



## National planning

Pictured: Duncan Rayner, coastal engineer, UNSW

Photo: Water Research Laboratory, UNSW

This document is intended for decision-makers across the Pacific with an interest in policy and planning, infrastructure, and climate change governance.

The Australian Government's **Pacific Adaptation Strategy Assistance Program (PASAP)** helped to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Cook Islands to plan for the impacts of climate change.

**Intensifying:** Climate science projections indicate that the Cook Islands will face more intense cyclones, which means more destructive winds, waves, storm surge and flooding. It is estimated that the average cost per cyclone is NZ\$6.5 million.

# A national approach to managing climate change in the Cook Islands

The Cook Islands has a history of managing the risks of natural disasters, many of which stem from its already variable and extreme climate.

Like most Pacific island countries, the nation's geography, remoteness and developing-nation status makes it highly vulnerable to impacts of climate change. Climate change threatens the sustainable development and aspirations of the country—economically, socially and environmentally.

The Cook Islands Government has recognised that climate change will increase the risks of extreme weather events and natural disasters, so it is planning a strategic approach to manage these risks.

With the support from the Australian Government, the Cook Islands has:

- » reviewed its climate-change and disaster-risk management activities
- » established a new division in government to focus on climate change
- » developed a Joint National Action Plan (JNAP) to collectively address the issues of disaster management, risk reduction, and climate change adaptation.

The Cook Islands Government is now implementing the JNAP and drafting a climate change policy to offer further guidance into the future.



## Joint effort



Photo: Econnect Communication

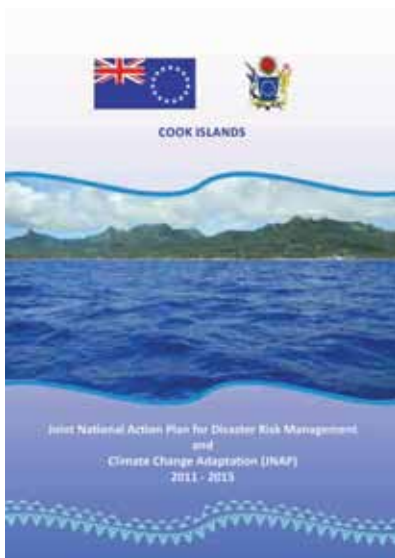
**Coordinating:** Ana Tiraa, director of Climate Change Cook Islands, says her office has been established to provide the Cook Islands government with a division that can focus on coordinating cross-cutting climate change activities.

### JNAP—a joint approach to manage natural hazards

The *Joint National Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation Plan* (JNAP) is a five-year plan (2011–2015) that spells out how the Cook Islands as a nation will reduce vulnerability and build resilience to the risks of natural disaster and climate change.

The fundamental principle of the plan is that everybody and every agency has an active role to play in reducing vulnerability and building resilience. The plan promotes cooperation, coordination and collaboration.

The JNAP includes strategies for governance, monitoring, disaster management, risk reduction and climate change adaptation.



Cook Islands  
*Joint National Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation Plan*



Photo: Econnect Communication

**Aligning:** Elizabeth Wright-Koteka, chief of staff for the Office of the Prime Minister, says that aligning any policy or plan with the nation's overarching plan will increase buy-in internally and from external funders.

### Building ownership through consultation

The JNAP is the product of a rigorous series of national consultations, which included all tiers of the Cook Islands society—government ministries and agencies, outer-island administrations, non-government organisations, the private sector, community groups and churches.

Involving many people and organisations fostered community ownership of the plan, and strengthened the knowledge base from which the plan was developed.

The process also allowed all parties to become more aware of the context of climate change, which helped build knowledge and capacity.

### Cost–benefits of a JNAP

The potential economic benefits from investing in the JNAP are likely to be substantial in comparison to the costs of natural disaster recovery and the impacts of climate change.

It is estimated that the average cost per cyclone is NZ\$6.5 million—calculated from the costs of 24 cyclones that have affected the Cook Islands since 1955.

The overall cost for implementing the JNAP in the Cook Islands over the five years from 2011 to 2015 is estimated to be NZ\$53.7 million.

