

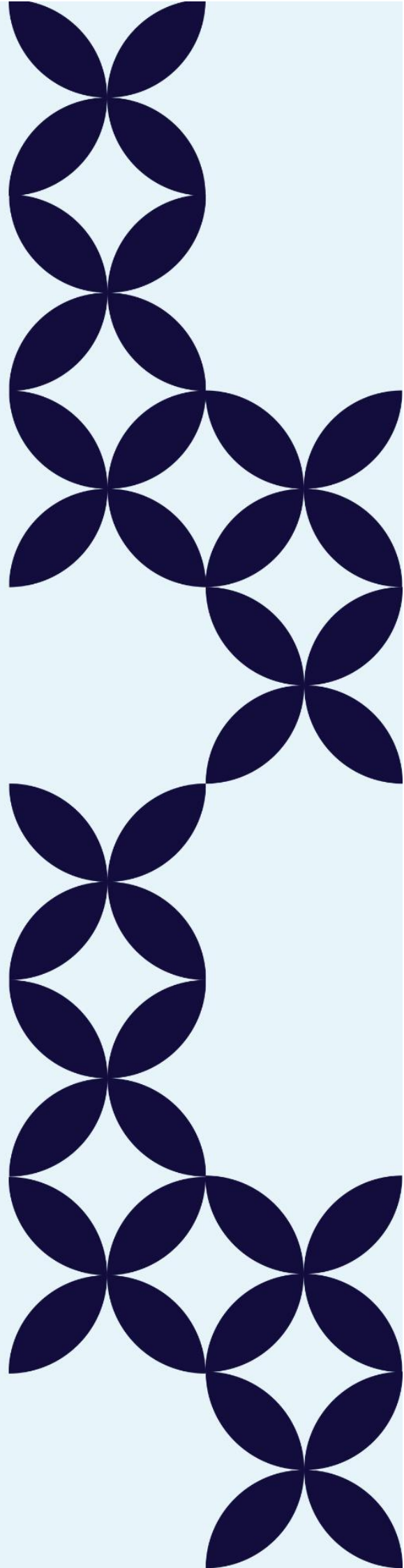
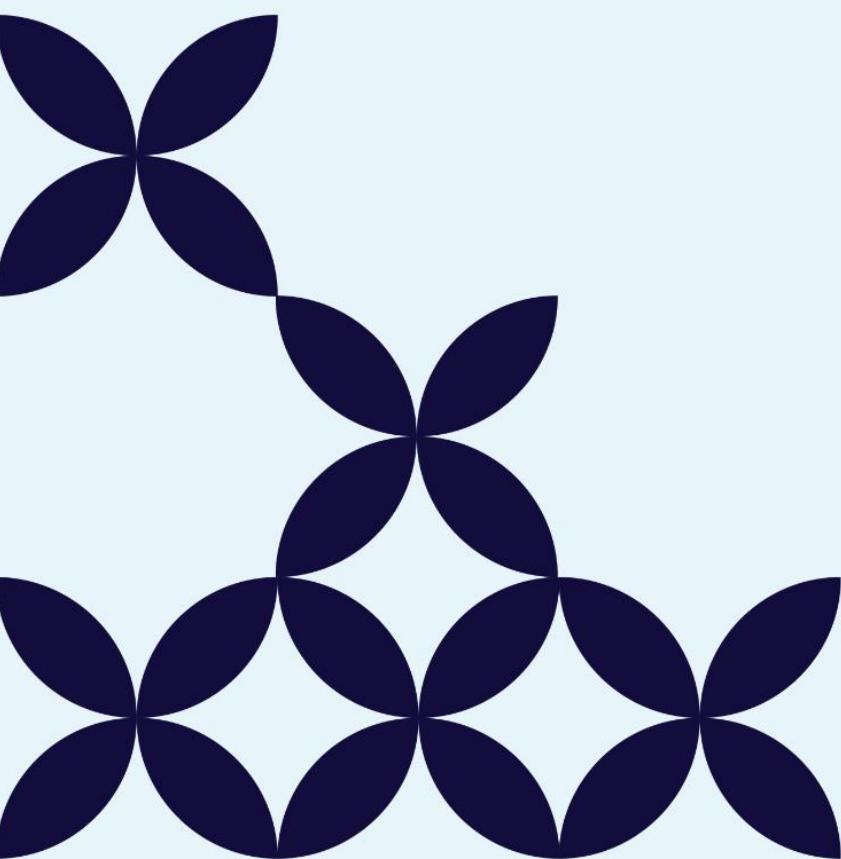


