

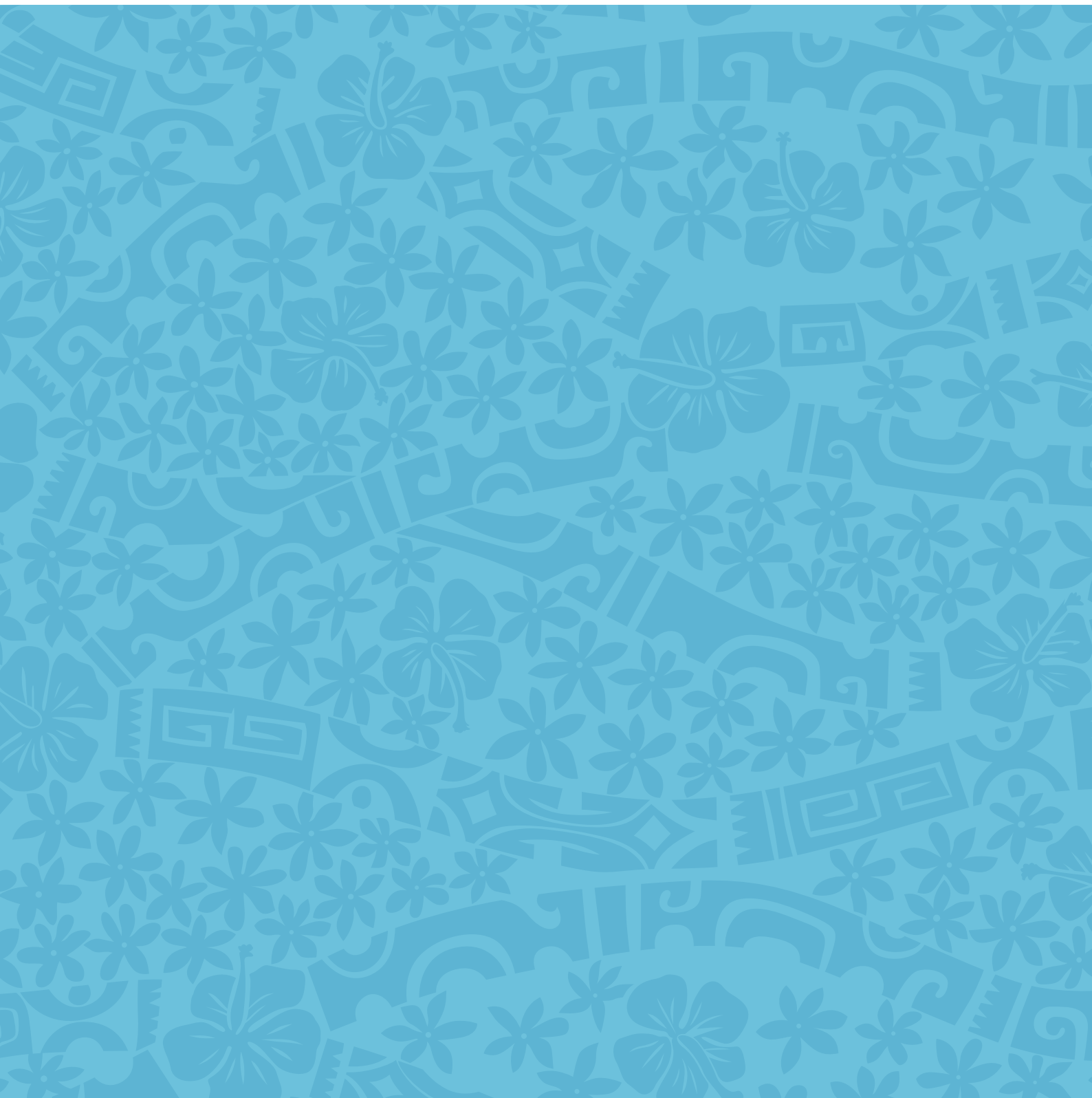
# COOK ISLANDS



# NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY 2023–2026







**COOK  
ISLANDS**

**NATIONAL  
SECURITY  
POLICY  
2023–2026**



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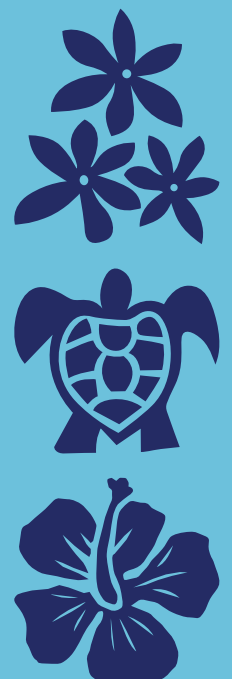
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# MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER





It is of the utmost importance that we, as your elected Government, commit to the protection of our national interests by maintaining our national sovereignty and border integrity; ensuring a peaceful and just society; and nurturing strong human security for all Cook Islanders.

I am proud to present our first National Security Policy (2023-2026). The policy outlines our security environment by identifying the threats that we face and our initiatives to mitigate those threats. It provides a clear pathway forward for additional actions we can take to strengthen our resilience to any threat that may bring harm to our people, communities, environment, and the systems and infrastructure that help sustain our valuable way of life.

The policy supports our national aspiration for a stable, sustainable and prosperous Cook Islands, as set out in the *National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+* and the *Economic Development Strategy 2030*. It reflects our fundamental national values including our respect for the rule of law, human rights, cultural and religious practices, economic stability, resource efficiency and social cohesion.

Using our national legislation, governance principles, risk management and efficient use of resources we will build resilience, prevent conflict, and deter threats to our sovereignty and society.

We value the strong support of our security partners as well as regional and international organisations. We continue to strengthen these relationships and work closely with our partners to build our security and prosperity.

We give high-priority to countering growing threats from cybercrime and transnational organised crime and those that have the potential to impact upon our health, food, community and personal security. We will guard against foreign interference and espionage and protect our national border and Exclusive Economic Zone. We will work with our communities to address domestic crimes.

We continue to improve our National Security Architecture and are building a robust intelligence capability to meet our future security needs.

Stakeholder consultation with our Government agencies, Chiefs, Churches, Pa Enua, and the general public and the private sector informed the policy's development.

The security of the Cook Islands is a truly national endeavour and we must all play our part. We are committed to working closely with all sectors of society to implement the policy and together we can build a secure, prosperous and happy future for all Cook Islanders.



Hon. Mark Brown  
Prime Minister



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



There can be no higher responsibility of a government than to protect the nation. This document is our first National Security Policy (NSP). It provides an integrated, overarching framework for our national security effort.

The NSP reflects our fundamental national values, including respect for the rule of law and basic human rights and norms, and promotes good governance principles. It supports the goals, objectives and actions set out in other national policies, especially *Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui: the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+* (NSDA 2020+) and the *Economic Development Strategy 2030* (EDS 2030).

The NSP supports other regional and international commitments and policy priorities that we subscribe to. These include Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) policies, most notably the *Framework of Pacific Regionalism*, adopted by PIF leaders in 2014, and the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, agreed by Pacific Islands' leaders at the Nauru PIF in 2018, the PIFS 2050 Strategy for the *Blue Pacific Continent*, the *Pacific Security outlook report 2022–2023* and the *Regional Security Roadmap*.

The NSP takes into account international, regional and national security-related developments. We held initial consultations with security experts in New Zealand, the public sector and community stakeholders on Rarotonga. It was not possible to conduct in-person consultations in the Pa Enua; however, Pa Enua representatives attended a consultation workshop on Rarotonga both in person and via zoom.

Regional, national and international security agencies identified threats and hazards relevant to the Cook Islands, which informed the NSP.

Interactions with community representatives were particularly valuable in identifying issues relating to human security, and will help us to decide the actions we need to protect the Cook Islands.

For policy purposes, such as cooperation and collaboration with external security agencies, especially those active in the region, the NSP has been guided by the focal areas identified in the Boe Declaration, while stressing substantive security-related issues of particular importance to the Cook Islands.

The NSP identifies national priorities in general terms and a number of specific security-related actions. The NSP refers to a number of security-related policies and activities that have already been adopted and are being implemented.

While military deterrence still plays a role in protecting our national security many serious threats and hazards today (e.g. pandemics, cyclones) are most effectively addressed through our adoption of a precautionary approach and implementing effective resilience measures (i.e. reduction of risk, readiness, response and recovery).

The NSP takes into account the severe impact of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on our country as well as the many other security situations we face. It reflects new opportunities to build a more secure future for our country and our people now and for generations to come. These opportunities are reflected in our vision, objectives, and the eight National Security Pillars. These pillars capture how our national security objectives will be met and the actions necessary to secure our future.



### Our vision

Our people, resources and environment are effectively protected through well-designed and implemented measures that anticipate threats, protect our national interests, and enhance resilience for the benefit of all Cook Islanders.





