is unattainable.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Island</th> <th>Area (km²)</th> <th>Area (ha) note 1</th> <th>Area of "Protected Areas" (ha) note 2</th> <th>Area of "Protected Areas" (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Palmerston</td> <td>2.5</td> <td>254</td> <td>0</td> <td>0.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Aitutaki</td> <td>18.0</td> <td>1798</td> <td>71</td> <td>3.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mitiaro</td> <td>22.9</td> <td>2287</td> <td>373</td> <td>16.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Atiu</td> <td>28.5</td> <td>2846</td> <td>333</td> <td>11.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mauke</td> <td>19.2</td> <td>1920</td> <td>323</td> <td>16.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mangaia</td> <td>48.4</td> <td>4842</td> <td>4842</td> <td>100.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sth Group</td> <td>139.47</td> <td>13947</td> <td>5942</td> <td>42.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Note 1. Island areas as per MMCO GIS Officer calculation (Gander 2020) Note 2. Source: Cook Islands Protected and Managed Areas Database, PACS (Twyford 2021)</p>	Island	Area (km ²)	Area (ha) note 1	Area of "Protected Areas" (ha) note 2	Area of "Protected Areas" (%)	Palmerston	2.5	254	0	0.0	Aitutaki	18.0	1798	71	3.9	Mitiaro	22.9	2287	373	16.3	Atiu	28.5	2846	333	11.7	Mauke	19.2	1920	323	16.8	Mangaia	48.4	4842	4842	100.0	Sth Group	139.47	13947	5942	42.6	<p>prevent reporting on what was and what was not actually accomplished.</p> <p>No island bylaws were changed. With the exception of co-sponsoring (with Nia Tero and CI) three fora for traditional leaders and the provision of some signage to mark boundaries of Ra’ui areas, little was done to reinforce and strengthen traditional management systems. Very little was done to build capacity of traditional leaders and communities to conserve biodiversity even if some of these were involved in good, participatory terrestrial plant and animal surveys.</p>
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<p>#2b</p> <p>Area of inhabited Outer Islands in Southern Group managed for biodiversity conservation through traditional systems and island bylaws and supported through capacity development of traditional leaders and communities¹⁰</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine 	0 ha	6 islands totalling 16,174 ha.	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>Target exceeded by more than 800x.</p> <p>This has been achieved under the Marae Moana Act 2017 section 24 marine protected areas zone, which extend to 50nm around all islands. The legislated purpose of these MPAs is to protect marine habitats; all large-scale commercial fishing and mining activities are prohibited in these areas.</p>	<p>Target Partially Achieved</p> <p>Reporting in the EoP report over-simplifies the situation by suggesting that everything included in the 50 nm around all islands is managed for biodiversity conservation. Indeed, this area is now “marine protected areas zone” in which large-scale commercial fishing and mining activities are prohibited, but the indicator specifically refers to strengthening the management of those areas through traditional systems and island bylaws and supported through capacity development of traditional leaders and communities. Progress related to that has been minimal. Same comments as for above target.</p>																																								

¹⁰ Revised indicator as per approved project extension.

Objective-Level Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM and CTA)	Progress at TE (as per TET)																														
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#3 Tracking Tool IW1: Innovative solutions	Limited local capacity exists for overseeing	Water quality improved through small	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>Water quality has been improved through small demonstrations and monitoring mechanisms in place for project-related indicators.</p>	TE note on the target: Water quality is never improved simply by monitoring it. This is a poorly described target.																														

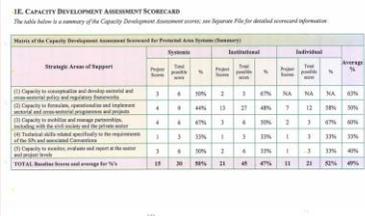
Objective-Level Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM and CTA)	Progress at TE (as per TET)
<p>implemented for reduced pollution, improved water use efficiency, sustainable fisheries with rights-based management, IWRM, water supply protection in SIDS, and aquifer and catchment protection</p>	<p>and monitoring of water quality in lagoons</p>	<p>demonstrations and monitoring mechanisms in place for project related indicators</p>	<p>Cumulative progress towards these IW indicators throughout the life of the project includes the following:</p> <p>Indicator: reduced pollution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erosion & Sediment Control Guidelines 2019 were developed by the R2R IW project which are planned to be brought under the revised Environment Act 2003, demonstrating sustainability and strengthened governance in this area. • ICI have replaced many culverts throughout Rarotonga to improve water drainage and reduce lagoon pollution caused by unmanaged storm water. <p>Ministry of Health conduct monthly testing of all public water stations to ensure they are safe for public use and consumption; dated test results are posted at each station. If polluted, the station is closed, and measures are implemented to rectify this. Once the water is again safe to consume, new signage is installed, and monthly tests resume.</p> <p>Indicator: improved water use efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mana Tiaki Eco Certification scheme under Cook Islands Tourism (CIT) was established by R2R and encourages tourism operators and providers to conserve water; water conservation is an assessment criteria under the scheme. • Island-wide notices and warnings are issued when water is running low in certain areas/intakes so the community can limit their usage. • To Tatou Vai (TTV) was set up in 2018 as a State Owned Enterprise (SOE) responsible for managing and maintaining the public water supply on Rarotonga. TTV will install water meters at all Rarotonga households and monitor and charge for water use. <p>Indicator: sustainable fisheries with rights-based management</p> <p>The Island Marine Spatial Planning (IMSP) process supported by the project, and led by MMCO and HoA, is conducting extensive</p>	<p>The target does not define what is meant by “small demonstrations”. Small demonstrations of what? Demonstrations on how to monitor water quality? This was already known and would have no effect on water quality anyway. It would have, however, been helpful to include activities for youth, both in and out of school, on monitoring water quality in lagoons and understanding what contributes to poor water quality, perhaps even visiting pollution point sources.</p> <p>Although the target was poorly described, the TE attempted to interpret what was intended in order to enable a fair assessment and then sought to obtain information on what we believe was intended by the target, ie., an improvement in water quality in lagoons and an ongoing water quality monitoring programme in lagoons. TE cannot properly assess until requested information on water quality trends in lagoons is provided by MMR</p> <p>The TE notes that although the target specifies that water quality monitoring mechanisms would be put in place, these were in fact already in place before this project began. This project provided minimal but important support related to the already ongoing lagoon water quality monitoring program basically by provided funding for the purchase of MMR laboratory equipment and consumables which was important for keeping the monthly lagoon water quality assessments going. Monthly lagoon water quality assessments are conducted by MMR with some field support from NES. This has been an ongoing activity before R2R and will continue after R2R with MMR core funds.</p>

Objective-Level Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM and CTA)	Progress at TE (as per TET)
			<p>workshops and consultations with traditional leaders and communities for each island. IMSPs aim to ensure community livelihoods and food are maintained with strong emphasis on fish conservation and local management.</p> <p>Indicator: IWRM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated water resource management is being achieved under TTV as a coordinated approach to water resource management. National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) goals and targets point to this as well with progress reported in annual indicator reports. <p>Indicator: water supply protection in SIDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As mentioned above, TTV has been established to be responsible for public water supply on Rarotonga. The PEARL project, funded by the Adaptation Fund and housed at Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI), has been handling water security in outer islands by providing infrastructure such as water tanks. The 2019 NSDP indicator report states “major improvements made with improved water storage capacity for the Pa Enuā through aid-funded water tank projects”. The Cook Islands Building Code 2019 developed by ICI includes elements of water protection and efficiency for both private and public buildings (parts D5/6/7 and NF5/6/7). CCCI have a project proposal with Green Climate Fund (GCF) to help implement these parts of the building code for enhanced water security. <p>Indicator: aquifer and catchment protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takuvaine water catchment was established under Environment Act regulations in 2006; the area has a management plan and local community-based committee of traditional landowners. All Rarotonga catchments are proposed to be protected or managed under TTV Authority Bill. 	<p>Compared against the baseline, local capacity for overseeing and monitoring of water quality in lagoons has been significantly improved since start of project but this is not attributable to this project but rather to other initiatives.</p> <p>Indicator: reduced pollution</p> <p>This project did not directly support any activities to reduce pollution.</p> <p>Indicator: improved water use efficiency</p> <p>The Mana Tiaki Eco Certification scheme established by R2R and encourages tourism operators and providers to conserve water; water conservation is an assessment criteria under the scheme. No monitoring was done to determine if water was actually used more efficiently thus it is not know if efficiency was improved or not.</p> <p>Indicator: sustainable fisheries with rights-based management</p> <p>Consultations and workshops with traditional leaders and communities organized by HoA and MMCO are an important early step in moving towards, perhaps, sustainable local rights-based fisheries but this has certainly not yet been achieved.</p> <p>Indicator: IWRM</p> <p>This project did not contribute to IWRM</p> <p>Indicator: water supply protection in SIDS</p> <p>This project did not contribute to water supply protection.</p>

Objective-Level Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM and CTA)	Progress at TE (as per TET)
			<p>Overview</p> <p>Compared against the baseline, local capacity for overseeing and monitoring of water quality in lagoons has been significantly increased since start of project.</p> <p>Evidence for this includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monthly lagoon water quality assessments (NES & MMR) • MMR laboratory improvements supported by R2R • monthly water quality newsletters distributed by MMR • improvements to Ministry of Health (MOH) water quality assessments have been made based on support from the PEARL project (Adaptation Fund) • establishment of TTV, including ongoing monitoring and management activities. 	<p>Indicator: aquifer and catchment protection</p> <p>This project did not contribute to aquifer and catchment protection.</p> <p>Overview</p> <p>Most of what was presented in the EoP report related to these indicators is helpful background information but very little of it has to do with this this project. Monitoring of water quality in lagoons was already ongoing before this project began, the techniques for doing so were adequate and have not been altered, and the program has not been expanded to additional lagoons. The project's contribution was basically to provide funds for some equipment and supplies to keep the ongoing water quality programme operating. This was helpful but the contribution of this project should not be over-stated.</p>

Progress Towards Component 1 Indicator Targets

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
I#4 Improved management effectiveness of Cook Islands Marine Park, as measured by GEF BD 1 Tracking Tool (METT)	30	METT score > 60	METT score of 61 at end of project	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>Final METT assessment was undertaken in January 2021 and score of 61 was confirmed (Twyford & Weeks 2021), thereby exceeding the target.</p> <p>The substantial strategic and targeted interventions made by R2R in specific areas since the MTR (2018) and CNAR</p>	<p>Target Partially Achieved</p> <p>See TE notes on METTs completed at TE (Annex ----)</p> <p><i>Lesson: Caution should be taken in those cases where indicators are assessed only by METT scores. METT score differences can sometimes be attributed to different people filling in the METT. METTs become much more useful as a tool to assess trends in how effective PAs are being</i></p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				(2019) (described against KPI #1; summarised by Twyford 2020a), along with complementary government and NGO activities, have undoubtedly contributed to this positive result.	managed when complemented by comprehensive threats assessments done at project start and end.
<p>#5a National agencies responsible for PA management are effectively delivering PA management functions (as measured by the capacity development indicator score for protected area system):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic 	50%	70%	<p>Assessed in CNAR: 42%</p> <p>Not assessed at EoP</p>	<p>Not achievable.</p> <p>Twyford (2019a) assessed and described the various issues and deficiencies with this KPI. Extract from this report follows:</p> <p>As part of baseline design, UNDP carried out an assessment of capacity at three levels – systemic, institutional, individual – using the capacity development assessment scorecard (UNDP 2015). Results were aggregated and summarised in the project design document and are shown below.</p>  <p>Care is needed in use of this data for various reasons. Firstly, the capacity result categories (listed under column headed ‘Strategic Areas of Support’) do not correspond to the categories used in the CDS (refer template at Annex 3); this suggests that the baseline assessment was undertaken using a different scorecard tool.</p>	<p>Target Not Assessed</p> <p>TE agrees with EoP assessment. The TE notes that the actual baseline assessment of capacity was never seen by either the PMU or the CTA as UNDP could not locate it. Only the summary was included in the PRODOC.</p> <p>Lesson: Capacity assessments should not be done primarily for the purpose of monitoring to determine if targets in RFs are met but rather to identify what capacity the project should focus on building to enable it to reach the project objective.</p> <p>Lesson: Capacity scores should never be aggregated as this renders them meaningless.</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				<p>Furthermore, aggregation of results (and non-availability of the original file) means that detailed analysis and longitudinal comparison of trends over time is fraught with methodological problems - risks exist that we are not comparing “apples with apples”. Finally CDS assessment was not undertaken at MTR.</p> <p>For these reasons, lack of data means it is not possible to assess quantitative changes in capacity over time.</p> <p>However CDS were completed as part of the CNAR. These results show that at system level, total capacity score was 42% of maximum possible. Highest rated was result area #3 (strategy, policy and legislation development) with 56%; lowest rated was areas #1, #4 and #5 with 33% each.</p>	
<p>#5b</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional 	47%	By end of project: 70% Baseline	Assessed in CNAR: average of 46% Not assessed at EoP	<p>Not achievable.</p> <p>At organisational level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MMCO self-assessed at 24% (lowest of all agencies) and CITC at 60% (highest) NES self-assessed at 51% and was peer assessed at 38% <p>Across all organisations average score was 46% (range 24 – 51%); area #1 (engagement) was highest rated at 57%; lowest rated was area #5 (monitor and evaluate) at 36%.</p>	<p>Target Not Achieved</p> <p>No assessment of capacity was done at end of project, nevertheless according to the CNAR (conducted in late 2019), a score of 70% or better was not achieved by any of the institutions assessed.</p> <p>Same lesson as above: Aggregating scores renders these meaningless. Individual scores for each institution should be presented.</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
#5c • Individual	52%	By end of project: 70% Baseline	Not assessed in CNAR Not assessed at EoP	Not achievable	Target Not Assessed TE Note regarding EoP assessment of indicator: Simply because something is not measured does not mean it is not achievable.
#6 Updated and consolidated legal framework for management of the Cook Islands Marine Park (CIMP) and all other protected areas in the country	Existing legislation for PAs is out-dated and incomplete: CIMP and Ra’ui systems have no legal standing; detailed regulations are not in place	Review of legislative framework for protected areas and development of a Protected and Managed Areas Policy, national protected areas classification system developed through policy ¹¹ (NA	Target partially achieved. Key outputs: <i>Marae Moana Act 2017</i> developed and approved by Parliament. The Act provides a consolidated legal framework for management of the Marae Moana (Cook Islands Marine Park - CIMP). Passage of the legislation was undertaken by the Cook Islands Government and was not directly attributable to the R2R Project. <i>National Environment Policy (NEP)</i> is being developed as an initiative of the National Environment Service (NES). R2R has provided extensive inputs and technical advice to this process. <i>Protected Areas Management Policy (PAMP)</i> –	Target Partially Achieved This Target was revised during the project extension period. The original target as presented in the PRODOC was, “Protected and Managed Areas Act drafted and enacted by end of year 2; detailed regulations for resource restrictions and PA management enacted by end of project.” According to Government of Cook Islands policy, before legislation can be drafted, a policy must be in place. A Protected and Managed Areas Policy which was to be developed with project support, was not developed ¹² . A discussion paper on such a policy was as far as the project got. Even that discussion paper has not yet been officially reviewed by Government. The TE found it odd that even though the consultancy to develop the policy paper included a literature review, there was no reference to the existing Marae Moana

¹¹ Revised indicator as per project extension request to UNDP.

¹² The EoP report refers to a “Protected Areas Management Policy” instead of a “Protected and Managed Areas” – not a minor distinction as the managed areas refer to traditional sites that traditional leaders have opposed classifying as “protected areas”.

