



Government of the Cook Islands
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

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Minister of Finance talks about sustaining the economy into 2021 and retooling the public service

In a live address tonight, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Hon. Mark Brown talked about the steps the Government is taking to retool the economy for the next 12 months, including streamlining core government services.

Minister Brown spoke in detail of his plans to sustain the economy and the government purse well into 2021. Even in today's COVID-19 context, the Government continues to receive revenue. While the Tourism industry has taken a hit, it is not the country's only income stream: approximately 35% of economic activity is not tourism related.

"Look around, not every business is shut," he said. "There are businesses still running, imports are still arriving. Projects, both government and private, are still taking place."

He said the Government's operating budget would be refocused on the country's economic stimulus response. "To help us get there, the team is already looking at cuts, prioritising some work over others, running a streamlined service focusing on the core government services, and improving our efficiency."

"This might mean redirecting some government workers into different areas for a time, doing work outside their usual day-to-day. Perhaps supporting Te Marae Ora, or the Punas. All options are on the table," he said.

There are no plans to cut the pay of the country's public servants, he said, who number just under 2000. "Salaries are one of the Government's most effective means of getting cash out into the economy."

However, pre COVID-19 budget plans to increase government employee wages will now be deferred. The money will be directed towards the next stage of the economic response plan.

"We will see some changes in the way government does business. Government will also look to engage more local businesses as we go forward. We will look to small infrastructure projects

using both public and private resources. We will aim to get, and keep, as many people employed as we can.”

The public service is working to aid the country's recovery. Their role in maintaining core services including medical, policing, social services, agriculture, infrastructure and planning - was needed “now more than ever,” said Minister Brown.

The Minister commended the country for showing consideration to people in need, such as offering the use of land to grow food, rent reductions and free accommodation. The Cook Islands Investment Commission are providing rent reprieves for people who have been financially impacted by COVID-19, he said. He encouraged others to follow suit: “If you can afford to help another family out, either by reducing their living costs or supporting them in any other way, please do so.”

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