## Our objectives

To achieve our vision, our enduring national security objectives are to:

- Protect and promote Cook Islands' sovereignty, territorial integrity and good reputation.
- Safeguard the democratic institutions, the rule of law, principles, and national values upon which our society is founded.
- Ensure our safety and that of our communities as well as the safety and integrity of key national assets, institutions and infrastructure.
- Preserve and promote the economic security of individuals, families, businesses and communities throughout the Cook Islands.
- Protect the fundamental cultural values and the welfare of our people.
- Protect our natural environment while promoting the sustainable development of the Cook Islands and its resources.
- Engage effectively at the regional and international levels to support and promote the rules-based international order consistent with our national security needs and interests.

## Our 8 National Security Pillars

1. Well-coordinated and effective Government machinery to manage national security issues supported by high-quality intelligence and assessment capability.
2. Resilient national systems that support disaster preparedness, response, recovery and climate change adaptation.
3. A strong, well-managed economy.
4. Robust human security for individuals and families.
5. Effective monitoring and protection of the Cook Islands borders and its Exclusive Economic Zone.
6. Political stability and strong governance of institutions, including the security sector.
7. Strengthened capacity for tackling organised crime.
8. Strong policy framework to protect individuals, government, and the private sector against cyber-crime and other malicious activity.





# PART 1

# NATIONAL SECURITY IN A COMPLEX WORLD

A photograph of a lush green mountain landscape. The foreground and middle ground are covered in dense, vibrant green tropical forest. In the background, a prominent mountain peak rises, featuring a large, light-colored, rocky cliff face. The sky above is a clear blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene conveys a sense of natural complexity and environmental richness.





# CHAPTER 1

## COOK ISLANDS' NATIONAL SECURITY



## Purpose of the National Security Policy

We are proud to deliver our Government's first National Security Policy (NSP) for the Cook Islands. It includes an overarching framework that supports our national security efforts and describes the strategic context for the development of long-term plans, policies, and capabilities to address national security threats. The NSP will ensure we are prepared for and can respond to security challenges effectively and efficiently, both now and in the future.

While our Government will have the main role in implementing the NSP, national security is an important task for all Cook Islanders. An important purpose of this NSP is to inform Cook Islanders of our key concerns.

## What is national security?

The security of a nation is linked to economic stability, resource efficiency, good governance and social cohesion. National security is a broad and evolving concept. It is concerned with how we shape our environment, and how we prevent and prepare for threats to our sovereignty, people, assets, infrastructure and institutions. National security is also concerned with how we respond to such threats and recover from any event that may occur. National security also includes threats such as climate change and natural disasters, cyber security and elements of human security.

## Alignment of the National Security Policy

The NSP reflects our fundamental national values, including respect for the rule of law and basic human rights and norms as well as promotion of good governance principles. It has been prepared to support the goals, objectives and actions set out in other national policies, especially *Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui: the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+* (NSDA 2020+) and the *Economic Development Strategy 2030* (EDS 2030).

This NSP is also compatible with and supports other regional and international commitments and policy priorities that we subscribe to. This includes Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) policies, most notably the *Framework of Pacific Regionalism*, adopted by PIF leaders in 2014, and the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, agreed by Pacific Islands' leaders at the Nauru PIF in 2018.



## Our vision, objectives, and principles for national security

### Vision

Our people, resources and environment are effectively protected through well-designed and implemented measures that anticipate threats, protect our national interests, and enhance resilience for the benefit of all Cook Islanders.

### Objectives

To achieve our vision, our enduring national security objectives are to:

- Protect and promote Cook Islands' sovereignty, territorial integrity and good reputation.
- Safeguard the democratic institutions, the rule of law, principles and national values upon which our society is founded.
- Ensure our safety and that of our communities as well as the safety and integrity of key national assets, institutions, and infrastructure, including from increasing climate risks.
- Preserve and promote the economic security of individuals, families, businesses and communities throughout the Cook Islands.
- Protect the fundamental traditional and cultural values and welfare of our people.
- Protect our natural environment while promoting the sustainable development of the Cook Islands and its resources.
- Engage effectively at the regional and international levels to support and promote the rules-based international order consistent with our national security needs and interests.

### Principles

We will apply the following principles when implementing this NSP:

- Priority will be given to activities requiring action by the Government and involve serious risks to achieving one or more of the above objectives.
- Activities will be undertaken in an accountable, transparent manner, respecting the rights and freedoms of Cook Islanders, our national values and the rule of law.
- We will seek to maintain control of our own national security, while recognising our capacity constraints and the benefits of appropriate and effective bilateral, regional and international collaboration.
- We will seek to ensure that activities carried out in the Cook Islands do not present a security risk to other countries.
- Actions will be undertaken recognising that sustainable development and security are mutually reinforcing and inextricably linked.
- Because security threats, risks and challenges are constantly evolving, implementation of our NSP will necessarily be a continual work in progress and its effectiveness regularly evaluated against relevant standards.
- National security will be strengthened based on genuine cooperation, collaboration and information-sharing among all relevant ministries, and agencies of Government as well as between Government and our people.
- We will support and contribute to the promotion and strengthening of an effective, international rules-based order that reflects and supports Cook Islands' security interests and priorities.

In undertaking activities to achieve the objectives in line with the principles above, strengthening deterrence and resilience in critical areas will be the primary consideration, including addressing climate risks.





# **CHAPTER 2**

## **THE EVOLUTION OF THE COOK ISLANDS' SECURITY ENVIRONMENT AND OUTLOOK**



## National security in today's world

A country has effective national security when it has the necessary safeguards in place to counter serious threats to its vital national interests. The identification of threats is a vital and ongoing process, which prompts the development and implementation of plans to safeguard any country.

Cook Islanders no longer live in relative isolation from the rest of the world. While we benefit greatly from our participation in world affairs, global and regional activities may also have serious, or potentially serious, implications for our own national security.

A serious security event for distant countries (e.g. military confrontation between major powers on the other side of the world) may generate a different type of security threat within the Cook Islands (e.g. a threat to our economic security). A security threat elsewhere in the world and even in our own region (e.g. drug trafficking) may have security implications in the Cook Islands (e.g. increased presence of illegal drugs). The NSP must simultaneously consider inter-related international, regional and national security dimensions.

For this reason, it is useful to place our NSP in its broader global, regional and domestic security context before discussing particular areas of our policy.



## Global

In the decades following World War II, the concept of security was mainly understood in terms of 'hard security', that is, large-scale military confrontation and threats of nuclear war. There remains the potential for significant state-on-state conflict as well as the possible proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including by non-State actors, that may have potentially severe impacts on even small, peaceful countries like the Cook Islands.

Advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) and transportation modalities and linkages have contributed to new opportunities arising from the emergence of a new and more complex international environment. This includes industrialisation, globalisation and the growing inter-connectivity and inter-dependency of countries, economies and people. However, these opportunities also increase challenges to global, regional and national security, including terrorism, transnational crime and, in more recent years, cybercrime, climate change, environmental, health and other threats.

As a result, national security is increasingly understood from a global perspective and more broadly than in earlier years, and a wide range of policy, legal and other forms of cooperation are evolving to respond to modern-day security concerns.

## Regional

Our own insular Pacific region has long been concerned with broad-based security issues. For example, in 2014, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders adopted a *Framework for Pacific Regionalism* (FPR). An important objective set out in the FPR is "security that ensures stable and safe human, environmental and political conditions for all".

Reflecting the above global developments, in 2018 Forum Leaders adopted the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*, which identified five regional security priorities:

- Climate change, the single greatest security threat
- Human security, including humanitarian assistance
- Environmental and resource security
- Transnational crime
- Cybersecurity.

In their Declaration, leaders committed to, *inter alia*, developing national security strategies and strengthening national security capacity. To give effect to the Declaration at the regional level, Forum Leaders in 2019 endorsed a detailed *Boe Declaration Action Plan*. In doing so, they requested that traditional and cultural norms be acknowledged and considered as an underpinning imperative of all initiatives under the plan.







In their adoption in 2022 of the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*, Forum Leaders recognised the central role that peace and security play in ensuring that forum island countries are able to realise a safe, secure and prosperous region. They committed to working together to promote security in the region.

### **The Cook Islands' security context**

We have adopted a broad approach to the formulation and implementation of this NSP. We consider this as the most effective and efficient means of safeguarding the Cook Islands against the five regional security priorities. This approach is based on a realistic assessment of the current and potentially most serious security issues we face.

Effective implementation of the NSP will require the full cooperation and support of all Cook Islanders, not only in the public sector but also in the private sector and in the wider community. Given the multidimensional nature of security concerns, it is important to collaborate with bilateral, regional and international partners to address issues of common concern.

