

PĒPERUARE / FEBRUARY 2020



TE IPUKAREA SOCIETY

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

Kia Orana kotou to matou au taeake. Te mataora nei matou i te oronga atu i teia nuti no te marama Pēperuare.

Welcome to the February 2020 edition of our newsletter.

New Intern Andrea engrossed in 'gross stuff'

As Te Ipukarea Society's newest intern, I have had many opportunities to take part in a number of conservation efforts. A large part of what we do is raise awareness on a range of topics and working with young people is a major part of that. Check out the video we made: [TIS Facebook Video](#)

[Sustainability in Schools](#)

This month I got involved in the new gardening program within primary schools, focused on cultivating their vegetable gardens. This is a collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture, Te Ipukarea Society, Kōrero o te 'Ōrau and the Ministry of Health.

The gardening program has already begun at Apiai Avarua and Apiai Takitumu but we anticipate the

inclusion of Apiai Nikao, Te Uki Ou and Saint Joseph throughout the year.



Apiai Avarua's Grade 3 clearing the garden of cabbage to prepare for new produce.

TIS's role in this gardening program is to help enlighten children's minds on the benefits of composting and worm farms for healthy gardens. We encourage organic waste to either be taken home for pigs and other animals, or placed in compost bins and worm farms.



Apiai Avarua's Grade 3 students go down the garden to eat worms. Well, not actually eat them...

Our visit to Blackrock Preschool to revive their worm bin this week was especially rewarding. The kids were really keen to check out the worms we brought and they looked for more themselves in their garden.



Blackrock Preschool children – learning by doing

I also had the wonderful opportunity to join staff of the inshore division at the Ministry of Marine Resources. We went on a research expedition to identify, record and preserve species of algae within our lagoon.

Another activity this month has been the start of a 6 week Funky Friday sustainability program with a group of future conservationists from Apia Te Uki Ou. We started with a beach clean-up and audit of findings. The kids had great ideas about how to prevent this rubbish reaching the sea – by using alternatives and refusing plastic in the first instance!



Apia Te Uki Ou students look for microplastics on the beach in front of their school

We followed this up with a photography session as a medium for environmental awareness, something we will continue to build on. We hope to go on some fun excursions too – but more on that in the next edition!

The work we do within schools is largely funded by money we receive from donations. If you believe in our work and want to help us continue, we would be humbled if you could donate or talk to us about becoming a TIS member.

We also have a GiveaLittle page 'Protecting a little Paradise'<https://givealittle.co.nz/cause/protecting-a-little-paradise> Although this does incur a 5% service fee on donations, so if you are based in the Cook Islands, it is better to donate directly to our BCI bank account, 82853S15.

Any donation big or small, is welcome!

Update of Mana Tiaki Eco Certification 2020

Tourism operators are encouraged to apply now for their 2020 eco-certification which runs for a calendar year. www.manatiaki.org

This month we are excited to announce these newly Mana Tiaki Eco Certified businesses:

- ***Serenity Villas***
- ***Turama Pacific Tours***
- ***Nirvana Cottage***
- ***Etu Moana***
- ***Muri Vista Villas***
- ***Aroa Beachside Inn***
- ***Kia Orana Villas***
- ***Ikurangi Eco Retreat***
- ***Rarotonga Daydreamer Resort***

In other exciting news, we have recently welcomed two independent assessors to undertake our first round of verifications of eco-certified businesses in both Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

This is an important phase in the certification process which authenticates the steps each business has taken in its journey towards creating a more sustainable tourism operation.



Look out for Mana Tiaki Eco-Certified businesses displaying the big green tick in Rarotonga and Aitutaki

Turama Pacific's Journey Towards Sustainable Tourism

Congratulations to Turama Pacific for the launch of their water bottle project earlier this month with the help of Ridge to Reef Cook Islands. They are really demonstrating their commitment to their Mana Tiaki Eco Certification for the 2nd year running now!

Each visitor with Raro Tours will receive a reusable water bottle filled with UV filtered and ozonated water which can be kept or returned to reuse.



Proudly displaying their Mana Tiaki Eco Certification, Turama Pacific Tours opens the new water bottling station

This has a huge potential to reduce plastic bottles to landfill, especially as tourists are likely to continue to use them throughout their stay.

We are very grateful to Turama Pacific for their support over this past year as a Gold Corporate member of Te Ipukarea Society and we enjoyed being a part of their celebrations at the launch which took place on the 10th of February.



Be a Tidy Traveller with Turama Pacific Travel Group!

Young people throw spotlight on 'boys club' of Cook Island politics

The public of Rarotonga were recently treated to a rare night of satirical comedy theatre – at the Rehab Bar. The play, Mana Vaine, was written and directed by Teherenui Wright Koteka, and the cast was selected from current and past students from the Tereora College media course.

