NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
Manatū Aorere

RESTORING ISLAND RESILIENCE

MANAGING INVASIVE SPECIES IN PACIFIC ISLAND ECOSYSTEMS

MID-TERM REVIEW
FINAL REPORT

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PREPARED FOR: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE

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Disclaimer

This report represents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Review Team based on the information available at the time of writing. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the evaluators cannot guarantee the completeness or currency of all information. The report has been prepared solely for the purposes stated in it. It should not be relied on for any other purpose. The recommendations provided are intended to support decision-making but should be considered alongside other relevant factors and contextual considerations.

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List of Acronyms

CSO	Civil Society Organisations
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion
ICFS	International Climate Finance Strategy
ISM	Invasive Species Management
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MISCCAP	Managing Invasive Species for Climate Change Adaptation in the Pacific
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NENS*	Natural Enemies, Natural Solutions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NZD	New Zealand Dollar
OECD - DAC	Organisation for Economic Coordination and Development – Development Assistance Criteria
PFP*	Predator Free Pacific
PILN	Pacific Invasives Learning Network
POI*	Protect Our Islands
PRISMSS	Pacific Regional Invasive Species Management Support Service
RERC*	Resilient Ecosystems, Resilient Communities
RIR	Restoring Island Resilience
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
TK	Traditional (indigenous) Knowledge
WOW*	War on Weeds

* Denotes a programme under PRISMSS

Executive Summary

Background & Purpose

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Restoring Island Resilience (RIR) Activity assessed the relevance and coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (MFAT) NZ$20.6 million investment in invasive species management (ISM) in the Pacific region. The Review's core focus was the RIR Activity (July 2023 - June 2026) however in order to meet MFAT's objectives, aspects of RIR's predecessor activity, Managing Invasive Species for Climate Change Adaptation in the Pacific (MISCCAP, December 2019 - October 2024) was also considered.

The Review aimed to identify what works, what doesn't, and why in RIR's delivery approach, activities, and results to date. Key focus areas included:

- Assessing the climate impact of MFAT's funding of RIR and MISCCAP delivered by the Pacific Regional Invasive Species Management Support Service (PRISMSS) and progress in scaling up ISM
- Assessing how well Gender, Equity, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and Traditional Knowledge (TK) are being incorporated
- Reviewing the effectiveness of the MERL Framework and reporting templates
- Examining approaches for communicating climate impact through storytelling

The Review's findings are intended to inform decision-making for the remainder of the RIR activity, improve reporting processes, and enhance the integration of GEDSI and TK in PRISMSS's work. The Review also provides insights for future climate resilience and biodiversity conservation projects in the Pacific region. This includes potential future investments made by MFAT, as well as other donors.

Key Findings

- **The Review found that RIR is highly relevant, meeting clear needs that address interrelated biodiversity, livelihoods, and climate change objectives in the Pacific region.** The activity demonstrates broad coherence with relevant regional and national strategies and plans, though there are opportunities to strengthen local engagement and consultation processes.
- **RIR is being well implemented overall, with most planned work progressing on track despite logistical challenges typical of operating in remote Pacific locations.** PRISMSS is proving to be an effective delivery modality, though some efficiency gains could be achieved through improved coordination and continuing to focus on developing the systems and processes they have established.
- **While it is too early to assess many of RIR's intended short-term outcomes, progress reporting suggests intended outputs and outcomes will be achieved.** Evidence from MISCCAP and the trajectory of RIR indicates progress toward intended short and medium-term outcomes is occurring, supporting target communities and sites to be more climate resilient, although risks associated with longer-term monitoring data collection may constrain future impact assessments.

The Review identified several critical factors influencing RIR and PRISMSS's effectiveness:

1. The importance of community engagement and ownership in successful ISM initiatives
2. The value of MFAT's flexible funding approach in enabling responsive programming
3. The need to balance rapid scaling with sufficient time for community consultation
4. The benefits of integrating traditional knowledge, local expertise, and working with community.

Several challenges were also identified that may threaten continued success:

1. RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS: PRISMSS's small team size limits their ability to effectively balance strategic and operational functions. Similar resource constraints are experienced in partner countries.

2. SUSTAINABILITY RISKS: Limited in-country ISM capacity and reliance on short-term funding pose risks to long-term sustainability of funded initiatives. The effectiveness of critical enablers such as meaningful community engagement and capacity building pose further risks to sustainability.

3. MERL LIMITATIONS: The current MERL framework's focus on quantitative metrics may not adequately capture qualitative outcomes including GEDSI, TK, climate impacts, and critical enablers.

4. IMPLEMENTATION TIMEFRAMES: Relatively short funding (and therefore delivery) windows can compromise important foundational work, particularly community engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review offers nine key recommendations organised into three key areas for improvement:

SYSTEMS AND TOOLS

1. Strengthen the Navigator platform to improve user engagement and data collection, including for GEDSI, TK, and climate outcomes.
2. Strengthen the RIR MERL Framework by including critical enablers and expanding data. collection approaches to better track GEDSI, TK and climate outcomes.

ADDRESSING THE CRITICAL ENABLERS / CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

3. Develop locally appropriate approaches to build in-country ownership.
4. Implement a more systematic approach to building in-country capability for ISM.
5. Strengthen the integration of GEDSI and TK by building on existing good practice.

STRATEGIC APPROACH AND FUNDING

6. Review PRISMSS's project development and implementation model to better support all critical activities.
7. Strengthen PRISMSS's strategic approach through use of shared/integrated frameworks and review the effectiveness of the governance arrangements for the RIR Activity.
8. Adopt more inclusive investment design processes for future MFAT funding.
9. Explore complementary funding mechanisms to support comprehensive, long-term ISM as a response to climate resilience.

LOOKING FORWARD

RIR represents a significant investment in Pacific climate resilience through invasive species management. The activity demonstrates strong potential for success, however careful attention to the identified challenges and implementation of the recommendations will be crucial for achieving lasting impact. Particular focus should be given to building sustainable local capacity, ensuring adequate time for community engagement, and developing more comprehensive monitoring and evaluation approaches.

The Review confirms that MFAT's choice to deliver through PRISMSS was appropriate, though additional support may be needed to fully realise the potential of this regional service model. Future investments should consider longer timeframes and more flexible funding mechanisms to better accommodate the complex nature of invasive species management in the Pacific context.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Invasive Species Management In The Pacific

Climate change is regarded as the *"single greatest existential threat to the Blue Pacific"*[1], and it is widely acknowledged that climate and biodiversity are interrelated and must therefore be addressed together. In addition to the impact of human activities, and the impacts of climate change itself, **invasive species** are one of greatest threats to biodiversity in Pacific Island countries and territories[2]. Strengthening ecosystems in the Pacific forms the frontline defence against the multiplier effect of climate change and invasive species - whether sea level rise and storm surge, or flooding and erosion from storm events.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) have funded an array of activities historically that address invasive species management (ISM) in the Pacific region. Most recently (from 2019 – 2024) MFAT funded the Managing Invasive Species for Climate Change Adaptation in the Pacific (MISCCAP) activity. This activity comprised of $10 million dollar investment (funded under MFAT's Climate Change Programme) which funded two New Zealand organisations (Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (MWRL) and the Department of Conservation (DoC)) and one regional organisation (Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) to deliver ISM programmes. SPREP's component was delivered through its Pacific Regional Invasive Species Management Support Service (PRISMSS), based in Apia.

What is PRISMSS

PRISMSS was established in 2019, and builds on a range of ISM activities delivered over the years by SPREP. PRISMSS was set up to address a major gap in the provision of on the ground support, targeting operational action and in doing so (by operating as a regional mechanism) provide an opportunity to *"significantly increase both the quantity and scope of management operations in the region"*[3].

ISM approaches used by PRISMSS include: Prevention; Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR); Control; Eradication; and Restoration[4], any of which can target both weeds (plants) and pests (animals) to address the threats and impact these invasive species posed to biodiversity, climate resilience and livelihoods outcomes. Invasive species are present in both the terrestrial and marine environment, although to-date the bulk of ISM in the Pacific has targeted terrestrial pests and weeds (although PRISMSS intends to add a marine programme, and added the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) as a Technical Partner in late 2024).

A key feature of PRISMSS is its intention to act as a coordinating body, to bring greater efficiency and effectiveness to ISM in the region. PRISMSS is doing this through securing regional funding for countries and territories, as well as streamlining and coordinating access to technical expertise and operational support.

PRISMSS have established five regional programmes each of which provides advice, training and operational support tailored to the needs of the country/location/site. These are summarised in Table 1 (pg. 5). Each

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[1] 51st Pacific Islands Forum Communique 11 – 14 July 2022 Paragraph 33, pg, 6. https://forumsec.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/2022-Forum-Communique-Suva-Fiji-11-12%20July.pdf

[2] Managing Invasive Species for Improved Climate Resilience, Single Stage Business Case, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pg. 6.

[3] Pacific Regional Invasive Species Management Support Service Brochure. https://www.sprep.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/prismss-%20e-brochure.pdf

[4] Managing Invasive Species for Improved Climate Resilience, Single Stage Business Case, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, pg. 9.

programme has an assigned 'technical lead', however within each programme the delivery may involve contracting arrangements with several other partner organisations.

MFAT's International Climate Finance Strategy and Strategic Intentions

In 2022, MFAT released Tuia te Waka a Kiwa – the Aotearoa New Zealand International Climate Finance Strategy (ICFS). This strategy underpins all investment decisions for allocations from NZ$1.3 billion of climate finance from 2022 – 2025, including NZ$800 million climate-specific funding. It was from within this climate-specific envelope that any follow-up to MISCCAP would be funded.

The ICFS is guided by a high-level Theory of Change (ToC), comprised of four goals, each of which has a small number of contributing outcomes. The strategy also outlines three engagement principles[5], and five key 'preferences' (including investing in biodiversity)[6] to be considered when designing and delivering initiatives funded under this portfolio. It is within this funding context that MFAT considered its investment decisions regarding follow-up to MISCCAP. These investments are also more broadly aligned to MFAT's overall Strategic Intentions 2024-2028, particularly the 'sustainable future' goal and the supporting outcome to improve Pacific climate and disaster resilience. While these strategic intentions were announced after the RIR Activity was started, these intentions reflect the higher-level commitment to climate resilience beyond the life of the ICFS.

A business case was developed that considered several funding options to continue/follow-up the MISCCAP investment. The business case identified two key problems:

1. Spread of invasive species threatens ecosystems and biodiversity, increasing vulnerability to climate change and disaster impacts
2. Spread of invasive species is impacting food security, livelihoods and people's wellbeing.

The business case also noted that notwithstanding growing efforts the region, ISM in the Pacific was deemed 'poor to fair' in a regional State of the Environment report, and identified three current barriers to successful ISM in the Pacific:

1. Limited capacity, capability, and financial resources
2. Complex and remote ecosystems
3. Limited technical expertise

The subsequent investment was named the Restoring Island Resilience (RIR) Activity[7]. The new RIR activity has seen a doubling in funding (NZ$20.6 million over three years, July 2023 – June 2026), and a change to the contracting approach – directing funding via PRISMSS to coordinate, rather than three separate delivery partners. An overview of the RIR (and MISCCAP) investment is shown in Table 1.

[5] Engagement principle 1: Te Puna Manaaki (fountain of support); Engagement principle 2: Raranga te Muka (weaving the strands); Engagement principle 3: Tātou Tātou (all of us together). See Section 5.1 of the ICFS. (link in footnote below).

[6] High Climate Impact, Pacific Focus Global Impact, Promoting Adaptation, Loos & Damage, Acting at Scale. See section 5.2 of the ICFS. https://www.mfat.govt.nz/assets/Aid/Climate-finance/International-Climate-Finance-Strategy-FINAL-16Aug22-low-res.pdf

[7] Note that MFAT referred to investments into programmes of work are as 'Activities'

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF FUNDING AND ACTIVITIES SUPPORTED BY RIR AND MISCCAP.

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The new RIR activity has reconfigured how the funding is allocated, with two broad outputs (see Figure 1). Output 1 provides core funding to build PRISMSS capacity, and Output 2, funds the ISM activities that are delivered via PRISMSS five programmes (see Table 1).

It should be noted that due to the tight funding window for the ICFS, there was an overlap of approximately 16 months in funding between MISCCAP (December 2019 – October 2024) and RIR (July 2023 – June 2026). Furthermore, the funding period for ICFS means funds must be disbursed by December 2025 (even though the Activity runs until June 2026).

RIR operating context

As noted above, PRISMSS sits within SPREP, which has been delivering other ISM activities via its Invasive Species Team for some time, as well as other regional organisation's activities (e.g., SPC). These other activities have been funded via a series of multilateral and bilateral funding mechanisms including GEF grants, the Kiwa Initiative, and the International Climate Initiative (IKI), and previous funding from MFAT, the EU, US and UK implemented at regional and national levels.

Because RIR is being delivered via PRISMSS, this means that differentiating RIR specific outcomes is not always straightforward. While PRISMSS's approach is to tag funds to specific activities and outputs, the summative effect of different donor's and their investments into ISM activities in the Pacific (previously and currently) makes differentiating donor contributions more difficult.

It should be noted that coordinating and leveraging different investments is a core intention of PRISMSS to make ISM activities more efficient and effective, and the use of a regional delivery partnership strongly aligns with ICFS investment principles and preferences. This can create attribution/contribution challenges when assessing specific outcomes and impacts from individual investments such as RIR. For example, in some countries, RIR has utilised or leveraged foundational work (e.g. feasibility studies and stakeholder engagement) undertaken by MISCCAP, or relies upon in-country resourcing (e.g., invasive species co-ordinators) funded under GEF-6.

