



ʻAkaterereʻanga Ranga Pōkai i te Ipukarea

Guiding principles for
Research in the Cook Islands



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Central Policy and Planning Office
Te Kōutu Mana Tūtara O Te Ipukarea
Office of the Prime Minister
Government of the Cook Islands
Rarotonga, Cook Islands

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`Akatomo`anga – Introduction

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

The Cook Islands National Research Committee (CINRC) will engage with host institutions regarding any non-compliance with research approval conditions.

These guiding principles incorporate lessons learned from past experiences and elements from the Health Research Council of New Zealand Pacific Research Guidelines (2014)¹.

`Akakoro`anga – Purpose

This document outlines conditions for all research in the Cook Islands, aiming to provide guidance to:

1. Researchers planning to undertake research in the Cook Islands
2. Researchers collecting biological and environmental samples for analysis.
3. Researchers applying for a research permit from the CINRC.

Aite`anga o te Ranga Pōkai i roto i te Ipukarea – Defining Cook Islands research

Research is a structured and systematic process of investigation, gathering, and analysing information, data or evidence. This is to develop knowledge and gain a deeper understanding on a specific topic, problem or question. In the Cook Islands, research for the purpose of this guide, refers to empirical research must be based on observation and measurement of phenomena directly experienced by the researcher. This may include other areas as deemed appropriate by the respective research authorities

The primary role of Cook Islands research is to generate knowledge and understanding for and about the Cook Islands. It must also be noted and acknowledged, that the Cook Islands has its own Māori knowledge systems which are highly valued and encouraged in research design.

These guiding principles are based on values established through consultations under the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+ (NSDA 2020+).

¹ 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.

Vaerua `Okota`i – Our values

Tū `Oa`oa – Reciprocal Relationships: this is 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 and do good. Researchers provide skills and resources while participants provide data, knowledge, and wisdom. The researchers benefit in terms of enhancing their 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.

Tū 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 the 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 ownership² is important to avoid exploitation of culturally owned knowledge and genetic material.

The first is **intellectual property rights**, which is based on individual ownership

² 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).

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*³, and UNESCO`s *Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights*⁴. Collective ownership of knowledge is important for sustaining collective identity and sense of being⁵. In Cook Islands cosmology, some forms of knowledge are considered tapu (sacred) and need to be treated with respect⁶. Researchers must reach mutual agreement prior to the collection of data in respect of ownership of data and authorship of publications.

6. Researching 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 use⁷.

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 ([Appendix 01: Material Transfer Form](#)).

³ See United Nations (2007). Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. New York: United Nations.

⁴ UNESCO (2005). Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights. New York: UNESCO.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ See Ratuva and Mead (2007).

National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+ Kia Orana

Shared understandings for context



Kite Pakari. *Knowledge* – 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.



`Irinaki`anga vaerua. *Faith* – 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`i`anga. *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 e te `Au. *Humility* – the quality of having a modest view of one`s importance and peaceful nature – marked by tranquillity and the absence of 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



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 goals outlined in Te Ara `Akapapa`anga Nui: The National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+ (NSDA 2020+) and its iterations⁸. 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 Ara `Akapapa`anga Nui framework through 25-year Uki `Akapapa`anga 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 five-year 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, fulfilment 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 maximize benefits. The benefits of research should be shared equitably between the researched communities and the researchers. For researchers, the benefits include professional

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

advancement and job satisfaction. For researched communities in the Cook Islands, benefits derived from research and patents on cultural knowledge should assist them.

The principle of non-maleficence is just as important as the principle of beneficence. Non-maleficence refers to the commitment and obligation not to cause harm and to guard against avoidable harm to research participants in the Cook Islands. Care must be taken to ensure that Cook Islands people are protected from harmful aspects and outcomes of research. Research findings must not threaten the way of life or interests of the community, nor should they reinforce racial stereotypes that undermine their identity and sense of belonging. Researchers must be transparent and honest when engaging with the community and must not manipulate the situation for personal gain or exploitation. Maintaining a reciprocal relationship by providing feedback is essential to uphold ethical standards.

2. Ensure that Cook Islands participants in research projects are clearly informed about the research; and their rights as research participants.

Prior⁹, free, and informed consent¹⁰ 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, decision-making and implementation. This ensures the project is responsive and accountable to the research needs of the participant community.

4. Be undertaken in an appropriate, ethical and effective manner in accordance with relevant ethical standards for research the ethical guidelines of the of the researchers` affiliate institution.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

Ethics approval from the Cook Islands Research Ethics Committee must be attached to the application form for conducting research in the Cook Islands.