Given the impossibility of removing all national security threats or hazards or negating all risks that we face, traditional deterrence measures may be neither practical nor possible. We seek to protect and promote our security interests by strengthening our resilience; that is, our ability to anticipate, absorb, adapt to and recover from an event seriously disruptive to our national security. This approach is consistent with our NSDA 2020+, especially Goals 2 and 13. In strengthening our security resilience, high priority will be given to critical infrastructure protection, building on progress made to date. At the same time, we will seek to collaborate with and support private sector entities providing critical services to our country, including the airlines, banks, radio, shipping, and civil society bodies (e.g. the Cook Islands Red Cross) with a view to strengthening resilience where possible and necessary.

With this context in mind, we approach national security from the dual perspective of the Cook Islands as both a very small Island State and a large Ocean State (see Figures 1 and 2).





Figure 1: Location of the Cook Islands in the Pacific



Figure 2: The Cook Islands

The total land area of the 15 islands that comprises the Cook Islands is approximately 240 km<sup>2</sup> and is surrounded by our 1.96 million km<sup>2</sup> Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Our living resources within our EEZ are of great importance to our people culturally and economically for both subsistence purposes and for domestic and foreign commercial fishing. (The non-living marine resources of our EEZ and continental shelf are potentially significant sources of great wealth for our nation).

The total resident population of the Cook Islands in 2021 was 14,987, with 72.5% residing on the main island, Rarotonga. In 2021, Cook Islands Maori and part Cook Islands Maori residents comprised 85.7% of the total population. The number of those residing in the Pa Enua (outer islands) has decreased over the years while the number of non-indigenous Cook Islanders has increased.

The Cook Islands has a small, open economy with growth heavily reliant on the export of services. In recent decades, tourism has become more important and was our country's leading economic sector pre-COVID-19 (estimated 66% of our total nominal gross domestic product (GDP) in 2019–20<sup>1</sup>). Smaller contributions to the economy are made by agriculture, fishing, construction and international financial services.

Telecommunications links between Rarotonga and Aitutaki and the outside world have improved greatly with the installation in early 2020 of the Manatua submarine cable. Other islands of the Pa Enua continue to rely on satellite communications through telecommunications providers on Rarotonga. International shipping links are primarily between Rarotonga and Aitutaki and New Zealand on approximately three-weekly schedules.

The Cook Islands is a parliamentary democracy based on the Westminster model. The Head of State of the Cook Islands is King Charles III, represented in the Cook Islands by the King's Representative. Executive Government is led by the Prime Minister as head of a Cabinet including a maximum of six other ministers.

The Cook Islands is a self-governing State in free association with New Zealand. Cook Islanders are New Zealand citizens by birth with a non-reciprocal free right of access to New Zealand. As New Zealand citizens, they also have visa-free access to Australia for work and residency purposes. The Cook Islands and New Zealand cooperate closely, assist each other and consult regularly on foreign affairs, defence and national security-related issues.

The Cook Islands has also forged cooperative arrangements with other countries and organisations in security-related areas. It has become a full member of a wide range of multilateral and regional organisations and has entered into multifarious security-related and other multilateral, regional and bilateral treaties.

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<sup>1</sup> According to New Zealand. MFAT (5.5.20) Forward: Pacific Tourism: COVID19 Impact & Recovery Sector Status Report: Phase 1 B, p.19, the share of contribution of tourism as a percentage of GDP in 2018 was 87%.







# PART 2

# BUILDING A FUTURE OF HAPPINESS, SAFETY AND WELLBEING





# **CHAPTER 3**

# **OUR NATIONAL SECURITY PILLARS**



On the basis of international, regional and national risk assessments there are several challenges to the Cook Islands' national security, especially climate, economic and health security. Security challenges in one focal area (e.g. climate security) may have serious implications in other areas (e.g. food and health security), which must also be considered.

Addressing these challenges requires a range of capabilities and an enabling environment. The eight pillars show the actions needed to meet our national security objectives. Some security concerns identified are being addressed under other policy initiatives.

The actions listed are those that the Government intends to address in the near future.





# PILLAR 1

## MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT

Well-coordinated and effective government machinery to manage national security issues supported by high-quality intelligence and assessment capability.

The NSP architecture is adaptable and flexible, and enables cooperation and collaboration between relevant agencies when there are serious risks to the:

- security and safety of our people and those who visit us.
- sovereignty, reputation, or vital interests of the Cook Islands
- economy or the environment
- effective functioning of Cook Islands' communities.

In formulating this NSP we adopted an 'all hazards, all-risks' approach, taking into account domestic, regional and international developments. We identified and prioritised a number of actions based on initial assessments of security threats and risks as well as other security-related challenges we face. We also recognised new or expanded opportunities for security collaboration



## National intelligence collaboration, gathering and assessment

Preserving and promoting our national security necessitates fostering collaboration within Government and between Government and domestic and foreign stakeholders. At the domestic level, Government at all levels will need to work closely with a wide range of stakeholders, both on Rarotonga and in the Pa Enua, to address the national security areas of concern highlighted in this NSP.

The Cook Islands has no military force of its own. We have established close defence and security collaboration with New Zealand based on unique constitutional ties and shared interests and concerns.

Our Government will pursue strengthened security collaboration with New Zealand based on principles set out in the *2001 Joint Centenary Declaration* (JCD) and the Aotearoa New Zealand – Kuki Airani The Cook Islands *Waka Hourua/Vaka Purua 2022–2025* statement of Partnership; and with Australia as per the Cook Islands – Australia Oa Tumanava statement of Partnership 2022. We will also strive to promote collaboration with other governments in the region, as well as with governments beyond our region that share our security interests and concerns.

We will work to strengthen our collaboration with regional and international agency partners and continue our participation in security-related initiatives at both the regional and international levels, including under the Boe Declaration Action Plan.

We continually gather intelligence for analysis, risk assessment and update our security policies. This is essential for understanding threats to our national security and as necessary. This intelligence work, tailored to our particular circumstances, may require capacity building and strengthening of our Government's protective security arrangements.

## Protective security arrangements

Up until 1965 our communications were almost exclusively with New Zealand and concerned fundamental developmental issues. Today, we enjoy close relations with many countries. We are a member of numerous regional and international organisations and an active participant in many critical decision-making processes. Our Government has many important regional and international interests and priorities. We are party to sensitive information that may be of great interest to external actors. Illegal access to this information would be detrimental to our national interests or those of our partners.

Promoting and enhancing our national security requires balancing confidentiality and sharing information between our Government and our people, including those living abroad. The protection of confidential information through secure arrangements within and between all levels of Government, including both the political and agency levels, as well as between our Government and our external collaborating partners is paramount. To satisfy the protective security requirements that are appropriate for the Cook Islands and meet the highest relevant international standards we are establishing a policy framework and procedures. The framework will build on and strengthen arrangements already in place and cover personnel security (access to sensitive information made available only to qualified persons), information security (procedures for protection of sensitive information) and physical security (measures in place to protect people, information and assets).

The framework and procedures will be set in place over time, taking into account agreed priorities given our current human and financial resource constraints.

With an appropriate, internationally recognised satisfactory level of protective security, established through legislation if necessary, our security partners will be better placed to share sensitive security-related information of importance to the Cook Islands.



## Cook Islands Security Council

Exercising responsibilities for our national security is a complex task requiring close cooperation and collaboration among many central security and other agencies of Government, acting under appropriate policy direction.

The highest responsibility for the security of our country rests with Government, led by the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Select Cabinet Members can sit as the Cook Islands Security Council (CISC) and act on the basis of independent, professional advice from relevant national experts, and review NSP implementation and issue policy directives. These directives will be carried out by the central security and other agencies identified below.

As appropriate, the Government will also be advised by and support local government bodies in the Pa Enua.

## Central security agencies

Key responsibilities for national security are exercised by the following agencies:

- Cook Islands Police Service (CIPS)
- Office of the Prime Minister – National Security Directorate (NSD)
- Customs Service in Ministry of Finance & Economic Management (MFEM)
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI)
- Crown Law Office (CLO)
- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)
- Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR)
- Te Marae Ora/Ministry of Health (TMO)
- Ministry of Transport (MoT)
- Cook Islands Financial Intelligence Unit (CIFIU).

These agencies will be assisted by other agencies of Government as well as other governments and organisations. They will continue to conduct normal operations; however, broader collaboration may



be required to address threats that could pose serious risks for one or more of our key national security objectives, especially where those risks require urgent, coordinated intervention by our Government and have the potential to generate or exacerbate risks in other areas.

A Director of the National Security Division (NSD) supported by NSD officers, within the Office of the Prime Minister, has been established to:

- Provide support and advice to the Prime Minister, the CISC and the National Security Committee on national security issues and implement policy directives as appropriate.
- Work in collaboration with other agencies of Government as appropriate, monitoring domestic, regional, and international developments of security relevance to the Cook Islands, preparing assessments and report thereon to Government.
- Support other agencies of Government in the implementation of this NSP, including in capacity-building and undertaking work in security-related areas (e.g. threat and risk assessments; international and domestic legal matters) and the formulation and implementation of sectoral security resilience strategies in collaboration with external partners as appropriate.
- Facilitate collaboration between Government and the Cook Islands private sector and other stakeholders on national security matters as appropriate.
- Represent Government at the regional and international levels in security matters or, when security matters relate to particular aspects of security (e.g. meetings on customs security), support the responsible agency of Government.
- Support the formulation of a national cybersecurity policy and support other agencies of Government in the implementation of the policy, taking into account existing security-related communications arrangements of specific Government agencies.
- Coordinate formulation of a Protective Security Requirements Framework (PSRF) for Government and support implementation of that framework.
- Report periodically to Government and annually to Parliament on implementation of the NSP including by coordinating the preparation of an annual national security assessment.