RIR Theory of Change

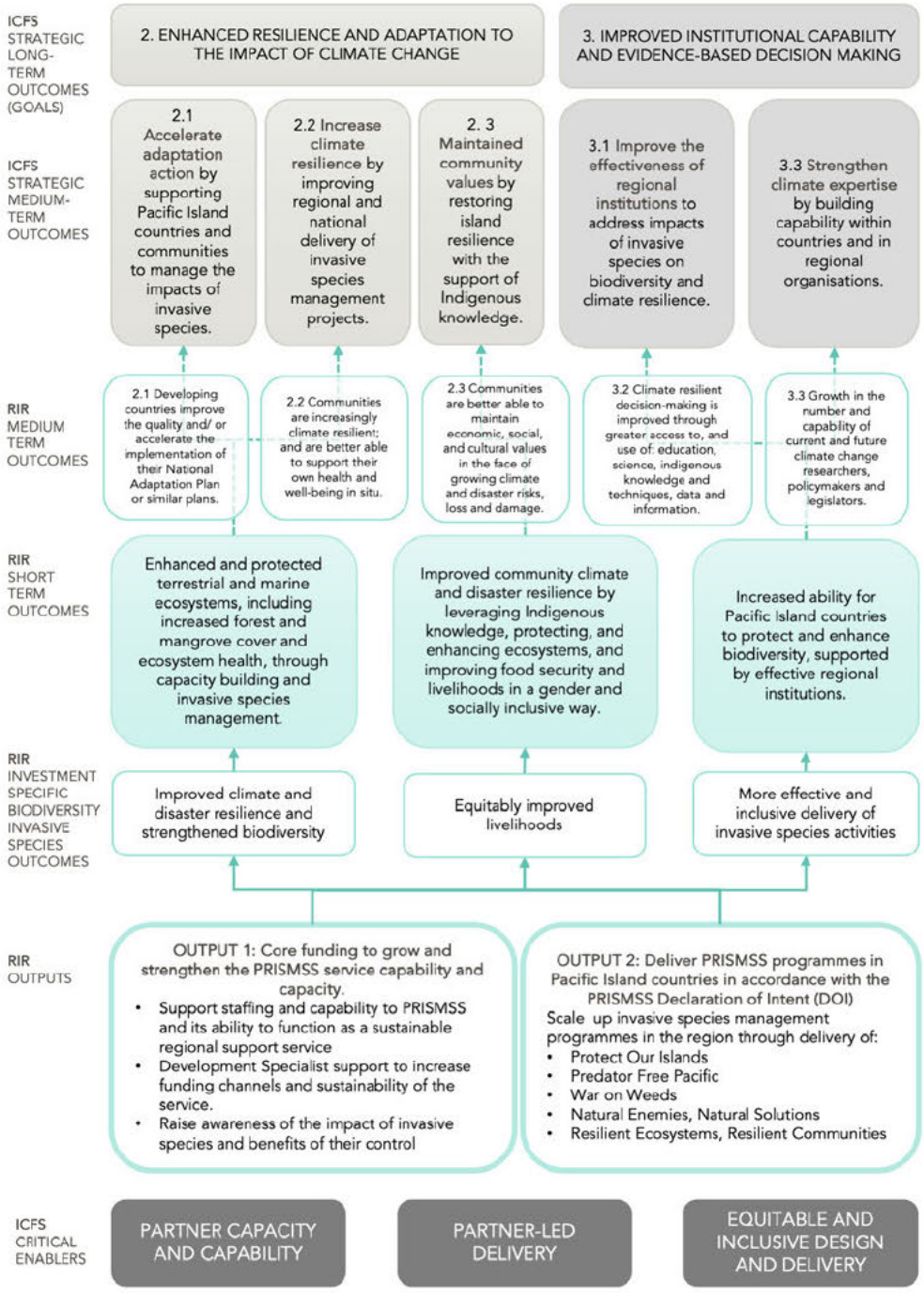
The business case and RIR Implementation Plan outlined an overarching Theory of Change (ToC) for the investment, which is shown in **green** in Figure 1 and describes the intent for the RIR activity, through a combination of direct funding to PRISMSS to grow regional capability and capacity (Output 1), and direct funding of ISM projects (delivered via PRISMSS programme structure) (Output 2), to contribute to outcomes related to improvements to biodiversity, to livelihoods, to regional capacity and capability, and climate change resilience. The Activity level ToC described in the Activity documentation, also identified which ICFS medium and longer-term outcomes RIR contributes to (shown in Figure 1 in grey and light brown).

The ToC shown in Figure 1 is a slight elaboration on what has been described in the Activity documentation to-date. It includes the addition of the ICFS 'critical enablers', which were added to the ICFS's strengthened ToC following an evaluability assessment in 2024[8]. Figure 1 also differentiates the outcomes that are being tracked and monitored for performance reporting for RIR, which are shown as boxes with a **green outline** (RIR outputs, Investment specific biodiversity and ISM outcomes, and RIR medium-term outcomes). Figure 1 also seeks to more clearly show (using a diagram/logic model) the line-of-sight from RIR's short-term outcomes, through to the medium and long-term outcomes for both RIR and ICFS[9]. In reality there is a many-to-many relationship between short, medium and long-term outcomes, however this helps to illustrate the general 'logic' of the intended ToC

[8] Martin Jenkins, 10 April 2024, Evaluability Assessment report – ICFS | Tuia te Waka a Kiwa, pgs., 16 – 17, Appendix 1 & 2.

[9] Note – the numbering included for the RIR medium-term outcomes currently does not correspond to the numbering for the ICFS for ICFS outcome 3.1 and RIR medium-term outcome 3.2. The numbering has been carried forwarding into the diagram from the RIR Implementation Plan for tracability. Some comments regarding updates to the ToC for RIR are included as part of the findings in this report. For more details refer to the MERL section pg. 25 and Appendix A.

FIGURE 1. REVISED HIGH LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE FOR THE RESTORING ISLAND RESILIENCE ACTIVITY.



PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this Mid-Term Review ((MTR), hereafter also referred to as 'the Review') is to examine the activity's delivery approach, activities and results to date, to identify what works, what does not, and why, for the Restoring Island Resilience (RIR) activity. It has focused on describing progress and any key results from RIR to-date, identifying opportunities for improvement, strengthening implementation approaches, and developing tools to support ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

Key focus areas identified by MFAT for the Review included assessing:

- the climate impact of PRISMSS's work, including understanding key achievements of the work MFAT has funded through MISCCAP and RIR, and understanding progress in scaling up invasive species management work
- how well it is incorporating practices to support GEDSI and TK
- the effectiveness of the MERL Framework and associated reporting templates to improve reporting on outcomes related to climate, GEDSI and TK
- the effectiveness of approaches and strategies for communicating the climate impact of the activity particularly through the use of more storytelling vs. technocratic approaches.

While the focus of the Review was RIR, due to MFAT's inclusion of a focus on understanding the climate impact of MFAT's funding to PRISMSS work through both MISCCAP and RIR, the scope of the Review is best described as nested, with a core focus on RIR (July 2023 to present), but with an expanded focus to include MISCCAP's to allow for considerations of that investment's impacts and learning from delivery. This scoping created some challenges for the Review which are detailed in the Limitation and Considerations section.

MFAT also requested the scope of the Review include capability building or training for PRISMSS implementing partners on identifying and reporting on climate, GEDSI and TK outcomes. Expert advice on GEDSI was included via the Review Team's participation in the six-monthly Partners Meeting (November 2024). Training was also delivered on the use of Rubrics as a tool at the same meeting. The Review Team also identified potential follow-up sessions linked to the purpose and key findings in the report, which were also offered when this report was submitted. The uptake of these was not confirmed at the time of finalising this report.

Use and Users

The MTR will be used to inform decision-making for the remainder of the RIR activity, improve reporting processes, and enhance the integration of GEDSI and TK in PRISMSS's work. It will also provide insights for future climate resilience and biodiversity conservation projects in the Pacific region and contribute to portfolio-level reporting and decision-making.

The main users of the Review's output are expected to be:

- **MFAT** (as the donor organisation), **SPREP/PRISMSS** (as the implementing partner), **Other PRISMSS partners** (Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research, Island Conservation, BirdLife International, etc.)
- Pacific Island country governments and stakeholders involved in the RIR activity
- New Zealand stakeholders such as Treasury, who are interested in the results of this significant investment.
- Other current and potential future donors including the UK and Australia.

Key Questions

11 key evaluation questions were used to guide the inquiry process for this review. The key questions were based on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria to assess quality of development assistance[10], and then expanded to meet all the key objectives of the Review (see above, Purpose and Scope). A rubric was developed for these to support the evaluative judgements made in the report (Appendix B).

RELEVANCE & COHERENCE

1. *To what extent is RIR meeting the needs of stakeholders, partners and communities?*

[10] https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/development-co-operation-evaluation-and-effectiveness/evaluation-criteria.html

2. *How well is the activity aligned to other relevant strategies, activities, and plans[11]?*

EFFICIENCY

3. *How well is RIR being implemented?*
   a. How well are the MFAT, PRISMSS, and other partners working together to deliver RIR?
   b. Are the arrangements supporting the effective access to and deployment of resources?

EFFECTIVENESS

4. *To what extent has RIR achieved, or is likely to achieve, its intended outputs and short-term outcomes?*
5. *How effective has MFAT's funding of MISCCAP and RIR been or likely to be in enhancing climate resilience and biodiversity in the Pacific Island countries? What evidence is available to assess this?*

SUSTAINABILITY

6. *How is RIR's and PRISMSS implementation approach helping to build sustainable approaches to invasive species management across the Pacific?*
7. *How well have the ICFS critical enablers been incorporated into the RIR Activity?*

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

GEDSI AND TK INTEGRATION

8. *To what extent and how well has the activity incorporated GEDSI and Traditional knowledge in its implementation?*

MERL QUALITY

9. *How well does the current MERL Framework capture and report on the activity's outcomes?*
   a. How well does RIR align with and contribute to the broader climate finance portfolio's Strategic (Short, Medium, and Long-term) Outcomes?
   b. How effectively are RIR activities framed and communicated in terms of their climate change impact?
   c. What improvements (if any) can be made to reporting processes (including engagement and feedback mechanisms) and products to better reflect the activity's outcomes and the information needs of stakeholders, partners and communities?
10. *What learnings can be identified that might contribute to MFAT's MERL activities for the ICFS?*

[11] These include (but not limited to) MFAT's ICFS, National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs), National Invasive Species Strategy and Action Plans (NISSAPs), and the Guiding Framework for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific.

LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT

11. What changes could be made to enhance the implementation (including the scaling up) of the RIR activity?

It should be noted that the core criteria are inter-related. For logic and flow some findings may be elaborated in other latter sections. Where this is the case, cross-referencing to the relevant section help ensure these connections and inter-related findings are clear.

APPROACH/METHODOLOGY

The methodology used was a culturally sensitive, strength-based approach following the six-step Kakala[12]. The Kakala Research Framework is a Pacific methodology. Developed in 2006, it is an extension of the Kakala Framework, originally designed by Konai Helu (1997) and further refined by Fua Johannson (2014). It's influenced by Tongan ethical research protocols that observe and honours relationships, reciprocity, respect and humility. The Kakala is a metaphor and an analogy about making garlands or kahoa, which is a communal process (of weaving together a string or lei of flowers) that demonstrates collaboration, sharing of resources. There is a unique method and process to making specific garlands for specific occasions which mirrors the processes of monitoring, research, evaluation and co-design. Below were the six steps undertaken by the Review:

Image: A Kaloni Kakala garland representing the six steps

Phase 1: TEU (Setting the Pathway) began with discussions with MFAT to clarify the Review's purpose, scope, and key evaluation questions. This included reviewing relevant documents (the RIR business case, logic model, etc.), mapping and aligning of outcomes from RIR to ICFS to define the theory of change, and identifying key stakeholders to engage throughout the process.

Phase 2: TOLI (Data Collection Methods) This phase has two distinct features; the Stakeholder Identification and Engagement process and the Collection of Data and Insights.

- Stakeholder Identification and Engagement – A comprehensive list of stakeholders was developed, ensuring diverse representation (Pacific Island communities, government officials, implementing partners, NGOs, etc.) and a strategy for engaging these stakeholders was detailed, respecting cultural norms, and voluntary participation.
- Collection of Data and Insights – Data collection employed a hybrid model with in-country travel for Tonga and Cook Islands and online inquiry for Tuvalu, Solomon Islands (FSM were also invited but were unable to attend). The same method was used to engage the Technical Partners and MFAT with more feedback collected at the MISCCAP Steering Committee Meeting and the six-monthly PRISSMS Partners Meeting in Christchurch. A complete list of Stakeholders engaged and documents reviewed is included in Appendix C.

Phase 3: TUI (Data Analysis Techniques) Data both quantitative and qualitative (thematic analysis) were reviewed and analysed. Emphasis was given to identifying emergent themes, contextualising findings within

[12] Johansson-Fua, S. (2014). *Kakala Research Framework: A Garland in Celebration of a Decade of Rethinking Education*. In M. 'Otunuku, U. Nabobo-Baba, & S. Johansson-Fua (Eds.), Of Waves, Winds and Wonderful Things: A Decade of Rethinking Pacific Education (pp. 50-72). USP Press.

the experiences of Pacific Island communities, triangulation through post-field debriefing discussions (Tonga and Cook Islands) and online discussions with technical partners and MFAT to validate results.

Phase 4: LUVA (Preliminary Sense Making and Rubric Development). This is a twofold phase:

- Preliminary Sense-Making – Early findings from data analysis were shared and discussed online with key stakeholders: MFAT, SPREP, technical and country government, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) partners and communities. This process involves iterative feedback to ensure the interpretation aligns with community experiences and priorities.
- Rubric Development – Preliminary findings were refined through a collaborative process to improve the draft evaluation rubric to guide final judgments on the RIR activity's performance against the identified evaluation criteria (relevance and coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability).

Phase 5: MALIE (Integration, Framing the Story) A draft MTR report was compiled, integrating findings, interpretations, and stakeholder feedback. The draft revised version of the ToC was also finalised (and a separate generic ToC was also developed). Emphasis was given to telling a compelling and culturally appropriate story that reflects the experiences and perspectives of Pacific Island Communities, particularly Palmerston Atoll in Cook Islands, and Vava'u in Tonga. The draft report was shared with key stakeholders for feedback and validation. Iterative revisions were made to incorporate comments and ensure consensus.

Phase 6: MAFANA (Empowerment, Transferability, and Sustainability) Final recommendations were developed, emphasising both specific actions to improve the RIR activity and broader lessons learned for future initiatives. Additional outputs were also discussed to support effective use of the report's findings. The recommendations are designed to equip Pacific Island communities, promote sustainability, and enhance transferability of ISM for climate resilience that are based on lessons learned, to other contexts.

Ethics

The following steps were taken to ensure the Review complied with expectations for ethical conduct:

- Obtained informed consent from all participants
- Respected cultural norms and practices in Pacific Island communities
- Ensured voluntary participation and the right to withdraw
- Conducted the evaluation in line with MFAT and SPREPs relevant MERL policies and guidelines
- Adhered to the professional guidelines and standards of the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association and the Australian Evaluation Society, as Kara is a member of both organisations
- Anonymised data where appropriate
- Secure storage of all collected data
- Limited access to raw data to the evaluation team only
- Destroying any sensitive data in accordance with NZ law (noting some information may need to be held securely for extended periods of time).

Limitations and Considerations

As noted above, there has been a large overlap in the RIR Activity and MISCCAP, and many of RIR activities are inter-related with MISCCAP. This is either by building on the work completed (directly funding the continuation of work already initiated by MISCCAP, or by replication to other sites) or indirectly, by leveraging the operations and regional work programme being led by PRISMSS (partly funded by MFAT via MISCCAP).

The overlap in funding periods, combined with delivery pressures to complete contracted deliverables under MISCCAP, which also suffered time pressures (primarily due to COVID), meant the majority of efforts by PRISMSS partners was prioritised to MISCCAP rather than RIR activities in 2023 and much of 2024. This delayed implementation of many of the RIR activities until later in 2024.

This created four associated important limitations for this review:

Differentiating RIR, MISCCAP, and PRISMSS in stakeholder consultations: Due to the integrated ISM approach under PRISMSS, with work being delivered by the same people/organisations, it was often hard to clearly differentiate and attribute comments made during consultations with country partners to RIR, MISCAP and other work delivered by PRISMSS and partners (or members of the PRISMSS team who may also have undertaken ISM activities as part of SPREPs wider work in the area).