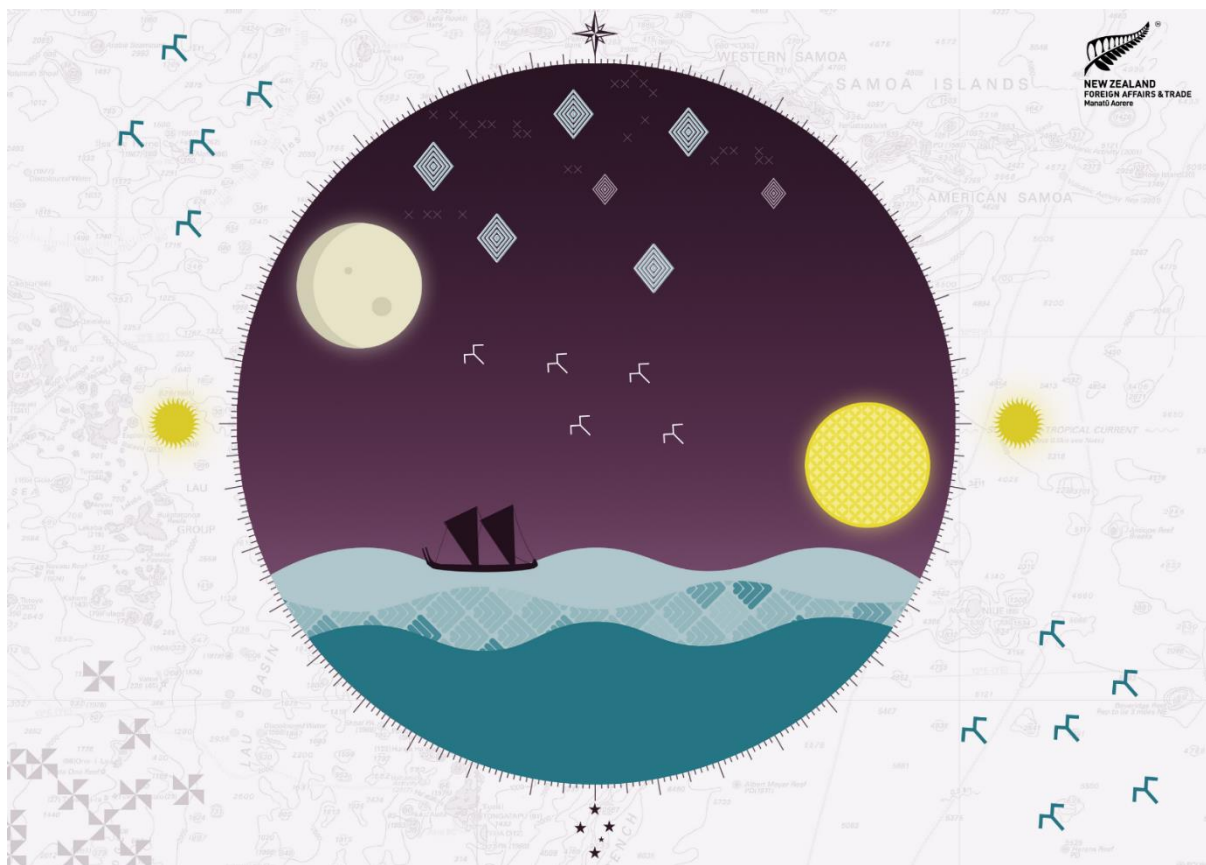
NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
Manatū Aorere

Cook Islands

Four Year Plan

October 2021





Navigating our approach to engagement in the Pacific will require us to draw on all the tools available in our kete to help guide our journey... much like our tupuna, before us.

We have taken this concept and developed a **compass**, built around various elements found in Māori and Pacific navigation narratives.

Tātai hono: represented by the **ocean** – and its currents – binding us all through whakapapa and connection.

Turou Hawaiki: represented by the **navigation winds**, carrying manu and waka, charting our course and direction, and recognising our shared common values.

Whāia te Taumata Ohanga: like the sun, setting and rising, but always on the horizon, showing us that although the journey may be different, the long-term perspective remains the same.

Tātou Tātou: reflecting the strength of our friendships – and where we are headed – in the faces, and phases, of the moon.

Arongia ki Rangiatea: represented by **Matariki me nga purapura whetu**, drawing a common architecture across the night's sky that reinforces our integration.

This document is one in a series of Four Year Plans for Pacific Island countries published by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. For the latest version please go to www.mfat.govt.nz

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² <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/1981/0047/latest/DLM51358.html>



Purpose of this document

The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has developed this Four Year Plan (4YP) to guide the planning and management of New Zealand's overall engagement with the Cook Islands, and as a platform for dialogue.

The 4YP is used to bring clarity to what work should be prioritised and to help monitor progress to achieve shared outcomes and strategic goals.

This is a living document that will be refreshed annually to ensure it responds to changes in country context, including impacts of external shocks such as COVID-19.

An integrated approach

Aotearoa New Zealand pursues an integrated approach to engagement with the Cook Islands. We focus on coherence across our diplomatic, trade and economic, climate change, environment, security, and development objectives to deliver sustainable progress in developing countries, and advance New Zealand's interests and values. As such, our development contribution (both policy and financial) is an integral pillar of our foreign policy – it reflects our network of international relationships and commitments, and is an expression of our values.

Enduring principles for New Zealand's engagement in the Pacific

The **enduring principles** which guide New Zealand's overall engagement in the Pacific region are:

- **Tātai Hono** (The recognition of deep and enduring whakapapa connections):

Shared history and meaningful relationships will shape our engagement, reinforcing New Zealand's depth of connection within the region and increasing understanding of Pacific peoples. These connections can further be enhanced by the shared value of reciprocity, shared national and regional priorities, shared language connections, and the recognition and celebration of the diversity between and within our indigenous values and those of Pacific partners.