5. Be led by researchers who have a proven record of research experience, professional competence, and appropriate qualifications.

A brief summary of the researchers` experience should be included in participant information sheets to reassure prospective participants of their credibility.

6. Be disseminated and made accessible to research participants and the Cook Islands community.

Dissemination of the research findings is a significant part of maintaining respect and reciprocity. It acknowledges the contributions of the participant community and the researchers` role in the development of the Cook Islands. The final research publication should not only acknowledge the participants but reflect a sense of co-ownership by the community that provided the knowledge and information that made the research possible.

Effective, responsive, adequately resourced, and appropriate dissemination is an essential form of reciprocity in research. The results of the research should be publicised using multiple means to ensure broad access and engagement.

Taka`i`anga Ranga Pōkai – 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/> ([Appendix 2](#): Research Approval process flowchart)

Note to applicants: We welcome types of research; however, we request information on your research aligns with the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA)¹¹. This request is for reporting purposes.

The timeframe for assessing an application is **three weeks** from the date of receipt. Upon receipt of the application, the Cook Islands National Research Committee (CINRC) Secretariat will:

1. Acknowledge receipt of the research application via email
2. Verify that the application form is complete and assessed the risk classification
3. Forward the research application to the Cook Islands National Research Ethics Committee (CIREC) or the CINRC for assessment as per risk classification
4. Correspond with the applicant for further information as requested by the CIREC or CINRC
5. Advise the applicant of CINRC`s decision for a research permit.

Before CINRC`s approval, **relevant authorities** must provide necessary approvals. After the CIREC review, applicants may wait up to three weeks for feedback before the permit is issued.

¹¹ NSDA documents link: <https://www.pmooffice.gov.ck/nsda/documents/>

Please note your research start date may have to be adjusted as appropriate. Further extension of the permit will require approval by the CINRC. All applications are risk analysed prior to CIREC meeting by secretariat and chairperson.

Risk Classification

1. High and Medium Risk – Applications in this category are reviewed by the CIREC.
2. Low Risk– Applications are processed directly to the CINRC.

Examples of High–risk research includes studies involving:

- Animals
- Laboratory testing
- Human participants
- Vulnerable communities
- Cybersecurity and artificial intelligence
- Dual use research – technologies, infrastructure

Researcher Requirements

- ✓ Applicants undertaking a research degree (e.g., Masters, PhD) only require an academic supervisor for the “Cook Islands investigator” in the application form
- ✓ The Cook Islands investigator must provide a brief summary of their research experience and any relevant cultural aspects
- ✓ All other research applicants must have a Cook Islands Researcher (CI & PR) or a local expert
- ✓ Cook Islands researchers residing in country may not require a local researcher, however, this will be determined at the committee`s discretion
- ✓ Cook Islanders based overseas may require assistance from a local researcher
- ✓ Conditional to the research permit being approved is the submission of a **preliminary report** required **one month after the completion of the research fieldwork**
- ✓ Applicants should allow up to three weeks for feedback before a research permit is issued. Research start dates may need to be adjusted accordingly.

Documentaries

1. Complete the Application for Ethics Approval (CIEAF-01) with clear rationale of the impact and benefits of the research to the human participants, cultural protocols and intellectual property
2. Submit the application to the Secretariat for review by the CIREC
3. Decision:
 - If `Met Ethics Criteria`, then application is submitted to the CINRC for final

endorsement

- If 'Not Approved', additional justification may be required; or Permit is declined

Land-based research

Researchers interested in land-based research must follow a two-stage process:

1. Researchers must first apply for a research permit from the CINRC. If approved, the 'Approval is in Principle' on the basis of written consent provided from relevant local authorities depending on the nature of the research. This could range from, but not limited to; Archaeological, Cultural Heritage and Health studies, to Agricultural, Environmental and Biodiversity studies
2. Once all necessary local and government approvals have been obtained, researchers must provide this information to the CINRC for the research permit to be issued.

Marine-based research

Researchers interested in marine-based research must follow a two-stage process:

1. Under the Marine Resources Act 2005, researchers must obtain written authorisation from the Secretary of Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) before applying for a research permit from the CINRC. Important: A research permit does not guarantee clearance to enter Cook Islands territorial waters. The Secretary of MMR will provide guidance on the required process for marine scientific research clearance.
2. Once you have the written authorisation from MMR, then you will be required to follow the CINRC research approval process for a research permit.