## **National Security Committee**

The National Security Committee (NSC) is chaired by the Chief of Staff of the Office of the Prime Minister. The committee is made up of the Commissioner of Police, the Solicitor-General, Director National Security, Principal Immigration Officer, Comptroller of Customs. Other officials may be invited to participate in NSC meetings.

The objectives of the committee include:

- Monitoring, evaluating and supporting implementation of this NSP and proposing amendments of the NSP to the Prime Minister and CISC, as appropriate.
- Collating and analysing intelligence from member agencies and others as appropriate in order to understand and identify national security threats, and providing high-quality and timely advice to the Prime Minister and the CISC as appropriate.
- Coordinating national responses to major crises or circumstances affecting national security, respecting the legal and policy mandates of specific agencies as appropriate.
- Facilitating mutual cooperation and assistance in national security matters between member agencies, including:
  - sharing information and intelligence in relation to potential national security threats in a timely manner
  - sharing specialised skills and resources for training and capacity building, as well as in response to specific national security threats or events.
- Engaging in effective partnership between the NSC and external security partners and agencies.
- Establishing and monitoring the deliberations of specialised standing or ad hoc security sub-committees and acting on recommendations of those committees.

The NSD Director and NSD officers support the NSC.

Detailed consultation will be undertaken among all security agencies to determine the extent that new legislation is required or existing legislation amended or repealed to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of the security agencies, and to ensure the safeguarding of confidential security information and related matters.

## Other security committees

The NSC may establish special committees on either a standing or ad hoc basis to deal with either security focal areas generally or circumstances of immediate security concern.

A standing committee may be established to collaborate in addressing specific intelligence security threats, comprising key security agencies involved (e.g. senior officials from Police, the FIU, Customs and Immigration) while an ad hoc committee might be established to prepare for a national conference on food security, also comprising the relevant agencies and other stakeholders as appropriate (e.g. agriculture, customs, health, marine resources, growers associations etc.).

Collaboration will take place under existing legislative arrangements or other agreed operational procedures (e.g. the *Disaster Risk Management Act 2007*, *Ministry of Health Act 2013*) or by Cabinet mandate or directive.

The NSD and officers of the NSC will support the work of such committees as appropriate.

## Transparency and reporting arrangements

It is essential for the Government's security-related activities to be transparent. Under the direction of the NSC, the NSD will coordinate the preparation of an annual national security report on the implementation of the NSP during the year for presentation to the NSC. The report will provide an assessment of current and potential security issues facing the Cook Islands.

The Prime Minister, as CISC chair, will arrange for the report to be tabled in parliament.

The NSD will coordinate the preparation of special reports on particular security-related events for consideration by the NSC and possible public dissemination.

## Action plan

- Strengthen immediately our capacity to address critical, wide-ranging security concerns as set out in the NSP.
- Establish new policy-making machinery, and strengthen existing machinery to address concerns, both at the Cabinet and official levels.
- Implement a program of activities focused on capacity-building and strengthening cooperation and collaboration at all levels among key security agencies and others as appropriate over the next three years.
- NSD to coordinate the preparation of special reports on particular security related events for consideration by the NSC and possible public dissemination.
- Conduct detailed consultation amongst security agencies on new legislation or amendments to current legislations to clarify and confirm roles and responsibilities to ensure the safeguarding of confidential security information or related matters.
- Protect access to our security-related information in ways appropriate to our way of life while still meeting recognised international standards.
- Prioritise security response activities based on professional risk assessments undertaken on a continuing basis to support the NSP.
- Strengthen collaboration and cooperation between Government and external partners, including through information exchange and capacity building.
- Table in parliament annual reports on the Cook Islands national security situation and implementation of the NSP.

## PILLAR 2

# NATIONAL SYSTEMS

### Resilient national systems that support disaster preparedness, response and recovery, and climate change adaptation

Climate change is one of the greatest security hazards facing humankind today, with serious implications for sea level rise (SLR), as well as increasing conditions for extreme sea level events, tropical cyclones and rainfall, heatwaves, floods and droughts, with potentially existential risks for the Cook Islands and other small island states. Climate change has already caused substantial damages and increasingly irreversible losses in the world's coastal and ocean ecosystems.

Addressing the risks posed by climate change is an important goal in the NSDA 2020+. Overseeing climate change initiatives and activities across Government is the responsibility of Climate Change Cook Islands (CCCI), a Division of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). Given the implications of climate change for the Cook Islands, disaster preparedness is also an essential part of addressing extreme events that will be exacerbated by a changing environment over longer time frames. The Emergency Management Cook Islands (EMCI) Division (located in the OPM) focuses on disaster preparedness, response, recovery and related matters.

Central to our Government's efforts in addressing climate change hazards has been the implementation of the *Cook Islands Climate Change Policy 2018–2028*. In 2023, the policy will be reviewed and revised based on the latest information and research findings available from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other sources. The review will be undertaken through a transparent, consultative





process and informed by a detailed risk assessment of the implications of climate change for our country. On the basis of the review, a range of climate security activities will be implemented within the framework of the government's Climate Change Country Programme 2018–2030.

We are party to the mitigation and adaptation approaches to dealing with climate change security identified in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2015 Paris Agreement.

As a small island state (SIS), our greenhouse gas emissions have a minimal effect on global warming. The steps it is obliged to take under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement to fight global warming are therefore modest. Nevertheless, in solidarity with other members of the international community and to promote our own security, we are undertaking a growing range of mitigation activities aimed at reducing the sources of greenhouse gases, such as replacing fuel-powered generators with solar energy and enhancing the processes, activities or mechanisms that remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

We will prepare, maintain and submit to the UNFCCC Secretariat nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that it intends to achieve through domestic mitigation measures to meet the objectives of the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement. The NDCs will assist in guiding efforts to combat climate change going forward.

We must also take measures to adapt to the effects of both actual and expected climate change. Adaptation may necessitate changes to how we work with the natural environment to reduce the harmful effects of climate change. Where possible, we could take advantage of beneficial opportunities resulting from climate change, such as changing fish stock migration patterns that increase the living marine resources in our EEZ.

SLR has broad, existential and sovereignty implications of special importance for our national security. It is currently projected that sea levels in the Cook Islands may rise between 27–30 cm by 2030 and 2 m by 2100. This could threaten the viability of many of our low-lying communities, especially in the atolls of our Pa Enua. This is a priority for the NSP.

The living and non-living resources of our EEZ and continental shelf constitute an important part of our national patrimony as a large ocean State. Given the possible implications of SLR, we must ensure that our existing rights to those resources under the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS) are protected. We are working domestically, with our regional partners and with other like-minded countries towards that end.

Under UNCLOS, we have claimed sovereign rights over certain continental shelf areas covering some 350,000 km<sup>2</sup> beyond the EEZ. We are intensifying our efforts to secure a final recognition of our claim that was submitted to the *United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf* (CLCS) in 2009. Once this is completed all our national territorial boundaries are legally fixed.

The NSDA 2020+ recognises the clear link between climate change and disaster risk management. During the 2023 review of the *Cook Islands Climate Change Policy 2018–2028* national planning of climate-related activities will be based on vulnerability and adaptation assessments for each island and those results fed into Island Development Plans.

To achieve our objectives for climate security we continue to work closely with our regional and international partners to draw on expertise and to strengthen international legal arrangements to achieve the objectives set out in the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement.

Mitigation and adaptation necessitates investment of large-scale financial and other resources. While domestic financial resources will be used where possible, it will be important for the Cook Islands to participate in reviews of and benefit from new international funding mechanisms (e.g. a 'loss and damage' instrument) and make access available through existing regional and international mechanisms, regardless of the Cook Islands' developed status.

## Action plan

- Review existing climate change policies and revise them based on the most up-to-date information and research findings.
- Strengthen mitigation and adaptation activities to enable the Cook Islands to respond effectively to current and future security challenges of climate change.
- Protect our sovereign rights over maritime areas under international law, especially from threats arising from sea level rise.
- Strengthen our resilience to the effects of natural disasters through professional assessments and effective protection, response and recovery measures.

## PILLAR 3 ECONOMY

### A strong, well-managed and resilient economy

Economic security is an important goal of the NSDA 2020+ and a cornerstone of this NSP. It depends on our ability to protect or promote our national economic interests in the face of events or circumstances that may jeopardise or block those interests. Long-term sustainable development is closely related to the maintenance and strengthening of economic security.

