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Niue Ocean Wide (NOW) Trust and Ocean Conservation Commitments (OCCs) Niue

INNOVATIVE FINANCING CASE STUDIES

ROCK POOLS IN NIUE. IMAGE CREDIT: NIUE TOURISM

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CASE STUDY IN COLLABORATION WITH:



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Innovative Financing Case Studies

Each of the case studies in this series describes a conservation finance mechanism in action. Before diving into a case study, look for the **Key Readiness Factors** – these are conditions or resources you should ideally have in place to successfully implement that model – and the **Best Fit Contexts** suggesting where or when the model is most appropriate. Use these pointers to gauge if a mechanism aligns with your community’s situation.

The intent of sharing these financing case studies is to offer an in-depth look into the essential but often unseen inner workings – the “engine room” – of community-led conservation finance mechanisms. While other resources typically highlight funding sources or the ultimate distribution of funds, this series illuminates the critical governance, administration, and management processes at the heart of conservation financing. The case studies demonstrate how robust internal structures can prevent conflict, streamline administration, and ultimately drive enduring environmental and community outcomes.



NIUE COASTLINE. IMAGE CREDIT: NIUE TOURISM

Niue Ocean Wide (NOW) Trust, Niue



OCEAN CONSERVATION

LOCATION

Niue



Niue, a small Pacific Island nation with a vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), has committed to sustainably manage 100% of its ocean territory, including a no-take Marine Protected Area covering 40% of its EEZ. To finance and govern this effort, Niue established the Niue & Ocean Wide (NOW) Trust in 2023 – a first-of-its-kind public-private conservation trust between the Government of Niue and local NGO Tofia Niue.

The NOW Trust is the designer and issuer of Ocean Conservation Commitments (OCCs), a world-first conservation finance instrument. Each NZD 250 (approximately USD 148) commitment enables a donor to co-sponsor the conservation of 1 km² of Niue's ocean for 20 years. The price is determined by considering the actual incremental cost to ensure legitimate conservation is undertaken, and to leverage the resilient sustainable development outcomes associated with this conservation effort.

This mechanism is designed to endow long-term ocean management, build a climate-resilient blue economy for Niue, and ensure benefits flow to Niue's people and marine biodiversity. All OCC proceeds and donations are held by the NOW Trust – a charitable trust under New Zealand law – and are dedicated to ocean protection, sustainable development initiatives, and community resilience in Niue.

Key readiness factors:

- Political / government commitment (Niue's entire EEZ was designated as a marine park).
- Public-private collaboration (the NOW Trust built on a 7-year partnership between Niue's government and a local NGO).
- Cultural and community buy-in.
- Partnerships / technical support to fill capacity gaps
- Anchor funding / proof of commitment to such funding

Best fit contexts:

- Communities with large natural resources relative to population and budget.
- High biodiversity areas with global significance.
- Political will to support nature protection.
- Legal and institutional frameworks (governance to support a trust and marine management).
- Communities open to monetizing conservation in a non-market, values-driven way.
- Government open to leveraging its investment in nature conservation in different ways.

Mechanism overview

Niue's Ocean Wide Trust model links ocean protection with long-term finance. In 2022, Niue created the Niue Nukutuluea Multipurpose Marine Park covering its entire Exclusive Economic Zone, about 321,000 km². Inside this park, 40% of the ocean is a no-take marine protected area, where fishing and extractive activities are not allowed. The rest of the park is divided into zones for village subsistence fishing, local fishing and tourism, and carefully regulated commercial use. This allows Niue to protect important ocean ecosystems while still supporting local livelihoods and sustainable economic activity. Zoning balances conservation with sustainable use, but it also imposes costs – for example, Niue forgoes foreign fishing licenses in the 40% no-take area.

To pay for this system over time, Niue created the Niue & Ocean Wide Trust, or NOW Trust. The Trust is a dedicated conservation fund that receives and manages money for ocean protection, climate resilience, and community benefit. Some of the money is invested to build a long-term endowment, while some is used straight away for marine park management and related programs. The Trust is governed by a board that includes government, local leadership, private sector and expert partners, with community advice built into decision-making. This helps make sure the model is accountable and stays aligned with Niuean priorities.

A key part of the model is the Ocean Conservation Commitment, or OCC. Through this system, any supporter can make a one-time sponsorship of NZD 250 to support the protection of one km² of Niue's ocean for 20 years (a figure derived from the estimated annual conservation cost/value of 1 km² (NZD 12.50) × 20 years). This is not a carbon credit, biodiversity offset, or property right. Sponsors receive a certificate and updates on the impact of their contribution, but do not own part of the ocean and cannot trade or resell their contribution. Instead, the money goes into the Trust and is pooled to support marine protection, enforcement, education, community projects, and sustainable livelihoods. This design avoids the complexity of carbon or biodiversity offsets and emphasizes ethical responsibility: one cannot sponsor an OCC to justify harming nature elsewhere. In this way, the mechanism combines conservation law, ethical fundraising, and community-led governance in one system.