Seabed mineral-based research

Researchers interested in seabed minerals (related) research must follow a **two-stage process**:

1. Researchers must first apply for a research permit from the CINRC. If approved, the 'Approval is in Principle' on the basis of written consent provided from relevant local authorities depending on the nature of the research. This could range from, marine scientific research, spatial mapping to social-economic research.
2. Once all necessary local and government approvals have been obtained, researchers must provide this information to the CINRC for the research permit to be issued.

Intellectual Property

What is Intellectual Property (IP) in the Cook Islands?

Researchers conducting studies in the Cook Islands must adhere to national IP laws and policies to ensure compliance with copyright, traditional knowledge, and access and benefit-sharing

(ABS)¹². This includes compliance to applicable New Zealand IP laws¹³ relating to patents, trademarks, and designs.

The Cook Islands is also a member of the [World Intellectual Property Organization](#) (WIPO) and has acceded to several key treaties¹⁴, which influence the IP landscape and enhance the protections for creators and researchers in the Cook Islands.

By understanding and adhering to these national and international IP frameworks, researchers can conduct their studies responsibly, ensuring compliance with both domestic laws and international standards.

Cultural Protocol for Research and Protection of Traditional Knowledge

The Cook Islands' traditional knowledge and cultural expressions are valuable intellectual property of its people. This protocol ensures that researchers engaging with Cook Islands communities adhere to ethical, legal, and cultural obligations, safeguarding the rights of knowledge holders ([Appendix 03](#)).

Guiding Principles

- **Respect for Traditional Knowledge Holders** – Acknowledging and honouring the custodians of traditional knowledge.
- **Prior Informed Consent** – Ensuring knowledge holders fully understand and agree to the research scope and potential use of their knowledge.
- **Equitable Benefit Sharing** – Where traditional knowledge has commercial or research value, the benefits must be shared fairly.
- **Cultural Integrity** – Protecting the authenticity of knowledge and ensuring it is used in ways that align with Cook Islands customs and values.
- **Transparency and Accountability** – Researchers must provide clear objectives, methodologies, and intended outcomes.

Cultural protocol for Research Approval

1. **Engagement with Traditional Knowledge Holders** – Researchers must approach the rightful custodians of knowledge through community leaders, elders, or designated representatives.
2. **Formal Consent Process** – A documented agreement ([Appendix 04](#)) outlining the scope of research, intended use of knowledge, and benefit-sharing arrangements.
3. **Review by a Cultural Authority** – A national cultural body or relevant government agency should review and approve agreements to ensure compliance with this protocol.
4. **Compliance with Local Laws** – Researchers must adhere to Cook Islands intellectual

¹² National IP legislations: Copyright Act 2013, Traditional Act 2013; Access and Benefit Sharing policy

¹³ Applicable NZ IP legislation: Patent Act 2013, Trademarks Act 2002, Designs Act 1963

¹⁴ WIPO conventions acceded to by the Cook Islands: WIPO Convention (2016), Berne Convention (2017), Beijing Treaty (2019), WIPO Copyright Treaty (2019), WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty (2019), Marrakesh Treaty (2019)

property and cultural heritage legislation.

5. **Ongoing Consultation and Reporting** – Researchers must maintain communication with knowledge holders throughout the research process and provide findings back to the community.

Protection of Commercially Sensitive Data and National Intellectual Property

The Cook Islands affirms its sovereign rights over research findings generated within its jurisdiction. Researchers and affiliated institutions are required to:

- Declare any commercial intent, potential for patents, or planned intellectual property claims.
- Refrain from publishing, disclosing, transferring, or commercializing data without explicit authorization where it involves:
 - Marine genetic resources;
 - Seabed minerals assessments;
 - Ecological baselines of the EEZ;
 - Traditional knowledge systems; or
 - Any research output that may have strategic or economic value to the Cook Islands.
- Failure to safeguard this information may result in civil penalties, international legal claims, and disqualification from future research opportunities in the country.

All research must undergo final review to assess:

- Compliance with permit terms;
- Integrity and security of data collected;
- Fulfilment of benefit-sharing obligations, including appropriate reporting back to local communities and institutions.
- Findings with national relevance must be shared with the CINRC before any international dissemination.

Reporting of unauthorized Research

Researchers conducting research in the Cook Islands without a valid permit should be reported to the CINRC through the official complaints process outlined in the Research Ethics Guidelines.

Members of the community, government agencies, and local researchers are encouraged to report any suspicious research activities that may harm the Cook Islands people, environment, or cultural heritage.