Our vision of how to achieve national economic security is set out in the EDS 2030, which was adopted on the basis of widespread public consultation in 2021. However, implementation of the strategy was seriously impacted by COVID-19, which led to a contraction of the Cook Islands' nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by some 22% between March 2020 and June 2021. To address the security challenges of COVID-19, our

Government adopted urgent measures, including the *Economic Recovery Roadmap* (ERR) in July 2021. The ERR uses the EDS 2030 as a guiding document for Government over the next decade, identifying actions that support our sustainable development through the NSDA 2020+. Various workstreams have been identified in the ERR that promote NSP national security objectives.

The EDS 2030 acknowledges the central importance of the tourism sector for economic growth. However, it also recognises the risks to our economic security from this dependency. It therefore supports economic diversification, building on the Cook Islands' comparative advantages, while recognising the importance of other sectors as current contributors to economic diversification (e.g. financial services). There are other possibilities to be explored and promoted through effective policy and other measures. In support of a NSDA 2020+ goal, for example, our Government will continue to strengthen existing initiatives for both increased primary production and explore the development of commercial



micro-processing in the primary sector. Special attention will be given to the Pa Enua, both for economic security and broader sustainable development purposes, including providing increased employment opportunities and enhanced wellbeing. Where possible traditional knowledge of Cook Islanders will assist in the adaptation of practices to the effects of climate change.

There is considerable potential for promoting our services sectors beyond tourism. For example, our Government will consult with stakeholders on Rarotonga and in the Pa Enua, to consider initiatives to support further development and promotion of our creative or cultural industries; that is, economic activities concerned with the generation or use of local knowledge or information, such as the media, performing arts, visual arts, music and publishing. We will collaborate with other like-minded countries to promote international rules in this area to protect our interests.

A third, broad area offering possibilities for economic diversification concerns Artificial Intelligence (AI); that is, activities relating to the ability of a computer system to perform actions that would otherwise require human intelligence. These include, for example, social media applications and video games. Our Government will consult with the growing number of talented, innovative Cook Islanders, both in the Cook Islands and elsewhere, about support and encouragement to undertake promising entrepreneurial activity to strengthen and expand this part of our domestic economy.

A number of other activities will support the above initiatives. In particular, the *Development Investment Act 1995–96*, *Investment Regulations* and the 2003 *Cook Islands Investment Code* will be reviewed, along with the Government's investment priorities, practices and activities to ensure that investment activities are for the genuine, long-term security and benefit of the Cook Islands.

The Government will arrange an Ease of Doing Business (EDB) survey to measure best practice across key Doing Business Topics (e.g. starting a business) to identify where improvement can be made to better assist and strengthen our private sector and enhance our competitiveness.

The success of these diversification initiatives depends on our capacity to establish and protect the intellectual property rights (IPRs) of our people, including those relating to traditional knowledge (TK). We will review the 2014 *National Intellectual Property Strategy* (NIPS) and implement a program to preserve and promote IPR, including for TK, at national and international levels, collaborating with like-minded partners and working through regional and international institutions.

We will review and refresh our 2014 *Trade Policy Framework* and use it as a tool to promote our economic security interests and identify trade opportunities, and areas where assistance might be required especially in the sectors indicated above. We will support our private sector to exploit the opportunities available through the PACER Plus Agreement and PICTA, including increasing resources for trade capacity building. We will strengthen the Cook Islands' *National Trade Facilitation Committee* (NTFC). We will support our private sector through enhanced *Quality Infrastructure* (QI) – the institutional arrangements, policies and practices that support and enhance the quality, safety and environmental soundness of goods, services and processes.

Given recent disruptions to global supply chains, the Government will consider strengthening the security of supply of goods and services to the Cook Islands.

As determined by the *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development* (OECD) in accordance with its own criteria, from 1 January 2020, the Cook Islands has ceased to be eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA), and is now deemed a developed country given our relatively high per capita GDP. Nonetheless, Cook Islands will intensify its bilateral, regional, and international efforts to secure access to assistance.

## Action plan

- Continue to implement the ERR, using the EDS 2030 as a guiding document.
- Strengthen national security through economic diversification, including consultation with stakeholders in the primary resources, cultural industries and AI sectors.
- Update the Cook Islands investment regime and trade policies, protecting the Cook Islands IPRS, and other measures to strengthen the Cook Islands economy.
- Continue to work at the international level to ensure access to resources critical for the success of our efforts to address climate change and other national security concerns identified in this NSP.



## PILLAR 4 HUMAN SECURITY

### Robust human security for individuals and families

National security involves more than threats and hazards to national borders. The notion of human security in the context of overall national security is important. At its most basic, human security encompasses freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity. It also relates to security of government institutions, individuals, groups and island communities.

Human security is directly relevant to the NSP goal and objectives. It is a broad, security focal area and concerns internal and external threats and hazards, both natural and human-caused, to our national security. It also often involves complex issues in one of the individual focal areas below

that may be relevant to security concerns in other focal areas, including in the context of sustainable development.

In addition, various aspects of the Cook Islands' population have significant implications for public policy, including policies relating to the country's human security. These include changes to the Cook Islands' age structure, depopulation of the Pa Enua, internal/external population movements, and changing ethnic composition of the resident population. The Government has adopted a *National Population Policy* (NPP) reflecting the above considerations as well as an important NSDA 2020+ goal to maintain a resident population that is consistent with our economic, social and cultural aspirations. The NPP recognises that various population-related policies are reflected in individual departmental policies and work plans. The NPP supports the goals and objectives of this NSP.







## Food security

The 2009 World Summit on Food Security has stated that “food security exists when all people, at all time, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. Food security is impacted by many social, economic, technological, political and environmental factors, including degradation of natural resources, water scarcity, pests and diseases, and risks associated with climate change.

An important goal of the NSDA 2020+ is food security. The Government is committed to promoting national food security, and recognises that food security involves several considerations including those relating to import substitution,

production, retaining arable land, biosecurity, trade, health, accessibility and other issues. Considerations may also differ between individual islands in the Pa Enua and Rarotonga. Food security issues fall within the responsibility of various government ministries including agriculture, customs, health, marine resources and transportation.

We will hold a national consultation on food security to determine a detailed policy, including a work plan. It will review the responsibilities and collaboration arrangements of our Government and address the concerns of both Rarotonga and the Pa Enua.

We will strengthen collaboration with relevant regional and international organisations and incorporate our Cook Islands traditional knowledge practices.

## Health security

Over recent decades, a number of disease-related issues have assumed significance as global public health concerns. These include emerging infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and HIV/AIDS, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, and heart and respiratory diseases, as well as health problems relating to climate change such as the increased risk of transmission of infectious diseases.

The Cook Islands is facing many of the same health security concerns as other countries. Consequently, health security is one of the fundamental goals of the NSDA 2020+ and another cornerstone of this NSP.

Health security matters are a primary responsibility of *Te Marae Ora*/Ministry of Health (TMO). Health information systems have been introduced and a review of the Ministry's health governance is underway. In addition, one of TMO's primary legislative instruments, the *Public Health Act 2004*, is currently being revised.

With immense effort on the part of local authorities and great assistance from New Zealand and other countries, COVID-19 resulted in only two fatalities in the Cook Islands. While over 6,900 Cook Islanders caught the disease they subsequently recovered. However, as indicated elsewhere, the pandemic had severe economic consequences for the country that are still being felt to this day.

Pandemics are security hazards that have become more prevalent in recent years and there is no indication that such pandemics will become less frequent in the future. In order to better prepare for the next pandemic and following a precautionary approach, we will undertake a thorough, independent, and comprehensive review of our experiences in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned will strengthen our resilience to such events in the future. This is relevant to the review of management practice and the draft Cook Islands Pandemic Action Plan.





NCDs are the leading causes of premature illness, death, and disability in the Cook Islands. Over 75% of all deaths in the country are NCD-related. In 2021, TMO adopted a *Strategic Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-Communicable Diseases 2021–2025*. We will continue to strengthen our capacity to deal with NCDs concerns once the final STEPwise Approach to NCD Risk Factor Surveillance (STEPS) Survey Report 2022 is received. We will build on activities undertaken to date, traditional practices as appropriate, and agreed regional action programs.

Also of health security concern is the level of health services in the Pa Enua. Owing to financial and personnel constraints facing TMO, as well as the decreasing population in the Pa Enua, it has not been feasible to station doctors on each of the Pa Enua. However, experienced nurse practitioners-in-charge stationed on each island have gone some way in improving health services in the Pa Enua, while serious cases are flown to Rarotonga for treatment. Telemedical services are available on some of the Pa Enua. Consideration will be given to introducing a regular 'flying doctor' service for the Pa Enua and improving inter-island ambulance services.

