



# TE TANGO AKATEREANGA MONI O TE IPUKAREA MINISTRY OF FINANCE & ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT GOVERNMENT OF THE COOK ISLANDS



## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PLAN 2025-30

*Te Ara Tukatau – Our journey forward*

February 2025

# Recruitment and Retention Plan 2025-2030 for the Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM), Cook Islands

This document outlines a planned approach to workforce development, emphasising alignment with MFEM's organisational goals and priorities for sustainable growth.

## 1. Introduction

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) is committed to fostering a resilient and skilled workforce to support the Cook Islands' economic and financial policies. This comprehensive plan aligns with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning Strategic Plan 2022-2026, particularly Priority 3 (***Providing Leadership to Strengthen the Cook Islands Public Sector***) and Priority 4 (***Strengthening MFEM's Connectedness and Capacity***).

This plan aims to achieve measurable outcomes, including increasing staff retention by 20% over five years, reducing recruitment vacancies by 15% within the first three years, and enhancing employee engagement scores by 10% as measured by annual surveys.

Workforce planning and the evolving operational landscape post-COVID have necessitated a more agile and adaptive approach to service delivery within MFEM. The pandemic underscored the importance of flexibility in operations, requiring us to pivot quickly to emerging economic and financial challenges. As a result, our outputs and priorities have evolved, and it is now essential to ensure that our structures align with these changes.

Restructuring the divisions within MFEM will enable us to better match our workforce capabilities with our functional outputs, ensuring efficiency, sustainability, and enhanced service delivery. By realigning roles and responsibilities to meet current and future demands, we will strengthen our ability to respond effectively to national economic and financial priorities while optimising the use of available resources.

Information was gathered through:

- Employee Engagement Surveys;
- MFEM's Strategic Planning Day held in September 2024;
- Divisional Workforce Planning;
- Conversations with staff;
- Feedback received, and
- Observations and lessons learned over the past 12 months.

These sources directly informed specific initiatives in the plan, ensuring alignment with staff needs and organisational priorities.

This plan outlines a comprehensive approach to recruitment and retention, integrating professional behaviour, organisational values, and innovative practices. It builds on workforce insights to address challenges and opportunities, including those outlined in divisional workforce plans.

## 2. Organisational Values and Professional Behaviours

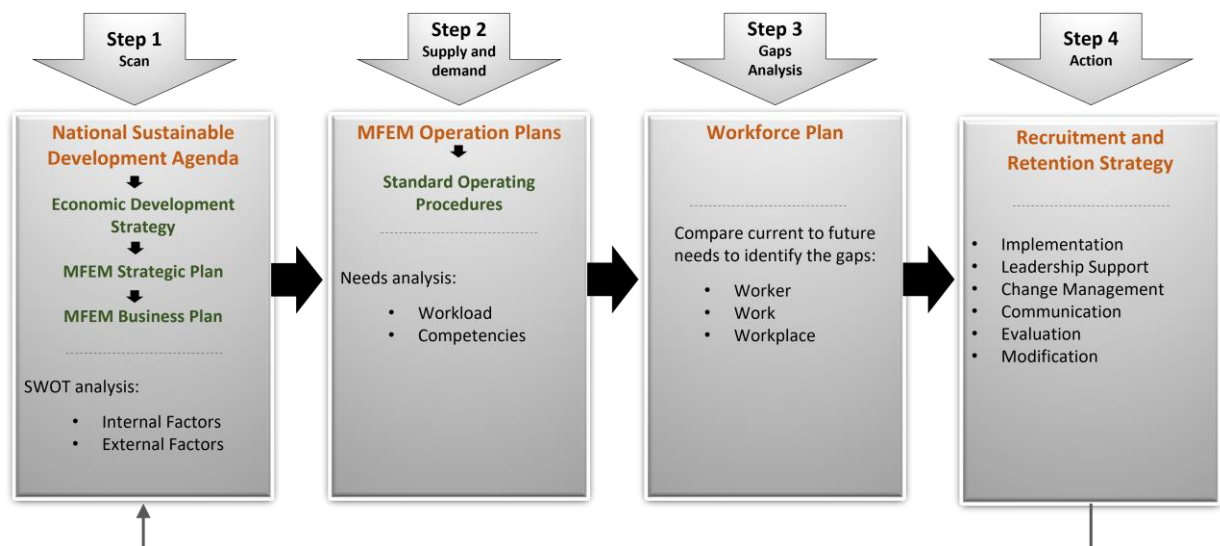
MFEM's plan is underpinned by its values:

- **Honesty:** Upholding truthfulness and integrity in all actions.
- **Impartiality:** Ensuring fairness and objectivity in decision-making.
- **Service:** Committing to excellence in serving the public and stakeholders.
- **Transparency:** Maintaining openness in processes and communication.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for individual and collective actions.
- **Respect:** Valuing diversity and treating everyone with dignity.
- **Efficiency and Effectiveness:** Delivering high-quality outcomes in a timely and resource-conscious manner.