Teherenui Wright Koteka says that her play was a chance to bring a 'new form of expression to her homeland' and to show young aspiring artists that they can build careers in the arts, something she never saw when she was growing up here. Also, she wanted to create a production that would 'generate conversation around the Seabed

Minerals Bill 2019', a bill that she believes was prematurely passed.



Cast on stage with Teherenui Koteka (seated in front) writer and director of Mana Vaine

Te Ipukarea Society organized a youth debate on the topic of Deep Sea Mining back in October 2013. Participants were required to debate both sides of the argument, for or against seabed mining in the Cook Islands. Guess who won first prize in that competition? Yes, it was Tehere – proving herself even back then, as someone to pay attention to.

This performance chose to bring attention to a flawed process followed in the recent passing of the Seabed Mining Bill into legislation, and in doing so also threw a spotlight on how important decisions are made by Government that affect us all. In particular, it brought attention to how these decisions are made by “the boys club” of Cook Islands politics and senior public servants. It also highlighted the vital role of women in decision making in our society.

The play certainly had an impact, as it attracted a diverse group of patrons of all ages and backgrounds, including a few who had never been to Rehab before! There have also been a lot of positive posts about the play on Facebook, as well as letters to the editor, praising the talent and audacity of the production. While some of the language used would not make it past the Chief Censor for television screening, it certainly got the message across to the audience!

The characters in the play were entirely fictitious. In saying that, 2 of them, Benry Tuna and Clark Clown, did display characteristics reminiscent of certain prominent members of Government.

The play itself, however, was an obvious dig at the way political decisions are made in the Cook Islands, and it was unfortunate that no politicians were visible in the audience. Several studies have highlighted the health benefits of being able to laugh at yourself, and perhaps some individuals may have missed a golden opportunity here to improve their well-being!

Mana Vaine is a powerful satire with a message that needs to be shared widely. It would make for a compelling local television production and a thought-provoking comedy if performed for our senior high school students.

Thank you for your creative and courageous energy Tehere, and well done to the impressive cast and crew.

Building a Climate Resilient Cook Islands

TIS staff attended a recent workshop on “Building a Climate Resilient Cook Islands” hosted by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Climate Change Cook Islands and the Green Climate Fund.



TIS team brainstorming ideas with representatives from Ministry of Trade and Foreign Affairs.

The main objective of the workshop was to assist the Cook Islands increase their awareness of and access to climate finance through the Green Climate

Fund, as well as options for public private partnerships and investment.

Having only recently graduated from Tereora College, TIS intern Andrea shares her experience of her first workshop in the working world:

'A glance around the room presented many familiar faces. Some I hadn't yet met in person but had seen on the news or read about in the papers. Excitement overpowered all else as I began to meet and mingle with some truly brilliant people.

One highlight of the workshop was being able to discuss within teams what we believe are priority areas that we need to focus on. It was interesting to hear each group present their ideas and perspectives.

I left the workshop not only with a renewed respect for the people behind environmental conservation in the Cook Islands but with a full belly as well. We were treated to a lovely morning tea and lunch.

I definitely won't say no to opportunities to attend more engaging and thought-provoking workshops like these or mingling with some brilliant individuals!'

Plastics - The Burning Question

Despite all the concerns raised around burning plastics it still continues today within our community and generates mixed opinions.

Burning plastics via back yard burn pits releases harmful ash and toxic smoke packed with dangerous chemicals including dioxins which can contribute to hormone disrupting, cancer causing substances that build up in the water, soil, crops and our own bodies.

Why not instead place your plastic waste out with your recyclables, and at least give the staff at the landfill the opportunity to divert it into recycling or have it shipped overseas.

There is no perfect solution to plastic disposal, so what we should really be doing is using less plastic, particularly the types that can't be recycled easily.



Current burn pit site spotted on Rarotonga, burning electronic waste, aluminium cans and plastics

On an individual basis this means refusing plastic products in the first place or trying to use your own reusable containers and buy in bulk.

Here on Rarotonga, the burning of plastic is banned under the Public Health Act and is also an illegal offence under the Environmental Act 2003 where non-compliance can result in penalties anywhere between \$750 to \$5000.

If you are concerned of any illegal burning occurring in your neighbourhood, please report your case to both the National Environment Service and the Ministry of Health, and don't forget to follow up.

Enforcement and imposition of fines may be the only way we can get some people to change their practice of burning plastics.

E akangateitei atu I toou tangata tupu e toou Oire/Vaka Tangata. Be a conscious citizen. A person who not only respects your neighbour's health and wellbeing but who also has respect for yourself, your family and our surrounding environment on which we rely.

Sustainability ethics? Magic Reef have it in spades

Visitors to our islands increasingly wish to tread lightly when they visit and are appreciative of these types of eco-friendly differences. It is refreshing to

see the real innovations that some of our local tourism providers are offering.