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				<p>Stage 1 of project completed and includes literature review (Sheppard 2020a) and PAMP discussion paper (Sheppard 2020b). Stage 2 PAMP was planned prior to EoP however has been cancelled because of lack of funds.</p> <p>National protected areas classification system policy paper (PACS) prepared (Twyford 2021b); this is an important resource for future development of PAMP by the government.</p> <p>Marae Moana (CIMP) marine spatial planning</p> <p>MSP policy paper developed (Twyford 2021a). This policy paper assesses the Act and aims to identify implications, issues and constraints that the legislation may pose to the effective development of MSPs. The paper provides the policy basis for technical and policy advice by the Marae Moana Technical Advisory Group, decision making by the Marae Moana Council, and development of MSP Regulations and changes to the Act.</p>	<p>Policy (2016-2020) and the TE interview with the consultant confirmed that he was not aware of its existence.</p> <p><i>A National protected areas classification system policy paper was prepared in 2021 (close to project end) with project support but has not yet reviewed by Government.</i></p> <p>Zoning in the existing Marae Moana Act of 2017 (which this project had nothing to do with developing) is confusing, and the MSP policy paper developed with project support tries to sort that out, but no action including official review has yet been taken on that recently submitted (2021) paper, and according to TE interviews with stakeholders who have seen it, there is not agreement on its contents and it will require a great deal of discussion.</p> <p>No decision has been taken regarding what legislation to strengthen, and even after several policy papers were developed with project support, there is still confusion as to the best way to proceed, with some stakeholders focused on developing new legislation and others focused on strengthening existing legislation.</p> <p>Ra'ui still have no legal standing and there is still no agreement as to whether they should have.</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
					<p>No new "detailed regulations" have been drafted and, thus, naturally are not in place.</p> <p>The final draft of the NEP (which was not an expected output of this project but which the EoP indicates the Project provided extensive inputs into) does not contribute significantly to "clarifying management of the CIMP and all other PAs in the country".</p> <p>Although not relevant to this indicator, as mention has been made in the EoP report to the MM Act 2017 and to the extension of the CIMP, the TE reiterates that this project did not contribute to the design of the Marae Moana Act of 2017, nor was it responsible for the enlargement of the CIMP.</p>
#7 Consolidated management authority for protected areas in the Cook Islands	Institutional authority for protected areas is spread among various agencies	Legislative review and policy identifies appropriate mechanisms for coordination and management of protected areas by end of project ¹³	NA	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>Stage 1 PAMP Discussion Paper completed (Sheppard 2020b).</p> <p>Stage 2 PAMP was planned prior to EoP however has been cancelled because of lack of funds.</p> <p>Institutional authority for protected areas is still spread among various agencies.</p>	<p>Target Not Achieved</p> <p>This Target was changed during the project extension period from the original in the PRODOC which was, "Marae Moana Office undertaking coordinated management of protected areas by end of project". Although the TE agrees that the Target needed to be changed, we believe it would have been more legitimate for the change to indicate "management authority for marine and terrestrial PAs, CCAs and Ra'ui agreed and in place" (even if not consolidated in a single entity), rather than in essence lowering the bar to indicate that these do not have to be in</p>

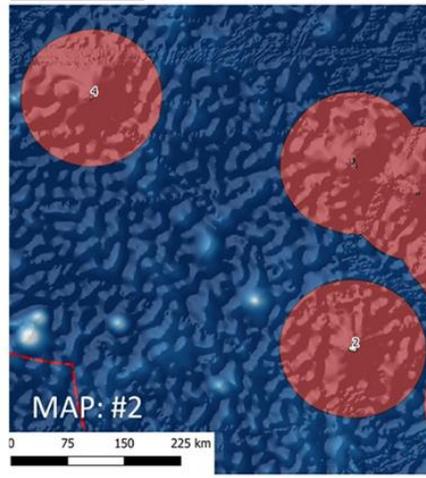
¹³ Ibid

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
					<p>place and indeed don't even have to be agreed but simply "identified".</p> <p>Institutional responsibilities have not changed and there is no agreement regarding how, if at all, these should be changed. The project has prepared several relevant policy discussion papers including the PAMP discussion paper (2020) and the MSP Policy paper but these have not yet been officially reviewed by Government.</p> <p>Institutional responsibilities regarding marine and terrestrial PAs are still not sorted out and MMR, a key stakeholder, believes instead of clarifying institutional responsibilities the Project has further "muddied the waters".</p>
<p>#8 Management of protected area sites on islands in the Southern Group</p>	<p>One existing protected area site (Takitumu Conservation Area) is actively managed</p>	<p>Management plans for at least 15 protected area sites under implementation by end of project</p>	<p>Management plans for four sites</p>	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>Management plans for at least 15 protected area sites under implementation by end of project will not be achieved by end of project. Currently, four management plans have been completed and are being implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takitumu Conservation Area Management Plan (Robertson et al. 2020). • Catchment management and restoration plan for Rarotonga Cloud Forests (Wildlands Consultants 2015, 2016) (prepared under the UNDP GEF Integrated Island Biology Project). 	<p>Target Partially Achieved (but mostly not)</p> <p>Table 8 in the PRODOC lists the proposed protected and managed areas which the Project would focus on. Twenty-four sites on 9 islands are identified (with others to be identified during the project). Of these 24 sites, management plans have been developed for one (Takitumu Conservation Area). Two others (Palmerston Island Natural Resource Management Plan and Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan) are being drafted (draft of only one of these – Palmerston Island -- available) but are not yet completed. It seems doubtful that the Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan (ALMP) will be completed before project closure. Extensive delays have resulted for several reasons the latest being that one person in</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palmerston Island Natural Resource Management Plan is under development and will be completed before project closure (TIS 2021). • Assessment report with management recommendations into Palmerston Atoll coconut crab completed (Kora & Munro 2020). <p>The Aitutaki Lagoon Management Plan (ALMP) is being developed; stakeholder consultations are underway.</p> <p>Extensive delays throughout the project at various levels have prevented this target from being achieved. When assessed in mid-2019, there had been no discernible progress against this indicator. Accordingly, the 2019 Project Strategy (in Twyford 2019b) acknowledged this and the KPI was assessed as being '<i>Category 4: Not able to be completed</i>'. This rating was because the prospects of meeting targets and completing outputs were very poor or nil.</p> <p>A consultant can develop a management plan quickly and cheaply. However, such action results in damage, to relationships and the prospects of better management and resource protection. Done well, management plans are time consuming and costly to develop, requiring extensive community and other stakeholder consultation. These inputs and complexities are even more significant when dealing with privately and/or</p>	<p>MMR, the Secretary, is the person developing the plan and she has travelled extensively during the period. There have been delays of all sorts, many unexplained. It is not mostly because developing management plans takes time (although it certainly does) but rather that the time has not been taken to do this work due to other pressing priorities by MMR staff. The TE questions why the full-time MMR Officer paid by the GEF over the project period was not assigned greater responsibility for undertaking this task.</p> <p>No progress in developing management plans was made for most of the areas identified (Te Manga Te Kou Cloud Forest and Takitumu Reserves on Rarotonga, 6 Ra'ui sites on Rarotonga; 3 terrestrial CCAs (Motu Tavake, Motu Koravea, and Motu Kitiu), 3 marine CCAs</p> <p>The TE notes that the target (Fisheries Protection Zones), and 4 Ra'ui sites, the Manuae Wildlife Sanctuary and Manuae Marine 'Sanctuary on Aitutaki; Moko'ero Nui Leeward Forest Reserve, Takurea Wildlife and Marine Sanctuaries on Atiu; and Te Roto Nui CCA on Mitiaro speaks to implementation of management plans. Like the target, the baseline is in regards to PAS that are being actively managed, not which simply has a management plan. Despite this, given that the first step was to develop management plans before these could be implemented, and given that the progress has been slow in even this regard, the focus of reported progress is on development of</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				<p>community owned lands as is the case with the majority of the Cook Islands.</p> <p>Apart from work already underway (TCA, Palmerston, Aitutaki), a strategic decision was made to not place any more project resources into development of management plans. The project strategy highlighted that efforts and project resources should be placed on targets more realistically achievable by end of project.</p> <p>Field assessment reports for Mokoero (on Atiu) and Takutea are completed (Brider 2020), but management plans for these are not expected within the remaining project life due to inter-island travel restrictions (from Covid-19) preventing island community consultations.</p> <p>Management plans for sites scheduled as protected areas under the Aitutaki Environment Act Regulations are planned once these regulations come into place; this will be undertaken by NES as part of the R2R exit and sustainability strategy.</p>	<p>management plans instead of on their implementation. Few of the sites are being actively managed.</p> <p>The “Overview of Project Consultants” in the PRODOC (which was also reviewed during the project inception workshop) gives an idea of the emphasis placed on the activities associated with this indicator, “Working for the relevant management authorities (private landowners and trusts), the consultant(s) will take lead responsibility for producing management plans for five Protected Natural Areas”. This was budgeted at US\$100,000. “Working for the relevant management authorities (private landowners and trusts), the consultant(s) will take lead responsibility for producing management plans for approximately 15-20 Locally Managed Productive Areas”, budgeted at US\$54,000.</p>
#9a % Area of Southern Group islands managed as Protected Areas (protected natural areas, community	2.8%	6.7%	30.1%	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>Completed and target exceeded.</p> <p>Total area of “protected areas” (protected natural areas, community conservation areas, ra’ui sites) on Southern Group islands is at least 6,471 ha (area of two ra’ui on Palmerston is not known); this</p>	<p>Target Not Assessed</p> <p>The TE questions whether the baseline was accurate. There haven’t been new terrestrial PAs designated since project start. How could the area go from less than 3% to 30%?</p>

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conservation areas, ra'ui sites): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terrestrial 				represents 30% of the total island area and exceeds the target by over 4x. <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Island</th> <th>Area (km²)</th> <th>Area (ha) note 1</th> <th>"P Ar</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Penrhyn</td><td>10.0</td><td>997</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Rakahanga</td><td>4.0</td><td>396</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Manihiki</td><td>5.1</td><td>513</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Pukapuka</td><td>3.9</td><td>394</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Nassau</td><td>1.2</td><td>120</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Suvarrow</td><td>1.1</td><td>114</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Nth Group</td><td>25.34</td><td>2534</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Palmerston</td><td>2.5</td><td>254</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Aitutaki</td><td>18.0</td><td>1798</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Manuae</td><td>6.9</td><td>689</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Takutea</td><td>1.1</td><td>113</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Mitiaro</td><td>22.9</td><td>2287</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Atiu</td><td>28.5</td><td>2846</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Mauke</td><td>19.2</td><td>1920</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Rarotonga</td><td>67.7</td><td>6772</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Mangaia</td><td>48.4</td><td>4842</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Sth Group</td><td>215.21</td><td>21521</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Total</td><td>240.55</td><td>24055</td><td></td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Note 1. Island areas as per MMCO GIS Officer ca Note 2. Source: Cook Islands Protected and Mana PACS (Twyford 2021)</p>	Island	Area (km ²)	Area (ha) note 1	"P Ar	Penrhyn	10.0	997		Rakahanga	4.0	396		Manihiki	5.1	513		Pukapuka	3.9	394		Nassau	1.2	120		Suvarrow	1.1	114		Nth Group	25.34	2534		Palmerston	2.5	254		Aitutaki	18.0	1798		Manuae	6.9	689		Takutea	1.1	113		Mitiaro	22.9	2287		Atiu	28.5	2846		Mauke	19.2	1920		Rarotonga	67.7	6772		Mangaia	48.4	4842		Sth Group	215.21	21521		Total	240.55	24055		
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#9b % Area of Southern Group islands managed as Protected Areas (protected natural areas, community conservation areas, ra'ui sites): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marine (to the outer reef) 	9.7%	12.3%	15.9%	Target achieved. Completed and target exceeded At EoP, 174,965 km ² is managed as a marine protected area in the Southern Group; this represents 15.9% of the total area of the Marae Moana in Southern Group. This has been achieved under Marae Moana Act 2017 section 24 marine protected areas, which extend to 50nm around all islands; all large-scale	Target Achieved (but not attributable to this Project) Marae Moana Act 2017 extends marine protected areas to 50nm around all islands.																																																																												

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#10a Improved management effectiveness of priority conservation zones, as measured	64	METT score >70	65	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>EoP METT score for TCA was assessed as 65: small change since MTR and baseline when scored as 64 points (Twyford & Weeks 2021).</p>	Target Partially Achieved																														

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by the GEF BD 1 Tracking Tool (METT): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takitumu Conservation Area (Rarotonga) 				Lack of appreciable change is attributable to scoring at MTR and inception being unrealistic and in error. For instance, scoring of 3/3 for Q7 and 1/1 for each of Q7a-7c regarding a management plan being in place. Clearly, this is incorrect – score should have been 0 as no plan was in place at that time.	
#10b <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cloud Forest Nature Reserve (Rarotonga) 	26	METT score >50	13	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>It is important to recognise that this area is not designated in any way; establishment of a Cloud Forests protected area was an aspirational aim from the R2R PRODOC however unfortunately R2R did not put any resources or apparent effort into this initiative.</p> <p>No progress has been made towards the Cloud Forest as this is much more complex than expressed in the project design, with traditional land tenure, uninvestigated land, multiple land-owning families, traditional leaders, etc. Given this was not initiated at the start and early years of the project, the decision was made in mid-2019 (through the Project Strategy) to defer any activity.</p> <p>Final METT score of 13 is a more realistic view of the status of management effectiveness than the baseline assessment (score 26).</p> <p>Establishment of this protected area will remain a goal for NES.</p>	<p>Target Not Achieved</p> <p>Although a Catchment management and restoration plan for Rarotonga Cloud Forests (Wildlands Consultants 2015, 2016) was prepared under another UNDP GEF project (Integrated Island Biology Project), and despite this cloud forest being of high global significance, no progress was made on further developing or implementing aspects of the plan already developed. TE interviews indicated that landownership in that area is simply too complex and nobody knew where to begin. It was not given priority by the PMU and the PSC was not effective in ensuring something was done.</p>
#10c <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manuae Wildlife Sanctuary / 	12	METT score >40	25	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>It is important to recognise that this area is not designated in any way; establishment</p>	<p>Target Not Achieved</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
Marine Reserve (Manuae)				<p>of a reserve/sanctuary on Manuae was an aspirational aim from the R2R PRODOC however unfortunately R2R did not put any resources or apparent effort into this initiative.</p> <p>On-site management is progressing with Manuae rangers built into the 2021 organisational structure for NES demonstrating commitment, legacy and sustainability beyond the project. The legal status of the landowners committee is being updated. Once this is completed, further management can be progressed such as rat eradication as part of native bird conservation programs. The Aitutaki Island Council (including Manuae) is also progressing with updated regulations under the Environment Act which will afford greater legal protection to Manuae than at present.</p>	The project did not undertake any activities for Manuae.
#10d • Moko Ero Nui Leeward Forest Reserve (Atiu)	26	METT score >50	30	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>There has been limited R2R support provided to the establishment of Mokoero and its management. Funding was provided for a biodiversity assessment and report (Bridger 2020). Establishment of the reserve was facilitated by the NHT in conjunction with local landholders.</p>	<p>Target Partially Achieved??</p> <p>The TET would have given more points for several low or 0 scoring categories, such as for human impact in a non-covid situation; positive education programs that Birdman George is providing for Guides and Boys Brigade groups earning environmental badges; more acknowledgement of the risk to the reserve of already introduced invasive plants into the area; Impending visitors also increase the risk of litter and airborne pollutants of danger to wildlife and plants on the reserve; There was a 0 for not establishing a schedule to update their management plan, but is there one</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
					for Moko'ero.? The tracking tool did not include the community involvement in assisting with the data collection with NES; or their contribution of multiple families to the creation of the reserve and getting wider community buy in. All these considerations add considerably to what would have been at least 50 points and an ACHIEVED status for the sustainability of the terrestrial reserve
#10e • Takutea Wildlife Sanctuary / Marine Reserve (Takutea)	29	METT score >50	37	Target partially achieved. There has been limited R2R support provided to the ongoing management of Takutea. Funding was provided for terrestrial and marine biodiversity assessments (Brider 2020; Kora et al. 2019).	Target Not Assessed The TE has no valid basis on which to verify the METT score given as no site visit was made to the Takutea Wildlife Sanctuary/Marine Reserve.
#11 Lagoon ecosystems are managed in a coordinated manner and with clear ecological conservation objective	Lagoons in the Cook Islands are not actively managed for conservation	Aitutaki Lagoon Master Plan in place, with conservation zoning, goals and targets	NA	Target partially achieved. There was no real effort made to action this until 2020 by which time it was too late for an effective planning process to be undertaken. An international consultant has been contracted by MMR to undertake multi-stakeholder consultations on Aitutaki and progress the lagoon management plan. Covid-19 has significantly delayed progress of this activity with ongoing restrictions in international and domestic travel. MMR staff along with representatives of other agencies are needing to lead the consultations, which creates increased delays.	Target Not Achieved No Aitutaki Lagoon Master plan has yet been developed and it is doubtful that one will be before project end. No draft of a plan was available to the TE or to the PMU.
#12a Funds available for management of Protected Areas, as	US\$23,800	US\$523,800	NA	Target partially achieved. Precise figures are not available because government systems are not adequate to capture all NGO funding. External funding from development partners, NGO's and	Target Not Assessed This target is not possible to assess with the information available.