Best practice behaviour includes transparency in communication, proactive problem-solving, and consistent engagement with employees and stakeholders.

## 3. How it fits within our planning framework

The generic model shows that we have conducted strategic planning and documented our direction, including short-term and long-term goals. One of the strengths of workforce planning is its ability to adapt to agency or departmental strategic and operational planning processes. Aligning the workforce plan with our organisation's strategies will connect our Recruitment and Retention program to the operational needs of the Ministry and provide the visibility and organisational support needed for overall program success.



## 4. How Recruitment and Retention Fit Together

Both recruitment and retention are important to the growth of our organisation. Recruitment allows us to carefully identify the talented individuals that will make up our teams, and retention allows us to hold onto those talented individuals for the long run.

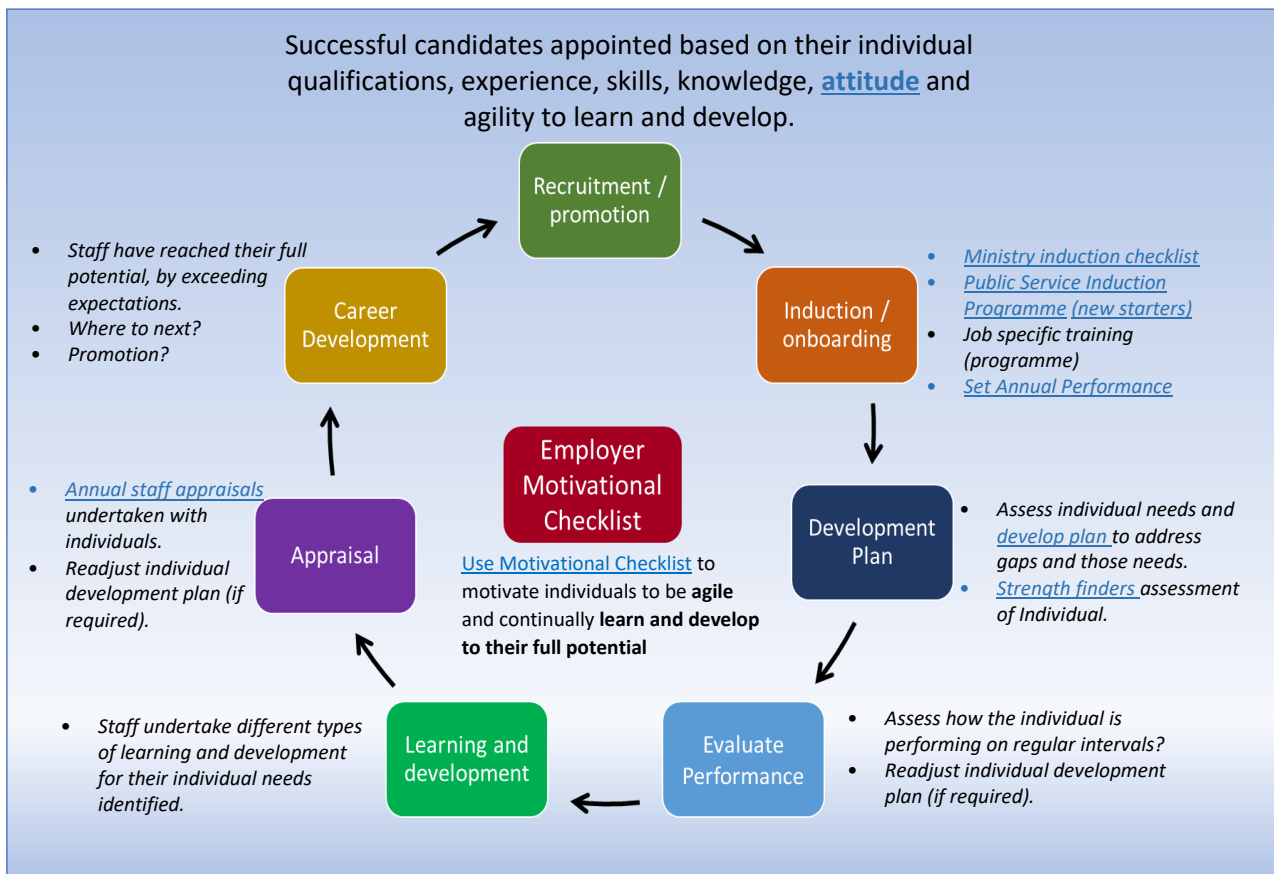
However, there's no point in recruiting new employees if we can't keep our current ones. In the big picture of organisational success, employee retention of skilled talent is much more beneficial and cost-effective than consistently acquiring new team members. This is because exhausting our resources to find new employees isn't worth it if they don't stay long enough to add value to our organisation.