- **Turou Hawaiiki** (Navigating together):

Our engagement will recognise that we share common values, and will reflect the unique and substantial overlap with New Zealand domestic policy decisions in respect of the Pacific. The development of New Zealand regional and national policies will actively consider their implications for the Pacific. We will also actively consider the impact on Pacific Island countries from international treaties and agreements that Aotearoa New Zealand is negotiating.



- **Whāia te Taumata Ōhanga** (Journey towards a circular economy):

Our engagement will recognise that the journey we each take is different but our horizon is the same. We will collaborate in support of the Sustainable Development Goals, with the long-term inter-generational perspective these Goals bring consistent with New Zealand's and Pacific Island countries' enduring journey together. We will aim to achieve lasting resilience through Pacific Island countries' enhanced capability to deliver on national and regional priorities through supporting sustainable human, economic, and social development. We recognise each country's mana to determine and protect its own kaitiakitanga.

- **Tātou Tātou** (All of us together):

Our cooperation will be underpinned by the principles of whanaungatanga and friendship, including honesty, trust, and respect. We will listen and have conversations. We will act with predictability, consistency, and based on the values we share as people of the Pacific. We will harmonise our efforts with others. We will confidently share New Zealand's views and perspectives, being clear about the things we will do and the things we will not do. The strength of friendship allows us to communicate openly even when our views differ.

- **Arongia ki Rangiātea** (Focus towards Excellence):

We will actively take an integrated approach across each New Zealand Government agency to recognise the centrality of the Pacific. We will amplify our value in the Pacific through encouraging impactful co-investment from actors outside the region, and by supporting regional architecture that reinforces Pacific ownership and priorities.



Country overview

Country context

The Cook Islands is a Polynesian country consisting of 15 islands (12 inhabited) with an exclusive economic zone of close to two million square kilometres. While the northern group of islands are atolls, the Southern Cook Islands are volcanic and comparatively fertile. The Cook Islands population is almost 15,000 (27% under age 15), most of whom live on the largest island of Rarotonga. The official languages are Cook Islands Māori and English. Most of the population identifies as Christian, with the Cook Islands Christian Church having the largest denomination at 49%. The majority of Cook Islanders have New Zealand citizenship, while the diaspora population in Aotearoa New Zealand (of over 80,000 people) is New Zealand's third largest Pasifika ethnic group.

The Cook Islands is a representative democracy with a parliamentary system and elections held every four years. Since attaining statehood in 1965 it has been a self-governing country in free association with Aotearoa New Zealand, making its own laws and conducting its own affairs. Aotearoa New Zealand's special constitutional relationship with the Cook Islands (and with Niue and Tokelau) comes with a set of mutual expectations and obligations, including an expectation that shared values and principles (such as human rights and good governance) will be upheld, as well as specific obligations for Aotearoa New Zealand to assist with foreign affairs, defence and security upon the request of the Cook Islands Government. This special relationship also underpins many partnerships between New Zealand and Cook Islands government agencies.

Many believe the original waka that settled Aotearoa New Zealand departed from the Cook Islands, giving rise to a characterisation of our relationship as one of tuakana-teina, with the Cook Islands being the older sibling and Aotearoa New Zealand the younger.

The Cook Islands' economic performance in the two decades leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic has been impressive. In the period 2016-2019 GDP growth averaged 6.75% per annum compared with 3.43% across the Pacific. This sustained economic growth, accompanied by budget surpluses and low debt levels, saw the Cook Islands graduate to OECD high income country status in January 2020. However, while this was a significant achievement, it also led to reduced access to external sources of finance at a time when the Cook Islands still faced significant development challenges. For example, the country's public infrastructure requires investment to be fit for purpose; its economy is heavily reliant on one sector (pre-COVID, tourism contributed around 65% of GDP, with fisheries a distant second); non-communicable diseases and their risk factors are a major challenge; and there is a gap in the level of development between Rarotonga and the Pa Enuā (outer islands).

The Cook Islands faces security threats common to other Pacific region countries. As a small island ocean state it is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters, with 91% of the population living within 1km of the coast. It also faces increasing national and regional security challenges, particularly emerging transnational crime and cybersecurity risks.

The Cook Islands is an important voice in the Pacific region and its international connectivity is growing. It is a full member of the Pacific Islands Forum and of most other regional institutions



(importantly fisheries institutions). Beyond the Pacific it participates in a number of fora where this is in its interests, it has capacity to do so, and its constitutional status allows. The Cook Islands is also a member of the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Statement of Strategic Intentions and National Sustainable Development Plan

The Cook Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration's (MFAI) **Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki / Statement of Strategic Intentions 2019-2024**³ articulates how MFAI will work across government to achieve its vision of a safer and more prosperous Cook Islands. Four interconnected tango/pillars constitute its strategic direction: Te Paruru Tirartiratu/Security; Tupu'anga Ruperupe/Prosperity; Tu Rangatira/Leadership; and Karapa Kama'atu/Innovation. MFAI contributes towards realising the Cook Islands' Orama Ipukarea/National Vision as set out in **Te Kaveinga Nui / The National Sustainable Development Plan 2016-2020**⁴. Its work is rooted in shared values of Vaerua Ta'okota'i/Collaboration, Vaerua Tiratiratū/Integrity, and Vaerua 'Akangateitei/Mutual Respect.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Cook Islands Government's development priorities were wide-ranging. Te Kaveinga Nui includes 16 goals focused on achieving: improved health, education, welfare and equity (including gender equality); increased economic opportunities and productive employment; resilient, sustainable infrastructure; sustainable agriculture, land use, and marine resources management; effective climate change and disaster resilience; heritage and cultural preservation; a sustainable population; and peace and good governance. The Cook Islands Government is consulting on an updated National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+, which will outline its goals and targets. In the interim Te Kaveinga Nui continues to guide the Cook Islands' development.