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
<p>reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-governmental financing mechanisms 				community groups is still in existence (eg. ADB, Seacology, Nia Tero, Conservation International) however is expected to be less than the target of US\$523K.	
<p>#12b</p> <p>Funds available for management of Protected Areas, as reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government budget allocations 	US\$63,750	US\$148,750	US\$6,435,838 NZ\$9,034,214	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>The low baseline figure of US\$63K needs to be understood in the context that the Marae Moana (CIMP) had not been established at that time (2015), hence funding for management of 'Protected Areas' was very low and limited to island (terrestrial) protected areas.</p> <p>Establishment of the CIMP in 2017 meant that government budget allocations for agencies such as MMR, MoT and SBMA – all of whom operated within the CIMP and contributed to its management and implementation – were included in the calculations of actual EoP performance.</p> <p>The Marae Moana Sustainable Financing Mechanism Report (Conservation International 2020) included a comprehensive analysis of FY19/20 government budget allocations for "protected area" management and estimated that approximately NZ\$9.0 million (US\$6.4 million) were available for management of Protected Areas (refer figures below). This report also highlighted the difficulty of accurately assessing implementation costs because government budgets do not separate out</p>	Target Achieved

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)																																																																																																																																		
				<p>Marae Moana or other protected area allocations from broader agency budgets.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Ministry</th> <th>2019 Budget (Gross)</th> <th>% Total Budget</th> <th>% Ministry Budget to MM</th> <th>Marae Moana Spending</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>National Environmental Services</td> <td>\$ 1,686,417</td> <td></td> <td>9%</td> <td>\$ 160,045</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 1: Advisory and Compliance</td> <td>640,178</td> <td></td> <td>38</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Infrastructure Cook Islands</td> <td>\$ 6,285,169</td> <td></td> <td>1%</td> <td>\$ 53,958</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 7: National Hydrography Office</td> <td>53,958</td> <td></td> <td>1</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ministry of Marine Resources</td> <td>\$ 2,372,618</td> <td></td> <td>100%</td> <td>\$ 2,372,618</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 1: Offshore Fisheries</td> <td>477,289</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 2: Pearl Industry Support and Laboratory Services</td> <td>571,872</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 3: Inshore Fisheries Management & Aquaculture</td> <td>857,786</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 4: Policy and Legal Services</td> <td>142,597</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 5: Corporate Services</td> <td>323,074</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Office of the Prime Minister</td> <td>\$ 2,712,886</td> <td></td> <td>3%</td> <td>\$ 80,600</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 8: Marae Moana</td> <td>80,600</td> <td></td> <td>3</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cook Islands Police Service</td> <td>\$ 5,375,199</td> <td></td> <td>23%</td> <td>\$ 1,252,351</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 1: Crime and Operations</td> <td>4,174,563</td> <td></td> <td>78</td> <td>30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cook Islands Seabed Minerals</td> <td>\$ 295,292</td> <td></td> <td>100%</td> <td>\$ 295,292</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 1: Effective Seabed Minerals Sector</td> <td>295,292</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 2: Stakeholder Engagement</td> <td>20,000</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 3: Corporate Services</td> <td>45,104</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cook Islands Tourism Corporation</td> <td>\$ 9,274,662</td> <td></td> <td>50%</td> <td>\$ 4,637,331</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 1: Destination Sales and Marketing</td> <td>7,386,520</td> <td></td> <td>78</td> <td>50</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 2: Destination Development</td> <td>958,670</td> <td></td> <td>10</td> <td>50</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 3: Corporate Services</td> <td>919,472</td> <td></td> <td>10</td> <td>50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ministry of Transport</td> <td>\$ 1,160,232</td> <td></td> <td>16%</td> <td>\$ 182,020</td> </tr> <tr> <td> OUTPUT 2: Maritime Division (Taka o te Moana)</td> <td>182,020</td> <td></td> <td>100</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total Cook Island Budget/Marae Moana Spending 2019</td> <td>\$ 141,370,725</td> <td></td> <td>6%</td> <td>\$ 9,634,214</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>Figure 1: Marae Moana spending across Cook Island Ministries (Ministries not presented are expected to have no spending).</i></p> <p>For FY20/21, Covid-19 has drastically affected government allocations in all areas, including for management of protected areas. Although FY20/21 figures are not available, we are confident that government allocations for 2020/21 still exceed the target, despite budget cuts.</p> <p>The main sources of funding in FY20/21 are through NES for the management of Suwarrow National Park (NZ\$150,000), rangers for Manuae (included in the NES organisational structure - NZ\$70,000), central support through Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) for MMCO (NZ\$100,000), and annual budget for MMR all of which is directed towards marine resource management within Marae Moana (NZ\$2.37M in FY19/20).</p>	Ministry	2019 Budget (Gross)	% Total Budget	% Ministry Budget to MM	Marae Moana Spending	National Environmental Services	\$ 1,686,417		9%	\$ 160,045	OUTPUT 1: Advisory and Compliance	640,178		38	25	Infrastructure Cook Islands	\$ 6,285,169		1%	\$ 53,958	OUTPUT 7: National Hydrography Office	53,958		1	100	Ministry of Marine Resources	\$ 2,372,618		100%	\$ 2,372,618	OUTPUT 1: Offshore Fisheries	477,289		100	100	OUTPUT 2: Pearl Industry Support and Laboratory Services	571,872		100	100	OUTPUT 3: Inshore Fisheries Management & Aquaculture	857,786		100	100	OUTPUT 4: Policy and Legal Services	142,597		100	100	OUTPUT 5: Corporate Services	323,074		100	100	Office of the Prime Minister	\$ 2,712,886		3%	\$ 80,600	OUTPUT 8: Marae Moana	80,600		3	100	Cook Islands Police Service	\$ 5,375,199		23%	\$ 1,252,351	OUTPUT 1: Crime and Operations	4,174,563		78	30	Cook Islands Seabed Minerals	\$ 295,292		100%	\$ 295,292	OUTPUT 1: Effective Seabed Minerals Sector	295,292		100	100	OUTPUT 2: Stakeholder Engagement	20,000		100	100	OUTPUT 3: Corporate Services	45,104		100	100	Cook Islands Tourism Corporation	\$ 9,274,662		50%	\$ 4,637,331	OUTPUT 1: Destination Sales and Marketing	7,386,520		78	50	OUTPUT 2: Destination Development	958,670		10	50	OUTPUT 3: Corporate Services	919,472		10	50	Ministry of Transport	\$ 1,160,232		16%	\$ 182,020	OUTPUT 2: Maritime Division (Taka o te Moana)	182,020		100		Total Cook Island Budget/Marae Moana Spending 2019	\$ 141,370,725		6%	\$ 9,634,214	
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Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				Collectively these government budget allocations surpass the target.	
#13 Conservation of critical coral reef habitat within the CIMP, as measured by finfish populations at coral reefs around Rarotonga and Aitutaki	Baseline TBD in year 1 of project	No decrease in finfish populations by end of project	Not known	<p>Not achievable.</p> <p>Performance against this indicator by EoP cannot be assessed or determined: this is because a baseline was never established by R2R PMU at the start of the project. This means that performance and change cannot be assessed with confidence.</p> <p>Nearshore surveys of all Southern Group islands have been completed by MMR (R2R funded activities), with results published in associated reports that are now available. These reports are a useful resource that provide data on marine species populations and habitat trends. Additionally, MMR have conducted activities to reduce harvest pressure on reef fish and to improve coral reef habitats.</p> <p>However, scientific advice from MMR is this is a poorly designed indicator because fish populations and live coral cover are not necessarily positively correlated. Many studies have shown finfish densities on coral reefs are correlated more with habitat complexity, rather than with live coral cover (MMR's 2019 survey of Manihiki found similar results where the sites with the highest live coral cover had the lowest complexity and the least number of finfish whereas the area with the lowest live coral cover had the highest complexity and the highest number of finfish).</p>	<p>Target Not Assessed</p> <p>The TE confirmed with MMR that the indicator was poorly designed in that finfish populations at coral reefs is not necessarily a good indicator of coral reef health. Nevertheless, this is an important indicator and the TE believes that the intent of the indicator was clear, i.e., the health of coral reefs within the CIMP, and that protocols for measuring the health of coral reefs are well known and that instead of dismissing this indicator, the project should have refined it and measured it.</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				<p>MMR conducted a range of activities to reduce reef fish harvest pressure, improve coral reef habitats and assess marine resources including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lagoon and nearshore biodiversity surveys (Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Manuae). • Ra’ui workshop with House of Ariki and other agencies regarding enforcement of <i>ra’ui</i> in Rarotonga and. lagoon management • Developed methodology for regular coral health monitoring (Rarotonga, Aitutaki). • Water quality monitoring • Outreach and awareness activities highlighting the importance of habitat and resource conservation. • Creation and deployment of FADs designed to relieve localised fishing pressure. • Collection and analysis of genetic material from pa’ua (giant clams) to inform management decisions regarding coral reef habitats and conservation. • Hatchery rearing and outplanting of giant clams and coral as part of an on-going habitat restoration project at Aitutaki. 	
#14a	Baseline TBD in year 1 of project	No net decline in population	Not known	Not achievable.	Target Not Assessed

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
<p>Conservation of priority species at selected sites:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Turtle (Takutea and Manuae) • Hawksbill turtle (Takutea and Manuae) • Loggerhead Turtle (Palmerston) • Napoleon (Humphead) Wrasse (Rarotonga & Aitutaki) 				<p>Due to design flaws, the final result for this KPI is indeterminate: it is not known if the target is achieved.</p> <p>Performance against this indicator by EoP cannot be assessed or determined: this is because a baseline was never established by R2R PMU at the start of the project. This means that performance and change cannot be assessed with confidence.</p> <p>Furthermore, scientific advice from MMR is this is a poorly designed indicator because there are multiple external factors affecting marine species population densities, as well as long-term responses, which are difficult to measure in the relatively short-term period of the project.</p> <p>MMR conducted turtle population surveys on the islands of Takutea (twice - May 2018, October 2020), Manuae (twice - November 2017, October 2020), and Palmerston (once - October 2018). Only green turtles were recorded; no hawksbill or loggerhead turtles were observed.</p> <p>MMR prepared nearshore marine assessment reports with management recommendations for Palmerston, Atiu and Takutea islands. A <i>Turtles of Manuae and Takutea Report</i> is under development.</p> <p>NES held turtle monitoring workshops for tourism operators to increase awareness about turtle species, their threatened status, identification tips, conservation needs, and how operators and visitors can support management. This led to the establishment of a local turtle</p>	<p>The TE agrees with the comments made in the EoP report.</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				<p>conservation NGO 'Te Ara o te Onu', who has taken over turtle monitoring, education and awareness activities.</p> <p>During 2017 surveys at Aitutaki, Napoleon wrasse were surveyed at close to the highest densities recorded in published literature. MMR consulted with the world's leading Napoleon wrasse expert who travelled to Aitutaki to observe these fish and provide advice on the local assessments.</p> <p>Outreach and awareness activities were conducted with Aitutaki community and other stakeholders to highlight the importance of Napoleon wrasse conservation.</p>	
No # assigned Conservation of priority species at selected sites:				<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>Of the terrestrial species, all have remained stable or increased against their baseline population densities at selected sites (refer reports by NHT); targets have therefore been achieved.</p>	TE Note: Several of the reports on surveys conducted allude to methodological challenges, thus it may not be valid to indicate that all of these species have remained stable or increased.
#14b • Atiu Swiftlet (Atiu)	420 individuals	No net decline in population	>420 individuals	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>The Atiu Swiftlet (locally called Kopeka) was estimated in 2016/17 as having good population numbers of around 600, surpassing the baseline figure. Numbers are expected to be stable with no adverse effects currently identified to impact population size (TIS 2020a).</p> <p>Natural Heritage Trust are investigating the feasibility of translocating a small number of the Atiu population to another island within the Southern Group to provide an "insurance policy" against any</p>	<p>Target Not Assessed</p> <p>The TE notes the following extract from the status report produced by TIS with project support, "During the four-year R2R programme 2015-19, later extended to 2021, no updated population surveys were conducted. In 2016 -2017, estimated population numbers were around 600 adults (M. Humphreys pers. comm, 2020), but questions remain over the methodology used and these figures have not been corroborated. Based on this,</p>

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
				severe threatening events (eg. disease or cyclone) that may threaten the Atiu population.	Gerald McCormack, Director of the Natural Heritage Trust, advised in 2020 that “no total counts for both caves have been [confirmed] above 420” but that the population was stable (pers. comm, 2020)”.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> #14c Mangaian Kingfisher (Mangaia) 	1000 individuals	No net decline in population	>1000 individuals	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>The Mangaian Kingfisher (Tangaeo) was assessed in 2019 and numbers recorded exceeded the baseline population figures (TIS 2020b). The population appears to be on the rise, which has been attributed to forest regeneration replacing previous pineapple plantations; this has increased the availability of suitable bird habitat.</p>	Target Achieved (but not attributable to this project)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> #14d Rarotongan Monarch (Rarotonga & Atiu) 	Rarotonga - 428 individuals Atiu - 125 individuals	No net decline in population	Rarotonga - >428 individuals Atiu - >125 individuals	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>The Rarotongan Monarch (Kakerori) has seen continual population increases, attributable in large part to extensive on-going predator control within the TCA (on Rarotonga). The population in and around the TCA increased to at least 471 birds in 2017. These results are reported in the R2R-funded TCA Management Plan (Robertson et al. 2020).</p> <p>Translocations of a total of 40 young kākeroi to form an ‘insurance’ population on ship rat-free Ātiu has been successful, with a minimum population of 150 birds recorded in 2017, bringing the global total to well over 600 birds, or over 20 times the number of kākeroi alive in 1989 (Robertson et al. 2020).</p>	Target Achieved

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP report prepared by PM & CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> #14e Mitiaro Tree Palm (Mitiaro) 	375 mature trees	No net decline in forested area	>375 mature trees	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>Mitiaro Fan Palm (Iniao) was surveyed in 2019 using drone technology; this technique allows for more in-depth and accurate aerial surveying. These surveys found population numbers to be higher than the baseline; this was attributed to more accurate counts as well as recent population growth (TIS 2020c).</p>	<p>Target Achieved</p> <p>Although more than 375 mature trees were found in the survey, the TE notes that the baseline and target are not truly comparable. According to the status report produced by TIS, “The increase is largely attributed to more efficient survey technology, i.e. the use of a drone in place of Google Images, which allowed for higher resolution images of clusters in very difficult terrain”. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the number of mature trees has certainly not decreased and therefore the target was achieved. It is also worth noting that this project did not undertake any conservation actions related to this species, it merely supported a survey.</p> <p>“Baseline information for the start of the R2R project in 2015 put the number of Iniao plants found in Mitiaro at 375, with an end-of-project target of ‘no net decline’ in population size. A survey in 2017 updated this figure to 395 (McCormack, pers.comm). Following a further survey in 2019 by the National Environment Service (NES) R2R team, the number of plants is now estimated to be between 500 and 600.” “The range of Iniao clusters was also confirmed to stretch further south than in earlier surveys.”</p>

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

Indicator	Baseline	End of Project Target	Quantitative	Summary of achievements (as per EoP Report Prepared by PM and CTA)	Status at TE (as per TET)
<p>#15a</p> <p>Landscape/ seascape area covered by the project (ha), as measured by GEF BD 2 Tracking Tool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly covered 	0 ha	1.1 million sq. km. (CIMP)	1.1 million sq. km. (CIMP) of landscape/ seascape area has been covered by the project	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>All of Southern Group of CIMP is covered by the project as evidenced by numerous R2R-funded activities that support Marae Moana, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment and research of biodiversity values of inshore marine areas. • Research into and completion of a plan for sustainable financing. • Completion of the first ever Outlook Report and comprehensive review by independent scientific experts. • Development of a policy to inform and guide development of Regulations for marine spatial planning (MSP). • Data collection as basis for marine spatial plans for all of the Cook Islands marine estate. 	<p>Target Achieved</p> <p>The TE finds this a fairly meaningless indicator</p>
<p>#15b</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly covered 	0 ha	0.83 million sq. km. (Northern Group)	0.83 million sq. km. (Northern Group) of landscape/seascape area has been covered by the project	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>All of the Northern Group of CIMP is covered by the project as evidenced by numerous R2R-funded activities that support Marae Moana and are targeted at the entire CIMP (see above).</p>	<p>Target Achieved</p> <p>The TE finds this a fairly meaningless indicator</p>
<p>#16a</p> <p>Pressures from resources uses in the land- and seascape are reduced through Ridge</p>	NZ\$339,554	At least 15% reduction in value of imports of agricultural chemicals by the end of the project	25% reduction in value of imports of fertilisers	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>Most recent (2019) figures show 25% reduction in value of imports of fertilisers. Despite some discrepancies in baseline figures listed in the UNDP PRODOC against those held at Ministry of Agriculture (MoA),</p>	<p>Target Not Achieved</p> <p>TE Note: This target is poorly framed. The value of imports is irrelevant as price/kg could go up even if imports decrease. The relevant</p>

<p>to Reef management approaches, including: Reduced use of agricultural chemicals, based on value of annual imports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fertilizers 				<p>analysis has demonstrated a reduction in fertilisers >15% (25% in value), and a total value much less than the baseline of NZ\$339K.</p>	<p>point is the amount of fertilizer imported, not the cost of the import.</p> <p>MoA only started keeping records regarding fertilizer imports in 2017. Fertilizer imports into the CI over the last four years have fluctuated (records provided by MoA to the TE in the Fertilizer and Pesticides Report 2017-2020) with data for the latest year for which data is available (2020) indicating that there has not been a reduction in the import of fertilizers. (2017: 68 ton, 2018: 56 ton, 2019: 61 ton, 2020: 68 ton). Nevertheless, there are important differences that indicate a possible positive trend. According to MoA, the decrease in import of fertilizer in 2018 was likely due to a large quantity imported in 2017 and utilized over the two-year period. The increase in 2019 of 9% and in 2020 of 11% was presumably due to the increase in the import of Yara Mila Complex and Nitrophoska Perfekt, slow releasing fertilizers imported by MoA. The increase in the importation of slow releasing fertilizers was due: to: a) Increased demand by the farmers & households; b) Increase in the bulk order for fertilizer from the Supplies overseas as the COVID-19 situation was unforeseeable (unknown lockdown period), the Ministry opted to bring two containers instead of one; c) Government initiative for agriculture for household that encouraged more households to plant. No leaching is expected from slow-release fertilizers thus environmental impact is less.</p>
<p>#16b</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pesticides 	<p>NZ\$406,701</p>	<p>At least 15% reduction in value of imports of agricultural chemicals by the end of the project</p>	<p>13% reduction in value of imports of pesticides</p>	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>Most recent (2019) figures show 13% reduction in value of imports of pesticides. For pesticides there are also discrepancies in the baseline figures used, however a</p>	<p>Target Partially Achieved</p> <p>TE Note: Same as above. This target is poorly framed.</p> <p>According to information provided to the TE by MoA (Fertilizer and Pesticides Report 2017-</p>