## 5. Employee Lifecycle Framework

MFEM is committed to fostering a holistic approach to workforce management, enabling all staff to reach their full potential and pursue career pathways within the Ministry and wider government sectors. The Employee Lifecycle Framework demonstrates the progression of roles within MFEM and the opportunities available for continuous learning and development.

## Employee Lifecycle Framework Diagram



### • Recruitment and Role Matching:

- The recruitment process is a critical driver of MFEM's success, emphasising the alignment of candidates with the specific skills, attitudes, and potential needed to thrive. Understanding that initial alignment may not always fully meet role requirements, MFEM actively supports staff through tailored learning and development programs, enabling them to achieve and exceed job description standards.
- To maintain alignment over time, MFEM conducts periodic reviews of staff roles and responsibilities, assessing whether evolving job requirements match individual skill sets. These reviews ensure that staff remain equipped to meet organisational goals while identifying opportunities for additional upskilling or role adjustment.
- This approach fosters a culture where staff are empowered to take ownership of their progress and career development, with ongoing support and guidance from management. Together, this partnership drives organisational growth and individual excellence.

- **Secondments and Cross-Division Collaboration:** Where vacancies arise, the possibility of filling roles through secondments is emphasised internally and across divisions. While staff movement between teams isn't always literal, flexibility is key—allowing personnel to assist with work in different teams as needed. For example, the Economic Policy Division (EPD) frequently reallocates staff between the Economics and Budget teams based on workload requirements. This cross-training approach ensures a dynamic, adaptable workforce while fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing across the Division.
- **Learning and Development: Maximising Resources for Growth:** Upskilling is a cornerstone of MFEM's workforce lifecycle, ensuring staff meet and exceed their roles' minimum requirements. By leveraging internal resources and budget-allocated opportunities, MFEM fosters a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth.

Key tools in this approach include:

- **Tailored Development Plans:** Personalised growth roadmaps targeting immediate role requirements and long-term career aspirations.
- **Mentorship Programs:** Structured guidance from experienced staff to build technical expertise, soft skills, and leadership capabilities.
- **Workshops and Conferences:** Opportunities to network and stay current with industry trends and best practices.

A critical resource is the [One Stop Shop Learning and Development Platform](#), offering flexible, in-house training options to efficiently equip staff with essential skills. As budget permits, MFEM extends learning opportunities to include online microlearning modules and courses focused on practical skills such as **logic and reasoning, mind mapping for problem-solving, effective communication strategies, and project management tools**.

This blended approach ensures staff have access to immediate, scalable, and cost-effective learning solutions while benefiting from external opportunities that bring broader perspectives and deeper expertise. Through strategic resource utilisation and a commitment to development, MFEM empowers its workforce to excel and drive organisational success.

- **Performance Appraisal and Motivation:** Annual staff appraisals and feedback sessions are vital to aligning employee performance with MFEM's strategic objectives. Using motivational checklists ensures employees remain engaged and driven, while development plans reinforce their commitment to achieving individual and organisational goals.

This lifecycle framework integrates seamlessly into the broader Retention and Recruitment Plan 2025–2030, ensuring consistency and opportunity for growth across all MFEM divisions.

