

Spatial Planning Support for Marine Park



At the Eye on Earth Summit in Abu Dhabi last week, the Geographic Information System (GIS) software company Esri committed to building a database for the Cook Islands Marine Park to aid in the spatial planning of the 1 million sq km park, which was officially announced earlier this year by the Cook Islands Prime Minister, Henry Puna.

This new commitment is in response to Prime Minister Henry Puna's challenge, which was issued to the international community at the summit, to provide support to developing countries who have expressed a commitment to protecting the oceans.

The Cook Islands Marine Park is a large addition to the Pacific Oceanscape, an innovative commitment by sixteen Pacific Island governments to integrated marine conservation and sustainable management across approximately 40 million sq km of ocean. Prime Minister Puna and the Cook Islands delegation was joined at the summit by Teuea Toatu, executive director of the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) in Kiribati, and a delegation from Conservation International (CI) which has committed technical and scientific assistance to implement the Pacific Oceanscape since its inception.

Esri, in partnership with University of California, Santa Barbara and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, agreed to assign two senior scientists to bring together all the available information on the marine park into a single digital platform, and to train Cook Islands people to operate it. The project will begin in early 2012 with a stakeholder meeting in Rarotonga.

Prime Minister Puna was the keynote speaker at the third day of the summit, which is focused on information gathering and sharing to provide for a sustainable future. The 4-day summit attracted over a thousand delegates from around the world and had a line-up of prestigious guest speakers including Dr. Jane Goodall, Dr. Sylvia Earle and former U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The Cook Islands Marine Park, the world's largest marine park, is scheduled to be officially established at the next meeting of the Pacific Islands Leaders Forum, to be held in the Cook Islands in August 2012 and will be a major focus of this forum.