				<p>reduction in value of 13% has been achieved.</p> <p>The MoA considers that there has been a steady decrease in pesticide usage since the project inception. Steady progress has been made against this target, with multiple R2R-funded activities by MoA including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training across the Southern Group islands aimed at improved understanding of pesticide management and increased uptake of bio-agricultural practices. • Transitions to organic farming across the Southern Group Islands through associated support and training. • New opportunities provided for island communities in beekeeping to increase natural pollination. • School programs led by a local NGO to foster traditional, sustainable, organic agricultural practices amongst the youth. <p>There remains a need to review the Pesticide Act 1979 and Ministry of Agriculture Act 1978.</p>	<p>2020), import of pesticides decreased from 2017 to 2019 but increased again in 2020 (2017: 6,113 kg imported, 2018: 4,656 kg, 2019: 3,764 kg, 2020: 5,156 kg). The increase in 2020 is attributed to the import of organic insecticides: DC Tron (Mineral Oil) and Neem Oil.</p> <p>Although there was a slight reduction of 0.2% in the import of herbicides (Glyphosate and Paraquat) from 2019 to 2020; 73% of all pesticides imported over the four years is largely Glyphosate and Paraquat, herbicides widely used for weed management and plantation clearing. A high proportion of commercial farmers on Rarotonga and the southern Pa Enea of Aitutaki and Mangaia and to a lesser extent, Atiu and Mauke continue to use the herbicides Glyphosate and Paraquat for weed management in perennial and annual crops.</p> <p>Awareness programs undertaken by the Ministry with the farmers informing them of the harm pesticides can do, has resulted in an uptake of the use of organic pesticides.</p> <p>A slight reduction in the use of some highly hazardous pesticides (insecticides) such as Imidacloprid and Permethrin has been seen.</p> <p>During the project, and in part, according to the MoA, because of the project, CI re-established the Pesticides Board as mandated under the Pesticides Act 1987. The Pesticides Act had not been enforced until this time. This is expected to make important in-roads into the import of pesticides into the country by registering the importers and placing a quota on the amount of harmful pesticides that can be imported.</p>
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<p>#17 Planning approval process for infrastructure and other development</p>	<p>Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process depends on self-reporting by developers</p>	<p>EIAs for infrastructure development in or around PAs are subject to independent review, and development plans are adapted as necessary to conserve biodiversity</p>	<p>Not known</p>	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>There has been no substantive change in the approach towards EIAs for infrastructure development in or around PAs; EIAs are not subject to independent review, and development plans are not adapted as necessary to conserve biodiversity.</p> <p>Following a detailed gap analysis report (R2R funded) on permitting processes (Tonkin & Taylor 2019), NES has undertaken an extensive review of the Environment Act 2003 to address gaps, weaknesses and overlaps with other agencies. This includes the EIA process and governance.</p> <p>This legislative review process is ongoing and engaged in extensive consultation with many stakeholders; this review will continue beyond the life of the project. It is anticipated that the review will propose changes to the composition of Island Environment Authorities (IEA's) who approve EIAs (a higher level of technical expertise is to be included on IEAs). Securing this change in legislation is a long-term and enforceable solution to ensuring biodiversity is fully considered in the EIA process, particularly in key areas such as within and adjoining PAs.</p>	<p>Target Not Achieved</p> <p>EIAs still depend on self-reporting by developers and are not subject to independent review. There is no evidence of any development plans which were adapted to conserve biodiversity.</p>
<p>#18 Forest cover on the nine islands within the Cook Islands Marine Park</p>	<p>13,245 hectares of natural forested area</p>	<p>No decline in forest cover by the end of the project</p>	<p>At least 13,245 ha</p>	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>The 2018 State of Environment Report found that forest cover across the Cook Islands was 'stable' (SPREP 2018). This trend of stable forest cover is assumed by the report authors to apply across the entire country. On that basis, it is anticipated that forest cover of the nine</p>	<p>Target Not Assessed</p> <p>The PRODOC stipulates that, "Estimated forest cover (to be confirmed at project inception, including confirmation of natural forest as opposed to plantations or invasive dominated areas): Mangaia (4,500 ha.); Rarotonga (4,000 ha.); Aitutaki (1,600 ha.), Manuae (350 ha.),</p>

				<p>Southern Group islands has not declined from a baseline of 13,245 hectares since the start of the project.</p>	<p>Atiu (1,140 ha.), Takutea (94 ha.), Mauke (1,046 ha.), Mitiaro (335 ha.), Palmerston (180 ha.) Forest cover was never confirmed at inception, therefore the baseline was not verified.</p> <p>The TE visit to TCA confirmed through interviews with the landowners that expansion of residential settlement continues to encroach on the forest there.</p>
<p>#19 Sedimentation and pollution of aquatic and marine habitats</p>	<p>Sedimentation and pollution (pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, waste) have significant negative impacts on streams and lagoons in the country</p>	<p>At least 10 sites within CIMP where water quality will be improved through measures to control water pollution and sedimentation (from agriculture or other sources)</p>	<p>More than 10 water monitoring sites in place; not known if there is improved water quality</p>	<p>Target partially achieved.</p> <p>Monitoring sites (>10) are in place however data is not adequate to demonstrate that water quality has improved due to pollution and sedimentation control measures.</p> <p>Whilst water quality testing has been routinely conducted throughout the life of R2R, in collaborative efforts between MMR & NES, measures to control pollution were not directly implemented in these same areas. Consequently, whilst water quality may have improved in five areas (with an additional site showing no increase or decrease in water quality), this target is unlikely to be fully achieved as little direct management was implemented at these sites.</p> <p>In 2019, erosion and sediment control guidelines were produced by Infrastructure Cook Islands as part of the IW R2R project. NES is now looking to integrate these into the National Environment Policy as part of the Environment Act review that is currently underway. This will result in sustainability beyond the life of the project;</p>	<p>Target Not Assessed</p> <p>The TE confirmed that more than 10 water monitoring sites are in place within CIMP (these were in place already prior to this project), but has not yet received requested information from MMR regarding the results of water quality monitoring and thus is unable to verify if water quality has improved or not.</p>

				there will be enhanced governance frameworks to support the management of this issue, resulting in impactful change despite this indicator not being directly achieved.	
#20 Reduced impacts of human activities on land on the health of inshore marine ecosystems, as measured by algal levels (coralline algae, turf algae, and macro-algae) on coral reefs around Rarotonga and Aitutaki	Baseline TBD during year 1 of project	No increase in algal levels on coral reefs by end of project	NA	<p>Not achievable.</p> <p>Due to design flaws, the final result for this KPI is indeterminate: it is not known if the target is achieved.</p> <p>Performance against this indicator by EoP cannot be assessed or determined: this is because a baseline was never established by R2R PMU at the start of the project. This means that performance and change cannot be assessed with confidence.</p> <p>Whilst MMR algae survey and monitoring programs are in place on coral reefs around Rarotonga and Aitutaki (drone mapping and surveys, water sampling, genetic and molecular taxonomy review, herbarium established) we cannot demonstrate that algal levels have declined. Algal growth was found to be seasonal, with higher levels in the hotter, wetter summer months.</p> <p>To address one of the input factors contributing to elevated algal growth, MMR assisted MFEM and GHD consultants to conduct preliminary surveys on a proposed ocean sewage outfall location. This is currently still in feasibility stages and public consultation is underway.</p> <p>NES is also addressing these human impacts by more stringent EIA and permitting processes, particularly in vulnerable coastal and foreshore environments.</p> <p>Mitigating poor water quality that enters marine environments and influences aquatic algae levels is complex and involves multiple</p>	Target Not Assessed

				agencies - Ministry of Health (MOH), ICI, MoA, NES and MMR. External factors such as climate change and increased temperatures also contribute to algae levels. This has proved to be a much larger issue than anticipated and the Cook Islands is seeking future support for continued activities in this area to reduce human pressures on freshwater and marine ecosystems.	
#21 Impact of tourism businesses on biodiversity and ecosystem functioning in targeted KBAs	Less than 5 tourism businesses in the Cook Islands actively implement environmental management programs	At least 20 tourism businesses are implementing BD management programs that comply with conservation guidelines developed through the project and included in national accreditation system	40 tourism businesses	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>A tourism industry assessment report commissioned by R2R validates completion of this target (TCA Tourism 2020).</p> <p>At least 40 tourism businesses are implementing biodiversity management programs that comply with conservation guidelines developed through the project and included in national accreditation system. This target has therefore been achieved and surpassed.</p> <p>The Mana Tiaki Eco Certification program (MTEC) developed under the project in 2018 is now being widely implemented within the tourism industry, with over 40 businesses signing up in its first year.</p> <p>In early 2020, R2R contracted TCA Tourism to review the MTEC criteria, particularly the biodiversity component, to assess how this can be further strengthened and applied across the industry; TCA final report has been completed.</p> <p>The R2R project supported business subscriptions to MTEC for its first year, after which businesses were to take on this commitment. However, the second year of MTEC operation was negatively impacted by Covid-19; the ability of operators to re-register to MTEC was impacted by travel</p>	<p>Target Achieved (but sustainability in question)</p> <p>The scheme has been operating for two years with participation fees which are to eventually be paid for by tourism businesses thus far being paid in full by the project. It will only be possible to gauge the success and sustainability of the scheme once fees are required to be paid by the tourism businesses themselves. If the COVID pandemic continues to impact the Cook Islands tourism industry, the number of participating tourism businesses may well decrease. This decrease will likely be exacerbated once project ends when there are no longer funds to pay for the fee to participate in the scheme. This will only be known after project end.</p>

				<p>restrictions and associated loss of tourism revenues.</p> <p>As such, the project has agreed to support subscriptions for a second year so that the private sector can continue their environmental initiatives throughout 2020. However, support will be specifically targeted to those businesses implementing biodiversity focused activities (as opposed to other elements of MTEC such as energy or waste reduction).</p>	
<p>#22</p> <p>Number of projects by tourism operators that support biodiversity conservation (e.g. creating ra'ui sites / CCAs; coral gardens; beach clean-up; sponsored species conservation)</p>	<p>Six on-going projects in the Southern Group</p>	<p>At least 15 projects operating by the end of the project</p>	<p>At least 20 projects</p>	<p>Target achieved.</p> <p>A tourism industry assessment report commissioned by R2R validates completion of this target (TCA Tourism 2020).</p> <p>At least 20 projects by tourism operators that support biodiversity conservation are in operation at EoP; this target has therefore been achieved and surpassed.</p>	<p>Target Achieved</p>

Annex 9. TE Comments on Tracking Tools Prepared By the Project

- As reported in the TTs, “Proposed” only means it has not been designated as a PA, it does not mean it has actually been proposed to be designated as a PA. This distinction should be made in the Financial Sustainability Scorecard and other TTs.
- The METTs were completed by the CTA and the PM. It is best practice to include PA Managers and others. In the case of the CIMP, it would have been best to complete together with MMR. In the case of terrestrial areas, it would have been best to complete together with landowners.
- There is no indication of # ha of coral reefs targeted within the CIMP. This information should have been included.
- CIMP was established during the project period so answer to “is it a new PA” should be “yes”.
- The METT indicates that Moko’ero Nui is a new PA but it is our understanding this has not yet been designated as a reserve.
- No METTs were done for Ra’ui sites. It would have been useful to have, after 6 years, at least a simple table of all the Ra’ui sites that existed at project start and at project end and an indication of if they are being actively managed or not. There is apparently a database with this information in the GIS Unit at ICI but it could not be found by the GIS Unit. The PACS includes an inventory of some of these sites.
- People involved in completing the assessment for CIMP (should be #6 for CTA and #8 for PM)
- Threat level for 2.4 (CIMP) shouldn’t it be higher given unsustainable harvest of Pa’ua?
- Licenses for seabed minerals exploration may not have been in place at the time the METT was completed but at the time of the TE, licenses have now been given, raising the threat level.
- 4.3 (CIMP METT) would be helpful to include in notes column more about overlays of shipping lanes with SUMA – where are these overlays exactly?
- 5.4 (CIMP METT) mention of Pa’ua harvest could be included in notes. Notes suggest area is well managed but threat level is 2. Incongruent. Avoid use of terms such as “relatively” well managed. Best to indicate strengths and weaknesses.
- 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 Provide notes with information regarding these activities
- 7.3c, 8.1, 8.1b No annotations. Any score above 0 deserves some explanation. Otherwise, this cannot be used to track anything.
- 9.1 Scores are not “relative to MPAs in other countries”. This is an absolute value not a relative one.
- 9.3 Relates to threats from fertilizers, pesticides and other agrochemicals. Score of 1 would seem to indicate that project focus on this area was not of high relevance. If the figures reported in PIRs and EoP report related to reduction of agrochemicals are to be believed, there is some incongruity here.

Annex 10. Planned Versus Actual Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholders	Anticipated Roles and Responsibilities in Project Implementation as in PRODOC	Update at TE
National Government		
National Environment Service (NES)	Lead Executing Agency Primary agency responsible for coordination and management of the project Facilitate linkages with other related national and regional projects under implementation in the Cook Islands.	No change. As planned, NES acted as the Executing Entity/Implementing Partner for the project.
Cook Islands Marine Park Steering Committee (CIMP SC)		
Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR)	Implementation of the project's activities related to marine and coastal area conservation	No change
Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)	Implement activities to reduce the levels of agro- chemicals, sediments and nutrients coming from agricultural areas into aquatic and inshore marine Environments	No change
Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT Corp)	Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into the operations and practices of the tourism industry	No change
Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)	Marae Moana Office as the coordinating hub for protected areas activities throughout the Southern Group of islands. Outer Islands Governance Unit to have key role in supporting the integration of R2R approaches and biodiversity conservation into Island Development Plans.	The Marae Moana Coordination Office is under the OPM. Its role has been stronger than originally anticipated in the PRODOC, in part due to the enlargement of the MM, in part to strengthened capacity and in part because institutional responsibilities for PA management in CKI have still not be clarified.
Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI)	Through the SRICCC project work with the R2R project to strengthen resilience to climate change in the protected areas system.	SRICCC Project ended shortly after the mid-term of the R2R project. There was little collaboration between the two projects although they complemented each other.
Ministry of Finance and Economic	Development Cooperation Division (DCD) will manage the disbursement of project funds within the country,	Two separate accounts were actually established, one for NES and one for MMR (as described in detail in Section 4.2.3).

Management (MFEM)	oversee the managing, reporting and auditing of financial accounts	
Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI)	The Water, Waste and Sanitation Unit (WATSAN) through its national waste and sanitation improvement programme on Rarotonga and Aitutaki aimed at reducing the flow of pollution, nutrients and sediments into freshwater and marine ecosystems	ICI was not involved through the R2R project in any activities to reduce flow of pollutants into freshwater or marine ecosystems. The Project did support the GIS Unit at ICI to enhance its capacity in marine spatial planning and to produce maps important for marine spatial planning.
Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)	Responsible for the national biodiversity database, and will be a repository for new biodiversity related information as it becomes available, participate in species conservation programs for endemic birds and flora.	Database developed and managed by NHT (prior to R2R) was further strengthened with R2R support. NHT did the Takutea and Mokoero Terrestrial Assessments. Conducted endemic bird surveys.
Seabed Minerals Authority (SMA)	Consultations with project as part of the zoning process and management planning for the CIMP. <u>Project</u> will facilitate consultations between the CIMP Steering Committee and the SMA to determine whether to allow any seabed exploration, pilot operations and mining, and under what conditions, within the CIMP.	It was expected that the project would facilitate consultations between the CIMP Steering Committee and the SMA to determine whether to allow any seabed exploration, pilot operations and mining, and under what conditions. The R2R project has not been involved in this. The SMA, although a member of TAG, has not participated actively in that forum or in the NBSC. SMA is now granting licenses for seabed mineral exploration.
Local & Traditional Leaders		
Island Councils	Key partners in Island Conservation Strategies integrated into each Island Development Plan, facilitating management of inhabited outer islands as Managed Conservation Areas, declaring/strengthening Community Conservation Areas	Island Councils have not been significantly involved in the project as originally envisaged. No island conservation strategies were actually developed by the project, although these were planned for. Little of what was expected to be done regarding CCAs and Ra'ui sites was actually done.
House of Ariki (HoA) and Koutu Nui	Support in establishing and managing Community Conservation Areas and Ra'ui sites	HoA was one of the main RPs in this project, responsible for implementing numerous activities regarding CCAs and Ra'ui sites. The project supported a full-time Ra'ui Coordinator in HoA.
Environmental NGOs		
Te Ipukarea Society (TIS)	Important partner in implementation of the Marae Moana Programme for the operationalization of the CIMP. Support throughout on biodiversity and biosecurity issues.	TIS co-chairs the NBSC, which serves as the PSC for this project. TIS has also been involved as a RP implementing numerous project activities including development of the Palmerston Island Natural Resource Management Plan, the Kakerori Species Status

		Report, the Kopeka Species Status Report, the Tanga'eo Species Status Report, the Iniao Species Status Report. It was also involved in the development of the Mana Tiaki Eco Certification scheme. The Director of TIS was involved as the NC on the team to produce the Marine Ecosystem Services Valuation report. TIS is also on the Technical Advisory Group for the Marae Moana.
Muri Environment Care	Potential partner in application of R2R approaches to wastewater management and marine protection in the Muri lagoon area	There has been no involvement of this organization in the project.
Local Stakeholder Groups & Private Sector		
Tourism Industry Council	Participate in all work under the tourism sector related to accreditation, education and awareness, use of organic products, sponsoring of biodiversity conservation projects undertaken by tour operators.	Involved in developing biodiversity criteria for Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification programme.
Private Tourism Operators	As above	It was anticipated that private tour operators would be more involved in the project than they actually have been although many participated along with owners of numerous hotels, resorts and other lodging types on Rarotonga in the Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification programme.
Titikaveka Growers Association (TGA)	Provide assistance to MoA in promoting sustainable agricultural practices	TGA was not involved as much as they could have been in the agricultural project activities
Cook Islands National Council of Women (CINCW)	Key role in ensuring participation of women in project activities and in the sharing of benefits produced by the project	Although the CINCW was anticipated to play a key role in ensuring women's participation in the project, CINCW was never involved in the project from the start.
Local communities	Will be deeply involved during and post project in community conservation areas and Ra'ui sites - biodiversity friendly agricultural practices, sustainable fisheries systems and developing and implementing a vision for the Cook Islands Marine Park and protected areas within it	Local communities have been involved in many consultations undertaken by the project and also involved in several terrestrial and marine surveys conducted with project support as well as sustainable agriculture activities. Even greater involvement of local communities was originally anticipated but because little on-the-ground activity took place to strengthen CCAs and Ra'ui sites, the involvement of local communities was less than expected in that regard.
Added during Inception Phase (IR p10)		

Ministry of Health	Not specified	No involvement
Pacific Islands Conservation Initiative	Not specified	No involvement

Annex 11. TE Assessment of How Well Cross-Cutting Issues Were Addressed

Cross cutting issues are those which impact all aspects of a project and therefore should be made part of the development policy on all its levels: goals, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Several cross-cutting issues are relevant to this project and were mentioned in the Terminal Evaluation Inception Report - these include considerations relating to gender equality, capacity development, climate change and the nexus between poverty alleviation and protection of the environment.