## 6. Recruitment Plan

### 6.1 Enhanced Job Marketing

- **Digital Platforms:**
  - Digital platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram are essential tools for showcasing MFEM as an employer of choice. Job advertisements will include detailed descriptions and emphasise opportunities for growth within the organisation. MFEM will also leverage these platforms to share success stories and career progression examples, building a compelling employer brand that attracts top talent.
  - To ensure alignment with evolving recruitment needs, MFEM will conduct periodic reviews of the effectiveness of the digital platform. These reviews will assess the performance of job advertisements, the reach and engagement metrics, and the relevance of digital content in attracting qualified candidates. Based on the findings, MFEM will optimise its digital recruitment, ensuring it meets job seekers' changing expectations and aligns with organisational goals.
- **Professional Networks:** Develop referral programs and collaborate with alumni networks from educational institutions to identify top talent.
- **Local and Regional Outreach:** Engage universities, vocational schools, and regional partners to attract talent. Host targeted career fairs and workshops.

### 6.2 Competitive Compensation and Benefits

- While adhering to the pay structure set by the Office of the Public Service Commissioner, seek market premium approvals where necessary.
- While MFEM recognises the challenges of competing with international salaries, particularly in New Zealand and Australia, our competitive edge lies in offering a unique career development experience. MFEM provides unmatched opportunities for learning, professional growth, and leadership development, making it an attractive employer for individuals seeking career progression rather than just financial incentives.
- Explore non-monetary compensation, such as:
  - Professional development opportunities.
  - Recognition programs like Employee of the Month or annual awards.
  - Access to wellness programs and flexible working arrangements.

### 6.3 Streamlined Recruitment Process

- Simplify application processes and ensure prompt candidate communication.
- Provide detailed job descriptions highlighting growth opportunities.

### 6.4 Targeted Recruitment Initiatives

- Partner with law societies, CAANZ, CPA Australia, and similar bodies to source specialists.
- While the recruitment process aims to secure the best applicant for each role, MFEM remains committed to prioritising local talent. The focus begins with identifying and developing qualified candidates from the Cook Islands, followed by second-generation Cook Islanders and, as needed, drawing from the broader Pacific Islands talent pool. Competitive incentives are utilised to attract and retain exceptional candidates, ensuring the workforce reflects regional strengths and supports local development.
- Given the seamless labour market that allows Cook Islanders to work in New Zealand and Australia, MFEM must emphasize non-monetary incentives such as professional development, leadership exposure, and clear career pathways. By positioning MFEM as a career incubator where employees can grow into regional experts and leaders, we can attract and retain talent that values long-term career progression over short-term salary gains.
- Tailor advertisements for entry-level positions and collaborate with training programs.

### 6.5 Educational Engagement

- Develop structured internship and trainee programs.
- Benefit from scholarships administered by the Ministry of Education by employing individuals on these schemes.
- Support continuous education and professional certifications.
- Offer scholarships tied to post-graduation commitments to MFEM.
- Support continuous education and professional certifications.

### 6.6 Internal and External Secondments

- Establish internal secondment opportunities to encourage skill diversification and career growth within MFEM.
- Facilitate external secondments, both national and international, to broaden staff experience and bring innovative practices back to MFEM.

- Provide opportunities for staff to cross-train in other areas within MFEM, fostering a deeper understanding of departmental functions and enhancing collaboration.
- Spread opportunities among staff to attend conferences, workshops, and meetings, enabling them to create networks, gather information, and represent MFEM on national and international platforms.

## 7. Retention Strategy

### 7.1 Professional Development

- Create personalised development plans linked to organisational goals.
- Offer ongoing training, workshops, and access to leadership development programs.
- Utilise an HRMIS to track employee qualifications and monitor learning and development initiatives.

### 7.2 Positive Work Environment

- Foster inclusivity and diversity within teams.
- Recognise achievements through awards and team-building activities.
- Ensure environmental safety by maintaining good working conditions, including suitable workplace locations, ergonomic workspaces, and striving towards compliance with health and safety standards.
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### 7.3 Employee Engagement

- Conduct regular performance reviews with actionable feedback.
- Maintain open-door policies for employee input.

### 7.4 Work-Life Balance

- Provide flexible working conditions, including remote work and adaptable schedules.
- Promote health and wellness through counselling services, gym memberships, and wellness workshops subject to budget availability.
- Explore childcare support options, including:
  - Flexible work hours to accommodate school or day care schedules.

- Subsidised childcare costs or reimbursement for employees with young children are subject to budget availability.
- Family-friendly events to create an inclusive workplace for employees with children.