The Cook Islands has also recently finalised its **Economic Development Strategy 2030**⁵. The objectives of this strategy focus on: equity and access (welfare system, access to public/utility services); economic transformation (new opportunities); developing people and culture (labour force participation, skills, educational quality); investment (rebuilding the economy and broadening its base); and greening the economy (climate change adaptation and marine resource protection).

COVID-19 impacts

While there have been no cases of COVID-19 in the Cook Islands to date, its economy and society have been profoundly affected by the pandemic due to the country's heavy reliance on tourism. Border closures led to both a steep reduction in tourism-derived revenue and additional expenditure pressures, such as wage subsidies. These two forces led to the Cook Islands exhausting its Stabilisation Fund reserves and a sharp reduction in cash reserves. In response, development

³ <http://www.mfem.gov.ck/news1/121-finacial-secretary-office-news/961-te-kauono-tutara-e-te-mana-tiaki-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-immigration-statement-of-strategic-intentions-2019-2024>

⁴ <https://policycookislands.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/nsdp-2016-2020-final-3rd-ed.pdf>

⁵ <http://mfem.gov.ck/economic-planning/economic-development-strategy>



partners provided additional lending alongside New Zealand grant financing, which helped resource the Cook Islands Government's implementation of its **Economic Response Plan**. This two-phase plan included stimulus measures to sustain local businesses, support the livelihoods of those most affected, kick-start growth, and incentivise private sector innovation and diversification. It has been credited with reducing the economic impact of COVID-19 on businesses and households. However, even with this support, the Asian Development Bank estimates that GDP fell by 32% in the period March 2020 to June 2021.

Businesses have been hit hard (and businesses owned by women have been disproportionately impacted), which has flow-on effects on communities. An increase in working-age travel to Aotearoa New Zealand for employment since January 2021 (made possible by one-way quarantine-free travel) has raised fears of population loss that could have a lasting impact on the Cook Islands' sustainability. Two-way quarantine-free travel and the COVID-19 vaccine rollout commenced in May 2021 and are critical enablers of economic recovery. However, New Zealand's Delta outbreak in August 2021 resulted in the suspension of two way quarantine-free travel, further impacting tourism revenue. Return of tourism revenue to pre-COVID levels is expected to be gradual.

The Cook Islands Government's focus is now shifting to recovery under a new **Economic Recovery Roadmap**. The Government is committed to sustaining livelihoods, core public services and critical public infrastructure investment despite its fiscal constraints. However, debt servicing will have a significant impact in the medium term, with debt levels forecast to exceed 50% of GDP. The impact of COVID-19 has given renewed impetus to exploring alternative sources of revenue such as the potential to harvest seabed minerals while managing risks to the environment.

New Zealand's partnership with the Cook Islands

As already noted, the Cook Islands is a self-governing country in free association with Aotearoa New Zealand. The most recent codification of the principles underpinning the partnership between the two countries is set out in the Joint Centenary Declaration signed by Prime Ministers in 2001 and reaffirmed in 2015. This document recognises our respective sovereignty while prioritising the maintenance and strengthening of the special constitutional relationship Aotearoa New Zealand has with the Cook Islands to promote joint objectives and strengthen coherence on issues of mutual interest and engagement. A key vehicle for our bilateral engagement is the New Zealand-Cook Islands Joint Ministerial Forum (JMF), which meets annually. The Joint Ministerial Forum Working Group (involving senior officials) meets biannually, and our two countries' respective Prime Ministers, Ministers and officials engage regularly.

New Zealand's High Commission to the Cook Islands was established in 1965 following the Cook Islands' attaining of statehood and is based in Rarotonga. The Australian High Commission, which is the only other in-country foreign representation to the Cook Islands, is co-located in the New Zealand High Commission office. The Cook Islands has a High Commission to Aotearoa New Zealand based in Wellington and a Consulate-General in Auckland (where the majority of the Cook Islands diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand live).



In addition to New Zealand’s permanent diplomatic presence in the Cook Islands led by MFAT, there are two New Zealand Defence Force secondees stationed with the Cook Islands Police under the Pacific Patrol Boat Programme. New Zealand Government agencies with direct working relationships with Cook Islands counterparts include: New Zealand Defence Force, New Zealand Police, New Zealand Customs Service, Immigration New Zealand, Office of the Auditor-General, Local Government New Zealand, Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand, Maritime New Zealand, Land Information New Zealand, Ministry for Primary Industries, National Emergency Management Agency, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Ministry of Justice, Department of Corrections, Ministry of Health, New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Ministry of Social Development, and the Office of the Clerk. A number of these agencies carry responsibilities for Cook Islanders as New Zealand citizens, such as the delivery of administrative services. There is scope to deepen and broaden these relationships to include other agencies and Crown Research Institutes, as resourcing permits.

