



MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND IMMIGRATION
Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki

STRATEGIC INTENTIONS

2026-2030



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FOREWORD BY MINISTER

The world the Cook Islands navigates today is more complex, more contested, and more consequential than at any point in our recent history. Climate change continues to threaten the very foundations of Pacific life. Geopolitical shifts are redrawing the landscape of international relationships. New opportunities, in trade, ocean governance, digital diplomacy, are emerging alongside new risks. In this environment, the work of foreign affairs and immigration has never mattered more.

This Statement of Strategic Intentions sets out how the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration will rise to meet that moment — with clarity of purpose, strength of principle, and a deep and abiding commitment to the people of the Cook Islands, guided in the values of Cook Islanders – family, community, respect, generosity, loyalty, cooperation and guardianship of our environment and culture.



At the heart of this document are four strategic pillars — Security, Prosperity, Leadership, and Innovation — that together give shape and direction to everything MFAI does. They are not merely organisational categories. They are expressions of what we believe the Cook Islands must be: a nation that is safe and sovereign; economically resilient and self-determining; respected and influential on the world stage; and served by a public institution that is adaptive, capable, and worthy of the trust placed in it.

These pillars are anchored in our national commitments — the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+, the National Security Policy, and the frameworks that bind us to our Pacific neighbours and the wider international community. They are equally grounded in who we are as a people, in our Pacific values, our ocean identity, and our enduring belief that a small nation can, and must, play a principled and meaningful role in shaping the world it inhabits.

What gives me confidence in this Statement of Strategic Intentions is not simply the quality of its ambitions, but the strength of the foundations on which those ambitions rest. MFAI does not act alone. Our work depends on the partnerships we nurture across government, across the Pacific, and across the globe. It depends on the relationships we have built with New Zealand through the Waka Hourua / Vaka Purua Statement of Partnership, with Australia through the 'Oa Tumanava Partnership, and with the growing number of partners who recognise the Cook Islands as a credible, principled, and valuable voice in international affairs.

It also depends, perhaps most of all, on the people of MFAI itself. Those that bring to their work a level of dedication, expertise, and pride in service that I have the privilege of witnessing every day. This document is, in many respects, a testament to their efforts. I commend this Statement of Strategic Intentions to all who serve in and alongside MFAI. It is our compass, our commitment, and our call to action. Let us navigate the waters ahead — as our ancestors always have — with courage, with wisdom, and with our eyes firmly fixed on the horizon.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tingika Elikana', written in a stylized, cursive script.

Hon. Tingika Elikana
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration

INTRODUCTION FROM SECFAI

A Statement of Intent is only as powerful as the people who bring it to life.

The Minister has set out with clarity and conviction the strategic landscape we navigate and the ambitions we carry on behalf of the Cook Islands. My role, and the role of every person in this Ministry, is to translate that ambition into action.

MFAI is a small ministry with an extraordinarily broad mandate. We are asked to safeguard our nation's security, advance its prosperity, elevate its voice on the world stage, and build an organisation capable of doing all of this with integrity and excellence — often simultaneously, and frequently with limited resources. That is not a complaint. It is, in fact, a source of quiet pride. Because what this Ministry achieves, day in and day out, is remarkable.

But remarkable is not enough. This Statement of Strategic Intentions challenges us to be better — more coherent in our strategy, more coordinated across government, more innovative in our approach, and more deliberate in how we invest in our people and our systems.

The four pillars, Security, Prosperity, Leadership, and Innovation, provide the framework through which we will meet that challenge. But I want to be direct about what they mean in practice. Security means we must be vigilant, coordinated, and proactive, not reactive, in protecting the Cook Islands and its people. Prosperity means we must be strategic and entrepreneurial in identifying and advancing the economic opportunities that serve our nation's long-term interests. Leadership means we must show up, in the Pacific Islands Forum, in the United Nations, in bilateral meetings, and in every interagency conversation here at home — with confidence, with preparation, and with something meaningful to contribute. Innovation means we must be honest about where our systems, our processes, and our ways of working need to change, and courageous enough to change them.

To that end, this Statement of Strategic Intentions is designed to cascade. From the pillars and strategic directions set out here, to our Business Plan, to Divisional Work Plans, and ultimately to the individual objectives of every member of our team — the thread connecting your daily work to the Cook Islands' national interests should be visible, meaningful, and motivating.

I also want to acknowledge the partners, across government, the Pacific, and the globe, without whom MFAI's work would be far less effective. The period ahead will not be without difficulty. This is our plan. Let us own it, live it, and deliver it — together.



Elizabeth Wright-Koteka
Secretary

Vision:

A safe and prosperous Cook Islands through exceptional Immigration services and a capable and empowered foreign service.

Security

- Protecting and promoting the national security of the Cook Islands.

Leadership

- Proactively contributing to domestic and international policy formulation, decision making and implementation to advance and protect the Cook Islands interests.

Prosperity

- Pursuing opportunities for economic and social prosperity through sustainable development.

Innovation

- Advancing national priorities through innovative approaches to domestic and international challenges and opportunities.

MFAI Mission

Provide strong leadership in advancing and safeguarding the Cook Islands' national interests through innovative service delivery, a responsive and efficient immigration system, proactive diplomacy, and greater national awareness.

A. OUR CONTEXT- OUR PURPOSE



At Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI) we engage globally with purpose: to champion a people who are empowered, innovative, and environmentally aware — proud of our culture and languages and living well. We recognise that well-managed immigration is both a matter of border integrity and economic opportunity — protecting our people while welcoming the skills, labour, and connections that strengthen our nation. Through our international relationships and partnerships with regional and multilateral bodies, we work to shape outcomes that reflect our values and advance our national interests.

Te Paruru Tiratiratu – Paruru mate turu i te au maru o te Ipukarea Security – Protecting and promoting the national security of the Cook Islands

The Cook Islands' national security is shaped by its geographic isolation, small and dispersed population, vulnerability to climate change, and reliance on global trade, mobility, and tourism. These factors heighten the country's exposure to external shocks, natural disasters, and evolving global threats, including cybercrime, transnational crime, pandemics, and geopolitical tensions.

MFAI is committed to safeguarding the Cook Islands' sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national interests through strategic and coordinated security efforts in alignment with the Cook Islands National Security Policy (NSP). Key areas of focus include strengthening border and biosecurity systems, enhancing cyber and climate security, supporting robust and responsive immigration frameworks, and building resilience to traditional and emerging security risks.

The Cook Islands–New Zealand partnership remains fundamental to the nation's security outlook. As partners in free association, New Zealand is the Cook Islands partner of choice regarding defence and security matters as articulated in the Declaration on Defence and Security between the Government of the Cook Islands and Government of New Zealand. This enduring and valued relationship is central to the Cook Islands' ability to prepare for and respond to complex security challenges.

The multi-decade Cook Islands-Australia maritime partnership is a central tenet of the Cook Islands maritime security which provides critical maritime assets and capabilities which strengthen the Cook Islands maritime security.

MFAI's national security approach is also aligned with regional security commitments, including the Boe Declaration on Regional Security and the Pacific Human Security Framework, which emphasise an expanded concept of security that includes human rights, environmental resilience, and community well-being.

Grounded in strategic collaboration with domestic and international partners, and supported by enhanced operational capabilities, MFAI is committed to ensuring the effective enforcement of immigration laws and the coordinated protection of the Cook Islands' borders, sovereignty, and national security.



Through proactive engagement with New Zealand, Australia, regional mechanisms such as the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Immigration Directors Community, and broader international partners, and in coordination with national agencies, MFAI will continue to strengthen the Cook Islands' security and resilience in a rapidly evolving global environment.

Tupuranga Ruperupe – Tatari i te au ravenga kia puapinga te oraanga tangata na roto i te akono anga tau i te aorangi ei tupau tuatau

Prosperity – Pursuing opportunities for economic and social prosperity through sustainable development

The prosperity of the Cook Islands depends on a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable development model that aligns with the nation's unique context, values, and aspirations. A prosperous Cook Islands is one where all Cook Islanders working together to build a dynamic, prosperous and inclusive economic future for Cook Islanders, that is in harmony with our culture and environment. Grounded in Christian values and faith, and strengthened by our commitment to peace, resilience, and collective responsibility, the Cook Islands strives to build a future that is secure, inclusive, and guided by values that have long united our people.

Central to this vision is the enduring free association relationship with New Zealand, a partnership founded on shared Māori kinship, citizenship, history, and mutual respect. This unique relationship provides critical support for the Cook Islands' sustainable development by enhancing access to international markets, development funding, technical expertise and institutional collaborations, and regional security cooperation. New Zealand's diplomatic advocacy and global networks help amplify the Cook Islands' voice on the international stage, when required. The partnership also facilitates labour mobility, economic opportunities, and people-to-people ties that contribute to social well-being and economic resilience for Cook Islanders at home and abroad.