GENDER EQUALITY

The GEF has a long history of mainstreaming gender as a cross-cutting priority and believes that more systematic inclusion of gender aspects in our projects can create positive synergies between improved environmental impact and greater gender equality. “The potential transformation of gender equality stems not only from the opportunity to engage more people in environmental efforts in absolute numbers, but also through the inclusion of the unique skills, knowledge and experiences of women in their roles as the primary users and stewards of many natural resources. Addressing gender gaps and more effectively engaging women has the transformative potential to generate greater results for the global environment.”¹⁴ Many case studies from around the world have demonstrated that biodiversity conservation efforts become more effective and efficient when women and vulnerable groups are empowered to participate as equal partners in information sharing and generation education and training, technology transfer, organisational development, financial assistance and policy development.¹⁵

In 2014, the Project Appraisal Committee recommended that Gender and Youth be given more emphasis in the Ridge to Reef project. They saw youth and women playing an important role within the tourism section of this project and noted that the Gender Market utilised by UNDP could include the score of this into the project. It was also mentioned that Gender and Youth could be part of the Terms of Reference for the Project Manager and his/her role to further incorporate these groups during project implementation. It was highlighted that there was very little mention of youth in the R2R Project Document (PRODOC) yet they even had the potential to take over the management of an output.

The PRODOC stressed on several occasions that the project would pursue a gender-sensitive approach whereby women’s participation in conservation would be strongly promoted (through targeted training, social mobilisation, and other means) and thereby increasing their ability to adapt (p100). The project further stated that it would ensure that women participate fully in and benefit from the activities of the project. “The project will ensure that women are provided every opportunity to be involved as fundamental stakeholders of the project, through their involvement in the design and implementation of project activities to ensure their equitability and sustainability” and that “All members of the communities, including vulnerable, disadvantaged and minority groups, will be given the opportunity to be involved and will benefit from awareness-raising and training activities, through participatory consultation processes engaging community governing and social institutions, such as village councils, church, youth, and women’s groups.” (para 186).

¹⁴ From <https://www.thegef.org/topics/gender>, *what we do*

¹⁵ From “*Mainstreaming Gender at the GEF*”
https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/publications/Mainstreaming_Gender_Eng_3.pdf

Within the questions and responses in the PRODOC's Social Equity and Equality section and the Socio-Economics of the Initial Environmental and Social Screening checklist, it was indicated that the project's environmental and social impacts could negatively affect indigenous people or other vulnerable groups, gender equality and women's empowerment yet there were too few specified activities that demonstrated how the project might minimise any such impact. While women held many project administrative and leadership roles and participated in the implementation of several technical and non-technical project activities, there was little specific activity that focused or even acknowledged their involvement in biodiversity conservation roles from a gender perspective. The GEF Policy on Gender Equality (2017) was introduced when it was found that up until then there had "only been a slight increase in the percentage of projects rated gender sensitive or gender mainstreamed" into GEF programmes in general. Despite this guidance and PRODOC recommendations, the objective of the GEF Equality Policy had less impact on the R2R project than could have been expected.

The Midterm Review (2018) noted the representation in the Management and Implementation of the Project due to the predominance of women in senior leadership roles of the PMU, Ministries of Marine Resources and Agriculture, as well as within the National Environment Service. However, there was little acknowledgement of the involvement of both sexes in "participatory community-based consultation processes to ensure that specific interventions and consultative processes [were] accepted and owned by communities, [were] gender sensitive and equitable, and clearly understood outputs or targets [were] communicated" (PRODOC, 186).

Project Implementation Reports 2017-2020 recognised women's involvement as project leaders, but despite the frequent mention of gender as a cross-cutting issue within all the formal project reports (PIRs and MTR), there was still no formal recognition given to gender equality. The 2018 MTR recommended that the Gender Assessment and Action Plan be included for the next period but the 2020 PIR reported that it still did not exist. Gender was mentioned only once in the R2R End of Performance report in the survey section - as a demographic indicator where the response was "optional".

Youth however were included in project opportunities. The End of Project report noted that an NGO provided school programmes to foster sustainable organic agricultural practices among the youth. Te Korero o te Orau provided the youth of Rarotonga with an introduction to age-old agricultural, food gathering and conservation practices as well as to other aspects of their culture including umu food preparation and ancient games that are rarely experienced by the children of the day. There is some hope that the Ministry of Education will enable this programme to become incorporated into the school curriculum. The Cook Islands Tourism Corporation used women and young actors in a series of R2R videos to promote ecological tourism activities to reduce human impacts on protected natural areas and other important ecosystems as part of Component 2. These videos also featured Kia Orana values and were promoted widely in schools and on local television to promote the sustainability messages and themes related to the impact of tourism on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Youth leaders on Atiu, an outer island visited during the evaluation programme, were provided with biodiversity camps on the Moko'ero reserve to learn more about biodiversity conservation on their island. This was led by the island's bird conservationist, George Mateariki, also known as Birdman George. The House of Ariki also introduced a programme for youth to support local ra'ui programmes and practices.

Findings:

The Government of the Cook Islands has a National Policy and Planning Unit of the Office of the Prime Minister's Office and a Gender Unit contained within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. They could take some responsibility for a Gender Assessment and Action Plan, as a cross cutting issue for all national policy-related activities including national project implementation.

A Gender and Youth Affairs representative from the Ministry of Internal Affairs should be a member of the National Project Committee to ensure that their interests are accounted for during project design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

CAPACITY BUILDING

In our quest for a sustainable future, by way of national development objectives, it is important that we think outside of our narrow areas of focus and work across disciplines to ensure our ideas are shared and our efforts are united¹⁶. In observations during a site visit and discussions that took place with landowners and traditional leaders on the outer island of Atiu, I noted that the most successful projects were those which were community-oriented, and where people from all walks of life on the island were collaborative engaged in a community learning and project supportive activity. Two successful capacity building activities had taken place on Atiu. They included an activity where the community participated in a research and data-gathering activity on the recently developed protected reserve of Moko'ero, and a week-long agricultural workshop involving over 30 farmers and growers from the southern group islands to learn about responsible pesticide use and some hands on farming practices, as well as an introduction to "crop banks" to support the production of farming produce on each of the islands. From the discussions I had within the community, I found the concepts that had been promoted were still instilled, and the sustained commitment of participants of these events was very much aligned with the R2R objectives of the activities.

One failing of the R2R project was the delay in the development of the Capacity Building Needs Assessment which PRODOC Activity 1.3.1 indicated would address the capacity issues relevant to the implementing of establishing and managing Protected Areas in the Cook Islands: specifically 1.3.2 (capacity strengthening of national institutions and upskilling of government officials), 1.3.3 (capacity strengthening of local officials on Island Councils and traditional leaders) and 1.3.4 (capacity strengthening of private landowners and local communities, civil society e.g. NGOs and community groups and private sector partners e.g. tourism operators, fishermen, farmers, etc.).

Both Laurie (2018) and Twyford (2019) recognised that although national capacities should have been initiated and demonstrated by the PMU at the outset of the project, a major issue was that some serious capacity gaps were identified within its own system. These were particularly in the area of technical expertise, project management, procurement, and contracting skills. This was particularly highlighted when they failed to mobilise consultants early in the project to help establish a workplan and identify what needed to be prioritised.

The R2R Capacity Needs Assessment Report (CNAR) did not appear until September 2019 so that capacity gaps and deficiencies became more noticeable. If earlier introduced, the R2R Capacity Strengthening Action Plan (CSAP) would have provided the framework on which to build a more

¹⁶ From <https://www.unep.org/resources/publication/environmental-change-through-capacity-building-africa-caribbean-and-pacific>

appropriate learning platform on which to develop the capacity required to achieve the project goals, through targeted and coordinated action.

The MTR acknowledged the importance of capacity development - alongside policy, institutions, public consultations, involvement and awareness, and knowledge management - as fundamental to the success of the R2R project in achieving its objective and expected results (MTR, p19). However, the report also recognised that while significant capacity was available, it was not engaged efficiently and the poor rating of “moderately unsatisfactory” reflected this. The project had not dealt satisfactorily with its core role of coordination and targeted capacity building across government sectors, island councils, traditional leaders, business, and the general public. It was the capacity to work together that had not yet been achieved. (p22).

In 2017, the Pacific Community (SPC) R2R programme partnered with James Cook University to deliver the Post Graduate Program in Ridge to Reef Sustainable Development. The R2R post graduate programme provides educational pathways from 2 years for the certificate to an additional year for the diploma. Participating countries include: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. 8 Students from the Cook Islands began the course and 4 still remain and will complete the programme during 2021. The others dropped out to take up other positions outside of R2R – 3 of them overseas.

When looking at the capacity needs for Marae Moana, the CNAR identified a need for improved communications to engage traditional leaders. While the project required engagement with Island Councils, traditional leaders, local communities, civil society and private sector partners into its project activities, there was no mention of any intensive training into how these groups could contribute effectively within the wide range of activities involved in the R2R project. The report advised that a separate project might be required to “assess capacity needs and strengthening focussed on the unique needs of customary landowners and government staff.” (CNAR, p19)

This is particularly relevant with regards to the difficulties of engagement between local landowners and traditional leaders over the issue with respect to integrating raui into the island marine spatial planning process. Despite assigning \$60k specifically to provide for capacity building of PA managers, including Government, staff, traditional leaders, private landowners and community members, the lack of agreement on Aitutaki among the local Aronga Mana with regards to the ra’ui for Manuae evidence that “enormous communications efforts” and the requirement for skilled facilitators to mediate between the opposing factions is an imperative if they want to achieve this project goal.

Finding: The Aronga Mana regularly hold fora in which this training could take place. Interpreters could be made available to ensure that appropriate technical knowledge and advice is given in the local language and within relevant contexts that would help members of the Aronga Mana to better understand what the project was trying to achieve. Training in the technical attributes of the project, within a cultural environment for traditional leaders and in Te Reo Maori, may possibly help to improve understanding of the different perspectives.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Despite the minimal impact that the Cook Islands and other ocean-based countries have on the production of greenhouse gases globally, the government recognised that the country remained particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of anticipated changes in climate and impending sea-level rise and the stresses that these can impose on their environmental systems. As a result, the office of the “Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI)” was established within the Office of the Prime Minister

(OPM) in 2011 to address climate change matters and strengthen institutional arrangements within its most vulnerable sectors – agriculture and food security, coastal zone and coral reefs, marine resources, water resources and biodiversity.

By the time the Ridge to Reef (R2R) project came into being in 2013, there was already a plethora of other projects that were already operational and expected to bring benefits to complement the new project. These were explained in the PRODOC as:

- “Cook Islands Joint National Action Plan (JNAP) for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction (2011-2015)” which dealt with disaster risk reduction and climate change issues by all agencies. This was initiated in 2011 and was coordinated by NES (42);
- “Strengthening the Resilience of our Islands and our Communities to Climate Change” (SRICCC) which was to promote climate resilient practices to mitigate climate-related risks for agriculture and fisheries, water capture and storage, coastal protection and tourism enterprises (73&119). The project was initiated in 2012 and was coordinated within OPM;
- “Water, Waste and Sanitation Unit (WATSAN)” was established to reduce the flow of pollutants into the aquatic and inshore marine (lagoons and fringing reefs) ecosystems of Rarotonga and Aitutaki. It was initiated in 2014 and coordinated by ICI. As well, there were national policies for Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), Sanitation and Waste Management.
- Community based NGOs were also involved.
 - Te Ipukarea was to assist OPM in promoting natural solutions for building climate change resilience.
 - The National Council of Women (NCW) was also to be included by documenting the impact of climate change on women and participating in climate change policy development. The MTR later noted that the involvement of NCW did not eventuate as was anticipated to include some gender equity into any climate-related activities.
- A new Biodiversity unit was to be established within NES with key partners including MMR and local NGOs to develop and implement conservation activities for high priority species, especially as a result of climate change activities. (para 105).

Given all that was happening within the Cook Islands with regards to stretching local capacity already involved in project activity relating to climate change and other environmental issues, under the R2R project, CCCI was also to provide technical guidance on integrating climate change resilience into decisions on the siting and management of protected areas and on integrating climate change resilience into the Island Conservation strategies for each of the six inhabited Outer Islands of the Southern Group. Although the SRICCC team participated in a week-long youth workshop in 2016, the lack of any real follow-up and their irregular attendance of project steering committee meetings diminished any quality input of climate change adaptation or mitigation into R2R project activities. Nevertheless, while not developing a specific climate change project, each implementing partner incorporated into at least one of their projects an activity that could result in a climate change adaptation outcome.

- Agriculture has ensured that different climate-resilient crops are more available in their crop banks, including varieties of taro and other that could be better accommodated by the soil and weather conditions of the different islands.
- Tourism has incorporated greater awareness of climatic conditions and biodiversity conservation into their Mana Tiaki Eco Certification programme through an expectation for candidates to incorporate at least one special project into their annual programme.
- MMR surveys of marine life identify the impacts of climate change on the degeneration of the reef environment, on marine life in the lagoon, as well as depleting stocks of finfish. A reef regeneration project will remain in progress even after the closure of the project, in an attempt to support building back our reefs.
- NES has been surveying populations of bird and plant life on its outer islands, watching carefully for any changes in weather patterns that might have consequential impacts on our biodiversity.

POVERTY-ENVIRONMENT NEXUS

UNDP supports the incorporation of sustainable development of the poverty-environment nexus, building from the widely recognised assertion that poverty often exacerbates environmental degradation and environmental damage reinforces poverty. Therefore, country programmes are encouraged to focus on ways to incorporate poverty reduction into the activities of their environmental projects.

For this reason, the involvement within the R2R programme of the Ministry of Agriculture became an important part of the development and implementation of sustainable activities related to these two key assertions, that would reduce the levels of agro-chemicals, sediments and nutrients coming from agricultural areas and into aquatic and inshore marine environments. In support of this goal, MoA worked with MMR on baseline studies to assess the current impacts of fertilizer, pesticides, and nutrients on coastal environments. They supported farmers by training programmes that supported the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices in order to reduce soil erosion and the flow of sediments, and to adopt agricultural practices that would reduce the need for agricultural chemical inputs for crop production. An ultimate goal was to improve the market for sustainable agricultural products and at the same time ensure quality products for the use and consumption of the hospitality industry as well as for local families.

A very successful training programme was run on Rarotonga and again on Atiu for Pa Enea farmers and growers that introduced farmers to MoA “crop banks”, and provided support with farming inputs, as well as training about appropriate pesticide use. Crop banks were introduced on the Southern Group islands of Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke, Mitiaro and Mangaia. They were established to conserve traditional varieties of root and vegetable crops, coconuts, fruit trees and medicinal plants. In the event of a cyclone affecting the planting areas of the Pa Enea, these food varieties would be distributed to those islands to facilitate immediate replanting programmes for homes and communities. The Ministry purchased seeds from overseas, grew these in their nurseries and distributed them to farmers to plant. They also helped to develop and support a new bee-keeping industry on several of the islands. Strengthening their data collection and analysis systems, using R2R funding to support the establishment of their AgINTEL (Agricultural Intelligence) database, has been helpful in enabling them to collect, analyse, record and impart market information to their stakeholders. The Ministry has also reinstated the Pesticides Board in an effort to monitor and also reduce the amount of pesticides imported into the country. The Ministry is also supporting organic farming with experts being brought in from SPC to provide further training.

The Ministry has also established a successful partnership with Te Korero o te Orau, a non-governmental organisation that currently provides school holiday programmes that focus on science, environmental and indigenous issues and believes that connecting young people with their environment using traditional knowledge to explain the science of it, will transform the mindset of our future generations. Most importantly, Te Korero o te Orau aims to provide our children with the tools to enable them to make better informed decisions regarding the utilisation of their natural resources to build a resilient Cook Islands.

To date, a total of seventy-three (73) children made up of forty-four (44) females and twenty-nine (29) males registered for the overall five-day school holiday program. Ages ranged from as young as 5 years old to 17 years old. The programme re-creates the typical Cook Islands Māori lifestyle that previous generations grew up with, as a means of re-connecting young people with the environment and to encourage the use of the Māori language. Taking a practical hands-on approach to learning indigenous life skills such as rangaranga (weaving with coconut leaves), tanu taro (planting taro), tautai (fishing), 'opu moa (catching chicken), kangakanga (traditional games), tui 'ei (making eis), ta'u umu (cooking underground), and tanu 'ūtū (planting king bananas) are all inclusive of the way of life of Cook Islanders. Technology (e.g., mobile phones, hand-held gaming consoles) were discouraged in order to keep children connected to the activities and to the people around them. The overall school holiday programme received nationwide television and front page newspaper coverage and requests came from parents, associates and other agencies to continue the program during each school holiday. The Ministry of Agriculture aims to continue to support this programme.

Protection of the marine environment using the ra'ui approach has been another way of the Cook Islands retaining a traditional method for protected areas for conservation of our biodiversity. This approach was one of the key purposes detailed in the introduction to the R2R Project document - to support the Cook Islands in maintaining traditional resource management and conservation systems and approaches, including a leading role for traditional and local leaders and the local communities that they represent in the declaration and management of protected areas, while also integrating these traditional systems into a formal legal and institutional system of protected areas.