Aotearoa New Zealand remains the Cook Islands’ main development partner, reflecting our special constitutional relationship and implicit obligations. Aotearoa New Zealand increased its level of support to the Cook Islands in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism. This included providing PPE and medical consumables, substantial additional budget support to sustain livelihoods and social security, vaccines, and health and border security support to enable safe two-way quarantine-free travel and vaccine rollout. As the Cook Islands’ focus shifts from pandemic response to recovery, Aotearoa New Zealand remains committed to contributing to the Cook Islands’ goal of economic recovery. This will be the principal focus of our support in the next few years, while we also re-engage on other areas of long-term significance such as health and security. Ongoing uncertainty about the pace and path of recovery in an evolving pandemic means that New Zealand’s approach to development assistance must remain agile and flexible.

New Zealand’s 4YP strategic goals in the Cook Islands

Strategic goals

**Goal One:
The Cook Islands
economy is more
resilient, delivering
benefits for all Cook
Islanders**

The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Cook Islands’ economy means that supporting a resilient economic recovery will be the primary focus of our bilateral support over the term of this 4YP. Our engagement will be focused on supporting the Cook Islands to sustain and improve the quality of core public services, and make progress towards a smart (technology-enhanced, innovative and inclusive) and green (low emissions) economy. We will provide budget support to boost the Cook Islands’ operating budget, invest in quality public infrastructure, and provide targeted assistance to small-medium businesses (access to finance and capability building).



Strategic goals

We will also support the Cook Islands Government's economy by contributing to enablers such as improved ICT and through technical assistance to facilitate access to finance and manage risks.

Goal Two:

The Cook Islands has strengthened public institutions, leading to improved outcomes for Cook Islanders

We will focus our support to the Cook Islands Government on technical assistance to obtain evidence-based information to inform decisions, and build capability and supplement capacity gaps in priority public sector policy, planning, systems and service development areas. This will include support to achieve greater equity and social inclusion across public services, to protect the environment and marine resources, and to build resilience to climate change and natural disasters. We will encourage New Zealand Government agencies to deepen and extend their relationships with their Cook Islands counterparts, and to strengthen and refresh our domestic policy frameworks to facilitate agency support.

Goal Three:

The Cook Islands is supported to grow its voice in the region and the world, working with Aotearoa New Zealand towards a safer Pacific community

We will support the Cook Islands Government when it seeks to increase its voice regionally and globally through constructive bilateral and multilateral engagement. We will enhance our coordination on international issues by strengthening our bilateral security cooperation in areas such as national security policy and security capability, and including cyber security.

Specific outcomes linked to our strategic goals

The logic diagram annexed to this 4YP sets out how strategic goals, which are long term outcomes, drive more specific **medium and short term outcomes**. Aotearoa New Zealand will work towards these outcomes in partnership with the Cook Islands.

Assumptions

In setting out the logic diagram and outcomes, we have made the following **key assumptions** which we will continue to test and monitor during the implementation of this 4YP:

- The Cook Islands' economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 on current forecasts will take up to five years, and support for economic recovery will be the priority focus for Aotearoa New Zealand.
- The Cook Islands remains COVID-19 free (or manages small, short-term outbreaks effectively) through the coordinated management of the health risks associated with two-way



quarantine-free travel with Aotearoa New Zealand (and any future countries), and travel remains restricted due to international border closures for at least the next one to two years.

- The Cook Islands is successful in the implementation of its COVID-19 vaccination rollout strategy for its population, including in the Pa Enua.
- Addressing disparities in access to public and utility services, enhancing social inclusion, and achieving more equitable outcomes for all Cook Islanders (particularly for those living in the Pa Enua) is a high priority for both the Cook Islands and New Zealand Governments.
- The impacts of climate change will accelerate over the next ten years and the Cook Islands Government will continue to develop its policies and priorities through a climate change lens, maintaining a strong focus on building resilience in a climate conscious and environmentally sustainable way.

Risks

We have noted the following **key risks** which we will continue to monitor and develop mitigation measures for during the implementation of this 4YP:

Strategic level risks	Mitigation measures
The COVID-19 virus enters the Cook Islands and spreads amongst the population.	We will work closely with the Cook Islands to monitor and manage its health and border security. We will continue to support the Cook Islands' health response to COVID-19, through bilateral technical and financial support (principally through the Polynesian Health Corridors Programme).
Pacific Island countries are impacted by extreme weather events or other natural disasters, resulting in significant damage, loss of life or disruption to New Zealand development investments.	We will offer support when required, drawing on our humanitarian partnerships and national capabilities in responses phases, and through bilateral programmes in the recovery phase. Through our development investments, we support countries to be better prepared for and reduce risks from disasters, including through integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction measures into development investments where relevant.
Debt servicing is not sustainable, particularly in light of borrowing required to finance the Cook Islands' recovery from COVID-19.	We will work closely with the Cook Islands to secure grant assistance and low cost financing options in collaboration with other partners (such as the Asian Development Bank). We will also provide technical assistance to support effective debt management and forecasting.



