## Terrestrial protected areas

**Indicator Definition**

Niue has two key protected areas (Hakupu Heritage and Cultural Park, and Huvalu Forest Conservation Area. The latter is the larger and most well-known of the two. Smaller village and community managed areas exist, but these are not found in government records. Currently, the Department of Environment is evaluating the best approach to promote and manage protected areas to achieve conservation outcomes and meet Niue’s obligations to multi-lateral environment agreements. Some of the options, include expansion of existing conservation boundaries, and engaging villages and landholders to establish community-based protected areas. There is also an option to categorise the marine and terrestrial protected areas to make them easier to manage and to align them with the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. This indicator deals with terrestrial protected areas. Marine protected and conservation areas are included under the Marine Theme. This indicator looks at the size of the area included in the protected area.

**Status and Key Findings**

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| **SDG** | **CBD** | **Status & Trend** |
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|  | Environment and Climate Change Pillar [NNSP 2016-2026]  **Biodiversity**: Protecting biodiversity, maintaining sufficient remaining habitats and ecosystems to support the population of all species and their genetic diversity |

There are two existing protected areas established for the conservation and sustainable use of resources: the Huvalu Forest Conservation Area and the Hakupu Heritage and Cultural Site. On occasion villages and extended families have used traditional practices to manage land and prohibit activities in certain areas. A ***Fono*** is a temporary restriction imposed usually for a year, prohibiting access to an area, land or marine, and prohibiting harvesting in it as a mark of respect to a deceased family member. *Fono* may also be enforced for a few months to facilitate the harvesting of certain species of fish, for example the *kaloama* or yellow-striped goatfish *Mulloides flavolineatus.*

A ***tapu*** is a permanent restriction imposed by the whole village, protecting a certain area because it is sacred or vital to the breeding of certain species such as flying foxes. Many *tapu* cover primary forest and a key part of the Huvalu Conservation Area is protected by this means. There is some concern that such traditional measures are weakening, due to lack of awareness amongst the young, the poorly defined boundaries of such areas, and the pressures to clear more land or harvest more resources.

**Huvalu Forest Conservation Area**

Established in 1992, the Huvalu Forest Conservation Area (HFCA) lies in the south-eastern part of the island, within the villages of Hakupu and Liku. The Conservation Area covers 5,400 ha (54km2), surrounding the largest area of primary forest in Niue. The site is divided into three areas according to local traditional practices. The core of the reserve, about 100 ha in size is *tapu*, a most sacred site, and hunting, logging or even research is prohibited. A surrounding area of about 2,500 ha of primary forest provides some protection to the core but is used for hunting and other activities and outside this is a buffer zone of 2,800 ha of agricultural land (see Figure 76) (1st Country Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2001). The Conservation Area also includes an area of reef platform, about 15-20 m from the high tide mark. A recent project to explore ways to sustain the protected areas and to develop a management plan has been completed. While the management plan is still work in progress, a number of recommendations were made to assist with sustaining the protected areas. This includes employing a forest ranger to monitor the protected areas, with funding generated through a visitor levy. Identifying ways to stop the illegal hunting of *lupe* and *peka* was also suggested, as well as finding ways for families to share the cost and benefits of managing the protected areas.



Figure 76. Huvalu Forest Conservation Area – showing the boundary and the *tapu* area.

Whistler and Atherton (1997) provided an extensive description of the HFCA vegetation. Two key vegetation types include managed land vegetation and natural vegetation. The managed land vegetation, which includes vegetation that is in a continual state of disturbance, was further categorised into crop-land and fern-land. The natural vegetation includes areas that have not been used by humans, or at least have not been disturbed for many years. The natural vegetation on the shore is herbaceous and shrubby, comprising littoral shrub-land. Four plant communities were recognised along the coastal area: littoral forests, coastal forests, mature forests (= primary forest) and secondary forests.

**Hakupu Heritage and Cultural Park**

The Hakupu Heritage and Cultural Park was designated as a national park in 1998. It extends south from the Tuhia access track in the village of Hakupu, hence it is in close proximity to the Huvalu Forest Conservation Area that is located to the north. This park was a private initiative by Misa Kulatea of the village of Hakupu with the support of family members. A committee comprising mainly of family members, who share ownership of the land, manages the park. The primary objective is to document and protect sites of historical and ecological significance. This includes some of the caves that were used for traditional burials, or for women to weave mats and other crafts. Some of the sites in the area were also used as a fortress and where the community lived. It was also an area with a flying fox sanctuary (*Tauga* *Peka*). Some of the natural components of the park include three fresh water caves at the Tuhia Sea Track and blowholes at Mata along the coastal area. The park is fairly small (0.05km2) but it is an area with ecological and historic significance.

**Impacts**

The threats to Niue’s biodiversity will remain constant with the increasing focus on development and with the impacts of climate change. Surveys of bird species following cyclones have demonstrated a serious population crash after such an event. Protected areas provide a large scale refuge for birds, crabs and reptiles. Without these protected areas, many of Niue’s species will face extinction.

**Response and Recommendations**

Protected areas are important refuges for vulnerable species in Niue. Larger protected areas provide a better chance for species survival and offer resilience to the impacts of climate change. The diversity of protected areas, especially in terms of the vegetation types, offers a better opportunity for species to survive and to thrive. Hence, coastal forests are just as important as inland forests when it comes to protecting species population. Communities should be encouraged to protect primary forests under their stewardship and the government to work with communities to document the biodiversity, the ecology and the cultural knowledge of these areas. This will enhance Niue’s commitment towards the conservation of its biodiversity and surpass the global target of 17% of terrestrial area for conservation under the Aichi Biodiversity Target. Currently, just over 20% of Niue’s terrestrial area is protected. There is a need to develop the management plan for the Huvalu Forest Conservation Area and explore ways to ensure that families and communities are benefiting from protecting this national asset. Managing the threat posed by illegal hunters should also be considered and community participation in this area is encouraged.