The TMO and the Government as a whole benefit greatly from regional and international cooperation, including with the World Health Organization (WHO). Collaboration with those agencies will be strengthened and we will participate in decision-making to advance our interests, including revision of the WHO's International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR 2005). Given the critical importance of the IHR 2005, with the support of our development partners, we will strengthen our capacity to implement fully the IHR 2005.

We will continue to work closely through various mechanisms to support and advance regional and international health security, including the formulation and implementation of a cooperation program.

## Community security

Many people derive security from membership of a group, be it a family, a community or ethnic group that provides an identity, a common language and a reassuring set of common cultural values and practical support when needed. This aspect





of human security is found throughout the NSDA 2020+. This includes a vision of safe communities to live in with vibrant living languages and culture and the collective capacity to respond effectively to change. This is expressed, for example, through national events and community collaboration.

While our decision to become part of the broader world has brought us many benefits and opened up many opportunities for a better life, it has also given rise to important challenges to our community security, especially on Rarotonga. It is important that these challenges be recognised and that we continue to safeguard and strengthen our community security as a modern, open society while striving to achieve our broader developmental aspirations. This will be achieved through various programs including those promoting harmonious relations among the various communities making up the modern Cook Islands, and enhanced programs to protect and promote our culture, develop the Pa Enua and encourage our people to remain in the Cook Islands or return from abroad.

Over the years, much effort has been spent on preserving and promoting our community security, including our Maori language, culture and core social values. The response of our people in the face of the COVID-19 adversities demonstrated that

community institutions are strong. Such activities will continue, and institutions supported and strengthened.

There remain other, more fundamental challenges to our community security: including the breakdown of the traditional extended family system and networks; economic pressures that have forced many Cook Islanders to sell land, businesses and properties to foreign interests; and continued emigration threatening the viability of many of our island communities. The exodus of Cook Islanders to New Zealand and elsewhere because of the economic impact of COVID-19 must not be discounted and will need to be addressed through priority initiatives in the EDS 2030 and those indicated above.

Attracting Cook Islanders of all ages to remain in the Cook Islands, including the Pa Enua, or return from abroad has long been an objective of the Government as a contribution to strengthening both economic and community security.

However, achieving this requires formulation and implementation of targeted policies and programs to address critical concerns. When encouraging Cook Islanders to return home it is important to recognise that many of our people living abroad, especially those of working age and with skills





in high demand in our country, face numerous obstacles to returning. This includes overseas loan commitments and access to land at reasonable prices on Rarotonga for housing purposes.

## Personal security

Threats to personal security take many forms, including domestic violence, domestic criminal activities, and threats to one's own personal security such as drug abuse and suicide.

Freedom from physical violence is a vital element of human security. Reducing domestic violence is one of the important goals of the NSDA 2020+ and is reflected in the goals of this NSP. Despite efforts over recent years, domestic violence has risen to a matter of significant public concern.

In recent years, increasing instances of abuse have been reported to Government authorities, such as the Police, as well as to social organisations, especially the Cook Islands Women's Counselling Centre/Punanga Tauturu and in the local media. Given the multi-faceted nature of the problem, we will strengthen our multi-pronged approach, including closer cooperation between Government agencies, non-governmental organisations, family and community representatives.

The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration from the woman leaders inaugural meeting was received and endorsed at the PIFS Leaders Forum in July 2022. It addresses the role that gender plays in shaping approaches and decisions in support of human security.

The increase in drug usage, especially cannabis, has given rise to issues of potentially serious security concern. Again, because of its multi-faceted nature, the problem will be addressed through a strengthened, multi-pronged approach involving Government agencies, non-governmental organisations community groups to ensure that drug use does not rise to the level of a serious security risk.

To strengthen public safety, our national firearms legislation will be updated and strengthened, taking into account developments in firearms technology and the history, practices and traditions of firearms usage and practices in the Pa Enua.

As the 2019 events in Christchurch demonstrated, no country is immune from terrorism-related activities. Our security-related agencies will continue to work closely together under the oversight of the NSC and with bilateral, regional and international partners to reduce the risk of a terrorism event occurring in our country.

Similarly, our Government security agencies and other agencies will work collaboratively with community groups and other domestic stakeholders as well as bilateral, regional, and international partners to ensure gang influences do not give rise to a serious security concern in our country.

## Action plan

- Initiate preparations for a national consultation on food security at an early date to chart a way forward to strengthen the food security of the Cook Islands.
- Undertake an early, independent assessment of our experience in dealing with COVID-19 to strengthen our capacity to prepare for and effectively address any such health threats that may arise in the future.
- Strengthen activities to combat NCDs and continue to address the particular health security challenges of those living in the Pa Enua.
- Strengthen community security through building harmonious relations between all groups comprising modern Cook Islands society while enhancing programs to promote the Cook Islands languages and culture.
- Strengthen efforts to encourage Cook Islanders to remain in the Cook Islands and those living abroad to return home.
- Address personal security challenges arising from domestic violence.
- Address other personal security challenges facing the Cook Islands, including increasing drug use.
- Update the Cook Islands' firearms legislation.
- Work collaboratively under the umbrella/oversight of the National Security Committee and with bilateral, regional, and international partners to reduce the risk of a terrorism event occurring in our country.

## PILLAR 5

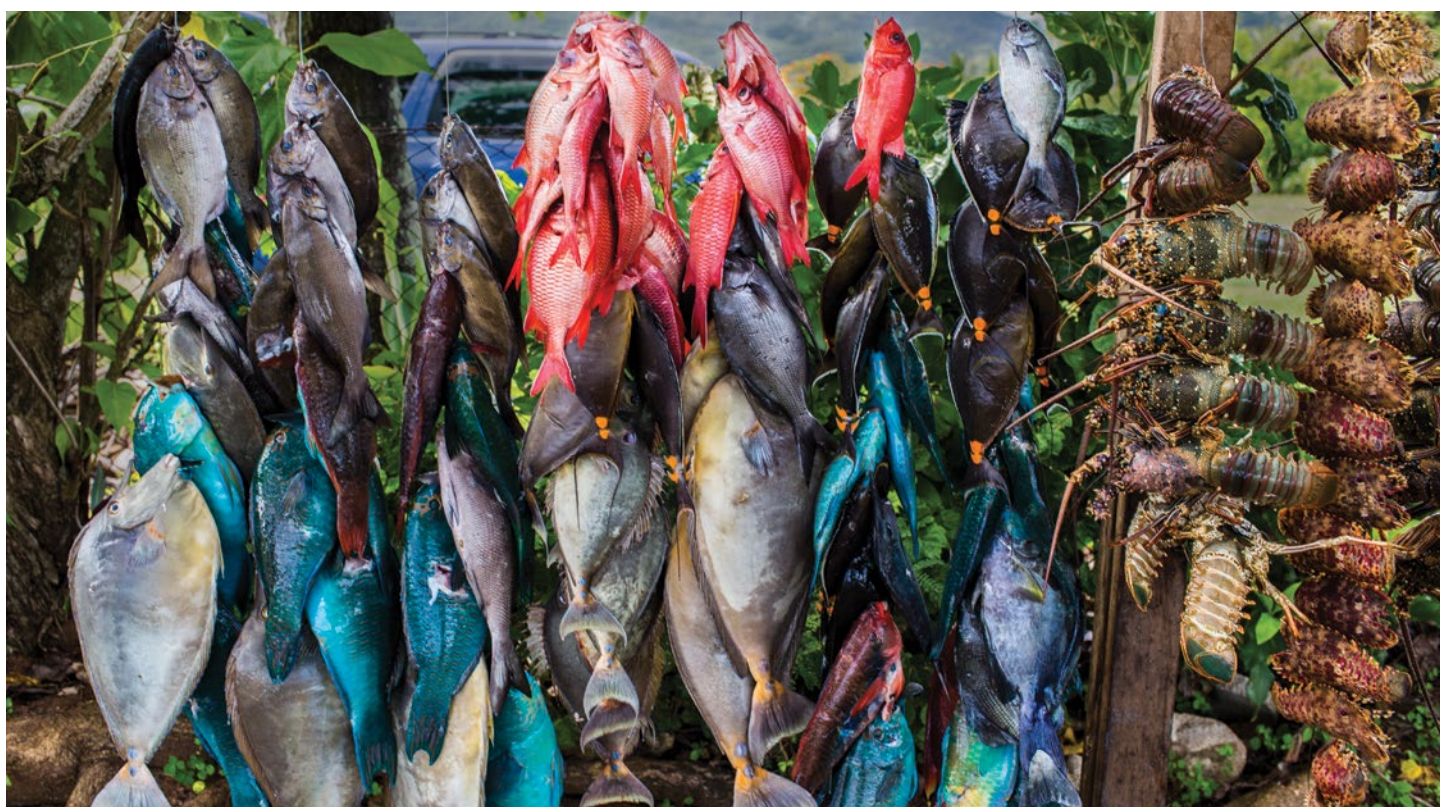
# ENVIRONMENTAL AND RESOURCE SECURITY

### Effective monitoring and protection of the Cook Islands borders and its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)

Protecting and promoting environmental and resource security is a fundamental objective of the NSP. Security considerations must be carefully balanced against the need to protect and promote our nation's economic security. This balance is clearly reflected in the NSDA 2020+ in the principle of sustainability.