MFAI contributes to this vision by advancing foreign policy, trade, investment, and development cooperation and effective management of immigration. The Ministry plays a key role in identifying and unlocking opportunities for sustainable economic growth, promoting resilience, and ensuring inclusive development that benefits all Cook Islanders, including those in the pa enua and diaspora.

Through strategic international engagement and a responsive, secure and people centered immigration system, MFAI supports national priorities and enhance the well-being of all Cook Islanders.



Rangatira Tutara – Arataki i te au kaveinga e te akanoonoo’anga o te Ipukarea mate ao katoa, ei tiaki i te mana e te umuumu’anga o te iti tangata

Leadership – Proactively contributing to domestic and international policy formulation, decision making and implementation to advance and protect the Cook Islands interests.

By actively pursuing support for initiatives that address global challenges alongside priorities outlined in the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+, MFAI will strengthen the Cook Islands' position as a respected and influential participant in regional and international affairs and decision-making processes.

MFAI will provide principled and forward-looking leadership in shaping the Cook Islands' domestic and international policy agenda. The Ministry will represent the Cook Islands with integrity and influence on the international stage, while ensuring strong interagency collaboration at home. By anticipating challenges, making informed decisions, and advocating for the Cook Islands' interests, MFAI plays a central role in guiding the country's engagement in regional and multilateral forums and driving outcomes that matter to the Cook Islands.

Tu Karape Kama’atu: Akatupu’anga i te au ravenga karape kama’atu ei akatinamou i te anoano o te Ipukarea na roto i te au turanga tau e te ngata, i roto nei i te basileia e teia nei ao katoa.

Innovation: Advancing national priorities through innovative approaches to domestic and international challenges and opportunities.

Innovation is central to MFAI's ability to adapt and succeed in a fast-evolving geopolitical and digital landscape. Whether through modernizing immigration systems, employing digital diplomacy tools, or exploring new models for development cooperation, the Ministry embraces creativity, technology, and agility to drive progress.

By embracing innovative thinking and applying creative strategies, MFAI will enhance its operational efficiency and strengthen its capacity to safeguard and advance the Cook Islands' national interests. This commitment to innovation will continue to be reflected in the Ministry's institutional strengthening investments, bilateral relationships, as well as across domestic, regional, and international platforms.

OUR CONTRIBUTION



MFAI delivers two core services for the Government of the Cook Islands firstly as the primary agency of the Government of the Cook Islands entrusted with representing and advancing the nation's interests on the regional and international stage, and secondly, providing a responsive and efficient national immigration service. Through these dual responsibilities, MFAI plays a key role in supporting the Cook Islands' regional and global engagement, economic development, and national resilience and strengthens the security of the country's borders.

The Ministry builds connections with, and influence, other countries to advance the Cook Islands interests, project our values, and secure outcomes that matter to Cook Islanders. MFAI lead the Cook Islands diplomatic network and mandate representatives to speak with authority in the international arena on matters of importance to the Cook Islands. We progress the Government's international priorities and advice the Government on how regional and global events impact the Cook Islands.

Influencing and working with others is critical to the work of MFAI. This includes working collaboratively with domestic agencies building effective international relationships vital to us to influence international outcomes

OUR VISION & MISSION

In an increasingly interconnected and dynamic global environment, the Cook Islands stands firm in its commitment to safeguard its sovereignty, enhance its international influence, and foster national prosperity. MFAI plays a pivotal role in shaping and implementing policies that advance our national interests, protect our people, and promote meaningful engagement with the global community.

Grounded in our shared values and cultural identity, we aspire to deliver excellence in diplomacy and immigration services. Our Vision and Mission reflect our unwavering dedication to proactive leadership, innovation, and service, ensuring that the Cook Islands continues to thrive in a safe, secure, and prosperous future.

Our Vision: A safe and prosperous Cook Islands through exceptional Immigration services and a capable and empowered foreign service.

Our Mission: Provide strong leadership in advancing and safeguarding the Cook Islands' national interests through innovative service delivery, a responsive and efficient immigration system, proactive diplomacy, and greater national awareness.

OUR VALUES



MFAI upholds the Public Service Act 2009 and the Public Service Commission's Code of Conduct (August 2018), drawing on this robust values-based framework to guide its conduct, decision-making, and relationships at every level. In addition to the core values of the Cook Islands Public Service, MFAI has the following values, which reflect our unique role in promoting the nation's interests at home and abroad:

- **Taokotai Unity** – We work together across teams, sectors, and borders, fostering collaboration and shared purpose in pursuit of national goals. Te angaanga kapiti i rotopu ia i te au pupu angaanga, te au tuanga, e te au pa enua i vao mai, kia taokotai i te umu'umu'anga i te au akakoroanga o te Ipukarea.
- **Te inangaro i te Ipukarea Patriotism** – We serve with pride and dedication, placing the wellbeing and advancement of the Cook Islands at the heart of everything we do. Ka tavini matou mate akatietie e te akapapu'anga, ma te tuku i te ora'anga meitaki e te tupuranga o te Ipukarea ei mua ua rai i ta matou e rave nei.
- **Te tiratiratu Loyalty** – We demonstrate commitment and integrity in our service to the Government, the people of the Cook Islands, and the principles of our Constitution. Ka aka'ari matou i te akapapuanga i te tu tau i roto i ta matou tavinianga ki te Kavamani e te iti tangata Kuki Airani, e te Ture Metua e te Mana.
- **Te raveinga ngaio Professionalism** – We uphold the highest standards of conduct, competence, and respect in all aspects of our work, internally, domestically and internationally. Ka rave matou i akara'anga teitei roa atu, te rave'anga tau e te akangateitei i roto i ta matou angaanga ravarai, i roto i te ngai angaanga, i roto i te Ipukarea, e i te pa enua i vao mai.

These values underpin how we engage with our people within MFAI and how we build and maintain trust with our domestic, regional, and international stakeholders. Upholding these values ensures that MFAI maintains a credible, ethical, and proactive institution committed to advancing the Cook Islands' interests with integrity and professionalism.

Vision:

*A safe & prosperous Cook Islands through
exceptional Immigration services &
empowered foreign services.*



Grounded in the Cook Islands Public Service Values

<i>Tu Tavini</i> (Service)	<i>Tu Tiratiratu</i> (Honesty)	<i>Tu Papakita'i kore</i> (Impartiality)	<i>Tu Akangateitei</i> (Respect)	<i>Tu Akapapu'anga</i> (Accountability)	<i>Tu Ma'ora'ora</i> (Transparency)	<i>Turanga Tau</i> (Effectiveness)	<i>Turanga Meitaki</i> (Efficiency)
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OUR FUNCTIONS



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration's (MFAI) comprehensive statutory and operational responsibilities inform a broad and integrated programme of policy development, regulatory oversight and service delivery.

The mandate for Te Kauono Tutara e te Mana Tiaki - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI) emanates from several pieces of legislation:

- the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Act 1984;
- the Cook Islands Immigration Act 2021, Cook Islands Immigration Amendment Act 2004, & Cook Islands Immigration Amendment Act (No.2) 2024;
- Diplomatic Privileges and Immunities Act 1968;
- Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols Act 2002 & Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols Amendment Act 2011; and
- Consular Privileges and Immunities Act 1971.

In addition to the mandate provided MFAI by the above legislation, the Ministry concurrently observes and is guided by

- the Ministry of Finance & Economic Management Act 1995-96;
- Public Expenditure Review Committee & Audit Act 1995-96; and
- the Public Service Act 2009.

Additionally, MFAI administers

- the Anti-Personnel Mines Act 2007;
- Chemical Weapons (Prohibition) Act 2007;
- Nuclear-Test-Ban Act 2007;
- United Nations (Security Council Resolutions) Act 2003;
- Cook Islands Red Cross Society Act 2002;
- Visiting Forces Act 1992-93; and
- New Zealand Representative Act 1980.

The Ministry operates across a wide spectrum of issues — from economic and political affairs to social, environmental, and security concerns — anchored in the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+ and informed by global frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and regionally by the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent.

MFAI's Key Functions



FUNCTION	DELIVERED BY
 <i>Foreign Policy and International Relations</i>	• Formulating and implementing the Cook Islands' foreign policy to advance national interests; • Strengthening bilateral and multilateral relationships, and • Ensuring effective representation in regional and global forums.
 <i>Regional and Multilateral Engagement</i>	• Shaping the Cook Islands representation in regional organisations (e.g., Pacific Islands Forum & CROP Agencies) and international bodies (e.g., the United Nations bodies/agencies, multilateral development banks, and international financial institutions), and • Participating in collective responses to shared regional challenges such as climate change, security, oceans governance and sustainable development.
 <i>Interagency Coordination and Policy Integration</i>	• Leading and supporting cross-government coordination on foreign policy, trade, and security matters, to enable the contribution of whole-of-government responses to international events and obligations.
 <i>Trade and Economic Diplomacy</i>	• Promoting international trade and investment opportunities by engaging in trade negotiations, supporting market access, and contributing to economic policy coordination and trade-related institutional frameworks.
 <i>Immigration and Border Management</i>	• Administering immigration policy, visas, entry and residency permits, and border security systems to facilitate safe, orderly, and lawful movement of people while protecting national sovereignty and security.
 <i>Protocol and Diplomatic Services</i>	• Managing diplomatic protocol, facilitating official visits and engagements, and supporting the accreditation and functioning of foreign missions in the Cook Islands.
 <i>Consular and Diaspora Services</i>	• Providing consular assistance to Cook Islanders abroad, maintaining strong connections with the diaspora, and facilitating their engagement in national development.

