

The following comments in part try to address the five objectives in the Cook Islands Economic Development Strategy 2030. The comments headings are: population, economic, and environmental issues affecting Mauke.

Population

Population planning involves increasing fertility (births), decreasing mortality (deaths) and immigration

Fertility

We need to increase population by at least 200 people. There are several ways to increase a population; increased fertility, decrease mortality and encourage immigration. Young people are not producing as many children and Mauke does not seem to be a place where young ones want to come to live. There are not many jobs and Mauke may seem to be too quiet. Improved parental leave and family benefits may help to encourage young families.

Travel to and from Mauke is expensive for young families. Encouraging competition in air services may bring costs down. One way to increase competition would be a high speed hydrofoil service for passengers and cargo. Although not as speedy as air travel a high speed hydrofoil service would be an alternative mode of transport. The service could include up skilling opportunities for seafarers and hospitality servers.

Producing value added products from our crops e.g. dried pineapples, pineapple licquer, extra virgin coconut oil, star fruit sparkling wine, kuru (breadfruit) flour, maniota (arrowroot) flour/starch and ginger powder may create some employment especially for women. Up skilling opportunities in this secondary sector could include technological improvements in processing the raw ingredients, marketing and management.

Some say we cannot compete with low income countries such as the Philippines for manufacturing our fruit and vegetables. Therefore we need to market ourselves as high income, premium value-added producers. Many Mauke growers are practising organic methods in producing their fruit and vegetables. Greening our economy would include planting more coconut and kuru trees, maniota and pineapples.

Mortality

Another way to increase population is by decreasing mortality (deaths). People seem to be aware of their health by eating more nutritional foods. Vegetables are soon sold out in shops. We (Samuela Ariki and I) found we couldn't keep up with the demand. A challenge for the Ministry of Health is to reduce NCDs. obesity, excessive alcohol and tobacco use before becoming addictive. It saddens me to see the young ones quickly getting addicted because the older ones' binge drinking and therefore acting as negative role models. It becomes a vicious circle of intergenerational addiction and substance abuse. Perhaps a yearly reduction in the amounts of addictive substances (tobacco and alcohol) could be introduced at the national level. However home brew sales would increase.

Immigration

Immigration could be a way to increase Mauke's population over the short to medium terms. Mauke could target older Maukeans living overseas in a marketing drive. Being COVID 19 free would be a powerful incentive. Over 65 year olds can have their New Zealand pensions paid here on Mauke. The weather is warmer and they have their own land to build. Older Maukeans would require services such as gardening, housekeeping, home care and meals on wheels that they could contribute to for some or all of the cost. These services provide employment and up skilling opportunities for younger Maukeans.

Labour migration is another way to increase our population although labour migration is emphatically opposed by some people. Single migrant men do cause problems so migrating families could be a better solution. One parent could help on the plantation, the other with social services. We have vacant houses and a school that would welcome extra students. A problem would be that the children would identify as Maukeans and not want to leave.

Economic

The discussion about increasing population covers some economic challenges and opportunities. Funding development projects is always a problem. We cannot always expect government or funding agencies to provide for development projects. One way could be to develop a Mauke Development Trust (or Enterprise) Fund which over the medium to long term would provide funds. Perhaps a challenge would be to ask individuals (and/or families) to contribute a one off donation of \$100 to \$500 each. Donations would be accepted from people identifying as Maukean (blood, residency, affiliation). Affiliation could be feeding children from another enua who were fed by Maukeans, spouses and previous employees or tourists who have visited and have 'got the Mauke magic'.

A development plan for sustainable tourism could increase Mauke's social and economic well being. Care would be needed to consider environmental issues.

Environment

Environmental challenges might be a huge problem for Mauke to overcome. Packaging, plastic and e-waste are solid waste products filling our landfill. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the coral area and the lagoon near our landfill are affected possibly by leaching of liquefied waste. A challenge and opportunity would be to have a 'state of the art' landfill development plan. We have 'state-of- the art' water and power supply so the landfill should be a priority. However it will take education and attitudinal change in decision maker's outlook to replace the 'dump'.

Another environmental opportunity would be to turn all fallen trees into organic compost. The compost could be sold to growers to increase production and provide employment skills and opportunities. Composting fallen trees would lessen the amount of waste in the landfill.

Yet another opportunity would be to plant thousands of coconut trees for extra virgin oil production and which would contribute to our carbon sink.

As well Mauke could become a certified organic crop producing island which would provide challenges, skills and opportunities.