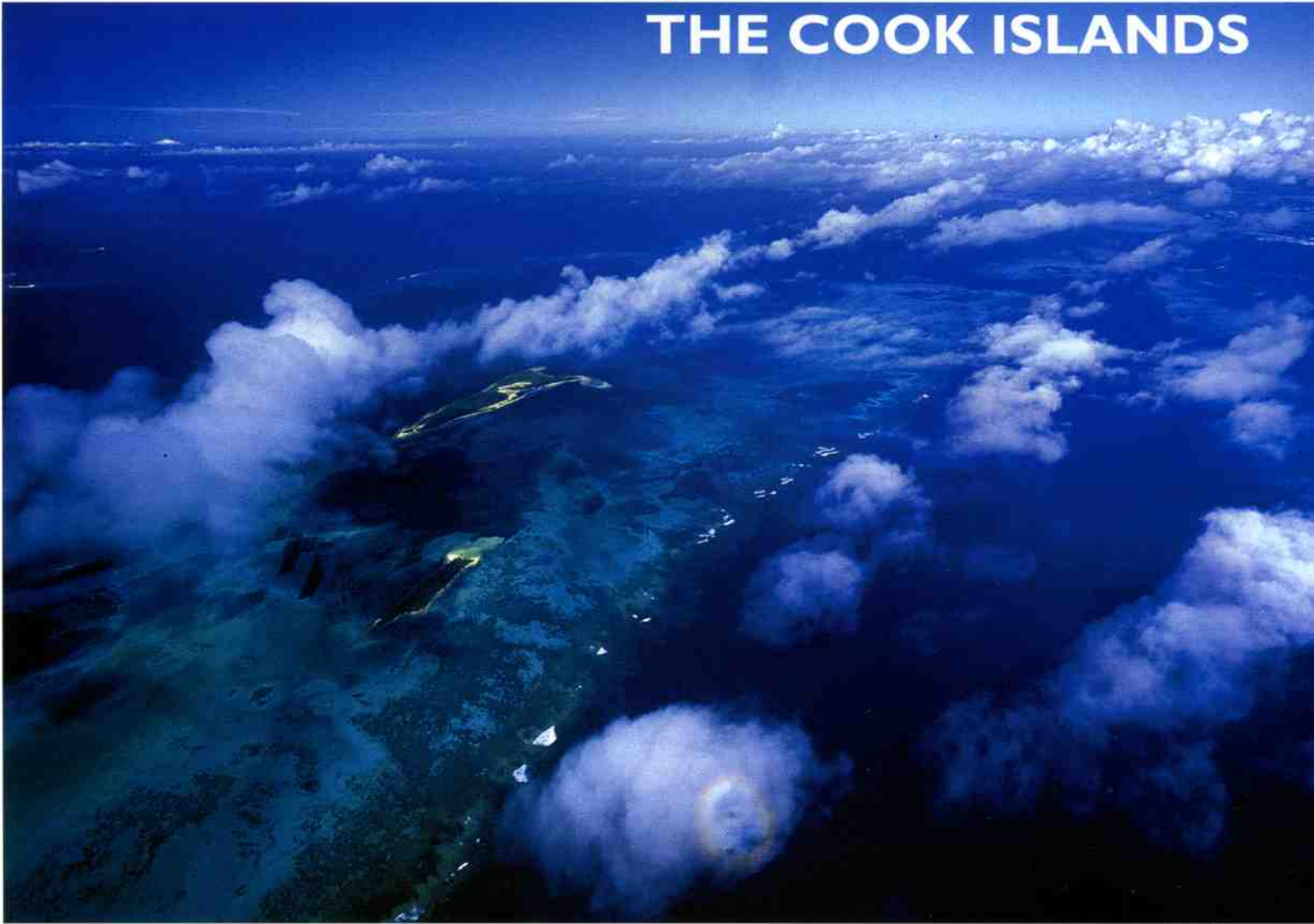


DUANE SILVERSTEIN

Elder Care, Island Care

THE COOK ISLANDS



ALLAN TUARA



There are many adjectives to describe the Cook Islands. 'Beautiful, friendly, balmy and remote' come to mind for this Polynesian nation located in the

South Pacific between French Polynesia and Fiji. A quick look at a map would show that the nation is primarily comprised of water. The Cook's 15 widely dispersed islands have a total land area of 240 square kilometers, while the Cooks' exclusive economic zone covers an amazing two million square kilometers, roughly the size of Western Europe.



ALLAN TUARA

ATIU is a raised atoll located 187 kilometers northeast of the main island of Rarotonga. With a population of 569 and an average of no more than 12 tourists on the island at any given time, it would be fair to say that the island of Atiu is well off the beaten path. Being so remote, economic opportunities on Atiu are limited, causing many of the younger members of the community to leave in search of jobs. The population has declined 40 percent in the last 20 years, leaving fewer and fewer people on the island to take care of the elderly. A few years ago an elderly woman living alone, was dead for some time before her neighbors became aware of her demise. The people of Atiu were in need of a geriatric ward to house their elderly population.


That's where Seacology comes in. In line with Seacology's goal of offering local stakeholders tangible benefits in exchange for an agreement to preserve threatened marine or forest ecosystems, we offered the people of Atiu funding for the construction of the geriatric facility in exchange for their

declaring nearby Takutea Island a wildlife sanctuary, and establishing a restricted fishing zone extending five miles from Takutea's shore, both for a minimum duration of 20 years. Only Atiu residents will now be allowed to fish in these waters. This restricted fishing zone will keep out all foreign fishing fleets while the tiny, uninhabited Takutea Island will become a virtual paradise for birds. Rakia (white-capped noddy), Toroa (red-footed booby) and Kota'a Nui (great frigatebird) are among the species found on Takutea that do not breed elsewhere in the Cook Islands. These bird species, along with many others, now enjoy absolute protection thanks to the contract the people of Atiu entered into with Seacology.

Equally important, the frail elderly of Atiu now have a nice facility in which to live. They will be well taken care of as the new geriatric ward is near the Atiu Hospital where medical attention is close at hand. This new facility built with volunteer labor, cost less than US\$17,000. Considering that



Atiu residents in front of Seacology funded geriatric facility.

this project protects the waters from over fishing, the many rare bird species from being hunted and helps the people of Atiu take care of their elders, this money by any measure is indeed very well spent. 

DUANE SILVERSTEIN is the executive director of Seacology, the world's premier non-governmental organization with the sole purpose of preserving the ecosystems and cultures of islands throughout the globe. www.seacology.org