Limited evidence of outputs due to review timing and RIR implementation: The overlapping timeframe in delivery between MISCCAP and RIR (due to the relatively narrow funding window associated with ICFS funding) meant that activities associated with RIR implementation have only recently accelerated. While planning was underway, most delivery on the ground during 2023 and much of 2024 was associated with MISCCAP. This, combined with the limitation above, meant that stakeholders were limited in the extent to which they could comment on RIR, and instead tended to focus comments on activities delivered under MISCCAP. The timing of PRISMSS annual progress report to MFAT in 2024 also limited the Review Team's visibility of progress. The annual report was until May 2024 (which contains details of progress against outputs and outcomes), and meant the information on plans and progress was relatively dated, given the relatively short delivery window.

The aid modality adds complexity in presenting findings: RIR (and a portion of MISCCAP) used PRISMSS as a delivery partner, with both investments including specific deliverables and outputs to support PRISMSS as a regional service organisation. This means that many findings (and consequently recommendations) in the Review are most logically targeted at PRISMSS as both the modality and 'beneficiary' of the RIR investment and its intended outcomes, rather than just RIR.

Information trade-offs when selecting in-country consultation locations: identifying the locations for in-country visits required trade-offs, over and above balancing usual logistical considerations regarding costs and timing. To maximise the quality of information gathered from in-country visits, the two countries (Tonga and the Cook Islands) were selected due to their longer engagement with PRISMSS and MFAT funded activities under both MISCCAP and RIR. These countries were identified in consultation with MFAT and were selected on the basis this would give the Review Team a better opportunity to engage with communities and understand the emerging climate impacts from the perspective of community and other in-country stakeholders. However, because of the delays in RIR implementation and overlap in delivery, this means that much of the stakeholder feedback related to PRISMSS and MISCCAP rather than RIR (or comments weren't easily differentiated – see above). Originally Samoa (RIR) and the Cook Islands (MISCCAP and RIR) were selected, however travel and logistical constraints due to CHOGHAM meant Tonga (MISCCAP and RIR) was selected as the alternative which compounded this challenge (did not allow us to differentiate between a country that had not been involved in MISCCAP). Visits to other countries were not possible due to their more remote locations and the associated cost and logistical constraints.

For both Tonga and the Cook Islands, consultations with community were planned. In the Cook Islands this was arranged remotely, however in Tonga, the timing of the school year (curtailing consultation with students and other representatives at Toloa Rainforest Reserve), combined with an inability to secure travel to Vava'u or E'ua meant that our consultations with community in Tonga were limited to consultations with community representatives only.

Based on the limitations outlined above, three implications and considerations for the Review's findings and recommendations are identified:

Caution generalising the findings to other countries: Findings in this Review are based on consultations with a sub-set of countries included in RIR, and represent only Polynesia. While some limited remote consultation was undertaken as part of the Review with Melanesian countries, the findings would need further validation before being considered as fully representative of all countries involved in RIR.

Findings can't always differentiate PRISMSS, RIR and MISCCAP: Where possible findings seek to differentiate between RIR, MISCCAP, and PRISMSS, but as outlined above, there are constraints associated with the integrated approach and operating context, overlapping funding windows, and the modality. A guide to how findings in each section aligns to PRISMSS, RIR, and MISCCAP is summarised below.

- Findings and overall judgements for relevance, coherence, and efficiency, GEDSI, and MERL Quality relate to RIR and PRISMSS (and incidentally to MISCCAP).

- Findings for effectiveness and sustainability relate to both RIR and MISCCAP, and by extension PRISMSS. Comments on climate impact are based on feedback associated with MISCCAP (and sometimes PRISMSS), and are indicative for likely climate impacts for RIR (given the delivery modality via PRISMSS and its programmes remains much the same). Comments on sustainability will relate to RIR, PRISMSS, and learnings from MISCCAP.

Assessments of RIR progress and achievement are indicative: The assessments of progress towards outputs in the effectiveness section are based on self-reported information by PRISMSS and technical leads, building on and updating comments in the Year 1 May 2024 report, via either one-on-one discussions or updates presented at the six-monthly Partners Meeting. These were not substantiated/validated with each country (although in-country visits and remote consultation provided further opportunities to triangulate if progress was on-track). There is no suggestion from the evidence gathered for the Review that these updates are inaccurate but is an implication for the findings presented.

FINDINGS

This section summarises the key findings against each of the evaluation criteria. Each criterion starts with an overall statement (evaluative judgement), with more details findings that support the statement outlined.

RELEVANCE & COHERENCE

To what extent is RIR meeting the needs of stakeholders, partners and communities? **How well is the activity aligned to other relevant strategies**, activities, and plans?

Overall RIR is highly relevant. It is meeting a clear need that addresses several inter-related goals and objectives that jointly address biodiversity, livelihoods and climate change objectives. **RIR is also broadly coherent** with other relevant strategies, activities and plans, although more robust engagement and consultation with in-country partners and stakeholders at selected project sites could strength this further. Greater transparency, and the use of strategies and tools to minimise confusion between individuals and agencies would strength coherence. The Activity is overall performing well (good) for these two criteria.

- **The RIR activity is meeting a clear need, based on a robust rationale and supporting evidence.** The RIR business case provided a clear basis and justification for the investment. The business case clearly outlined key problems and identified the barriers to success experienced to-date which had been identified in consultation with stakeholders, and the design of the RIR activity clearly seeks to address these. Relevant organisational (MFAT), regional (e.g., SPREP) and global strategies and RIR's alignment to these was also clearly described.
- **The need for the activity has been confirmed during consultation with Pacific Island Country partners.** The rationale outlined in the business case, particularly in addressing gaps in resourcing, and technical capacity and capability were consistently highlighted as challenges to effective ISM in Pacific Island countries. PRISMSS, and MFAT's funding of their work was welcomed and is high valued, particularly the technical/operational activities that have been or will be undertaken, and noted it was unlikely it would have happened without MFAT and PRISMSS support.

  "New Zealand [MFAT] obviously has been awesome, and it's allowed us to really take off. It's also given us the opportunity to now actually venture out to look at other donors…we're looking at the [Green Climate Fund] and the [Adaptation Fund], and we've got another [Global Environment Facility] project and so on…these are things that we can do because of the New Zealand funding… we're trying to bridge that gap, to show that there is a need and that we can package it in a way that is palatable to as many donors as possible"

- **Funding and using PRISMSS as the coordinating body for the RIR Activity has helped ensure there is strong alignment with other relevant work** in the region by virtue of SPREP being a regional organisation and its associated reputation and convening power. RIR funding is helping to establish PRISMSS as a mature and sustainable regional support service for ISM, within the broader mandate of SPREP. The PRISMSS team is also co-located with SPREP, which helps to ensure PRISMSS is connected both formally and informally to relevant discussions, activities, and people. Key members of the PRISMSS team continue to hold roles within the wider Invasive Species Team which also helps to identify or maintain visibility of other relevant work.
- **PRISMSS and the RIR Activity design and implementation plan help to ensure activities are delivered in a way that is coherent with existing national strategies and plans.** Many partner countries have

National Invasive Species Strategy and Action Plans (NISSAPs) that have either been fully adopted (e.g., Tuvalu, Tonga) or are being drafted (e.g., the Solomon Islands). These action plans or similar equivalents (such as Tuvalu) are used as a starting point for PRISMSS and RIR activities to guide discussions on where support could be best directed. Many national frameworks such as NDCs and NAPs already identify ISM activities (such as ecosystem restoration) as avenues to support climate resilience, reinforcing the importance of aligning PRISMSS (and RIR) activities to these. The importance of embedding these key documents to support high-quality decision-making process is further reinforced by RIR via the inclusion of this as a key results area with matching indicators.

- **RIR's inclusion of dedicated funding to build the core capability and capacity of PRISMSS was confirmed as an important feature of the Activity's design**. The value of having a regional support service for ISM (as is the intention for PRISMSS) was tested with Pacific Island country partners. There was very strong endorsement of this as a support model, and consequently the design intention of MFAT in building PRISMSS core capacity and capability. There was however a question and plea that capacity and capability also be built at a country level. There was a strong desire for countries to be able to take increasing leadership and ownership of their ISM but noted (notwithstanding resourcing challenges) that capacity and capability in country was a limiting factor also. While it was acknowledged that capability and capacity building has been and continues to be part of the approach by RIR and PRISMSS, feedback suggests it is not being done in a way that supports *systemic* capacity building[13] (also see Effectiveness).

  It should be noted that in the business case, one option for investment included a greater focus on country level capability and capacity building. This was ultimately not selected, based largely on the additional administrative costs this option would incur, questions about achievability, and the assessment this would overall result in less 'value for money' (at least in the short-term/over the life of the Activity).

- **While RIR is meeting a clear need in general, the Review found that agreement on needs and priorities vary, depending on who is consulted, and at what scale the question is being asked**. Consultation with stakeholders highlighted that at a regional and national level the need for activities that target ISM was a priority, this was not always consistent with priorities for in-country or site level stakeholders. This was sometimes due to a lack of knowledge and awareness regarding the presence and threat posed by specific invasive species, but at other times it was due to different (and potentially competing) priorities. There were different perspectives regarding the presence, threat, and prioritisation of invasive species at the community level compared to those of technical experts, and it was also clear there was not always agreement on priority species between government agencies within countries.

  While prioritisation workshops are routinely completed as part of PRISMSS programme's approach, the validity of these depends heavily on who participates. Comments from stakeholders suggested that the relevance of these priority lists to both government and communities could be strengthened by ensuring they are more meaningfully localising (see Effectiveness and Sustainability). In follow-up discussions with PRISMSS and Technical Leads it was clear there is an acknowledgement that prioritisation exercises may not always be as effective as the could be, but 'satisfice', largely due to resourcing and time.

- **Stakeholder consultations found there is a heavily reliance on in-country partners capability and capacity as the mechanism to assure an effective process, but this creates risks particularly for sustainability**. For example, in some countries clear protocols are followed when issuing invitations, but this can mean the 'right' people (with the relevant knowledge) are not always in the room. Community representation is also typically absent from workshops held at a national level. A further mediating factor identified in securing the engagement or attendance of stakeholders was the in-country

[13] Systematic capability and capacity building refers to activities that: (1) are defined by a clear strategy and plan that aligns to and clearly support the broader objectives (2) has activities designed and delivered in a way that is consistent with adult learning principles (3) is resourced appropriately (4) expert advice or guidance is a feature in at least the design of the approach, if not including the delivery.

government representative's status/mana and/or possessing the right networks and connections, as well as competing priorities/availability.

- **Having sufficient time was also consistently identified as a 'critical success factor' by a range of stakeholders.** Usually, this is because education and awareness-raising is needed first and participants need to share or socialise this information (with colleagues or community), before any meaningful discussion regarding what's a problem or needed.

  The short timeframes associated with RIR's implementation, combined with other practical and logistical issues typical of the Pacific operating context (also see Efficiency) means there is an increased risk that contextualising/localising and embedding the relevance of the ISM activities locally may fail.

  "that's certainly a risk for the project…the funding timeline and the project timeline certainly has compressed the project timelines that we might have normally worked to."

EFFICIENCY

How well is RIR being implemented? How well are the MFAT, PRISMSS, and other partners working together to deliver RIR? Are the arrangements supporting the effective access to and deployment of resources?

Overall RIR is being well implemented (good). Most work is progressing as planned and is on-track (notwithstanding logistical challenges that are typical of the operating context involving remote or difficult to access locations/sites). Some further efficiency gains could be made through improving coordination, strengthening RIR governance, as well as bedding in key systems, processes, and tools. It is notable that PRISMSS already has plans or work underway to address several of these areas/opportunities for further improvement, indicating PRISMSS is proving to be an effective delivery modality for the RIR activity.

- **The PRISMSS 'service design' and approach is appropriate and generally delivering the desired technical and operational support to country partners to address their ISM goals.** In-country partners reported they were able to work well with the PRISMSS, that they and any other technical partners where helpful, proactive, and knowledgeable.
- **The implementation of projects could be strengthened by ensuring the planning, contracting, and operating arrangements that supports coherence and coordination between government and other organisations in country.** Stakeholders reported that at times some of the projects have inadvertently reinforced the silo-ed approach that is often typical (but unintended) when multiple organisations need to work together. Stakeholders identified helpful examples of 'good practice' where this was avoided, which involved providing transparency regarding roles and responsibilities between all partners and activities. Limited capacity in-country also appears to be a compounding factor. Most Pacific Island countries do not have a full-time invasive species coordinator (Tonga is a notable exception) meaning they're less able to ensure clarity and coordination between PRISMSS and projects in-country.

  "There was not enough on the ground. Stuff was happening, developing strategies and having these knowledge exchange and regional meetings and so on, but one of the indicators was that there was not enough happening on the ground…so having a dedicated service that can drive the on the ground delivery that that's why [PRISMSS] came about."

- **PRISMSS's has a competent core team and it is evident they have a strong focus on continuing to strengthen and improve the operations of PRISMSS.** PRISMSS is still maturing as a 'service', and are still establishing or embedding appropriate arrangements, roles, and processes. However, the team has a clear view of where improvements need to be made, and have clear plans and processes in-train to address these.

For example, it was recognised that their five programmes have limited visibility of each other's plans and activities. This reduces the extent they can leverage off joint activities and reduce any duplication. The best examples of coordination so-far are by RERC and WOW – which are both run by SPREP – and illustrates this point. This has already been identified as an area for improvement by PRISMSS, and during the November 2024 six-monthly Partner Meeting there was a presentation and agreement to trial the use of a shared project planning application.

- **The commissioning of the 'Navigator' system is a further example of PRISMSS's desire to operate efficiently and effectively.** This bespoke platform has been designed to support a range of functions for a range of different users to support good quality ISM in the region.

  It should be noted that stakeholder consultations (with those who are the intended users) revealed that the awareness and understanding of its potential was still limited. If left unaddressed, this may curtail PRISMSS and their partners' ability to realise the value of what could otherwise be an extremely useful tool. More work needs to be done to socialise the tool, and make the value proposition to partners clearer. Currently it is mostly understood as a project reporting tool, with little awareness of its intention (and ability) to capture (and then visualise) the 'demand' for ISM across the region. The interface and user experience also does not make its purpose clear, nor does it guide a potential naïve user effectively. The interface could also do more to guide and support users to include the right information, and introduce more flexibility into the data entry process and pipeline (see MERL section for more details).

  "...many countries are not yet aware of the Navigator. They don't know how to access it, and they don't know how to use it. So definitely, that's a need for the future."

- **The PRISMSS team's resourcing creates risks for its ability to be fully efficient and effective.** As noted above, the PRISMSS team is comprised of technical and operational experts suited to the region, and is on-track (see Effectiveness) to deliver a large programme of work. However, the Review found the PRISMSS team is under-resourced (too small), meaning strategic and operational roles are being undertaken by the same people. Several team members hold roles that include being a Technical Lead or co-lead, a PRISMSS operations role, and perform leadership or management functions that require strategic actions. Mixing strategy and operational functions is difficult and demanding, and is likely to become further constrained as a focus on delivery targets associated with the RIR Activity increase. This creates a risk for the overall sustainability of PRISMSS and the outcomes MFAT is seeking to contribute to.