IMAGE CREDIT: NOW

Guiding principles

Message from the NOW Trust

Niue encourages other countries to consider OCCs for funding conservation and sustainable development. Initially developed for marine conservation, climate resilience, and blue economic initiatives in Niue, OCCs are designed to address specific challenges in financing marine conservation.

We welcome countries to develop their own mechanisms inspired by OCCs, but ask that those using the "OCC" name and brand follow Niue's vision and principles

Guiding principles for the OCC model

- Conservation commitments
- Inclusive governance & representation



1. Develop OCCs for **legally designated MPAs** with strong governance and sustainable financing strategy developed



2. Develop OCCs for **MPAs with highly or fully protected status**



3. Ensure MPAs have marine ecosystems with **high biodiversity significance and diverse value dimensions**



4. **Prioritize country and community-driven implementation** of conservation activities



5. Ensure **strong engagement or partnership with government**



6. **Establish meaningful community consultation**



7. Provide **acknowledgement of Niue's role and history** in developing OCCs



IMAGE CREDIT: NOW

How it works

- 1. Niue legally protects its whole ocean area.** The entire EEZ becomes part of one marine park.
- 2. The marine park is divided into zones.** One large area is fully protected with no take. Other areas allow village fishing, tourism, and some regulated commercial use.
- 3. Niue sets up a conservation trust fund.** The NOW Trust is created to collect, manage, and distribute money for the marine park.
- 4. Supporters contribute money through OCC sponsorships and other sources.** People, companies, governments, grants, and possibly tourism-related funding can all contribute.
- 5. The money goes into one central fund.** Funds are pooled together rather than tied to one exact part of the ocean.
- 6. Some money is invested to generate annual returns for the future** (endowment fund).
- 7. Some money finances immediate management needs.** These funds cover a range of programs: strengthening monitoring, control, and surveillance (e.g. training local rangers, deploying radar, satellite or drone systems); enforcement of no-take zones (patrols, legal follow-up); climate resilience measures such as reef restoration and disaster preparedness for coastal communities; capacity-building for sustainable livelihoods and ecotourism (e.g. supporting Niuean fishers to shift to tourism or other income, training guides, developing marine ecotourism attractions); and mitigating opportunity costs – for instance, helping local fishers adjust to the 40% no-take by investing in fish aggregation devices or fishing in permitted zones, and compensating the government for lost fishing license revenue. The Trust can also fund education and cultural initiatives related to the ocean, such as school programs, scholarships, and incorporating traditional knowledge into park management.
- 8. Niuean communities help guide decisions.** Village councils, local leaders, and Niuean institutions help decide how the system works on the ground. Niuean authorities, such as the Ministry of Natural Resources) and village Resource Management Advisory Councils (RMACs), comprising Village council members and local marine stakeholders, remain key decision-makers in how marine areas are managed on the ground. For example, each village helps enforce rules in the subsistence zone adjacent to it.
- 9. The Trust reports on results.** Audits, reports, and public information help keep the system transparent and accountable.

Money flow

Niue's Ocean Wide Trust model combines a nationwide marine protected area framework with a dedicated conservation trust fund to ensure ongoing financing and equitable governance.

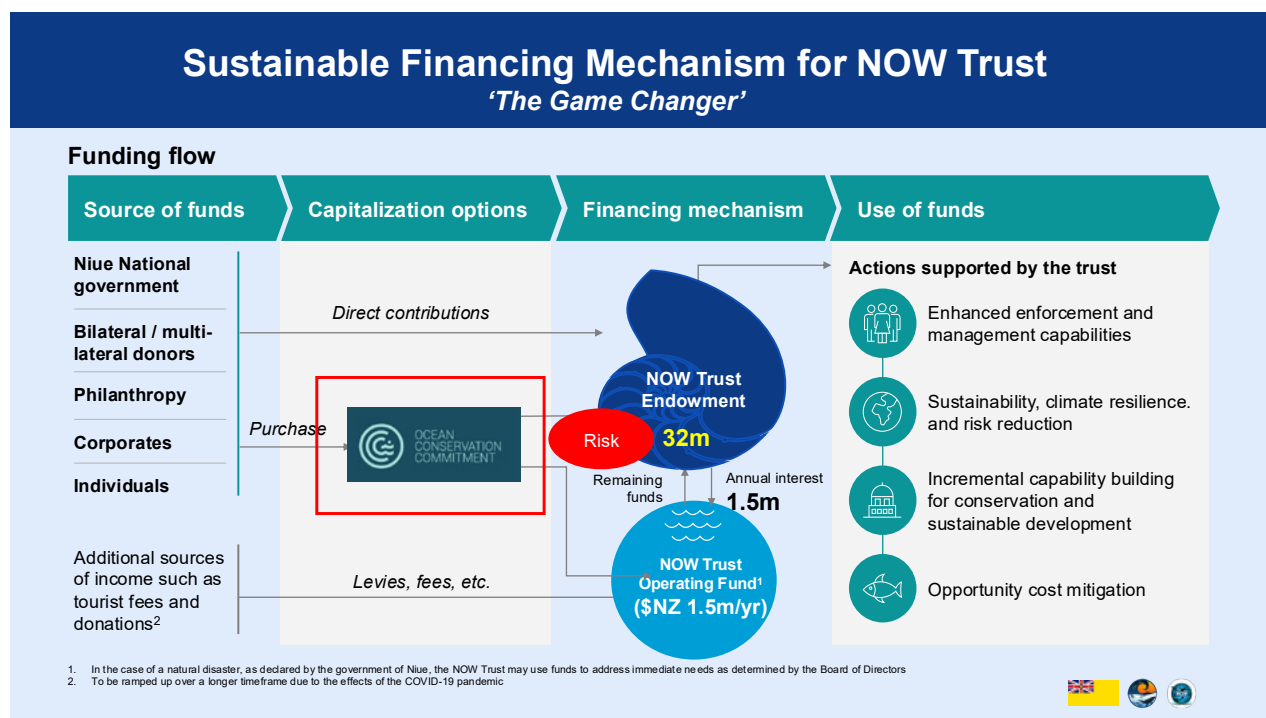


IMAGE CREDIT: NOW

Timeline and key dates

- **2015–2017:** Foundations laid through partnerships – Niue’s government and local NGO Tofia Niue begin collaborating on ocean conservation strategy. They engage with external partners (including Blue Nature Alliance, National Geographic Pristine Seas and other regional partners) to conduct baseline research and develop a marine spatial plan.
- **2020:** Niue Moana Mahu – a large-scale Marine Protected Area – is legally established, protecting ~40% of Niue’s EEZ as no-take zone.
- **2022:** Niue unveils the Ocean Conservation Commitments (OCC) concept at the Pacific Islands Forum as a “world-first” sustainable finance mechanism to fund the marine park. Leaders welcome the innovation as way to increase access to finance including climate finance for important ocean.
- **2023:** The NOW Trust is formally incorporated as a charitable trust in New Zealand. The NOW Trust and OCCs are formally launched at the United Nations during UN General Assembly week. Niue announces a target to raise USD \$18 million via OCCs and other donations to endow the NOW Trust. The Government of Niue commits to sponsor ~1,700 OCCs (one on behalf of each Niuean). Initial sponsors include Blue Nature Alliance, Conservation International, and private donors.
- **2024:** Implementation begins. The NOW Trust receives and manages funds as they come in. Niue starts procurement of surveillance technology (e.g. camera-equipped marker buoys and drone systems are considered) and conducts training for compliance officers. Niue’s OCC concept wins Fast Company’s World Changing Idea Award (Nature Category), bringing further visibility.
- **2025 and beyond:** Niue’s goal is to fully capitalize the Trust and achieve a self-sustaining finance model for its ocean.



NIFA COMP. IMAGE CREDIT: NOW

Partners and beneficiaries

- **Government of Niue:** The Niuean Government is a primary driver and beneficiary of the NOW Trust. It provides political leadership, policy framework, and in-kind support (e.g. personnel from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Fisheries) to enforce the marine park.
- **Niuean Communities and Traditional Owners:** Niue's entire population (predominantly Indigenous Polynesian Niueans) are key beneficiaries. 14 village communities manage adjacent reef areas and have a direct role in stewardship. Through the Trust, communities receive resources for education, livelihood projects, and cultural programs. The Trust reflects the principle that this innovation was designed "by Niueans, for Niue".
- **Tofia Niue (Local NGO):** As Niue's leading environmental NGO and co-founder of NOW, Tofia Niue represents local civil society in the partnership. Tofia Niue was instrumental in conceptualizing the OCC and rallying community support. It continues to play a watchdog and advisory role – ensuring the Trust's activities respect community values – and delivers on-ground programs (such as school outreach, marine clean-ups, and showcasing Niue's conservation story regionally and internationally).
- **International Conservation Partners:** The development and execution of Niue's mechanism involve numerous global partners, such as the Blue Nature Alliance including Conservation International (who provided technical assistance in designing the finance mechanism and is a co-sponsor of OCCs).
- **Private Donors and Sponsors (global community):** The OCC mechanism opened Niue's conservation effort to anyone in the world – from multinational companies to concerned individuals. Engaging a broad base of sponsors not only raises funds but also builds an international constituency advocating for Niue's sovereignty and conservation goals. Sponsors are considered partners and "care-holders" in the sense that Niue provides them transparent reporting and storytelling on how their contributions make a difference.



