PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	11185
Project Name:	Reducing Single-use Plastics on Small-island Economies (RESPONSE - Plastic IP)
Countr(ies):	Cook Islands
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name
Reducing Single-use Plastics on Small-island Economies (RESPONSE - Plastic IP)

Country
Cook Islands

GEF ID	Implementing Agency
11185	UNEP

Executing Entity
National Environment Service (NES)

Trust Fund	Project Type
GET	FSP

PIR Submission	Fiscal Year , PIR Number
9/14/2026	FY 2026 , 1st PIR

Objective
To reduce the amount of plastics entering the Cook Islands via the F&B and tourism sectors and to support enabling environments for circular solutions, with the intention of reducing the burden on the Cook Islands waste management system, as well as reducing pollution and harmful impacts of plastic.

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress	Development Objective
Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Overall risk
Moderate Risk

Project Financing	Cumulative Disbursement
6,782,000.00	417,140.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval	Agency Approval
12/21/2024	6/10/2025

Implementation Start 6/12/2025	First Disbursement 7/18/2025
Expected MTR 1/18/2028	Actual MTR
Expected Completion 4/30/2030	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities

The project continued to transition from inception into full implementation during the reporting period. Key achievements included establishment of the Project Management Unit (PMU), completion of the Project Inception Workshop, establishment and operation of the Project Steering Committee (PSC), development of key implementation and governance arrangements, advancement of procurement processes, and substantial progress towards completion of the Gender Action Plan. Stakeholder engagement activities were undertaken in Rarotonga and Aitutaki to support implementation planning and identify opportunities for future interventions. Initial communications and awareness products were also developed and disseminated. While most outcome-level indicators have not yet materialised, the project has established the governance, planning and coordination systems necessary to support implementation and remains broadly on track to achieve its intended outcomes.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

As a first-year implementation project, a key challenge has been balancing the establishment of governance, procurement and management systems while also progressing technical delivery activities. Several outputs are dependent on completion of foundational activities, including the National Plastics Audit, which will inform future policy development, identification of alternatives and pilot interventions. Coordination with complementary initiatives, particularly the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP), has required careful planning to avoid duplication and maximise synergies. Participation in some global programme coordination activities has also been constrained by time-zone differences and competing implementation priorities. Despite these challenges, the project remains on track and no major implementation obstacles have been identified.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

During the reporting period, stakeholder engagement focused on project inception, governance establishment, and implementation planning. The first Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting was convened on 11th March 2026 and brought together representatives from the National Environment Service (NES), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Business Trade Investment Board (BTIB), Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CIT), Te Ipukarea Society (TIS), and the Development Coordination Division of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management. The PSC endorsed the PSC Terms of Reference, the Project Inception Report, and the 2026 Annual Work Plan and Budget, establishing the projects governance framework and implementation direction.

Stakeholder discussions highlighted strong cross-sector support for the project and provided valuable input into implementation priorities. Discussions focused on the role of the tourism and food and beverage sectors in reducing plastic pollution, the identification and assessment of alternatives to single-use plastics,

opportunities for sustainable business practices, support for community initiatives in the Pa Enua, and the establishment of technical and inter-ministerial working groups to facilitate implementation. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of evidence-based alternatives, capacity building, awareness raising, and integration with existing national initiatives and partnerships.

The project continued to apply a participatory and gender-responsive approach to stakeholder engagement. During PSC discussions, members sought clarification on gender-related activities within the project, and the project team confirmed that activities had been informed through engagement with Te Puna Vai Marama as the project's Gender Safeguards Consultant to support gender-responsive implementation.

As an outcome of stakeholder engagement, the PSC supported the establishment of project working groups, including technical and inter-ministerial mechanisms, to strengthen coordination and stakeholder participation throughout implementation. Actions were agreed to establish these groups, provide updates to members, and circulate project documents for stakeholder review and feedback. Stakeholder commitment to project implementation remains strong, with partners expressing support for continued collaboration throughout the life of the project

D. Gender Equality

A Gender Action Plan (GAP) has been developed and is currently in its final stages of review and refinement. The GAP has been informed by project preparation consultations and stakeholder engagement processes and will provide a framework for integrating gender-responsive approaches across project implementation.

During the reporting period, gender considerations were incorporated into inception and implementation planning activities. Gender-responsive implementation was discussed during the first Project Steering Committee meeting, where the project team confirmed that gender-related activities had been informed through engagement with Te Puna Vai Marama as the project's Gender Safeguards Consultant and reflected commitments made during project design.

The project continues to promote inclusive participation in stakeholder engagement, governance arrangements, capacity-building activities, data collection, and decision-making processes. Planned project interventions, including plastics audits, stakeholder consultations, knowledge management activities, and capacity-building initiatives, will incorporate sex-disaggregated data and gender-responsive approaches consistent with the project results framework and forthcoming GAP.

Finalisation and endorsement of the Gender Action Plan is expected during the next reporting period and will guide implementation, monitoring and reporting of gender-related targets and outcomes throughout the life of the project.

E. Knowledge Management

Knowledge management activities during the reporting period focused on establishing the foundations for information sharing, coordination and learning across the project. The Project Steering Committee was established and stakeholder engagement activities were undertaken to support collaborative decision-making and information exchange. Existing project planning, reporting and communication processes are being used to capture lessons and inform implementation. Engagement with the wider Plastic Reboot Programme has been limited due to time zone constraints, although project developments continue to be monitored where relevant.

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	During the inception and early implementation phase, several minor implementation adjustments were made to improve project delivery while maintaining the approved project objective, outcomes and Results Framework. Institutional arrangements were refined, with Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI) transitioning from an anticipated co-execution role to a supporting implementation partner role, while National Environment Service (NES) assumed sole execution responsibilities. The sequencing and timing of selected activities were also adjusted to reflect changes in the national context and project dependencies, including alignment with the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP), prioritisation of the National Plastics Audit, and earlier planning for grant facility implementation. The project risk assessment was reviewed during inception, confirming that the overall project risk rating remains Moderate and that no new major risks have been identified. These adjustments do not change the approved project objective, Results Framework, overall budget, co-financing commitments, safeguard classification, executing agency, or project duration.
Financial Management	
Implementation Schedule	
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	During the inception and early implementation phase, several minor implementation adjustments were made to improve project delivery while maintaining the approved project objective, outcomes and Results Framework. Institutional arrangements were refined, with Infrastructure Cook Islands (ICI) transitioning from an anticipated co-execution role to a supporting implementation partner role, while National Environment Service (NES) assumed sole execution responsibilities. The sequencing and timing of selected activities were also adjusted to reflect changes in the national context and project dependencies, including alignment with the Pacific Ocean Litter Project (POLP), prioritisation of the National

	Plastics Audit, and earlier planning for grant facility implementation. The project risk assessment was reviewed during inception, confirming that the overall project risk rating remains Moderate and that no new major risks have been identified. These adjustments do not change the approved project objective, Results Framework, overall budget, co-financing commitments, safeguard classification, executing agency, or project duration.
Increase of GEF Financing up to 5%	
Co-Financing	
Location of Project Activity	
others	

IV: Geographic Coordinates of Project Activities

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Cook Islands	-21.236736	-159.777671	1,899,402

Location Description:

Activity Description:

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	11185_PIR_UNEP_2026