- **The governance of RIR could be strengthened by more clearly differentiating operations and strategy, and more explicitly linking to governance arrangements in-country.** RIR structure and management arrangements follow what was proposed at design phase with frequent coordination, check ins and steering committee meetings in place. These arrangements are appropriate, however there is a need for better (or to improve) coordination of these, consider the competing priorities of the in-country partners' capacity to report, participate in these forums and meeting implementation deadlines. With lots of moving parts, a consolidated updated tracking framework, such as the one being tested, where activities under different programmes in different countries are visible through one platform can improve this situation. To be effective the tracking tool should be made available and be user friendly.

- **PRISMSS integrated approach and institutional structure could be strengthened by more effective communication and governance.** There was an acknowledgement during discussions at the six-monthly Partners Meeting that the governance arrangements could be improved, and that (as an example) explicit consideration of the PRISMSS strategy needed strengthening (and prompted the re-circulation of the strategy to participants). The Review found there was fragmentation and silos between delivery partners and in-country stakeholders. Newer partners also reported confusion about the structure and operations of PRISMSS (including how it works and coordinates across donors), which is a further indicator that structures could be enhanced. A simple FAQ sheet (updated at a set period of time) about PRISMSS structure, aspirations and successful models of community engagement would enhance ISM operation and implementation relationships. Ideally this would also include examples of how to engage and embed project activities into local governance structures, to ensure long-term sustainability.

Discussions and stakeholder feedback suggest having Technical Leads, also siting on the Steering Group results in a strong focus on operational delivery, and limited attention on broader strategic considerations. There is a need to more clearly separate strategic and operational discussions in order to sustainably achieve long term goals. The short delivery timeframe appears to be a compounding factor leading to a strong delivery focus.

It was noted that to ensure longer-term efficiency, PRISMSS will need to be able to support robust oversight arrangements to satisfy potential future donors. While the Review did not find that the governance of RIR is seriously flawed, minor modifications and improvement to RIR governance arrangements could be made to strengthen the established systems, processes, and protocols in the short-term. Simple changes such as avoiding duplication of agenda items/discussions across meeting and setting strategic level discussions in the first half of the Steering Group meeting, as well as greater use of shared frameworks and strategies/strategic tools (such as ToCs) to support discussions. Longer-term, PRISMSS (preferably with the support of MFAT) should ideally transition the role of the RIR Steering Group into a more permanent governance mechanism that donors and interested parties (e.g., other technical experts or potential donors) can join, rather than the other way around.

- **In some cases, PRISMSS is hampered by factors beyond its control, which are constraining their ability to address areas that could help them operate even more efficiently**. For example, there are lengthy approval processes for communications material which has been a 'pain-point' and preventing timely communication activities, reducing their effectiveness. It is worth noting that PRISMSS are aware of these constraints and are proactively seeking to address them where they can as evidenced by the discussions and plans detailed during the six-monthly Partners Meeting (also see beginning of Effectiveness).

- **There are some risks associated with the new contracting arrangements under this Activity, which may mean it will be harder for PRISMSS to engage the best technical partners**. This has been a barrier for DoC in particular (who were a delivery partner under MISCCAP), as they need relatively long lead-in times to provide technical assistance. There are unique constraints that government or crown-owned organisations experience which need to be considered and factored into contracting and planning decisions. While this is not a specific risk to the implementation of RIR currently, it was identified as an area that needs acknowledgement when planning next steps. For example, New Zealand Crown Research Institutes (CRIs) such as MWLR, and NIWA who are joining PRISMSS as a Technical Lead for the new marine programme, have constraints associated with their operating model, meaning it can be difficult for them to 'invest' unpaid/untagged time to develop their projects/programmes under RIR and PRISMSS. CRIs effectively operate as consultancies where hours are tracked carefully, and unpaid time can only be allocated with the approval of Managers. There is also a potential delivery risk for RIR associated with disruptions from the forthcoming merger of CRIs.

  A related but different point was made regarding the partnering and contracting approach of PRISMSS more generally. Stakeholders described and reported an approach that is relatively devolved which can create *risks* of a 'transactional' rather than relational approach to contracting. This kind of risk increases when delivery timeframes are short. While not a specific risk to efficiency in the short-term, this can create potential longer-term delivery risk, which could undermine some of the broader principles of engagement that both MFAT and PRISMSS have articulated in their strategies.

- **Although RIR is overall on-track (see Effectiveness), logistical challenges associated with the operating context (many sites being remote and/or hard to reach), combined with a heavy reliance on in-country partners and a fairly tight delivery timeframe is a limiting factor for implementation, and is a potential risk to delivery.** The Pacific operating context for ISM means an array of logistical challenges are a constant feature, and can only be managed to an extent. Many sites are remote. This can mean that getting people and equipment to sites are often reliant on irregular or infrequent schedules, disruptions from weather such as cyclones, and have limited, unreliable, or an absence of communications.

  Stakeholders described many examples of how this has impacted either the current, or previous projects. While partners reported they remained confident in their ability to deliver the activities planned under RIR, the tolerances in the schedule are small which creates risk. Tight timeframes can

also mean some important early steps in the process, particularly engagement with community can be rushed, which ultimately negatively impact effectiveness.

A good example described by stakeholders has occurred In Tonga in Vava'u, under the NENS programme. A combination of disruptions to communication with the Island due to the 2021 volcanic eruption and pressures to release the bio-controls at a given time due to team travel arrangements has led to a situation where the local community is unhappy and not supportive of this project. Communication difficulties meant the local partner NGO who hold key relationships with the community and facilitate community engagement on behalf of Government of Tonga and RIR/PRISMSS were not aware of the work, and had insufficient time to do preparatory consultation and awareness raising activities with the local community.

- **MFAT's choice of modality for RIR (with delivery through PRISMSS) has been a contributing factor for the efficient delivery of RIR so far.** This modality means MFAT can leverage the skills, regional knowledge and relationships held by PRISMSS staff and their technical and in-country partners. The benefits of this approach were noted in the commercial case and confirmed via stakeholder consultations as a good choice. This modality (providing additional support for partners delivering activities) has been identified as an operational enabler within ICFS. The findings from this MTR therefore indicate MFAT's climate financing approach represents a good funding strategy to help support the intended outcomes and longer-term goals of the ICFS. This modality has also substantially reduced the resource demands on MFAT staff's time compared to the previous contracting model, and enables a more Pacific-led approach, with the simplified approach bringing efficiencies at multiple levels.
- **The relative flexibility of MFAT's funding is notable as a very positive feature, which more broadly supports both the efficient and effective delivery of the Activity.** Stakeholder consultations emphasised that MFAT's relative flexibility in its funding model has and is supporting PRISMSS and the programmes be more agile and responsive under RIR. This is particularly important and welcome for an investment that is being delivered over a relatively short timeframe. It has meant that new opportunities can be responded too, and the implementation of activities can be modified or combined to leverage efficiency and effectiveness gains.
- **The time pressure and consequently the approach to develop the RIR business case may have compromised aspects of the Activity design which *may* pose a risk to effective implementation (and longer-term effectiveness).** The RIR business case needed to be developed under a fairly short timeframe which curtailed the MFAT staff tasked with developing it to engage key stakeholders into the design process. As a consequence, some stakeholders noted that accommodations, plans, and funding for some other enabling activities appear to have been missed. The strong focus on delivering by 'scaling up' in numbers could also be detrimental/at the cost of ensuring critical enablers are also addressed.

EFFECTIVENESS

To what extent has RIR achieved, or is likely to achieve, its intended outputs and short-term outcomes? How effective has MFAT's funding of MISCCAP and RIR been or likely to be in enhancing climate resilience and biodiversity in the Pacific Island countries? What evidence is available to assess this?

In most cases it is too early to assess the extent to which RIR is achieving its intended short-term outcomes. Progress reporting suggests there is reasonable evidence to expect nearly or all outputs will be achieved. There was encouraging evidence to suggest that short- and medium-term outcomes will be achieved as a result of MISCCAP in some sites, although limited longer-term monitoring data may constrain the extent to which this can be assessed in future. **This suggests that**

MFAT can be reasonably confident that RIR will be effective in the short-term (good) and strong potential to contribute to longer-term climate outcomes.

- **Evidence in the annual RIR progress report, combined with updates provided at the six-monthly Partners Meeting and follow-up discussions with Technical Leads suggests that overall, good progress is being made** towards nearly all outputs. s6(b)(ii)

  The largest funding allocations (after Output 1 – PRISMSS) under Output 2 are to PFP and NENS which are both progressing well against KPIs in the RIR MERL framework. Evidence regarding the growth and strengthening of PRISMSS is also tracking well. While there are some areas where progress is slower, the strong attention to continuous improvement offsets these risks to a reasonable extent. It should be noted that constraints on the size of the team may yet curtail the team's ability to fully deliver on Output 1 (and its closely associated short-term outcome '*More effective and inclusive delivery of invasive species activities*'). See Efficiency section for more details.

  Overall, the progress reporting against performance indicators suggests that RIR is on-track to 'scale-up' ISM in the Pacific (at least in the short-term) via this investment, making important contributions to achieving the climate impacts that underpin the rationale for this investment (see next bullet point). However, there are some risks to achieving other 'broader' outcomes (e.g., around inclusiveness) and potentially others that are not specifically or well captured in RIR's MERL framework, meaning they may not be achieved to the extent anticipated (See MERL section).

- **Early evidence also suggests MISCCAP, and by extension RIR (and other work PRISMSS is delivering), will make important contributions to climate impacts.** To *enhance resilience and adaptation* (ICFS Goal 2), 10 Pacific Island Countries (PICs) are implementing invasive species management initiatives, with 3 of these countries being new participants in these efforts, which is helping to *accelerate adaptation action* (ICFS SMTO 2.1). This aligns with the ICFS strategy's focus on enhancing regional resilience by addressing biodiversity threats through targeted management actions in Vanuatu, Palau, RMI, Tonga, Tuvalu, Samoa, Cook Islands, Tokelau, and additional (new) action in Kiribati, Solomon Is, and FSM.

  The region's adaptation capacity will be improved by building indigenous ecosystems through the designation of 105 hectares (so far) for restoration work, supporting efforts under ICFS MTO2.1 to achieve *enhanced resilience and adaptation* in these countries. This includes:

  - 13 hectares at the Barana Community and Heritage Park in Solomon Islands dedicated to ecological restoration.
  - 21 hectares at the Nusemetu Conservation Area in Vanuatu aimed at enhancing local biodiversity.
  - 71 hectares in Tonga at Mt Talau (50 hectares) and Toloa Rainforest Reserve (21 hectares) are to be included as PFP, NENs and WOWs programmes, collectively worked to enhance biodiversity benefits and preserve cultural heritage.

  These restoration initiatives support ecosystem health and resilience against climate change impacts, aligning with Tuia a Kiwa ICF Strategy and PRISMS framework's focus on sustainable and integrative ecosystem management approaches as key tools to achieve climate resilience.

  To *improve institutional capability and evidence-based decision-making* (ICFS Goal 3), ISM initiatives in the Pacific under RIR are contributing to the review of adaptation strategies for Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Stakeholder consultations confirmed RIR funded activities are helping to accelerate, trigger updates, or renew the relevance of existing National Invasive Species Action (NISA) Plans and other policies and frameworks, indicating progress in environmental governance and the protection of ecosystems from climate change-related threats.

  Seven countries have endorsed rodent eradication efforts, with planning work underway in Tuvalu, Cook Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, Tokelau and Palau. Kosrae, Palau, and

Yap have also developed Plant Management Plan for eradication activities targeting 5 low incidence high priority weeds.

These efforts not only target ecological threats but allow for regeneration of native vegetation for ecosystem resilience supporting several key climate outcomes, including *accelerating adaption action* and *increased climate resilience* (ICFS MTO2.1 & 2.2), as well as *improving the effectiveness of regional institutions* (ICFS SMTO 3.1).

Assessments from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands reveal ongoing challenges related to climate change impacts. The NENS programme will inform future interventions to address these challenges. This aligns with ICFS Long-Term Outcome 3 by enhancing institutional capability and supporting evidence-based decision-making. While specific solutions for natural enemy introductions have not yet been identified, continuous evaluation will provide data to assist informed decision-making regarding climate change.

Integrating ISM, habitat restoration, local governance, and community engagement shows a commitment to building long-term resilience to climate change. This approach also helps sustain the economic, social, and cultural values of the Pacific region, which aligns to the critical enablers (also see Sustainability).

The Review had more limited evidence or received more mixed feedback regarding the extent to which the RIR will contribute to two other ICFS SMTOs; *maintaining community values* and *strengthening climate expertise*. The former is primarily addressed in this review under the GEDSI & TK Integration, and MERL Quality sections. The latter is expanded on further in the bullet points below, and in the Sustainability section - relating particularly to comments on technical training and capacity in-country.

Although the Review has been able to describe (above) the contributions RIR will make to climate outcomes, there are opportunities to strengthen both PRISMSS and RIR's ability to do so in richer and more meaningful ways to give greater confidence to partners regarding the strength of contribution to climate outcomes. See below, and the MERL Quality section for further details.

- **Gathering credible evidence of longer-term effectiveness, and the time-frames necessary to detect change varies considerably for different species and management approach.** The Review was able to identify some good examples of effectiveness, particularly for animal pests (rats and feral pigs) as a result of MFAT's MISCCAP Activity. Stakeholders acknowledged that assessing effectiveness for different species (especially weeds compared to pests) varies considerably, and that assessing the effectiveness of ISM activities targeting weeds can be particularly challenging. Currently the metrics being used to track performance are relatively crude, and do not adequately reflect or capture these nuances and the constraints of timeframes. There is an opportunity to strengthen the collection of credible evidence (including evidence of the climate benefits of the work) by integrating other data/evidence collection approaches, including critical enablers which can be proxies for longer-term effectiveness. See the MERL and Sustainability sections for more details.
- **There has been successful implementation of community-based management models in Tonga, and the Cook Islands.** Solomon Islands is also in its inception phase and has identified this model of implementation or partnership as key to success working with the Barana Nature and Heritage Park. These models highlight the importance of sufficient time and information for community engagement, the effectiveness of "ambassador" models (e.g., VEPA – see the break-out box pg. 20), and the integration of invasive species management into existing conservation initiatives (Solomon Islands).
- **Country partners are increasingly leveraging national engagement frameworks to build ownership (though improvements are still needed).** The success of Palmerston's feasibility study (Cook Islands), which carefully managed expectations, and the community-based approach in Vava'u and that is emerging in Toloa Rainforest Reserve (Tonga) demonstrate the importance of a holistic approach to invasive species management. Stakeholders from Palmerston Atoll emphasised that one of their critical success factors was that the community had identified the need themselves first, and that their commitment was reconfirmed following the feasibility study. Similar comments were made regarding the community-based approach in Vava'u, confirming that where possible targeting ISM that has been identified by the community already, helps support long-term effectiveness.