Key themes supporting these outcomes

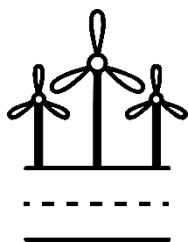
Aotearoa New Zealand has adopted a number of thematic focus areas for its engagement with the Pacific region, recognising that thematic policy, insights and technical expertise are vital to building strong and resilient partnerships. For our engagement with the Cook Islands the key thematic focus areas are as follows:

Economics

With its relatively small population and narrow resource base, the Cook Islands currently generates insufficient revenue to fund core public services to a standard expected by its citizens. Equitable access to quality public services is a particular challenge for Pa Enua residents. COVID-19 related border closures have had a severe impact on the Cook Islands' economy and elevated its level of debt. Our focus on **economics** is aimed at supporting the Cook Islands to regain prosperity and build a resilient and inclusive economy, including through maximising the benefits of The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus⁶.



Infrastructure and energy



Climate resilient public **infrastructure** is key to ensuring high quality, inclusive and transparent public services; but the Cook Islands is unable to finance the large fixed capital costs it faces on its own. Our focus on infrastructure is aimed at promoting improved access to finance and technical assistance to build and maintain high quality infrastructure and services. This includes improving domestic connectivity for the Pa Enua that is enabling and contributes to sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Governance and institutions

The Cook Islands' capability across government institutions and services is relatively high, but it faces capability gaps in some specific sectors and capacity constraints associated with its small size. Our focus on **governance and institutions** is aimed at supporting targeted capability building and supplementing capacity gaps to support more effective, accountable, and inclusive public institutions and services.



⁶ <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/trade/free-trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements-in-force/pacer-plus/>



Health

The Cook Islands Government responded rapidly and effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic by strengthening its health system, drawing on partnerships with New Zealand and other health



agencies. It is currently COVID-free. Our focus on **health** is aimed at further strengthening the Cook Islands health system to support improved health security; the delivery of inclusive, affordable and accessible health services; and better population health. This support will also help sustain two-way quarantine-free travel, which supports access to specialist health services in

Aotearoa New Zealand and community well-being.

Education

The Cook Islands faces challenges in recruiting and retaining teaching staff, and the education sector is seeking strengthened relationships with their New Zealand counterparts. Our focus on **education** is partnering with the Cook Islands education sector to support the development of skills and locally relevant knowledge and values that are needed to access equitable opportunities and to thrive in a changing world.



Climate and environment



As an ocean state the Cook Islands faces economic, social, environmental and cultural risks due to climate change and natural disasters. Our focus on **climate and environment** is helping to strengthen the Cook Islands' adaptive capacity to the impacts of climate change, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, and protect and restore natural systems and ecosystem services.

Achieving development outcomes that are effective, inclusive, resilient and sustained

New Zealand's International Cooperation for Effective, Sustainable Development policy statement identifies four development principles that guide New Zealand's work with partner countries: effective, inclusive, resilient and sustained⁷.

Effective development is values driven, partnership focused, adaptive, outcome focused, and evidence based.

In the Cook Islands we will support the delivery of effective development outcomes by ensuring that New Zealand 4YP development priorities align with the Cook Islands Government's national development strategies and plans⁸, which reflect local consultation. We

⁷ <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Aid-Prog-docs/Policy/Policy-Statement-New-Zealands-International-Cooperation-for-Effective-Sustainable-Development-ICESD.pdf>

⁸ Economic Strategy 2030, Economic Recovery Roadmap, National Sustainable Development Plan



will affirm the Government's self-governance capability and ambition by channelling our core bilateral support through its systems and by ensuring deep, respectful, and mutually accountable partnerships. Regular policy dialogue with the Cook Islands Government and engagement with local communities will ensure our support is responsive and adapts to the evolving local context.

Inclusive development addresses exclusions and inequality created across all dimensions of social identity, while promoting human rights, and equitable participation in the benefits of development.

In the Cook Islands we will support the delivery of inclusive development outcomes by ensuring that our economic support contributes to sustaining the livelihoods of those most at risk of being left behind, and that it mitigates the risk of economic growth having a negative impact on the environment. We will promote inclusive development by our support of stronger public sector governance and accountability (mainly through state sector partnerships), our support to health and education (core funding, cooperative partnerships, and inclusive education), and designing for and demonstrating a human rights approach in activities that we manage. We will engage in policy dialogue with the Cook Islands Government on human rights and inclusion, taking account of the local context, and offer support to locally developed initiatives as appropriate to improve outcomes for vulnerable and marginalised groups including women, young people and children, the economically disadvantaged, disabled, and the LGBTQI+ community.

Resilient development strengthens the environment, economy, and society to withstand shocks and manage crises while protecting future well-being.

