

NEWS UPDATE

MEI TE VAI KI TE VAI – RESTORING THE HEALTH OF OUR LAGOONS RAROTONGA NEWS UPDATE, JANUARY 2018

HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM THE MEI TE VAI KI TE VAI TEAM!

Download the discussion guide presented at our recent workshop from our [website](#), or ask our team for a [copy](#).

AT A GLANCE

- Preparing a Wastewater Infrastructure Masterplan for Rarotonga
- Dredging planned to help address the issues in Muri/Avana
- Key comments and questions from attendees at our December public workshop
- Results of our laundry soap survey

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

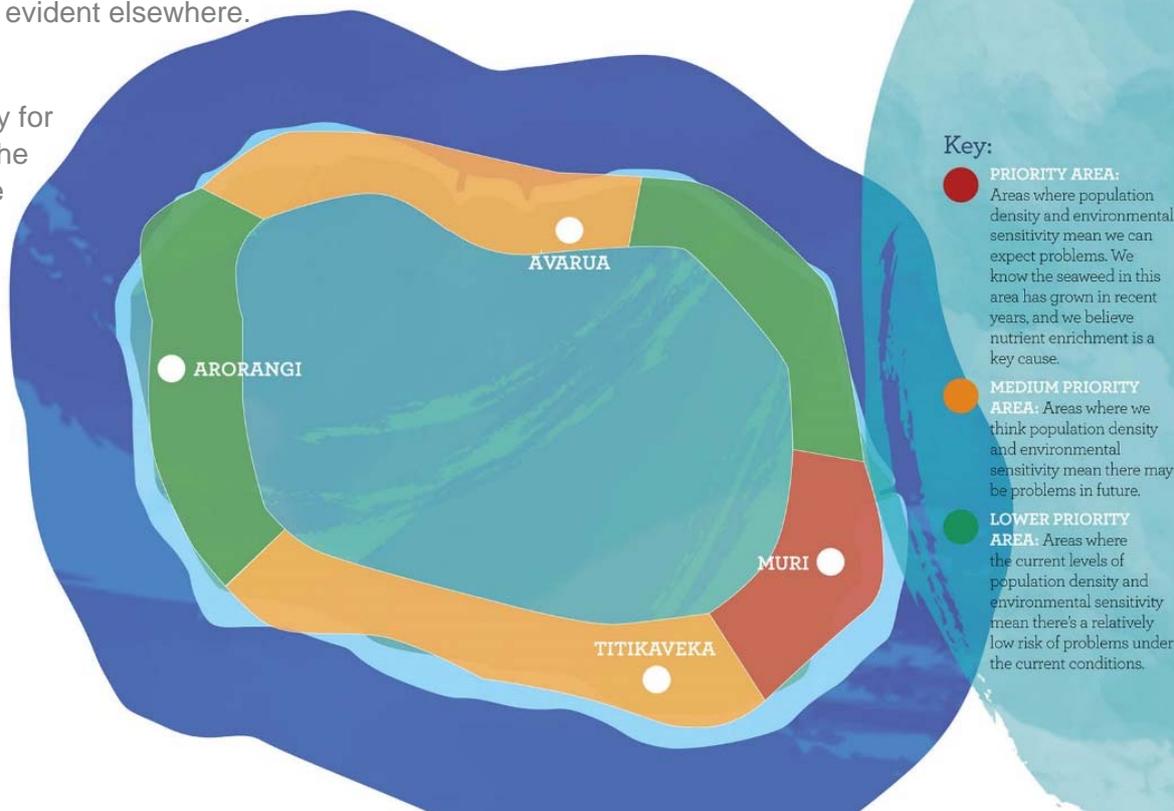
We're preparing a wastewater masterplan for Rarotonga

The need for a high-level plan to guide investment in upgrading sanitation infrastructure in Rarotonga and Aitutaki has been well recognised by the Cook Islands Government. We are now preparing a Wastewater Infrastructure Masterplan for Rarotonga, to be presented to the Cook Islands Government later this year. The Masterplan will reflect the Government's national requirements and goals, identifying key actions, their priorities and linkages, and a timeline.

