

Proactive Release

07/03/2023

The following Cabinet papers and related Cabinet minutes have been proactively released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Title	Reference
<i>Cabinet Minute of Decision – Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nania Mahuta</i>	CAB-22-MIN-0551
<i>Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nania Mahuta</i>	

Some parts of this information release would not be appropriate to release and, if requested, would be withheld under the Official Information Act 1982 (the OIA). Where this is the case, the relevant sections of the OIA that would apply have been identified. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Key to OIA redaction codes:

- 7(b): to protect relations between the governments of:
 - (i): New Zealand;
 - (ii): the Cook Islands;
- 7(c)(i): to protect the international relations of the Government of the Cook Islands.

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Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Cabinet

Report to Cabinet: Minister of Foreign Affairs' Visit to the Cook Islands: 12-15 October 2022

- 1 I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to the Cook Islands over 12-15 October 2022.

Report

- 2 My visit to the Cook Islands from 12-15 October 2022 was the first ministerial visit since its COVID-19 outbreak and the General Election in August 2022. The trip met the objectives outlined in the Cabinet paper seeking approval for the visit (see paragraph four below), and reaffirmed Aotearoa New Zealand's steadfast commitment to this important partner.
- 3 The Cook Islands is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's closest relationships in the Pacific region. We share a long-standing and special relationship, founded on deep whakapapa connections, constitutional ties and close political, economic and people-to-people links.
- 4 The objectives for my visit were to:
 - 4.1 consolidate gains in the relationship that we have made over the past two years of COVID-19, and reinforce our commitment to Cook Islands' response and recovery, including through announcing further support to the Polynesian Health Corridors programme and signing a Statement of Partnership;
 - 4.2 demonstrate Aotearoa New Zealand's commitment to supporting the Cook Islands' economic recovery, sustainable development and resilience, specifically through partnering on priority projects via our joint Infrastructure Trust Fund, including announcing an initial climate finance contribution of \$7.5m to a renewable energy upgrade in the northern Pa Enea;
 - 4.3 discuss opportunities for expanding mutually beneficial Māori-Māori engagement with the Cook Islands; and
 - 4.4 develop a mutual understanding of our respective priorities and positions on multilateral and regional issues, including in relation to the Pacific Islands Forum, which the Cook Islands will host in 2023.
- 5 The official programme included a welcome at Te Ui Ariki – the House of the Traditional Leaders, a meeting with Cook Islands Prime Minister Mark Brown and his Cabinet; the signing of the statement of partnership 'Waka Hourua/Vaka Purua'; a visit to Rarotonga Hospital; a day-trip to the remote island Manihiki, and visits to projects supported by Aotearoa New Zealand, including the Te Mato Vai water intake, Rarotonga Airport and the waka-building project Te Mana o Te Vaka.

- 6 Detailed reporting has been produced by the diplomatic post in Rarotonga and circulated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade's formal message system.

Strengthening the bilateral relationship

- 7 My visit began with a kiritimarotai turou at Te Ui Ariki, the House of the Traditional Leaders. I laid a mauri stone at the pito of the marae as a symbol of our countries' enduring connection. The strength of our hononga Māori also played a large part in how positively the Cook Islands responded to the visit.
- 8 My meeting with Prime Minister Brown and his Cabinet was constructive and engaging, reflecting the whanaungatanga shared by our two countries. Our conversations traversed a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues, including seabed mining, and Pacific Islands Forum leadership. We reiterated a joint commitment to working together on the shared challenges of climate change and building economic resilience, and I confirmed Aotearoa New Zealand's intention to invest a further \$3.8 million in the Polynesian Health Corridors programme.
- 9 Prime Minister Brown expressed the Cook Islands' gratitude for Aotearoa New Zealand's support through its COVID-19 outbreak. The Cook Islands experienced a 25% contraction in GDP during COVID-19 border closures, and Prime Minister Brown identified tourism and infrastructure investment as the two pillars to support its economic recovery. s7(b)(ii)

On infrastructure investment, I noted the benefits of our Infrastructure Trust Fund given it enabled local contractors to complete work on our joint Rarotonga Airport runway slab remediation project, despite border closures. The project had employed over 60 local workers at full pay.

- 10 My engagement with the Prime Minister culminated in the signing of our statement of partnership, *Waka Hourua/Vaka Purua* (our respective Te Reo Māori names for the double-hulled canoe our shared tupuna used when navigating the Pacific). *Waka Hourua/Vaka Purua* anchors our relationship firmly in our centuries-old whakapapa links, is interwoven with our shared matauranga Māori, and commits us to upholding one another's mana as we work to improve our prosperity, well-being, security and environment.

Seabed mineral extraction

- 11 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii) I emphasised that while we respected the Cook Islands' sovereign right to mine in its Exclusive Economic Zone s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii), Aotearoa New Zealand would nevertheless likely support a conditional moratorium in the absence of agreed international rules on high seas mining. [Our support for a conditional moratorium has subsequently been announced publicly.] Prime Minister Brown and I agreed our bilateral relationship was strong enough to withstand being in "different vaka" on this issue.

Pacific Islands Forum

- 12 The Cook Islands' role as in-coming PIF chair was a key subject of discussion, with s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

I offered an initial \$200,000 to support the Cook Islands' PIF preparations, s7(c)(i)

Climate finance

- 13 I noted Aotearoa New Zealand's awareness of the challenges around adaptation in the Pacific, noting that 50 per cent of our \$1.3 billion climate finance commitment would be spent on adaptation. The Prime Minister and I discussed regional solutions to enable smoother access to climate finance, tailored to regional needs.
s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Manihiki visit

- 14 One of the highlights of the visit was the opportunity to travel with the Prime Minister and a Cook Islands delegation on the NZDF C-130 Hercules to the northern coral atoll of Manihiki. I met with the Island Council, visited Aotearoa New Zealand funded projects and engaged with the community. I was able to see first-hand the impacts of sea level rise and climate change in Manihiki. The coral atoll is just five meters above sea level, but the community wants to remain living on the land of their ancestors.
- 15 During the visit, I announced Aotearoa New Zealand would provide \$7.5 million in climate financing to upgrade the solar renewable energy systems in the northern group of islands (including Manihiki), and affirmed our in-principle support to the Island Council for the Manihiki airport runway upgrade.
- 16 s7(b)(i), s7(b)(ii)

Proactive Release

- 17 This paper will be proactively released as per Cabinet Office Circular CO(18)4 on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website. Proactive release is subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendations

The Minister of Foreign Affairs recommends that Cabinet:

- 1 note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

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Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Minita Take Aorere / Minister of Foreign Affairs

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Cabinet

Minute of Decision

This document contains information for the New Zealand Cabinet. It must be treated in confidence and handled in accordance with any security classification, or other endorsement. The information can only be released, including under the Official Information Act 1982, by persons with the appropriate authority.

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Portfolio Foreign Affairs

On 12 December 2022, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Nanaia Mahuta under CAB-22-SUB-0551 on her travel, from 12 to 15 October 2022, to the Cook Islands for a bilateral visit.

Rachel Hayward
Secretary of the Cabinet