

Checks shed light on lagoon issues

AS THE Mei Te Vai Ki Te Vai project management unit (PMU) prepares a full report from its extensive environmental investigations, they are able to report one of the key findings - that groundwater in the Muri catchment is directly connected to water in Muri Lagoon.

This means that land-based activities, such as agriculture, waste disposal and septic tanks, directly contribute to the lagoon's water quality.

As previous environmental studies of Muri Lagoon did not confirm the factors contributing to the lagoon's water quality, the PMU decided to undertake further studies to close the remaining information gaps.

The extent of connection between groundwater and the lagoon was one of these gaps.

PMU Environmental Scientist, Anthony Kirk explains how the information was gathered.

"The connection between groundwater and the lagoon was found through a combination of information from monitoring wells we installed in Muri, ground surveys we conducted on Muri beach and testing of lagoon water.

"The information these methods provided shows that groundwater, even at very deep levels below the ground, responds to the lagoon tide. We also found chemical indicators of groundwater far out into the lagoon. This proves that groundwater and water in the lagoon are mixing," explains Kirk.

He adds, "The public need to be aware of this, as it means toxic material dumped on the ground, or in streams, may make their way into groundwater and eventually into the lagoon. Examples of common products likely to cause issues

are insecticides, weed killer, pharmaceuticals, paint and motor oil." The PMU's early findings highlight that Rarotonga's natural environment is strongly interconnected and at risk, at least in part because of the current lack of public sanitation infrastructure, but also from everyday products that harm the environment when they end up in the water.

In addition to the planned new public sanitation infrastructure and more responsible septic tank management, the community also need to take a more conscious approach to choosing products being used on the land.

Without these changes, the current issues at Muri are likely to worsen, and develop in other areas around Rarotonga and around the Cook Islands.

The PMU will be publicly release a full report on the re-

Project aims to improve water quality

IN JANUARY 2017, the Cook Islands Government launched the Mei Te Vai Ki Te Vai (MT-VKTV) project to improve the water quality of the lagoons in Rarotonga and Aitutaki.

The project involves confirming the source of the issues, identifying what can be done in the short term, providing a road map for investment, developing a concept design for a long-term wastewater management solution, establishment of a Crown-owned water and wastewater authority and engaging with the community throughout and beyond.

To confirm the source of issues that contribute to the water quality of Muri lagoon - a number of environmental monitoring and investigations have been conducted both in the water and on land.

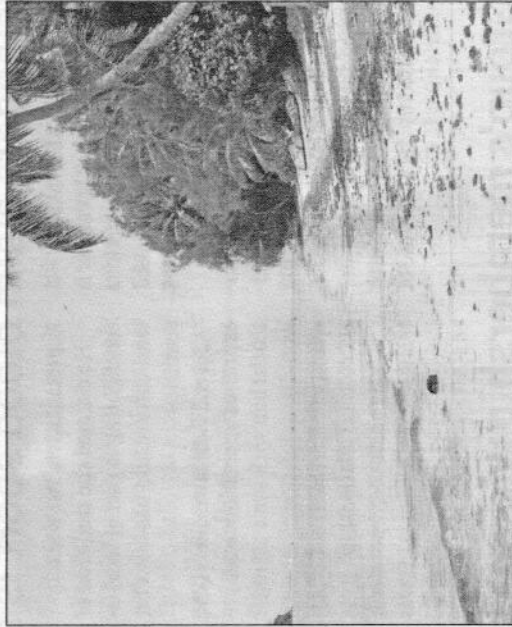
Experts are analysing the data gathered and today's story shares some of the findings from the investigation programme.

More findings from the investigation will be published over the coming weeks in media including the Mei Te Vai Ki Te Vai Facebook page.

sults of their investigations in September, but in the meantime will be sharing key findings with interested parties as work on the final report progresses.

The final results of the investigations will provide valuable information and methodology for water quality assessment, monitoring and management in other parts Rarotonga and the Cook Islands.

To stay up to date with the project, subscribe to the newsletter at <http://www.vaikitevai.com/subscribe> and for more information, please visit www.vaikitevai.com, call 28851 or email vaikitevai@cookislands.gov.ck for updates. ■ PR



A build-up of unsightly weed at Muri beach has caused concerns in the past about the effects of pollution. 18/07/06

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