## 7.5 Retention Incentives

- Implement loyalty rewards and long-term commitment bonuses.
- Support sabbaticals and study leave for personal and professional growth.
- Offer additional leave days or vouchers for exceptional performance or tenure milestones.
- Focus on reducing reliance on contractors by upskilling and training existing staff to take on critical roles, ensuring sustainability and capacity-building within MFEM.
- Support sabbaticals and study leave for personal and professional growth.
- Offer additional leave days or vouchers for exceptional performance or tenure milestones.

## 7.6 Fit-for-Purpose Organisational Structures

- Develop and maintain organisational structures that align with their functions, resulting in operational and people efficiencies while supporting employee development.
- Establish clear career pathways to enhance employee progression and retention.
- Promote staff by identifying and providing growth opportunities within their career pathways, ensuring alignment with organisational needs and personal development goals.
- Develop and maintain organisational structures that support operational efficiency and employee development.
- Establish clear career pathways to enhance employee progression and retention.

## 7.7 Leadership Development

- Pair staff with experienced mentors to guide career growth.
- Invest in leadership training workshops to build internal capacity.
- Leverage professional networks to enable staff to attend national and international leadership development programs, fostering exposure to global best practices.

## 7.8 Wellbeing Tools

- Provide staff access to online applications for workplace wellbeing surveys and health checks to monitor and improve their overall wellbeing.
- Recommend mental health resources through external providers or programs, ensuring staff are aware of available support options.

# 8. Implementation Plan

## 8.1 Leadership by Corporate Manager and HR Team

- The Corporate Manager and Human Resources team will oversee the implementation of this plan.

## 8.2 Objectives and KPIs

- Track metrics such as reduced vacancies, improved tenure, and enhanced engagement.
- Set benchmarks for promotions, attrition rates, and professional qualifications.

## 8.3 Regular Monitoring

- Conduct annual plan reviews and adapt based on workforce feedback.
- Address identified challenges, such as structural workplace issues and resource constraints.

## 8.4 Budget Allocation

- Allocate resources for plan execution and include these costs in financial planning.

## 8.5 Communication

- Promote MFEM's values and achievements through internal updates and external channels.
- Ensure staff understand their roles in achieving strategic objectives.

## 9. Strategic Innovations

- **CIG Pay Scales Review (January 2025):** Analyse and revise pay scales to address competitiveness and equity.
- **Homestay Programs:** Encourage young Cook Islanders studying abroad to return and integrate into the local workforce.
- **Modernisation Initiatives:** Leverage technology and data-driven insights to enhance recruitment and retention efficiency.

## 10. What would success look like (Outcomes)

Success in implementing the MFEM Recruitment and Retention Plan (2025–2030) would look like the following outcomes:

### 10.1 Workforce Excellence:

- A skilled, resilient, and motivated workforce fully aligned with organisational goals and values.
- Increased staff performance, with individuals meeting or exceeding expectations and reaching their full potential through targeted learning and development programs.

### 10.2 Enhanced Recruitment:

- Reduced vacancies and improved tenure through effective recruitment initiatives.
- Attracting high-calibre candidates through competitive compensation, innovative marketing, and educational engagement programs.
- Streamlined recruitment processes, leading to a quicker and more efficient hiring cycle.

### 10.3 Retention Improvements:

- High employee satisfaction and engagement levels, as indicated by feedback and engagement surveys.
- Increased retention rates due to career progression opportunities, leadership development, and a positive work environment.
- Reduced reliance on contractors by upskilling existing staff for critical roles.

#### 10.4 Operational Efficiency:

- Fit-for-purpose organisational structures supporting operational and people efficiencies.
- Clear career pathways fostering progression and employee satisfaction.

#### 10.5 Workplace Culture:

- An inclusive and diverse work environment where achievements are recognised and teamwork is encouraged.
- Improved work-life balance facilitated by flexible working arrangements and wellness programs.
- Enhanced wellbeing through access to mental health and wellbeing resources.

#### 10.6 Strategic Objectives Achieved:

- Align workforce initiatives with MFEM's strategic priorities, strengthening leadership and capacity within the Cook Islands public sector.
- Consistent application of plan initiatives across all divisions for uniform growth.

#### 10.7 Quantifiable Metrics:

- Measurable improvements in KPIs, including reduced attrition, increased professional qualifications, and higher engagement scores.
- Successful integration of international Cook Islanders and other local talent into the workforce.

