



## REPORT OF THE COOK ISLANDS TRUSTEES

JANUARY TO JULY 2015

### MP GIFTING PROGRAM

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#### **TURA, Tai - Member of Parliament for Mauke**

A Cook Foundation grant has reinvigorated a cottage industry on the outer island of Mauke, whose population has been reduced to 300 as locals leave for greener economic pastures. The result is that the island struggles to maintain even nominal levels of industry. Tai Tura, who represents Mauke in the Cook Islands Parliament, elected to put his Cook Foundation grant toward revitalising coconut oil production as a moneymaking venture his community can depend on. Mauke is known for its coconut oil, coined Mauke Miracle Oil, which for years has been sold in small quantities at shops and markets on Rarotonga. But as the outer island's population decreases, the supply of Miracle Oil for export grows more sporadic. A reduced population means a reduced capacity to undertake daily chores like fishing and gathering and cooking, so there's less time to produce oil for commercial purposes. "In the old days, in Nga-pu-toru [the islands of Mauke, Mitiaro, and Atiu], we were known for making oil but you had to squeeze the coconut by hand," Tura says. "It's time consuming and it's hard work for the ladies. Now times are changing and they need some support." Support came in the form of a Cook Foundation grant. With the money Tura purchased two electric coconut graters and several large storage containers, and set up a makeshift production centre in his garage. "Makes the job much easier," he says, "and more comfortable for the women."

The women extract oil from grated coconut, then boil it with local herbs. One frequently used herb is from a thick-leaved plant called *pi*, which possesses a range of healing properties. The oil is most

often used as a medicine for sores. Traditional healers have always used it in massage, a primary method of alleviating aches and pains in a pharmaceutical-free society. The waste that accrues in the oil production process – the leftover coconut meat – is used as food. The oil is then sent to Rarotonga, where it's sold to tourists and locals alike. Tura says the project benefits not only the women who make the oil, but also the kids they pay to collect coconuts for them. "Keeps production going on our little island," he says, gazing into the distance, a smile on his face.

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## **BEER, James – Member of Parliament for Murienua**

Member of Parliament for Murienua James Beer received a \$2,000 grant from the Cook Foundation to help clean out the streams and waterways in his constituency. Formed in 2006 in the Cook Islands, the charitable foundation was set up by United Kingdom resident George Cook, who had an affinity to the islands and decided to set up the foundation to help the people.

Since the foundation was established, it has concentrated on giving twenty-four \$2,000 grants to each Member of Parliament every year, provided they can prove a particular project would benefit their constituency. Beer said the team was a little weary from all the physical activity of cleaning up streams from Kavera to Betela, but it was a successful day of team work. Beer said the streams between taro patches in his constituency were blocked up from recent rains wreaking havoc on the root vegetables and creating a good breeding environment for mosquitoes.

The money was used to buy basic equipment to do the work and to feed the many volunteers. Since the cleanup, the taro patches are much improved and weeds are no longer restricting the flow of water between streams, which was causing the blockages. Beer said he expected the work would take four or five weekends to finish. Weather permitting Kavera Pu Tapere William Pera is arranging another working bee today, Saturday January 31. "We'll be doing the Kavera to Aroa Muri a Vai this Saturday, leaving at 8am," said Beer. Heavy machinery would be used at the next working bee particularly at the Betela and Rutaki ends of the area, he said.

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## **HAGAI. Toka - Member of Parliament for Rakahanga**

On the atoll of Rakahanga in the northern Cook Islands, which is 1200 kilometres from a township or an international airport, there are no clothing shops. The only shop in the village sells basic foodstuffs like rice and sugar, and only when they're in stock, which isn't often, as there's no airstrip and the cargo ships arrive every five months or so.

So when Toka Hagai, who represents Rakahanga in the Cook Islands Parliament, learned about the Cook Foundation grant he was eligible to receive, he decided to use it toward something special for the 26 students of Rakuraku School. With the grant he purchased new uniforms. There is no cash economy on Rakahanga, and students' parents and grandparents would have been hardpressed to purchase new clothes for kids who would likely outgrow them. The uniforms are *pareu* print, or decorated in island patterns – a departure from the black and navy blue uniforms Rakuraku students have been wearing since Toka was in school. The students will begin wearing their new uniforms next term, but before they do, they will await Toka's next trip home so they can honour his gift, and celebrate Cook Islands style, with a formal ceremony and feast. Toka is grateful to the Cook Foundation for giving the kids in his village something to be excited about.

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## **NICHOLAS, Albert – Member of Parliament for Avatiu, Ruatonga and Palmerston Island**

\$2000 was donated to the Ruatonga community. Albert Nicholas said that “This fund will help to support the refurbishment of the Ruatonga meeting house. This is only made possible through the Cook Foundation, which continues to work with the MPs and the community to identify and support charitable causes in the Cook Islands”.

