

Biodiversity Challenge Funds Projects Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus Half Year Report

Note: If there is any confidential information within the report that you do not wish to be shared on our website, please ensure you clearly highlight this.

Submission Deadline: 31st October 2022

Project reference	29 - 005
Project title	Safeguarding Rennell Island Livelihoods and Biodiversity from Invasive Species
Country(ies)/territory(ies)	Solomon Islands & Fiji
Lead partner	BirdLife International
Partner(s)	Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association
Project leader	Steve Cranwell
Report date and number (e.g. HYR1)	31/10/2022 HYR1
Project website/blog/social media	

1. Outline progress over the last 6 months (April – Sept) against the agreed project implementation timetable (if your project has started less than 6 months ago, please report on the period since start up to end September).

Output 1

1.1 The Project Partner Inception Workshop was successfully conducted on the 30th of August in Honiara, with 25 representatives from the Solomon Island Government (SIG) & key implementing partners. In delivering the workshop opening remarks, the Deputy Director Technical for the SIG Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management & Meteorology, Mr Chanel Iroi, encouraged all stakeholders to work together to share experiences & understanding of the challenges & opportunities at the ERWHS, to facilitate concrete actions through the project. He added that the project would begin to address some key issues for the removal of the ERWHS from the WHS In-Danger List. In response, the SI British High Commission Deputy High Commission, Mr Steve Auld, acknowledged the support by the SIG and all development partners in addressing key biodiversity threats, adding that Solomon Islands has the 2nd most impressive level of biodiversity in the region, after PNG. Presentations were given by the SIG, UNESCO Desk, the Lake Tegano World Heritage Site Association (LTWWSA) and partners with projects underway in East Rennell, including Live & Learn and the GEF/IUCN EREPA Project. A key achievement from the workshop was the review & agreement of the yearly implementation timetable, including timeframes & clarity on deliverables for each Project Output by the key implementing partners.

The Community Project Inception meetings were held in Hutuna & Tegano Villages on 2nd September and in Niupani & Tevaitahe Villages on 3rd September, with about 20 village members attending each meeting. Facilitated by the LTWWSA Chairman in the Rennellese language & supported by the BL Team, the 5 main Project Outputs were presented to the village members. The BL Team presented the rodent control program in a visual form (diagram) and briefly discussed the communities' role in delivering all project outputs. The team discussed all non-target (species) mitigation measures with the communities and there was a consensus for BirdLife/LTWWSA to develop & make available awareness information,

prior to commencement of baiting. Key achievements from the village meetings were the (i) clarity/understanding of the rodent control setup (the effort needed from the communities in marking & setting it up, the importance of keeping pets & children away from the treatment areas), (ii) the identification of the four 100ha plots/sites to be discussed & agreed in LTWHSA-led village meetings in October, and (iii) the nomination & recruitment of 1 Local Ranger from each village by the end of October.

- 1.4 An early draft of a community-based Rodent Control Operational and Monitoring Plan has been developed. The Plan includes the outline/setup of the 1km² rodent treatment and associated non-treatment (control) plots to be established at each of the 4 ERWHS villages and the potential indicator species of crops (e.g., kumara, taro, yams, papaya) and birds (e.g., Rennell Shrikebill, Rennell Whistler, Rennell Starling) that could be studied for IAS impact. These will be agreed to by the 4 communities, when the draft of the Plan is presented to the 4 villages in November.

Output 2

- 2.1 A Solomon Islander with biosecurity expertise has been identified to lead the development of the Renbel Province biosecurity plan. Technical assistance will be provided by BirdLife, the New Zealand Department of Conservation, Pacific Biosecurity and the SIG through the Biosecurity Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Biosecurity (MALB). The Biosecurity Division (through the Director) has agreed to host the position which will aid access to local expertise and the integration of the plan into SIG national policy. Contractual arrangements for the position are being finalised and a stakeholder consultation to scope the Biosecurity Plan, will commence. A few key stakeholders, including representatives from the SI Maritime Authority & the Deputy Premier of the Renbel Province helped identify additional biosecurity stakeholders at the Project Inception Workshop in Honiara. A Stakeholder Analysis and document outlining scope of the Renbel Biosecurity Plan will be available by the end of Q4.