While we acknowledge there is significant concern about the problems at Muri, it's important we plan infrastructure upgrades at a Rarotonga-wide level, as we expect these problems will not be limited to Muri. Similar problems will begin to show up in other places around Rarotonga – seaweed growth is already evident elsewhere.

The map below shows the areas we think are a priority for wastewater investment in the future. This is based on the intensity of land-use and environmental sensitivity.

We'll update this map when we have completed our investigations at Muri, and as we learn from ongoing environmental monitoring at Muri and around the island.



Dredging planned at Vai Te Renga Stream

There is a widely-held public view that poor water circulation in the Muri Lagoon is caused by sediment build-up in the lagoon and/or at Ngatangia Harbour mouth. A number of concerned residents have asked us why dredging in the area hasn't been done yet.

The water flows in the lagoon are being studied now by coastal specialists, and a model will be built over the next few months. The model will be used to run simulations for dredging in a range of areas to predict how the pattern of water flow will respond. To ensure all environmental effects can be properly accounted for, our environmental experts will not commit to large scale dredging until the field work and modelling is complete.

However we have developed a near-shore dredging plan to remove sediment from the mouth of the Vai Te Renga Stream (near Pacific Resort), using the sediment along eroded areas of the Muri Lagoon foreshore. We think this will improve the along shore movement of the Lagoon water, while helping to replenish sand on the eroded beach area at Nukupure sports field.

In December we lodged an Environmental Impact Assessment with NES for this work. As part of their assessment process, the NES has now publicly notified our proposal – you can find a copy of it on the NES website:

<http://environment.gov.ck/advisory-compliance-division/eias/>.

Summary of our December public workshop

At the end of last year we met with Kainuku Ariki, the Pu Tapere and the Aronga Mana of Muri and Avana. This meeting was to discuss the two possible disposal options for treated wastewater from the Muri area and ask for their input to find suitable land to ensure we can present land disposal as a viable option in our report to the Government. This meeting was followed by a community workshop at the University of the South Pacific Centre.

At the workshop we presented an update on the environmental investigations and the two recommended permanent infrastructure options for Muri. We also discussed why wastewater management might be needed around the rest of Rarotonga in future.

There was general consensus from attendees that the wastewater issue on Rarotonga needs to be addressed, but technical solutions will need to be environmentally, socially, culturally acceptable as well as economically viable.

Key issues raised included:

- The need to prevent issues like those at Muri Lagoon from happening on other islands.
- The impact of Muri Lagoon issues on tourism, which hurts local businesses and the community.
- A strong preference for dredging, and for the work to happen as soon as possible.
- The challenge of locating and acquiring suitable land to make land-based disposal a viable option.
- Managing the impact of ocean outfall on the sensitive marine environment, in particular as the reef is still recovering from a Tamea (crown of thorn) outbreak.
- Ensuring the PMU provides information on all options for wastewater treatment (primary, secondary, tertiary), not just recommended options (we will follow up on this).
- Involving the community and local experts in the project (we will follow up on this also).

In 2018 we will be taking information out into the community, for example through a stall at the markets, and continuing to meet with Aronga Mana, environmental and other interest groups, and local experts.

Results of our laundry soap survey

We recently ran a survey about use of laundry soaps containing phosphates, to inform our environmental monitoring and plans to help manage Muri Lagoon's water quality.

The results told us that:

- We use at least 8760 kgs of laundry soap each month in Rarotonga.
- We put about about 4.35 kgs of phosphates from laundry soap into the environment each month.
- This is unlikely to be a big cause of seaweed growth.

Although it's great to know laundry soap is unlikely to be a big cause of seaweed growth, positive choices are still important because of the large amount of laundry soap used in Rarotonga.

So please choose phosphate-free!