- **Successful projects can drive demand in other communities and countries.** The Review found that the results and success in Palmerston Atoll is creating a demand from other communities in the Cook Islands. Stakeholders acknowledge that replicating the Palmerston results would be challenging in bigger islands (with larger communities), but this demand was seen as encouraging. There is an opportunity for PRISMSS through RIR to support the Cook Islands to help other communities to learn more about their experience (including the real challenges around community buy-in and commitment to the activities it requires). This would help grow awareness, and validate the demand for more support from PRISMSS. Tonga has also commented that they have seen a demand (informally) for help with rats in particular (e.g., through requests for bait).

- **Stakeholder consultations in country emphasised that much of the success of ISM activities are due to social factors, and failure to properly consider these processes will undermine the success of ISM activities (including under RIR).** This has implication for both planning and communication activities. Considering (and communicating) social benefits alongside environmental goals, as evidenced in Vava'u and Palmerston, reinforces the importance of considering (and building) the critical enablers (Also see Relevance, Sustainability, and MERL Quality). Effective ISM must consider these social dimensions.

  This can be achieved (and as demonstrated by some of the MISCCAP Activities) by involving communities from the design phase through to implementation and reporting phases of projects. This shifts power dynamics, supporting ownership and long-term buy-in. Other approaches such as having community co-lead's in PRISMSS work could further strengthen the approach, as does broadening stakeholder engagement. This can act as a social accountability mechanism, provides a good foundation for the integration of ISM activities into the community, and builds ownership. PRISMSS currently has plans to develop a specific inclusive engagement strategy with the engagement of a dedicated GESDI Co-ordinator who began at the start of 2025 under RIR. The learnings from this review could usefully inform the development of this strategy (see GEDSI & TK Integration section).

- **PRISMSS communication strategies appear largely targeted to donors, or government partners.** As part of its Mainstreaming strategy (also see Sustainability) PRISMSS has placed a large effort on communicating the results to these audiences mainly to secure resourcing and support. However, engaging local communities is also key to long-term success. There is a risk that PRISMSS could hamper its overall effectiveness by failing to consider supporting communication activities that support building ownership and leadership at local levels.

  Stakeholders reported that engaging community requires less technical content, and more representation of what's happening 'on-the-ground'. Favoured channels include Facebook, and the use of short videos, that ideally are in their language. PRISMSS already has an impressive archive of video material that could be reformatted to support sharing via social media. The PRISMSS Communications Advisor has already delivered training to attendees of the most recent PILN meeting (August 2024) in how to create and record short videos suitable for social media platforms. Alternative materials, that do not rely on digital media and technology, are also still needed given the remote locations of many potential sites.

- **PRISMSS could further enhance its effectiveness by leveraging the skills and expertise held by its partners.** The Review found that some of the partners had strengths and expertise in areas where more guidance might be required to maximise the effectiveness of the RIR Activity (and PRISMSS more generally). For example, Birdlife International has good experience at working with communities and undertaking baseline and monitoring. These (and other skills held by others) may not be being fully leveraged. The contracting arrangements (which are strongly delivery focused) may be one barrier to this (also see Efficiency section).

- **Further investing in capacity building to strengthen the scientific and technical expertise within Pacific Island countries will also help support both Effectiveness and Sustainability.** There was a real appetite expressed during in-country consultations for more targeted efforts to be made in growing both the technical and scientific expertise in-country. It is acknowledged that the option funded under the RIR business case excluded a strong focus on directly funding building in-country capacity, however the Review found there is a demand for this kind of support, which would be consistent with the broader ICFS ToC.

This should also include supporting in-country partners to undertake pest/weed monitoring activities. These 'citizen science' approaches are valuable (and transferrable) skills, contribute to maintaining ownership within the community, and can also provide importance evidence of longer-term effectiveness. Palmerston Atoll's is exemplar of this approach, where the local Environment Officer works with the local school to school students to track the biodiversity impacts of their rat eradication work. VEPA in Vava'u have also adopted a similar approach and identified this as a critical success factor of how they work (See below).

Two breakout boxes have been included in this report to highlight some of the key aspects of integrating climate, GEDSI and TK outcomes and illustrate the importance of the critical enablers that are fundamental to long-term sustainability for climate resilience outcomes. While these are primarily highlight activities undertaken by MISCCAP, they serve as an example of narrative, storytelling approaches that could be used for RIR reporting in future.

Community Voices in Action: VEPA's Commitment to Community Resilience through integrated Biodiversity and Invasive Species Management in Tonga

Karen Stone, the Director of the Vava'u Environmental Protection Association (VEPA), is passionate about empowering local communities in biodiversity conservation efforts. Since her involvement with VEPA in 2009, she has witnessed the profound impact of community engagement in addressing the invasive species crisis faced by Tonga. "It's not just about trapping invasive species; it's about building relationships and trust within our communities," she states, emphasising the importance of community collaboration.

As an implementing partner, VEPA has worked closely with SPREP PRISMSS managing invasive species for Mt Talau designation as a national heritage site symbolises the intersection of conservation and cultural identity. "This site is significant for our people; preserving it enriches our cultural and natural heritage," Karen adds.

So far, VEPA has installed 26 traps and a pig fence, in partnership with the local community actively setting traps and monitor invasive species. Karen notes, "Training community members to handle this work is crucial; it creates champions for conservation."

Acknowledging and respecting the community's wealth of local knowledge VEPA operates on a sharing and partnership model encouraging community buy-in, Karen explains, "We integrate traditional practices with modern strategies to make our efforts more effective...We are seeing improvements, not just in wildlife numbers but in community pride and stewardship as well."

The challenges of managing invasive species are multifaceted. Karen acknowledges, "Community resistance to new interventions can hinder progress. We work diligently to address these concerns." There's a great need for better engagement with local leaders and schools: "Involving high school teachers in our workshops can help bridge communication gaps and foster understanding." By establishing feedback mechanisms, VEPA continues to enhance community trust in their projects.

One major challenge is securing consistent funding. "Stable financial resources are vital for sustaining these initiatives," she explains, calling attention to the importance of long-term commitment to community empowerment.

Through this journey, VEPA has identified key lessons for successful invasive species management:

Early Meaningful Engagement: Proactive community consultation is essential. "If we involve the community from the start, they are more likely to accept changes," Karen reflects.
Continuous Capacity Building: Ongoing training for community volunteers ensures that locals remain equipped to participate effectively.
Ambassadorship Network: "Creating a network of community ambassadors is vital for fostering a sense of ownership," Karen highlights.

Looking ahead, VEPA aims to develop additional platforms for outreach. One innovative idea discussed was utilising a traditional voyaging society's boat, operated by an all-female crew. "This vessel could serve as a floating classroom, visiting islands and raising awareness about invasive species management," proposes a team member, emphasising the value of traditional methods in contemporary conservation.

Karen Stone encapsulates VEPA's spirit: "Our work is about people. Through collaboration, education, and respect for our environment, we can overcome the challenges that threaten our unique biodiversity."

A Rat-Free Paradise: Palmerston Atoll's Inspiring Journey to Restore Ecological Balance and Climate Resilience in the Cook Islands

Palmerston Atoll, a small island in the vast Pacific, faced a critical crisis as invasive rats devastated crops and threatened the delicate ecosystem. "Before the eradication," recounts Mayor Marcus, "rats were eating through plastic containers to get to our food. It was dreadful!" " they would end up eating soap and any rubbish"

In response, the Palmerston Atoll community through PRISMMS and the National Environment Service Department joined forces with the Department of Conservation (DOC), MFAT, Island Conservation. This collective effort was built on trust, leading to the successful eradication of rats—a remarkable achievement that secures the island's unique biodiversity for future generations. "We did it! There are no negative effects at all," shares a resident.

Underlying this success is community ownership "You gotta have goodwill amongst your community. Everyone's got to buy into it," emphasises a participant. For Palmerston, a unique small community, managing change proved possible.

Early signs of ecological recovery are evident: bird populations are increasing, and native plant life is flourishing. "We're seeing an abundance of mahogany trees and sugarcane patches sprouting up where we'd never seen them before," observes another resident. "The environment is coming back to life."

This success is a model for other communities, highlighting the importance of community commitment, planning, communication and stewardship. Residents played vital roles in baiting, monitoring, and data collection. "It was hard work, but seeing the change is awesome," says one participant.

Realistic planning and understanding of challenges are essential for success. Support from technical partners, like DOC, was crucial. "The feasibility study showed us what we could do and how achievable it was," shares a local leader. "Everyone agreed because we believed it could be done."

A key outcome of the project is the integration of science and traditional knowledge. Residents have enhanced their understanding of ecological management. "We learned the importance of limiting food resources," explains Dion. "I learned how to distinguish between male and female rats." Another adds, "We managed waste better to deny rats access to food. It was about changing old habits."

Maintaining biosecurity and preventing future infestations requires ongoing community commitment. "Travelers must fill in a title certificate upon arrival to help manage what comes to our island," notes Juliana, emphasising that environmental stewardship is everyone's responsibility.

The project has fostered a deeper sense of community ownership and responsibility. "We learn to work together for our land and future," according to a community leader "Goodwill amongst everyone is essential."

Palmerston's success story must be shared to inspire similar initiatives across the Pacific. "Our experiences can help other communities. Everyone needs to know what we've done," urges the Island Administrative Officer.

SUSTAINABILITY

How is RIR's and PRISMSS implementation approach helping to build sustainable approaches to invasive species management across the Pacific? How well have the ICFS critical enablers been incorporated into the RIR Activity?

The RIR Activity and PRISMSS are building an important regional service, with the necessary relationships, capability and capacity in Pacific Island countries with their government, stakeholders and in-country partners and communities. However the foundations for this are fragile, with insufficient resourcing meaning that many of the critical enablers that underpin long-term sustainability could falter. Overall RIR and PRISMSS are only adequately addressing sustainability.

NOTE: Sustainability was not initially considered as a criterion for inclusion in the Review, however because of the consistency with which stakeholders raised issues related to sustainability, this was added for the purposes of the report. It also links strongly to the addition of the critical enablers to the ICFS ToC (see page 6) of Partner Capability and Capacity; Partner-Led Delivery; and Equitable and Inclusive Design.

- **The funding and delivery modality used by PRISMSS and MFAT was confirmed to be the most appropriate modality for both scaling and sustainable** (see Relevance & Coherence). RIR's investment in PRISMSS activities is helping to strengthen and grow the regional service and its long-term viability. MFAT most important contribution is its direct funding via Output 1, which has also provided capacity to PRISMSS to seek additional funding further to ensure its sustainability. However, it should be noted that the short-term funding window has also placed some constraints on supporting the sustainability of the investment and PRISMSS more generally. Particularly by creating potential tensions between delivering projects and time or focus on supporting critical enablers.
- **The establishment of strong partnerships, and collegial connections with national governments, regional organisations, and local communities lays a strong foundation for institutional sustainability.** Existing partnership frameworks, like in-country Steering Committees or Technical Advisory Committees (TAC), have been leveraged and capacity building and staff development initiatives directly enhance institutional capabilities and ensure continuity beyond the project's lifespan. The report acknowledged delays in recruitment, and contracting which could affect building sustainability and the project should develop alternative options to maintain momentum.
- **Limited in-country capacity poses a risk to sustainability.** Much of the work in-country is reliant on one or two individuals, who often hold multiple roles, and other positions are funded through donors rather than being permanently funded by government. Consequently, concerns about the limited capacity within certain countries to scale or manage project maintenance post-completion was also raised to the Review. The dependence on short-term funding contributes to instability, with sentiments expressed like:

  "...if we don't get more funds in the door...the whole thing could fall apart"

  It was noted that having access to longer-term and more flexible funding to support the regional service offered by PRISMSS was key. In the short-term much of the focus has been on securing donor funding to delivery projects, but other funding models (such as Trust Funds) would provide greater security long-term along with the opportunity to introduce more flexibility funding that could be made available to in-country partners and stakeholders.
- **PRISMSS's Sustainability Strategy is one important approach being taken to offset the risks to sustainability.** This largely revolves around 'mainstreaming' activities (to raise the profile, awareness, and value of the work to government and donors), and seeking further funding. Previously PRISMSS capacity has constrained their ability to submit funds, however the core funding now provide by MFAT is allowing PRISMSS to develop more proposals (STO1.3 (Output 1.2)) and PRISMSS notes that they see

how this approach can be used as a 'multiplier' to leverage greater organisational and long-term fiscal sustainability.

"Not only did [MFAT] provide the core funding that gives us a team that can work on delivery, but they've also provided funding to support us in developing new proposals, which not a lot of donors do. The fact that we have a budget set aside to be able to develop proposals is a huge opportunity to build sustainability, and something we should be trying to include more often into proposals."

- **As noted in Efficiency, existing silos and a somewhat fragmented approach to delivery across different programmes and agencies presents coordination challenges which create a risk to sustainability.** The lack of clarity regarding mandates (including roles and responsibilities) and poor communication across agencies in-country creates a risk that will hinder the mainstreaming efforts PRISMSS is accelerating under the RIR Activity to sustain ISM across the region. A common gap identified by the Review is the need for clearer roles and responsibilities among various government agencies, supported by one stakeholder:

"...lack of communication. We don't know what's going on...clarifying our roles...how much can we overstep our mark..."

- **The Mid-Term Review revealed mixed results across other dimensions that will influence sustainability at a community level.** Impacts from the rat eradication initiatives were confirmed, leading to emerging mechanisms and behaviour changes to sustain impact in Palmerston Atoll and Mt Talau (Tonga), and the release of bio-controls for the African Tulip in Rarotonga, visualised through the use of remote sense mapping. However considerable community resistance arose from release of the bio-controls in Tonga. Stakeholders commented on the need for ongoing monitoring, proper community engagement and effective communications to increase awareness, ownership, and community buy-in to avoid dissatisfaction expressed regarding the release of the mite larva.

"...people are afraid of the wrong thing...they're not afraid enough of the weeds"

The Review noted that while community engagement is critical, inconsistencies have arisen due to logistical challenges and limited funding, with one stakeholder noting,

"...this is needed but community consultation...is expensive."

