



31st July 2020

Hon, Mark Brown Deputy Prime Minister Speech – National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+ Consultation Launch

Kia Orana

Welcome to the launch of the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+.

This launch signifies the fact that we are nearing the end of our five year National Sustainable Development Plan. The most recent plan, from 2016 – 2020, has given us five years of action, five years of learnings and five years of achievements.

The National Sustainable Development Plan for the Cook Islands has encompassed the vision of our people and provided the framework for the strong development of our nation. This resulted in our biggest achievement of the last five years, graduating to developed nation status, an accomplishment many countries in the world wish to reach.

With the age of COVID upon us, this status is being threatened, the economic impacts of COVID-19 could have had lasting impacts on our nation and our wellbeing. But the sustained efforts across the whole of the Cook Islands community over the last five years has meant that we are well prepared for these impacts.

We have:

Made significant progress towards achieving 100% renewable energy

From being dependent on fossil fuels to generating our own renewable energy in the Pa Enea and Rarotonga.

Reformed our Telecommunications sector to strengthen our economy

By developing partnerships with Tahiti, Samoa and Niue to install the Manatua Cable to secure faster internet connectivity between Rarotonga, Aitutaki and the world. The Government has also established the Competition and Regulatory Authority to ensure that we can achieve fair pricing and quality service for our people.

Made significant investment in major infrastructure projects

To improve the infrastructure of the country and promote sustainable development. These projects include; Te Mato Vai, to deliver safe potable water, road sealing in Rarotonga and the Pa Enea to improve our safety and cyclone shelters in the Pa Enea to ensure that our population is safe in the case of a natural disaster.

Improved our social welfare and tax system to reduce inequality and improve equity This has included an increase in the minimum wage to \$8 an hour, an increase in the tax free threshold and an increase in the pension and caregivers allowance.

Created our Marae Moana

Increasing the sustainability of our marine resources and natural environment.

Developed a sound fiscal framework

Our strong fiscal management over the last ten years meant that we were in the position to set aside \$56.7 million into the newly developed Stabilisation Account in 2019/20.

At the same time, we have reduced our debt, increasing our ability to respond to the needs of our people today through the Economic Response Plan.

We have had many successes, and have learnt many things, which has created a stronger foundation for our nation. But we are now nearing the end of our NSDP, and we must navigate towards a new future, a future that will become more certain throughout this consultation process.

The NSDA+ will incorporate the plans that we already have developed and those that we are in the process of developing. The NSDA+ will expand upon the Economic Development Strategy which will be delivered by the end of 2020.

The Economic Development Strategy will address cross-cutting economic issues — both challenges and opportunities — to achieve a vision of the economy in 10 years' time that will carry us into the future. The focus of the Strategy will be on evolving from 'quantity' to 'quality' growth. As such, it recognises that economic development will not be sustainable without addressing relevant social and environmental challenges.

The draft Economic Development Strategy will be released in the coming months for public consultation. This draft will set the economic and fiscal foundation of the NSDA+ which will in turn expand upon the Strategy and incorporate further social and environmental considerations.

The NSDA+ will set out our vision for the next 100 years, and guide us towards that destination. As we envision the NSDA+ over the next 100 years we must look back, to look at our successes and learn from our mistakes. The NSDA+ will consider the Cook Islands in its entirety. Our culture, our environment, our population and our economy.

This will be the first of many exchanges with our communities to imagine the future of our nation and reflect on our achievements in the five years since the last National Sustainable Plan (NSDP) was launched.

Like any voyage we need a bearing to navigate towards. We need your input to help determine our final destination and set that bearing.

There will be two phases to completing our NSDA2020+ by April next year.

i. Phase one – Consultation

Our multi-sector NSDA2020+ committee will be conducting consultations with our communities to hear your voice, thoughts and opinions to envisage the Cook Islands long term future and the steps required to get there.

ii. Phase two – Development

Once we complete consultations, draft plans will be developed, and we will be seeking your input.

Once the NSDA 2020+ has been finalised, we will embark on the greatest part of this journey – working together to lay out our voyage towards this 100-year vision of the nation.

We are here today to celebrate what we have achieved over the past five years, to acknowledge the hard work of our nation and our people, and prepare for the voyage ahead.

With that I'd like to launch our consultation phase of our National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+.

For our Cook Islands, our Legacy.

We look forward to this journey together with you all.