OUR STRUCTURE AND NETWORK



MFAI is headquartered in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, and is structured according to its core functions—namely, policy development, regulatory oversight and corporate services. It is comprised of the:

- Office of the Secretary;
- Immigration
- Pacific Regional Affairs
- International Affairs and Trade
- Treaties, Multilaterals and Oceans
- Capability and Service Delivery

MFAI's Diplomatic and Immigration presence, while small, sustains a purposeful and coordinated presence through:

- Overseas Missions – High Commissions in Wellington, New Zealand (with a representative office in Auckland, New Zealand) and Suva, Fiji;
- Diplomatic Representation – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in Paris and International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in London;
- Honorary Consuls

MFAI has a total of 44 staff members, with 34 located in the Cook Islands and 10 offshore. MFAI's global network is comprised of 5 posts in 4 countries, and 7 Honorary Consuls.

OUR OPERATING ENVIRONMENT: GLOBAL, REGIONAL, DOMESTIC, AND DIASPORA



MFAI operates within a dynamic and interconnected environment shaped by national priorities, regional developments, global trends, and the evolving expectations of Cook Islanders. Guided by the spirit of the 2001 Joint Centenary Declaration, the Cook Islands—while self-governing in free association with New Zealand—exercises full responsibility over its foreign affairs and immigration, while sustaining strong and enduring partnerships with key international counterparts

Domestic Context

At the national level, MFAI plays a lead role in coordinating the Cook Islands' external engagement, ensuring it aligns with the country's sustainable development objectives, as outlined in our National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+. Working closely with government agencies, MFAI supports outcomes across trade, development cooperation, security, investment, fisheries, infrastructure, climate change, social development and human mobility. The Ministry also delivers essential immigration services that support labour market needs, enable safe and orderly movement of people, and maintain strong border management. Effective immigration policy and operations are critical to national security, economic development, and social cohesion.

Diaspora Engagement

The Cook Islands diaspora, particularly in New Zealand and Australia, forms a vital part of the nation's extended community. The diaspora contributes to national development through cultural exchange, the transfer of skills and knowledge, and active involvement in social and economic initiatives. MFAI is committed to strengthening engagement with Cook Islanders abroad by fostering inclusive dialogue, providing responsive consular and immigration services, and creating pathways for meaningful participation in the nation's development and future.

Navigating this complex and evolving operating environment requires agility, foresight, and strong collaboration with the Cook Islands Development Agency NZ and diaspora communities. MFAI is committed to responding proactively to emerging challenges while leveraging opportunities to build a more resilient, globally connected, and prosperous Cook Islands—for all its people, both at home and abroad.



Regional Engagement

The Cook Islands has long championed Pacific regionalism and has an enduring interest in a prosperous, resilient and stable Pacific. Regionally, the Cook Islands is an active participant in key Pacific institutions such as the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Immigration Development Community and other Pacific Regional Organisations. Regional cooperation is essential to tackling shared regional challenges—climate change, disaster resilience, ocean governance, and economic vulnerability. As the Pacific grows in geopolitical significance, MFAI navigates this evolving landscape through sustained advocacy to respect Pacific Islands sovereignty and support for regional solidarity while engaging constructively with external partners, ensuring the Cook Islands’ interests are strategically represented. MFAI will continue to advocate for a Pacific regional architecture that is Pacific-led, coherent and accountable and delivers on the priorities and regional collective actions articulated in the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

Global Diplomacy

Internationally, MFAI leads the expansion of bilateral and multilateral partnerships to secure the Cook Islands’ place and voice in the global community. Strong relationships with New Zealand, Australia, China, Japan and the United States, and other development partners enable access to critical resources, technical assistance, and trade opportunities. The Ministry is also active in international forums and treaty processes, advocating for national priorities on issues such as climate finance, sustainable development, human rights, ocean governance and global mobility. Advancing efforts toward full membership in key international organizations remains a strategic priority.

OUR COOK ISLANDS INTERNAL CONNECTIONS



The Ministry engages strategically with Cook Islands stakeholders to navigate international issues and pursues collaborative approaches to achieving the nation's shared goals and development aspirations. By nurturing strong domestic connections, MFAI reinforces the Cook Islands' standing and its own capacity to engage effectively at the international level.

In practice, this collaboration spans the breadth of government to deliver the Cook Islands' foreign, trade, development, and security objectives. Depending on the issue at hand, the Ministry assumes either a leadership role or provides coordination and support to the relevant lead agency. Where appropriate, technical experts are included in delegations to international meetings to ensure informed and effective representation. Through these partnerships, MFAI also seeks to deepen engagement with both longstanding and emerging external partners, fostering a cohesive and strategic approach to international relations.

Beyond its bilateral and multilateral engagement, MFAI also leads or actively participates in a range of national taskforces and multi-agency coordination bodies. These platforms are instrumental in driving whole-of-government responses to complex issues that cut across foreign policy, trade, border management, national development, and security. The Ministry chairs the Joint Ministerial Forum Working Group and the Combined Border Agencies Taskforce, and co-chairs the Cook Islands National Trade Development Committee — roles that position MFAI at the centre of cross-agency policy alignment and implementation.

B. OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

MFAI operates with a clear and purposeful strategic framework that outlines its direction over a five-year period. This framework articulates MFAI's vision, mission, and key strategic priorities—ensuring alignment with national aspirations and regional and global responsibilities. It provides a structured approach for delivering the Ministry's mandate, anchoring its work in the values and interests of the Cook Islands people.

At the core of this framework is a clear ambition: through focused diplomacy, robust immigration systems, and strategic partnerships, MFAI aims to—:

- i. safeguard the security of the Cook Islands;
- ii. protect the sovereignty of the Cook Islands in all international engagements ;
- iii. advance sustainable development for the benefit of the people of the Cook Islands; and
- iv. preserve and promote the customs, language and cultural identity of the Cook Islands.



This framework underpins the achievement of the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+ and the Government's broader policy commitments, while providing the foundation for MFAI's Business and Work Plans. Equally important, it embeds a culture of continuous organisational learning. Through regular performance reviews, reporting, and strategic foresight, the Ministry remains well-positioned to adapt, refine its priorities, and deliver outcomes that are meaningful and lasting for the Cook Islands.

This strategic framework is operationalised through annual business planning, divisional work plans, and individual performance goals. It is supported by governance mechanisms, including a performance management system. A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework is in development, and these systems should ensure that MFAI's activities remain coherent, responsive, and aligned with changing national and international contexts.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES AND FOREIGN POLICY DIRECTION

The Cook Islands Government has articulated a set of strategic priorities to steer national development and resilience in the years ahead — encompassing economic growth, social well-being, environmental sustainability, and the cultivation of strategic international partnerships. Collectively, these priorities affirm the Government's enduring commitment to a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable future, one that harmonises economic advancement with social equity and environmental stewardship. In doing so, they also give shape to the Cook Islands' foreign policy outlook: proactive and balanced and steadfastly focused on advancing national interests while contributing meaningfully to regional cooperation and global stability.

