Introduction:

The Pacific Invasives Learning Network was first proposed by a group of regional and national agencies to help Pacific Island countries and territories tackle the urgent threats posed by invasive alien species (IAS) in the region. The PILN would focus on working with country or island-b multi-agency IAS teams to help them address their priority challenges while sharing expertise and resources in a coordinated learning network. This report summarises the results of a start-up consultancy to assess the need for a Pacific Invasive Learning Network (PILN) among organizations and practitioners working on invasive species issues in the Pacific islands and to provide input on priority needs, regional partners, and potentially active island or country IAS teams. This broad consultation has proved a widespread demand for PILN among IAS professionals and agencies in the Pacific and has provided critical input to assist in planning for its establishment.

The following is a summary of the Consultant’s Report; the full report is available from David Butler or should soon be available on SPREP’s website (www.sprep.org.ws).
PILN Mission:

To empower effective invasive species management through a participant-driven network that meets priority needs, rapidly shares skills and resources, provides links to technical expertise, increases information exchange, and accelerates on-the-ground action.

PILN Goals:

1. PILN team members strengthen essential technical, organizational, collaborative and policy skills to advance invasive species management in the Pacific Islands.
2. PILN teams demonstrate on-the-ground action against invasive alien species and rapidly share their experiences, skills and resources.
3. PILN team members work cooperatively on high priority local and national invasive species issues.
4. PILN teams collaborate in addressing at least one critical regional invasive issue or opportunity.
5. PILN team members and partner organisations work together to design and implement a well-coordinated, cost-effective, and active network or alternative mechanism to provide ongoing, effective support and services to invasive alien species teams throughout the Pacific Islands.

Key findings of consultancy:

- Pacific island countries and territories have responded enthusiastically to the proposed Pacific Invasives Learning Network (PILN) and seven have indicated strong interest in applying as ‘founding teams’ in 2005-06.
- The original six regional and national agencies that initiated the Network are being joined by three additional regional agencies with considerable invasives experience, to provide a strong base of technical support for PILN teams.
- PILN is very timely. There are several major new initiatives arriving to address invasive species issues in the region and the Network can increase their effectiveness by rapidly sharing lessons learned.
- This consultation with countries and territories has largely confirmed the proposed design of the network, and identified ways that it could be clarified or improved.
- Lack of staff time and funding have been identified as constraints by countries, however the Network will assist teams in addressing these.
- $50,000 in implementation funding has been secured from The Nature Conservancy (TNC); three invited funding proposals have been submitted and one more is pending. Additional support will be needed to secure the full two-year PILN budget.
- A revised timeline for the PILN start-up has been developed leading to a possible first meeting of the Network in early 2006, subject to available funds.
Detailed Summary:

The Pacific Invasives Learning Network was introduced to 19 of the countries and territories of the Pacific Island region over a 7-month period using a questionnaire, phone consultations and 6 country visits. The response was enthusiastic, with widespread agreement that such a network was urgently needed to increase the effectiveness of the fight against invasive species. There was confirmation that many working in this field are geographically and professionally isolated and that a learning network was likely to be a successful way of dealing with this issue.

Seven countries, states and territories confirmed that they were in a position to consider joining the network as founders in 2005 (Vanuatu, Palau, Guam, Fiji, Hawaii, American Samoa, Marshall Islands). Several other countries also appear ready though detailed discussions have not yet been held with them, and many individuals have also expressed interest. Most of these potential founders have a national, territorial or state-wide group or committee that deals with invasive species and includes representation from different government and non-government agencies and the private sector, so that they could quickly form a multi-agency team as required to participate in the network. These potential founding teams have also identified a series of strategic projects that they wish to tackle with PILN assistance, including strengthening prevention/quarantine, public education, obtaining funding and training and site-based projects to eradicate or control rats, ants, insects and weeds. All the countries of the region will have the opportunity to apply to join the Network.

Feedback from consultations has largely confirmed the structure of the network as it was developed by the design team made up of regional and national agencies1. This structure calls for a PILN Secretariat with a full-time coordinator based at the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The Network’s main activities would be to bring participants of the country teams together with technical resource people through network meetings, learning exchanges and/or training programmes. The Network would be supported by an electronic network or email group as well.

Based on the questionnaire, the priority areas identified for Network assistance were:

- obtaining funding (86%)
- planning and carrying out control programmes (82%)
- developing an IAS strategy (79.6%)
- developing early response and detection capability (77.5%)
- strengthening border control (75.5%).

The main factors that countries and territories identified as possibly reducing the effectiveness of their participation in PILN were lack of staff time given other commitments and a lack of funding. By focusing on each team’s top priorities or challenges, the Network activities will be specifically designed to support staff to address their invasive species commitments more effectively rather than make extra

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1 The original PILN Design Team included representatives from TNC, SPREP, IUCN/ISSG, Palau and American Samoa
work for them. The Network also will help countries identify funding sources and prepare applications to advance their work.

During the consultation, nine regional and national Pacific island agencies agreed to cooperate in establishing the PILN -

- The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)
- Palau Office of Environmental Response & Coordination (OERC)
- National Park of American Samoa (NPSA)
- IUCN’s Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG)
- Conservation International (CI)
- University of the South Pacific (USP)
- United States Forest Service (USFS)
- Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

The Pacific Programme of the Cooperative Islands Initiative (PPCII) will also work closely with PILN through letters of agreement.

These PILN partners will participate in network activities, provide technical and expert assistance to field projects, coordinate learning exchanges, collaborate in IAS planning, and promote and support the PILN objectives using their available resources. The active participation of all of these agencies, with their considerable experience and expertise on invasive species and related issues, provides the Network with a very sound base. A Memorandum of Understanding is currently being circulated among the PILN partner agencies for signature.

The enthusiastic response of countries to PILN is beginning to be matched by funding agencies. TNC and SPREP have made provision for some implementation funding, invited proposals have been submitted by TNC to the US Department of State and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and it is hoped that the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) for Micronesia-Polynesia will provide significant support when it gets underway. Each of the PILN partners is working to identify additional funding sources.

The development of PILN has proved very timely. Several major new initiatives are planned to tackle invasive species issues in the region, recognising this as one of the key threats to biodiversity and peoples’ livelihoods. The Pacific Invasive Species Management Programme (PISMP) led by SPREP is seeking Global Environment Facility (GEF) funding for a major effort to prevent new invasions and to restore critical island ecosystems by removing pests already present. The PPCII is focussing on operations to control or eradicate invasive species on the ground through a series of ‘demonstration projects’. The CEPF will provide funding to organisations working to conserve rare terrestrial species and ecosystems in the ‘biodiversity hotspots’ of Polynesia and Micronesia and invasive species management is one of its four strategic directions. The SPC has played a long-term leadership role in helping Pacific Islands address invasive species, particularly in agricultural systems. PILN will work closely with all these programmes to rapidly transfer lessons learned and best practice throughout the region through its network of teams.
A target timeline has been developed which involves the recruitment of a coordinator and the establishment of a secretariat at SPREP in July/August, announcement and country applications in Sept/Nov and the first meeting in Feb/March 2006. However, the PILN partners recognize that the timeline will ultimately be determined by the availability of adequate funds for the two-year implementation budget.

The consultant wishes to thank those of you who participated in the PILN questionnaire survey or offered support and encouragement, particular the representatives of the partners. Audrey Newman and Mark White of The Nature Conservancy very ably guided and managed this work.

Please forward this summary on to any colleagues who you think would be interested in it.

PILN gratefully acknowledges the support of the US Department of State, for making possible the original founding partners meeting and this consultancy report.

David Butler, Nelson, New Zealand.
3 June 2005