Cook Islands

Status: Cook Islands is self-governing in 'free association' with New Zealand. Graduated Country. Not eligible for Australian ODA

Population: 17,0500 speaking Cook Islands Maori and English. Rarotonga has over 74% of the population, about 13,000, and is the administrative center for the region. Aitutaki is the second most populated island, with about 1,900 people. More than 80,000 Cook Island Māori live in New Zealand.¹

Geography: 15 scattered islands made up of 15 islands and atolls that cover a total area of 237km2A combined coastline of 120km is spread over 2 million km in the Polynesian region of the mid-Pacific Ocean.

Accessibility: From Auckland to Avarua Capital on the Islands of Rarotonga. Plane, boats to outer islands.

Statistics around Waste (including plastic waste data)

	Coastal population	Waste generation rate [kg/person/da y]	% Plastic in waste stream	% Inadequately managed waste	Waste generati on [kg/day]	Plastic waste generation [kg/day]	Inadequately managed plastic waste [kg/day]	Plastic waste littered [kg/day]	Mismanage d plastic waste [kg/person/ day]	Mismanage d plastic waste in 2010 [tonnes]	Mismanage d plastic waste in 2025 [tonnes]
Cook Islands	20,934	1.2	12	36	25,121	3,002	1,079	60	0.054	416	784

Source Pacific Islands Plastic Waste Report Jambek 2016

Cook Islands produces large volumes of waste per capita, in part due to the tourism sector, which poses challenges with the limited availability of suitable land for landfilling. With Rarotonga landfill predicted to have reached capacity in 2020. Management options are to minimise waste and, second, to dispose of waste in an environmentally sound manner offshore. Recycling services, including for plastics, are in place in Rarotonga with some recyclable materials exported to New Zealand. However, access to markets for recyclables remains difficult due to transport costs and variable material values.

Mismanaged plastic waste eventually enters the marine environment by way of inland rivers and waste water outfalls or is transported by wind and tide. Rigid and light-weight plastic material from products consumed or used on a daily basis become marine debris if not managed appropriately. An estimated 12% of the Cook Islands' waste stream consists of plastic components. Coastal communities within a 50km range of the seaboard in the Cook Islands generate approximately 3t of plastic waste each day. An estimated 1.1t is mismanaged on a daily basis, entering the marine environment through release from uncontained disposal sites or by direct littering. As a result, an estimated 416t of plastic waste became marine debris in the waters around the Cook Islands in 2010 which, if not addressed, is expected to rise to 784t by 2025.

Of the 3t of plastic generated each day, approximately 0.3t may derive from PET or high-density polyethylene (HDPE) bottles, eligible for recycling under a container deposit scheme (CDS). Based on an average reduction rate of 40% in mismanaged waste with a CDS in place, approximately 0.05t of PET and HDPE plastic could be recycled each day. This could increase to an 80% or above reduction rate, depending on access to recycling collection services and viable markets, among others. Nonetheless, a 40% reduction in mismanaged PET and HDPE would result in approximately 397t of plastic becoming marine debris each year. The outcome of mismanaged plastic can be divided into three groups: plastic that remains on the surface of the sea as floating debris, plastic that sinks to the ocean floor and plastic that washes up on the beach. A CDS that recovers 40% of HDPE and PET plastic bottles in the Cook Islands may achieve the following reductions in marine debris each year: n 3t in floating plastic n 13t in sunken plastic n 3t in beach plastic Further benefits attributed to a CDS are a potential reduction in annual damage costs for the 74 local fishing vessels of the Cook Islands (approximately US\$572. If beaches were cleaned

¹ https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/countries-and-regions/australia-and-pacific/cook-islands/

up, it would save over US\$4,667, of particularly relevance to the amenities of coastal communities and the tourism sector.

Household waste is collected weekly. A mixture of containers, rubbish bags, and bins are used for rubbish and recyclables containment. Waste is manually loaded into a single compactor truck that services residential and small commercial customers across the island. Residents separate glass, cans (aluminum and steel), plastic bottles (PET and HDPE), and glass bottles for recyclables. This collection is undertaken by a private contractor commissioned by the Ministry of Infrastructure Cook Islands. Recyclables are collected alongside rubbish and are manually loaded into a dedicated collection vehicle and trailer. Waste is taken to the Rarotonga Waste Facility for disposal in the landfill.

Community recycling and pickup stations provide services to householders in Rarotonga. Recycling waste stations with sorting areas are located on the outer islands; however these are generally uncovered facilities without storage. Rarotonga's Waste Management Facility currently receives a small amount of recyclables from the outer islands (ADB, 2014)

Aitutaki has a plastic bottle baler and a baler for aluminium cans. Although no export of recyclables is currently undertaken. The landfill has a design life of 20 years and was commissioned in 2005.

Legal/Policy framework to address single use plastics

Currently no specific waste management legislation is in place, and waste management falls under the *Environment Act 2003* and public health legislation. This act outlines obligations for pollution, waste disposal and littering. In 2012 the *Prohibition on Importation of Plastic Shopping Bags Regulations* 2012/9 was introduced, requiring organisations to apply for permit to import bags which biodegrade within 12 to 18 months. The *Single use Polystyrene Ban Policy* 2017-2018 was endorsed by Cabinet. In January 2018, the Government of Cook Islands proposed a ban on the importation of polystyrene food containers.