Between 2023 and early 2025, the Cook Islands' leadership has given concrete expression to these priorities, actively articulating its foreign policy direction at both the national and international levels. These efforts have centred on five interconnected areas of focus:



i. Enhancing Economic Resilience and Sovereignty – Economic resilience lies at the heart of the Cook Islands' long-term development vision. The Government is committed to diversifying the economy beyond tourism — strengthening sectors such as ocean resources, renewable energy, ICT, and financial services — while ensuring that growth remains compatible with the cultural, social, and environmental aspirations of Cook Islanders. This approach prioritises the responsible stewardship of natural resources alongside the promotion of economic security and social well-being for all.

ii. Advocating for Climate Action and Sustainable Development - Recognising climate change as an existential threat, the Cook Islands remains a determined and vocal advocate in global climate forums. The nation actively champions regional and international frameworks — including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — to guide national efforts in building environmental resilience, securing climate finance, and pressing global partners for stronger, more ambitious commitments.

iii. Diversifying Strategic Partnerships and Strengthening Economic Diplomacy - Through the pursuit of Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships, the Cook Islands seeks to deepen cooperation with partners capable of supporting sustainable development across trade, infrastructure, ICT, and the blue economy. While affirming the strength of its free association with New Zealand, the Cook Islands continues to assert its autonomy in foreign affairs — carefully and confidently balancing longstanding alliances with emerging international partnerships in a manner that serves the nation's broader interests.

iv. Strengthening Regional and Longstanding Alliances - The Cook Islands remains steadfast in its commitment to enduring regional relationships. The 'Oa Tumanava Partnership with Australia prioritises collaboration on security, economic resilience, and climate adaptation, while the Waka Hourua / Vaka Purua Statement of Partnership with New Zealand underscores joint action in health, education, infrastructure, and public service development. The Cook Islands also plays an active and constructive role in Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) processes and engages closely with Pacific bilateral partners to advance shared regional priorities and strengthen collective resilience.

v. Pursuing Greater International Engagement and Oceans Advocacy - As a small island developing state with far-reaching global interests and stewardship over a vast ocean territory, the Cook Islands is committed to expanding its international presence and influence. By engaging actively in regional and global forums, the nation seeks to amplify its voice on issues of critical importance — including climate action, sustainable development, and ocean governance — and to contribute meaningfully to international decision-making and rule-setting. As a large ocean state, the Cook Islands places particular emphasis on ocean diplomacy: safeguarding its maritime interests, protecting marine biodiversity, promoting equitable access to ocean resources, and elevating traditional knowledge in the shaping of global ocean policy. Together, these efforts affirm the Cook Islands' role as a responsible, principled, and proactive actor on the world stage.



STRATEGIC PILLARS AND OUTCOMES

In pursuit of its vision and in fulfilment of its mandate, MFAI has organised its work around four strategic pillars — **Security, Prosperity, Leadership, and Innovation** — that give direction and coherence to the Ministry's approach to foreign affairs and immigration. Rooted in the Cook Islands Government's sustainable development priorities and international policy commitments, these pillars form the bedrock of MFAI's strategic planning and operational delivery, ensuring a principled and coordinated approach to advancing the nation's interests at home and abroad.

Each pillar represents a distinct and critical area in which MFAI's leadership and action are expected to yield meaningful and lasting results. Taken together, they embody the Ministry's commitment to safeguarding the Cook Islands' sovereignty and well-being, strengthening economic resilience, elevating the country's international influence, and cultivating a forward-looking and adaptive public service — one that is equipped to meet the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly complex world.

Underpinning each pillar is a set of defined outcomes that give concrete expression to MFAI's intentions — framing how the Ministry will measure its progress, deepen collaboration with partners, and deliver enduring value to the nation. In doing so, these outcomes reinforce MFAI's central role in securing a safe, prosperous, and globally respected Cook Islands — one that is well-positioned to navigate the evolving global landscape.

Pillar 1 Security

Strategic Intent

The security pillar sets out MFAI's approach to safeguarding the Cook Islands at the national and regional level. It encompasses the Ministry's contribution to sovereign capability, cross-agency coordination, and the cultivation of collective resilience in response to an evolving landscape of traditional and emerging threats.

Why it matters

National security is integral to the Cook Islands' broader vision of a safe, resilient, and sustainable future. Guided by the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2020+, the National Security Policy 2023–2026, and regional frameworks such as the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, MFAI will lead and support whole-of-government efforts to strengthen the nation's resilience — engaging through regional diplomacy, policy dialogue, and strategic international partnerships to address both traditional and emerging security challenges.



This encompasses strengthening border protection and management systems and enhancing the nation's capacity to respond to a broadening range of threats — including cybersecurity, transnational crime, and biosecurity — while fostering robust partnerships with national agencies and international allies. As a self-governing state in free association with New Zealand, the Cook Islands benefits from a unique constitutional relationship that underpins close cooperation on defence and external security. This enduring partnership remains a cornerstone of the nation's security architecture, complementing regional and multilateral efforts to uphold peace and stability across the Pacific. Taken together, these efforts are integral to safeguarding the Cook Islands' people, sovereignty, and national interests in an increasingly interconnected and dynamic regional environment.

At the regional level, MFAI will continue to champion a people-centred and Pacific-led approach to security — advancing the Cook Islands' interests through principled diplomacy, strategic partnerships, and active contributions to regional policy and coordination frameworks.

Outcomes

1. Enhanced security of the Cook Islands through strengthened cooperation with New Zealand and the implementation of the Declaration on Defense and Security between the Government of the Cook Islands and Government of New Zealand.
2. Strategic participation in CROP, UN, multilateral frameworks; and bilateral and regional partnerships which both strengthen national security architecture and amplifies collective impact of shared security initiatives.
3. Strengthened maritime security and resilience in the Cook Islands, achieved through sustained collaboration and targeted investment with like-minded partners, supported by proactive risk assessments and robust management of the maritime domain, contributing to a reduction in Transnational Crime.
4. Sustained leadership in a whole government system that consistently detects, deters and responds to irregular movement, while enabling the lawful flow of people that supports national economic and social objectives.
5. Advanced human and climate security as interconnected and existential priorities – securing the international commitments, accountability and partnerships to protect Cook Islands people, sovereignty and place, and amplifying the Pacific voice in shaping the global response to the defining threats of our time.

Pillar 2 Prosperity

Strategic Intent

Under this pillar, MFAI's role is to cultivate the international partnerships and diplomatic engagements that generate meaningful economic opportunities for Cook Islanders. This encompasses advancing the nation's interests through bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation; ensuring external engagements are firmly anchored in national priorities; and maintaining a foreign policy that is coherent, responsive, and fit-for-purpose.



By influencing the rules, mobilising the resources, and nurturing the relationships that shape the Cook Islands' external environment, MFAI works to ensure the nation remains globally connected, economically agile, and sovereign in its ability to define and pursue prosperity on its own terms.

Why it matters

Prosperity is fundamental to the long-term well-being, resilience, and sovereignty of the Cook Islands. As a small island developing state (SIDS), economic prosperity enables the nation to invest in essential services, infrastructure, and opportunity — improving the quality of life for all Cook Islanders, reducing vulnerability to external shocks, and empowering the country to make decisions that are independent, principled, and aligned with its national priorities and cultural values.

As a large ocean state, the Cook Islands' economic, social, and environmental well-being is also deeply connected to the health and productivity of its marine and coastal resources. Through a Blue Economy lens, the Cook Islands affirms its commitment to sustainable ocean governance, responsible resource management, and intergenerational equity — ensuring that both current and future generations can benefit from and contribute to the stewardship of the sea.

Prosperity equally strengthens the Cook Islands' voice on the world stage, enabling the nation to engage in international forums with confidence, advocate for the distinct needs of Pacific Island nations, and contribute meaningfully to global conversations on sustainable development and economic resilience.

In pursuit of these goals, MFAI will play a central role in identifying and advancing developmental opportunities — spanning trade, investment, and diverse forms of cooperation and assistance — that support a more dynamic, diversified, and resilient national economy. These efforts will be guided at all times by the nation's sustainable development priorities and its commitment to ensuring that prosperity is inclusive, enduring, and firmly grounded in Cook Islands values.

Outcomes

1. Expanded and diversified trade, investment, and development cooperation with the New Zealand Government, Māori entities, private sector, academia, and the Cook Islands diaspora, resulting in strengthened economic resilience and socio-cultural ties.
2. Deepened Pacific partnerships and high-level regional engagement deliver greater influence, expanded collective capacity, and improved social and economic outcomes for our people and the region.
3. Our people and communities prosper through a foreign policy that secures expanded trade, quality investments and strategic partnerships; diversifying the national economy, building resilience and reducing vulnerability on our own terms.
4. Strategic engagement in international ocean and resource governance delivers stronger sovereign protections and greater development returns for the Cook Islands.
5. Partner with the local private sector using diplomatic relations, trade agreements and international networks to expand market access, attract quality investment and build a more diverse and resilient national economy.



Pillar 3 Leadership

Strategic Intent

The third of these pillars sets out MFAI's commitment to advancing principled, influential, and people-centred leadership across the national and regional arena. Through sustained diplomacy, the cultivation of strategic partnerships, and effective cross-government coordination, MFAI will work to elevate the Cook Islands' international standing, deepen its contributions to Pacific regionalism, and ensure that national policy remains globally informed, regionally engaged, and firmly grounded in the priorities and values of the Cook Islands people.

Why it matters

Leadership matters because it is the foundation upon which effective foreign policy, security, and development decisions are built. Without principled and strategically coherent leadership, the Cook Islands risks being shaped by global forces rather than shaping them. Strong leadership ensures that national policy remains responsive to the needs and aspirations of Cook Islanders, anchored in long-term sustainable development goals, and sufficiently agile to meet the pressures and opportunities of an evolving regional and global landscape. In this way, leadership is not merely an institutional function — it is the mechanism through which the Cook Islands asserts its voice, protects its sovereignty, and advances a vision of the future that is both ambitious and grounded in Pacific values.