Simonne and Lawrence, owners of Magic Reef Bungalows, had a vision of a sustainable and eco-friendly resort and set about to make it a core part of their operations.

Their impressive fleet of electric vehicles now stands at five electric cars and 10 electric bikes, all available for guests to use.

Not satisfied with electricity generated by fossil fuels, Magic Reef have recently constructed a solar panel carport to charge their electric fleet.

Completely off the grid, the solar carport is the first of its kind for the Cook Islands.



Five electric vehicles being charged by solar panels on carport roof.

Solar also powers the washing machine, garden lights, the swimming pool pump and lights, and also an ice machine which especially popular with tourists.

You can't complain about plentiful ice made from purified Rarotongan rainwater and chilled by the sun's energy! Even the power tools are electric – the nice and quiet kind we all like.

No rest for the wicked, Lawrence is already eyeing up his next job to reroof the utility buildings so that water can be captured and gravity fed to the underground tank. There is a very real and exciting possibility of being completely off the public water mains in future.

Interestingly, North American visitors are particularly appreciative of their eco-initiatives. Guests say it is eye-opening to drive an electric vehicle, often for the first time and seem to enjoy both the quietness and the surprising acceleration – for those lead-footed doubters!

A core focus of Mana Tiaki Eco Certification is supporting local suppliers. Magic Reef's new carport is decorated with stunning wooden art by local artist and sculptor Glenn Miller Hori. Rito supply the beauty room products and all of the bed covers are by Tivaevae Collectables. Eco-friendly cleaning products are sourced from Paradise Supplies plus coffee is provided by the Cook Islands Coffee Company.

It's the little things that add up such as the 'won't go brittle and break' stainless steel pegs; the homemade fruit jams and mueslis all in reusable containers, and glass coffee keep cups. The stainless steel reusable bottles in the villa fridges are white for milk, orange for juice and blue for water.

Guests are provided with their own reusable tote bags to encourage plastic free shopping, and bespoke stainless steel amenity dispensers are fitted into the showers.



Some of the 10 electric bicycles available for guests.

Wetlands – Our Giant Sponges

World Wetlands Day was celebrated on February 2nd, reminding us of the many ecosystem services wetlands provide us.

In the Cook Islands we are lucky to have four types of wetlands:

- Freshwater marshes and swamps: on Rarotonga, Mangaia, Atiu, Mitiaro and Mauke.
- Permanent freshwater lakes: Lake Tiriara on Mangaia, Lake Tiroti on Atiu, and Lake Rotonui and Lake Rotoiti on Mitiaro.
- Tidal salt marsh: at Ngatangiia Harbour on Rarotonga.
- Mountain streams: on Rarotonga.

Rarotonga also has the only remaining tidal salt marsh in the country – the Aroko Salt Marsh in Ngatangiia.

This salt marsh is different to freshwater swamps where we grow our taro, as the area is covered by salt water during high tide. The Aroko Salt Marsh provides habitat for certain marine species such as the Koiti Raukura (Fiddler Crab) and provide shelter and safe hatchery conditions for lagoon fish species.



Koiti Raukura/Fiddler Crab on the shores of Aitutaki.

The most common use of the freshwater swamps is for the cultivation of taro. Cultivation methods of taro in freshwater wetlands include raised taro beds (pa'i taro), taro swamp (repo tavarai) or irrigated taro terraces (such as those found in the Takuvaine and Tupapa valley streams).

A number of wetland plant species are also used in traditional maori medicine, such as mauku vai (water grass), ta'uri'au and tamore.

Wetlands do some of their best work in reducing pollution entering our lagoon. They effectively 'clean' water that is contaminated by soil, fertilisers and septic effluent. Acting as a natural filter, wetlands prevent pollutants such as nitrates and phosphates from entering the lagoon.

Wetlands also do an important job of retaining water, a bit like a giant sponge. By slowing down the water moving over the surface of the land to the lagoon, it reduces the impact of floods. Flooding like the recent severe episodes in Avatiu were far less frequent or severe back in the days when the wetlands were intact.

A permit from NES must be obtained for any works in a wetland. This includes clearing, dumping, paving, reclamation and removal of trees, or the erection of any building or structure in a wetland. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is also required should any environmental impacts be anticipated.

It is important to recognize the value of these ancient wetlands. If you are considering filling a form of wetland, please think again!

Te irinaki atu nei matou e kua mataora koe i to tatou nuti purapura.

We hope you have enjoyed our newsletter. May the month of March bring you joy and prosperity.

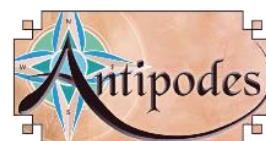
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