However, the six years of the R2R project has seen an erosion of the success of the traditional conservation model in modern times due to the lack of regard and a conflict of values by some landowners of traditional conservation practices, in their quest for monetary gain from poaching from resource areas designated by traditional leaders as ra'ui sites.

Ra'ui sites are small-scale conservation zones established and managed by traditional leaders in conjunction with local communities. They have a number of characteristics: 1) they are primarily concentrated in coastal and inshore ecosystems but can also be established at inland sites; 2) they are typically established on a temporary basis (a few months to a few years), but can also be permanent; and 3) they normally prohibit entry and/or taking in an entire area and thus are ecosystem focused, but they also can apply to specific species. Traditionally, the primary management objective of Ra'ui sites has been resource management, and especially the protection of food resources. While this objective remains the highest priority for most Ra'ui sites, today these sites are also seen as important for ecosystem conservation. Community conservation areas are similar to Ra'ui sites, except that they are proposed and overseen by Island Councils rather than traditional leaders (PRODOC, 22). The Aronga Mana or traditional leaders and the traditional wardens (tiaki ra'ui) have a wealth of local traditional and cultural knowledge which they can contribute to the management of protected areas, particularly for the Ra'ui areas for which they are primarily responsible. However, they do not have formal training or technical knowledge in protected areas management (24). The lack of a legal

mandate for enforcement (as well as a lack of regular review and follow up) [has] limited the efficacy of these ra'ui so that support and management of these sites has diminished over time (36).

In 1998, the Koutu Nui reasserted their traditional role in environmental management by initiating the reintroduction of Ra'ui sites around the Rarotonga lagoon. The MMR worked closely with the Koutu Nui in establishing these Ra'ui sites through ecological surveys, devising management plans for harvesting, and on-going monitoring surveys. Although this approach met with some initial success, many of the Ra'ui areas declared impeded on subsistence fishing requirements, and the lack of a legal mandate for enforcement to prevent poaching limited the efficacy of these Ra'ui so that support and management of these sites has diminished over time. Over the past few years, the MMR has drawn on its competency in offshore fisheries compliance and enforcement and using advisers from the NZ Ministry of Fisheries to develop a cadre of compliance staff to undertake local fisheries enforcement roles. The MMR continues to support Ra'ui established on other islands such as Aitutaki and Manihiki and provides enforcement for by-laws established by island council. MMR has also drafted regulations to provide enforcement to Ra'ui sites designated by traditional leaders on Rarotonga. However, traditional leaders remain interested in finding ways to provide legal authority and backing to the ra'ui system in a way that will not disempower them as the traditional authority (37).

Finding:

The issues related to traditional and modern biodiversity conservation practices requires further explanation especially to local landowners about the technical and scientific necessity for sustainable conservation practices. As well there is a need for intense mediation and negotiation to resolve what has become an impasse between local landowners, Aronga Mana, and local councils.

Annex 12. Status at TE of TAG Review/Action on Key Reports Produced with Project Support & Brief TE Assessment of Quality of the Reports

Below is a summary of products (reports/plans/policy papers/strategies) produced with R2R support and includes a brief description of what has happened with those products and a very brief assessment of the quality and relevance of each product.

Lesson: This type of overview is helpful and should, as best practice, be kept by the PMU. If only a project's RF is used for reporting, much important information is missed. For example, this type of table or a table of Ra'ui sites and the management status of each, etc. are helpful in keeping track of where a project is and can provide much more practical information than merely reporting on indicators and targets in an (often faulty) RF.

Report & Cost	Date TAG Met to Discuss Report	Outcome of Discussion (any decisions, recommendations, actions)	Action Taken by Government after TAG Review/Decision	TE Notes/Recommendations
Marae Moana Outlook Report (version 1 DRAFT 2020) Cost= NZ\$19,378	According to MMCO, the revised MM Outlook Report has not yet been reviewed by the TAG as it was recently received. It was shared with TAG on March 8 and is on the agenda for the March 22 TAG meeting.	An independent review (outside the TAG) was done as required under the MM Act. It was decided to, in essence, begin again and contract a new team to draft a new MM Outlook report. The 2 nd report was sent to TAG on 3/8. Comments were expected in mid-March. Once comments are received will go back to authors if changes are required, then back to TAG and then to Cabinet for endorsement.	None to date	The TE reviewed the first draft of the first Outlook Report. The funding level initially allocated for this effort was not nearly enough. This certainly significantly constrained the outcome. Under-funding such an effort was not a cost-effective approach and caused several problems. See Section 4.3.7 of this report for more details. The TE did not review the new (second) Outlook Report as this was not yet available at the time the Project Information Package was shared with the TE Team. It is noteworthy that only one week has been given by the MMCO for the TAG to review the new Outlook Report. We believe this is insufficient time for a serious review even if nothing else was on the agenda (but a lot is on the agenda).
Sustainable Finance Mechanisms for Ridge to Reef Approaches and Protected Area Management within Marae Moana: An Assessment of	Shared with TAG in March 2020 (one year ago). Not yet reviewed by TAG. Is on agenda for March 22, 2021 TAG meeting.		None to date.	The report was shared with the TAG one year ago, but it has not yet reviewed it. According to the MMCO Director, it is now on the agenda of the next meeting of the TAG, at which time this and three other key products of the R2R project are to be discussed. MFEM should have been a key partner in this effort. It was not. This is also not high on the radar of NES. The

<p>Options Report</p> <p>(Final March 2020)</p> <p>NZ\$ 98,000</p>			<p>Director of NES apparently unaware of this effort. There is a single reference to SFM in the final draft of the NEP (2020). "All decisions regarding the environment of the Cook Islands should (a) adopt democratic and transparent decision-making procedures and financial accountability2;" The footnote reads, "2 Sustainable financing may include a dedicated environmental fund." And, under the section on Governance, "That a sustainable financing framework is established which would include recognizing the impacts of climate change and natural disasters on the environment and responding to it.</p> <p>The report provides many examples from other countries. Good sharing of experiences from around the world. Comprehensive report. Well done. it is a comprehensive publication on financing options that are available today and a first step that enables considering various options, at least in principle, even if not with detailed estimates of revenues</p> <p>It may have been helpful to estimate how much revenue could likely be generated by the various mechanisms mentioned such as taxes, etc.. The costs have been estimated but there is no estimate of potential revenue. This makes the report fairly theoretical. Next step is to estimate possible revenues from various sources.</p> <p>It was good that the report went into some history regarding the previous Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) in the 1990s. "There appears to be broad perception that the EPF, although innovative at the time, was not ultimately effective, generally due to a perceived lack of transparency in the administration, governance and decision-making of these funds, as well as a lack of environmental projects successfully receiving financial support from EPF (Conservation International, 2019). Many of the consulted stakeholders expressed their concern that this type of environmental funding runs the risk of being reprogrammed for other purposes, and that environmental funding</p>
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				<p>derived from a departure tax may be better suited to a specially designated fund for conservation or environment purposes.” It may have been helpful to discuss specific ways of avoiding the problems experienced with the earlier fund.</p> <p>Would have been good to discuss potential pitfalls related to biodiversity offsets, especially if EIA processes are not adequate. Instituting biodiversity offsets when EIA processes are not strong can lead to increased revenues with little BD benefits and even increased threats to BD.</p>
Protected Areas Classification System Discussion Paper (January 2021)	Was shared with TAG in February, 2021. Like so many other key project-supported technical products, this too is on the agenda for March 22 TAG meeting		None to date	The following sentence was included in the Final draft of the National Environment Policy (2020) regarding a PA classification system, “Support development of an integrated classification system for land and marine protected areas – a Protected Areas Classification System (PACS).
Protected Area Management Policy Discussion Paper (Final December, 2020) NZ\$54,000	Not yet shared with MMCO by PMU. The PM indicated that although the discussion paper deals with all PAs, it is not specific to the Marae Moana, and therefore had not been shared with MMCO. Not reviewed yet by TAG.		Reference included in the Final draft of the National Environment Policy (2020)	No draft policy was actually developed as this effort began much later than originally anticipated. It only started in 2020. A policy discussion paper regarding a policy was developed instead of an actual proposed policy. The PAM Policy was supposed to identify: 1) Priority areas required to reform protected areas legislation and institutional and governance arrangements. 2) Implementation arrangements for islands and the territorial seas (coastline to 12 nm) including options for integrated land-sea management, management planning, and zoning. Particular emphasis is required on interactions between the Environment, Island Government and Marae Moana Acts. 3) Strategic assessment and recommendations on a conceptual model for PAM policy and legislation. 4) Potential organisational arrangements including agency roles and responsibilities that might flow on from conceptual model. 5) Potential opportunities, initiatives and targets that government may wish to consider for inclusion in the National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP)

				2021-25 and to adopt as government policy positions. This might include international obligations under the CBD, UNFCC and other treaties, as they relate to PAM.
Marae Moana Marine Spatial Planning Policy Paper (Final January 2021)	Has been shared and is with TAG members at the moment. On March 22 agenda. Has been discussed several times in draft form.	<p>There are issues around sensitivity of mapping of the ocean floor. SBMA has started mapping the ocean floor. Licenses are being given to explore the seabed for minerals. A MSP, including zoning, is, however, not yet in place. This is partly a coordination issue (even if SBMA is a member of the TAG) .</p> <p>According to MMCO, some recommendations to amendments proposed in the report to the 2017 MM Act don't sit well with some of the partners. There is concern that if these amendments are made, they will affect other existing legislation including the Marine Resources Act and its amendments, the Seabed minerals act and its amendments , and the new national environment policy which is still in draft.</p> <p>Re-defining zones will complicate matters according to some of the RPs because "old", i.e., existing definition of zones was used in the legislation pertaining to them.</p>	No action taken to date. Discussions regarding the policy paper are underway.	Helpful paper that brings many issues to the fore that will need to be confronted if the CIMP is to be more than a "paper park". This paper helps to bring reality to what it means to designate the Marae Moana as a marine park. There are many relatively fundamental issues at project end that still need to be sorted out which this project was expected to help sort out. The paper is useful as having a basis for discussion on how to move forward.
Marine Ecosystem Services Valuation report (DRAFT Dec 2020. Final March 2021)	not formally shared with TAG at draft stage based on the fact that ongoing consultations had been conducted with relevant TAG members,	TAG members contributed to the report via the survey systems so they have been aware of this from the early stages.		<p>Under-budgeted in the PRODOC but more funds were subsequently devoted to this allowing for a good quality report.</p> <p><u>Challenges:</u></p> <p>Covid did not allow IC to travel. A NC was hired, Kelvin Passfield, who did all interviews.</p> <p>Getting data from the ministries was challenging. Especially MMR and ICI</p>

<p>NZ\$54,000 (almost double what was originally budgeted for which was US\$20,000)</p>	<p>including the engagement of TIS as the local NGO counterpart in the report production, in order to collect the relevant data needed for the report.</p>			<p>(information on location of vulnerable coastal assets).</p> <p>No final workshop/event took place (and none is planned) to present and discuss the report. This is normally done and would be helpful in ensuring awareness of the report and providing the opportunity for discussion. Without this, may be difficult for senior government officials to come on board.</p> <p>Team worked primarily with NES, not much with MFEM although MFEM was included in the survey done at the beginning of the effort. IC had no contact with MFEM.</p> <p><u>Benefits:</u></p> <p>Even though CI well aware of importance of their marine environment, study may have helped to raise awareness of key decision makers. Way of framing the importance of ecosystem services. This potential benefit depends on what is done with the report, especially as no final workshop was held. None has been planned.</p> <p>Got good data for most of the ecosystems. He is confident that quality of report is good.</p> <p>Household surveys worked well. Got good response rate.</p> <p>May have built some local capacity, especially in TIS even though there was no training element but Kelvin and his team were involved in frequent discussion.</p> <p>Did survey at the beginning of the project – surveyed all the ministries, including MoF</p> <p>Recommendation: Produce a graphic schematic to make it more easily understood</p>
<p>Marine Bioregions of the Cook Islands (Final December 2020)</p>	<p>Not yet reviewed by TAG.</p>	<p>Even though this report has not yet been reviewed by the TAG, SBMA and MMR have already expressed some concerns.</p>		

NZ33,250				
Biophysically Special Unique Marine Areas (SUMA) report (Final November 2020) Combined with Bioregions consultancy	TAG has this report but it has not yet been discussed. According to MMCO, it too is on the agenda for the TAG March 22 nd meeting.	A long time has passed since the initial report was received but it has not yet been reviewed because key decision makers have not been available.		MMR has indicated some concerns with the process undertaken to define the SUMA. The approach adopted is a standard one that has been used in other countries. The TE believes that a greater effort to obtain scientific data from entities such as MMR, and greater willingness on the part of MMR to share information, prior to the workshop would have been helpful, and mechanism put in place to ensure all scientific data was included (MMR indicated few data points which MMR had provided were included in the identification of the SUMA). The Consultants indicated difficulty in getting MMR to share data for the exercise.

Annex 13. TE Assessment of Project Oversight by UNDP as GEF Agency for this Project

Note: A color-coding system is used, with green shading indicating satisfactory, brown indicating less than satisfactory; and no colour indicating that aspect of project oversight cannot be assessed at this time.

Responsibility	TE Observations/Comments	Evidence Collected From
<p>Convene/participate in LPAC meeting</p>	<p>A Local Project Appraisal Committee (LPAC) meeting should be held for full size GEF projects before the expected CEO endorsement date, which in the case of this project was February 2015.</p> <p>The LPAC meeting was held in a timely fashion on November 21, 2014. This was a thorough review, and many important issues were raised at the meeting including the need to ensure gender and youth were adequately addressed in the project. Another issue discussed was whether the project should be DIM instead of NIM given the low score that CKI had received in the capacity assessment. This was to be further discussed despite CKI having indicated that they did not want to sign a LOA. The risk log was seen as overly ambitious in that it may have underestimated risks. The fact that a CTA was mentioned in the PRODOC but was not budgeted for was discussed but no decision taken regarding action that may be required. Mention is also made that wording regarding the PSC would need to be clarified and that even if the NBSC is used as the PSC, UNDP would need to be included as a member on that Committee.</p>	<p>LPAC Meeting Minutes (erroneously entitled PAC Meeting Minutes)</p>
<p>Ensure project inception workshop is held on time with all project executing agencies and all topics expected to be covered are adequately discussed</p>	<p>Project inception workshops should be held within 60 days after CEO endorsement. This was also the deadline agreed under the DOA for this project. The M&E plan in the PRODOC indicates that the inception workshop should take place within the first two months of project start up. The Inception Report should be completed within one month of the inception workshop.</p> <p>The inception workshop took place quite late (on Oct 20, 2015), eight months after CEO endorsement on 23 February 2015 instead of within the required maximum of 60 days after endorsement, with the report completed on time one month later (November 2015).</p> <p>The workshop lasted two days and was well attended by over 60 participants including Government Agencies, NGOs, Island Government Council representatives, Private sector, Traditional leaders and community organizations. UNDP was well represented with two UNDP representatives from UNDP MCO Samoa and the Regional Technical Advisor from the UNDP Office in Bangkok. One of the two original co-chairs of the PSC (the TIS representative) was, however, not present (although two TIS staff were present).</p> <p>Lesson: It is important to ensure the Chair/s of a PSC attend the project inception workshop.</p>	<p>Project Inception Workshop Report</p> <p>TE Interviews</p>

All topics expected to be covered during an inception workshop were covered, including the Results Framework (RF), institutional responsibilities, budget and financing, the 2016 AWP and budget, the M&E plan, consultancy needs, TORs for the project team and TORs for the PSC. A number of these topics were, however, addressed rather superficially. This was a serious deficiency. Indicators and targets in the RF were not fine-tuned. Discussion of institutional responsibilities was basically limited to reviewing who the Executive, Senior Supplier and Senior Beneficiary were and reviewing the TOR for the PSC. There was no discussion or outlining of the responsibilities of each of the Responsible Parties (RPs), including what activities each would be responsible for. Reporting lines were not reviewed. No detailed work plan was produced.

Lesson: This would have been a good opportunity to ensure that the various RPs understood the need to report to the PM and that Project Officers in MMR as well as the Ra'ui Coordinator understood that they would report both to their own entities as well as to the PM. There was no discussion related to having both a Project Coordinator and a Project Manager.

According to the workshop report, "The top priority was to review and endorse the project's Strategic Results Framework (log-frame)". From the report, it is not clear what changes were actually proposed, if any. The report mentions that "A number of adjustments were needed: a) to align with the required GEF format; b) to clarify project targets; c) to re-order and revise some Outputs to make them more logical; d) to insert some missing information and outputs". The report then somewhat confusingly indicates that, "No amendments were further done on the SRF due to it being sufficient in what was expected of the R2R project." There were, in fact, many weaknesses in the RF and this opportunity, at still an early stage in the project, to revise the RF was missed.

"There were no revisions to the project budget and financing of the R2R Project discussed during the Inception workshop." A number of activities were in fact under-budgeted, but this was not recognized during the inception workshop. No changes were made to the project risk log.

The UNDP team gave a presentation on the GEF-UNDP Finance procedures and mechanisms to be employed in the project.

"The Project Document budgeted activities for a large number of consultant-led inputs (national and international). However, there was no definition of the number or roles of individual consultants, and no TORs for many of the proposed TOR's. Substantial work is still needed to determine consultancy arrangements and priorities." The consultancies were reviewed but no decisions were taken regarding these except that in principle international consultants would only be hired where national expertise did not exist. The report indicates that consultancies would be included in the procurement plan which would be developed during the first year of the project.