Given the transnational character of many environmental and resource security threats and hazards, the Cook Islands has long sought to collaborate in both international and regional environmental security-related activities, including participation in treaties (such as the *Convention on Biological Diversity* [CBD]) and initiatives to combat threats to environmental and resource security through, for example, the *UN Conference on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction* (BBNJ). The Cook Islands will continue to engage with these treaties.

Water security, an important element of environmental security, is reflected as a high priority in the NSDA 2020+. Building on existing programs, we will preserve and strengthen infrastructural facilities and management practices on Rarotonga and in the Pa Enua to ensure water security for our people.





Through our *Marae Moana*, a marine protected area covering the Cook Islands' EEZ, we will continue to protect and conserve the ecological, biodiversity and heritage values of our marine environment. We will allow sustainable use of that environment, including its resources, through the application of the precautionary approach and sound principles of ecologically sustainable use.

The living and non-living marine resources of our EEZ and continental shelf form an invaluable part of our patrimony over which the Cook Islands has sovereign rights recognised by UNCLOS. We are committed to using those resources for the economic benefit of our country while managing our fisheries in a sustainable manner based on the best scientific information and techniques available. We are working to protect our EEZ from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and cooperating with overseas partners to tackle IUU fishing on a regional basis. The *2009 Port State Measures Agreement* (PSMA) is currently being assessed with a view to the Cook Islands acceding the agreement, and reviewing our relevant legislation and practices to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

Our continental shelf has an abundance of polymetallic nodules that offer potentially significant seabed mining opportunities for economic diversification that could greatly enhance our country's economic security. The Cook Islands has also signed an *International Seabed Authority* (ISA) – a 15-year contract for exploration for polymetallic nodules in an area in the North Pacific.

All actions taken to explore and exploit mining opportunities must be consistent with our own legislation and our obligations under UNCLOS. In order to promote and protect our environmental and resource security they must also be conducted in such a way as to, in particular, protect and preserve the marine environment and rare or fragile ecosystems, conserve biodiversity and apply the precautionary approach. We are preparing an Environment Management Framework for seabed mining activities.

Given our responsibilities with respect to environmental and resource security, we actively participate in ISA deliberations on the elaboration of environmental regulations governing seabed mining beyond the EEZ. We have received valuable advice and assistance from external collaborating partners with respect to our own economic and resource security concerns.

Maritime, aviation, water, energy, telecommunications, medical, banking and other infrastructural facilities are critical to our national security and the security of our environment and our resources. These facilities are liable to a wide range of human and natural threats and hazards. It is essential that we protect those facilities. Protection measures will be based on experiences in the Cook Islands and elsewhere, reflect regional and international best practice and the highest applicable international standards. These measures will build on positive initiatives already being undertaken by several Government agencies. We will collaborate with and support private sector entities providing critical services to our country.

Under the 2019 *Boe Action Plan* a wide range of regional activities will be undertaken to address threats to environmental security. These include (for example):

- refining environmental risk assessment techniques in the context of regional security
- information-sharing on environmental criminal matters
- ensuring that regional countries have effective legal and other mechanisms in place to implement the relevant environmental security agreements
- enhancing monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) efforts to combat IUU fishing
- strengthening efforts to combat corruption relating to the environment and natural resources
- strengthening national policy, legal and institutional capacities in the above areas.

We continue to play a constructive, proactive role in Boe Declaration Action Plan activities addressing the particular needs and concerns of the Cook Islands with respect to environmental and resource security.

## Action plan

- Protect the environmental and resource security of the Cook Islands through national activities as well as through participation in regional and international legal and other initiatives.
- Strengthen effort to protect water security for all communities in the Cook Islands.
- Manage and exploit the marine and other natural resources of the Cook Islands sustainably and based on the best scientific information and practices.
- Assess the 2009 *Port State Measures Agreement* (PSMA) with a view to the Cook Islands acceding to the agreement and reviewing our relevant legislation and practices to ensure that they are fit for purpose.
- Review and strengthen our existing national plans to protect the integrity of our ports and airports and meet our international safety obligations through our own initiatives and existing regional and international partnerships.
- Implement a broad-based program for the strengthening and protection of the country's critical infrastructure, based on national, regional, and international risk assessments and build on ongoing efforts.





## PILLAR 6

# POLITICAL STABILITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

### Political stability and strong governance of institutions, including the security sector

Political security covers a wide range of issues from threats or challenges to our national sovereignty, to supporting the democratic process, to promoting respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Central to a country's national security is protection of its sovereignty and essential national interests from external interference. In recent years, the Cook Islands and other Pacific Island countries have become the subject of unprecedented attention on the part of external actors, some with interests different to ours. While recognising the importance of legitimate international diplomatic discourse, we will continue to protect against threats to our national interests and sovereignty.



Modern geo-political uncertainties have arisen from powerful forces acting on the global and regional stages, generated or exacerbated by COVID-19. It is critical for us to: monitor closely regional and international political developments as they may impact on our own national security; undertake risk assessments; formulate response strategies; and take action, including in concert with other like-minded States as necessary, to protect our security interests and strengthen the rules-based international order. This may require participation in regional and international organisations, initiatives, and treaties such as we have done in the *1985 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty*. The Cook Islands will continue to expand its cooperation in those areas as appropriate.

Corruption has been recognised by the Cook Islands and other regional governments, including through the *2020 Teieniwa Declaration*, as having the potential to pose a serious national security risk. In support of the NSDA 2020+, the Government has adopted a *National Anti-Corruption Strategy* (NACS) to significantly reduce corruption in our country and hence any risk to our national security. The NACS will support this NSP and be implemented and anti-corruption efforts strengthened in light of evolving circumstances.

Our Government's longstanding commitment to preserve and promote political security is reflected, for example, in the NSDA 2020+, which recognises the fundamental rights and freedoms currently enshrined in Part IVA of the Constitution. We will give serious consideration to becoming a party to other human rights and disarmament agreements, including the *1984 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* (CAT) and the *2013 Arms Trade Treaty* (ATT).

Our Government will ensure that respect for the rule of law, democratic principles and fundamental human rights and freedoms of the people of the Cook Islands are protected.

## Action plan

- Monitor closely regional and international political developments, undertake risk assessments, formulate response strategies, and take action, together with other like-minded countries as necessary, to protect our national security interests and strengthen the rules-based international order.
- Promote national security through respect for the rule of law, democratic principles and fundamental human rights and freedoms of the people of the Cook Islands; implement national anti-corruption strategies; and participate in other human rights and related instruments as appropriate.



## PILLAR 7

# TRANSNATIONAL ORGANISED CRIME

### Strengthened capacity for tackling organised crime

A growing security threat at the global, regional, and national levels is transnational organised crime (TOC). TOC is organised crime coordinated across national borders involving groups (such as Organised Motorcycle Crime Gangs (OMCGs), deportees from these groups and other organised crime groups) working in more than one country to plan and carry out illegal business activities. TOC includes, for example: drugs, arms, and people trafficking; money laundering; laundering of the proceeds of crime; importation/manufacture and

sale of illicit drugs and counterfeit goods; tobacco, wildlife and cultural artifacts smuggling; and cyber-related crimes. TOC poses an increasingly diverse range of serious security threats relating to, for example, border security, public health, government corruption, and logistical and other support to terrorist financing.

In March 2004, the Cook Islands became a party to the *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime* (UNTOC) and our Parliament has passed several laws enabling us to combat TOC-related activities. Consideration will be given to the Cook Islands also becoming party to the UNTOC Firearms Protocol. At the same time, our security agencies are continually being strengthened to deal with TOC and collaborating with external



partners. We will review our legislation and practices relating to TOC and continue to strengthen our ability to implement the convention.

Various TOC activities referred to above are of growing security concern in our own country, including drug trafficking and money laundering. Evidence suggests that drugs are increasingly present in the Cook Islands (including in or around some of the Pa Enua), both on their way to larger markets, as well as for domestic consumption, which may give rise to unforeseen risks to the personal health and security of our people. As a consequence, the Government is strengthening its efforts to address the problem through both domestic and international action.

The Cook Islands is a party to both the 1961 and 1988 Narcotics Conventions and will give serious consideration to participating in the *1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances* and the *1972 Protocol* amending the 1961 Convention.

In recent years, our Parliament has adopted a suite of legislation that strengthens the operations of our financial services sector and its ability to combat money laundering and other international illicit financial transactions. We have concluded a number of bilateral tax information exchange agreements (TIEAs) that facilitate our involvement in tackling international financial crimes. Our Government will continue to strengthen its money laundering and proceeds of crime protections, including entering into other TIEAs as appropriate and reviewing/amending proceeds of crime and money laundering legislation to include civil forfeiture/unexplained wealth provisions.

