



**Guiding Principles**  
for research conducted in  
the  
Cook Islands

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# Guiding principles for research in the Cook Islands

## Introduction

Researchers applying for approval to undertake research in the Cook Islands are advised to read this document.

The Cook Islands National Research Committee (CINRC) will discuss with host institutions any matters arising in respect of researcher non-compliance with the conditions of the research approval.

These guiding principles are adapted from the Health Research Council of New Zealand Pacific Research Guidelines 2014<sup>1</sup>

## Purpose

These guidelines sets out the conditions for all research in the Cook Islands. The aims of this policy is to provide guidance to:

1. Researchers who are planning to undertake any research in the Cook Islands
2. Researchers who have research that involves the collection of biological and environmental samples for analysis
3. Researchers who are applying for a research permit from the CINRC

## Defining Cook Islands research

Cook Islands research is a broad descriptor that encompasses various approaches to research. The primary role of Cook Islands research is to generate knowledge and understanding for and about Cook Islands peoples to improve the wellbeing, social, cultural and economic status of Cook Islands peoples. The source material for Cook Islands research should be derived from Cook Islands peoples, their world views (epistemology), social and cultural contexts, and real-life experiences. 'Ākono'anga Māori is the central component of the Cook Islands knowledge system. It encompasses the skills, experiences, and insights of people, which are applied to preserve or improve their lives. Cook Islanders continue to maintain aspects of their cultural heritage through churches; communal gatherings; reciprocal exchange of goods; ceremonial occasions; and transfer of stories and values to their children.

These guiding principles are underpinned by the following values which have been captured through consultations and also the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+.

## Our values

**Tu 'Oa'oa - Reciprocal relationships** are a fundamental Cook Islands value and involves the exchange of goods, services, trust, loyalty, and social goodwill. It is a two-way process that ensures a sense of balance is maintained throughout the research process. Reciprocal relationships ensures that both sides benefit from the research. Researchers provide skills and resources while participants provide data, knowledge, and wisdom. The researchers benefit in terms of enhancing their

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<sup>1</sup> The NZ Health Research Council is a crown entity and is the accreditation agency for all university and other ethics committees in NZ. It is primarily responsible for funding health research in NZ.

professional development while the Cook Islands community benefits through the outcomes of the research.

Reciprocal relationships in research requires that knowledge gained through research will be shared with and used to benefit research participants and their communities. For example, knowledge acquired from research that generates significant financial returns, should be shared with the people from where the original knowledge came from. Reciprocity is a way of establishing good harmonious relationships between researchers, participants and their communities to avoid exploitation and harm.

**Tu Tā'aka 'aka (Respect)** is a significant value in the Cook Islands culture. Respect between the researcher and research participants is key to the maintenance of reciprocal relationships in the Cook Islands. There are different types of relationships and situations in the Cook Islands whether formal or informal, where particular forms of respect are shown. This can be defined by one's position within the social hierarchy or kinship system. It may be based on social status, genealogical links, age, gender, achievement or general recognition of the importance of humility and acknowledgement in a communal relationship. Respect in practice means:

1. Seeking advice relating to protocols, cultural sensitivities, and social tapu to avoid insulting people and creating negative feelings, which would undermine the aims of the research
2. The research methodology, ethics, and approach must be responsive and sensitive to Cook Islands cultural understandings and practices
3. Developing some basic understanding of 'Ākono'anga Māori. For example learning and using some key words in reo Māori Kūki 'Airani; understanding the meaning of some cultural symbolisms; developing an appreciation of the cultural sensibilities of the community
4. Appreciating diversity in terms of socio-economic inequality; gender differences; religious beliefs; tapere tangata membership; educational attainment; professional background; and political ideology
5. Acknowledging Cook Islands knowledge and genetic heritage. Awareness of the distinction between these two contending notions of knowledge ownership<sup>2</sup> is important to avoid exploitation of culturally owned knowledge and genetic material.

The first is intellectual property rights, which is based on individual ownership prescribed under such international instruments as *Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights of the World Trade Organization*. The second is cultural ownership, which is recognised under the United Nations-related World Intellectual Property Organizations, the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*,<sup>3</sup> and UNESCO's *Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights*.<sup>4</sup> Collective ownership of knowledge is important for sustaining

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<sup>2</sup> Some regional agreements and declarations have been framed with the primary purpose of protecting indigenous Pacific knowledge and genetic heritage. These include *Model Law and Traditional Biological Knowledge* (2000); UNESCO Pacific Declaration on Bio-piracy (2007)

<sup>3</sup> See United Nations (2007). *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. New York: United Nations.