Building on this foundation, MFAI is uniquely positioned to drive initiatives that shape the global conversations and decisions that matter most to the Cook Islands. This means ensuring the nation's distinct needs and priorities are not only represented but actively championed — in the United Nations, the Pacific Islands Forum, CROP Agencies, Multilateral Development Banks, International Financial Institutions, and across the full range of multilateral platforms where consequential decisions are made. Through sustained and strategic engagement in these forums, the Cook Islands continues to build its reputation as a credible, principled, and influential voice on issues of existential and generational importance — among them climate action, ocean governance, debt sustainability, innovative financing, and sustainable development. It is through this kind of engaged and purposeful leadership that the Cook Islands secures not just a seat at the table, but genuine influence over the rules and decisions that shape its future.

At the regional level, this leadership translates into active and constructive engagement in the cooperation and collaboration frameworks that define the Pacific's collective response to shared challenges. MFAI will ensure the Cook Islands remains a visible, credible, and influential participant in regional discussions on security, trade, and development — facilitating collective action and giving voice to the priorities of both the Cook Islands and the wider Pacific.

Yet effective international leadership is only as strong as the domestic foundations that underpin it. MFAI must therefore continue to cultivate and strengthen relationships across government and beyond — building the policy coherence and cross-institutional alignment that ensures the Cook Islands' international engagements are not only strategically sound but translate into tangible and lasting benefits for Cook Islands communities. In this way, MFAI's leadership role is as much an inward-facing responsibility as it is an outward-facing one — connecting the work of diplomacy and international engagement directly to the lives and aspirations of the people it serves.



Outcomes

1. Stronger domestic awareness and community empower Cook Islands Government agencies and stakeholders to seize international opportunities that advance national interests and development goals.
2. Strengthened regional collaboration and local stakeholder alignment accelerate NSDA 2020+ through integrated regional work programs.
3. Coordinated engagement between domestic and external partners shapes bilateral, regional and multilateral trade and security initiatives advancing NSDA goals.
4. Strengthened cooperation with New Zealand, grounded in the principles of the Joint Centenary Declaration of 2001, reinforces the special relationship of free association and advances mutual development and strategic interests.
5. Strengthened international standing and national interest protection through effective negotiations and leadership in ocean governance, multilateral forums and treaty processes.
6. We lead advocacy for Smaller Islands States (SIS), driving regional and international agendas to advance our national development goals.
7. Enhanced foreign and immigration policy awareness across Cook Islands government and communities drives inclusive engagement in international cooperation and national security.

Pillar 4 Innovation

Strategic Intent

The Innovation Pillar is directed at building an MFAI that is genuinely future-fit — an organisation that is nimble in structure, open and inclusive in culture, and confident in its capacity to anticipate change, solve complex problems, and deliver meaningful results. It places deliberate emphasis on workforce development, internal collaboration, and the adoption of smarter systems and flexible structures that recognise and reward capability, performance, and initiative. Underpinned by a sustained commitment to innovation, MFAI seeks to position itself as an organisation that leads with integrity, operates with relevance, and remains well-equipped to serve the Cook Islands effectively in an increasingly dynamic and complex world.

Why it matters

Innovation matters because a Ministry that stands still in a rapidly changing world inevitably falls behind — in relevance, in effectiveness, and in its ability to serve the Cook Islands well. For MFAI, innovation is not an end in itself but the means by which the Ministry remains fit for purpose: capable of anticipating change, responding with agility, and delivering outcomes that are meaningful to the people it serves.



At the organisational level, innovation enables MFAI to streamline internal processes, manage institutional knowledge more effectively, and improve service delivery across consular, immigration, and policy functions. Whether through digital diplomacy, data-driven policy development, or modernised service platforms, embracing new tools and ways of working allows the Ministry to operate with greater efficiency, coherence, and responsiveness.

At the policy level, a culture of innovation encourages proactive and flexible thinking — equipping MFAI to anticipate shifts in the global landscape, adapt quickly to emerging challenges such as climate change, migration, and evolving security threats, and engage with domestic agencies, regional organisations, and international partners through more inclusive and dynamic platforms.

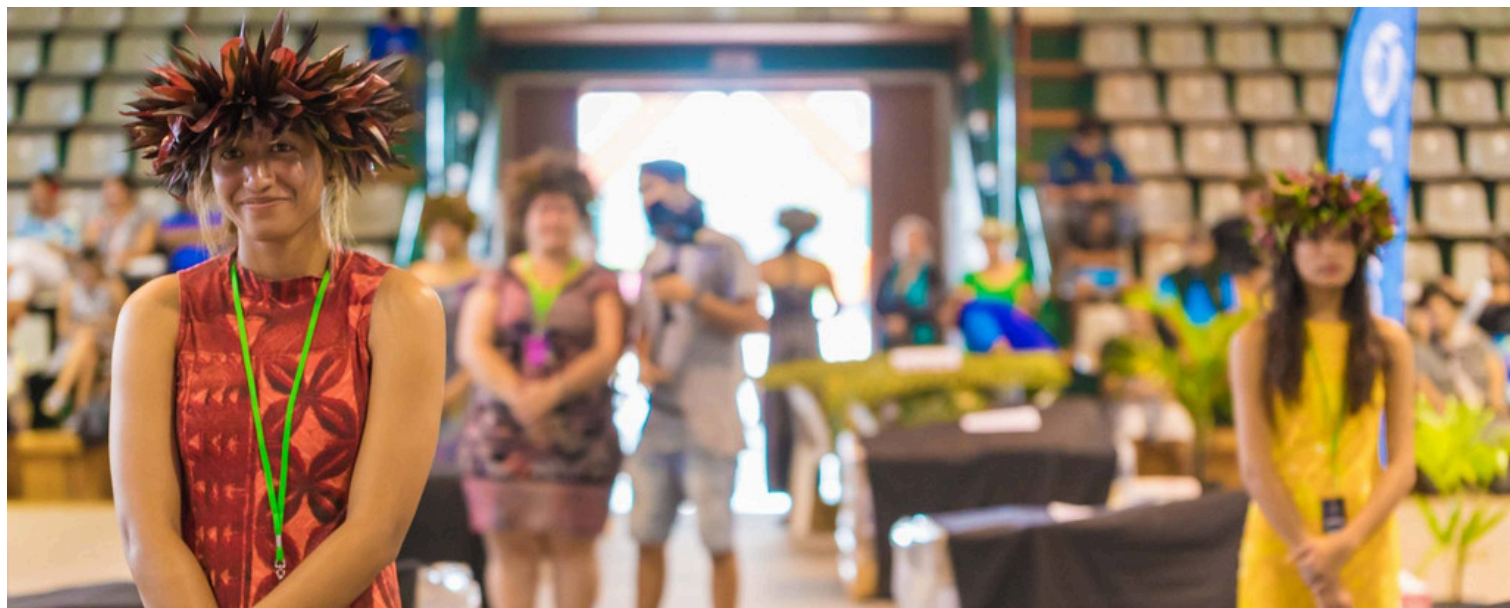
At the strategic level, an innovative MFAI positions the Cook Islands as a forward-thinking, solutions-driven nation — one that punches above its weight among small island developing states and commands respect in bilateral relationships and across regional and international platforms. This reputation enhances the Cook Islands' standing, attracts investment and development opportunities, and reinforces its influence in the forums and institutions where its future is shaped.

In embedding innovation into its culture and operations, MFAI ensures that the Cook Islands remains not merely reactive to a changing world, but resilient, adaptive, and confident in shaping it.

Outcomes

- 1.Strong human resource capacity, digital transformation, and staff-centred initiatives drive organizational performance and deliver better services.
- 2.Enhanced institutional effectiveness and strategic decision-making informed by a comprehensive functional review that guides future investments and reform aligned with Cook Islands' values and priorities.
- 3.Whole of Government coordination drives cohesive national engagement across regional and international forums, advancing Cook Islands interests with one unified voice.
- 4.Strengthened institutional credibility and effectiveness through strong governance, legislative compliance, and strategic policy frameworks that uphold sovereignty and support Cook Islands' international representation.
- 5.Advanced human and climate security as interconnected and existential priorities – securing the international commitments, accountability and partnerships to protect Cook Islands people, sovereignty and place, and amplifying the Pacific voice in shaping the global response to the defining threats of our time.

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION



In the medium term, MFAI will direct its resources and attention toward three interconnected priorities: strengthening domestic collaboration for a more cohesive foreign policy approach; deepening strategic partnerships to advance diplomatic, economic, and development cooperation; and cultivating an organisational culture of excellence, integrity, and innovation. Together, these directions will position MFAI to deliver with greater coherence, credibility, and impact — at home and on the world stage.

