

Aperira (April) 2019



TE IPUKAREA SOCIETY

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

Kia Orana, Katou katoatoa, teia te nuti no Aperira 2019.

Welcome to the April edition of our newsletter.

Jacqui Evans wins Goldman Environmental Prize for her work on Marae Moana

Jacqui Evans, the manager of the Marae Moana Cook Islands Marine Park has won the prestigious Goldman prize for her efforts in conserving the marine environment. Jacqui arrived home on May 6 to a warm turou complete with the drumming team of Mark Short's family.

Jacqui has worked tirelessly for 5 years to help get the Marae Moana to where it is today. In her acceptance speech, she mentioned a number of individuals for their combined efforts, she also spoke about how Te Ipukarea Society had helped with raising awareness and bringing marine issues to the forefront, putting pressure on Government to establish a meaningful protected area.



Jacqui was welcomed home by a big crowd at Rarotonga International Airport, including her mum, Mereana Evans

In speaking to the Cook Island News Jacqui said that "Without [TIS], public debate on the issue would have been minor and few would be aware of what is happening to our ocean."

The Goldman Environmental Prize recognises "grassroots" leaders who are involved in local efforts to create positive environmental change through community or citizen participation in issues that affect them.

Heartfelt congratulations Jacqui, on a well deserved win!

TIS meets Helen Clark

It was a privilege for Te Ipukarea Society staff and executive committee members to spend a few hours chatting with Helen Clark about the big environmental issues facing the Cook Islands.



TIS staff and executive committee members meet Helen Clark

The former Prime Minister of New Zealand is renowned for her strong commitment to environmental issues. She has won many awards over her lifetime, including New Zealand's highest honour, the Order of New Zealand in 2010. She also won awards for her work on promoting nuclear disarmament and world peace. As former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Clark was responsible for the work that UNDP did with the Global Environment Fund, a very large public funder of environmental projects, including many in the Cook Islands. This includes one of the very few sources of funding for NGOs under the Small Grants Programme.



A few hours of productive discussion with the former NZ Prime Minister and former head of the UNDP

In her characteristically candid manner, Clark wasted no time in asking the hard questions including, who bears the costs of the adverse impacts of tourism? With respect to the health of the Muri lagoon she remarked that you 'don't want to kill the goose that lays the golden egg'. Clark was very interested to hear about how local tourist operators were registering to become green accredited through the recent Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification project, promoted through Te Ipukarea Society and Tourism Cook Islands (as discussed later in this newsletter).

Waste management was another hot topic. Clark shared her concerns on how none of the revenue created from the importation of goods goes towards covering the cost of dealing with the product at the end of its useful life. She was very interested to hear about the draft Solid Waste Management Bill which should soon be before the Cook Islands' Government. Among other things, the Bill seeks to ban a range of single use plastics.

Clark also expressed her strong support for the concept of an Advanced Disposal Fee (ADF). The ADF works by adding a sum of money to the cost of a product when it enters the country, that will pay for its disposal when it reaches the end of its usable life. The ADF could be added to almost all non-biodegradable or hazardous products that enter the Cook Islands, from plastic bottles to cars and heavy machinery. For example, it could provide the basis of a Container Deposit Scheme where you receive cash back for returning an item such as an empty plastic drink bottle. This would provide an incentive for people to bring back products once they are no longer useful instead of dumping them or putting them into general rubbish bins.



Helen Clark takes a trek up to the TCA with some of our very youngest TIS members!

Other topics from the Society's ecologically sustainable development portfolio were also of particular interest to Ms Clark. These included our work raising awareness on the potential impacts of deep sea mining, a campaign on sustainable fisheries, and reviewing environmental impact assessments (EIAs), especially for coastal developments, wetland infilling and developments on sloping land. She was also very glad to hear of the Society's work on educating our youth through our schools' programme on worm farming, composting and waste management.

A robust discussion was held on how to overcome the constraints of political bureaucracy, lack of planning regulations and issues around landownership in the Cook Islands. Clark advised that people need to take action themselves and actively push governments if they want environmental change. She suggested a paradigm shift whereby the Cook Islands globally identify themselves as 'green champions', effectively challenging and committing both government and the community to live up to the expectation.

An avid conservationist, Clark wanted to hear about the Society's biodiversity projects throughout the Cook Islands, including the 2018 rat eradication project in Suwarrow. Despite her jam-packed schedule, she enthusiastically accepted an invitation from Te Ipukarea Society patron Ian Karika for a trek up to the Takitumu Conservation Area (TCA) in Vaimaanga the next day. She was in her element exploring the diverse biodiversity and beautiful landscape of the valley and looking for the rare Kakerori bird also known as the Rarotongan flycatcher. She was also shown an example of efforts to control invasive plant species using biological control.



Ian Karika demonstrates the TCA rat control programme

Te Ipukarea Society is very grateful to the President of the Rotary Club of Rarotonga, Jaewynn Mckay, for facilitating our meeting with Ms Clark. We really appreciated the time Ms Clark spent

with us, sharing her knowledge and experience and also for her moral support for the work that we do. We were left inspired by her resolve and determination to make environmental change by just getting out there and getting things done!



Launch of Mana Tiaki Eco Certification



Te Ipukarea Society is spearheading an initiative to curb the effect visitors are having on the natural environment.

The Cook Islands tourism industry has experienced a boom in recent years, creating jobs and wealth for many in the small island nation. With tourism as the main economic driver for the country, the community has welcomed this increase in visitor numbers with open arms. It goes without saying however that with an increase in visitor numbers, we see an increased strain on the environment and infrastructure.

The natural beauty and biodiversity of the Cook Islands is increasingly drawing visitors from all over the world, with numbers growing from 56,000 in the year 1999 to 169,000 today. This is an average increase of 5.7% per year, though some years have jumped by as much 30% in one year.

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In response to this pressure, an initiative for sustainable tourism has been launched called Mana Tiaki Eco-Certification. The launch was held in early April 2019 at an event hosted jointly by the Cook Islands Tourism Industry Council, Te Ipukarea Society, and government agency Cook Islands Tourism Corporation.

The certification scheme offers local businesses an opportunity to celebrate the things they are doing right when it comes to the environment, and a pathway to best practice for those wanting to do more. Ongoing training opportunities will also be provided to tourist operators to help better 'green' their businesses.



Kelvin presents at the launch of the Mana Tiaki Eco-certification project

Whilst international eco-certifications have been around for many years, some local businesses tried to engage with such schemes and came up against barriers. This Cook Islands-specific programme has been designed to reflect the unique opportunities and challenges of our islands, and to be cost-accessible to all businesses in the tourism industry here.

Luana Scowcroft, is working for TIS as the Project Implementation Manager of the certification. "We have looked at international standards under the Mohawk Agreement and developed our own set of criteria which is more relevant to our Pacific context". Globally, issues being discussed in abstract, such as climate change, are more of a daily reality for many small islands and measures to

address adaptation (for example to coastal erosion) have been included in the standards.



A great turnout to the Mana Tiaki Eco-certification launch hosted at the Discover – Marine and Wildlife Eco-Centre

Sue Fletcher-Vea, President of the Tourism Industry Council describes the Mana Tiaki Eco Certification as a way for visitors to make more conscious choices about the impact their holiday may have.

Visitors to the Cook Islands are urged to support those businesses that display the Mana Tiaki Eco Certification logo on their websites and premises when choosing accommodation, tours, restaurants and activities.

Immediately following the launch, attendees were invited to the Green Expo hosted on the land next door, where local suppliers of eco friendly products displayed their products and services.

Email admin@manatiaki.org for more information.



TIS Gold Corporate Member CITC displaying their range of eco-friendly products at the Green Expo

Electric Vehicle Owners Meet Up

With more than 40 electric vehicle owners on Rarotonga, a forum gave the opportunity for such vehicle owners to discuss challenges and new prospects of owning an electric vehicle. The EV owners meeting was a partnership between Te Ipukarea Society and the Royal Takitumu.

Kelvin attended the event and discussed the advantages and challenges of running an electric vehicle in general. Kelvin stressed that EVs are the second best option of getting around after using your bicycle. "Te Ipukarea Society is proud to have the only electric mini-truck operating on the island, but hope there will be many more to follow," he said.



Kelvin attended the first EV owners meeting in Rarotonga

Jolene and Peter Hayes from Arcadia Retreat, Helen Henry, John Hay, Bill Carruthers, Matt and Adele de Beer from Cooks Oasis, Peter and Lesley Huckle, Gillian Frances of Magic Reef Bungalows and Nathan Matata from Raro Cars were some of the guests and electric vehicle owners who were at the forum.

In addition to the Rarotonga based EV owners there are also several in Aitutaki, and at least one in Atiu.

Manager of Royale Takitumu Tim Meyer said "EVs have zero emission and are a relatively green alternative to internal combustion engines. If an EV is charged with power generated through solar energy, then they are a good alternative. So, that

needs to be the aim, having a charging network based on solar here on the island."



The reliable TIS electric mini truck is currently the only one of its kind in Rarotonga

It was great having Nathan from Raro Cars here and discussing future challenges about replacing and recycling batteries for EVs. It was encouraging to see that local companies see new business opportunities associated with EVs and are investing time and resources into these new areas."

Speaking on the relevance of EVs to Mana Tiaki Eco Certification, Meyer said they were excited about this new guideline for the tourism industry here in the Cook Islands.

"Switching to e-mobility was one step for us on the way to meet the new eco standards".

Meanwhile, there is only one public charging station on the island located at the Te Aponga Uira head office in Avarua. However, EV owners are also charging their vehicles at their own home.

Meitaki and thanks for reading our newsletter.

Kia Manuia

The TIS team