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## GENERAL COMMUNITY GIFTING PROGRAM

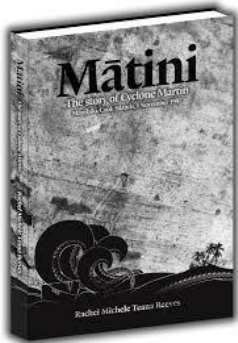
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### AVATIU MEETING HOUSE

If there's a focal point in the village of Avatiu – a place where people of all ages and creeds and codes can come together as a community – it's the meetinghouse. The building accommodates all kinds of functions, among them an annual end of year reception organised for Cook Islanders visiting from overseas; events for churches of all denominations; prize-giving ceremonies for all sports codes; memorial and funeral services; youth groups; workshops and training sessions organised by non-government organisations like Red Cross; and land meetings and disputes. John Henry, the Member of Parliament representing Avatiu and the surrounding area, calls the building a "community nest." The meetinghouse is of such social significance in his village that Henry had no trouble deciding how to spend his Cook Foundation grant. He chose to purchase new tables and chairs for the community centre, which will be maintained and looked after by a committee of organisers. Henry and the rest of the committee envision using the meetinghouse in new ways. They want to create a space for seniors and the disabled to gather, and they want to reinstitute the traditional practice of *patai*, or welcoming all outer islanders who arrive to Rarotonga via the Avatiu harbour.

"We have an old tradition within our community of welcoming people who come on the boat, a Maori *turou* and of course *kaikai* after so we are reviving that at the right time," Henry said, in this case "the right time" being the year 2015, during which the Cook Islands celebrates 50 years of self-governance.



## CYCLONE MARTIN CHARITABLE TRUST

On 1 November 1997 Cyclone Martin passed over Manihiki devastating the island, taking 19 lives. In 2014 the Cyclone Martin Charitable Trust was formed for the purpose of fundraising for and commissioning a book about the cyclone and its impact on the island and people of Manihiki. The Cooks Foundation was approached and donated \$2,000 to this project. The book 'Matini' was released this year.

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## PAPA KAIRENGA

A Cook Foundation grant has made it possible for a chronically hospitalised elderly man to spend the rest of his life at home. Papa Nooroa Kairenga, 90, is a respected community leader. He was a school principal, a Boys' Brigade leader, and an elder in his church, who received a Queen's award for his service to his community. Several years ago, Papa Nooroa developed a respiratory problem that forced him to be dependent on an oxygen tank and a wheelchair. This year, after spending weeks in the hospital, he begged his family to let him return home. The family appealed to the trustees of the Cook Foundation, who approved the release of a \$2,000 grant to cover most of the cost of an oxygen machine. Using what little means of income they had, the family came up with the remaining \$500. The man who sold the machine told Cook Foundation trustee Niki Rattle he deeply appreciated what it had done for him. "The four months of having [his] parents at home was well worth the \$4K," Rattle wrote in her proposal to fellow trustees. In the Cook Islands, where the fabric of family is tightly-woven, it is customary to keep loved ones close in their final moments, and even after they

have passed on. Local families sit around the open casket, and later bury their dead in the yard. To have their papa at home is a blessing for which the Kairenga family is deeply grateful. When Papa Nooroa passes away, the machine will be donated to Te Vaerua Community Rehabilitation Services, where it will be available for others to use or borrow.

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## **AVARUA SEA SCOUTS**

Since 1992, volunteers affiliated with the worldwide Sea Scouting movement have been imparting nautical skills to Cook Islands youth. Their tools have been two 5.2-metre wooden cutters – gifts from the New Zealand Sea Scouts in the 1980s. Sometime in 2013, the cutters fell out of serviceable shape – a local boat repairman declared them unseaworthy – and the Avarua Harbour chapter of the Sea Scouts disbanded. In 2015, the Cook Foundation granted the Scouts’ request for funding to refurbish the cutters. The money covers the cost of materials and professional input, and a team of volunteers is undertaking most of the labour. Sea Scouts leader Tangi Tereapii, a Wood Badge-carrying Scout who has been leading the local chapter since its inception, looks forward to being able to reconvene his scouts – boys and girls who range in age from six to 16. He teaches them to rig sailboats, prepare and use safety equipment, tie knots, and read the sea – all vital skills for people who call the islands home.

Ron Bird, a part-time Cook Islands resident who has been involved in Sea Scouts for 62 of his 73 years, is passionate about educating Pacific youth about seamanship and sea safety; he attends regional conferences on behalf of Sea Scouting chapters in Oceania and facilitates donations of equipment and lifejackets to Sea Scouts in the islands. Bird is troubled by the apparent lack of sea safety training among locals and the lack of signage and briefing provided for tourists who use the sea. He refers to a recent example of a tourist drowning after hiring what he alleges was a defective kayak. “We’ve got to raise awareness starting at the level of children... We’ve got to get young people to say, ‘Dad, going out beyond the reef without a lifejacket and radio is no longer acceptable,’” he says. “Now that we’re getting the boats up and running again, we can offer this programme for youth.”

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