Output 3

- 3.2 A Services Agreement is being finalized with the Local Consultant on Rennell, to assess the LTWHSA capacity needs & thus produce a LTWHSA Capacity Development Plan. A questionnaire/survey form is being drafted to identify the baseline institutional capacity needs & gaps, after which this will be conducted as a participatory process at the LTWHSA Capacity Needs Assessment Workshop by end of Q3.
- 3.3 EcoOceania Consultant, Dr. Ray Pierce has signed & commenced the Services Agreement for the development of the LTWHSA Environment Monitoring Plan. A component of the Monitoring Plan is the development of a Monitoring Template, which will be used during the rodent control setup in November to train the LTWHSA & community members on collation & reporting of monitoring data.

Output 5

- 5.1 Implementing partners & stakeholders at the Project Inception Workshop in August discussed and reviewed existing coordination structures embedded within national frameworks. BirdLife also presented what could potentially be the role of a Project Steering Committee. This was done to avoid any duplication of efforts, but to ensure clarity & synergies between national & local programs for Rennell. It was agreed that a separate Steering Committee be established, as this would specifically focus on the Darwin project, and would also ensure that actions, results & outcomes of the project are communicated & reported to the SIG and to provide a coordination body for other ongoing projects/programs within the ERWHS. The forum agreed that the membership of the PSC was to include the SI MECDM (a representative from the Environment Division & Climate Change Division), SI MALB (representative from the Biosecurity Division), SI Ministry of Culture & Tourism, SI National University, SI Handicraft Association, Live & Learn SI, UNESCO, GEF/EREPA Project Representative, Renbel Province & Renbel Province Women Development Program.

2. Give details of any notable problems or unexpected developments/lessons learnt that the project has encountered over the last 6 months. Explain what impact these could have on the project and whether the changes will affect the budget and timetable of project activities.

The lack of reliable shipping services in the Solomon Islands continues to be an issue (or has worsened post-covid), particularly for remote islands like Rennell where communities depend on ships to transport goods & supplies from Honiara, including those for daily consumption & sustenance. This has also resulted in the loss of income opportunities for individuals who visit Honiara for casual employment or to sell produce, crafts; and an increase in fuel prices by the few available vehicle-owners, who are able to provide transport across Rennell. The increase in fuel makes it completely difficult for local people to purchase fuel, on the other hand this provides no alternative for the project team when travelling to the ERWHS. The BirdLife team will make slight modifications to the travel budget, and this is been reflected in a Change Request Form.

The LTWHSA is closely monitoring the shipping schedule & at this point, there is available time to get the rodent bait (already purchased) to Rennell before the end of Y1.

3. Have any of these issues been discussed with NIRAS-LTS International and if so, have changes been made to the original agreement?

Discussed with NIRAS-LTS: Yes/No

Formal Change Request submitted: Yes/No

Received confirmation of change acceptance Yes/No

Change request reference if known:

4a. Do you currently expect to have any significant (e.g. more than £5,000) underspend in your budget for this year?

Yes No Estimated underspend: ██████████

4b. If yes, then you need to consider your project budget needs carefully. Please remember that any funds agreed for this financial year are only available to the project in this financial year.

If you anticipate a significant underspend because of justifiable changes within the project, please submit a re-budget Change Request as soon as possible. There is no guarantee that Defra will agree a re-budget so please ensure you have enough time to make appropriate changes if necessary. Please DO NOT send these in the same email as your report.

5. Are there any other issues you wish to raise relating to the project or to BCF management, monitoring, or financial procedures?

None at this point.

If you are a new project and you received feedback comments that requested a response (including the submission of your risk register), or if your Annual Report Review asked you to provide a response with your next half year report, please attach your response to this document.

Please note: Any planned modifications to your project schedule/workplan can be discussed in this report but should also be raised with NIRAS-LTS International through a Change Request. Please DO NOT send these in the same email.

Please send your **completed report by email** to BCF-Reports@niras.com. The report should be between 2-3 pages maximum. **Please state your project reference number, followed by the specific fund in the header of your email message e.g. Subject: 29-001 Darwin Initiative Half Year Report**