Researchers are strongly encouraged to comply with all Cook Islands research policies to avoid penalties, maintain ethical integrity, and foster positive research collaborations.

Penalties for unauthorized Research and Breaches of Research Permit conditions

Conducting research in the Cook Islands without the required approvals and permits constitutes a serious breach of national research policies and regulations. The Cook Islands National Research Committee (CINRC) enforces the following penalties for unauthorized research activities or violations of permit conditions:

1. Formal Warning

First-time offenders may receive a written warning from the CINRC. The researcher will be required to immediately cease all research activities until appropriate authorization is obtained.

2. Research Suspension or Termination

If a researcher continues to operate without a permit despite prior warnings, the CINRC reserves the right to suspend or permanently terminate the research project. All data collected during unauthorized research may be confiscated or declared invalid.

3. Fines and Financial Penalties

The CINRC may impose monetary penalties based on the severity of the violation. In cases involving exploitation of indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, or intellectual property, additional penalties may apply, including financial compensation to affected communities.

4. Legal Action

Serious breaches—such as misrepresentation of research intentions, gross misconduct, or causing environmental harm—may result in legal proceedings under Cook Islands law. Civil suits may also be pursued for violations of ethical research standards or unauthorized use of indigenous knowledge.

5. Immigration Sanctions

Foreign researchers found conducting unauthorized research may face deportation and temporary or permanent entry bans. Future research permit applications from the individual or their affiliated institution may be automatically declined.

6. Institutional Repercussions

The CINRC may notify the researcher's home institution or funding agency of the violation. Institutions that consistently fail to ensure compliance with Cook Islands regulations may be blacklisted from future research collaboration.

7. Ethical Review and Reputation Damage

Unauthorized research may trigger negative ethical reviews and damage the researcher's professional reputation. Academic journals and research institutions may flag or retract publications based on unauthorized data or findings.

Monitoring, Reporting and random inspections

To ensure compliance with national research regulations and protect Cook Islands' strategic, environmental, and intellectual interests, the Cook Islands National Research Committee (CINRC), in partnership with relevant government agencies—including the Ministry of Marine Resources, Seabed Minerals Authority, National Environment Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, and others—implements a robust monitoring, reporting, and inspections framework. This includes the following:

1. Mandatory Reporting Requirements

All research conducted under an approved permit must adhere to mandatory reporting obligations:

Preliminary Report

A Preliminary Report is required to be submitted within one month of completing the fieldwork phase of the research. Submission of this report is a condition of the research permit, and failure to comply may result in penalties, permit suspension, or disqualification from future research activity.

Final Research Report

A Final Research Report must be submitted to the Research Secretariat in three hard copies and one digital copy. Distribution is as follows:

- i. One hard copy and digital copy to the Central Policy and Planning Office (CPPO);
- ii. One hard copy to the National Library – Te Runanga Puka;
- iii. One hard copy to the University of the South Pacific.

Content Requirements

Both reports must detail research methodology, locations, data collected, ethical protocols followed, and any observed or potential policy, environmental, or economic implications.

Reports must also disclose:

- Any commercial or strategic sensitivity of data;
- Potential intellectual property or patent claims;
- Plans for publications or **international** dissemination;
- Measures for benefit-sharing or capacity building with Cook Islands stakeholders.

Failure to meet reporting obligations may result in the invalidation of research outputs, forfeiture of data rights, publication bans, and restriction from future research activities in the Cook Islands.

2. Community and Institutional Feedback Channels

Local communities, institutions, and national agencies may submit feedback or lodge complaints regarding any research activity suspected of violating permit conditions, ethical standards, or cultural protocols. This feedback forms part of the ongoing compliance assessment and can trigger further scrutiny or investigation.

3. Random Inspections

CINRC and relevant authorities reserve the right to conduct random or targeted inspections, including unannounced visits, particularly in high-sensitivity research areas. This applies especially to:

- Marine scientific research (MSR);
- Activities in or near marine protected areas, the seabed, or exclusive economic zones (EEZ);
- Research associated with foreign vessels and strategic actors.

Inspections will verify compliance with permit terms, sample management, data custody, and environmental safeguards.

4. Special Oversight for Marine Scientific Research

Marine scientific research—especially by foreign researchers or institutions—receives enhanced scrutiny, particularly where activities involve:

- Seabed minerals exploration;
- Marine genetic resource sampling;
- Bio-prospecting or resource assessment;
- Data gathering of potential military, strategic, or surveillance value.