Annual costs for implementing the JNAP have been calculated to assist the Cook Islands Government to budget for its rollout.





Photo: Cook Islands News

**Planning:** Research into climate change impacts on key infrastructure in the Cook Islands means the Cook Islands Government can develop relevant and robust policies. The climate change department recognises that research is extremely important to guide policy development.

## Aligning the plan with key policy

The Cook Islands recognises that any national action plan should be strongly ‘embedded’ in the relevant policy. This maximises support for the plan at various levels of governance—international, regional and national.

At an international level, the JNAP is shaped by a number of interrelated conventions and frameworks relating to sustainable development, environment, climate change, the Millennium Development Goals and disaster risk management. For example, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

These conventions and policies are largely mirrored at the regional level. The two key frameworks which influence the JNAP are the:

- » Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action 2005
- » Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change 2006–2015.

At a national level in the Cook Islands, the JNAP is closely linked to the *National Sustainable Development Plan* as well as various acts and frameworks surrounding finance, disaster risk management and recovery, infrastructure and the environment.

“The JNAP is a really important framework for us because it provides us direction.”

Ana Tiraa, director of Climate Change Cook Islands



Photo: Econnect Communication

**Supporting:** Senior environment officer for Cook Islands National Environment Services Teresa ‘Mii’ Matamaki says it is important to collect feedback from remote communities when creating a national policy.

## Developing a climate change policy

The *Cook Islands Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Policy* provides greater mandate for climate change activities within government.

To inform the policy, the Cook Islands National Environment Services visited five of the Cook Islands’ smallest and most isolated islands to understand and assess community vulnerability and capacity to adapt to climate change risks and disaster events.

Communities were given the opportunity to provide feedback about their understanding of climate change, as well as learn about the impacts of climate change.

All communities recognise that climate change is happening and that they are extremely vulnerable to the risks given their remoteness; lack of infrastructure; and vulnerability to sea-level rise, drought and more intense cyclonic events.

The Cook Islands Government is using community feedback to prepare, adapt and improve local and national decision-making and planning. Priorities include:

- » improve early warning systems, building codes, water storage and infrastructure
- » draft environmental protection, waste-management and drought-management plans
- » build cyclone shelters
- » establish local emergency operation centres to coordinate responses and maintain communication with the National Emergency Operation Centre in Rarotonga.



Photo: Econnect Communication

**Joining:** Adapting to climate change and managing the risks of disasters such as cyclones share similar strategies. To combine disaster and climate-change management into one national plan removes duplication and maximises use of resources.

## Next steps

The Cook Islands' integration of climate change policy and governance into its national administration systems is a model for other Pacific islands, especially for governments wanting to develop early adaptation planning, policy, activities and strategies.

Through its national framework, the Cook Islands government is rolling out adaptation activities across its entire administration.

It is working to integrate risk considerations and adaptation measures in all policy and development plans.

Ministries and agencies are incorporating actions for adaptation into work plans and annual budgets.

They are also raising awareness among communities in outer islands about the risks associated with the impacts of climate change.



Photo: Econnect Communication

**Strengthening:** Australian researchers are presenting new risk-mapping data to national agencies to inform and strengthen climate-change management decisions. Having good scientific information means more robust national policies.

“The biggest outcome for us is having the JNAP in place. Looking at a plan where we are going to deal with climate change in a coordinated manner is a great achievement.”

Ana Tiraa, director of Climate Change Cook Islands

Investing

# NZ\$1

in disaster risk reduction  
can save up to \$10 in recovery  
and reconstruction costs

Cook Islands Joint National Action Plan

## More information

The Australian Government's **Pacific Adaptation Strategy Assistance Program (PASAP)** assisted 15 Pacific island countries to assess their vulnerability to climate change and incorporate adaptive measures into planning and development.

For further information on the Cook Islands institutional strengthening or other PASAP projects, go to [www.tiny.cc/t5axxw](http://www.tiny.cc/t5axxw) or contact [InternationalAdaptation@climatechange.gov.au](mailto:InternationalAdaptation@climatechange.gov.au)



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