A. STRENGTHENING DOMESTIC COLLABORATION FOR A MORE COHESIVE FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH

Enhanced domestic collaboration is fundamental to MFAI's ability to advance a unified, coherent, and well-informed approach to foreign policy, immigration, and international engagement. By embedding a genuine whole-of-government model, MFAI ensures that its international positions are not only grounded in national interests but informed by the specialised expertise of partner agencies, civil society, and the private sector.

Strong interagency coordination is at the heart of this approach — ensuring that MFAI's engagement on the global stage consistently reflects national priorities across government and presents a credible, unified voice to international partners. This collaborative model also enhances efficiency, minimises duplication, and optimises the use of scarce resources, ensuring that policy delivery is as effective and coordinated as possible.

Ultimately, a whole-of-government approach to foreign policy strengthens the Cook Islands' credibility and reliability as an international partner — elevating its standing and deepening the long-term relationships that are essential to advancing national interests abroad.

B.STRENGTHENING DIPLOMATIC, ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS



As a small island developing state with unique vulnerabilities — including exposure to climate change, economic volatility, and geographic isolation — the Cook Islands' ability to secure its future depends in large part on the depth and quality of its international relationships. Greater and more targeted engagement with the international community is therefore not merely desirable but essential.

Through this strategic direction, MFAI will work to deepen diplomatic, economic, and development cooperation across bilateral, regional, and multilateral relationships — elevating the Cook Islands' participation and influence in international forums while ensuring that all external engagements remain firmly anchored in national development goals and priorities.

This engagement will support greater access to the funding, expertise, and technical assistance needed to drive national development; amplify the Cook Islands' voice in regional and global decision-making processes that directly affect its people; and promote the nation's identity and leadership in areas of particular strength and strategic importance — among them climate action, ocean governance, and cultural diplomacy.

C.CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF EXCELLENCE, INTEGRITY, AND INNOVATION ACROSS MFAI



MFAI's ability to navigate an increasingly complex global landscape depends as much on the strength of its people and institutional culture as it does on the quality of its policies and partnerships. To that end, the Ministry is committed to fostering an organisational culture rooted in excellence, integrity, and innovation — one that enhances institutional capacity, invests in the professional development of its people, and upholds the highest standards of transparency and accountability in all that it does.

A high-performing and well-respected Ministry plays a pivotal role in advancing national interests effectively. By prioritising professionalism, integrity, and innovation, MFAI strengthens its reputation and its capacity to forge strategic partnerships, engage in impactful diplomacy, and represent the values of the Cook Islands with confidence on the world stage.

Meeting the diverse challenges of shifting geopolitical dynamics, evolving security risks, changing trade relations, and climate change requires a Ministry that is adaptable, well-resourced, and forward-thinking. A sustained commitment to institutional capacity and a culture of excellence is equally vital for attracting and retaining the calibre of professionals needed to drive the Ministry's strategic goals and deliver measurable outcomes.

Underpinning all of this is a robust commitment to transparency and accountability — the cornerstones of a modern, credible, and effective foreign service, and the foundation upon which public trust and institutional legitimacy are built. A respected MFAI sets the standard for good governance and principled diplomacy, inspiring confidence among Cook Islanders, international partners, and the global organisations with whom it engages.

OUR PERFORMANCE REPORTING AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

MFAI maintains a strong commitment to transparency and accountability through regular performance reporting. Each year, the Ministry provides an annual report to the Public Service Commission, offering a synopsis of its performance and operations. This report outlines progress in the development and delivery of strategic priorities, work programmes, and core functions.

In addition to this, MFAI is required to submit an annual report to the Cook Islands Parliament, ensuring public visibility of its achievements and challenges. The Ministry also reports regularly to the Cook Islands Cabinet, providing timely updates on policy developments, strategic initiatives, and operational matters.

These reporting obligations reinforce MFAI's accountability to the public and to government, and ensure that its work remains aligned with national interests and expectations.

C.OUR ORGANISATIONAL FOUNDATION



MFAI's organisational foundations comprise its people, culture, capabilities, systems, and ways of working—together forming the backbone of how the Ministry delivers on its mission. These internal strengths enable us to operate efficiently, effectively, and sustainably in an increasingly complex environment.

By fostering a cohesive and high-performing internal environment, we are better positioned to achieve our strategic and organisational objectives, uphold our constitutional and legislative mandates, and engage constructively across government and with key external stakeholders. Strengthening these foundations ensures that MFAI remains agile, credible, and equipped to serve the Cook Islands' national interests—at home and on the global stage.

OUR PEOPLE AND CAPABILITIES

At the heart of MFAI's effectiveness are its people—our most valuable internal enablers. With a workforce that brings together diverse skills, backgrounds, and experiences, many staff contribute across a range of foreign affairs and immigration priorities throughout their careers. This breadth of exposure strengthens institutional knowledge, fosters adaptability, and supports a dynamic organisational culture.

MFAI leverages this collective expertise to deliver on its mandate with professionalism and purpose. Underpinned by strong, accountable leadership and fit-for-purpose systems and processes, the Ministry promotes a culture of integrity, collaboration, continuous learning, and service excellence. These core values guide all aspects of our work and form the foundation for delivering impactful, responsive, and sustainable outcomes for the Cook Islands.

RELATIONSHIPS

MFAI's domestic relationships are crucial for coordinating and aligning the Cook Islands' foreign policy, immigration services, and international engagements with national priorities.

MFAI needs to collaborate closely with other government departments and ministries to ensure that foreign policy and immigration strategies are aligned with national development goals and priorities. This coordination ensures that the Cook Islands presents a unified approach to international affairs. Additionally, MFAI must work closely with key agencies such as the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Marine Resources, Cook Islands Tourism, Police, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, National Environment Service, Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure Cook Islands so it remains the optimal channel to address cross-cutting issues, including economic development, climate change, security and oceans governance. This collaboration strengthens the Cook Islands' ability to respond effectively to emerging global challenges.

Engagement with the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society should ensure that foreign policy decisions consider the needs and views of all stakeholders and foster an inclusive approach to development and diplomacy. By maintaining strong connections with the Cook Islands diaspora, particularly in New Zealand and Australia, MFAI encourages contributions to the Cook Islands' growth and prosperity.



MFAI engagement with the public and key stakeholders should ensure that foreign and immigration policies reflect national interests. This includes seeking input on key foreign policy decisions and ensuring that the Cook Islands' global position is well understood domestically.

These domestic relationships must be built on collaboration, ensuring that foreign policy and immigration services are coordinated with the needs of the nation and aligned with broader national goals. These relationships are key to maintaining a cohesive, responsive, and effective approach to both domestic and international priorities.

Special Constitutional Relationship with New Zealand

The Cook Islands shares a special constitutional relationship with New Zealand, founded on partnership, shared citizenship, and mutual respect. As a self-governing country in free association with New Zealand, the Cook Islands manages its own foreign affairs and immigration, while maintaining strong political, economic, and cultural ties with its key partner.

This enduring partnership supports the Cook Islands' regional and global engagement, with New Zealand providing diplomatic, development, and security support. In turn, the Cook Islands contributes meaningfully to shared Pacific priorities—particularly in areas such as climate action, ocean governance, and the promotion of indigenous knowledge. The relationship is inherently reciprocal, with both countries benefiting from continued collaboration, mutual trust, and shared responsibility in navigating regional and global challenges.

Evolving this partnership remains central to the Cook Islands' foreign policy. It provides a foundation for collective resilience, sustainable development, and long-term security and wellbeing across both nations and the broader Pacific region.

MFAI plays a central role in nurturing and advancing the Cook Islands–New Zealand partnership. It is responsible for managing strategic diplomatic, political, and economic engagement to ensure alignment with national interests and development objectives. In doing so, MFAI will ensure the Cook Islands remains a strong, credible, and active partner—working constructively with New Zealand to realise mutual benefits and uphold the principles of free association in a rapidly changing world.

Regional and Multilateral Organisation Relationships

MFAI plays a vital role in the Cook Islands' engagement with regional and multilateral organizations. By participating in these platforms, MFAI enhances the Cook Islands' voice and influence in addressing shared challenges and opportunities across the Pacific and the broader international community. Key areas of engagement are with Pacific Island Forum, Pacific Community, other members of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific and the United Nations. MFAI leverages its membership in multilateral organizations to advance the Cook Islands' international standing, forging strong partnerships and accessing critical resources, expertise, and support for national development. By being an active participant, MFAI ensures the Cook Islands remains a respected voice in global discussions on peace, security, and development.

Through these regional and multilateral engagements, MFAI represents the Cook Islands' interests, advocates for national priorities, influences policy, and secures vital resources and partnerships to drive sustainable development and strengthen the nation's global presence.

D. MANAGING OUR FUNCTIONS AND OPERATIONS



Governance Framework

MFAI is governed under the policy direction of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration, in accordance with relevant foreign affairs and immigration legislation[1]. The Ministry's operations are led by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which provides strategic direction, oversight, and assurance in the delivery MFAI's mandate.