Unauthorized MSR or failure to declare strategic affiliations will be treated as serious breaches and may lead to enforcement action, maritime interdiction, diplomatic protest, or international notification through relevant regional security frameworks.

Payment process for Permit fees

Once the research application is approved, all researchers are encouraged to pay online. The Secretariat will **not** handle cash payments.

The Committee may exercise discretion regarding fees for certain applications, for example, permit extensions, addendums and the like.

Immigration requirements and Visa-related information

Before applying for a visa through the Cook Islands immigration process and traveling to the Cook Islands for research, you must first obtain a research permit.

Upon arrival in the Cook Islands, when completing the immigration arrival card, select

“Other” and write “Research” along with your research approval number. Ensure you carry a copy of your research permit at all times.

A research visa and permit do not cover spouses or dependent children. They must enter as visitors and apply for a visitor extension while in the Cook Islands if they wish to stay longer.

Tax Obligations for Researchers

1. If the Researcher is a tax resident in the Cook Islands as an independent contractor, the local researcher must file a return annually and pay tax accordingly.
2. If the Researcher is an employee of a Cook Islands based company, the company will deduct PAYE tax from payments made to employee. Need to file an income tax return each year.
3. If the non-resident Researcher has a research permit in the Cook Islands, the non-resident Researcher is eligible to tax-free status proportional to the number of days present in the Cook Islands; i.e. non-taxable for stay less than 30 days.

Closing Reflections

The Cook Islands National Research Guide provides an important framework to uphold the integrity, transparency, and accountability of all research conducted within our jurisdiction. It reflects our commitment to protecting the interests of our people, environment, and cultural heritage, while promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing. By ensuring ethical standards and safeguarding sensitive data and intellectual property, this guide supports research that contributes positively to national development and global understanding.

We invite constructive feedback from all stakeholders to help strengthen and improve this framework, ensuring it remains responsive, inclusive, and effective for the evolving needs of the Cook Islands.

Cook Islands National Research Committee - Terms of reference

Role

The primary role of the Cook Islands National Research Committee (CINRC) 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 CINRC is made up of 11 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
11. Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA) – Commissioner

The Research Secretariat shall be the Central Policy and Planning Office (CPPO) – Office of the Prime Minister.

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. At the conclusion of a term of two years. Committee members can discuss the possibility of the position of chair revolving amongst members.

Quorum

The quorum will comprise 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.

Akara`anga na te Kumiti Akatere – 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

References

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Appendix 01: Material Transfer Agreement (MTA)

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Material Transfer Agreement (MTA)

This agreement (hereinafter referred to as “**MTA**”) is entered into by and between:

i. _____, COOK ISLANDS, represented by _____
Secretary for _____ (hereinafter referred to as “**Provider**”)

AND

ii. _____ (hereinafter referred to as “**Researcher**”).

Hereinafter, jointly or individually, referred to as “**Parties**” or” **Party**”

SECTION 1 Purpose of the MTA

This MTA sets out the terms and conditions governing the transfer of biological and/or cultural material outside of the Cook Islands, as defined in Section 2.

SECTION 2 Description of Material

2.1 Biological Material

The Biological Material (hereinafter referred to as "Material") covered by this MTA includes any material derived from or produced by biological organisms, such as plants, animals, bacteria, fungi, and other life forms. This includes, but is not limited to, nodules, human remains, bones, and other biologically derived materials.

2.2 Cultural Material

The Cultural Material (hereinafter referred to as "C Material") covered by this MTA includes physical objects such as instruments, tools, weapons, utensils, and buildings, as well as intangible cultural elements such as ideas, customs, languages, value systems, and songs.

2.3 Collection Details

The Material and C Material are collected by _____.

SECTION 3 Status of the Material

The Material originates from biological and cultural resources over which the Provider has jurisdiction. It remains under the sovereignty of the Provider at all times.

SECTION 4 Authorised utilisation of the Material

The **Material** is provided by the **Provider** to the **Researcher** for the specific purpose of:

All authorized activities are outlined in the collaborative agreement appended to this MTA (Annex 1: Approved Research Permit).

SECTION 5 Obligation of the Researcher

5.1 The Researcher shall handle the Material in compliance with all applicable national and international laws, regulations, and guidelines.

5.2 The Researcher shall ensure that only individuals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise handle the Material.

5.3 The Provider and its employees shall not be held liable for any loss, damage, claim, or liability arising from the Researcher's use of the Material.

5.4 For the duration of the project and for five (5) years after its completion, the Researcher shall provide the Provider with any results or data obtained from the evaluation or utilization of the Material.