	<p>TOR included in the workshop report are for the Project Coordinator, Finance/Administrative Assistant, NES Project Officer, MMR Project Officer and Ra’ui Site Coordinator. There is no indication that these TOR were discussed. No changes were made to their TOR as presented in the PRODOC although there were significant weaknesses in these TOR in the estimation of the TET. The report also included a note that “Terms of Reference need to be developed for the following project staff: two Marine Technical Staff supporting marine monitoring stations on Aitutaki and Rarotonga for years 1-3 of the Project; one full-time ranger each at Takutea and Manuae for years 1-3 of the project; and 1 full-time staff for monitoring and enforcement in Aitutaki lagoon for years 1-3 of the project.” Such TOR were never developed as it was decided that rangers at Takutea and Manuae should not be recruited. No explanation has been provided to the TET regarding why no one was recruited for the monitoring/enforcement in Aitutaki lagoon.</p> <p>Lesson: Drafting good, detailed TOR is key to the success of consultancies. For technical consultancies, if the PM or CTA do not have a relevant technical background, it may be best to recruit someone to develop those TORs. (If they are knowledgeable about what needs to be done and how to go about doing it, this should not require more than one workday.)</p> <p>Lesson: Although it is common practice to combine “launching” a project with the in-depth review of the PRODOC in a project inception workshop, this is poor practice. Launching a project should be done with a broad audience. The project does not have to be presented in great detail for the purposes of launching it. The launching should take place <u>after</u> the in-depth scrutiny of the PRODOC. Scrutiny of a project’s RF, budget, AWP, etc. is not best done with this same audience but rather with a small group comprised of the PMU, CTA, and key IP representatives (typically not more than 3 or 4 individuals). This is a “roll up the sleeves” intense working session that may last several days during which the RF, AWP for first year, project sites, consultancies, procurement plan for year one, reporting arrangements, are all carefully scrutinized, and changes/updates made as appropriate and permissible by the GEF.</p>	
<p>Ensure experiences/lessons from other relevant projects around the world are shared</p>	<p>Sharing information regarding what other relevant projects exist around the world should be done early on, preferably beginning with the project inception workshop. After this, it is the responsibility of the PMU and CTA to stay up-to-date and informed about what relevant initiatives exist, although sharing of information by UNDP is encouraged throughout a project.</p> <p>According to TE interviews, no experiences/lessons from other relevant projects around the world were shared by UNDP with the PMU or the IP. The TE is aware of a number of GEF-financed R2R projects, including one in the South Pacific and others in the Caribbean, that would have been relevant to this project and from which ongoing experience lessons could have been shared.</p>	<p>Project Inception Workshop Report</p> <p>TE Interviews</p>
<p>Ensure annual PIRs and a Project</p>	<p>PIRs were produced for all years for which they were required. A total of 4 PIRs were produced (2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). No PIR was</p>	<p>PIRs</p>

<p>Terminal Report and Exit Strategy (if indicated in the PRODOC or inception workshop report) are prepared that provide a comprehensive and candid picture of progress, risks etc.</p>	<p>produced in 2016 and no PIR will be produced for 2021 as this is not required¹⁷. PIRs were comprehensive and mostly candid. Progress reported by the RPs was rarely verified by the PMU.</p> <p>An End of Project (project terminal report) and an exit/sustainability strategy was prepared by the PM and the CTA. The final version of this report was completed in a timely fashion (March 2021) with three months remaining in the project. The report has not yet been shared with the PSC (as of mid-March 2021). Although preparation of the terminal report within this time frame is acceptable, it is not optimal as it leaves discussion by the PSC to its last meeting prior to project closure. Progress reports by the various IPs to the PM has not been fully adequate during the project, often lacking verification by the PMU, but it appears that the information provided in the EoP report was generally well verified by both the CTA and the PM. The exit strategy requires strengthening (see relevant section of TE report).</p> <p>Lesson: Project Terminal reports should be prepared in time to ensure that the PSC can review these important reports in time to not only discuss but also take decisions and ensure there is a plan to put recommended exit strategy actions into place.</p> <p>Lesson: Although the EoP report (sometimes referred to as the Terminal report) prepared by PMs certainly should complete the RF indicating progress made as of the time of the preparation of the report, this information should be complemented with much greater detailed textual information. Don't limit yourself to a few sentences simply because a Table format is not conducive to providing more information. There can be pages and pages of details supporting the progress reported in the RF. It is also important to report on progress (and lack thereof) related to commitments made in the PRODOC that were overlooked in the RF.</p>	<p>Terminal Report</p> <p>Exit Strategy</p>
<p>Manage independent MTR process</p>	<p>The MTR was conducted on time (August 1, 2017 to February 28, 2018), approximately 25 months into what was originally planned as a 48-month project (i.e., halfway through the project) with the original closing date being 6 July 2019. Best practice is to have a team comprised of both international and national consultants. The PRODOC called for this (see Overview of Project Consultants), but did not adequately budget for it, dedicating only USD 18,000. The under-funding of the MTR was raised at the LPAC but the budget was not changed. Only an international consultant, no national consultant, was involved in conducting the MTR. This is not best practice and was not in accordance with the PRODOC.</p>	<p>MTR Report</p> <p>TE Interviews</p>
<p>Timely preparation and submission of Management Response and oversee follow-up of MTR</p>	<p>Normally, the management response to an MTR should be prepared within three weeks after a final evaluation report is submitted, but in the case of this project it took 16 months (MTR Final Report Completion Date: 19th October 2017; Date of Issue of Management Response: 14th February 2019). Finalization and submission of the management response to the MTR recommendations was very late,</p>	<p>Management Response to MTR</p> <p>TE Interviews</p>

¹⁷ According to UNDP rules, 2016 PIRs were only required of those projects signed on or before June 2015. This project was signed after that, on 6 July 2015.

<p>recommendations agreed in Management Response to MTR</p>	<p>giving little time to implement the agreed recommendations. Although the draft management response was prepared shortly after the completion of the MTR, it was not discussed and agreed by the PSC until more than a year later despite UNDP’s reminders (via email) to the PC that this needed to be done. According to TET interviews, the frequent travel and heavy workload of the PC delayed presentation of the draft management response to the PSC. The management response was eventually finalized during a UNDP MCO visit to CI. Having a PSC dedicated specifically to this project may have prevented this delay.</p> <p>The MTR recommended revisions be made to the project RF but, according to TE interviews, UNDP indicated it was too late in the project to make any changes. Thus, no changes were made to the RF. The TE does not believe it was “too late” to make changes to the RF. Indeed, if that were the case, there would be no point in asking a MTR to review the RF.</p> <p>The management response is lacking in several respects. There is no indication of dates of when things were actually done. In some cases, there is not even an indication of whether they were done or not. The management response is not comprehensive, e.g., there is no mention of the Aitutaki Lagoon management plan even though it is indicated that the MTR recommendation is agreed. The management response seems to be a static document that is not being updated or used to track the actions agreed related to the MTR recommendations.</p>	
<p>Manage independent process TE</p>	<p>According to the PRODOC, “An independent Final Evaluation will take place three months prior to the final Project Board meeting”. The LPAC recommended this be changed to 6 months prior to or after project completion. The latest guidance on TE (2020) indicates that “Ideally, the evaluation mission occurs during the last few months of project activities, allowing the mission to proceed while the Project Team is still in place, yet ensuring the project is close enough to completion for the evaluation team to reach conclusions on key aspects such as project sustainability”. The guidance also indicates that no significant project activities should take place after the TE process is completed. The TE was conducted in a timely fashion, five and 1/2 months prior to project completion. The TE was not adequately budgeted for (\$27,000 for 1 international and 1 national consultant). Had it not been for COVID-related travel restrictions, there would not have been enough funds to cover international travel and visits to project sites. As it was, travel by the NC was somewhat limited because of lack of budget. The current recommendation is that at least US\$50,000 be budgeted for FSPs - for international/lead consultant) and additional funds for a national consultant. Less than this (a total of \$40,000) was the recommended amount at the time this project was designed.</p> <p>The TE process was managed fairly well although there was room for improvement. The UNDP M&E Analyst was correctly assigned as the TE Manager and made initial contact with the TE Team in a timely fashion, more than a week before the evaluation officially started. The TE Manager promptly set up “Teams” so that documentation could be uploaded for sharing. The PMU could not access “Teams” thus a Google Drive link was subsequently set up. Although many</p>	<p>TET’s experience</p>

of the documents requested by the TE Team were shared on time, there were others that were not shared until the evaluation was well underway. UNDP suggested regular weekly meetings with the TE Team. These were helpful during the planning phase of the TE when logistical arrangements were being made. Care must be taken that these meetings are not misunderstood by less experienced TETs and that the independence of the evaluation team is not compromised in any way. UNDP MCO ensured that budget was made available for the NC to undertake limited site visits despite a funding crunch which resulted from financial management issues which meant the project had less funds than originally thought. The PM had at first indicated that due to budget constraints no travel outside of Rarotonga would be possible for the TE. This matter was satisfactorily resolved with the intervention of the UNDP MCO. The presentation of preliminary findings was not planned for with sufficient time despite the date of the presentation being agreed well beforehand (as per the final TE inception report). The result was that, to accommodate UNDP MCO, the presentation and discussion which normally follows was truncated to half the time normally given. In addition to UNDP MCO, 6 PSC members were present (MMR, CIT, MOCD, MFEM/DCD, TIS, MOA) for the presentation of preliminary findings of the TE which took place on March 15, 2021. Only one of the two Co-Chairs of the PSC was present. The Director of NES was not present. The Head of Ministry from MOCD, although that entity is not a core agency involved in this project, did attend the presentation and actively participated.

Lesson: The presentation of preliminary TE findings is an important opportunity to share preliminary findings and to provide opportunity for discussion. Even more so in this case because the next GEF project for CI is already in an advanced stage of planning and the presentation/discussion could have been viewed as an important occasion to learn from this experience to help inform the next project.

An inappropriate request was made by the UNDP MCO for a photographer hired by UNDP to join on TE field site visits to take some project photos. The TE TL indicated to UNDP MCO this was not appropriate and this was supported by the UNDP RTA. The current RTA has provided excellent support to the TE, answering all questions raised in a timely and comprehensive manner, and with her inputs and participation in meetings enhancing the quality of those meetings and of the TE. The five RTAs which have been responsible for this project over the project period have provided high quality technical and managerial support to the project. RTAs have made three visits to the CKI over the project period. The RTAs have not been included in the review or approval of large-scale contracts awarded by the project.

Recommendation: In future projects, all large contracts should be reviewed by the RTA before signing. The ASL should not be issued until the RTA receives the AWP and provides his feedback on it. The TE believes this approach is helpful in ensuring proper technical oversight of the process of awarding contracts.

	<p>UNDP was responsible for identifying and recruiting the TE Team. All TE Team members met independence criteria but not all had the qualifications necessary to enable effective contribution to the TE including a relevant technical background, previous project evaluation experience, familiarity with the GEF, or intimate familiarity with the country's relevant policies, programmes and projects as related to the project.</p> <p>Lesson: Especially during COVID when travel to a country by the IC (who is normally the more experienced Team member with the GEF and project evaluations) is not possible, ensuring the NC has a relevant technical background and preferably also some project evaluation experience and familiarity with the GEF is important. In the event it is not possible to recruit a NC with a relevant technical background or experience in project evaluation and familiarity with the GEF, additional workdays should be given to the IC to enable her/him to do more than the normal amount of training for the NC.</p>	
Ensure TTs/Core Indicators are prepared for all relevant GEF Focal Areas at project inception, mid-term, and prior to the TE	See Section 4.2.4	METTs/Core Indicator Reports
Ensure proper composition of PB	<p>If existing committees are to serve as project steering committees for UNDP-supported, GEF-financed projects, it is the responsibility of UNDP to ensure the composition of these is in keeping with GEF and UNDP norms. The National Biodiversity Steering Committee serves as the PSC for this project. Even though as early as the LPAC it was recognized that there was need to clarify UNDP's role in the Committee, there is still confusion as to whether UNDP is a member of the Committee or not. This matter was never adequately clarified. UNDP is mentioned as a member of the PSC in some parts of the PRODOC as well as in some parts of the project inception workshop report (page 29), whilst not in other parts of the same documents. According to TE interviews with UNDP MCO, it does not consider itself to be a member of this "national" committee but has not found this arrangement to be problematic as it is always invited to attend NBSC meetings. The TE inquired with the RTA about the legality of an arrangement in which UNDP is not a legal member of a GEF project PSC even though the PRODOC stipulates that it will be. According to the previous RTA, this arrangement is legally possible. The TE believes further clarification on this issue may be required for future projects as no evidence was shared regarding the legal possibility of this arrangement, only that it is not specifically excluded. See detailed assessment of the PSC below.</p>	<p>TORs for PSC</p> <p>Actual composition of PSC according to PSC Meeting Minutes</p> <p>TE Interviews</p>
Ensure proper functioning of PB and timely conduct of PB meetings.	<p>The TET requested in its inception report that all PSC meeting minutes be shared with the TET. We believe several meeting minutes were not shared. The following information is based on the minutes shared. It may be incomplete if not all minutes were shared.</p> <p>The Board has met regularly over the 7 calendar years during which the project has operated, meeting quarterly every year with the</p>	<p>PSC Meeting Minutes</p> <p>TE Interviews</p>

	<p>exception of 2018 (only 1 meeting¹⁸) and only 3 meetings/year instead of 4 in 2017 and 2019. The Board met regularly in 2020 despite the COVID pandemic.</p> <p>UNDP's participation in Board meetings has been less than optimal. Of the 17 Board meetings which have taken place since the project began, UNDP (which does not have an office in Cook Islands) attended 5 (less than one third), missing the first meeting. UNDP's first participation was in the April 2016 meeting, 9 months after project start, with 3 Board meetings having already taken place. In 2017, a "UN Coordination Officer" based in Cis attended 2 meetings as a representative of UNDP. Since the October 2020 meeting, UNDP has participated remotely (via Zoom). UNDP's participation has been mostly at the level of Assistant Resident Representative/Programme Manager for the UNDP MCO, Samoa, although the Deputy Resident Representative also participated in the most recent meeting. Both the UNDP Programme Officer and the UNDP MCO Finance Officer participated in 3 of the meetings. Whereas there was no representation by UNDP at the majority of Board meetings, more than one UNDP representative participated in 3 of the 5 meetings they did attend. UNDP RTAs participated in two PSC meetings over the course of the project (the first in June/July 2017 -- two years after the project began -- and the second in 2018 following the MTR).</p> <p>As of the time of this writing, the Board has met once this year (2021), the last year of the project. Two more PSC meetings will take place before project closure. One, the week of 3/22/21 for end of Q1/start of Q2. EoP & the Exit/Sustainability Strategy reports will be discussed as well as updates on TE progress and the presentation of TE preliminary findings (the recording of which was shared with all PSC members). Final meeting will be held end of May/start of June just before/after project closure to present final documents, confirm spending and activity completions, and for final wrap up.</p>	
<p>Ensure audits/spot checks are conducted as required</p>	<p>According to the Monitoring and Evaluation plan presented at the Inception Workshop, audits will be conducted yearly (page 33). Audits were not conducted yearly. The Project operates under HACT policies. Instead of doing project audits, audits are done of the main IP, i.e., NES. Over the course of the six-year project, one annual audit was conducted of NES (2016) as well as one Spot Check (October 2019). NES also does annual internal spot checks. A micro-assessment of NES was conducted in 2020. If other assessments were conducted, no record of these was shared with the TET. The UNDP MCO underwent a HACT audit in 2020 for 2019 financial records and an internal UNDP audit in 2018.</p> <p>According to UNDP policy, "The Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfer (HACT) dictates policies and procedures for capacity assessment, cash transfer modality, audit, assurance and monitoring. Before an entity can be engaged as an IP on a UNDP project, a capacity assessment of that entity is performed including assessment of technical, managerial, administrative, and financial capacity. The capacity of the IP should be regularly re-assessed by</p>	<p>Audit Reports TE Interviews</p>

¹⁸ Based on the info in PIRs, the PSC met on 1/26/18 and 7/26/18 but as these minutes were not shared, these are not included in the analysis.