The SLT is comprised of the Secretary of MFAI and the Directors of International and Trade Affairs; Pacific Regional Affairs; Treaties, Multilateral and Oceans; the Principal Immigration Officer; and Capability and Service Delivery. Together, they form the core governance structure of the Ministry.

The SLT plays a critical advisory role on matters of organisational significance, shaping decision-making across policy, operational, and administrative domains. In doing so, the SLT provides assurance to the Secretary of MFAI that the Ministry's strategies, systems, and resources are effectively aligned to support its vision, mission and the Government's priorities.

Strategic Performance

Every five years, MFAI reviews the Cook Islands' strategic environment to assess its impact on foreign affairs and immigration, in line with the Public Service Act 2009 and performance management policies. This system, applied across the public sector, supports the NSDA 2022+ and the Ministry's Strategic and Business Plan goals.

The Strategic Framework outlines MFAI's strategic priorities for the next five years and will be supported by a streamlined monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approach, governance arrangements, and annual reviews.

These priorities guide business planning, divisional work plans, and individual performance objectives. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) monitors MFAI's operating environment and adjusts resources to stay aligned with government priorities.

Annual reports will track progress, while biannual focus reports will assess impact using both qualitative insights and quantitative data. MFAI will also strengthen its ability to measure the outcomes of its foreign engagement, encouraging innovation and continuous improvement through evidence-based learning.

PERFORMANCE SYSTEM AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT



MFAI's performance system must ensure clear strategic alignment, operational effectiveness, and accountability in delivering on the Ministry's priorities. It serves as a vital mechanism to track progress, inform decision-making, and demonstrate the value of the Ministry's work.

The system needs to be directly aligned with the National Sustainable Development Agenda (NSDA) 2022+, the Ministry's Strategic Framework, and broader government performance expectations. It will provide a structured means to measure how effectively MFAI utilises the resources allocated to it and how these contribute to national and sectoral outcomes.

Service performance will be assessed through both output measures and performance targets, ensuring that delivery is not only efficient but meaningful in its contribution to long-term objectives. MFAI is currently developing a comprehensive performance system that will enable both qualitative and quantitative evaluation of its performance in relation to its vision, outcomes, strategic priorities, and focus areas, as well as the Government's overarching goals.

This system, currently under refinement, will be underpinned by clearly defined and measurable indicators, designed to assess the impact of the Ministry's work over time. These indicators will play a central role in identifying what is working, what needs improvement, and where to focus future efforts to ensure continued relevance and effectiveness.

RISK ENGAGEMENT AND MANAGEMENT

A fundamental aspect of MFAI's work is the appropriate engagement with risk. In an increasingly complex strategic environment, risk must be thoughtfully considered in every decision made and in every piece of advice provided. Whether shaping foreign policy, managing international relationships, or guiding immigration processes, MFAI recognises that risk is inherent to delivering on our strategic intent.

To achieve outcomes that are safe, effective, and efficient, the Ministry must be prepared to take carefully measured risks that align with our organisational values and defined risk appetite. This approach enables us to remain agile, innovative, and forward-looking, while upholding accountability and public trust.

The MFAI Risk Management Framework will guide how we identify, assess, and respond to risk. This framework, currently in development will support decision-makers in understanding the potential rewards and consequences of different actions, enabling more informed and deliberate choices.

Central to this is a culture of openness and accountability—where risks are openly discussed, proactively managed, and consistently communicated to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Through transparent risk engagement, MFAI strengthens its capacity to deliver results in a dynamic global context.

PUBLIC RELEASE AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION



MFAI is committed to the proactive and responsible release of information to the public. Where appropriate, the Ministry will make relevant data, decisions, and updates publicly accessible to ensure openness in its operations. This approach reflects MFAI's core value of transparency and reinforces our commitment to keeping the public informed about the Ministry's priorities, initiatives, and performance.

By fostering open communication and sharing information in a timely and accessible manner, MFAI aims to build public trust and encourage meaningful engagement with the communities we serve.

E. ASSET MANAGEMENT

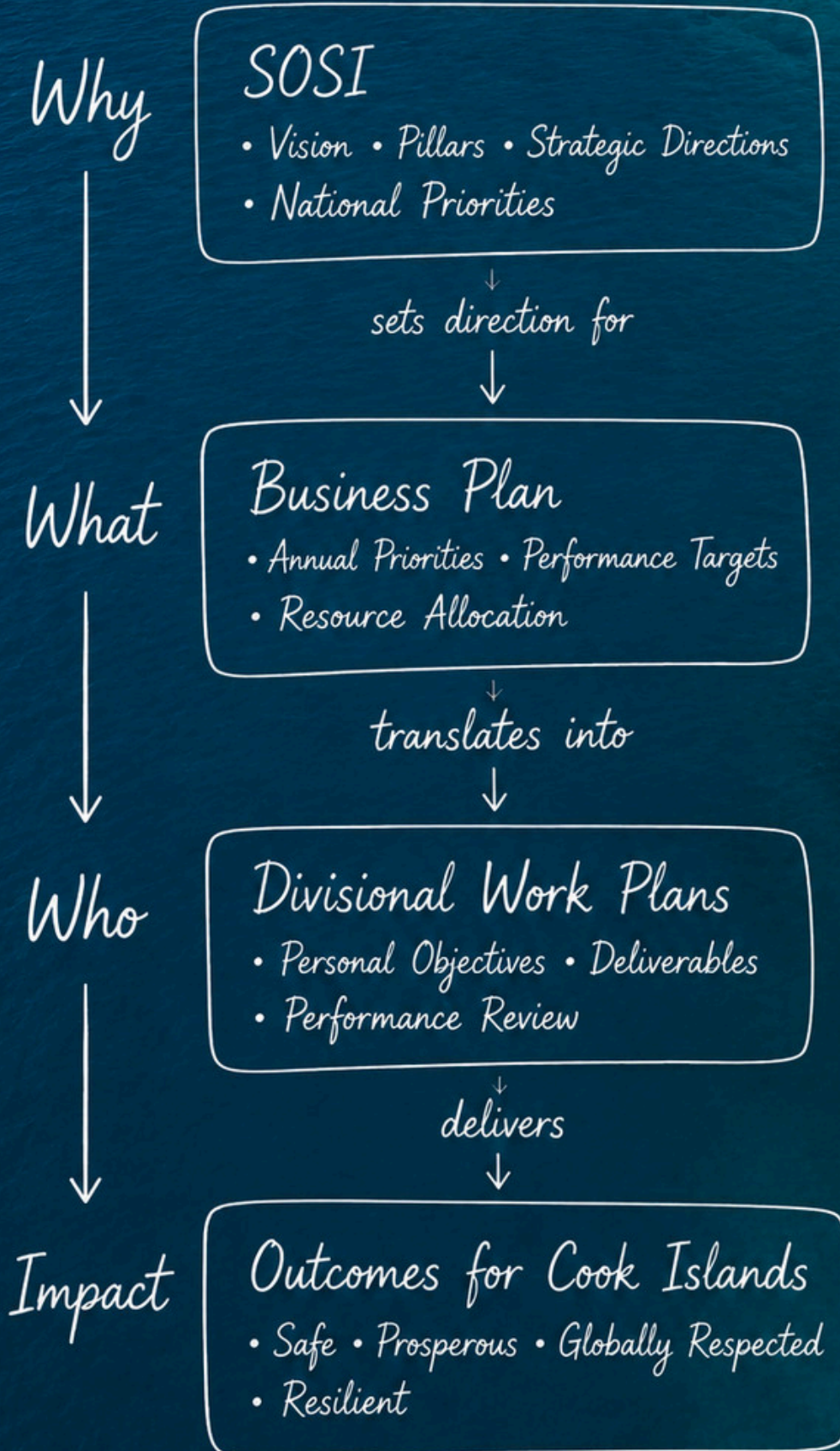
MFAI operates with a relatively modest asset base, primarily comprising furniture, equipment, ICT assets, and motor vehicles. Despite this, strategic investment in information and communications technology (ICT) plays a critical role in enabling the Ministry to achieve its strategic objectives and fulfill its mandate effectively.

The evolving digital landscape necessitates ongoing adaptation. MFAI's ICT priorities are shaped by several dynamic factors, including rapid technological advancements, escalating cyber security threats, the proliferation of misinformation, and the need to continuously upskill personnel and modernize practices. Ensuring that MFAI remains agile and responsive in this environment is essential to maintaining operational effectiveness and safeguarding the Cook Islands' national interests in an increasingly complex global arena.

Implementation

From Strategy to Action:

How the SOSI guides every level of MFAI's work.



What Does This Mean for MFAI Staff?

① Statement of
Strategic Intentions (SOSI)
Our vision, pillars and
strategic directions.



② Business Plan
Annual priorities, targets
and resources.



③ Divisional Work Plans
Division goals, activities
and milestones.