SECTION 6 Publications

6.1 The Researcher shall notify the Provider in writing of any intended publication or communication related to the Material.

6.2 The Provider has one (1) month from receipt of the notification to approve or reject the proposed publication.

6.3 The Researcher shall provide the Provider with a final copy of any approved publication.

SECTION 7 Intellectual Property Rights

The **Provider** is pleased to supply a sample of the **Material** described in Section 2, under the following conditions:

7.1 **Material** is used for strictly non-commercial purposes and will not be used by the **Researcher** for, nor supplied to any other parties for commercial purposes, even if those purposes are being pursued in the same laboratory;

7.2 The **Material** is made available for the purpose of the work performed in Annex 1 and will not be used for any other purpose without the express, written consent of the **Provider**;

7.3 In the event that the **Researcher** makes or observes any new discovery, improvement or invention (hereafter "Invention") relating to the **Material**, whether patentable or not, the **Researcher** will act to ensure that the protection of any rights to the Invention is not destroyed nor endangered by way of disclosure or any other route and shall bring this to the immediate attention of the **Provider**. The **Researcher** will not make any patent or secure other property rights without the express agreement of the **Provider**. A further agreement will be sought to specify the share of any benefits from the exploitation of Invention between the **Researcher** and the **Provider**.

7.4 The **Provider** will, at all times, retain the right to use any such an Invention for non-commercial research purposes only;

7.5 Repatriation The researcher will pay for repatriation of materials as agreed to by the provider

7.6 At any time requested by the **Provider** or in the event that the **Researcher** fails to comply with the conditions and provisions of this **MTA**, the **Researcher** shall immediately return the **Material** where and if possible, to the **Provider** and destroy any copies of the **Material** which may have been made in the course of the Work.

SECTION 8 Guarantee, exclusion of warranty and liability

8.1 The **Material** is experimental in nature and is provided without any warranty or guarantee with respect to its performance or fitness for any particular purpose or to the completeness and accuracy of any information related to the **Material** supplied by the **Provider** or any other source.

8.2 The **Provider** makes no representation and provides no warranty that the use of the **Material** will not infringe any other patent, copyright or any other proprietary right.

8.3 The **Provider** shall not be liable for any direct, indirect, consequential or other damages suffered by **Researcher** or any third parties resulting from the possession or the use of the **Material** pursuant to this **MTA**.

SECTION 9 Duration and Termination

9.1 This MTA shall be effective from the date of signature and remain in effect indefinitely unless terminated as specified below.

9.2 Either Party may terminate this MTA at any time with thirty (30) days' prior written notice.

9.3 Upon termination, the Researcher shall immediately cease use of the Material and dispose of it according to the Provider's written instructions.

SECTION 10 Contact Persons

For the Provider: Phone:

For the Researcher: Phone:

Email:

Email:

Date:

