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AHK Repräsentanz der Deutschen Wirtschaft German-New Zealand Chamber of Commerce Inc.

Project Brief: Waste Streams in Fiji and the Cook Islands: From Problem to Resource

Fiji and the Cook Islands face significant challenges in managing growing waste streams due to limited land availability, high transport costs, and a limited and fragmented recycling infrastructure. This project will develop a structured assessment of key waste and material flows, existing infrastructure, logistics systems, and institutional frameworks in both countries.

By identifying priority waste streams and evaluating practical recovery and recycling options, the study will provide a robust evidence base for future circular economy initiatives, feasibility studies, pilot projects, and investments. The findings will support policymakers, infrastructure operators, and businesses in turning waste from an environmental challenge into a valuable resource.

Overview

Limited land availability, small domestic markets, high transport costs and insufficient recycling infrastructure mean that valuable materials are often landfilled, stockpiled or discarded into the environment. This project aims to provide a robust evidence base for strengthening circular economy approaches and resource recovery in both countries.

Why Fiji and the Cook Islands?

Small Island Developing States face unique barriers in building cost-effective waste management systems. Geographic isolation, fragmented populations and limited economies of scale often make waste collection, treatment and recycling difficult and expensive. At the same time, these island environments are particularly vulnerable to pollution from inadequate waste management practices. Fiji serves as a regional economic hub with relatively developed infrastructure and links to numerous Pacific regional programmes, while the Cook Islands represent the realities of a smaller tourism-dependent island nation with limited infrastructure and strong logistical constraints.

Together, they provide valuable case studies for understanding how circular economy approaches can be adapted to Pacific island contexts.

Growing challenges for Pacific island waste management

Current systems rely heavily on landfill disposal, while local recycling, resource recovery and processing pathways for key waste streams such as plastics, metals, glass and e-waste remain limited. In addition, fragmented data and limited information on material flows make long-term planning and investment decisions difficult.

Project objectives

The project aims to create a clear and comparable understanding of waste and material flows in Fiji and the Cook Islands. To achieve this, it will consolidate and review existing waste-related data and studies, validate findings through consultations with key stakeholders, and systematically map and prioritise important waste streams. Building on this analysis, the project will assess existing infrastructure and operational arrangements, identify practical technological, organisational and logistical options for improved waste management, and develop country-specific recommendations and implementation pathways. The study will also highlight opportunities for future feasibility studies, pilot projects and investment activities.

Supported by:

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

based on a decision of the German Bundestag

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Expected outcomes

The project will deliver a comparative waste flow assessment for Fiji and the Cook Islands, providing a structured overview of key material streams and current management practices. In addition, it will produce standardised fact sheets for priority waste streams and assessments of technical and logistical options suitable for island environments. Based on these findings, the project will develop one to two priority action packages for each country, outlining potential implementation pathways and recommended next steps. Together, these outputs will provide governments, infrastructure operators, businesses and development partners with a practical framework for decision-making and future circular economy initiatives.

Long-term benefits

By identifying realistic pathways for improving waste management systems, the project will contribute to greater resource efficiency and support efforts to reduce environmental pollution and marine litter. Improved management of waste streams can help protect sensitive coastal and marine ecosystems while providing a stronger basis for planning and investment decisions. The project will also foster knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders and support the development of sustainable, scalable circular economy solutions that can be applied not only in Fiji and the Cook Islands but also in other Pacific island contexts facing similar challenges.

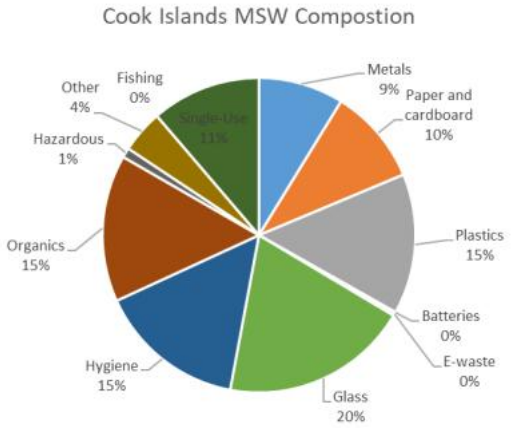

Figure 1: Cook Islands Municipal Solid Waste Composition (% by weight); source: Cook Islands National Waste Audit Analysis Report (PacWastePlus) June 2025

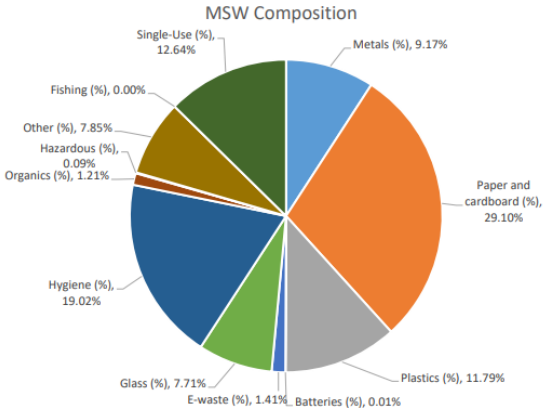

Figure 2: Fiji Municipal Solid Waste Composition (% by weight); source: Fiji National Waste Audit Analysis Report (PacWastePlus) June 2025

How will the project be implemented?

The study combines desk-based research with stakeholder engagement. Existing reports, datasets and policy documents will be reviewed and analysed, while interviews and consultations with government agencies, municipal authorities, waste operators, recycling businesses, logistics providers and regional organisations will provide local validation and practical insights.

The findings will be synthesised into a structured scoping study designed to support future policy decisions, technical assessments and project development activities. By bringing together fragmented information and stakeholder perspectives, the project aims to establish a shared understanding of priorities and opportunities for advancing circular economy approaches in Fiji and the Cook Islands.

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