<sup>4</sup> UNESCO (2005). *Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights*. New York: UNESCO.

collective identity and sense of being.<sup>5</sup> In Cook Islands cosmology, some forms of knowledge are considered tapu (sacred) and need to be treated with respect.<sup>6</sup> Researchers must reach mutual agreement prior to the collection of data in respect of ownership of data and authorship of publications.

6. Reaching mutual agreement when research relating to genetic engineering, creation of transgenic life-forms, and the human genome to investigate genetic diversity presents in the Cook Islands. This is particularly important in relating to how the samples are kept; stored in tissue banks; establishment of cell lines; tissue being sent overseas for use within genetic studies, and future use.<sup>7</sup> For Cook Islanders, the human body is tapu and is considered the embodiment of spirituality and sacredness. In the context of 'Ākono'anga Māori, bodies are not considered simple biological entities but are part of a bigger genealogical system that forms the very fabric of a kinship group's sense of being. It is the embodiment of socio-cultural and spiritual continuity between the past, the present, and the future. The consent of the research participant and their family and kōpū tangata should be sought. Adherence to the ethical guidelines of relevant host institutions and the Cook Islands should precede extraction of human tissues and genetic materials.

### **National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+ Kia Orana shared understandings**

- **Kite Pakari** – we will strive to foster and incorporate our traditional and innovative wisdom. Cook Islands history and cultural heritage will be key in our knowledge base.
- **Irinakianga vaerua** – the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. Spirituality and Faith in oneself and others will be important in the holistic approach to wellbeing.
- **Akakoromaki and Akatapu** – Patience – the capacity to accept or tolerate and Respect – is a way of treating or thinking about something or someone in a positive light. Fairness is key to these tenets, which will look at Justice in all its dimensions.
- **Ora – Life – Our Participation** will be key to our development – we will actively engage with communities and locally rooted economies.
- **Rota'ianga** – unity as a people and Nation is key to the Cook Islands success. Our connections will bring a sense of belonging and institutions that serve the common good
- **Tu 'Aka'aka and 'Au** – Humility – the quality of having a modest view of one's importance and peaceful – tranquil and no violence.
- **Noa** – Freedom – the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants this will be important in ensuring our dignity where everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety and happiness

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<sup>5</sup> See Secretariat of the Pacific Community (2002). *Regional Framework for the Protection of Traditional Knowledge and Expression of Culture*. Suva: Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

<sup>6</sup> For example, knowledge of medicinal plants and healing can be specialised and sacred and is often kept exclusively by particular groups for the community generally. In other cases, they can be commonly shared and are considered communal property.

<sup>7</sup> See Ratuva and Mead (2007).

- **Aro'a and Meitaki** – Love, kindness and thankfulness are keystones to Cook Islanders as a people. It encapsulates our obligation as Tiaki for a restored and safe natural world for all life.

## **Research in the Cook Islands**

Research conducted in the Cook Islands should be aligned to Cook Islands values in this document and/or the goal/s outlined in *Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui: the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2021–2121 (NSDA 2020+) and its iterations*.<sup>8</sup> The NSDA 2020+ encompasses a long-term vision of 'Turanga Memeitaki – Wellbeing for all'. Plans to achieve this long-term vision will be set within a 100-year Akapapa'anga framework through 25-year Uki generation plans and monitored through five-year scorecards.

## **Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui - National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+**

The formulation of Te Ara Akapapa'anga Nui - NSDA 2020+ takes an extended outlook over 100 years and prioritises a generational scale. This period will be interspersed with short to medium-term plans that will be adjusted as our Nation and our people continue to evolve. This is planned at 5 and 25 year intervals. These planning periods align with the philosophy and practice of 'Akapapa'anga: the use and importance of genealogical legacies to and for the Cook Islands and its people.

'**Akapapa'anga** is a cornerstone of Cook Islands Māori society. It informs the way our society is built and the collective enterprise of our people. For example, it underpins our connection, rights and management of land, records the interrelation of our islands over generations, and informs the relationships we have with our people and kin in the Ipukarea and further abroad. It is the relationships inherent in papa'anga (genealogies) that drives our preparations, an impetus to build a strong future for our society, our 'enua and the descendants to come.

### **Tūranga Memeitaki** - Towards a vision of Wellbeing

Central to Te Ara 'Akapapa'anga Nui- NSDA 2020+ will be the aspiration towards Tūranga Memeitaki -Wellbeing for all. A vision where each person attains, at its most basic-a state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy. There is general agreement that at minimum, well-being includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), and satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning. In simple terms, wellbeing can be described as judging life positively and feeling good. Albeit wellbeing may seem more subjective it is our job to measure the best way possible so that we can track attainment of wellbeing for all across the Nation.

### **Research undertaken in the Cook Islands must:**

1. Be translational and show clear benefits for the development of the Cook Islands and its people. In research the principle of beneficence refers to the ethical obligation to maximise benefits. That is benefits of the research should be shared equally between researched communities and researchers. For researchers, the benefits are in terms of professional advancement and job satisfaction. For researched communities in the Cook Islands benefits derived from research and patents of cultural knowledge should assist them.

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.pmooffice.gov.ck/nsda/documents/>

The principle of non-maleficence is as important the principle of beneficence. Non-maleficence refers to commitment and obligation not to cause any harm and to guard against avoidable harm to research participants in the Cook Islands. Care must be taken to ensure that Cook Islands peoples are protected from harmful aspects and results of research. Research outcomes must not threaten the way of life and interests of the community, nor should it reinforce racial stereotypes that undermine their sense of identity and being as a group. Researchers must be transparent and honest when dealing with the community and must not manipulate the situation for private gains and exploitation. The reciprocal relationship of providing feedback is important to avoid this.

2. Ensure that Cook Islands participants in research projects are clearly informed about the research; and their rights as research participants. Prior<sup>9</sup>, free, and informed consent<sup>10</sup> should result from affirmation of relationships and respect for local individuals and communities. It ensures that participants are fully aware of the entire process of research, including pre-research preparations; research assumptions; methodology; data collection and analysis; how the data will be used; how it will be kept; how it will be destroyed; timeframes; option of withdrawal from participation; and impact of the research on individuals and their communities.

Researchers should seek advice about the Cook Islands and context of the communities they are engaging with.

3. Build Cook Islands research capacity and capability as this is a tangible example of reciprocity as it involves skills and knowledge exchange. A research team demonstrates commitment to the wider Cook Islands community by helping to develop and enhance the human capital of that community. Capacity and capability building of the Cook Islands research community should be a central component of the research project and should be integrated into the research proposal. In practice this means participation of Cook Islands peoples at all levels of the research project, including research governance and decision-making and implementation of the project. This will ensure that the project is responsive and accountable to the research needs of the participant research population.
4. Be undertaken in an appropriate, ethical and effective manner in accordance with relevant ethical standards for the conduct of research and researchers of the researchers affiliate institution. Ethics approval from the Cook Islands Research Ethics Committee must be attached to the application form for research in the Cook Islands.
5. Be led by researchers who have a proven record of research experience, are professionally competent and well qualified. A short summary of researcher experience should appear in the participant information sheets to reassure prospective participants of the credibility of the researcher/s.
6. Be disseminated and made accessible to research participants and the Cook Islands community. The dissemination of the research findings is a significant part

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'prior' refers to consent taking place before the research. The term 'free' means that individuals and communities should not be put under pressure or any obligatory responsibility to provide consent. The term 'informed' means that the individuals and communities involved in the research should be given as much information as possible and they should make their decision in their own time and space, and based on their freewill and initiative.

<sup>10</sup> The notion of prior, free, and informed consent is strongly emphasised by the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* as a way of protecting the wellbeing, intellectual property, and knowledge of vulnerable groups.

of the ongoing relationship of respect and reciprocity. It acknowledges the contributions of the participant community and the work of the researchers in the development of the Cook Islands. The final research publication should not only acknowledge the participants from the relevant, it should also reflect the sense of co-ownership by the community who have provided the knowledge and information, which made the research possible. Effective, responsive, adequately resourced, and appropriate dissemination is an effective form of reciprocity in research. The results of the research should be publicised using multiple means to ensure wide coverage.

## Process for research approval

Applications for research approval to undertake research in the Cook Islands can be accessed from the Cook Islands Research website:

<https://www.pmooffice.gov.ck/national-research-council/>

The timeframe for assessment of the application is three weeks from the date of receipt.

Upon receipt of the application, the CINRC secretariat will:

1. Acknowledge receipt of the research application via email
2. Check that the application form is complete
3. Email research applications to CINREC or the CINRC to assess the application
4. Email the decision of CINREC or CINRC to the applicant.

The relevant authorities will need to approve before CINRC application and approval.

### Immigration

You must receive your research permit prior to undergoing Cook Islands immigration process and travelling to the Cook Islands to undertake research.

### Land based research

On arrival into the Cook Islands:

- When filling in the immigration arrival card select the box *other* and write research and the research approval number. Attach a copy of research permit.

### Marine research

There is a requirement under the Marine Resources Act 2005 to seek the written authorisation from the Secretary of Ministry of Marine Resources. Once approval is granted then the applicant may apply for a research permit under CINRC. **Note:** A research permit does not mean that you will get clearance to enter territorial waters. The Secretary of Ministry of Marine Resources will advise you of the process you will need to clear to be able to enter into Cook Islands waters to conduct marine scientific research.

### Seabed Mineral based research

Researchers/bodies interested in conducting seabed minerals related research are subject to a two stage process. Firstly, researchers must apply for a prospecting permit from the Seabed Minerals Authority, under the Prospecting Regulations of the Seabed Minerals Act 2019 (Act). The Act outlines the process to be followed, which is separate from the process that involves the CINRC.

## **Role, function and membership of the Cook Islands National Research Committee**

### **Terms of reference**

#### **Role**

The primary role of the Cook Islands National Research Committee is to provide strategic leadership in research by ensuring all research conducted in the Cook Islands meet the highest research and ethical standards.

#### **Functions**

The CINRC will:

- Assess research permit applications. In reviewing applications, the CINRC reserves the right to seek expert opinion;
- Advise on research issues relevant to the Cook Islands;
- Support Cook Islands research capability through the development of research funding.

#### **Membership**

The Cook Islands National Research Committee is made up of 10 members.

#### **Committee members:**

1. Office of the Prime Minister(OPM) – Chief of Staff
2. Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) – Secretary of Marine Resources
3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI) – Chief Immigration Officer
4. Ministry of Culture Development (MOCD) – Secretary of Culture
5. National Environment Service (NES)– Director of National Environment Services
6. National Heritage (NH) – Director
7. University of South Pacific (USP)– Cook Islands Campus Director
8. Ministry of Education (MOE)– Secretary of Education
9. Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)– Secretary of Agriculture
10. Te Marae Ora-Ministry of Health (TMO)– Secretary of Health

Office of the Prime Minister – Central Policy and Planning Office (CPPO) as Secretariat.

#### **Alternate members**

Each of the Committee members shall appoint alternate members in their place to attend Committee meetings in the absence of the member.

#### **External Advisors**

The CINRC may seek advice from external persons as appropriate.

#### **Chair**

The Chair will be appointed by Chief of Staff Office of the Prime Minister in the inaugural year. Thereafter the Chair will be appointed by members of the CINRC. The term of the Chair is two years which can be renewed, but no Chair shall serve more than three consecutive terms.

#### **Quorum**

The quorum will compromise 50 percent of the membership and must include the Chair. Decisions may be made via circular motion.

**Reporting**

The CINRC reports to the Chief of Staff OPM.

## **Review of applications**

1. All applications will be reviewed and discussed by committee members via email. Only those with queries are to be discussed at face-to-face committee meetings.
2. Ensure research is aligned to the Cook Islands values and the National Sustainable Development Goals
3. Decision making process The CINRC will make decisions based on consensus of the committee. This process is more likely to reflect the full range of views on the committee. Consensus does not require that all members support the decision, but that all members consider the decision acceptable. It is the role of the Chair to ensure this happens. On occasion, individual members may wish to abstain from some or all of the decision making process because of strong personal, moral or religious reasons. Such abstentions shall not affect the approval process.
4. Conflict of interest - To achieve impartiality, any member of the committee who has a proposal before the committee or who has a conflict of interest whereby the impartiality of that member could be questioned, will declare and withdraw from the deliberations at the meeting

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## Research Application process flow chart

# Cook Islands Research Application Process