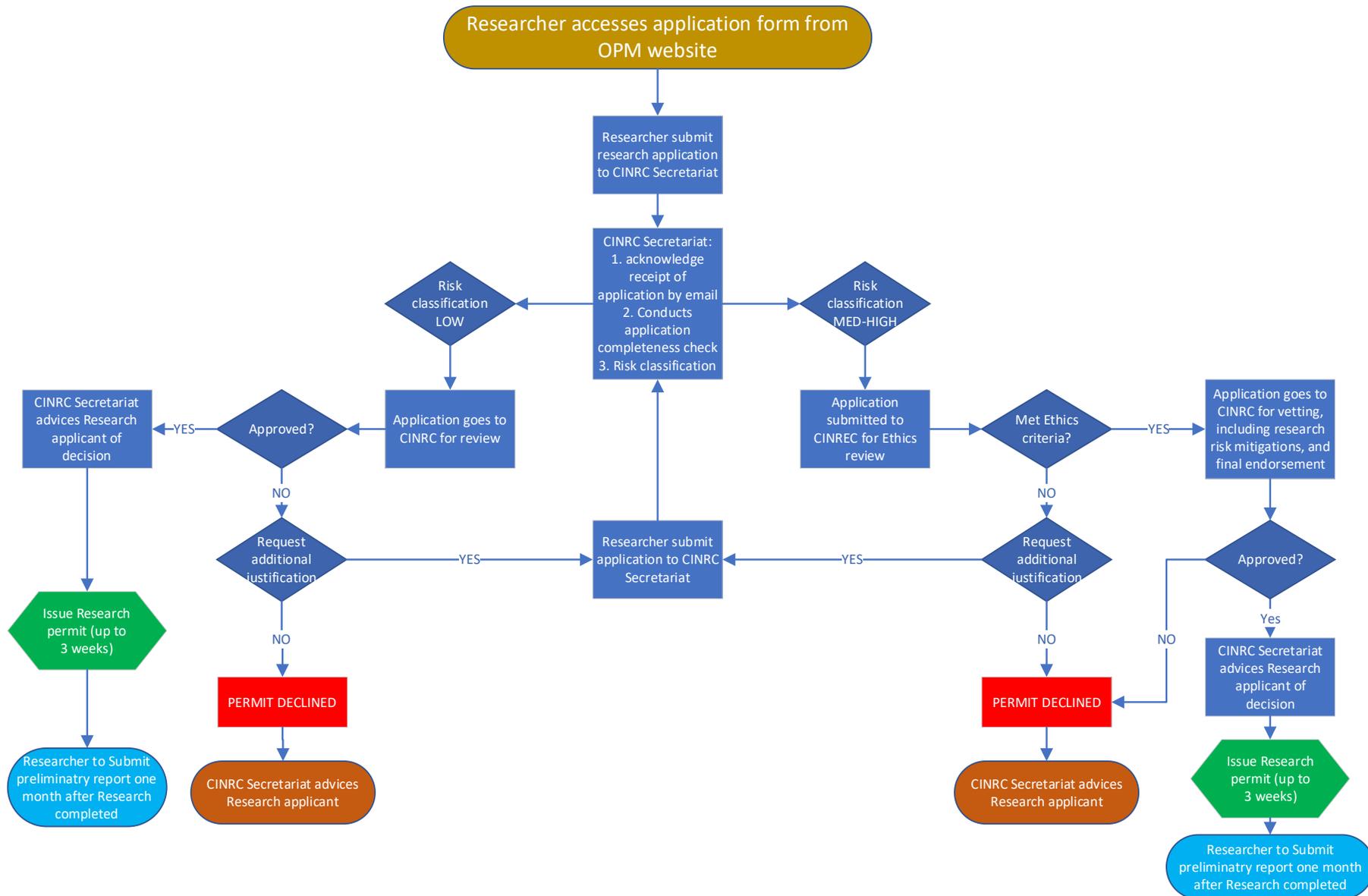
Date:

ANNEX 1

[APPEND A SCANNED COPY OF THE RESEARCH PERMIT APPLICATION]

Appendix 02: Research Application Process Flow Chart

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Appendix 03: Akono`anga Maori - Cultural considerations for Research

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When conducting research in the Cook Islands, it is essential to be culturally sensitive and respectful. The Cook Islands have a unique culture deeply rooted in traditions, and understanding these cultural considerations is crucial for building trust and conducting meaningful research. Below are key cultural protocols to observe:

Mana Pou Toru – Three Pillars of Authority: Three sources of power in the Cook Islands which are always consulted and acknowledged. Traditional tribal titles, the Church and Government.

Tutā`aka`aka - Respect for Elders: Elders (Pa Metua) hold a significant role in Cook Islands society and are highly respected. When conducting research, especially involving older generations, it is essential to seek their guidance and approval.

`Aka`aravei`anga - Traditional Greetings: A warm welcome is customary. The traditional greeting often involves a kiss on the cheek, especially among close acquaintances. When meeting locals or entering someone`s home, politeness and courtesy are highly valued. Establishing connections through papa`anga (genealogies) is a meaningful way to build rapport.

Uipa`anga - Community Engagement: Community participation is fundamental in research. Engaging with local leaders and seeking permission before conducting research in a particular area is crucial. Informing the community at island meetings is often an essential part of the process.

Kai Vananga - Oral Tradition: The Cook Islands have a strong oral tradition, where storytelling plays a vital role in preserving history and culture. Researchers should be prepared to listen to and respect oral narratives, as they provide valuable cultural insights. Where possible, research methods should incorporate oral traditions to align with cultural practices.

Reo/Talatala - Language: While English is widely spoken, particularly in Rarotonga and for official matters, it is important to acknowledge and respect the use of Cook Islands Māori (Reo Māori) and Talatala in Pukapuka. Learning and using basic phrases in these languages demonstrates cultural respect and appreciation.

Peu Māori -Traditional Values and Customs: The Cook Islands uphold strong traditional values and customs. Some locations are considered sacred (*tapu*), and researchers should always consult local authorities or elders before accessing these sites to avoid causing offense.