#### 10.8 Innovation and Modernisation:

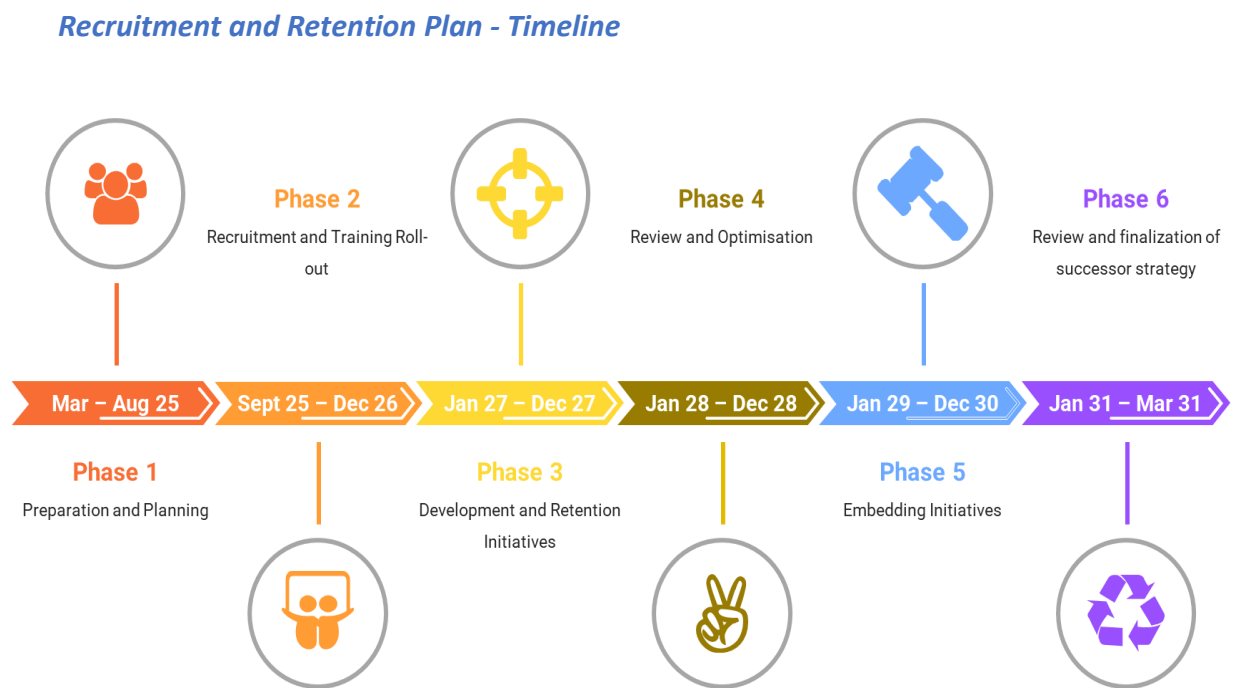
- Implementation of modern recruitment tools and processes, leveraging technology and data-driven insights.
- Adoption of homestay programs encouraging talent to return from abroad.

These outcomes reflect the strategic goal of MFEM becoming an employer of choice, contributing effectively to the Cook Islands' economic and financial management while fostering professional excellence and staff satisfaction.

## 11. Timeline

### 11.1 Implementation Timeline Overview

The successful implementation of the MFEM Recruitment and Retention Plan requires a structured and phased approach to ensure alignment across all divisions and Corporate Services. This timeline outlines a roadmap over the first three years, starting in March 2025, with milestones tailored to accommodate the extensive restructuring in 2025. Each phase builds on the previous one, ensuring the establishment of fit-for-purpose structures, effective recruitment and training processes, comprehensive development and retention initiatives, and a detailed review to optimise outcomes. For the remainder of the plan term (2028–2030), the focus will shift to embedding these initiatives, ensuring long-term sustainability and integration into MFEM's organisational culture.