Wildlife smuggling has also emerged in recent years as a serious global and regional TOC threat. A central aim of the *1973 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora* (CITES) is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Of some 35,000 species of fauna and flora regulated by CITES are species that migrate through or reside in the Pacific islands region, including all whales and dolphins, marine turtles, corals, several sharks, manta rays and orchids. The Cook Islands implements the CITES trade-related provisions. We will assess the convention with a view to the Cook Islands' possible accession.

Of concern are those Cook Islanders who, having spent most of their lives overseas and with little genuine connection to our country, have been expelled by their country of habitual residence and are returned to the Cook Islands after serving terms of imprisonment for serious crimes. It will be necessary for us to ensure that no security issues arise from their return.

Many governments and international organisations are heavily involved in combatting TOC. We will continue to collaborate closely with them and to play a constructive, proactive role in Boe Action Plan activities relating to TOC, strengthening collaboration and seeking capacity-building and other assistance where necessary. We will also develop our own transnational organised crime strategy in collaboration with our partners.

## Action plan

- Develop a Transnational Organised Crime Strategy for the Cook Islands.
- Strengthen the capacity and operations of the National Security Committee and its sub-committees including legislative measures to ensure the best advice is provided to the Prime Minister and the Cook Islands National Security Council as required.
- Strengthen money laundering and proceeds of crime protections, including entering into other tax information exchange and review and amend the Proceeds of Crime and Money Laundering legislation to include Civil Forfeiture/unexplained wealth provisions.
- Strengthen cooperation and collaboration with external partners to combat organised criminal activities, including those of gangs.
- Work with partners on developing a system of pre-warning Cook Islands authorities on criminal deportees.





## PILLAR 8

# CYBER CRIME AND CYBER ENABLED CRIMES

Strong policy framework for protecting individuals, government and the private sector against cyber-crime and other malicious cyber activity

The Cook Islands' increasingly diverse and growing electronic communication links within the country and with the world have brought us immense economic and social benefits, for example, the recently installed Manatua Cable. However, they make us increasingly susceptible to cyber security threats. Common cybercrimes include: using internet computer programs to penetrate or damage computer systems in order to steal banking logins, financial data, and intellectual property (malware); locking computer systems until a ransom is paid (ransomware); and convincing people to disclose confidential login, banking or other information (phishing). Cyber-enabled crimes are those assisted, facilitated or expanded using computer systems such as fraud and the online distribution of materials dealing with child exploitation.



Besides criminal individuals and gangs, certain State or quasi-State entities seek to use cyber technologies and systems for other purposes (e.g. political, military, or commercial espionage; distributing disinformation and enhancing social discord; disrupting the operation of critical cyber and other infrastructure; and promoting terrorism-related activities).

Our Government is committed to enhancing cybersecurity, defined for present purposes as “[p]olicies, procedures and processes that secure computers, networks, programmes and data from unauthorised access, usage or exploitation”.<sup>2</sup>

Given the broad-based impact of information and communications technology (ICT) on our way of life, including public sector, private sector, community and personal affairs, an important NSDA 2020+ goal is to promote national ICT connectivity. Cabinet has recently approved a national ICT policy based on expert advice and extensive public and stakeholder consultation. The policy includes actions to combat cyber and cyber-enabled crimes and strengthen cybersecurity both within Government and our broader community. The policy protects the rights and freedoms of Cook Islanders as guaranteed under the Constitution.

Our Government continues to participate in regional, international and other cybersecurity initiatives, including implementing the Boe Declaration Action Plan. Consideration will be given to the Cook Islands becoming a party to the *2001 Budapest Convention on Cybercrime* and other treaties.

The Cook Islands is currently working towards establishing a CERT (Cyber Emergency Response Team) that will consist of key Government and private stakeholders. It will be responsible for responding to any cyber security related events targeting the Cook Islands. We will explore legislative tools to give appropriate strength and authority to this capability.

## Action plan

- Strengthen our capacity to assess risks to the Cook Islands cyber security and potential harm from illicit cyber activities, including cybercrime and cyber-enabled crime.
- Strengthen legal and other measures to reduce risks to our cyber security, including systems and infrastructure in consultation with stakeholders.
- Implement the National ICT Policy.
- Establish a Cook Islands Cyber Emergency Response Team (CERT) and develop Cyber Crime/Cyber Enabled Crime legislation.
- Explore opportunities for the Cook Islands to become a party to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and other treaties.
- Develop the Cook Islands Cyber Security Strategy.

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2 PIFS(19)OCS.3b(iv) Annex 1, p.12.





# CONCLUSION





If we are to secure our future and increase our prosperity, happiness and wellbeing it is necessary to manage our national security issues. The NSP outlines the major tasks that must be undertaken to achieve this.

We continue to improve our high-quality intelligence and assessment capability, and build resilient national systems that support effective response to national security threats and or events, disaster preparedness, response and recovery, and climate change adaptation. We need to continue to address human security for individuals and families and effectively monitor and implement plans to protect the Cook Islands borders and the EEZ. We

need to ensure that we maintain political stability and strong governance of institutions as well as a strong, well-managed economy.

Finally, we need to strengthen our capacity to tackle organised crime and continue to develop a strong policy framework to protect individuals, government, and the private sector against cyber-crime and other malicious activity.

Now is the time to move forward quickly in this task. Our Government has already initiated numerous initiatives in the security sector and we will build on this momentum. Our political stability affords us the opportunity to advance on any agreed priority actions. Also, fortuitously the Pacific Islands Forum and security partners are currently strengthening their role in supporting Forum member countries in the security sector, in ways that complement our policy.

The Government gives priority to safeguarding the nation and building public awareness of security issues, and looks forward to working with all members of the community in this endeavour.













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Aerial View of Manihiki House on Coral

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Rarotonga Mountains

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Weaving Tivaevae on Atiu Island

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CIPPB Tekukupa II

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Top Left: Hon Mark Brown with members of cabinet

*Credit: Hon. Mark Brown Facebook page post 14 December 2022*

Bottom Left: Hon Mark Brown with Australian

Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong

*Credit: Senator Penny Wong Twitter Post 13 June 2022*

Right: Hon Mark Brown with Australian Prime

Minister Anthony Albanese

*Credit: Anthony Albanese Twitter Post 13 June 2023*

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Manihiki Island family

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Traditional fruit

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Primary health care in the Cook Islands

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Children swimming in Rarotonga

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Locally caught fish

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Fishing over Reef Rarotonga

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Cook Islands Cultural Dancers at Black Rock

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Cook Islands Tourism

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CIPPB Tekukupa II handover ceremony

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Aerial view Mitiaro Wharf and Island

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Cook Island family

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Island Vaka 2

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## Acronyms

<b>ACC</b>	Anti-Corruption Committee	<b>MFAI</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration
<b>AI</b>	Artificial Intelligence	<b>MFEM</b>	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
<b>ATT</b>	Arms Trade Treaty	<b>MMR</b>	Ministry of Marine Resources
<b>BBNJ</b>	UN Conference on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction	<b>MoA</b>	Ministry of Agriculture
<b>CAT</b>	Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhumane or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	<b>NACS</b>	National Anti-Corruption Strategy
<b>CCCI</b>	Climate Change Cook Islands	<b>NSDA 2020+</b>	<i>Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui</i> : the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+
<b>CITES</b>	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora	<b>NCD</b>	Non-communicable disease
<b>CLCS</b>	Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf	<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions
<b>EDB</b>	Ease of Doing Business	<b>NIPS</b>	National Intellectual Property Strategy
<b>EEZ</b>	Exclusive Economic Zone	<b>NPP</b>	National Population Policy
<b>EMCI</b>	Emergency Management Cook Islands	<b>NSC</b>	National Security Council
<b>EDS 2030</b>	Economic Development Strategy 2030	<b>NSD</b>	National Security Division
<b>ERR</b>	Economic Recovery Roadmap	<b>NSP</b>	National Security Strategy
<b>FIU</b>	Financial Intelligence Unit	<b>NTFC</b>	National Trade Facilitation Committee
<b>FPR</b>	Framework for Pacific Regionalism	<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology	<b>OPM</b>	Office of the Prime Minister
<b>IHR</b>	International Health Regulations	<b>QI</b>	Quality Infrastructure
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	<b>PIF</b>	Pacific Islands Forum
<b>IPRs</b>	Intellectual Property Rights	<b>SLR</b>	Sea Level Rise
<b>ISA</b>	International Seabed Authority	<b>SIDS</b>	Small Island Developing States
<b>IUU</b>	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated	<b>TK</b>	Traditional knowledge
<b>JNAPII</b>	2nd Joint National Action Plan: A Sectoral Approach to Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2016–2020	<b>TMO</b>	<i>Te Marae Ora</i> /Ministry of Health
<b>JCD</b>	Joint Centenary Declaration	<b>UNCLOS</b>	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
		<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
		<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization





