

# COOK ISLANDS WATER SNAPSHOT

## WATER IN THE COOK ISLANDS

Public awareness of the need to improve national water services is demonstrated by the consistent high priority given to water in the Cook Islands National Sustainable Development Plan. By building on past efforts, it is expected that relevant national water policies and significant water service improvements can be achieved.

Throughout the region and in the Cook Islands, water shortages provide a constant reminder that improved and holistic water resource management is needed to avoid failing infrastructure, the pollution of streams and ground water reservoirs and unnecessary waste. This is about improving the security of supply. Additionally, researchers (e.g. Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation) are providing greater insights into the risks of climate variability, highlighting the likely scenario of longer dry periods with more intense rain fall events.

Recently Government has invested in water system replacements on Rarotonga and the pa enua (sister islands) and undertaken research into water governance and operational improvement options (ADB, SOPAC Integrated Water Resources Management). Alongside this, our partners have developed potentially competing engineering concepts (China and EU/EIB) for major upgrades to the Rarotonga water infrastructure.

## OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

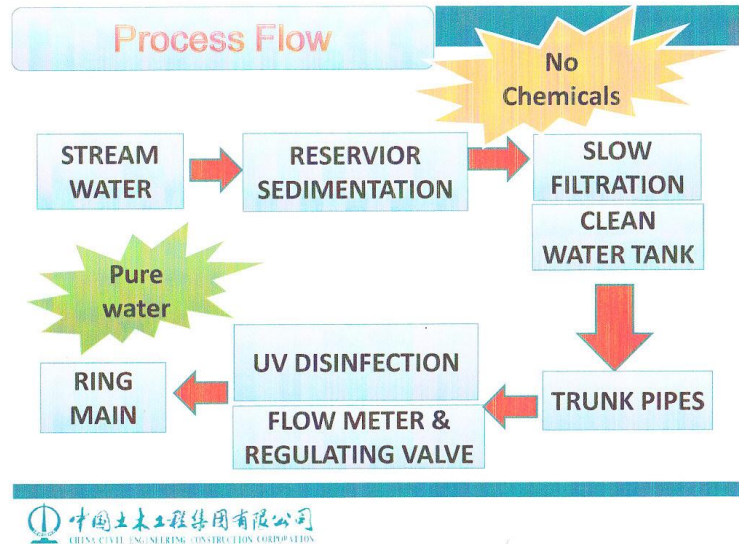
In Rarotonga, the service lines delivering water from the public water mains to households are expected to be 100% replaced by the end of 2012. This has been completed over a period spanning several years with national budget and more recently lending from ADB being invested.

Two (China & EU/EIB) engineering concept proposals and cost estimations have been completed for the remaining upgrades anticipated in Rarotonga. This investment is expected to be in the scale of NZD30 to 50M and assumes that standards will be lifted to 'drinking water' quality.

Over 1 million litres of additional drinking water storage was added across the northern Cook Islands with spin off benefits for household resilience achieved as a result of roof upgrades needed to provide suitable rain water catchment (\$2.2M, Australia and New Zealand). Australia has recently pledged an additional AUD 0.5M towards the costs of community water storage improvements scheduled for 2012 which will complete the Northern group water improvement programme.

Mauke island water reticulation system was completed and handed over to the Island Administration (\$2M, Cook Islands, Australia and New Zealand).

Ministry of Infrastructure & Planning has established a Water, Waste and Sanitation unit (WatSan) to build the necessary competence to coordinate strategy and policy development in these related sectors. This unit has completed the scoping and developed a procurement strategy to roll out the Muri pilot stage of the Cook Islands sanitation improvement programme. Additionally, WatSan is procuring specialist engineering services to assess and indentify preferred options for the long term sanitation solutions for Rarotonga and Aitutaki.



An option for Rarotonga water treatment developed in 2011 with the assistance of China.

## HOW IS THIS WORKING

The new competency of the WatSan unit has provided impetus to the implementation of sanitation improvements. The ability of government to call on specialist advisors to assess sanitation proposals emerging (e.g. from private interest groups) has been invaluable in strengthening the decision making process around this key national priority.

While small scale capital improvements have been secured, the capacity of national water sector planning is a constraint to scaling up impact. The difficulty assessing the two Rarotonga water upgrades proposals (From the EIB and China) has led to delays in decision making and frustration on the part of national and international partners.

Treasury estimates that the Cook Islands can take on another NZD 57 million in public lending (across all sectors, national and local) before reaching its debt ceiling commitments. As finances become scarce, the need to balance public investment and capacity to lever impact from partnerships becomes more important.

With this in mind, a robust policy dialogue with commercial and household consumers is all the more important to secure financial resources to sustain improvements. An agreement on water user fees requires costs of maintaining the current water standard ('industrial') and moving to 'drinking water' to be made evident to stakeholders.



Technical assistance with Watercare (NZ) and cooperation between several governments providing grant resources has been instrumental in Mauke.

## OUR UPCOMING PLANS

The WatSan unit is in the process of recruiting additional capacity to respond to the needs of the sanitation programme and build local capacity. Additional water specific resources will be needed to complete national plans and policy and oversee major water projects.

A water options paper is being developed to assess and inform a dialogue aimed at establishing an agreement between water consumers (tourism, agriculture, households), water providers (currently Ministry of Infrastructure & Planning Water Division), Regulators (e.g. Public Health) and asset owners (Cook Islands Government) regarding the standard of water services and financing for capital improvements and sustaining benefits into the future.

In order to coordinate resources for water sector improvements and create a shared platform the Cook Islands desires that its development partners agree to work in a **Water Partnership**. The anticipated outcome is a sustainable, long term approach to water service delivery across the Cook Islands. This would include the following:

1. Improved public health through increased access to quality water related services and supplies.
2. Appropriate levels and standards of service from a unified water sector.
3. Cost recovery and financial viability to the Government.
4. The strengthening of institutional capacity to sustain all water related services and coordinate resources.
5. Improved levels of water sector performance with higher system efficiencies.
6. An increased stakeholder involvement in the water resource management and service provisions.
7. Increased public awareness in the responsibility of water management and the use of the resource.
8. More public awareness of conservation and protection of water catchments areas.