



Initiatives in the Pacific Islands

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Environmental management is a key issue for Pacific Island countries and territories. Naturally, with their island environments, management of the marine environment is a central issue. The Pacific Islands are faced with marine impacts from climate change, ocean acidification, pollution such as marine rubbish, overfishing, off shore mining, and numerous coastal developments. Reef systems and inshore fisheries are under constant pressure from a range of effects, as are the livelihoods of island people and customary practices that derive from marine and coastal resources.

NZAIA has worked with the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) to support the development of impact assessment practice, under the guidance of our [Memorandum of Understanding](#). Collaboration between our organisations was part of the technical input to development of the EIA guidelines “[Strengthening Environmental Impact Assessment: Guidelines for Pacific Island Countries and Territories](#)” published by SPREP. The EIA guidelines point out that impact assessment is required in the Pacific at both project (site specific) and strategic levels. In particular, SEA has considerable potential to provide a framework for better application of IA to policy, plans and programmes, with the objective of increasing sustainability and the resilience of island ecosystems, societies and economics. Examples include coastal zone planning and tourism strategies and plans.

The SPREP EIA Guidelines indicate that climate change considerations and disaster risk reduction and management are key themes for Pacific Island impact assessments to address, particularly at the strategic level. There is also room to improve the ways that island nations tackle other complex problems such as marine spatial planning and coastal area management to accommodate increasing pressure from population, urban development, and expanding infrastructure.

Specific to IA and the marine environment are issues such as coastal erosion and extraction of sand and aggregates, reclamation, vulnerability to climate events and natural hazards such as cyclones and tsunamis, pollution of coastal waters with human or other waste streams, noxious spills, coastal developments such as resorts, harbours, marinas and other transport infrastructure, damage to coral reefs, aquaculture development, and sustainability of fish harvesting. Social and economic concerns include employment and business opportunities, lifestyles and livelihoods, customary rights and practices, and recreational uses.

Reliable information is essential for impact assessment and monitoring purposes anywhere. Indicators for IA and the marine environment as outlined in the guidelines can include:

- live coral cover in an area
- lagoon/harbour water quality measures (e.g. of pH, dissolved oxygen, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, total suspended sediment in lagoon water, pathogens, agricultural chemicals and heavy metals)
- amount and type of fishing activity
- fish biomass harvested (by species) per year
- sea level rise (millimetres per year)
- presence of threatened animal or plant species
- presence of invasive species with potential ecological consequences
- amount of mangrove, seagrass beds and coastal vegetation
- visual amenity
- levels and types of tourist activity and use.

Capacity building and professional support are an important part of IA practice in the Pacific. In respect to climate change as an overarching theme for impact assessments to consider, it is useful to note that SPREP coordinates the Pacific Climate Change Roundtable in partnership with the Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific, Pacific Island governments, development partners and donors. The roundtable is the key platform for dialogue amongst the Pacific climate change community through its working groups and [portal to support members in developing approaches](#) to the effects of climate change.

Some other initiatives of interest are the recent [High-Level Pacific Blue Economy Conference](#) in Fiji: hosted by the Pacific island Development Forum, drawing attention to the likely future pressures on marine resources and challenges of sustainable oceans in a changing climate. Also, the upcoming [3rd Annual Asia-Pacific Deep Sea Mining conference](#) in Singapore in late Nov.

The World Bank [Pacific Possible](#) report looks at transformative opportunities for Pacific Island countries over the next 25 years and identifies the region's biggest challenges that require urgent action, including deep sea mining, fisheries and climate change and management of natural disasters. Networks are an important part of building IA practice in the Pacific, to help provide and support regional expertise and experience, and to source practical assistance where practitioners are working in relative professional isolation. The [Pacific Network for Environmental Assessment \(PNEA\)](#) aims to support government officials from Pacific island countries and territories who work with environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA).