

Tiānuare / Pēperuare 2019



TE IPUKAREA SOCIETY

*Caring for our Environment
Taporoporo i to tatou Ao Rangi*

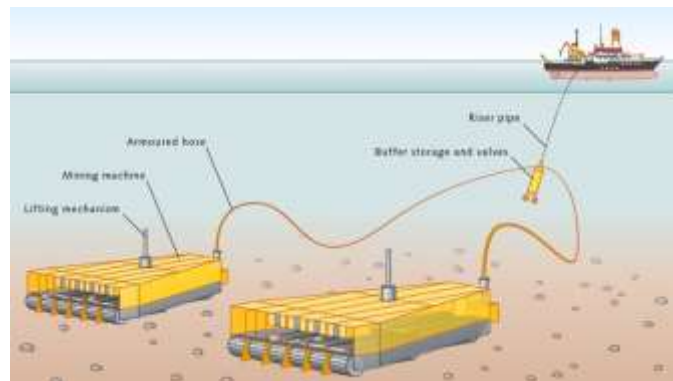
**Kia Orana,
Katou katoatoa, teia te nuti no Tiānuare/
Peperuare 2019.**

*Welcome to the combined January / February 2019
edition of our newsletter.*

The new year has brought in some changes in the Te Ipukarea Society office!. We have farewelled Alanna Smith and Liam Kokaua who have both left to further their post graduate studies. We wish to thank them both for their dedication, integrity and hard work, they will be missed! Our intern Jess Tepora Nicholson also completed her internship with TIS and is now finishing her degree at Waikato University. We wish them all the very best of luck.

We have welcomed new Project Officer, Kate McKessar, an experienced environmental planner. We also employed a new intern, Charlee McLean, who you can read more about in this edition!

Review of draft seabed mining bill.



The Seabed Minerals Commission has for the past two months been conducting consultations throughout the Cook Islands on the draft Seabed Mining Bill 2019, which is to replace the Seabed Mining Act 2009.

February 27 was the deadline for submitting comments on the draft Seabed Mining Bill 2019, before it is reviewed and tabled in Parliament.

This draft bill was prepared by the Crown Law Office with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat and New Zealand Parliamentary Council Office. Te Ipukarea Society and local NGO Korero o te Orau joined forces to engage a qualified professor of environmental law from Victoria University, Wellington to independently review the draft Bill. Te Ipukarea has submitted the legal opinion along with its submission to the draft Bill.

Overall, the legal review found that proposed Seabed Minerals Bill 2019 is an improvement on the current Act in a number of respects, most notably the additional references to environmental standards and principles and the inclusion of references to the Marae Moana Act (MMA).

However, the review noted that even these improvements could be strengthened. Further, there are some gaps and uncertainties, particularly around Environmental Impact

Assessments (EIAs) and obligations under international law.

One drawback identified was in the definition of “precautionary approach”. The definition used in the Bill is the minimum reference to precaution possible, and is not appropriate for deep sea marine environments where very little is known about biodiversity. Under the SPC Framework, developed under a regional seabed mining support project of which the Cook Islands was a part of, it was suggested there is a need to provide more detail about what it means for a decision-maker or an operator to be cautious. This Bill does not specify any more detail other than providing the generic principle from international law.

Another issue found was the definition of the term “serious harm” that is used, and its impact on the need to conduct an EIA. Under International Law, there is a requirement to conduct an EIA on activities that are likely to cause serious harm to the environment. However, the Bill’s requirement for an EIA depends on what is permitted under the Environmental Act 2003. Given that the Bill contains a provision which seeks to amend the Environmental Act to allow for regulations to be made stating that a particular activity is not likely to cause serious harm, this is a point of serious concern.