④ Individual Work Plans
Your objectives, deliverables
and performance.



⑤ Outcomes for
the Cook Islands
Safe • Prosperous • Respected
• Resilient



STRATEGIC INTENTIONS

2026-2030

— AT A GLANCE —

VISION

*A safe and prosperous Cook Islands
through exceptional Immigration services
and a capable and empowered
foreign service.*

SECURITY

*Protecting and promoting
the national security of
the Cook Islands.*

*Safeguarding sovereignty,
borders and national
interests.*

LEADERSHIP

*Proactively contributing to
domestic and international
policy formulation, decision
making and implementation
to advance and protect the
Cook Islands interests.*

*Representing the Cook Islands
with integrity and influence.*

PROSPERITY

*Pursuing opportunities for
economic and social prosperity
through sustainable
development.*

*Supporting sustainable
growth and wellbeing for
all Cook Islanders.*

INNOVATION

*Advancing national priorities
through innovative approaches
to domestic and international
challenges and
opportunities.*

*Strengthening services through
innovation and modern
approaches.*



MISSION

*Provide strong leadership in advancing and safeguarding
the Cook Islands' national interests through innovative
service delivery, a responsive and efficient immigration system,
proactive diplomacy, and greater national awareness.*

WHAT WE DELIVER

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

- International representation
- Treaty engagement
- Development cooperation
- Regional and multilateral engagement

IMMIGRATION

- Border integrity
- Immigration services
- Labour mobility
- Compliance and enforcement

OUR VALUES

TAOKOTAI
UNITY

TE INANGARO I TE IPUKAREA
PATRIOTISM

TE TIRATIRATU
LOYALTY

TE RAVEINGA NGAIO
PROFESSIONALISM

ANNEXES - A

GOVERNMENT OF COOK ISLANDS VALUES

As per the Public Service Act 2009 and the PSC Code of Conduct Policy - August 2018

Value	Explanation
Honesty	acting honestly, being truthful, and abiding by the laws of Cook Islands
Impartiality	providing impartial advice, acting without fear or favour, and making decisions on their merits
Service	serving the people well through faithful service to the Government of Cook Islands
Transparency	taking action and making decisions in an open way
Accountability	being able to explain the reason for actions taken, and taking responsibility for those actions
Respect	treating the people, the Government of Cook Islands and colleagues with courtesy and respect.
Efficiency & Effectiveness	achieving good results for the Cook Islands in an economical way

ANNEXES - B

Pillar	Security	Prosperity	Leadership	Innovation
Government Ministry or Agency	• Cook Islands Police Service (CIPS) Directorate (NSD) • Cook Islands Customs Service • Ministry of Finance & Economic Management (MFEM) • Crown Law Office (CLO) • Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) • Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) • Te Marae Ora/Ministry of Health (TMO) • Ministry of Transport (MoT) • Cook Islands Financial Intelligence Unit (CIFIU) • Civil Aviation Authority	• Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) - • CPPQ, Marae Moana, Climate Change, Renewable Energy) • Ministry of Finance & Economic Management (MFEM) • Crown Law Office (CLO) • Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) • Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) • Te Marae Ora/Ministry of Health (TMO) • Ministry of Transport (MoT) • National Environment Service (NES) • Ministry of Infrastructure • Ministry of Internal Affairs • Ministry of Education • Ministry of Culture	• Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) – Marae Moana, Climate Change, CPPQ • Office of the Public Service Commission • Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) • Te Marae Ora/Ministry of Health (TMO) • Ministry of Transport (MoT) • National Environment Service (NES) • Ministry of Infrastructure • Ministry of Education	• Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) – ICT, CPPQ, Climate Change • Office of the Public Service Commission (PSC) • Crown Law Office (CLO) • Ministry of Finance & Economic Management (MFEM) • Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR) • Te Marae Ora/Ministry of Health (TMO) • Ministry of Transport (MoT) • National Environment Service (NES) • Ministry of Infrastructure • Ministry of Education • Ministry of Internal Affairs
Government Body		• Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA) • Maritime Cook Islands (MCI) • Business Trade & Investment Board (BTIB) • Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC)	• Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA) • Maritime Cook Islands (MCI) • Business Trade & Investment Board (BTIB) • Cook Islands Tourism Corporation • (CITC)	• Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA) • Maritime Cook Islands (MCI) • Cook Islands Tourism Corporation • (CITC)
Non State Actors/Civil Society	Punanga Turuturu Itivaine	• Cook Islands Association of NGOs (CISCO) • Te Ipukarea Society Inc. • Cook Islands Voyaging Society • Cook Islands Chamber of Commerce	• Cook Islands Association of NGOs (CISCO) • Te Ipukarea Society Inc. • Cook Islands Voyaging Society	• Cook Islands Association of NGOs (CISCO) • Te Ipukarea Society Inc. • Cook Islands Voyaging Society

ANNEXES - C

Name	Function
Marae Moana TAG : NES, MMR, OPM, SBMA, MFAI	For all ocean matters but focused on Marine spatial planning and marine activities - refer to MM Act. At the moment, BBNJ implementation will be led by MM as opposed to one specific line agency. MFAI continues to lead on the negotiations and the ratification process.
KAON : NES, Te Ipukarea, MFAI, OPM, DCD, Agriculture, Custom	For the purpose of monitoring the completion of the NBSAP that relate to MEAs that CKI is party to. Engagements are monthly.
NLAB - FINSEC, Immigration, TMOD, INTAFF as chair, OPSC, Chamber of Commerce, Workers Association	To discuss all matters related to Labour - ILO engagements - Decent Work Country Program implementation - Maritime Labour Convention and separate tripartite. Should be held quarterly.
IMSAS AUDIT - Crown Law - MFAI - Ministry of Transport - MCI	For the purpose of the completion of IMSAS AUDIT only - scheduled for Oct 2025.
Maritime Coordination Group - Maritime Cook Islands - Ministry of Transport - MFAI - FIU	For all matters relating to Maritime issues such as the ILO engagements, the issues of the sanctioned vessels, flag registry. Ongoing and supposed to be held every quarter.
CLAG – Combine Law Agencies Group	To share information and intelligence that could potentially impact safe and security of the Cook Islands.
CINIT – CI National Intelligence Taskforce (MFAI, FIU, CUSTOMS, MMR, POLICE, MOA)	A taskforce with a focus on the sharing of information or intelligence on threats that could affect the safety and security of the Cook Islands. i.e. OMCG
Cook Islands Research Ethics Committee – OPM-CPPO, MFAI-PIO, MoE, MoT, SBMA	All research undertaken in the Cook Islands must meet our research and ethical standards to protect those participating in the research.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

ANNEXES - C

CONTINUED

Name	Function
CBET – Border Easement Taskforce (SecFAI - Chair supported by ITAD, CoS OPM, Sec Health, Solicitor General, FinSec, CEO Tourism, OPSC)	Senior Officials Level overall co-ordination of the All of Government approach to Quarantine Free Travel (QFT). Focused efforts on fortifying our borders against COVID-19 and ensuring health, border and whole of society preparedness for resumption of two-way QFT with New Zealand (NZ). BET work has required coordination of domestic effort and sustained negotiations and engagement with NZ counterparts. The BET report to and take direction from the QFT Ministerial Troika (Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Health and Minister of Tourism) and ultimately Cabinet.
CBAT – Combined Border Agencies Taskforce (chaired by MFAI – PIO Immigration supported by ITAD, Customs, Biosecurity, Health, MoT – Land and Ports, AA – Tower and Avsec, Police)	Formalisation of the team made up of senior officials of key border agencies established with the objective of serving the Cook Islands best interests by mitigating risk through integrated cooperative and responsive border management. Objective is to serve the CI best interests by mitigating risk through a cooperative and responsive border management.
Student Loan Working Group – MoE, MFAI, CLO, OPM (CPPO), MFEM, OPSC	Platform for strategic policy discussion around Cook Islands Tertiary Loans Scheme and repayments – focused mainly on NZ StudyLink
NCD Taskforce – MFAI, CLO, MoH, MoE, MoT, IntAff, MoA, OPSC, Police, Red Cross, CINYC, CISNOC, Tourism	To monitor and report the progress on the implementation of the Ngaki'anga Kapiti Ora'anga Meitaki: Cook Islands National Strategy and Action Plan for Non-communicable Diseases 2021 – 2025. Advise on, and participate as appropriate, in meetings, workshops in promoting any part of the strategic activities.
Development Sector Committee – NZHC, OPSC, MoE, TMO, Tourism, MFEM-DCD	Established at JMF 2018 to ensure a platform for strategic policy discussion around CSS programme
Defense Cooperation Programme – Aus, MFEM, MMR, Police	Support and Observe coordination of bilateral programme
National Trade Development Committee – MFAI-BTIB Co-chair	Reviewing and updating National Trade Policy Framework, which is aimed at promoting economic development and integrating the country into the regional and global economy.