- **Although there have been some varied results, PRISMSS, and RIR partners do maintain a focus on 'critical enabler' activities that build social sustainability.** Community consultations using participatory approaches, and capacity-building activities, including training programmes ensure local ownership, support local communities, and build long-term resilience. The Review highlights the integration of gender and social inclusion considerations (GEDSI) discussed in detail in the next section indicating RIR's efforts to maintain and sustain ISM work in communities, although it is also clear it relies heavily on in-country partners capability and capacity, which can be variable. It is noted that the delays in the implementation and transportation of tools and equipment can challenge communities' continued commitment and trust in the project. RIR should factor this into the planning with regular communications (and greater transparency – see Efficiency) to manage expectations.
- **A lack of systematic attention to critical enablers means long-term sustainability of the current and previously funded MISCCAP activities is fragile.** Stakeholder consultations identified several areas that are limiting in-country partners. They reported limited planning or resourcing for on-going monitoring activities ('after care'), which will be important to both track the longer-term outcomes of ISM activities as well as contribute to building or maintaining community trust. In-country partners also reported a desire for more tools and equipment to be made available so they can deliver more locally driven ISM once their technical knowledge and expertise has been developed. Positive examples of what this can look like include have been described in the Effectiveness section. Overall, however, a lack of systematic planning and/or resourcing for the critical enablers is a risk to effectiveness.
- **Expert advice and guidance could strengthen PRISMSS's approach to addressing the critical enablers and assure sustainability.** It is important to note that PRISMSS *does* resource and undertake activities to support the critical enablers, however the quality of these is unclear or feedback has been variable. Feedback from in-country partners suggests that some community consultation activities could be improved, and the quality and value of workshops and training also varied. While the MERL framework

counts these activities, there is an absence of any assessment of their appropriateness or quality. Stakeholder feedback suggests that expert advice and guidance could drive some systematic improvements. For example, by ensuring adult learning principles are reflected in any capability and capacity building activities. This would likely see a review of the mix and quality of workshops, peer-to-peer, and hands-on learning sessions that PRISMSS is already delivering and that more follow-up to reinforce learnings. For example, stakeholders noted that without follow-up it was hard for them to put into practice what they learned about making videos at PILN. Similar comments were made about sessions on using the Navigator.

Continuing to leverage the PILN meetings (which are not organised by PRISMSS, but PRISMSS uses as a key avenue for its activities) and continuing to grow the number of peer-to-peer and hands-on learning sessions is one avenue to address this feedback.

Similarly, the PRISMSS team could benefit from advice and guidance from technical experts in community engagement and communication. This would not replace the on-the-ground knowledge and expertise of local NGO partners (e.g., TIS and VEPA), but by, with, and through partners such as these, more locally appropriate capability and capacity could be delivered, that more effectively build the foundations of awareness, trust, and buy-in – which are the critical enablers for long-term success and sustainability.

GEDSI & TK Integration

To what extent and how well has the activity incorporated GEDSI and TK in its implementation?

The RIR is making <u>good</u> progress at embedding GEDSI and TK into its activities. PRISMSS does rely heavily on the skills and knowledge of its in-country partners, but evidence suggests that overall GEDSI and TK are being well considered. There is a risk it may become a 'tick-box' approach if PRISMSS does not incorporate 'on-the-ground' learnings of what work.

- **The RIR Activity has invested in integrating GEDSI principles and the value of TK in its implementation.** Based on the Year 1 Annual Report, and other stakeholder feedback, while it is not explicitly detailed how these are integrated there is evidence of their consideration in several areas. Under the cross-cutting outcomes, RIR is conducting GEDSI analysis using an emerging methodology by leveraging the investment made in this area under MISCCAP (in partnership with Newcastle University) offering a PhD scholarship focusing on a GEDSI-related thesis to support ISM in the region. This graduate will embed this research into RIR and PRISMSS via their engagement as a GEDSI Co-ordinator at the start of 2025. Training and discussion sessions have been held with PRISSMS Technical Leads (February and November 2024) and at the August 2024 PILN Meeting to consider GEDSI and TK aspects in planning and implementing strategies. The Year 1 report mentions a high proportion of women participating in community consultations and training sessions (e.g., 58 participants, 16 women, or 27%) building the capacity of the region on ISM. Nothing was mentioned about training targeting specific groups or addressed accessibility needs for people with disabilities.
- **The Annual Report acknowledged under one of the cross-cutting outcomes, that it is too early to track and assess the value of integrating TK.** There are activities planned but haven't been implemented. The report mentioned using local knowledge or data for informed decision-making and community education. While not explicitly stated, this implies use of traditional ecological observations integrated with scientific data. The choice of sites for the Resilient Ecosystems – Resilient Communities (RERC) project explicitly considered sites important for traditional knowledge and cultural practices (e.g., the Barana Community Honiara Solomon Islands and Talau Nature Park, Vava'u Tonga).

- **There is potential to use the Navigator to document and track what GEDSI and TK issues are being raised and considered for different projects,** however there needs to be careful consideration on how to appropriately capture this. During discussions at the six-monthly Partners Meeting, sessions were facilitated to begin exploring this with a view to support projects to complete the text boxes the Navigator currently has for each of these. This is an emerging area of understanding for PRISMSS, and there was a clear demand for some guidance and structure to effectively capture this information. In-country consultations emphasised the need for this to be captured in a way that is meaningful to the local context, rather than a donor-driven templated approach, suggesting any guidance material should focus initially on supporting the capturing of narrative information against themes or questions (also see MERL Quality section and bullet point below). These kinds of improvements could be systematically addressed via a GEDSI & TK strategy for PRISMSS.

"When we do our work, we don't look at it as a gender. It's just when we work with the community, it's the whole community. There's no separate 'it's only men that does this'. 'It's only ladies that does this'. It's something that lately we have to look at...you know, it's something that's hard for us to try to do. It's just ticking a box with a donors. I mean, how do we answer it?"

- **Through engagement with the country partners, the Review was able to verify progress in integrating aspects of TK and GEDSI.** The numerous community consultations, workshops, and meetings demonstrate an effort to include diverse community members in project planning and implementation. Specific attention is given to local stakeholder engagement to address concerns about project impacts as evidenced from MISCCAP, which are being continued under RIR. Tonga for instance observed both formal and informal engagement, through the District Office and VEPA. In Palmerston Atoll, DoC implemented a thorough engagement plan beginning with the feasibility study bridging the knowledge and understanding gap between themselves and the community. These proved that an integrated and inclusive approach was used and was evident in the conversations with the Palmerston community. This approach should therefore be continued under RIR. Different genders were involved in integrating the project activities with their communal roles and responsibilities.

"I guess it wasn't as technical, more down to earth. I remember we had printed copies of the different Motu (islets), and they would be labelling where they saw certain bird species or certain species of trees, to help us get the overall picture and which motu had the rats. They had older members of their community there too. So they were relying on their historical knowledge of where rats were not previously there, but they might be there now."

- **The success of the Palmerston Atoll rat eradication and the restoration of Mt Talau highlighted the importance and value of strong community participation as a critical enabler to achieving GEDSI related outcomes.** A female ambassador's programme was established under the guidance of VEPA trained using scientific and traditional knowledge to sustain ISM at Mt Talau. Communities are made aware of invasive species by drawing on farmers', and local healers' knowledge and a published Plants of Tuvalu book. This implies a reliance on local knowledge of the ecosystem and the rats' behaviour.

MERL Quality

How well does the current MERL Framework capture and report on the activity's outcomes? Is its alignment to the ICFS framework clear? Are the activities framed in a way that can effectively communicate RIR's climate change impact? What improvements can be made (if any) to better reflect RIR outcomes and the needs of stakeholders, partners, and community?

MERL Quality is adequate to good. The RIR MERL Framework has been developed in alignment with the Activity's high-level theory of change and is also clearly aligned to the broader ICFS strategy. However, **the MERL approach as it is currently designed, has several limitations which are likely to constrain MFAT and PRISMSS**

from effectively tracking and reporting on the investment's impact, potentially undermining the Activity's overall effectiveness and creating risks for sustainability.

NOTE: The Reviewers acknowledge that several of the points raised in this section may be beyond the scope to address as part of MFAT's funding to PRISMSS via RIR. However, they are documented to support the broader intent to build the capability and capacity of invasive management and climate-oriented outcomes.

- **The MERL framework is well aligned to the ICFS strategy, and line-of-sight via the incorporation of headline and/or supplementary indicators is a notable strength.** By clearly linking, particularly using selected headline or supplementary indicators from the ICFS MERL framework, the contribution of this investment will make to the ICFS climate outcomes can be effectively tracked and aggregated.

  However, in reviewing the RIR and ICFS strategies and frameworks, several areas of further improvement were identified, that would further strengthen the value and potential engagement with MERL activities and the 'theory of change' from implementing partners including PRISMSS/SPREP, and the programme teams.

- **A limitation of the current MERL approach is that is has been designed to primarily meet the information needs of MFAT.** There appears to have been limited attention given to aligning the MERL framework for the RIR activity to either the PRISMSS strategy, or other regional strategies. This is potentially inconsistent with intentions contained in other guiding documents, such as the strengthened ICFS ToC which highlighted the importance of the critical enablers, the focus of the fund's principles and preferences, and the intention of the RIR investment to grow the capability and capacity of PRISMSS. If this has been considered, it is not evident in the information that was included as part of the document review. Ideally, the RIR MERL would be aligned to both the ICFS, as well as a more general ToC for PRISMSS or ISM in the region.

  A very preliminary draft of a ToC for ISM for Pacific climate resilience has also been developed as an addition output of the Review, and is shown in Appendix A (Figure B). This is currently 'agnostic' of PRISMSS, to focus first on capturing the 'logic' of what good ISM looks like (and contributions to climate outcomes), as described to us during stakeholder consultation.

  The development and use of a tool such as this can also support good governance and more strategic thinking and discussions. Well-developed ToCs can help target/focus discussions by providing a clear framework (both at a strategic/governance as well as operational levels).

  It should be noted this approach still represents a 'donor' or 'western' approach. If this was built on, contextualising this with key country partners would be important. Supporting this would be entirely consistent with the broader ICFS (as well as the intent of RIR) which acknowledges that building capacity of partners and institutions is both a critical and operational enabler, as well as being captured as one of the long-term goals.

- **Evolving information needs are not easily accommodated by the current MERL framework.** PRISMSS (and by extension RIR) have been established with a strong framing around operational invasive species management. However, during stakeholder consultations, it was clear that a more diverse range of issues (both strategic and operational) need to be visible and understood if PRISMSS is to be successful. This includes being better equipped to articulate ISM contributions to climate change/climate resilience, and the social and cultural context of ISM. The Reviewers observed that the PRISMSS team and partners generally acknowledge and understanding this (and recognise they do not always have the capability), but it is not sufficiently 'hardwired' into funding and subsequent operating and reporting arrangements.

  This indicates MFAT may need to give further thought to how it can support and build capability in this way if this is a need (to be able to report back up to MFAT) and would help support PRISMSS more generally to clearly articulate how ISM contributes to climate resilience. It should be noted there was some preliminary efforts targeting this at the November PRISMSS Partners Meeting, and this initial work should be built on. This effort to describe the ToC for PRISMSS contribution to climate resilience (separate from MFAT's) is a logical area to target for follow up. This could then be used as a more

integrated tool to support funding applications as well as operational planning and reporting. See the following bullet points for further detail and discussion on how this could be operationalised.

A further comment made by stakeholders was that under MISCCAP there were requests for information that had not been included in the MERL reporting. It would be valuable as part of any review exercise (as described above) for MFAT to ensure that all information needs for end-of-activity reporting are understood and incorporated into their Annual Report template.

- **The current MERL framework is heavily focused on quantitative metrics. These cannot sufficiently account for some of the outcomes sought, provide no information on the quality of the work being delivered, and are not well suited to tracking critical enablers or other key areas of interest to MFAT (GEDSI, TK, and climate impact).** A further limitation to the current MERL approach is a focus on tracking outputs and outcomes only. Although this is consistent with MFAT's guidance, this limits the extent to which MFAT and PRISMSS have visibility over the presence or absence of critical inputs, and testing of assumptions. In some cases, the MERL framework also creates risks to the future effectiveness and/or sustainability of PRISMSS, by *potentially* driving programme activities to track metrics that are in-appropriate for the maturity of the work.

  For example, the inclusion of the ICFS headline indicator "*Number of activities that draw on indigenous knowledge*", and the associated RIR short-term outcome indicator "*the Number of programmes influenced by indigenous knowledge, and research outputs highlighting indigenous knowledge or ways of managing invasive species*". While these have not been developed with the intention to hit targets (rather, they are intended to support MFAT identify good practice case-studies), indicators such as these, when not applied or socialised properly with partners, can drive activities to support reporting on numbers, and less on activities that build the necessary foundations for programmes to deliver effectively. This involves quality engagement with communities, which, as identified in this review (and in the literature), time to build trust, awareness, and engagement. As such, the MERL is not currently entirely 'fit-for-purpose'.

  It should be noted that the Communications Advisor is already targeting the collection of more narrative 'stories' for the purposes of general communications and mainstreaming activities. This could be easily leveraged and used as a data source (both retrospectively and going-forward), where a simple framework (typically a ToC and/or some key questions that link to the ToC) is used to gather and then 'tagged' or record as evidence against key areas (e.g., climate outcomes, critical enablers, etc).

- **The MERL approach could benefit from including a parallel stream of activities focused on systematically gathering meaningful qualitative information, particularly for key outcome areas of interest including climate impact, GESDI and TK.** The incorporation of qualitative data, focusing on the why and how questions, will: support the team to learn and improve, validate and contextualise contributions to the ICFS, and generate more meaningful and useful information for in-country partners, stakeholders, and local community. MFAT recognises that 'storytelling' can be a valuable approach to gathering evidence, so this would not be inconsistent with an ambition to generate information that is more culturally relevant and meaningful. As outlined above, there are already existing communications activities that could be leveraged to efficiently serve multiple information gathering purposes by using a simple inquiry framework. A *draft* guiding question framework has also been included in Appendix D that PRISMSS and MFAT can use and adapt.

  As described above, the preliminary ToC for ISM and climate resilience in the Pacific (Appendix A, Figure B) is intended to help provide an initial narrative framework which could help develop a strategy to gather and share stories for both evidence gathering and reporting, but also to support building a 'community of practice' for ISM in the Pacific that is reflects the voices of those 'on-the-ground'. Such an approach would help validate progress reporting as well as provide a mechanism to support and strengthen other key activities captured within the ICFS critical enablers.

- **Limited collection of baseline data hampers MFAT and PRISMSS to effectively evidence the climate impact of the Activity.** Gathering 'retrospective counterfactuals' as narratives from communities involved with MISCCAP would provide a qualitative baseline for tracking and reporting, and could also be used for community engagement and other communications purposes. Narrative baselines, if gathered following a simple but systematic approach, can still support aggregation for reporting, and

may also identify locally relevant measures that could be developed into baseline data collection approaches for use by PRISMSS. It is acknowledged that the Technical Partners are aware of this, but that they are also grappling with the typical challenges associated with gathering quantitative biodiversity and livelihoods baseline data. There is promise around the use of modern technologies such as remote sensing to help support more cost-effective approaches, however these should not be considered as a substitute for the kind of narrative Talanoa style data collection, which is more locally meaningful and appropriate to the Pacific context. A draft question framework has been included in Appendix D to act as a starting point.

- **More value could be leveraged from the Navigator to gather data and report progress.** As noted in the Efficiency section, PRISMSS designed this system to support deeper engagement and use of the data it captures and manages by PRISMSS and its partners (in-country, and technical). The consideration that has gone into the design of the tool reflects strong 'data literacy' by the core PRISMSS team, exemplified by the design of dashboards to support quality engagement and feedback to intended users. However currently the value proposition of Navigator is constrained by relatively low engagement with it as a tool, as well as some interface design/user experience issues.