Another area of concern is with ministerial powers. Under the draft Bill, the Seabed Minerals Authority is clearly not independent of the Minister in terms of policy or decision-making. For example, section 14 appears to enable the Minister to direct the Authority to approve (or recommend for approval) an exploration or mining licence. It is already the case that the Minister and Cabinet has the final decision on prospecting and mining licenses, whereby the Authority may only recommend a result. The review suggests that it is not appropriate to also allow the Minister to direct the Authority as to what it may recommend to the Minister. The legislation has the appearance of setting up a semi-independent Authority to investigate the appropriateness of any particular application, but

then enables that semi-independence to be undermined. This goes against transparency of decision-making. It is misleading in suggesting that the Authority will make recommendations on an application on its merits and not be swayed by a political decision.



Manganese nodules

Shark Tagging with Jess

Over January and early February Project Officer Liam Kokaua, our intern Jessie Nicholson, and TIS member Teuru Tiraa Passfield were able to join shark researcher Jess Cramp on some of her research trips.



Jessie Nicholson tags a silky shark under supervision of shark researcher Jess Cramp

The team catch and put satellite tags on silky and oceanic whitetip sharks before releasing them. The tags record data on where the sharks travel, and also can also reveal when they have been caught and killed by fishing vessels. These satellite tags usually stay clipped onto the shark for 6 months before they automatically detach from the animal. Silky sharks are under immense pressure from being caught by longlining vessels. Oceanic white tips are also regularly caught and their fins cut off for the soup market.

Liam joined Jess Cramp and her Shark's Pacific team (Marino Evans, Emma Kainuku, and Corey Fisher) on the 7th of January. It was a good night for catching sharks, as two were caught. One being a feisty blue shark (tagged with a standard ID) and the other a monster (3m) silky shark, which managed to get loose before a satellite ID was placed on it.

It was another two research trips before Jessie got her first shark, which was a silky shark which the shark team had been eagerly looking for! They were able to tag this animal with a satellite tag, so hopefully it will produce some valuable data over the next 6 months.

Meitaki ma'ata to Jess Cramp for giving our staff opportunities to learn about our Cook Islands sharks. We support and commend Jess on her work to protect our sharks, which spans back to when the Cook Islands was first declared a shark sanctuary in 2012, as well as advocating for the broader protection of our marine environment.

Staff Join Botanist Art Whistler in TCA

Alanna, Liam and Jessie joined renowned Pacific botanist, Art Whistler, for a plant tour in the Takitumu Conservation Area on 11th January. The three young conservationists enjoyed learning about the interesting plants (native, polynesian-introduced, and european-introduced) which are in the conservation area.

The tour focussed on plants beyond just those which had signage, and it continued past the "lookout

area", and up the track all the way to the top of the ridge. It was between the lookout and the ridge top where the variety and frequency of native plants was highest. Interesting plants in this upper zone included maire rākau (Alyxia), pirita (finger-leaf yam), pirita tutae puaka (morinda vine), 'ora pāpua (Derris), rata (Polynesian Metrosideros). Our young team are grateful for Dr. Whistler's time and sharing of his knowledge.



Jess and Liam with Art in the Takitumu Conservation Area.

Welcome our new intern Charlee McLean

Te Ipukarea Society strongly believes in supporting young, local Cook Islanders to learn and develop their interest in environmental issues. For the past year, the society has been able to offer the Dame Margaret Karika Memorial internship for up to 3 months per year, thanks to generous donors, David and Sarah Gordon. The society believes that internships help grow local knowledge and encourage young Cook Islanders to pursue further education and careers in areas relating to the environment.

After the successful completion of Jessie Tepora Nicholson's internship earlier this year, Te Ipukarea Society has now employed Charlee McLean as an intern for a two month period. Charlee is from Vaimaanga, and went to school at Avarua Primary, spending four years of high school in Perth, Australia before returning home to Rarotonga. Charlee also works part time as a tour guide at Ariki

Adventures, specialising in turtle and giant trevally dive and snorkel tours.

A quick chat with Charlee shows just how passionate she is for the marine environment of the Cook Islands. She intends to pursue a degree in marine biology at the University BYU Hawaii.