In the Cook Islands we will support resilient development outcomes by contributing resources to support the country's economic recovery plans, including its Economic Recovery Roadmap. Deep, long-term relationships between our state sector agencies will contribute to long-term strengthening of government systems. Resilience will be further supported through investing in critical resilient public infrastructure and enablers of economic diversification, such as improved domestic connectivity and small-medium business capacity building. We will also support the Cook Islands to build climate change adaptive capacity and strengthen disaster risk management.

Sustained development enables lasting progress and is locally owned to uphold results in the long term.

In the Cook Islands we will support the delivery of sustained development outcomes by aligning our programme with the Cook Islands' own development priorities, channelling bilateral funding through Cook Islands Government systems and using higher order modalities, such as budget support, wherever possible. We will also support initiatives that build the local workforce capacity and capability needed to sustain growth and development. We will engage in policy dialogue with the Cook Islands Government as we work together on strengthening our reciprocal institutional accountability and transparency.



How we put this plan into action

To operationalise this 4YP and therefore contribute to achievement of agreed goals, Aotearoa New Zealand uses a range of actions and works with multiple partners. Our primary implementing partner is the Cook Islands Government. This approach is complemented by the work of state sector partners and regional agencies.

Aotearoa New Zealand delivers most of its development assistance to the Cook Islands through its government systems using three broad modalities: budget support, infrastructure investment, and New Zealand partnerships. This delivery model depends on a strong partnership with a high level of trust. Trust is built and strengthened through regular dialogue, sharing of information, and forming long-standing relationships.

International development cooperation funding for this 4YP is managed over a three year period. Over this period, there is flexibility to move funds into and between 4YPs in order to respond to rapidly changing contexts. Current information about New Zealand's International Development Cooperation appropriation is on the MFAT website⁹.

Goal One: The Cook Islands economy is more resilient, delivering benefits for all Cook Islanders

Our work to achieve this goal will draw on the technical thematic expertise (economic, private sector, and infrastructure) within MFAT and New Zealand Government agencies (such as The Treasury, Reserve Bank, and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment) and private sector development expertise. We will continue our dialogue with the Cook Islands Government regarding priorities for economic recovery, fiscal resilience and public financial management. We will also look to strengthen informal agency partnerships (where sought by the Cook Islands Government). We will seek to ensure our activities support the Cook Islands Government to deliver on its own priorities for improved livelihoods and social outcomes for its people.

Our support will include sustaining our commitment to providing annual budget support to key sectors agreed with the Cook Islands Government and resourcing flexible technical assistance to support public sector strengthening. Alongside this we will look to secure additional grant financing to support the Cook Islands' recovery from the severe economic impacts of COVID-19, invest in quality public infrastructure under the Infrastructure Trust Fund, and support skills building. This will complement scaled-up support to small-medium sized businesses (access to finance, capability building, and fostering innovation) and technical assistance to 'crowd in' external finance and capitalise on viable economic opportunities.

⁹ www.mfat.govt.nz/en/aid-and-development/our-approach-to-aid/where-our-funding-goes/our-planned-aid-expenditure/



Key indicators of progress

**Goal One:
The Cook Islands
economy is more
resilient, delivering
benefits for all Cook
Islanders**

- Increase in growth rate of GDP (% increase per year) (SDG 8.1.1)¹⁰
- Increase in average daily value of tourism spend (NZD, % increase per year)

Goal Two: The Cook Islands has strengthened public institutions, leading to improved outcomes for Cook Islanders

Progress towards this goal will be supported through our annual budget support to the key sectors of health, education, tourism (which also includes a flexible technical assistance facility to support public sector strengthening) and partnerships that build public sector capability and supplement capacity (in specialised areas). Much of this partnership support will be delivered by New Zealand state sector agencies already engaged across much of the Cook Islands' state sector, supplemented by targeted non state sector technical assistance.

Some key areas of focus are expected to be (but will not be limited to): strengthening health systems and specific services (for example, laboratory services); improving education delivery (curriculum, social inclusion, innovative methods); improving Pa Enua connectivity; supporting access to information and financing for climate change adaptation; strengthening maritime and aviation safety; fisheries leadership; and strengthening national security systems and risk management. We will encourage New Zealand Government agencies to deepen and extend their relationships with their counterparts in the Cook Islands, and will support a wider range of agencies to establish links where the Cook Islands is seeking new partnerships. New Zealand policy frameworks that facilitate these relationships across the Cook Islands (and also Niue and Tokelau) will also be updated to ensure they are fit for purpose.

We will engage in dialogue with the Cook Islands Government on how Aotearoa New Zealand can better support the Cook Islands to lead improvements in equity, inclusion and well-being. This will include: promoting and enabling more equitable access to and better outcomes in education, health and employment; promoting human rights, equality and inclusion for women, gender diverse groups, disabled people, and Pa Enua communities (with gender-based violence a particular concern for the Cook islands Government); and promoting child and youth well-being.