Cook Islands' Solid Waste Management Policy 2016-2026 outlines an overarching vision of transitioning to a zero waste economy, achieved largely through minimising waste generation.

In April 2019, the Government of Cook Islands endorsed the *Single-Use Plastic Ban Policy 2018-2019*. This policy is an extension of the previously endorsed polystyrene ban policy and supports the *Solid and Hazardous Waste Bill*, scheduled to be introduced to parliament in 2020. The Bill is a significant reform to the laws and policies on waste management and brings together existing legislation, fill gaps, and introduce bans and sustainable financing mechanisms for waste management. The *Single-Use Plastic Ban Policy 2018-2019* proposes a wide ranging ban the importation of lightweight plastic bags (including biodegradable bags), plastic straws, cups, stirrers, cutlery and plates. The ban also covers other products such as cling film, plastic-lined coffee cups, single-serve containers of butter and spreads and products containing microbeads. The policy proposes that the ban be expanded in later years to cover PET bottles.

Pipeline legislative activities for waste management and governance in the Cook Islands (in September 2020) included: Introduction of a ban on single use plastics—This would be introduced as part of the *Solid* and Hazardous Waste Bill.

Single Use Plastic policy: *Single Use Plastic Ban Policy 2016-2023.* Policy establishes the process to ban the importation of single-use plastic products into Cook Islands, rather than doing so. Ban is supposed to be written into the schedule of the *Solid and Hazardous Waste Bill* that will be submitted during 2022. Items included in this policy include: lightweight plastic bags including shopping bags; plastic straws and cocktail stirrers; plastic cutlery; plastic containers with no PET number or with numbers 3, 4, 5, and 7, including plastic plates and sealable food containers; Plastic and polystyrene cups, including plastic-lined coffee cups; polystyrene containers and meat trays; Single-portion breakfast spreads and products containing microbeads.

	Single Use Plastic Policy	le Dedicated Single Use Plastic Orders, Acts and Regulations tic cy								Economic Instruments to internalise costs	
		Plastic bags	Polysty rene plates	Straws	Styrofo am food Contai ners	Cups plates cutlery	PET	Plastic Ice blocks pouche s nappie s	Contai ner Deposi t Schem e	Levy Plastic Bags	Recycli ng
Cook Islands											

Economic Instruments: Advance Deposit Recovery Fee is under development (PacWastePlus)—This would involve collection of an advance disposal fee for a range of products potentially including vehicles, electronics, and single use packaging. This would be enabled as part of the *Solid and Hazardous Waste Bill*.

Institutional capacity: Under existing legislative arrangements, Island Governments are responsible for administering their own waste management systems. However, outer islands may not have appropriate waste management systems or disposal sites equivalent to the facilities on Rarotonga or Aitutaki. Communities on outer island's still practise open burning, and have limited ability to remove hazardous waste, such as asbestos, from old government buildings or safely handle and dispose of other wastes such as used batteries, e-wastes, bulky wastes and recyclables. If there was additional resourcing capacity, outer island waste segregation depots could be established to provide services to these communities.

Enforcement and compliance: the need for increased management controls for plastic waste has been clearly identified. (*Cook Islands National Solid Waste Management Strategy 2013-2016*). Compliance and enforcement capacity in the Cook Islands for its waste management legislation is assessed as medium. The Cook Islands either have in place, or are in the process of reforming, institutional infrastructure to facilitate compliance with, and enforcement of, its laws related to waste, including: Legislative requirements for permits (including EIA assessments) and management plans; powers for officers to inspect premises, issue clean up notices and issue stop orders; prohibitions on improper disposal of wastes (including burning plastic waste and tyres); provision of offences for littering or dumping, pollution controls, and controls for hazardous chemicals and waste; prohibitions on the importation of certain items i.e., single-use plastic policy

Governance: Government departments with waste responsibilities in the Cook Islands include: National Environment Services; Ministry of Infrastructure Cook Islands; Island environment authorities; Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture.

Public Awareness- communities/villagers, schools and involvement of youth Media reports during the consultation process suggests that the residents are generally supportive of proposed legislative changes, acknowledging negative implications that plastic marine litter has on the local tourism industry.

NGOs and Local communities in Cook Islands have been actively involved in clean up campaigns and programs to reduce use of single plastics including through alternatives.

Public Awareness- tourism: Improved waste management practices are considered to be a critical factor in retaining tourism as a key driver of economic growth. Tourism in 2012 accounted for approximately 54% of gross domestic product (ADB, 2014). The country's 93 resorts and accommodation facilities predominantly are located on the seaside and beachfronts of the main islands, as follows: 13 on Aitutaki, 2 on Atiu; 77 in Rarotonga; 2 on Mangaia.

Research and Development into Single Use Plastic alternatives: There is interest in reducing plastic packaging waste by through use of alternative options – for example nappies, food options but not much information on specific R and D initiatives being promoted in country.

Summary Overview

- > Good community and NGO engagement around single use plastic awareness
- Identified development of a National Action Plan as first priority in their POLP EOI recognising that it will be a key element of the anticipated Global Agreement on Plastic Pollution.
- Cooks has a Project Management Unit for potential POLP Liaison.
- The seed funding of the ARDF scheme provides an opportunity to join forces with PacWastePlus in their roll out of the ARDF which has been in the pipeline for a while and is in need of added impetus.