



Government of the Cook Islands
Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki
– **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration**

Friday 15th May, 16:00

New Zealand integral to the Cook Islands COVID-19 response and recovery



New Zealand's 2020/21 Budget is welcome affirmation of the depth of care and commitment New Zealand continues to extend towards the Pacific during the current COVID-19 crisis, and in particular, members of the Realm of New Zealand, of which the Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau and New Zealand are constituent parts. That commitment, outlined in New Zealand's 'Wellbeing Budget: Rebuilding Together' was announced yesterday. It details funding allocations of \$195million to help Pacific communities in New

Zealand and \$55.6million in additional funding for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), a testament to New Zealand's continued delivery on the Pacific Reset, despite the significant challenges imposed by COVID-19. [See statement on the 2020/21 Budget issued by New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister the Rt. Hon Winston Peters at <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/aid-spending-boost-budget-2020>]

"We acknowledge with gratitude New Zealand's continued upholding of care and responsibility towards our Realm of New Zealand and Pacific families and commend



their Wellbeing Budget for its targeted actions that will help support our response and recovery efforts from both the health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19," said Foreign Secretary Terepaiora Herrmann. "While the immediate health response continues to occupy the highest levels of priority for Governments around the world, including the Cook Islands, it is imperative we increase momentum towards mid-long term economic response and recovery that is evidence-based and people-centric. New Zealand must be commended for its' attention to both, an approach we in the Cook Islands have

endeavoured to ensure since the onset of COVID-19."

COVID-19 has seen a significant elevation of cooperation between the Cook Islands and New Zealand since the beginning of the year, with the first deployment of technical assistance to the Cook Islands led by a team



from the New Zealand Ministry of Health, in partnership with the World Health Organisation, in February this year. Bilateral collaboration has particularly focused on direct line agency assistance availed between our respective Ministries of Health, NZ District Health Boards, Education and Treasury, with the invaluable coordination and focusing of effort provided by the NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and the Cook Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

and Immigration (MFAI). At the highest echelons of both governments, Cook Islands Prime Minister Henry Puna has had discussions with both Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters of New Zealand - those interactions a significant source of assurance and support for the Cook Islands COVID-19 response efforts.

Said Secretary of MFAI, Tapaeru Hermann, "New Zealand's support and assistance to the Cook Islands COVID-19 response effort has been invaluable. They have consistently worked side by side with us to bolster our capabilities to respond to what has been an unprecedented crisis of



extraordinary global scale despite their own challenges caring for the almost 5 million New Zealanders (including Cook Islanders) that have spent over a month in Level 4 lockdown in New Zealand. Co-operation between MFAI and MFAT since January through to end of March has been particularly intense as we in MFAI toiled to come to grips with and respond to the practical implications of the unfolding pandemic, including urgent measures at both international borders, supporting Cook Islanders stranded globally and supporting repatriation for visiting foreigners stranded in the Cook Islands. New Zealand has been steadfast and

responsive in supporting our many efforts and we are ever grateful. As we look to the horizon, New Zealand's assistance will be even more important in the coming months as we continue to bolster our health response capabilities and rebuild our communities and economy so badly affected by this global pandemic."

At the end of March this year, with the gravity of the COVID-19 crisis becoming more apparent, New Zealand provided \$7million in direct budgetary support for the Cook Islands COVID-19 response measures. That assistance came off the back of 12 months of elevated engagement and investment on both sides, and crystallised the establishment of the Cook Islands Infrastructure Facility in December 2019, seeded by funds from the New Zealand Government. It also followed the convening of the Cook Islands-New Zealand Joint Ministerial Forum (JMF) Working Group (WG) hosted by MFAI at Rarotonga headquarters in December last year. "Our relationship with New Zealand and the future co-operation to be agreed by our two governments will have a significant bearing on the future of the Cook Islands and Cook Islanders," said Secretary Herrmann. The next JMFWG is anticipated to take place within the next month.



MFAI is presently reviewing the agency’s Statement of Strategic Intentions (SOSI) 2019-2020 with the updated SOSI to be released before the end of June. “The sudden and severe impact of COVID-19 on our tourism dependent economy is extensive and implications will extend long into the future because of the global impact of this pandemic,” said Secretary Herrmann. “In as much as there are urgent and immediate COVID-19 impacts to be addressed, particularly as a consequence of the abrupt stop to tourism arrivals into the Cook Islands and the global economic upheaval brought about by COVID-19, our current circumstances present an opportunity to revisit our development approach. To revisit what prosperity means for Cook Islanders today and into the future and to focus effort on an economy that is resilient to the impacts of climate change, external financial shocks and global health pandemics. To give substance to economy diversification and invest in Cook Islands innovation. Innovation which draws on Cook Islands

ingenuity and harnesses the utility of the Manatua Cable in sectors such as financial services, the creative industries, tourism, remote back-office administrative functions and more.”



As part of its SOSI review, MFAI are looking to develop an ‘Innovation Strategy’ to support its 4 key strategic priorities of security, prosperity,

leadership and innovation. The Innovation Strategy will particularly focus on identifying, establishing and leveraging international connections and mechanisms to support Cook Islands innovative and emergent industries. The Ministry is also advancing the development of the Cook Islands inaugural National Security Policy (NSP) and expect to progress domestic consultations on the NSP within the next month.

Queries regarding this media release can be directed to MFAI Director International Affairs Karo Ngatoko at Karopaerangi.ngatoko@cookislands.gov.ck MFAI’s 2019-2024 SOSI can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/2z52GYC>

Photos:

- 1 April 2018, Waitangi – CKI Prime Minister Henry Puna receives gift of CKI Soldiers to World War One by Pacific Artist Michel Tuffery from NZ Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters and NZ Minister for Pacific Peoples Aupito William Sio;
- 2 March 2019, Wellington – Pacific diplomats welcome NZ Foreign Secretary Chris Seed into his new role. L-R: then Deputy High Commissioner for the CKI High Commission to NZ Karo Ngatoko, who is now MFAI Director International Affairs; Joy Kere, Solomon Islands High Commissioner to NZ (3rd from left); Chris Seed, NZ Secretary MFAI; Francis Agwi, Papua New Guinea High Commissioner to NZ;
- 3 December 2019, Rarotonga - MFAI Foreign Secretary Tapaeru Herrmann during Cook Islands-New Zealand JMF Working Group Meeting

- 4 *December 2019, Rarotonga – NZ and CKI diplomats at Ngatipa to celebrate the life of former NZ High Commissioner to the Cook Islands, the late Tessa Temata, L-R; Jim Armistead, then MFAI Pacific Division Director, now Cook Islands Charge d'affaires to Cook Islands High Commission to Fiji; Rachel Bennett, Acting High Commissioner, New Zealand High Commission to the Cook Islands; Secretary Herrmann; Okesene Moananu, First Secretary, New Zealand High Commission to the Cook Islands; Josh Mitchell, Director UN, Treaties and Oceans Division MFAI;*
- 5 *2019, Wellington – Cook Islands High Commissioner to New Zealand Elizabeth Wright Koteka presenting her letter of introduction to New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern;*
- 6 *December 2019, Rarotonga – JMF Working Group Meeting*

End.