### 11.2 Phase 1: Preparation and Planning (Mar 2025 – Aug 2025)

**Objective:** Establish fit-for-purpose structures and lay the groundwork for implementation.

| Responsibility     | Key Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with divisions undergoing restructuring to finalise roles, workflows, and reporting lines.</li><li>• Finalise the HRMIS system to support workforce monitoring and data management.</li><li>• Communicate restructuring changes clearly to ensure alignment across MFEM.</li><li>• Establish KPIs to measure recruitment, retention, and engagement progress.</li></ul> |
| Divisions          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Align workforce plans with new structures, ensuring efficient role distribution.</li><li>• Identify critical skill gaps and training needs.</li><li>• Coordinate with Corporate Services to communicate restructuring changes to staff.</li></ul>                                                                                                                            |

### 11.3 Phase 2: Recruitment and Training Rollout (Sep 2025 – Dec 2026)

**Objective:** Launch recruitment initiatives and provide foundational training programs.

| Responsibility     | Key Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implement job marketing campaigns tailored to the restructured divisions.</li><li>• Develop and deliver induction programs customised for restructured roles.</li><li>• Begin tracking recruitment progress and refine processes as needed.</li></ul> |
| Divisions          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Onboard new staff and provide job-specific training.</li><li>• Initiate cross-training initiatives to create a flexible and collaborative workforce.</li><li>• Conduct regular performance evaluations and provide feedback.</li></ul>                |

### 11.4 Phase 3: Development and Retention Initiatives (Jan 2027 – Dec 2027)

**Objective:** Strengthen retention and career progression efforts in the restructured environment.

| Responsibility     | Key Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Launch leadership development programs and mentorship pairings.</li><li>• Implement retention initiatives, such as loyalty bonuses and career pathways.</li><li>• Monitor employee engagement and satisfaction, adapting programs accordingly.</li></ul>       |
| Divisions          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support professional development through workshops and training programs.</li><li>• Foster a positive work environment through team-building and recognition initiatives.</li><li>• Align divisional goals with individual career development plans.</li></ul> |

### 11.5 Phase 4: Review and Optimisation (Jan 2028 – Dec 2028)

**Objective:** Evaluate plan success and prepare for embedding initiatives.

| Responsibility     | Key Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct a comprehensive review of plan outcomes using KPIs and feedback.</li><li>• Refine workforce plans and update recruitment and retention processes based on findings.</li><li>• Publish a report summarising lessons learned and recommendations for embedding.</li></ul> |
| Divisions          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide detailed feedback on the impact of implemented initiatives.</li><li>• Assess team performance and propose additional adjustments or resources.</li></ul>                                                                                                                |

### 11.6 Phase 5: Embedding Initiatives (Jan 2029 – Dec 2030)

**Objective:** Institutionalise plan components into MFEM's operations for long-term success.

| Responsibility     | Key Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Integrate recruitment, retention, and development programs into routine operations.</li><li>• Ensure alignment between plan initiatives and ongoing organisational goals.</li><li>• Regularly update HRMIS and workforce plans to maintain relevance.</li></ul> |
| Divisions          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue to refine processes and practices introduced in earlier phases.</li><li>• Monitor workforce satisfaction and performance to ensure alignment with goals.</li><li>• Embed career pathways and wellness programs into the divisional culture.</li></ul>  |

### 11.7 Phase 6: Review and Finalisation of Successor Plan (Jan 2029 – Dec 2030)

**Objective:** Evaluate the 2025–2030 plan and develop a new recruitment and retention framework for 2031–2036.

| Responsibility                                     | Key Actions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Services in collaboration with Divisions | <b>Comprehensive Evaluation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review KPIs, workforce data, and stakeholder feedback to assess the plan's success and identify gaps.</li><li>• Analyse trends in recruitment, retention, and workforce performance.</li></ul> |
|                                                    | <b>Stakeholder Engagement:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Conduct workshops and focus groups with divisions and external partners to gather insights.</li><li>• Benchmark outcomes against regional and industry best practices.</li></ul>                 |
|                                                    | <b>Reporting and Recommendations:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Publish a report summarising successes, challenges, and lessons learned.</li><li>• Propose actionable recommendations for the next plan.</li></ul>                                        |

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>Plan Development:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft a successor plan (2031–2036) aligned with organisational goals and evolving workforce needs.</li> <li>• Ensure integration of best practices and lessons from the review.</li> </ul> |
|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

#### Expected Outcomes:

- Documentation of the 2025–2030 plan's impact and areas for improvement.
- A forward-looking plan to sustain and enhance MFEM's workforce.

## 12. Conclusion

MFEM's success relies on a dedicated, skilled, and motivated workforce. Some initiatives outlined in this plan is already in place, while others are aspirational. This plan ensures consistency across all divisions and positions MFEM as an employer of choice, fostering professional excellence and retaining valuable talent to support the Cook Islands' economic growth.

*Finding the Right Person for the Right Job, at the Right Time and keeping them....*