  Specific examples included a design that requires relatively detailed information to be logged which has put some stakeholder off logging information (as they often do not have all the details). It was also observed that the design of the interface is programmatic rather than Invasive Species specific. During stakeholder consultation it was clear that many users first engagement with a tool like Navigator would 'start' at the species, which could then trigger the collection of differentiated data depending on the maturity and alignment of the request to intended outcomes.

  It is also worth noting the Navigator interface via the Support request form currently uses a lot of technical terms with limited explanation. For example, users can't always determine which 'service category' they need, and making this a force-choice question is also problematic. Some basic explanatory/prompting questions and/or examples would support good quality data entry, as well as considering adding some 'triaging' steps before a full request form is necessary, particularly as the user-base is expanded.

  At present the Navigator's key 'value proposition' for Invasive Species Coordinator's to report their indicators to support annual reporting against the Guiding Framework for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific. Focusing on only this poses a risk to engagement and effective use of this tool. This strategy is understandable in short term, but PRISMSS should try to avoid inadvertently supporting a view that the tool is for SPREP and PRISMSS benefit only. This also undermines the critical capability of the Navigator platform to be able support mainstreaming activities (including leveraging additional donor funding) by demonstrating the pipeline of demand against different variable (e.g., country, and potentially in future, climate impact).

  There is also greater opportunity to use the Navigator to gather and manage data on other key focus areas. Details on how improvements could be made to recording GEDSI and TK information has been provided in the GEDSI & TK Integration section. Similar boxes could be added to capture narrative information on key climate outcomes (also see earlier bullet points in this section on gathering qualitative data).

- **The RIR MERL currently lacks any tracking or reporting against the ICFS critical enablers.** This review has found that these factors play a critical mediating role in the extent to which the intended outcomes from PRISMSS and MFAT's RIR investment are likely to be achieved (See Sustainability). The findings here confirm their relevance and validate their addition to the ICFS strengthened theory of change, however there is currently no systematic tracking of these as part of RIR MERL. Other ways to show RIR's 'line of sight' to the ICFS is to give greater visibility of the strategic short-term outcomes (SSTOs). A draft version including this has been completed as part of the report in Appendix A.

- **Consideration should also be given to more clearly identifying the contribution the RIR Activity appears to be making in terms of leveraging other funds (Goal 4).** While not a key focus of this Activity, the findings from this review (see Effectiveness) suggest this may be an outcome from the RIR and should therefore be captured and reported. Some minor changes may also be needed in demonstrating alignment to some of the STMOs for Goal 3 (see Appendix A for more information).

LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT - SCALING UP

This short section includes additional findings regarding the objective to 'scale up' activities. Other key learnings and opportunities for improvement have been covered in other areas of the report, and are addressed in the recommendations.

The ICFS, RIR Activity documentation, and PRISMSS documents all include references to 'scaling up'. Scaling up in these documents implies increasing numbers and often at speed (short timeframes), and the associated MERL frameworks for ICFS and RIR are geared towards this.

No definition of 'scaling up' are provided, nor substantive explanation of the time-frames scale is to occur and the extent to which this is realistic. The focus on scaling-up may be entirely appropriate from a strategic perspective, but the findings from this review suggest there is a lack of internal consistency with the high-level ToC in the assumptions being made when operationalising this, particularly over short timeframes.

MFAT has acknowledged the importance of the 'critical enablers' and the longer timeframes associated with building these in realising the goals contained within the ICFS, but tracking 'scaling up' as a quantum (i.e., numbers of countries, activities, hectares, people) over a short time frame.

As outlined above in Sustainability and Effectiveness, this approach is creating risks to longer-term effectiveness at an Activity investment level. Operationally it may undermine the development of the important trusted relationships and capability and capacity of partners due to under-investment in these qualitatively defined activities, and may also lead to unreliable reporting (over or under) for effectiveness.

This challenge is complex to address, and subject to a number of competing priorities, however further discussion at an Activity level at a minimum will be important to ensure PRISMSS and the RIR Activity are well placed to meet mutually understood and theoretically sound goals for 'scaling up'.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review has identified nine recommendations, organised into three key areas for improvement.

It should be noted that due to the implementation approach for RIR, most of these recommendations are targeted to PRISMSS. MFAT still has a role in considering how they can support PRISMSS in their role as a funder and partner address these separate from (and in addition to) the extent to which these are considered as part of any MFAT funded follow-up Activity.

SYSTEMS AND TOOLS

RECOMMENDATION ONE: Strengthen the Navigator platform to improve (1) user engagement and (2) data collection, including for GEDSI, TK, and climate outcomes

The Navigator has considerable potential to be a powerful tool. The Review recommends PRISMSS investigates way to increase user engagement by working with their stakeholders to refine the interface and improve the user experience, build more 'stage-gates' into the process to funnel and triage interest or requests, and to identify what key questions and information they would most like to access and why.

This recommendation would see PRISMSS apply more 'user-centred-design' principles, and seek to understand their needs, and questions when engaging with the tool. This might necessitate reconfiguring the initial entry point around the species of concern and a question pathway to assist in the identification of the right kind of support being requested. Any redesign should also include providing more guidance and/or examples of what information is required in free-text fields, to support systematic data collection.

Allowing for saving partially completed request forms would also support engagement with the platform (and give PRISMSS more visibility over the potential pipeline). Failure to address these issues is likely to result in the data under-representing the potential demand for PRISMSS service, which will undermine a key objective of using the data to show the 'need' for ISM activities in the region (e.g., to support funding proposals, progress reporting and engagement with other stakeholders and partners).

Several suggestions have also been included in the report describing ways the Navigator could be better utilised to support the collection of GEDSI, TK, and climate outcomes. It is therefore recommended that these are also considered (jointly with Recommendation Two), to support more systematic data collection of these key focus areas.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: Strengthen the RIR MERL Framework by including critical enablers and expanding data collection approaches to better evidence GEDSI, TK, and climate outcomes

The MERL section of this report identified a number of specific areas where the MERL approach could be strengthened. It is recommended that all these are considered and addressed to the extent possible. It is recommended that the development of any qualitative inquiry framework be guided by a relevant expert, but also follow a include in-country stakeholders to ensure the approach is culturally appropriate and relevant. Some preliminary frameworks have been provided as additional outputs (Appendix A, B, and D) that could strengthen the quality, richness, and integration of existing and new evidence to meet key information and reporting needs.

Approaches that may be instructive when developing the inquiry approach include outcomes harvesting, or a variety of thematic case-studies. Alternatively, a general set of evaluative questions could be developed to support regular reflective practice and/or data collection from stakeholders.

It is also recommended that the MERL findings in this report are shared with relevant MERL experts in MFAT for consideration as part of the ICFS MERL strategy.

ADDRESSING THE CRITICAL ENABLERS / CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

RECOMMENDATION THREE: Develop locally appropriate approaches to build in-country ownership

Long-term success will always hinge on local ownership of the 'problem', but there has been only limited resourcing or investment in this area to-date. This might include funding to translate materials, support the development of local resources and collateral, funding awareness raising activities. It is recommended that PRISMSS works with Pacific Island countries where they have been operating for some time (e.g., Tonga, Niue, Palau) as they have the most experience and understanding of what local partners 'need' to support effective local engagement.

PRISMSS may need to consider a new funding model to support this to provide flexibility and autonomy for local partners to apply for funds and arrange for material to be designed in a way that is appropriate to their needs (also see Recommendation Nine). To support this localisation approach, it is recommended that a simple communications strategy or guideline is developed to support local partners in delivering consistent key messages, and support to identify and differentiate local audiences and messages at different stages of an ISM activity.

This recommendation will help PRISMSS to systematically strengthening critical enablers for RIR and ISM more generally. To date the target audience for much of PRISMSS communication materials (including their mainstreaming) have been relatively technical and/or targeting donors, which makes it inaccessible or not readily translatable to local communities. National mainstreaming has been included in RIR design. This details in this recommendation can be used to support locally appropriate approaches that suit national stakeholders at different levels (local as well as national).

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: Implement a more systematic approach to building in-country capability for ISM

Look to engage a technical expert to ensure CCB activities are being design and delivered to achieve the intended learning and practical outcomes, and that these are being delivered in a way that is systematic and integrated, ensuring key messages are reinforced across all of PRISMSS work to consolidate learning.

This should include exploring ways in which PRISMSS can support its in-country partners and stakeholder to build communities of practice, based around informal collegial networks and connections. Such an approach supports peer-to-peer learning, and may also serve to identify additional needs. Looking at how professional bodies that rely on volunteers to lead activities may provide some examples of how to set this up that is low-effort high-reward. These networks should include community members who can also share examples of how buy-in and ownership at community level is built and maintained.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: Strengthen the integration of GEDSI and Traditional Knowledge by building on existing good practice

Work with the new GEDSI Co-ordinator to identify and share approaches and examples of good practice. Avoid developing 'tick-box' approaches which undermines locally appropriate approaches. Instead focus on recognising and sharing existing good practice, as the pathway so strengthening practice. In future, these examples may be identified through mechanisms such as communities of practice, if Recommendation Four is actioned.

STRATEGIC APPROACH AND FUNDING

RECOMMENDATION SIX: Review PRISMSS's project development and implementation model to better support all critical activities

This may include seeking examples of 'best-practice' from the PRISMSS implementing partners to identify and develop a clear process diagram or description of key milestones that project need to complete or have in place.

Any review would need to specifically target those activities this review has found are sometimes poorly done. This includes time allowances for community engagement, activities to support capability and capacity building (partners and community), and activities to support on-going monitoring activities undertaken by local partners as part of planned 'after-care' to track long-term effectiveness, embed sustainability and support future funding applications. It is also recommended that consideration be explicitly given to how PRISMSS can also support government (at national and local levels) to plan and resource these activities so they are embedded as 'business as usual', or explore how they can better coordinate with other partners (such as the ISM Team in SPREP) to ensure this occurs in an integrated way.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN: Strengthen PRISMSS's strategic approach through use of shared/integrated frameworks and review the effectiveness of the governance arrangements of the RIR Activity

PRISMSS, with support of MFAT and its other partners, have established and are continuing to develop a highly functional regional service. It is therefore recommended that PRISMSS, MFAT and all key partners continue to progress the strategies and plans that have already been developed to continue to consolidate their approach.

Further opportunities to grow PRISMSS strategic approach (in addition to those already outlined above) include developing a shared ToC to support PRISMSS strategy, planning, and implementation. It is recommended that PRISMSS considers using the draft included as part of this report as a starting point or resource when developing their own (also see comments in the MERL section for further considerations).

It is also recommended that PRISMSS consider creating their own definition of 'scaling up'. The existing challenges associated with this concept (as outlined in the report) are considered and discuss this with MFAT, including any implications this may have for how PRISMSS reflects this operationally.

Additionally, it is recommended that PRISMSS continues to progress efforts to develop tools to avoid duplication, and grow consistency across its programmes (such as through developing basic guidelines for different steps or activities), and with closely aligned partners (see final point of Recommendation Six).

The Review also recommends that a light-touch review of the governance arrangements for RIR, including an assessment of future needs to support PRISMSS to be able to act as an efficient and effective coordination body. Several suggestions have been described in the Efficiency section. In the short-term this would focus on eliminating duplication of operational agenda items, meetings that are structured around strategic issues first, and more use of shared strategies and frameworks to guide discussions. Longer-term the Review suggests a more permanent governance mechanism or platform may be warranted, with membership from key partners (donors, government, CSOs, and Research Organisations).

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT: Adopt more inclusive investment design processes for future MFAT funding

Any future investment design undertaken by MFAT should allow for a more inclusive investment design process. Opportunities to design the investment to include or accommodate activities that were already being identified as critical success factors/critical enablers could have been better accommodated if such an approach could have been taken.

Any future investment should also consider the questions raise here regarding scaling, and how to more effectively support localisation efforts that are cognisant of long timeframes required for success.

RECOMMENDATION NINE: Explore complementary funding mechanisms to support comprehensive, long-term ISM as a response to climate resilience

This would include direct community and local-NGO grant funding models, and trust funds. A diversified funding model that includes mechanisms such as these will provide for more flexible funding options that are also likely to be better suit and support locally driven initiatives. Flexibility would help PRISMSS to provide technical support directly to communities, and build capabilities captured by the ICFS critical enablers, which underpin sustainable ISM and by extension climate resilience, rather 'driving delivery'.

APPENDIX A: DRAFT REVISED TOCS FOR RIR

Two draft ToC are included in this appendix.

Figure A shows a Draft revised version of the RIR's ToC is showing over the page. This version has attempted to map the Strategic Short-Term Outcomes against the RIR outcomes to give greater visibility of where RIR outcomes map to the shorter-term outcomes (and therefore headline and supplementary indicators).

It also identifies (in dashed lines) the outcomes that may need to be added to the theory of change.

This diagram has added SMTO 3.2, as the RIR Activity documentation was somewhat confused as to whether this SMTO was relevant. It has not been listed as such in the Activity documentation, but the wording of RIR Medium Term Outcome reflects the ICFS SMTO 3.2.

Figure B shows a very preliminary 'generic' ToC for ISM in the Pacific. This captures many of the key activities identified by stakeholders as what successful projects have included. It also captures several key assumptions. Other considerations are included in *italics*.