	<p>UNDP throughout the project, preferably annually. The HACT macro- and micro-assessments are the basis for selection of the cash transfer modality used for each IP and the level of assurance activities used. The level of risk may change over time, and this may require appropriate changes in options for cash transfer modality, and audit and monitoring procedures.”</p> <p>Given the financial management issues experienced over the project life, the TE questions why annual micro-assessments were not conducted, and why the conclusion was derived in the first place that NES had the capacity to effectively manage this size and complexity of a project. NES had never managed a project of this size before, the largest project previous to this one being approximately one fourth the size and not nearly as complex.</p>	
Ensure recommendations in audit reports are addressed	It was not possible for the TE to assess whether this was done as only one audit report was shared in the Project Information Package.	Audit Reports TE Interviews
Ensure project is included in portfolio discussed during annual meetings of the Country Programme Board (Board responsible for oversight of the UNDP Country Programme implementation)	No evidence was provided by UNDP MCO that the project was included in the portfolio discussed during annual meetings of the Country Programme Board. The fact that senior management in the UNDP MCO were under the impression that the project was one of their most successful projects despite having received no higher than “Moderately Unsatisfactory” ratings for all years for which PIRs were done and the same rating by the MTR, would suggest that it was not.	TE Interviews with UNDP CO Country Programme Board Meeting Minutes
Conduct field monitoring visits to verify progress reported and to manage any risks identified	See Section 4.2.4 on Monitoring	BTORs TE Interviews
Ensure project risks are properly managed and mitigation measures and management plans are in place.	<p>Most risks were well defined although some were underestimated. Not all were properly managed, especially those related to social and environmental risk management and sustainability.</p> <p>Pre-screening of these factors identified that the project had some potential risk for indigenous people and vulnerable groups, gender equality and women’s empowerment, yet there were too few specified activities included in the project that demonstrated how the project could minimise such an impact.</p>	TE interviews PRODOC LPAC meeting minutes PIRs Terminal Report Exit Strategy
Ensure UNDP and GEF “mainstreamed issues” are adequately addressed	Gender and youth were cited in the LPAC as areas that “needed to be given much more emphasis”. The LPAC meeting minutes indicate, “youth and women to be much more involved in the stakeholder plan. The LPAC discussed the possibility of including gender and youth in the TOR of the PM as a way of ensuring these “groups” were	TE interviews PRODOC

	<p>fully incorporated in project implementation. None of this was done. The TE notes that the EoP report prepared by the PM and the CTA does not even mention the word gender or women or youth and despite youth buy-in and engagement in the project objective being a huge factor in sustainability of the project effort, youth are not mentioned in the exit/sustainability strategy.</p> <p>Poverty and the environment were given some focused attention through the Ministry of Agriculture’s training and support of farmers on Rarotonga and the Pa Enuu, on the need for the reduction of the use of chemically-based fertilisers and pesticides. MOA also provided support for home gardens with banks of more resilient food crops that could sustain a climatic event. Climate Change could potentially impact marine and terrestrial environments, yet there were no climate change activities within the programme.</p> <p><i>Lesson: Sharing of practical experiences from around the world (not just guidelines) regarding how to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment (as well as other cross-cutting issues) can be incorporated into projects should be done with the RPs at an early stage of the project.</i></p>	<p>LPAC meeting minutes</p> <p>PIRs</p> <p>Terminal Report</p> <p>Exit Strategy</p>
<p>Oversee timely preparation of Management Response to TE</p>	<p>Cannot be assessed by the TE.</p>	<p>Management Response to TE</p>
<p>Ensure PMU coordinates annual work planning workshop to discuss challenges, share lessons and good practices between executing agencies, and to strategize for the following year.</p>	<p>Cannot be assessed by the TE. No information provided.</p>	
<p>Ensure co-financing commitments are realized and updated correctly at MTR and TE.</p>	<p>Co-financing commitments have not been fully realized for UNDP or for NES, the IP, at the time of the TE, with UNDP having provided only 67% of the grant (TRAC) co-financing it committed to provide, and NES providing only 55% of their in-cash commitment. No information was available from UNDP regarding co-financing amounts provided by MFEM. The TE requested the evidence regarding the amounts of co-financing indicated by other partners but this was not provided. UNDP co-financing was not documented at the time of the MTR, with the MTR report simply indicating “TBA” for UNDP co-financing.</p>	<p>TE Interviews and email communications with UNDP MCO and PMU</p>

Annex 14. Risk Assessment Guiding Matrix

		Impact				
		CRITICAL	HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	NEGLIGIBLE
Likelihood	CERTAIN / IMMEDIATE	Critical	Critical	High	Medium	Low
	VERY LIKELY	Critical	High	High	Medium	Low
	LIKELY	High	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
	MODERATELY LIKELY	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Negligible
	UNLIKELY	Low	Low	Negligible	Negligible	Considered to pose no determinable risk

Annex 15. Monitoring Visits by UNDP as the GEF Agency

Date of Monitoring Mission by UNDP	Who went	Purpose
Sept 2015	Tessa Tafua, UNDP Samoa Programme Officer	Plan for the inception workshop and attend to other projects
Oct 2015	Tessa Tafua, UNDP Samoa Taufao Taufao, UNDP Samoa Johan Robinson, RTA (Bangkok)	Participate in the project inception workshop
May 9-13 2016	Doley Tshering, RTA, UNDP BRHD Tessa Tafua, Programme Officer, UNDP MCO, Frances Brown, Programme Associate, UNDP MCO	Follow up on progress of UNDP-GEF project with NES (R2R, ABS, NBSAP) And attend to other projects
June 27 – July 5 2017	Dr. Michael Green, UNDP GEF RTA Anne Trevor, UNDP Programme Officer	For the Multi Country Office (MCO) Programme Officer and Regional Technical Advisor (RTA) to visit the R2R project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow up on progress of project implementation of the R2R project • To support the R2R project in preparation for the Mid Term Evaluation • To support R2R Project in the Project Implementation Report (PIR) • The mission will also use the opportunity for the RTA and MCO Programme Officer to assist with the NBSAP and ABS project follow up actions • To discuss new project opportunities through a follow up project with NCSA for Cook Islands through the CCCD GEF focal area and GEF 7. • To attend Steering Committee Meeting –NES projects (NBSAP, ABS and R2R).
May 2018	Michael Green, RTA	Follow up on MTR recommendations
Jan 2020	Anne Trevor Ioane Iosefo	To attend the Cook Islands R2R Project Consolidation workshop and Biodiversity Steering committee Meeting and follow up on project implementation progress and reporting

Annex 17. Lessons

Lesson 1. This R2R project had 7 outputs, a number of which could have been an entire project in and of themselves. Take, for example, any of the following: Output 2.1: Ridge to Reef approaches integrated into land use and development planning, Output 2.2: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into agriculture sector, Output 2.3: Biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into tourism sector. Even some of the individual activities, such as ecosystem valuation, could have been an entire project (as was the case in the GEF-supported Piloting Natural Resource Valuation in Jamaica project, for example). **Lesson:** Simply because a project's approach is "ridge to reef" does not mean it should encompass everything. R2R in its truest sense encompasses all. A project is not a programme. A project cannot possibly succeed if it is all-inclusive. R2R projects should choose a specific R2R issue (as one example, agricultural practices in a given watershed that affect a globally significant marine ecosystem) and focus exclusively on that.

Lesson 2. Simplify. Successful BD projects are usually focused on addressing a few specific barriers/problems rather than attempting to address *all* the problems affecting biodiversity that may be identified in a threats analysis. Especially in countries where capacity constraints are significant, as is often the case in SIDS with small populations, limiting the scope of a project and the number of entities involved in implementation is best. Longer than normal time frames may also be needed.

Lesson 3. Many project activities were viewed as "add-ons" by RPs, not part of their core programme and therefore not of equally high priority. Project activities need to be built into regular work programmes of government entities. For this to happen, decision makers need to be very much involved in the design of projects and understand the commitment being made when a PRODOC is signed. There must also be adequate time in between the signing of a PRODOC and the time when IPs and RPs are expected to begin implementation as there is little flexibility to modify annual government work programmes once agreed. **Lesson:** Build Projects into Regular Work Programmes of IPs and RPs to enhance national buy-in and implementation.

Lesson 4. Given the capacity constraints in country, it was a good approach for the project to pay for additional technical people in the various Responsible Partner (RP) agencies and it was appropriate to house them in those entities instead of in a central PMU unit. Nevertheless, it is clear that some of their time, indeed in some cases, a significant amount of their time, was devoted to matters that were not project-related. The TE believes the solution is not to house all technical resource persons in a PMU, but rather to put a reporting system in place where monthly meetings happen during which all gather at the PMU to report on progress made to the PM. The PRODOC specified that "The NES Project Officer and the MMR Project Officer will report to the Project Coordinator, as well as to their respective supervisors within each Ministry" but in actual fact, there was little reporting done to the PM. If during regular PMU meetings it is clear that benchmarks are not being met due to lack of time dedicated to project efforts, resources should be reallocated. **Lesson:** Clear reporting lines (in this case to both the RP and the PMU), regular and official reporting to the PMU (instead of irregular and casual reporting), and use of achievement benchmarks motivates progress and helps ensure GEF-paid staff outposted in RPs dedicate their time to GEF project tasks.

Lesson 5. Consideration should have been given to beginning with a Medium Size Project (MSP) before undertaking to manage a Full-Size Project (FSP). This would have reduced risk and would have

been more congruent with existing capacity and experience which could have been built over the project so that NES could successfully play the role of IP in future larger projects. The biggest project the IP (NES) had managed prior to this one was less than one fourth the size, and far less complex.

Lesson 6. Limit the number of Government RPs on a project. Involving numerous Government agencies on a project may reduce ownership of the project by all of them.

Lesson 7. Projects must plan realistically based on known challenges. Existing known challenges (such as weather, logistical constraints, capacity constraints) should not be excuses for not achieving what was committed in a PRODOC. Instead, these challenges must be taken into account in the project design.

Lesson 8. Effective participation of UNDP on the PSC. UNDP is accountable to the GEF when it is designated as the GEF Agency for a project. As such, it must actively participate in PSCs and must play an important role in resolving issues and ensuring that PSCs are effectual. Poor PIR ratings that do not improve from year to year is one indication that a PSC is not effectively steering a project. **Lesson:** Although UNDP must respect the role of the IP in NIM projects, it must also serve effectively in its oversight role to ensure accountability to the primary donor, in this case, the GEF.

Lesson 9. Reported GEF Secretariat (GEFSEC) pressures to make projects commit to being more ambitious is causing projects, including this one, to commit to do more than they are able to do. This negatively affects project performance and results.

Lesson 10. Results Frameworks may not be the best format for tracking progress of biodiversity projects. Although they may work well for monitoring progress in more quantitative types of projects (e.g., POPs), RFs have been shown to be problematic in many GEF biodiversity projects. UNDP and the GEF should consider a different approach for monitoring and evaluating the progress and impact of UNDP-supported, GEF-financed biodiversity projects.

Lesson 11. Lack of accountability contributes to ineffectual projects. Coincident with the submission of this draft TE report, the PIF for the next project is being submitted to the GEF for approval. **Lesson:** Submitting PIFs for future projects before TEs of current projects are completed nullifies an important objective of conducting TEs, which is to help inform the design of future initiatives taking lessons identified in TEs into account. UNDP explains that it is only the PIF and that modifications can be made during the PPG. This shows lack of understanding of the critical importance of the PIF. **Lesson:** The PIF may be one of the shorter GEF documents, but is really one of the most important. It is difficult to make fundamental changes to a project design once the PIF is approved.

Lesson 12. Although a comprehensive threats analysis must certainly be done as a first step in defining the project intervention, it is not up to any one project to address all threats. Indeed, it would be impossible. The next step after doing a comprehensive threats analysis is to define which of those threats your project will try to address. This is done by understanding what the donor can fund in principle (and what they cannot), doing a gap analysis to see who else is doing what to address the threats identified, and considering several other factors. Instead, the project identification stage of this project seems to have gone from a listing of all threats to a description of an all-encompassing “solution”. The result is a project that does not have a well-defined scope/focus and is far too ambitious for the time frame, budget, and existing capacity to implement.

Lesson 13. In countries where capacity is severely limited, ensure project efforts support enhancing capacity in both Government as well as Non-Governmental entities.

Lesson 14. Give youth a real chance to engage in conserving biodiversity. They are in the truest sense, the present and the future. This project should have focused much more on youth and partnered with local NGOs whose focus is on youth and the environment.

Lesson 15. A more proactive approach by both UNDP and DCD to ensure that the full committed amount of UNDP's co-financing was spent would have been helpful. Only 67% of the co-financing committed by UNDP, which was specifically to pay for monitoring visits to the CIs, was spent. Thus, more visits could have been made by UNDP, and likely would have been, if DCD had requested UNDP to do so.

Lesson 16. Given that, with the exception of one year (2019), expenditures in all other years amounted to at most 70% of the approved budget, the experience of this project would suggest that a smaller annual budget would be more realistic for future projects implemented by this IP.

Lesson 17. A minimum of a diploma in accounting is normally required as a qualification for a Finance Officer in a PMU. Having at least this would have been important even for a much smaller and less complex project, but was essential for a project such as this one which was large for the Cook Islands, and complex for any project. The same constraints related to lack of qualified finance officers are likely to affect any future GEF projects in the Cook Islands unless action is taken to train more individuals.

Lesson 18. Establishing separate project accounts for different Government entities is not a good approach.

Lesson 19. It is important for the PMU and UNDP to keep DCD "in the loop" instead of contacting them for help only once a problem exists. Earlier and more frequent contact could avoid problems, or at least make them easier to resolve. A more proactive participation of DCD and UNDP on the PSC could have resolved the problem of the two accounts much earlier on in the project.

Lesson 20. So-called "no-cost" project extensions are actually quite costly. They come at a financial cost as well as an environmental cost. They are not, as the term suggests, without cost.

Lesson 21. Given that problems with financial reporting is not a new issue in UNDP's experience in the Cook Islands (similar problems existed with the previous "Adaptation Funds" project), and recognizing that the pool of qualified accountants in the Cook Islands is a limiting factor that is likely to affect future GEF projects in the country, UNDP might well have given further consideration to the use of funds to pay university courses for the PMU Finance Officer, approaching the GEFSEC for advice if needed. It is also true, however, that the PMU should have first consulted with UNDP regarding use of GEF funds for this purpose, and UNDP was correct to question this expenditure.

Lesson 22. The reason why these "tools" are referred to as "tracking" is because that is how they are

intended to be used. They are not primarily intended to present a snapshot in time but rather to enable tracking trends. If no comparison is made at EoP between the baseline and the EoP situation then the time and effort dedicated to the exercise represents a missed opportunity for gaining much more information compared with merely gaining a picture in time.

Lesson 23. In the case of this project, no analysis was presented comparing the baseline and the EoP TTs. Such a comparison should include not merely the scores for the different TTs at the various stages of the project but also an in-depth discussion regarding the change (if any) related to the various threats identified for each PA.

Lesson 24. Unless project activities are incorporated into regular work programmes, ownership may be lacking even if interest exists. Especially in small countries where capacity is limited, the few people involved in biodiversity conservation are usually over-stretched. In the case of Government entities, if activities are not in the regular work programme, they may naturally be seen as “add-ons” and not be assigned priority.

Lesson 25. Although the project paid for additional resource persons in several Government entities (MMR, NES) as well as for the HoA, it did not pay for additional resource persons in any NGO. Doing so may have enhanced ownership and sustainability.

Lesson 26. Recommendations made in assessments supported by GEF projects should be tracked to see which ones are being implemented.

Lesson 27. Caution should be taken in those cases where indicators are assessed only by METT scores. METT score differences can sometimes be attributed to different people filling in the METT. METTs become much more useful as a tool to assess trends in how effective PAs are being managed when complemented by comprehensive threats assessments done at project start and end.

Lesson 28. Capacity assessments should not be done primarily for the purpose of monitoring to determine if targets in RFs are met but rather to identify what capacity the project should focus on building to enable it to reach the project objective.

Lesson 29. Capacity scores should never be aggregated as this renders them meaningless.

Lesson 30. This type of overview is helpful and should, as best practice, be kept by the PMU. If only a project’s RF is used for reporting, much important information is missed. For example, this type of table or a table of Ra’ui sites and the management status of each, etc. are helpful in keeping track of where a project is and can provide much more practical information than merely reporting on indicators and targets in an (often faulty) RF.

Lesson 31. It is important to ensure the Chair/s of a PSC attend the project inception workshop.

Lesson 32. This would have been a good opportunity to ensure that the various RPs understood the need to report to the PM and that Project Officers in MMR as well as the Ra’ui Coordinator understood that they would report both to their own entities as well as to the PM. There was no discussion related to having both a Project Coordinator and a Project Manager.

Lesson 33. Drafting good, detailed TOR is key to the success of consultancies. For technical consultancies, if the PM or CTA do not have a relevant technical background, it may be best to recruit someone to develop those TORs. (If they are knowledgeable about what needs to be done and how to go about doing it, this should not require more than one workday.)

Lesson 34. Although it is common practice to combine “launching” a project with the in-depth review of the PRODOC in a project inception workshop, this is poor practice. Launching a project should be done with a broad audience. The project does not have to be presented in great detail for the purposes of launching it. The launching should take place after the in-depth scrutiny of the PRODOC. Scrutiny of a project’s RF, budget, AWP, etc. is not best done with this same audience but rather with a small group comprised of the PMU, CTA, and key IP representatives (typically not more than 3 or 4 individuals). This is a “roll up the sleeves” intense working session that may last several days during which the RF, AWP for first year, project sites, consultancies, procurement plan for year one, reporting arrangements, are all carefully scrutinized, and changes/updates made as appropriate and permissible by the GEF.

Lesson 35. Project Terminal reports should be prepared in time to ensure that the PSC can review these important reports in time to not only discuss but also take decisions and ensure there is a plan to put recommended exit strategy actions into place.

Lesson 36. Although the EoP report (sometimes referred to as the Terminal report) prepared by PMs certainly should complete the RF indicating progress made as of the time of the preparation of the report, this information should be complemented with much greater detailed textual information. Don’t limit yourself to a few sentences simply because a Table format is not conducive to providing more information. There can be pages and pages of details supporting the progress reported in the RF. It is also important to report on progress (and lack thereof) related to commitments made in the PRODOC that were overlooked in the RF.

Lesson 37. The presentation of preliminary TE findings is an important opportunity to share preliminary findings and to provide opportunity for discussion. Even more so in this case because the next GEF project for CI is already in an advanced stage of planning and the presentation/discussion could have been viewed as an important occasion to learn from this experience to help inform the next project.

Lesson 38. Especially during COVID when travel to a country by the IC (who is normally the more experienced Team member with the GEF and project evaluations) is not possible, ensuring the NC has a relevant technical background and preferably also some project evaluation experience and familiarity with the GEF is important. In the event it is not possible to recruit a NC with a relevant technical background or experience in project evaluation and familiarity with the GEF, additional workdays should be given to the IC to enable her/him to do more than the normal amount of training for the NC.

Lesson 39. Sharing of practical experiences from around the world (not just guidelines) regarding how to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment (as well as other cross-cutting issues) can be incorporated into projects should be done with the RPs at an early stage of the project.