

# World Environment Day 2006

## TAKORE IATU TE TAKINOKINO ENUA



COMBAT LAND DEGRADATION



### International World Environment Day 2006

World Environment Day is commemorated each year on 5th June and the theme for 2006 is "Don't desert drylands" emphasizing the importance of protecting drylands, which cover more than 40% of the planet's surface.

This ecosystem is home to one-third of the world's people who are more vulnerable members of society. Yet, through climate change and human pressures these drylands are increasingly under threat.

World Environment Day this year seeks to raise public awareness of this problem in union with the United Nations '2006 International Year of Deserts and Desertification'.

The Cook Islands, however, have localized this theme to 'Takore iatu te Takinokino Enuā – Combat Land Degradation'.

Land degradation is a big issue for our small islands and is something that we all need to be aware of.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY • 5 June 2006  
DESERTS AND DESERTIFICATION



DON'T DESERT DRYLANDS!

World Environment Day provides us with an opportunity to consider the environment in which we live – the air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we occupy, cultivate and enjoy.

The environment provides us with a quality of life which is often taken for granted.

It shapes our culture and traditions; we are, ultimately, a product of our environment.

### Protecting our environment from land degradation

It is important that while we work towards combating land degradation, we have effective tools to do so. Legislation and enforcement has always been a weak area for environment management in the Cook Islands.

To that end, the Asian Development Bank has been assisting government in strengthening its legislative framework.

Over the past year, a number of laws and bylaws have been drafted for consultation

and these frameworks will be presented at the ADB TA workshop **starting today Tuesday 6th to Wednesday 7th June** at the AOG Hall, Takuvaine.

This workshop is open to the public and some of the legislation relating to the broad area of land degradation that will be presented include: Permits and Consents Regulations, Waste Licensing Regulations and the Water Resource Management Bill.

### Developments and degradation – the Environmental Impact Assessment process

Land degradation can sometimes be caused by developments, especially those that are poorly planned and have no assessment of environmental impacts.

Developments such as tourism accommodation, filling of wetlands and slope excavations have been increasing in the Cook Islands over the past few years, especially in vulnerable ecosystems.

In the Cook Islands these areas are referred to as Specific Areas of Concern defined under the Environment Act 2003. They are the foreshore and Cook Islands waters, sloping land, wetlands and inland waters. Therefore to reduce impacts of land degradation, it is necessary to plan these developments properly. One way in terms of environmental planning is to have an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted for the development.

EIA is a formal study used to predict the environmental impacts and consequences of a proposed development or activity before that activity starts, and may include studies



Specific areas of concern include sloping land.

of flora and fauna, soil erosion, human health, that is to say all physical, biological, social and economic impacts. EIA provides a formalised way of consulting the people who will be affected by a development before it happens.

Such consultation helps avoid unwanted social and environmental effects that are not obvious to the developers and to decision-makers. This avoids adverse and costly changes in the natural and human environment as a result of human actions and would also go about reducing land degradation resulting from these developments.

The EIA process can be of great benefit to developers for long term planning by looking at how their development will impact on the environment but also how the environment could impact on their development. If they are building in an area that is prone to the impacts of climate change such as storm surge or flooding, then planning how your development would cope with these impacts could reduce any repair bills in the long run.



Specific areas of concern include the foreshore.

### United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

The objective of the UNCCD is to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought or human activities through effective action at all levels of society.

Desertification does not refer to the expansion of existing deserts but rather it refers to the degradation of land primarily by human activities and climatic variations.

Land degradation affects ecosystem health, stability and functions, and can be caused by a host of activities including deforestation, high erosion, clearing of land for housing and tourism development.

The Cook Islands is concerned with addressing land management issues that leads to degradation including filling of wetlands, foreshore development, erosion, waste management and management of our freshwater resources.

To combat land degradation, there is a need to adopt a balanced land management mechanism that will not undermine the rights of traditional land owners, traditional conservation practices, island customs and the land tenure system.

### Takore ia atu te Takinokino Enuā

E manata maata tikai te Takinokino Enuā no tatou i te Kuki Airani nei. E iti tangata irinaki oki tatou i te ki o te enuā e te moana no te oraanga tangata e pera te tu'anga turoto. To tatou enuā e vaiata rava ki te akau e te moana no reira e mea tau rai kia akono tatou i te reira e kia takore atu i tetai uatu au tu takinokino anga enuā.

Me kare oki tatou e rave i teia, ka riro mai te reira ei akakino atu i to tatou ora'anga tangata e tua o te angaanga akapuapinga. Tukeke te au tk takinokino'anga enuā e tupu nei i te Kuki Airani nei, mei te akaki'anga o te au ngai varivari, angaanga i te pae ta'atai, titiri'anga tita e te repo e pera katoa i te akono'anga i to tatou vai inu. Ko tetai manamanata maata, ko te titiri'anga tita e te vai'anga repo. Kia akaiti tatou i ta tatou tita e pepe nei i te pae aranui, kia akamaroiroi tatou i te apai atu i te tita ki te ngai titiri'anga tita i Arorangi. Te au apinga ka tano i te ta'anga'anga akaou ia, kia ta'anga'anga akaou ia te reira mei te moina plastic. I raro ake i te ture Aorangi 2003, ka apa koe i te ture me titiri tita koe i te pae aranui. Te repo manu e te tangata, kia akara vaiata atu ia te akaareanga e kia

Te au apinga ka tano i te ta'anga'anga akaou akono meitaki ia te reira.

Me ka rave tatou i teia au angaanga mate tau ka takore atu tatou i te takinokino'anga enuā. Kia vai ma to tatou ipukarea ei meitaki noku, noou e te uki ki mua.



### Rarotonga's wetlands

Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystem in the world and are valuable to you and your community. They improve water quality by absorbing and filtering out pollutants and sediments in the water. They also store floodwaters, acting as natural sponges and slowing down the force of flood and storm waters. Wetlands support biodiversity by providing breeding grounds for wildlife and nursery areas for fish.

#### Avatiu taro patch



The taro patches in Avatiu are an example of wetlands in the Cook Islands. This is a highly productive ecosystem that is able to provide nutrients for plant species such as taro and bananas.

#### Ngatangia salt marshes – what's left of them



The salt marshes in Aroko, Ngatangia are another form of wetland. It is the last remaining salt marshes on Rarotonga where plant species such as kiukiu or matie vairakau, a seagrass are mainly found. This salt marsh area is also an important area for fish breeding. It is traditionally known that seagrass provides shelter and hatchery conditions for locally important fish species.

Our wetlands are being threatened by the filling in of taro patches and marsh areas for land reclamation and development. Our communities need to be concerned, and look at ways to preserve this valuable ecosystem before it is lost from our islands.