NOW STAFF. IMAGE CREDIT: NOW

Impacts and outcomes

- **Comprehensive Marine Conservation:** Niue has effectively put 100% of its EEZ under active management, with 40% fully protected as a no-take reserve. This exceeds global targets and establishes one of the largest percentage-wise marine protected areas (MPAs) in the world. The immediate outcome is legal protection of critical habitats (coral reefs, seamounts, whale breeding areas), which is expected to lead to ecological recovery. Success will be measured in coming years by increases in fish stocks, healthier coral cover, and sightings of more marine life in Niue's waters.
- **Climate Resilience and Ecosystem Services:** By conserving its marine ecosystem, Niue is bolstering natural defenses against climate change. Healthy coral reefs help buffer storm waves and protect coastal freshwater. The Trust specifically funds climate resilience projects – e.g. improving water security and coastal infrastructure to withstand cyclones. Niue's ocean acts as a significant carbon sink and supports tuna and whale migration that have regional climate and ecological importance.
- **Sustainable Economic Opportunities:** The marine park is marketed as a pristine ecotourism destination – Niue is one of the few places where tourists can swim with humpback whales, and sports fishing is managed for high-value experiences rather than volume. By protecting its waters, Niue hopes to command premium ecotourism revenue (e.g. dive tourism, whale-watching fees) and develop niche products (such as sustainably caught "conservation fish" for export or local dark-sky ocean tourism where minimal artificial light allows better night-sky viewing). The Trust supports capacity-building for Niueans to enter these businesses – training guides, providing seed funds for community enterprises – thereby creating jobs linked to conservation rather than extraction.
- **Strengthened Governance & Autonomy:** The Trust introduces rigorous financial management and accountability practices (annual audits, multi-stakeholder oversight) which can be a model for other public and private funds in Niue. The project also invested in human capital: young Niueans are trained in marine science, compliance enforcement, and project management.
- **Cultural Revitalization and Education:** The initiative deliberately weaves traditional knowledge into marine management; for example, using Niuean language names (Niue Nukutuluea, Moana Mahu) and concepts of ancestral stewardship. Funding is earmarked for ocean education in schools and scholarships for Niuean youth in marine fields. This means the younger generation is reconnecting with traditional ocean wisdom (navigation, sustainable fishing practices) while gaining modern skills.
- **Global Influence and Replicability:** The Niue OCC model has inspired interest in other regions; policymakers and NGOs see it as a potential blueprint for funding 30x30 commitments or community-led MPAs elsewhere.



Community readiness questions

- ☐ Do we have clear rights and jurisdiction over our natural resources (land or sea)?
- ☐ Is government supportive of nature protection over resource extraction in our region?
- ☐ Is the wider community willing to support long-term conservation in exchange for the promised benefits?
- ☐ Are our governance structures inclusive, functional, and trusted by the community?
- ☐ Do we have a clear conservation and development plan that identifies what needs funding?
- ☐ Is it possible in our region to develop sustainable nature-based enterprises that repair, protect and steward nature (such as eco-tourism)?
- ☐ Can we manage potentially large financial contributions with accountability?
- ☐ Do we have a way to reach a diverse range of potential supporters beyond our community?

Key risks

Risk	Mitigation / what to plan
Funding sustainability and donor fatigue	• Broaden the donor base and pursue complementary revenue (e.g. tourism fees)
Governance and accountability	• Enforce robust oversight (e.g. independent audits)
Enforcement and compliance	• Invest in surveillance and training (e.g. satellite, drones) and regional enforcement cooperation
External economic pressures	• Ensure conservation commitments are protected through strong legal frameworks
Political will to protect nature wanes	• Develop and disseminate broad reaching, high quality communications products and plans in collaboration with government around the public benefits of protecting nature

Further reading

- Become a Guardian of Niue Moana Mahu: <https://niueoceanwide.com>
- Niue Ocean Wide [Annual Reports](#).



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