FIGURE A: DRAFT REVISED TOC FOR RIR

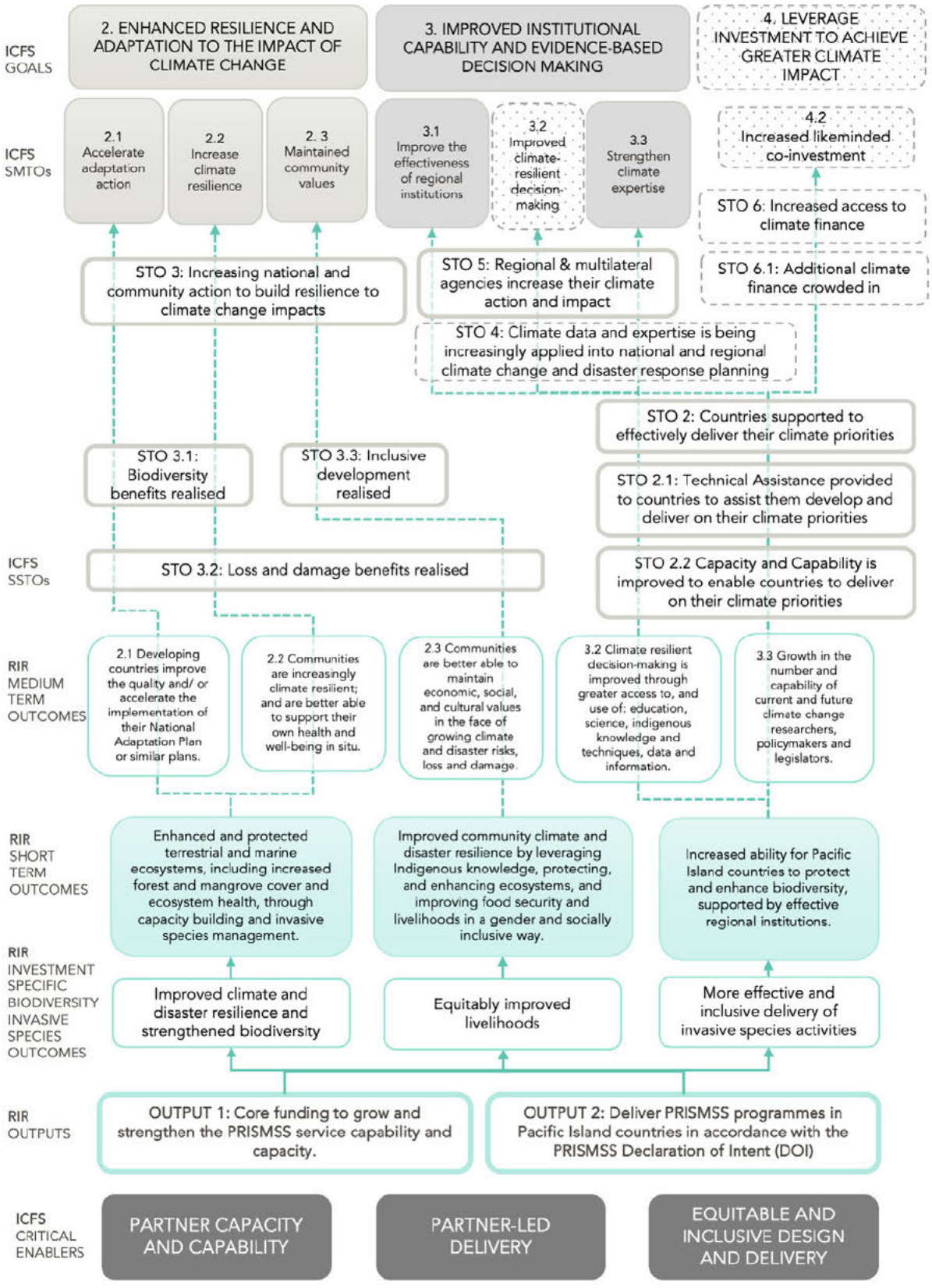
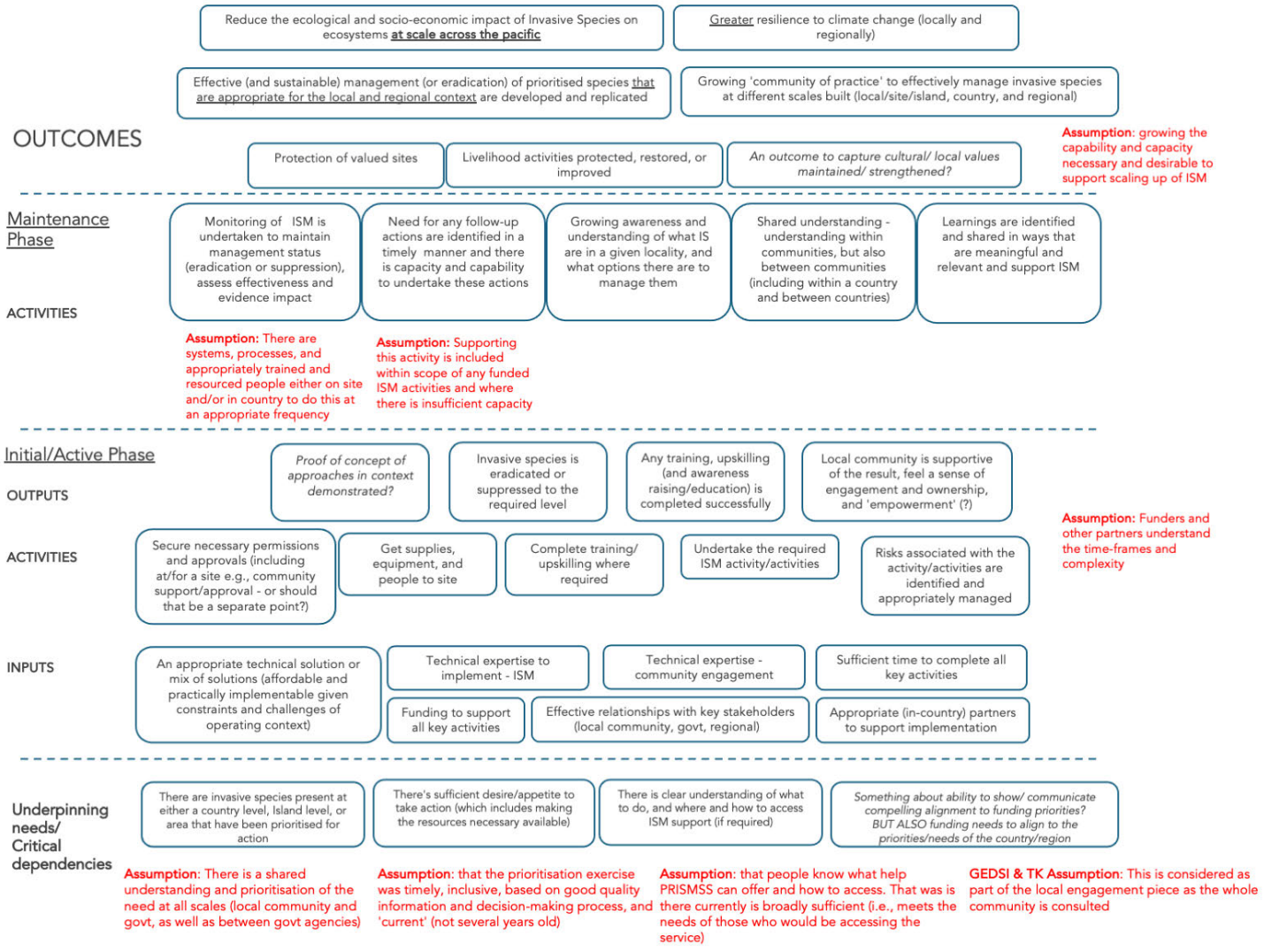


FIGURE B: PRELIMINARY HIGH LEVEL TOC FOR ISM IN THE PACIFIC



APPENDIX B: EVALUATION RUBRIC FOR RIR

A rubric was developed to support the over judgements stated in this review using a rubric. A rubric is a tool that helps to transparently and systematically assess the performance of programmes and investments against key criteria (which are typically aligned to the key questions).

The rubric was developed with the intention it can be used (and updated) to support PRISMSS complete systematic assessments of its performance in future. It is necessarily high-level and includes the key descriptors of what 'good' looks like, as identified via:

- A workshop with PRISMSS team and partners at the six-monthly PRISMSS Partners Meeting
- Feedback and insights obtained during stakeholder consultations

Rubrics that are developed as an support on-going assessment tool should ideally be reasonably high-level. Overly complex performance descriptions can make them less relevant as time progresses. When applying them, inevitably evidence sit across more than one level of performance. The user must use their own assessments of the relative importance of those specific dimensions, and the credibility and strength of the evidence to make a final assessment (evaluative judgement).

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	GOOD	ADEQUATE	POOR
RELEVANCE & COHERENCE	– Strong evidence of meeting stakeholder needs at all levels (regional, national, local) – Clear alignment with national and regional strategies – Robust consultation processes with appropriate time allocation – Activities strongly reflect local priorities and context – Effective coordination between all partners	– Evidence of meeting most stakeholder needs – General alignment with strategies – Adequate consultation processes – Most activities reflect local priorities – Good coordination with some gaps	– Basic alignment with stakeholder needs – Some alignment with strategies – Limited consultation processes – Variable reflection of local priorities – Basic coordination with clear gaps	– Limited evidence of meeting stakeholder needs – Weak alignment with strategies – Inadequate consultation – Poor reflection of local priorities – Weak coordination
EFFICIENCY	– Clear, effective implementation processes – Strong coordination between partners – Effective resource deployment – Robust systems and tools – Proactive risk management – Flexible and responsive to change	– Generally effective implementation – Good coordination with some gaps – Mostly effective resource use – Working systems with some limitations – Basic risk management – Some flexibility	– Basic implementation processes – Variable coordination – Resource deployment with inefficiencies (e.g. delays) – Basic systems with clear limitations – Reactive risk management – Limited flexibility	– Unclear implementation processes – Poor coordination – Ineffective resource use – Inadequate systems – Little risk management – Inflexible approach
EFFECTIVENESS	– Strong progress on outputs and outcomes – Clear evidence of impact – Strong community engagement – Effective capacity building – Clear communication strategies – Strong local ownership	– Good progress on most outputs – Some evidence of impact – Generally good community engagement – Some effective capacity building – Basic communication strategies – Some local ownership	– Variable progress on outputs – Limited evidence of impact – Basic community engagement – Limited capacity building – Ad hoc communications – Variable local ownership	– Poor progress on outputs – Little evidence of impact – Weak community engagement – Ineffective capacity building – Poor communications – Little local ownership
SUSTAINABILITY	– Strong local capacity built – Clear exit strategies – Embedded critical enablers – Strong institutional arrangements – Effective knowledge transfer	– Some local capacity built – Basic exit strategies – Most critical enablers present – Sound institutional arrangements – Some knowledge transfer	– Limited local capacity – Unclear exit strategies – Some critical enablers – Basic institutional arrangements – Basic knowledge transfer – Limited funding options	– Little local capacity – No exit strategies – Few critical enablers – Weak institutional arrangements – Poor knowledge transfer

CRITERIA	EXCELLENT	GOOD	ADEQUATE	POOR
	– Diverse funding sources	– Some funding diversity		– Single funding source
GEDSI & TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE INTEGRATION	– Systematic GEDSI integration – Strong traditional knowledge use – Clear evidence of inclusive practices – Effective local partnerships – Strong cultural alignment – Regular monitoring and adaptation	– Good GEDSI consideration – Some traditional knowledge use – Generally inclusive practices – Some local partnerships – Basic cultural alignment – Some monitoring	– Basic GEDSI consideration – Limited traditional knowledge use – Some inclusive practices – Few local partnerships – Variable cultural alignment – Limited monitoring	– Poor GEDSI consideration – Little traditional knowledge use – Few inclusive practices – Weak local partnerships – Poor cultural alignment – No monitoring
MERL QUALITY	– Comprehensive framework – Strong qualitative and quantitative measures – Clear alignment with ICFS – Regular, quality reporting – Evidence-based adaptations – Strong stakeholder engagement	– Sound framework – Good mix of measures – Basic ICFS alignment – Regular reporting – Some adaptations – Some (external) stakeholder engagement	– Basic framework – Limited measure mix – Unclear ICFS alignment – Variable reporting – Few adaptations – Limited engagement	– Weak framework – Poor measures – No clear alignment – Irregular reporting – No adaptations – Poor engagement

APPENDIX C: DATA SOURCES

s9(2)(a)

s9(2)(a)

Documents Reviewed

Aotearoa New Zealand International Climate Finance Strategy – Tua te Waka a Kiwa, Ministry of Foreign Affair and Trade, August 2022

6th Pacific Invasive Species Learning Network (PILN) Meeting. Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) 2024

Natural Enemies Natural Solutions - MISCCAP Achievements (Presentation, MISCCAP Closure Workshop), November 2024.

Natural Enemies Natural Solutions - MISCCAP Lessons (Presentation, MISCCAP Closure Workshop), November 2024.

Natural Enemies Natural Solutions - MISCCAP Opportunities and Challenges (Presentation, MISCCAP Closure Workshop), November 2024.

PRISMSS Long-term Strategy 2021

Activity Completion Report MISCCAP, SPREP December 2024

Activity Completion Report MISCCAP, Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research December 2024

Activity Completion Report MISCCAP, Department of Conservation December 2024

Activity Monitoring Assessment – MISCCAP, MFAT, April 2024

Activity summary - Restoring Island Resilience, MFAT, September 2024

Climate Change Programme EcoSystems Intervention Area Evaluation Report, Allen + Clarke, November 2023

Headline and Supplementary Indicator Summary (Updated), ICFS (no date).

ICFS Evaluability Assessment, Martin Jenkins, April 2024.

Meeting Notes (MFAT): Lessons learned presentations from PITAC meeting 10 October 2024.

MFAT Management Response, ICFS Evaluability Assessment, June 2024

Meeting Notes (MFAT): MISCCAP closure workshop 8 November 2024

MFAT Meeting Notes: PRISMSS six-monthly Partners Meeting, Indigenous Knowledge and GEDSI sessions, February 2024.

Activity MERL Framework Basic Guidance 2024, MFAT (no date)

PRISMSS Restoring Island Resilience Implementation Plan, MFAT, November 2023

PRISMSS RIR Steering Group Meeting Minutes, May 2024

PRISMSS Sustainability and Resource Mobilisation Plan (2024-2030), June 2022.

Restoring Island Resilience, Year 1 Report, SPREP, May 2024

Single Stage Business Case - Restoring Island Resilience, MFAT, April 2023

The Guiding Framework for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific, Second Edition, SPREP, 2023.

Other materials not listed here but reviewed included videos on the PRISMSS YouTube channel, new items posted on the SPREP website tagged to RIR and MISCCAP, and documents in the Battler Resource page.

APPENDIX D: DRAFT GUIDING QUESTIONS

The following are a sets of guiding questions PRISMSS could incorporate to support systematic qualitative data collection for Climate, GEDSI and Traditional Knowledge Reporting. A second set of questions are provided to support gathering a narrative retrospective counterfactual.

Guiding Questions for Climate, GEDSI and Traditional Knowledge Reporting

1. Is the target invasive species' growth impacted by flood, drought or cyclones?
2. Is the target invasive species affecting/impacting
   - the water systems, food sources, ecosystems
   - the ability of different people in communities to perform their roles and responsibilities?
3. If yes, in what way?
4. Are there any local solutions/strategies to cope or mitigate these impacts?
5. If yes, what are the contributions, including knowledge, of the different people in the community to implementing the solution?
6. How does the health or status of the local ecosystem contribute to the solution? (eradicating/managing the spread of the invasive species?)
7. If no, anyone helping the community to solve the problem?
8. What are some of the issues that will hinder implementation of solutions?

Guiding questions for retrospective counterfactual

What was the environment like prior to the intervention?

⇒ *Prompt – water systems, food systems land and aquatic (under cultivation or gathered/foraged), ecosystems (land/aquatic).*

What has changed since the intervention?

⇒ *Get detailed descriptions of change (or signs of possible change) for all contexts and systems. Eg. Food, human health, livestock health, sanitation, ecosystem health (including resilience to shocks)*

How has the intervention contributed to these changes?

⇒ *Even if people report things are not related to the intervention, it is important to note this, as it may become important information to understand contribution of the intervention.*

⇒ *Prompt to find out what (if anything else) has happened.*

These questions do not need to be asked in this order. You can Talanoa and just make sure you have covered them. You may also need to go backward over questions if more details come up as you discuss with stakeholders.