Taonga - Gift-Giving: Offering small, culturally appropriate gifts can help build goodwill with local participants and informants. However, researchers must ensure that gifts do not violate local customs.

Rakei tau - Modesty and Dress Code: Dress modestly when interacting with locals, especially in rural and traditional areas. Revealing clothing may be considered disrespectful in some contexts.

Tika`anga – Permissions, Consent, and Ethical Research:

Informed Consent: Always obtain informed consent from participants before conducting research. Clearly explain the purpose of the research and how their

information will be used and shared.

Landowner consultations: When working in the outer islands (*Pa Enea*), permission must be sought not only from the Mayor and Island Council but also from relevant landowners.

Local Expertise: Collaborate with local experts or cultural advisers who can provide insights into the nuances of Cook Islands customs and protocols.

Gender and Religious considerations:

Gender Sensitivity: Be aware of traditional gender roles and expectations within the Cook Islands. It's important to approach research involving sensitive topics related to gender with care and respect.

Religious Observance: Sunday is traditionally a day of worship and rest in the Cook Islands. Most businesses and work activities cease on this day, and researchers should plan accordingly.

Some useful vocabulary

Aro`a and Meitaki: These are defined as Love, kindness and thankfulness. These expressions are very important to Cook Islanders

Akaoki te meitaki: Can be described as (give back) which is through compensation and ensuring that the results of the research are shared as effectively as possible.

Taonga/Atinga – Donation: This custom serve to maintain reciprocal ties within the family and community. There should be some kind of offer to the participants.

Akapapa`anga: A cornerstone of Cook Islands Māori society. It informs the way our society is built and the collective enterprise of our people. It is important that our Akapapa`anga and values guide us through ethical matters. Akapapa`anga is central to understanding Cook Islands Maori world views and the connections which binds us together, including, the Moana (sea), Enea (land) and Mareva (air).

Ranga Pokai or KimiKimi`anga – Research

Uipa`anga or Iriiri Kapua - Consultation

Pa Metua - Elders

Ariki - High chief, ruler over a tribe (paramount chief),

Mataipo/Tutara - The head of a sub-tribe. (Paramount in their matakeinanga),

Rangatira - Hereditary title under the Ariki or Mataiapo.

Te Kopapa Reo Maori - Delegated authority on Cook Islands Maori language.

Please note that the Cook Islands consist of multiple islands, and there may be variations in culture and customs between them. Always be open to learning and adapting to the specific cultural norms of the area you are conducting research in. Building trust and establishing good relationships with the local community is key to successful research in the Cook Islands.

Appendix 04: (SAMPLE) Formal Agreement Between Traditional Knowledge Holders and Researchers

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1. Parties to the Agreement

This agreement is made between:

- i. **Traditional Knowledge Holders:**
 - o Name(s): _____
 - o Village/Community: _____
 - o Representative (if applicable): _____
- ii. **Researcher(s):**
 - o Name: _____
 - o Institution/Organisation: _____
 - o Contact Information: _____

2. Scope of Research

- Title of Research Project: _____
- Purpose of Research: _____
- Expected Duration: _____
- Knowledge Areas Covered: _____

3. Consent and Use of Knowledge

- The researcher agrees to respect and acknowledge the knowledge holders as the rightful custodians of the knowledge shared.
- The knowledge holders consent to sharing knowledge for the specified research purposes only.
- Any use beyond the original scope requires further written consent.

4. Intellectual Property and Benefit Sharing

- The rights to the traditional knowledge remain with the knowledge holders.
- If the research leads to commercial applications, the researcher commits to fair benefit-sharing, which may include:
 - o **Revenue sharing** (percentage agreed upon)
 - o **Co-authorship in publications**
 - o **Community development contributions**
 - o **Other agreed-upon benefits**

5. Confidentiality and Cultural Integrity

- Certain knowledge may be classified as sacred or restricted. Researchers must not publish, disclose, or use such knowledge without explicit permission.
- The researcher must ensure that findings are represented accurately and respectfully in any publications or presentations.

6. Reporting and Community Access to Research

- A copy of all research findings will be provided to the knowledge holders and the appropriate cultural authority.
- Knowledge holders retain the right to review and approve findings before public dissemination.

7. Dispute Resolution

- Any disputes arising under this agreement will first be resolved through dialogue between parties.
- If unresolved, disputes may be referred to a local cultural authority or mediation body.

8. Signatures

We, the undersigned, agree to the terms outlined in this agreement.

Traditional Knowledge Holder(s):

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher(s):

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Witness (if applicable):

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____



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