Fresh water dips

Tell us when did you first hear about Te Ipukarea Society (TIS)?

To be honest, TIS wasn't an organisation I had heard of, until the day I attended a shark presentation given by Marino Evans and marine biologist, Jess Cramp. I went along thinking it would be a great opportunity for me to meet people who share the same passion for biodiversity. Luckily I met Kelvin Passfield, Technical Director at TIS, who suggested I apply for an internship.

What was it that helped you decide you wanted to study marine science?

I think growing up on a tiny island nestled in the South Pacific has played a big role in shaping my future. I've found myself drawn to the cultural teachings of my ancestral background; developing a natural desire to keep our precious islands' ipukarea

(heritage) alive. Our forefathers lived a sustainable lifestyle, practicing planting by the moon, ways to preserve food items, how to use natural fertiliser for their crops (composting), fishing as a means for providing a meal for their families and not depleting the sea life in the lagoon. Now that we are developing into a westernised society, it is important to think about the choices we are making. Learning from the practices of our ancestors cannot change the past but maybe it can help change the future.

What might people be surprised to know about you?

Not so much of a surprise for those who know me, but I'd like to say I'm a social butterfly and could probably talk anyone's ear off!

What do you do when you aren't working?

As a child I learnt how to swim before anything, so the chances of finding me out on the water are very high. Depending on the tides, there is no better way to start the day off than with a morning dive. For those who haven't yet swum beyond the reef, put it on your to do list because it is AMAZING!

I am interested in reading anything that involves geography or marine. I'm currently reading a book from my Papa's library called 'Isles of the South Pacific'. It is a book that focuses on the Pacific Islands, introducing Polynesia and Melanesia and their similarities in culture and beliefs. A great read.



Charlee diving in Papoa passage. Her happy place. Photo credit: Charlotte Piho

If you could do one thing to help improve the environment in the Cook Islands, what would it be?

Get rid of PLASTIC! I think we all need to make more of an effort to rely less on single use plastic. Since settling in back home in Rarotonga, it has really opened my eyes to see how dependent we are on plastic and the effect it has on our marine life. Let's follow what Vanuatu and other countries have done and ban single use plastic in the Cook Islands!

If you weren't working as a TIS intern, what would you be doing instead?

If I hadn't worked at TIS, I wouldn't know about the wide range of work it does, as well as the passion and pride that keeps the organisation running. I believe I would still be continuing my search for whatever possible experience I could find that would kick start the next chapter of my life, especially to help me achieve my goal of studying marine science.

Corporate Membership Drive

Te Ipukarea Society hosted its inaugural Project Update and Corporate Membership Drive at the iconic Bergman's courtyard on February 12. The event was well attended by representatives of many local businesses who were invited to listen to an informative and entertaining presentation by Te Ipukarea Society staff.



New Project Officer Kate McKessar, TIS President Teina Mackenzie and CITC's Gale Whitta.

This event was the first of its kind for the society and provided an opportunity to show our gratitude for the support we have received from local businesses, both at present and in the past. The evening was also an opportunity to invite new businesses to

make to join Te Ipukarea Society as a corporate member, to support us in our future endeavours.

Te Ipukarea Society has historically relied on individual and family supporters which has been the foundation of our organisation. However, the growth of the organisation and the goals it has set itself to achieve, means that corporate sponsorship is now essential to help fund our work.

We would like to extend our special thanks to all of the members who have continued to support Te Ipukarea Society, both past and present.



Documentary on Suwarrow rat eradication project

Recycle those glass jars

Please remember to support local outer island cottage industries. Bring in your 350gm, or smaller, glass jars, no lids, to our office next to Bamboo Jacks or to BTIB opposite Punanga Nui Market.

Stay tuned for our next newsletter, we have some exciting projects coming up this year - and don't forget to buy a reusable Mana Tiaki bottle from our office, they are selling fast, with 80% of our stock sold! This is a one off, we wont be reordering!

Ka kite – kia manuia

The TIS Team