¹⁰ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collection of 17 interlinked global goals designed to be a "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". The 17 SDGs are defined in a list of 169 SDG Targets. Progress towards these Targets is agreed to be tracked by 232 unique Indicators. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>



Key indicators of progress

Goal Two:

The Cook Islands has strengthened public institutions, leading to improved outcomes for Cook Islanders

- Decrease in premature non-communicable disease mortality (30-69 years)
- Increase in secondary school retention from Years 11-12 and 12-13, by sex
- Increase in climate-related development finance – commitment (US\$ millions increase)
- Decrease in women who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner (% population)

Goal Three: The Cook Islands is supported to grow its voice in the region and the world, working with Aotearoa New Zealand towards a safer Pacific community

We will work to strengthen our shared relationships with regional bodies and international organisations. We will work with the Cook Islands Government to identify and support, where appropriate, its regional priorities including facilitating engagement. We will facilitate discussion on Pacific regional issues and the development of the Cook Islands' international footprint through our regular joint official and ministerial dialogues. We will work with the Cook Islands as it looks to develop its national security system to meet a range of national and regional risks (including transnational organised crime and cybersecurity threats), and to protect borders and maritime zones.

Key indicators of progress

Goal Three:

The Cook Islands is supported to grow its voice in the region and the world, working with Aotearoa New Zealand towards a safer Pacific community

- Increase in number of monitoring missions for the Cook islands' exclusive economic zone per year



How we assess progress against this plan

We report back on progress towards our goals in the Pacific overall via the MFAT Annual Report¹¹. We also report back on this 4YP to the Cook Islands Government via our annual Joint Ministerial Forum and through regular contact with officials. This not only gives us an opportunity to discuss what has been achieved in partnership but also to test whether our plan remains fit-for-purpose or we need to change anything.

Shared progress against the key indicators listed for each strategic goal help us to monitor progress at the highest level. We also support and use country-owned statistics and data to monitor country progress at the macro level and therefore will not develop a separate country-level measurement framework.

In addition, we monitor and evaluate our development activities to ensure effectiveness and ongoing strategic alignment. The results and any lessons learned from this process are compiled annually and fed into an Annual Reflection discussion and report on progress against the 4YP outcomes. This in turn informs the annual updates of the 4YPs.

Every 6-8 years we will commission an independent evaluation of MFAT's overall engagement in the Cook Islands in partnership with the Cook Islands Government. This evaluation, which will consider progress against outcomes, the challenges and lessons learned, will inform continued improvement.

For further information

Contact details for the New Zealand High Commission to the Cook Islands are available on the MFAT website¹².

To find out more about New Zealand's engagement with Pacific Island countries also go to the MFAT website, at www.mfat.govt.nz/en/countries-and-regions/australia-and-pacific/

¹¹ <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/mfat-annual-reports/>

¹² <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/pl/countries-and-regions/australia-and-pacific/cook-islands/new-zealand-high-commission-to-the-cook-islands/>



Appendix: Logic diagram for Cook Islands 4 Year Plan



STRATEGIC GOALS

STRATEGIC GOAL 1:

The Cook Islands economy is more resilient, delivering benefits for all Cook Islanders

STRATEGIC GOAL 2:

The Cook Islands has strengthened public institutions, leading to improved outcomes for Cook Islanders

STRATEGIC GOAL 3:

The Cook Islands is supported to grow its voice in the region and the world, working with Aotearoa New Zealand towards a safer Pacific community

MEDIUM TERM OUTCOMES

MO1.1: The Cook Islands sustains public services, and rebuilds towards a 'smart', 'green', inclusive economy.	MO1.2: The Cook Islands' private sector recovers from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.	MO1.3: The Cook Islands builds additional resilient public infrastructure, and leverages the benefits of improved connectivity.	MO2.1: The Cook Islands delivers higher quality, inclusive education services that lift educational achievement and encourage students to stay in school.	MO 2.2: The Cook Islands delivers higher quality public services through improved systems, capacity, and cross-government coordination.	MO2.3: The Cook Islands sustainably manages its natural resources and ecosystems.	MO2.4: The Cook Islands strengthens its health security and improves access to and effectiveness of health services.	MO2.5: The Cook Islands provides Pa Enua residents with more equitable access to quality public, utility, and business services.	MO3.1: The Cook Islands strengthens its national security.	MO3.2: The Cook Islands and Aotearoa New Zealand collaborate to achieve shared regional and global outcomes.
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SHORT TERM OUTCOMES: key changes expected to result from MFAT activities and engagement in 3–5 years

STO1: The Cook Islands Government has increased financial resources and appropriate expertise that supports quality public services, debt servicing, and revenue generation.	STO2: The Cook Islands private sector has increased access to low cost finance, improved capability to rebuild and innovate, and greater employment security.	STO3: Increased investment in construction and maintenance of priority resilient public infrastructure, including ICT infrastructure.	STO4: More collaborative partnerships between Aotearoa New Zealand and the Cook Islands' education sectors bring reciprocal benefits.	STO5: Deeper New Zealand – Cook Islands government agency and institutional partnerships support quality public services.	STO6: Improved access to finance and technical assistance builds capacity for a low emissions economy, and sustainable natural resource and ecosystem protection and management.	STO7: Cook Islands' health systems and workforce are better equipped to respond to health security threats and to address critical health issues.	STO8: Pa Enua residents have improved connectivity and improved access to other priority services.	STO9: Aotearoa New Zealand and the Cook Islands have deeper and constructive engagement on security and other shared regional and global interests.	STO10: More Māori to Māori engagement supports shared learning.
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Increasing influence of external/ contextual factors

MFAT has more influence