

Cook Islands and Japan partner to procure inter-island vessel for the Cook Islands

Joint Press Release – Cook Islands High Commission to New Zealand and Embassy of Japan to New Zealand – 30 September 2023.

The Cook Islands and Japan have formalised funding support through the signing of an exchange of Note under Japan's Economic and Social Development Programme (ESDP). This agreement enables the Government of the Cook Islands to secure a vital interisland domestic shipping vessel purpose fitted to suit the Cook Islands needs.

This partnership follows five years of diligent bilateral negotiations between the Cook Islands Government and the Japanese Government, the culmination of which took place on 30 September through the signing of Notes by the Honourable Tingika Elikana, Cook Islands Associate Minister for Foreign Affairs, and His Excellency ITO Koichi, Japan's Ambassador to the Cook Islands. This accomplishment is the result of close collaboration between the Cook Islands Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Immigration (MFAI), Finance and Economic Management (MFEM), as well as the Japanese Embassy in Wellington and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Japan's ESDP is one of a number of partnerships initiatives offered by Japan to support developing countries. This support comes at a crucial time for the Cook Islands Government, as it strives to enhance inter-island transportation links to ensure food security, boost imports and exports, and ensure economic resilience in the post-COVID era.

The multi-year limitations on interisland shipping infrastructure has had a significant impact on the Cook Islands Pa Enea (Outer Islands), causing disruptions for businesses and community planning. In alignment with the Economic Development Strategy 2030, the Cook Islands Government's goal of acquiring a domestic interisland vessel will help mitigate these difficulties, helping to alleviate poverty in the Pa Enea and promoting greater economic resilience.

On behalf of the Cook Islands Government, the Honourable Tingika Elikana expressed gratitude during the signing ceremony and emphasised the critical role of shipping for those living on the most isolated islands, particularly those in the North. The Cook Islands Government looks forward to continued co-operation with the Japanese Government to support shared development aspirations.

In reply, Ambassador ITO emphasised recent positive development in bilateral relations between Japan and the Cook Islands. In 2021, both countries celebrated the 10th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relationship. This year, high-level political engagements are taking place on both ways and more often, including Prime Minister the Honourable Mark Brown's visit to Japan in February and May, and Foreign Minister the Honourable Mr HAYASHI Yoshimasa's the first-ever Japanese ministerial visit to the Cook Islands in March.

Ambassador ITO said today's signing was a testament to amicable relations between the two countries and expressed his wish that the cargo-passenger vessel provided would improve the living conditions for the people in the Cook Islands.

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