

Cook Islands PM urges Pacific-wide action to tackle invasive species

Title

The Cook Islands Prime Minister Hon. Henry Puna and his Pacific Islands Forum colleagues have backed an initiative to recognise the widespread economic, social and environmental impacts of invasive species.

The support came during the Forum Leaders' Retreat this month, at which the Cook Islands put forward the proposal, and subsequently included in the Forum Communiqué.

Introduced animals such as rats, and plants, also diseases, and insects like fire ants, and taro beetle continue to spread across the Pacific and greatly threaten the economies and biodiversity of Pacific Island Countries and Territories.

Prime Minister Puna, Minister responsible for the Environment and a champion of environmental issues, urged Leaders to support more action to tackle the issue.

“The people of the Pacific are facing numerous threats from invasive species, which are having major effects on our food security, health and wellbeing, and are seriously damaging our natural heritage”, says Puna. “They are causing widespread problems such as crop loss, damage to infrastructure, forest degradation, collapse of native bird populations, along with risks to our reefs and fishing”.

The annual cost to the global economy is estimated to be more than US\$ 1.3 trillion. In 2008 alone, invasive species cost the New Zealand economy more than US\$ 2.7 billion.

“Actions are underway to address the issue led by the Pacific regional secretariats, Governments, research institutions, NGOs and communities,” says Puna.

One success story is the control of rats in the Takitumu Conservation Area of Rarotonga, which has saved a Cook Islands bird, the Kakerori (Rarotonga Monarch) from extinction.

“But this issue is so serious that greater commitment is now needed at the highest level. I urge Forum leaders, Governments and donors alike to provide additional dedicated resources

to address invasive species management as a priority for Pacific islands and their people”, added Puna.

Te Ipukarea Society (BirdLife in the Cook Islands) worked closely with their government to advocate for the issue of invasive species to be recognised at the highest level during the forum.

“Te Ipukarea Society are working hard to protect our birds, biodiversity and livelihoods from the threats posed by non-native species”, said Jacqui Evans – TIS Programme Manager. “We’re delighted that leaders from across the Pacific called for greater commitment for actions across the region to address the threat”.

Looking just at the regions globally threatened bird populations, around three quarters are currently being impacted by invasive species which eat their eggs and chicks, and compete for their food and nests.

“The impacts of invasive species are huge in the Pacific” said Don Stewart – BirdLife’s Director for the Pacific. “The BirdLife Partnership is on the front line in tackling rats, cats, goats and deer across the Pacific, but much more needs to be done”.

“Extra effort is urgently required by governments of all Pacific Island countries to integrate the threats into their actions and policies, provide dedicated staff and budgets for invasive species management including enhanced biosecurity, eradication and control”, concluded Don.

BirdLife International is part of the Pacific Invasives Partnership which represents over 30 organisations tackling invasive species across the region.

To find out more, please click to download '[Pacific People Fighting Invasive Species](#)' (pdf, 886 kb).